



# Will it help me to go? Disabled people's intentions to use social media in tourism

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the MSc in Management with Specialization in Strategic Marketing, at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa, January 2021

## **Abstract**

*Title:* Will it help me to go? Disabled people's intentions to use social media in tourism

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It is estimated that 15% of the world population has a disability. Therefore, tourism companies should provide opportunities for people with disabilities to be part of and take full advantage of traveling and experiencing life. The problem arises from the lack of information, and access to it, that disabled tourists face when searching and planning their trips.

The purpose of this study is to measure the impact of the benefits derived from the use of social media on the intentions to use them for traveling purposes in the disabled people's market. A quantitative research approach was chosen to gather information among social media users with disabilities. The online questionnaire was developed based on the Conceptual Framework and adapted from literature. The survey was distributed online, through social media and email, directly, and with the support of institutions that work with and for people with disabilities.

A statistical analysis was conducted through a Linear Regression to test the research hypotheses. Findings of the study stated that the three benefits analyzed – Functional, Social, and Hedonic and Psychological – have a positive, but low impact on the intentions of disabled tourists to use social media when planning and organizing their travels. Thus, the impact that the provision of specific information to potential customers with different disabilities by service companies and tourism enterprises may also have a positive impact on the business of these companies.

**Keywords:** Disabled Tourism, Accessible Tourism, Intention to Use Social Media, Information Search, Benefits

## **Resumo**

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É estimado que 15% da população mundial seja portadora de alguma deficiência. Assim sendo, as empresas de viagens e serviços turísticos devem providenciar oportunidades para que as pessoas com deficiência façam parte e aproveitem ao máximo as experiências associadas às suas viagens. O problema surge da falta de informação que o turista com deficiência enfrenta ao pesquisar e planejar as suas viagens e do acesso à mesma.

O objetivo deste estudo é avaliar o impacto dos benefícios do uso das redes sociais nas intenções de utilizá-las no turismo, no mercado de pessoas com deficiência. Foi escolhida uma abordagem quantitativa para reunir informações entre os seus utilizadores com deficiência. O questionário online foi desenvolvido com base no 'Conceptual Framework' e adaptado da literatura. A pesquisa foi distribuída online, nas redes sociais e por email, diretamente e com o apoio de instituições que trabalham com e para pessoas com deficiência.

Foi realizada uma análise estatística através de uma Regressão Linear para validar as hipóteses desenvolvidas. Os resultados do estudo indicam que os três benefícios analisados - Funcional, Social, e Hedónico e Psicológico - têm um impacto, baixo, mas positivo nas intenções dos turistas com deficiência de usar as redes sociais no planeamento e organização das suas viagens. Desta forma, o impacto que a disponibilização de informação específica para potenciais clientes com deficiências, por parte das empresas de serviços e empreendimentos turísticos, pode também ser impacto positivo no seu negócio.

**Palavras-chave:** Turismo com Deficiência, Turismo Acessível, Intenções de Uso de Redes Sociais, Pesquisa de Informação, Benefícios

## **Acknowledges**

I would like to start by thanking my family for always supporting my decisions, and for allowing me to pursue my dreams. The education given and all the opportunities provided were fundamental for me to become the person I am today. I am very grateful for everything they have done for me.

Also, I want to thank my friends, who have been with me during the hardest and easiest times, both academically and personally. A special thanks to Margarida Palma, Mariana Baptista, and Antonio Quintino for being with me for a long time now, and of course, to the biggest friends university could have given me, Ines Rito and Catarina Lobo, who were extremely important during these past years, each one at their way. Another special person who I would like to thank is my boyfriend, Fabio Gomes, who has always supported me, independently of the situation, and has encouraged me to work harder to achieve my goals. I could not ask for better people surrounding me, who have always made my days easier and funnier.

I also have to thank Católica Lisbon School of Business and Economics for providing me the tools to become a more knowledgeable person and professional, and for the opportunity to be part of such a great club - Equality in Business -, which has been crucial for my development and for giving me the chance to meet and work with such an amazing team.

Lastly but not least, a special acknowledgment to my supervisor, Professor Helena Rodrigues, who has been tireless during this entire process. The availability and support given were fundamental for me to pursue the path and directions ambitioned, with the constant encouragement to always do my best. I want to thank her for everything that she has done for me, especially the important and useful insights, and for the patience she had with me during this semester.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	i
Resumo .....	ii
Acknowledges .....	iii
Table of Contents .....	iv
List of Figures .....	vi
List of Tables.....	vi
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Context.....	1
1.2 Research Objectives and Methodology .....	2
2. Literature Review.....	3
2.1 Initial Remarks.....	3
2.2 Accessible Tourism .....	3
2.3 Disabled Tourism.....	4
2.4 Intentions to Use Social Media in Tourism .....	5
2.5 Social Media and Information Search .....	7
2.6 Benefits of Social Media .....	10
3. Methodology .....	12
3.1 Research Objectives.....	12
3.2 Research Hypotheses and Conceptual Framework.....	12
3.2.1 Research Hypotheses.....	12
3.2.2 Conceptual Framework .....	13
3.3 Research Approach.....	14
3.4 Questionnaire Conception .....	14
3.4.1 Macro-structure .....	15
3.4.2 Micro-structure.....	16
3.5 Target Population.....	17
3.6 Statistical Methods.....	17
4. Results.....	19
4.1 Data Cleaning .....	19
4.2 Sample Characterization.....	19
4.3 Univariate Analysis .....	21

4.3.1	Functional Benefits.....	22
4.3.2	Social Benefits.....	22
4.3.3	Hedonic and Psychological Benefits.....	22
4.3.4	Intentions to Use Social Media .....	22
4.4	Scale Validity and Reliability .....	22
4.5	Data Analysis.....	23
5.	Discussion .....	25
6.	Conclusions.....	27
6.1	Main Conclusions .....	27
6.2	Theoretical and Practical Implications .....	28
6.3	Limitations.....	28
6.4	Future Research .....	29
	References .....	30
	Appendix .....	36
	Appendix 1- Questionnaire.....	36
	Appendix 2 - Tables.....	41

## List of Figures

<b>Figure 1</b> – Conceptual Framework, adapted from Parra-López et al. (2011).....	14
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## List of Tables

<b>Table 1</b> - Demographic Characterization.....	19
<b>Table 2</b> – Psychographic Characterization .....	21
<b>Table 3</b> - Scale Reliability Analysis .....	23
<b>Table 4</b> - Linear Regression Analysis to test H1, H2, and H3.....	24
<b>Table A.1</b> - Questionnaire’s Micro-structure .....	41
<b>Table A.2</b> - Univariate Analysis .....	43

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Context

People with disabilities are required to constantly search for the word “Accessible” while making plans, to make sure that they can visit the desired places (Darcy & Dickson, 2009). The problem arises for the non-existence of a universal definition for “Accessibility”, which makes it more difficult to communicate and interpret the information provided by tourism providers (Cavinato & Cuckovich, 1992). The latter should take into consideration the two types of online information problems: the content – if it has the required information to meet the needs and/or restrictions of the disabled tourist, or if one can access that information, as there is no advantage of providing it if the person is not able to access it (Williams, Rattray, & Grimes, 2006).

Moreover, the lack of (organized) information and its spreading is one of the greatest problems regarding traveling and tourism systems. To increase the opportunities for travelers and service providers in terms of accessible tourism, it should be solved or, at least, improved (Cavinato & Cuckovich, 1992). Solving the problem is even more urgent when considering tourists with disabilities as they face more constraints in finding and accessing information (online and offline) (Williams et al., 2006). Also, these tourists tend to need more detailed information about the accommodation and facilities, compared to people without disabilities, to guarantee they can access them (Darcy & Dickson, 2009).

Travelers, with or without impairments, often make use of social media to plan and organize their travels. It is proven that Social Media is a helpful tool for travelers, especially the ones with some kind of disability, to gather and share information (Altinay et al., 2016). The problem arises from the lack of knowledge and information that people have regarding social media usage for tourism services and the costs they have to incur to be able to make use of these platforms. The current study focuses on the information search for the traveling decision-making process as a way to mitigate the perceived risk associated and, therefore, understand the impact on the disabled people’s intentions to use social media for traveling purposes. If the impact is significative, making available that information can also have a high impact on traveling and tourism provider companies.

The literature is scarce in what regards tourism for people with disabilities, and the existing majority mention the market as homogeneous, discarding the strong heterogeneity present (Figueiredo, Eusebio, & Kastenholz, 2012). There is a research gap regarding information

search of disabled tourists and internet usage, more specifically, on the benefits social media can bring to people with disabilities when used for traveling purposes.

## **1.2 Research Objectives and Methodology**

The present study intends to answer the following research question:

***RQ:** What are the benefits of disabled people's intentions to use social media for traveling?*

To answer this question, it is required to understand the disabled market's needs, how these tourists search for information online to plan their travels, and what are the benefits derived from the disabled people's use of social media when planning and organizing their trips.

The literature review section helps to set the definitions and starting ideas about the market of people with disabilities and its associations with tourism in terms of accessibility. Furthermore, it focuses on the benefits of using social media and how they affect the group's intentions to use them for traveling. To do so, it analyzes how people with disabilities search for information and how it is presented online. To further study the tourism for disabled people and social media's role in it, quantitative research is conducted through an online questionnaire, aiming to understand how the benefits impact the intentions of disabled people's use of social media for traveling.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Initial Remarks**

According to the World Health Organization (2018), 15% of the world population has a disability. In addition to this considerably large part of the population, it is important to mention that the majority of these people, when traveling, usually go with company, either their families or their friends (Buhalis & Michopouloub, 2011). More than often thought, people with disabilities and their families have enough money (Ray & Ryder, 2003), and time to go on pleasure travels, even though tourism and hospitality providers commonly do not give much attention and consideration to the group as a relevant market segment (Uriely, Reichel, & Shani, 2007).

The income level does not have a unanimous point of view from the researchers. Fontes (2014) mentions it as the higher economic constraints disabled people have to face when deciding to travel. Despite the lower average level of daily and personal expenditure, literature shows that travelers with disabilities tend to stay for longer periods in the destination, providing a higher overall expenditure level per trip (Var, Yeşiltaş, Yayli, & Öztürk, 2011).

According to Darcy and Dickson (2009), and in addition to the considerably large market previously mentioned, 30% of the population have access requirements, together with the fact that everyone will have access requirements at some stage of their lives. Considering the aging of the population, and the reality that ‘no consumer group is more susceptible to disabilities than the elderly’ (Burnett & Baker, 2001), the disabled segment will continuously become an increasingly important market in society. Due to its size and the expected growth, the market can be considered a business opportunity for tourism providers (Var et al., 2011).

### **2.2 Accessible Tourism**

Previous research confirms that tourism has a positive influence on the individual’s overall well-being and quality of life (Darcy & Pegg, 2011; La Placa & Corlyon, 2014).

Even though tourism is considered a basic human right and, therefore, should be accessible to the entire population (McCabe & Diekmann, 2015), several people believe that leisure is not for them, as it is considered a privilege (Bedini & Guinan, 1996), which might be reinforced in disabled people’s case.

Darcy and Dickson (2009, p. 34) define accessible tourism as an enabler for “people with access requirements, including mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive dimension of access, to function

independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universally design tourism products, services, and environments”. In previous research, accessible destination experiences are referred to as a means to provide independence, dignity, and equity relatively to essential experiences for people with access requirements (Darcy et al., 2008). Therefore, they create a ‘sense of place’ regarding traveling destinations. Also, Altinay et al. (2016) mention that Accessibility relies on the different needs to promote inclusion and socialization among people with disabilities.

There is not a universal definition of Accessibility, which makes it more difficult for people with access restrictions to correctly and fully understand the information made available by tourism agents (Cavinato & Cuckovich, 1992). Mentioning something as ‘Accessible’ does not say much about its characteristics, and how it can or cannot be accessed by the person, depending on one’s needs. A facility that fulfills the requirements of a physically impaired guest, does not necessarily mean that it will also be accessible for a person with visual constraints, for example.

Tourism services fail to understand and create systems that are supported by the disabled market’s perspective. Disabled tourists are not the only ones benefiting from accessibility. Accessible destinations can also be profited by its residents by fomenting social engagement, health outcomes, and economic benefits, as well as by the tourists without impairments, who benefit from the access support (World Health Organization, 2007).

### **2.3 Disabled Tourism**

Disability is considered “the product of the social relationships that produce disabling barriers and hostile social attitudes that exclude, segregate and oppress people with disabilities and deny them their rights of citizenship” (Dwyer & Darcy, 2011, p. 218). It is separated according to its visibility and durations, its effects (statical, episodic, or degenerative), and whether the person feels, or no, pain associated with it. Moreover, it is important to refer that the disability experience faced by people with disabilities might vary significantly due to their health conditions, personal or environmental factors (World Health Organization, 2011). It is specified that hearing, intellectual, physical, and visual are the four main types of disability, according to the variety of circumstances that people with disabilities face (Direção-Geral da Saúde & Organização Mundial da Saúde, 2004). Not only the types of disability are important for the study, but also the different levels of limitations those disabilities may represent, in terms of mobility constraints and ability to perform certain functions (Figueiredo et al., 2012).

Even though in the majority of the literature revised the disabled market is usually considered as a homogeneous group, the types and levels of disabilities show the diversity present (Buhalis & Michopouloub, 2011). According to McKercher and Darcy (2018), people with disabilities face different types of barriers when deciding to travel. They face the same barriers as every other tourist, shared barriers among all people with disabilities, the ones specific for their disability, and, ultimately, the barriers presented by the individualistic impairment effects. This being said, the heterogeneous characteristics of the market should be included in this study.

Literature presents tourism as a relevant tool for the health and rehabilitation of people with disabilities, as well as a powerful source of social inclusion (Moura, Kastenholz, & Pereira, 2018). People with disabilities believe that going on a trip is a valuable action for them as they will have a time without being an ‘object of care’ and, most important, because they can become “self-reliant, independent, confident and ‘able’ people” (McKercher & Darcy, 2018). Ray and Ryder (2003) reinforce the importance that these people attribute to traveling because of the self-confidence it gives them, as one of their top travel motivations. Their high interest and motivation to participate in tourism and leisure activities (Pagán, 2015) increase, even more, when the equipment and services provided are properly adapted to the requirements imposed by their type of disability and level of functioning. A big problem arises from their general perception that destinations are not prepared to receive them and to provide a satisfactory experience, according to their needs regarding physical accessibility and accessible activities (Figueiredo et al., 2012).

## **2.4 Intentions to Use Social Media in Tourism**

According to Tsai (2010, p. 513), intention is about “the degree to which a person has determined to perform a certain behavior”. Other authors reinforce that definition as the willingness of engaging in a certain behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

Countless people with disabilities perceive tourism as one activity that has to be forgone as more challenges have to be considered. Disabled people have to take into consideration the individual risk involved in traveling (Hua, Ibrahim, & Chiu, 2013). Moreover, travel intention and participation result from a complex interaction between the tourist, the tourism context, and the surrounding environment (Yau, McKercher, & Packer, 2004). Therefore, people with disabilities aim for more than just the removal of physical barriers to enable them to be actively engaged in tourism activities (Hua et al., 2013).

Many researchers separate leisure constraints into three categories: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints (Burns, Paterson, & Watson, 2009; Crawford & Godbey, 1987). The researchers conceptualize intrapersonal constraints on psychological factors that are typically defined by the person's disability, while the interpersonal ones are focused on symbolic and attitudinal factors about and with other people. Lastly, structural constraints are usually physical or material traits.

According to previous studies, the lack of information on accessibility and accessible facilities are the main barrier faced when planning a trip (Lee, Agarwal, & Kim, 2012). Tsai (2010) study shows that, with the elimination of tourism constraints faced by disabled people during the decision-making process, their likelihood of participation in tourism activities increases, which is supported by the correlation between travel constraints and attitude, with travel behavior intentions.

Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell's (1978) research explains the different and sequential stages of the decision-making process. These stages involve motivations derived from one's needs, problem recognition, information search, evaluation of possibilities and decision-making, purchase, and post-purchase evaluation. Other studies reinforce this idea by mentioning information search, information processing, and decision process as constituents of the travel planning process (Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002).

It is known from literature that information offers insights and broadens the understanding of the required services and the experienced travel constraints (Daniels, Drogin Rodgers, & Wiggins, 2005). In addition to the fact that people with disabilities need more information, they usually have more difficulty in finding and accessing information. Literature reveals that there is a problem with information provision to disabled tourists as they constantly mention its lack of availability and accuracy (Small & Darcy, 2010). Moreover, a considerable part of the tourists who required additional or alternative information, find it difficult to access (Dickson, Darcy, Johns, & Pentifallo, 2016; Zajadacz, 2014).

The different motivations, attitudes, and desires that emerge from the heterogeneity of the disabled market reinforce the need of taking into consideration the specific constraints and requirements caused by the previously mentioned types and levels of disability. As access and costs are some of the most significant barriers perceived by these tourists (Shaw & Coles, 2004), their families play a crucial role in allowing them to travel by providing monetary, physical, and psychological support (Kim & Lehto, 2013).

Literature shows that social media can act as a creator of opportunities for people with disabilities to have a voice online, rather than just the regular consumption of content generated by others (Tucker, Theocharis, Roberts, & Barberá, 2017), which impacted the ‘travel-experience-sharing behavior’ of tourists (Kang & Schuett, 2013). Not only the online presence that social media provides is important for disabled people, but also the fact that it enables them to raise awareness on accessibility and disability issues in many different aspects of their lives (Altinay et al., 2016).

As previously mentioned, social media enables the user with disabilities to ‘speak up’ and generate content, adding to the others-generated content. Literature shows that not only disabled tourists but all tourists share experiences, in addition to the knowledge gained over time (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). The authors also mention the willingness of these tourists to help to minimize the risk of other travelers by producing content that will help them in the decision-making process.

## **2.5 Social Media and Information Search**

Digital media provides support to traditional offline tasks in terms of communication and orientation (Bühler & Pelka, 2014). As defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), “Social Media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0”, allowing users to connect, participate and share their lives with others (McMillen & Alter, 2017). Moreover, its importance on the way people communicate and have online participation has been increasing (Kent & Ellis, 2015).

According to Statista (2020), the five social networks in the world with the higher number of active users are Facebook (2,603 M), YouTube (2,000 M), WhatsApp (2,000 M), Messenger (1,300 M), and WeChat (1,203 M). Therefore, these platforms are the chosen ones to be further analyzed in the present study.

Internet-based technologies facilitate the exchange of useful information between buyers and sellers without geographical limitations, enabling people to engage in more tourism activities (Williams et al., 2006).

Tourism is considered a ‘highly knowledge-based’ and an ‘information-intense’ industry, strongly benefiting from the improvements in technology (Nezakati et al., 2015). The dissemination of useful and specific information increases and creates opportunities for people

with disabilities to travel, as well as increasing the opportunities for tourism providers (Cavinato & Cuckovich, 1992).

By providing informed and complete information about destinations and other requirements, tourism providers support and enable tourists with disabilities to make informed decisions and plans (Darcy & Dickson, 2009), minimizing the risk associated with traveling. Not only solving these problems will allow disabled tourists to gather the necessary information for their travel, but will also be beneficial for tourists without disabilities to access the desired information (Sloan et al., 2006).

Furthermore, social media has been increasing its significance in the tourism sector (Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013) with the expansion of Internet marketing and eCommerce (Casaló, Flavián, & Guinalú, 2010). Social media, if properly used, can be a powerful tool for tourism providers, by giving them the chance of understanding consumers' insights and demands (Nezakati et al., 2015). With this knowledge, travel companies can properly promote and advertise their services and meet customers' needs and expectations (Leung et al., 2013).

Moreover, as the platforms allow real-time information sharing, social media enables travelers to share their experiences about previous or current trips (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014) and tourism providers to keep up with the content created, and share information about their services.

According to previous research, the use of social media for traveling purposes is divided into three stages: before, during, and after the trip (Amaro, Duarte, & Henriques, 2016). In each of these phases, social media provides different benefits, according to what the tourist needs at that moment. In the first moment – before the trip - social media supports customers on providing ideas, reducing the risk associated with doing a new thing and/or going to a new destination, and helps in creating an image on the destinations (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). Therefore, tourists essentially consume User-Generated Content (UGC), and not participating by generating additional content for others.

Even though distinct studies present very different values for social media usage during the trip, both agree on the usage reduction in that stage, in comparison to the consumption level before the trip (Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, & Buultjens, 2009). In this phase, tourists start using social media for sharing purposes, in addition to the previously mentioned, consumption of UGC.

In the last phase, it is known that tourists mainly generate content for others, by sharing their experiences and information about the trip they did (Parra-López, Bulchand-Gidumal, Gutiérrez-Taño, & Díaz-Armas, 2011).

Even though disabled tourists are required to have more ‘up-front decision-making processes’ than the other tourists, previous experience helps them in uncomplicating these processes due to the internalized knowledge about travels and the already known possible complications (Stilling Blichfeldt & Nicolaisen, 2010).

Tourists are highly influenced by their previous experiences or the ones from their peers (Burnett & Baker, 2001). Therefore, social media increases that influence with the inclusion of electronic word-of-mouth (WOM), playing an important role in the organization and planning of the trip (Hernández-Méndez, Muñoz-Leiva, & Sánchez-Fernández, 2015; Pan, MacLaurin, & Crofts, 2007). Also, it is known that WOM is considered a major source of travel information (Ayeh, Au, & Law, 2013), and it is the advertisement method that consumers trust the most (Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2012). Therefore, literature confirms that WOM, the Internet, and travel guides are the most used sources of information in regards to travel planning of people with disabilities (Kastenholz, Eusébio, & Figueiredo, 2015), as well as to people without disabilities.

All these constraints that disabled tourists need to overcome to be able to fully enjoy their travels led to an increase in the need of having and finding highly credible and reliable sources of information. Their previous experience, as well as the recommendations provided by friends and family, play a significant role in the information collection (Figueiredo et al., 2012).

The study conducted by McMillen and Alter (2017) highlights some technological advances that have enabled this group of people to overcome some of the existing barriers (voice readers, hearing aid apps, etc.) and the benefits that arise from the use of social media.

Despite the positive factors presented about social media and the fact that a considerable part of disabled people uses the platforms, literature shows a lack of knowledge and information in what regards its use for tourism services and activities (Altinay et al., 2016).

Even though the mentioned assistive technologies enable people with disabilities to use and take advantage of social media, literature refers that the costs associated with their acquisition are very high (Mammadova & Ahmadov, 2017). In addition to those technological costs, disabled tourists, despite their strong motivation to travel, frequently have to face higher costs

for doing the same trip as tourists without disabilities (Kastenholz et al., 2015), for instance being forced to take a private transfer at the arrival because public transports are not accessible.

It is known that many disabled people live under the poverty line mostly due to the employment constraints they face (United Nations, 2018), intensifying the obstacles to travel and search for information.

Previous research reveals the existence of digital inequalities resulting from the lack of equal opportunities that people with disabilities face when accessing social networks, therefore, creating social barriers between them and the rest of the population (Mammadova & Ahmadov, 2017). Even though social media is expanding considerably, there are still people who cannot benefit from it.

Even though these applications encourage community collaboration through UGC, there are still many of them that force users to access information in a particular manner (Ellis & Kent, 2011).

Social media can be considered a mash-up of platforms that overlap with each other and, when one of them is inaccessible, it jeopardizes the accessibility of all others (Kent & Ellis, 2015). Furthermore, the researchers conclude that to make these platforms fully inclusive, each part of the networks' creation must be aligned with universal design principles.

Online information is only relevant for customers if, in addition to being able to access it, its content fulfills the needs of the disabled person. The perceived risk mentioned before emphasizes the need of having the necessary information, and the proper access to it, as travelers have to stay in environments that they are not familiarized with, and there could be a need of having special requirements (Williams, Rattray, & Grimes, 2007).

Additionally, it is known that disabled users tend to accept better when the accessibility problem is caused by the content generated by other users, compared to the inaccessibility derived from problems with the platforms or the content of the providers (Bühler & Pelka, 2014).

## **2.6 Benefits of Social Media**

As mentioned before, through the use of social media, tourists are now, more than ever, able to access a greater amount of information related to their travels, in an easier and faster way. The Functional benefits of social media in tourism are associated with the knowledge provided about tourist sites and related activities, the expenses saving and higher returns on the investments

made in the search resources and benefits resulted from receiving and providing information (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008).

According to Wang and Fesenmaier (2004), the Social benefits are the ones dependent on the communication with others, the creation of relationships, on the exchange of opinions, and their involvement in it, by sharing information with one another. Nevertheless, these benefits are related to the usage level and participation on social media for tourism purposes (Chung & Buhalis, 2008). When it comes to tourists with disabilities, these benefits are particularly important to give them the opportunity to create online communities and enable social networking (Ellis & Kent, 2011).

Lastly, Hedonic and Psychological benefits are the ones associated with the trust tourists have on social media and the feeling of belonging to communities and consequently, being a member of one or more of them (Chung & Buhalis, 2008). Moreover, these benefits can be a result of a continuous activity and communication in an environment of cooperation and collaboration, which might lead to an expansion and development of the social benefits (Parra-López et al., 2011). This being said, it is possible to include feeling of pleasure, happiness, and of pride, when it comes to tourists' participation on social media.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Objectives

As mentioned before, this study intends to answer the research question: “*What are the benefits of disabled people’s intentions to use social media for traveling?*”

To do so, it is necessary to understand the market of people with disabilities and its needs, the way these tourists search for information online to travel, and the benefits associated with the use of social media by disabled people when it comes to planning and organizing their travels.

#### 3.2 Research Hypotheses and Conceptual Framework

##### 3.2.1 Research Hypotheses

Being a tourist with disabilities requires much more effort and time than what is needed from a non-disabled person. Traveling requires a collaboration of physical, mental, and social capabilities that are usually affected by their disability, making the entire process more difficult (Yau et al., 2004). However, the benefits associated with the involvement and participation in tourism and leisure activities are perceived to be more intense on individuals with disabilities, compared to non-disabled ones (Pagán, 2015).

Previous studies refer to the major importance given to information, especially in the search phase (Kim, Lee, Shin, & Yang, 2017). Also, Hwang, Gretzel, and Fesenmaier (2002) mention the fact that travel information is not only used in one stage of the decision-making process, as it is present in all of its phases, reinforcing the importance of having available information to make travel decisions.

The technological advances on information and global standards allow travelers to have more independence and flexibility in what regards to accessible and reliable information (Buhalis, Leung, & Law, 2011). Fundamentally, the destinations and tourism providers offer informed and complete responses to allow disabled tourists to make knowledgeable decisions (Darcy & Dickson, 2009), and plan according to their access requirements. Therefore, social media, if properly used, allows tourists to plan their travels without external support (e.g. travel agencies).

According to this, the first hypothesis is:

***H1: The perceived Functional benefits associated with the use of social media have a positive impact on disabled people’s intention to use them to plan and organize travels.***

Along with the functional benefits associated, social media usage for traveling purposes also provides some social benefits.

McMillen and Alter (2017) study concludes that social media enables disabled people to connect and communicate with their families, friends, peers, or other groups of interest. Moreover, Ellis and Kent's (2011) study emphasizes the opportunity derived from social networking that enables disabled people to become more connected and socially interact with others, enabling the creation of an online community. Therefore, the second hypothesis is:

***H2: The perceived Social benefits associated with the use of social media have a positive impact on disabled people's intention to use them to plan and organize travels.***

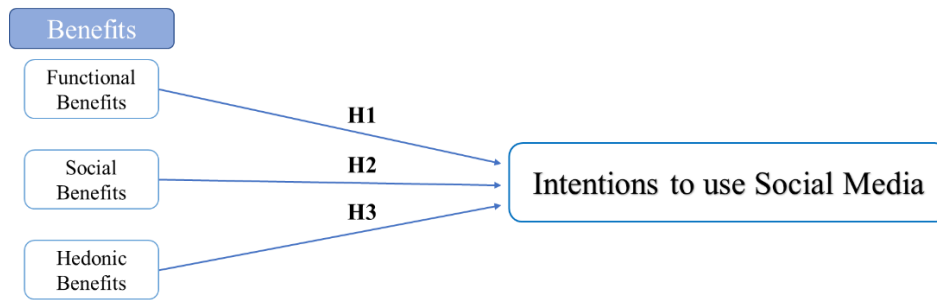
It is also important to refer to the Psychological and Hedonic benefits derived from the use of social media. According to previous studies, these benefits are associated with the tourist's trust in social media and the belonging to communities, which might lead them to become a member of them (Chung & Buhalis, 2008). These benefits result from active communication and participation in those collaborative environments, that enable the development and extension of the previously mentioned social benefits (Parra-López et al., 2011). Traveling involves higher risks for people with disabilities, compared with the others and, therefore, its minimization is even more important for this particular group of tourists. Their trust in social media can be a source of lowering anxiety and the perceived risk in the decision-making process (Yen & Gwinner, 2003).

Taking into consideration the Hedonic benefits, the final hypothesis is:

***H3: The perceived Hedonic and Psychological benefits associated with the use of social media have a positive impact on disabled people's intention to use them to plan and organize travels.***

### **3.2.2 Conceptual Framework**

The present study uses a model (Figure 1) adapted from Parra-López et al. (2011) tested model to study the hypotheses mentioned above, to understand the impact of the social media benefits and disabled people's intention to use it for traveling purposes.



**Figure 1** – *Conceptual Framework*, adapted from Parra-López et al. (2011)

To test the conceptual framework adapted from the literature reviewed, the current paper aims to assess the credibility and reliability of the research hypotheses mentioned above.

### 3.3 Research Approach

After studying data presented in the Literature Review section, the research objectives of the study are achieved through the collection of primary data.

A quantitative approach was chosen with the objective of quantifying data and generalize results from the sample to the population of interest. Moreover, this approach also enables the analysis of a large number of representative cases in a structured manner, that is furtherly studied in order to recommend a final course of action (Malhotra, 2010).

Within the possible quantitative methods, an online questionnaire is chosen to test the previously presented hypotheses. The online questionnaire was developed due to its main advantages, namely, the direct access of the participants to the questionnaire, as well as the confidentiality of the answers (Malhotra, 2010). Moreover, an online survey provides more accurate results and reliable answers, since it does not require any intermediaries, at a lower cost and higher speed. Lastly, and especially due to the characteristics of the target population, an online survey is the easiest way to get into contact with the desired respondents. However, results are dependent of the number of respondents, and that is difficult to control.

The platform chosen to create and distribute the online survey is Qualtrics, as it offers numerous options regarding question structure. It also presents the advantage of easily download the data collected into the SPSS program.

### 3.4 Questionnaire Conception

The questionnaire was created based on previous literature and the defined hypotheses, being meticulously adapted to the study (see Appendix 1).

At the beginning of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1), participants were presented with a brief explanation of the context and objectives of the study, including the desired population's profile, and ensuring the confidentiality of the answers. It was also made available an option for the respondents to choose the preferred language of the questionnaire, between the Portuguese and English versions.

### **3.4.1 Macro-structure**

In terms of Macro-structure, the questionnaire was divided into five dimensions. It starts with the screening questions, in order to check if the respondent belongs to the target group, followed by an assessment of the benefits associated with the use of social media by people with disabilities. The third dimension focuses on the disabled people's intentions to use social media, whereas the fourth and fifth parts aim to study the demographic and psychographic characteristics of the sample, respectively.

The variables composing the questionnaire are structured as the following:

- **Group I – Screening Questions**
- **Group II – Benefits of using Social Media**
  - Functional Benefits
  - Social Benefits
  - Hedonic and Psychological Benefits
- **Group III – Intentions to use Social Media**
- **Group IV – Demographics**
  - Type of disability
  - Disability level
  - Mobility level
  - Need of help to move
  - Assistance level
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Economic status
  - Educational level
  - Nationality

- **Group V – Psychographics**
  - Social Media use frequency
  - Social Media platforms use
  - Share of traveling experiences
  - Sources of information
  - Traveling partner

Benefits and Intentions were measured with a 5-point Likert Scale, with 1 representing “Strongly disagree”, and 5 “Strongly agree”. A neutral option (3) was also provided. The scales used were tested and developed on previous research articles found in literature.

### **3.4.2 Micro-structure**

The questionnaire is divided into four main groups, with a total of 28 questions. Table A.1 (see Appendix 2) summarizes the micro-structure of the questionnaire, with the sources consulted for its development.

The first dimension of the questionnaire seeks to examine the benefits associated with the use of Social Media by people with disabilities for tourism purposes. This dimension is divided into three variables, namely, Functional, Social, and Hedonic and Psychological Benefits, adapted from Parra-López et al. (2011) and Hwang et al. (2002). The variables are composed of three, two, and three items, respectively.

The second dimension (division/group) focuses on understanding the intentions of disabled people to use Social Media in the traveling context. The three items composing this variable are adapted from Parra-López et al. (2011) and Burnett and Baker (2001).

Lastly, the third and fourth parts of the survey intent to analyze the participants’ profile in a demographic and psychographic manner, correspondingly. On the third dimension, the demographical analysis of the sample is composed of ten variables, with one item each, retrieved from Figueiredo et al. (2012) and Cox et al. (2009). The psychographic analysis consists of five variables, also with one item each. These items are based on Ayeh et al. (2013), Kang and Schuett (2013), Hernández-Méndez et al. (2015), and Buhalis and Michopouloub (2011).

### **3.5 Target Population**

This study aims to understand how social media can help people with disabilities to plan their travels. Therefore, the target population is constituted by people with disabilities, who are social media users.

In order to guarantee that only people belonging to the desired target would fill out the questionnaire, it was necessary to develop and implement a filter in the questionnaire. Participants were screened through two questions that intended to confirm if the respondent had any type of disability and also if one was a social media user, through a binary scale. To continue answering the survey, both questions needed to be positively answered. In case the participant responded negatively to any of the screening questions, one would be automatically redirected to the end of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1).

Preceding the final questionnaire, a pre-test was made with an online survey being distributed between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of November, collecting a total of 50 completed and valid answers. The initial data collection allowed to conduct the necessary tests to understand if the results were consistent in order to sustain and answer the identified hypotheses. Even though some small adjustments were required, the pre-tests verified the reliability of the published questionnaire, allowing its use to answer the research problem and objectives.

The final questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was directly distributed to people belonging to the target and with the assistance of institutions and/or organizations working with disabled people. The contact with the institutions was made by phone and email to introduce and send the questionnaire's link, to be further shared among their beneficiaries. Due to Covid-19 pandemic, it was not easy to have the support of many institutions/organizations disseminating the questionnaire as the majority was only working with the most difficult cases, or with a lot of time restrictions. Therefore, in order to collect data from the desired population, the questionnaire was also shared on Facebook groups constituted by people with different disabilities, separately, (hearing, mental, physical, and visual), or including the four types together, allowing a more direct contact with the participants, and not only in Portugal. In order to incentivize people to participate in the study, a possibility for the participants to mention an institution/organization to participate in a voucher raffle was presented.

### **3.6 Statistical Methods**

The number of responses has a statistical influence on the estimates of the study, so it is important to make sure that a minimum number is guaranteed. According to Gorsuch (2003),

for each variable, there should be 10 to 20 respondents. This being said, and having a total of 11 variables being studied, the number of participants should be higher than 110, which was accomplished.

After collecting the necessary number of answers, data were exported, treated, and analyzed through Statistical Package, for Social Sciences (SPSS) – IBM SPSS Statistics 26, in order to test the research hypotheses.

Firstly, the preparation of the dataset was performed, by cleaning the data and checking for missing values and possible outliers. Afterward, a characterization of the sample is presented through frequency tables, including both absolute and relative values, and the identification of the mode for each variable. Furthermore, a Univariate Analysis is executed for each item that composes the scales of Benefits and Intentions to use Social Media. The analysis is done through central tendency and dispersion measures, such as Mean, Median, Standard Deviation, Minimum and Maximum values, with a 95% confidence level for the means.

Moreover, in order to check for the internal consistency of each variable (Functional, Social, Hedonic and Psychological Benefits, and Intentions to use Social Media), a Scale Reliability Analysis is performed.

Lastly, research hypotheses are tested using a Linear Regression. Through this test, it is possible to understand if the Functional, Social, and Hedonic and Psychological Benefits have a positive or negative effect on the Intentions of people with disabilities to use Social Media.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Data Cleaning

The questionnaire was closed with a total number of 342 entries. Of those, some did not fulfill the established criteria to be part of the sample, and others were incomplete.

In order to check for the existence of outliers, a Multivariate Outlier Analysis was performed. A Mahalanobis Distance was calculated for each participant and the ones in which the length of the answers was lower than a p-value of 0.001 were considered as outliers of the dataset. From this analysis, one outlier was identified and removed from the sample, leaving it with a total of 204 responses.

Given the size of the sample of this study (204 participants), which can be considered large, it is assumed that the sample follows a normal distribution. Therefore, parametric tests are applied to test the previously defined research hypotheses.

### 4.2 Sample Characterization

In order to classify the sample, some demographic and psychographic characteristics of the 204 respondents were analyzed.

The first questions of the Demographics group rely on the disability of the participant, namely, type and level of disability, mobility level, movement assistance, and whether the participant required some kind of support to fill the questionnaire. Afterward, general demographic questions were asked to the participants (see Table 1).

*Table 1 - Demographic Characterization*

Variable	Category	Frequency		Mode
		Absolute	Relative (%)	
Type of disability	Hearing	39	19.1	
	Mental	40	19.6	
	Physical	95	46.6	X
	Visual	30	14.7	
Level of disability	Less than 75%	120	58.8	X
	Equal or higher than 75%	84	41.2	
Mobility Level	Reduced	74	36.3	
	Somewhat reduced	130	63.7	X
Movement Assistance	Yes	50	24.5	
	No	154	75.5	X
Filling Assistance	Yes	34	16.7	
	No	170	83.3	X

**Table 1 - Demographic Characterization (cont.)**

Variable	Category	Frequency		Mode
		Absolute	Relative (%)	
Age	18 - 25	58	28.4	
	26 - 35	65	31.9	X
	36 - 45	52	25.5	
	46 - 55	17	8.3	
	>55	12	5.9	
Gender	Male	104	51	X
	Female	95	46.6	
	Other	3	1.5	
	Prefer not to say	2	1.0	
Occupation	Student	43	21.1	
	Employed	102	50.0	X
	Unemployed	47	23.0	
	Retired	12	5.9	
Education Level	Middle School or equivalent	10	4.9	
	High School	84	41.2	X
	Some college	41	20.1	
	Undergraduate	30	14.7	
	Graduate or more	39	19.1	
Nationality	Brazil	20	9.8	
	Portugal	107	52.5	X
	United States of America	52	25.5	
	Other	25	12.2	

In terms of the type of disability, “Physical” represented the category with the highest frequency (46.6%), as well as the “Less than 75%” in terms of disability level, amounting to a total of 58.8%. The majority of the respondents evaluated their mobility level as “Somewhat reduced” (63.7%), and do not need help to move (75.5%) and assistance to fill out the questionnaire (83.3%). Besides that, concerning the age, the groups of ages 18-25, 26-35, and 36-45 represent 28.4%, 31.9%, and 25.5% of the sample, respectively. The sample is composed of 51% of male respondents, with the majority of the participants to be employed (50%) and with High School as their highest educational level (41.2%). Lastly, 52.5% of the respondents are Portuguese, followed by North American participants (25.5%) and Brazilian (9.8%).

The last group of the questionnaire intent to understand the psychographic characterization of the sample. These characteristics include the Social Media use frequency, the most used platforms, their sharing behavior regarding traveling experiences, the sources of information, and the traveling partners (see Table 2).

**Table 2 – Psychographic Characterization**

Variable	Category	Frequency		Mode
		Absolute	Relative (%)	
<b>Social Media use frequency</b>	Several times each day	151	74.0	X
	Once a day	32	15.7	
	A few times a week	18	8.8	
	A few times a month or less	3	1.5	
<b>Social Media platforms use</b>	Facebook	108	52.9	X
	WhatsApp	57	27.9	
	YouTube	29	14.2	
	Facebook Messenger	10	4.9	
<b>Share of traveling experiences</b>	Yes	131	64.2	X
	No	73	35.8	
<b>Sources of information</b>	Destination / hotel websites	99	48.5	X
	Travel blogs	28	13.7	
	Travel social media sites	48	23.5	
	Travel reviews	29	14.2	
<b>Traveling partner</b>	Family	135	66.2	X
	Friends	50	24.5	
	Alone	15	7.4	
	Other	4	2.0	

Regarding the frequency of use, the majority of the participants stated that they use Social Media several times a day (74%), and Facebook is the most used platform (52.9%). Even though WeChat is considered the fifth social media platform with the most users in the world, no participants chose it as number one. 64.2% of the respondents confirmed that they had already shared their traveling experiences on Social Media and use destination and hotel websites as the main source of information (48.5%). Concerning traveling partners, participants that travel with their family amounted to 66.2% of the sample.

### 4.3 Univariate Analysis

In order to better understand the composition of the variables in the study and how they were assessed by respondents, a Univariate Analysis is performed. The study of the items composing each variable allows to better comprehend the behavior of the participants regarding the use of social media tools and find possible patterns that may exist. Table A.2 (see Appendix 2) summarizes the Mean, the Median, the Standard Deviation, and the Minimum and Maximum values, according to the 5-point Likert Scale used in the questionnaire.

#### **4.3.1 Functional Benefits**

Regarding the three items that compose the Functional Benefits variable (see Table A.2 in Appendix 2), the one that asks participants to what extent they believe that social media tools allow them to share and receive information about tourist sites and activities of interest, that are suitable for their needs (FUNC1), is the one with the highest mean (3.70). On the other side, the item with the lowest mean (3.21) relies on the costs saved with the use of social media to take the most advantage of the resources invested in the trip (FUNC2).

#### **4.3.2 Social Benefits**

The Social Benefits variable is composed of three items (see Table A.2 in Appendix 2), all with a relatively high mean (higher than 3.5). The item with the highest mean focuses on the extent to which respondents believe that social media tools enable them to stay in contact with peers that share similar interests in terms of touristic trips (SOC1), with a 3.96 mean value.

#### **4.3.3 Hedonic and Psychological Benefits**

The third variable – Hedonic and Psychological Benefits – comprises two items (see Table A.2 in Appendix 2), where the one with the highest mean (3.89) evaluates the extent to which participants are proud of themselves when sharing opinions and tourism experiences on social media (HED2). Contrary, the other item asks how pleasing and funny the process of organizing and taking trips is, using social media (HED1), with a mean of 3.56.

#### **4.3.4 Intentions to Use Social Media**

The last variable in question is the Intention to use Social Media, being composed of three items (see Table A.2 in Appendix 2). Although all items present high means, the one with the highest value (4.06) focuses on the fact that respondents believe more people with disabilities will use social media to comment, upload content and contribute with experiences and knowledge about traveling (INT1). In regard to how sure participants are about the possibility of using social media tools again to organize and plan their trips, they evaluated this item with the lowest values, accounting for a mean of 3.85.

### **4.4 Scale Validity and Reliability**

As previously mentioned, the items used to conceptualize the questionnaire for the present study were adapted from literature; therefore, the validity and accuracy of the results were not compromised. Moreover, a Scale Reliability Analysis was performed in order to check for the internal consistency of the scales. To ensure accurate findings, the Cronbach's Alpha resulted

from this analysis should be higher than 0.6 to be accepted that the scale is reliable but preferably greater than 0.7. Even though one of the Alphas is lower than 0.7, it is also known from the literature that scales with a low number of items composing it, tend to have a lower level of reliability (Malhotra, 2010). This is the case of the “Hedonic and Psychological Benefits” scale, which only has two items associated, while the remaining ones are composed of three items each. This information is summarized in Table 3:

*Table 3 - Scale Reliability Analysis*

Scale	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
<b>Functional Benefits</b>	3	0.828
<b>Social Benefits</b>	3	0.724
<b>Hedonic and Psychological Benefits</b>	2	0.690
<b>Intentions to use Social Media</b>	3	0.804

#### **4.5 Data Analysis**

In order to test the research hypotheses, and after confirming the validity and reliability of the scales used, a few variables were created. The variables assessed in the survey, namely, Functional Benefits (composed of three items), Social Benefits (with three items), Hedonic and Psychological Benefits (composed of two items), and Intentions to use Social Media (with a total of three items), were the base for the creation of the new variables. Consequently, four new variables were computed as an average of all the items that compose each construct mentioned above (Average\_FUNC, Average\_SOC, Average\_HED, and Average\_INT).

The hypotheses were tested through a Linear Regression as both dependent and independent variables are metric. The test allows to verify the effect of the independent variables (Benefits), on the dependent variable (Average\_INT), and check if the benefits of using Social Media have a positive impact on the intentions of people with disabilities to use them for traveling purposes. The results are summarized in Table 4:

**Table 4 - Linear Regression Analysis to test H1, H2, and H3**

Indep. Variables	Dep. Variable	Model Summary	ANOVA	Coefficients		
		Adjusted R-square	Sig.	Unstd. Beta	Sig.	VIF
Average_FUNC	Average_INT	0.500	0.000	0.199	0.000	1.751
Average_SOC				0.272	0.000	2.053
Average_HED				0.247	0.000	2.047

In Table 4, and through the value of the Adjusted R-Square, it is possible to extract the level of variance in the dependent variable, explained by the three independent variables. Therefore, it can be stated that 50% of the intentions to use Social Media (dependent variable) is explained by the benefits associated with its use (Functional, Social, and Hedonic and Psychological). Additionally, with the ANOVA test, one can confirm or reject that the model has explanatory power. For that, with a 95% confidence level, one can say that the model composed of Functional, Social, Hedonic and Psychological Benefits has explanatory power since it presents a p-value of 0.000 (below the significance level of 5%).

Moreover, according to the Coefficients section, the three independent variables are statistically significant (p-value < 0.05) and, thus, have an impact on the dependent variable. Regarding Functional Benefits, one can say that it has a positive impact on the intentions to use Social Media, with an Unstandardized Beta of 19.9%. The same happens to Social, and Hedonic and Psychological Benefits, with Unstandardized Betas of 27.2% and 24.7%, correspondingly. Lastly, the last column of the Table 4 is a representation of the Multicollinearity Analysis. The three variables present VIF values below 2.5, which enables to confirm that there is not a high correlation between them.

## 5. Discussion

This paper aims to study Parra-López et al. (2011) model, which explored the impact of the benefits of social media on the intentions to use them for traveling purposes, applied to the disabled people's market. From that, some interesting results were found.

***H1: The perceived Functional benefits associated with the use of social media have a positive impact on disabled people's intention to use them to plan and organize travels.***

Firstly, through the previous analysis of the Linear Regression test (see Table 4), an impact of the Functional benefits on the intentions of people with disabilities to use social media for traveling purposes is confirmed. The Unstandardized Beta of 0.199 represent a positive but low impact as, for each unit added in the variable, the general increase would be positive, but lower than the unit. Thus, **accepting H1**. This result is aligned with the previous literature reviewed. According to Munar and Jacobsen (2014), social media enables disabled tourists to share information about their traveling experiences, in real-time and therefore increasing the influence that their families and peers have on their planning and travel decision-making (Hernández-Méndez et al., 2015).

***H2: The perceived Social benefits associated with the use of social media have a positive impact on disabled people's intention to use them to plan and organize travels.***

Regarding the Social benefits of social media, through the Linear Regression analysis (see Table 4), it is possible to conclude that there is also a positive impact on disabled people's intentions to use them to plan their travels, **accepting H2**. These findings corroborate McMillen and Alter (2017) and Ellis and Kent (2011) research. The authors conclude that social media allows people with disabilities to connect and communicate with others, enabling social networking, and the creation of online communities. This variable is the one with the highest Unstandardized Beta, but it is also considered low, as per unit added, the general increase is much lower (0.272).

***H3: The perceived Hedonic and Psychological benefits associated with the use of social media have a positive impact on disabled people's intention to use them to plan and organize travels.***

The Linear Regression test (see Table 4) confirms the positive impact of social media's Hedonic and Psychological benefits on the disabled tourists' intentions to use them for traveling purposes. Therefore, **H3 is accepted**. This last result is in accordance with previous literature

articles. As stated by Parra-López et al. (2011), Social benefits are enhanced by the Hedonic and Psychological ones through an active communication and participation in the online collaborative environments. Additionally, the trust tourists have in social media can minimize the perceived risks and anxiety involved in the traveling process (Yen & Gwinner, 2003), especially for this group. Lastly, Munar and Jacobsen (2014) reinforce the idea that disabled tourists are willing to help others with the minimization of risk by producing content. Even though a positive impact is present, the Unstandardized Beta reflects a low impact (0.247), also showing that, by adding an unit to the variable, the overall impact will be substantially lower.

Even though the results show a positive impact, they are considerably low. By analyzing the psychographics of the sample, one can say that the majority of the respondents still do not use social media as their main source of information when it comes to traveling issues, instead, they use destination/ hotel websites (48.5%). In furtherance, only a small portion of the respondents stated that they travel alone (7.4%), and most of them usually travel either with their family or friends, which may result in a division of the information search responsibility. Taking this into consideration, these tourists might not have enough knowledge to understand and extract the full potential of social media as an information tool, which can thus, play an influence on the perceived benefits that these platforms can offer.

## **6. Conclusions**

### **6.1 Main Conclusions**

The current study tries to fill an existing research gap identified in the literature. The information search phase and the use of the internet, on the tourism market for people with disabilities, have not been subjected to study by previous research articles. More specifically, there is no literature covering the benefits that social media can bring to people with disabilities in what regards to the tourism sector. Therefore, this study aims to understand what the benefits associated with the use of social media have an impact on disabled people's intention to use them for traveling purposes. For that, it was necessary to understand the market, the way these tourists search for information online, and lastly, the benefits experienced by this segment of the market when using social media to plan and organize their travels.

A quantitative approach was chosen to conduct the proposed topic of the study and the main research question. To do so, an online questionnaire was performed, adapting the model developed by Parra-López et al. (2011) to the market in the study. The survey resulted in the collection of 204 valid responses that enable the analysis of the research hypotheses through a Linear Regression test.

Through the findings of the study, one can conclude that all of the three benefits derived from the use of social media have a positive, but low, impact on disabled people's intentions to use them for tourism purposes. The Social benefits are the ones representing the higher impact on the people with disabilities' intentions to use social media, aligned with what was mentioned by McMillen and Alter's (2017) and Ellis and Kent's (2011). This study corroborates the findings of previous research articles, by confirming that social media enables the communication between this group, and other groups of interest, in what regards to tourism planning. Moreover, the Hedonic and Psychological benefits present a similar effect on the using intentions, reinforcing the fact that social media can minimize the perceived risks involved when people with disabilities travel (Yen & Gwinner, 2003). Lastly, the Functional benefits are also shown to have a positive impact on the intentions of people with disabilities to use social media in the tourism context. These findings, along with the ones presented by Munar and Jacobsen (2014), and Hernández-Méndez et al. (2015) previous research, explain how social media enables real-time information sharing, which strongly influences disabled people's decision-making when it comes to tourism choices and plans.

## **6.2 Theoretical and Practical Implications**

The findings of this study contribute to increase and develop the existing literature on the topic in the sense of understanding the online behavior of this market and the intentions to use social media, especially, Parra-López et al. (2011) and Altinay et al. (2016) papers. The first one in terms of adapting the created model to the specific case of the disabled market on tourism, and the second one by further analyzing the role of social media for traveling purposes in this market. Additionally, the model used was adapted from an existing one, which contributed with a new question to study, that can, therefore, be also applied in other situations for future research.

Furthermore, in terms of managerial applicability, the current study provides important inputs for tourism providers and agents on the expansion of the business derived from the opportunity that is the size of the disabled people's market. The findings are important in the sense that it gathers information mostly about the search phase of the customer journey, that is known to be the stage where people with disabilities are enabled to travel. Also, it guides tourism providers to efficiently promote and advertise their services, to create interactions among people, and to understand and meet their needs and expectations. Moreover, this study allows companies that operate in the tourism sector to define efficient social media strategies to target tourists with disabilities.

## **6.3 Limitations**

Although the current study provides useful academic and managerial insights, some limitations need to be highlighted.

Firstly, in an online survey, the method chosen to collect primary data, presents some disadvantages, namely, the lack of identity control, the concentration level, the time spent and the dedication when answering, the fact that it does not allow to clarify possible doubts, among others. Also, since it is a considerably smaller market, compared to the overall tourism sector, especially when shared on social media, the number of respondents is not as high as it could. Even though the results were shown to be statistically significant, a bigger sample could potentially provide more accurate results. It is also important to mention that the majority of the participants have a physical disability (46.6%) and are Portuguese (52.5%). Lastly, the fact that this segment showed some reluctance to share information, and the assistance some participants needed to complete the questions might have an impact on the honesty of the answers given. Therefore, the extrapolation of results might become more difficult.

## **6.4 Future Research**

Future studies could go towards two streams of research, namely, adapting this model to study separate components, or introducing other variables, as the ones used in the departing model.

Firstly, one possibility for further research could rely on adapting the model to study the impact of the benefits of using social media for traveling purposes according to the types and levels of disabilities, that are known to have a heterogeneous behavior (Figueiredo et al., 2012), or to different types of tourism. Also, is it known that the use of social media to travel is different among the three stages of the traveling process (Amaro et al., 2016) and, therefore, it might be interesting to study the impact of the benefits on the disabled people's intentions to use social media, on those stages, separately. Moreover, as Bühler and Pelka (2014) discussed, disabled people tend to accept better the accessibility issues caused by User-Generated Content, rather than the one created by providers. Thus, studying the impact of the benefits in these two scenarios could bring interesting results.

Lastly, another stream of analysis could cover the other implications on the intentions to use social media for traveling purposes, such as the costs and incentives highlighted in Parra-López et al. (2011) research, in order to complement the current study.

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## **Appendix**

### **Appendix 1- Questionnaire**

Dear participant,

The purpose of this questionnaire is to study how Social Media can help people with disabilities to plan a trip.

The data collected will be used for my Master's Dissertation, and the questionnaire will take no longer than 5-6 minutes to complete. For that, the respondents should be 18 years old, or older.

It is important to note that all answers are confidential and will not be used for other purposes rather than the present study.

At the end of the survey, there will be a box where you can insert the name of the institution/organization that you would like to participate in the raffle for the voucher. Please note that this is not mandatory.

Your participation is highly valued and appreciated. If there are any questions, feel free to contact me through mail: [inesfariarodrigues@gmail.com](mailto:inesfariarodrigues@gmail.com).

Thank you.

#### ***Group I – Screening Questions***

Do you have a disability? (If the answer is “No”, the questionnaire will end)

- Yes
- No

Do you use Social Media? (If the answer is “No”, the questionnaire will end)

- Yes
- No

#### ***Group II – Benefits of using Social Media***

What is your level of agreement with the following statements?

1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Neutral, 4 – Agree, 5 – Strongly Agree

***Functional Benefits***

1. Social media tools enable me to keep up to date with knowledge about the tourist sites and activities of interest, that are suitable for disabled people.
2. Social media tools permit me to save costs and get the most from the resources invested in the trip.
3. Social media tools give me the possibility to provide and to receive information about tourist sites and activities of interest, that are suitable for disabled people.

***Social Benefits***

4. Social media tools enable me to stay in contact with others who share the same interests regarding tourist trips.
5. My personal relationships with people with similar motivations on the trip increase and are more interesting.
6. Social media tools provide me with a strong feeling of belonging to a group.

***Hedonic and Psychological Benefits***

7. The use of social media tools in the process of organizing and taking vacation trips is both pleasing and fun.
8. When I participate with opinions and share tourist experiences, I am proud of doing so.

***Group III – Intentions to use Social Media***

What is your level of agreement with the following statements?

1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Neutral, 4 – Agree, 5 – Strongly Agree

9. I think more and more people with disabilities will use these social media tools, commenting on aspects of trips, upload content, and contributing with experiences and knowledge.
10. I am sure that I will use these tools again to organize and plan vacation trips.
11. In the future, I will encourage my friends with disabilities to use and contribute to these social media tools to organize and plan vacation trips.

**Group IV – Demographics**

12. What is the type of your disability?

- Hearing
- Mental
- Physical
- Visual

13. What is the level of your disability?

- Less than 75%
- Equal or higher than 75%

14. What is your mobility level?

- Reduced
- Somewhat reduces

15. Do you need help to move?

- Yes
- No

16. Did you require assistance to fill this questionnaire?

- Yes
- No

17. How old are you?

- <18
- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- >55

18. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other
- Prefer not to say

19. What is your occupation?

- Student
- Employed
- Unemployed
- Retired

20. What is your higher educational level?

- Middle School or equivalent
- High School
- Some college
- Undergraduate
- Graduate or more

21. What is your nationality? (The “nationality” functionality of Qualtrics was used to show the list of countries)

### **Group V – Psychographics**

22. How often do you use social media?

- Several times each day
- Once a day
- A few times a day
- A few times a month or less

23. Which of the following social media platforms do you use?

- Facebook
- WhatsApp
- YouTube
- Facebook Messenger
- WeChat

24. Have you ever shared your traveling experiences on social media?

- Yes
- No

25. Which of the following sources do you most use when planning a trip?

- Destination/ hotel websites
- Travel blogs
- Travel social media sites
- Travel reviews

26. With whom do you usually travel the most with?

- Family
- Friends
- Alone
- Other

This part is not mandatory. I will offer a PayPal voucher of 20€ to one organization/institution to value the inputs given. If you would like to mention one to participate in the raffle, write its email or Facebook page link below.

**Thank you again for your participation!**

**If you have any comments or suggestions, feel free to send me an email:**  
[inesfariarodrigues@gmail.com](mailto:inesfariarodrigues@gmail.com)

## Appendix 2 - Tables

Table A.1 – Questionnaire’s Micro-structure

Dimensions	Variables	Item	Sources
Screening Questions	Sub-screening questions	Do you have a disability?	Figueiredo et al., 2012
		Do you use Social Media?	Kim et al., 2017
Benefits	Functional	Social media tools enable me to keep up to date with knowledge about the tourist sites and activities of interest, that are suitable for disabled people.	Hwang et al., 2002
		Social media tools permit me to save costs and get the most from the resources invested in the trip.	Parra-López et al., 2011
		Social media tools give me the possibility to provide and to receive information about tourist sites and activities of interest, that are suitable for disabled people.	Hwang et al., 2002
	Social	Social media tools enable me to stay in contact with others who share the same interests regarding tourist trips.	Parra-López et al., 2011
		My personal relationships with people with similar motivations on the trip increase and are more interesting.	
		Social media tools provide me with a strong feeling of belonging to a group.	
Hedonic and Psychological	The use of social media tools in the process of organizing and taking vacation trips is both pleasing and fun.	Parra-López et al., 2011	
	When I participate with opinions and share tourist experiences, I am proud of doing so.		
Intentions to use Social Media	Intentions to use Social Media	I think more and more people with disabilities will use these social media tools, commenting on aspects of trips, upload content, and contributing with experiences and knowledge.	Burnett & Baker, 2001
		I am sure that I will use these tools again to organize and plan vacation trips.	Parra-López et al., 2011
		In the future, I will encourage my friends with disabilities to use and contribute to these social media tools to organize and plan vacation trips.	Burnett & Baker, 2001
Demographics	Type of disability	What is the type of your disability?	Figueiredo et al., 2012
	Disability level	What is the level of your disability?	
	Mobility level	What is your mobility level?	
	Need of help to move	Do you need help to move?	
	Assistance level	Did you require assistance to fill this questionnaire?	
	Age	How old are you?	
	Gender	What is your gender?	
	Economic status	What is your occupation?	
	Educational level	What is your higher educational level?	
	Nationality	What is your nationality?	Cox et al., 2009

**Table A.1 – Questionnaire’s Micro-structure (cont.)**

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Sources</b>
<b>Psychographics</b>	Social Media use frequency	How often do you use social media?	Ayeh et al., 2013
	Social Media platforms use	Which of the following social media platforms do you use?	Kang & Schuett, 2013
	Share of travel experiences	Have you ever shared your traveling experiences on social media?	
	Sources of information	Which of the following sources do you most use when planning a trip?	Hernández-Méndez et al., 2015
	Traveling partner	With whom do you usually travel the most with?	Buhalis & Michopouloub, 2011

**Table A.2 – Univariate Analysis**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Variable</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Sd. Deviation</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
<b>Benefits</b>	FUNC1	Social media tools enable me to keep up to date with knowledge about the tourist sites and activities of interest, that are suitable for disabled people.	3.57	4	1.069	1	5
	FUNC2	Social media tools permit me to save costs and get the most from the resources invested in the trip.	3.21	3	1.143	1	5
	FUNC3	Social media tools give me the possibility to provide and to receive information about tourist sites and activities of interest, that are suitable for disabled people.	3.70	4	1.048	1	5
	SOC1	Social media tools enable me to stay in contact with others who share the same interests regarding tourist trips.	3.96	4	0.867	1	5
	SOC2	My personal relationships with people with similar motivations on the trip increase and are more interesting.	3.55	4	0.943	1	5
	SOC3	Social media tools provide me with a strong feeling of belonging to a group.	3.79	4	1.006	1	5
	HED1	The use of social media tools in the process of organizing and taking vacation trips is both pleasing and fun.	3.56	4	0.894	1	5
	HED2	When I participate with opinions and share tourist experiences, I am proud of doing so.	3.89	4	0.881	1	5
<b>Intentions to use Social Media</b>	INT1	I think more and more people with disabilities will use these social media tools, commenting on aspects of trips, upload content, and contributing with experiences and knowledge.	4.06	4	0.776	1	5
	INT2	I am sure that I will use these tools again to organize and plan vacation trips.	3.85	4	0.916	1	5
	INT3	In the future, I will encourage my friends with disabilities to use and contribute to these social media tools to organize and plan vacation trips.	3.97	4	0.812	1	5