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Exploring Online Travel Reviews of Backpackers

Motivations and Travel Decision-Making
Process

Tiago Alcântara Guerreiro Lopes Gomes

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ABSTRACT

Title: Exploring Online Travel Reviews of Backpackers: Motivations and Travel Decision-Making Process

Author: Tiago Alcântara Guerreiro Lopes Gomes

Backpacking is becoming a growing and relevant trend in the tourism industry. Following this trend, companies that operate in this industry are taking some actions. For instance, they are adapting their business models and communications strategy according to the backpackers' culture and characteristics as travellers.

User-generated Content is growing in importance in the backpacker's travel decision-making process. Especially, online travel reviews composed by other travellers are more available in the Web 2.0's interactive-based sites and platforms and used to make travel-related decisions. This content resulted from the development of information and communication technologies, changed the consumer behaviour and allowed the emergence and spreadness of the backpacking phenomenon.

The main purpose of this netnographic study is to understand the effects of Online Travel Reviews on backpacker's motivations and travel decision-making process. Blogs, Forums, Online Travel Agencies' websites and Social Media (Facebook Groups and Instagram accounts) were analysed in order to retrieve the online data. Furthermore, six in-depth interviews were conducted to reach a more detailed analysis.

The main results taken from this study are a more detailed knowledge of the different motivations for travelling; it was possible to divide them into two personas according to their motivations. Additionally, it was possible to understand that backpackers' travel decision-making process varies among them, however, all of them use the OTR to plan their journeys. Implications for travel marketing are also provided.

Keywords: Backpackers, travel behaviour, netnography, motivations, user-generated content, online communities

SUMÁRIO

Título: Estudo das Avaliações Online de Backpackers – Motivações e Processo de Tomada de Decisão

Autor: Tiago Alcântara Guerreiro Lopes Gomes

Nos dias de hoje, backpacking é uma tendência que tem crescido de uma forma relevante na indústria do turismo. Seguindo esta tendência, as empresas presentes nesta indústria estão a levar a cabo algumas ações. Por exemplo, estão a adaptar os seus modelos de negócios e estratégias de comunicação de acordo com a cultura e características dos backpackers.

O conteúdo gerado pelo consumidor está a ganhar cada vez mais importância no processo de tomada de decisões do backpackers. As avaliações escritas por viajantes disponíveis online aumentaram e têm sido usadas para tomar decisões relacionadas com viagens. Este conteúdo resultou do desenvolvimento de tecnologias de informação e comunicação e mudou o comportamento do consumidor; permitindo o surgimento e a disseminação deste fenómeno.

O principal objetivo deste estudo netnográfico é entender os efeitos das avaliações de viagens online nas motivações do viajante e no processo de tomada de decisão. Blogs, fóruns, sites de agências de viagens online e redes sociais (grupos do Facebook e contas do Instagram) foram analisados para recolher os dados online. Além disso, foram realizadas seis entrevistas para uma análise mais detalhada.

Os principais resultados deste estudo foram um conhecimento mais detalhado das diferentes motivações para viajar; foi possível dividir os backpackers em 2 categorias de acordo com as suas motivações. Além disso, foi possível entender que o processo de tomada de decisão varia bastante entre backpackers. No entanto, todos usam as avaliações de viagens on-line para planear as suas viagens. Implicações para o marketing de viagens também são fornecidas.

Palavras-chave: Backpackers, comportamento de viagem, netnografia, motivações, Conteúdo gerado pelo usuário, comunidades online

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Thank you.

List of Acronyms

e-WOM - Electronic Word-of-Mouth

OTR - Online Travel Reviews

TDMP - Travel Decision-Making Process

TLC - Travel Career Ladder

UGC - User-Generated Content

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1. Introduction

1.1. Problem Definition and Relevance

According to Leslie (2012), tourism is a sector that has been extending temporally and spatially as means and opportunity increase. This is justified by the increasing competitiveness in this sector that was induced by the easier access to better flight deals and travel destinations that low-cost carriers offer nowadays.

These days, the concept of backpacker is broadly adopted and well comprehended by the tourism sector, as well as the receiving communities and travellers themselves. The following term can be explained in a very clear and direct way as Loker-Murphy (1996) carries it out: "young budgeted travellers on extended and/or working holidays" (p. 23). However, this segment of travellers has lacked some recent literature regarding its main traits, motivations and the travel decision-making process that they use in their journeys. Therefore, this study uses a netnographic approach in order to clarify and complement some aspects of these travellers.

Following this idea, backpackers have been neglected, at least from an economic standpoint, since they carefully control their budget during their trips. Consequently, this makes them perceived as "cheap tourists" and therefore, not an exciting segment of travellers. However, according to a study conducted in 2017 by a global not-for-profit organisation, World Youth Student and Educational (WYSE) along with the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), estimated that the size of the youth travel market is increasing and makes approximately 25% of international travellers, making the group an important economic force (WYSE Travel Confederation, 2018). Additionally, another study published in 2012 by WYSE as well, indicates that some changes happened among this segment that reinforce their economic position: they are travelling more and for longer periods, and during their travels, they are spending more money (WYSE Travel Confederation, 2014).

The same way that this segment's traits are changing, their decision-making process is also changing. According to Dwityas and Briandana (2017), the way that backpackers collect and use information is different nowadays due to the development of the Web 2.0. The latter allows the emergence of interactive-based sites and platforms that are rich with user-

generated content. Furthermore, this enables travellers to collaborate with their peers to create, use, and diffuse travel information which is responsible for changing the context of travel decision-making (Fesenmaier & Jeng, 2000; Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006).

The current paper attempts to contribute to the emerging literature, and it explores the effect of User-Generated Content on Backpackers, more specifically the impact of Online Travel Reviews on Backpackers' motivations and Travel Decision-Making Process. Since understanding the traveller's behaviour and expectations is "the starting point for all marketing efforts" (Kaczynski, 2008, p. 254), this paper is relevant for the marketers and services providers in the tourism and hospitality industry; it is an additional tool that they may use in order to create and implement better marketing strategies (Nejati & Mohamed, 2014).

1.2. Objective and Research Questions

The main objective of this study is to comprehend backpackers and the effect of User-Generated Content on them, more specifically the effect of Online Travel Reviews on Backpackers' motivations and Travel Decision-Making Process. The following research questions were framed in order to accomplish this objective:

RQ₁: How do Backpackers make use of online travel reviews?

RQ₂: What is the effect of Online Travel Reviews on Backpackers?

RQ₃: What are the main decisions' factors that Backpackers consider during their decision-making process?

RQ₄: Do Backpackers share the same travel motivations?

1.3. Thesis Outline

The proposed dissertation will be composed of six key chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the underlying research topic and its relevance. Additionally, the problem statement and its corresponding research questions will also be presented in this chapter. Chapter 2 reviews the existing academic literature regarding Backpackers, Online Travel Communities, User-Generated Content, Travel Decision-Making Process, and Netnography. The third chapter presents a detailed methodology used in this paper and an explanation of the procedural steps of the Netnography method. The fourth chapter shows the findings that

resulted from the qualitative research of the online communities. Chapter 5 displays the main conclusions as well as its theoretical and managerial implications. At last, the final chapter closes with the study's limitations and some ideas for future research suggestions.

2. Literature Review

This chapter aims to present an overview of the relevant theory and research required to answer the research problem. It is divided into four main topics. The first one is regarding the concept of backpackers and its motivations. Concerning the second topic, Online Travel Communities and User-Generated Content. The Travel Decision-Making Process follows the latest. Lastly, the final topic regards Netnography and Tourism sector.

2.1 Backpackers

2.1.1 Concept

Backpacking is a recent term that was first presented by Pearce in 1990, however, the study of this concept was started by Cohen in 1972, when he addressed this group of travellers as Drifters. Backpacking is a term used and accepted by both tourism industry and academia (Luo, Huang, & Brown, 2014) to characterise young travellers that do not have a fixed itinerary and are on a restricted budget and travel for more extended periods.

In order to better understand this fast-growing phenomenon, it is important to look back into some traditions that happened in the past. According to Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995), the initial forms of backpacking can be related to the European Grand Tours and Compulsory Travels. The first occurred in the 17th and 18th century, where the wealthy and cultured young men departed on a crusade in order to experience a different reality overseas. By having this new adventure, they would be seen as being more sophisticated and more worldly and socially aware (Hibbert, 1969; Swinglehurst, 1974). Regarding the second one, it was also present in Central Europe until the 19th century, where the lower-class tramp, especially men, used to take already defined routes in order to search for work (Adler, 1985). Both the Grand Tours and Compulsory Travel were responsible for making the young men leaving their house and family, experiencing new adventures and enjoying different cultures and societies. Therefore, they can be considered as the initial step for the backpacking that the middle-class youth travellers experience nowadays (Adler, 1985).

Cohen (1972) was responsible for initiating the study of backpacking when he reflected on the typology of tourism. This researcher assumed that the experience retrieved from tourism contemplates the perfect balance between the degree of novelty and the degree of familiarity desired (Loker-Murphy et al., 1995). Consequently, on one side, there is the non-institutionalized tourism and, on the other hand, institutionalised tourism. Both categories were further divided into *Explorers* and *Drifters* within non-institutionalized, and into *Organized* and *Individual Mass Tourists* within institutionalised. *The Explorers* plan their schedule and itinerary on their own; nonetheless, they are looking for comfortable places to stay and reliable means of transportation. Also, they attempt to immerse themselves in the host society; however, they keep some routines and habits of their endemic culture. *The Drifters* are the most spontaneous and unconstrained group, who has no itinerary and schedule predefined. Most of the times, they are travelling on their own, living with the locals and taking different jobs, when comparing to their native culture. Here the degree of familiarity is at a minimum and novelty at maximum. Regarding the second category, the *Organized Mass Tourists* are the least adventurous group, and they always travel on excursions provided by the industry, remaining restricted within the "environmental bubble". Therefore, the degree of familiarity is at a maximum and novelty at a minimum. *The Individual Mass Tourist* is similar to the latter one, however, they are not entirely dependent on the industry since they have a certain amount of control of their trip.

This desire to be deeply involved with the "world of others" (Cohen, 2003, p. 96) and their characteristic ways depicted the *Drifters* of the 60s. After their departure, they did not expect to return to their lives due to all the uncertainty and stresses present in the late modern life that culminated in the 60s with several revolutions and alternatives ways of living like, the Student Revolution and the Hippie Movement, respectively. These changes in society represent a complex and unclear factor that made the youth wanted to experience another reality and to take a "time out" (Elsrud, 1998, p. 311) from their society, in order to contemplate and focus on their future life and aspirations. For this reason, the *Drifters*, first mentioned by Cohen (1972), is the base concept that originated the study of *Backpackers* (Cohen, 2003).

After this initial study, a lot of literature and a varied number of different terms to define this group of young travellers like, "*Nomads* (Cohen, 1973); *Youthful Travelers* (Teas, 1974); *Wanderers* (Vogt, 1976); *Hitchhikers* (Mukerji, 1978); *Tramping Youth* (Adler, 1985), and

Long-term Budget Travelers (Riley, 1988)” started to appear. After 1990, when Pearce mentioned the first time the term *Backpacker*, a lot of recent studies mentioned them as *Backpackers* as well (Loker, 1993; Loker-Murphy, 1996; Loker-Murphy et al., 1995; Pearce, 1990) which means that the academia was accepting this concept (Uriely, Yonay, & Simchai, 2002).

Pearce's multifaceted definition (1990) to identify a Backpacker is based on a five criteria framework. First, to be a Backpacker traveller, budget accommodations must be chosen, more specifically, Backpacker hotels, hostel, campsites and guesthouses (Loker-Murphy et al., 1995). Secondly, they are looking forward to meeting new people, both locals and other travellers. This way, they share travel experiences and information to help the formation and transmission of their identity (Sørensen, 2003). Thirdly, they have to be independent when comes to plan their itinerary and travel schedule, by relying on travel information available online and guidebooks (Peel, Sørensen, & Steen, 2012; Sørensen, 2003; Young, 2009). Then, backpackers go on more extended holidays, with the majority of them travelling at least two weeks (Larsen, Ogaard, & Brun, 2011). At last, every backpacker should be interested in taking part in recreation activities, such as trekking, rock climbing and mountaineering, scuba diving and surfing (Loker-Murphy et al., 1995; Pearce, Murphy, & Brymer, 2009), in order to have more authentic experiences along their travel (Luo, Huang, & Brown, 2014).

2.1.2 Ethnography

The initial literature referred that the majority of backpackers were from a Western culture country like the United States, Canada, Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand. However, it is possible to find in a more recent literature a reference to a large number of Israeli backpackers, who just left the military service, and also, an increasing number of Japanese travellers (Sørensen, 2003). Many of them, temporary leave their homes and start their trip due to a recent event of their lives, usually related to life crisis and transitions in life (Cohen, 2003) or they are recently graduated, married or divorced or between jobs (Riley, 1988). Backpacking can be considered as a rite-of-passage (Turner, 1973; Turner & Turner, 1978), more specifically from late adolescence to early adulthood, where they submit themselves to different experiences and realities during the journey. By successfully overcoming all the unfamiliar situations, they may come back to their society as being “adults” and freely manage all the events from their parents (Cohen, 2003)

Concerning their age, most of them are between 18 and 33 years old. Moreover, the biggest share is composed of backpackers between 22 and 27 years old, with more people older than 27, rather than younger than 22 (Sørensen, 2003). Therefore, this supports the idea that most of them have already finished an education degree or worked several years before taking on this experience. Consequently, the backpackers from today are not the same as they used to be on the *Drifters* time (Cohen, 1972). They will be back to their daily life routine someday since the majority leaves with a fixed return day, and posteriorly, they will return to the society and be a future leader (Sørensen, 2003).

The usual length of the trip is between two-and-a-half and eighteen months, however, the average is between four and eight months (Sørensen, 2003). Even though they travel solo or with just one person, along the journey they usually meet other backpackers and travel with them for several days or weeks but then, they separate, and follow different paths (Loker-Murphy, 1996; Murphy, 2001; Riley, 1988). This process of friendship is common between them, and it is defined in the norms and values of the backpacker culture (Sørensen, 2003).

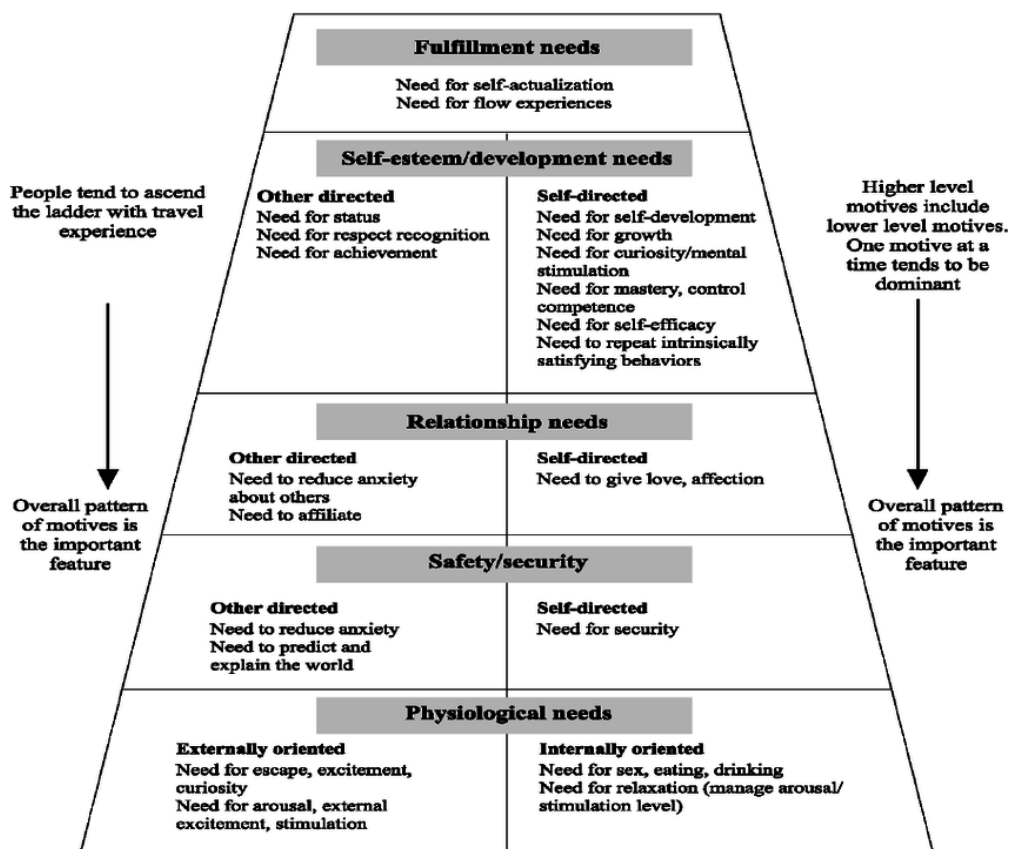
2.1.3 Backpacker's Motivations

Different motivations among backpackers is one of the factors that can show that this growing phenomenon is heterogeneous (Maoz, 2007). However, many scholars identified that the desire to construct a new temporary identity is the driven force that motivates the majority of them to start their journey (Maoz, 2007). By hoping to become more courageous, relaxed and independent, they can transform their identity, and consequently, construct the new self (Cohen, 2003; Elsrud, 2001).

Regarding Maoz's study (2007), travelling to regions that have a different culture than the one that the backpacker grew up in, makes them define the new self by not including the society's ideals but only their personal experiences that they have been having along the trip. They seek an identity that is not shared with any other else, which enhances the feeling of uniqueness that they deeply desire to achieve. Therefore, they aspire to have an individualised identity (Desforges, 2000) that is not controlled by any authority like their parents and society in general (Maoz, 2007). Their objective is to liberate themselves from a very "materialistic, stressed, and harsh society" and look for shelter in an "authentic, pure, relaxed, and primordial destination" (Maoz, 2007, p. 124). According to Maoz (2007), most of the backpackers during

their travels, especially those that come from a Western country, they rebel to their culture's traditions and parents' expectations while searching for their personal answers that motivated them to travel since the beginning. Yet, the new self resulting from this rebellion frequently ends up being a reflection of the typical values of their endemic society (Galani-Moutafi, 2001).

The Travel Career Ladder (TLC) was developed by Pearce (1988) by basing upon Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This model classifies five different hierarchical steps that influence tourist behaviour. It recognises the importance to consider tourist motivation as being multi-motive, in opposition to a single-trait or unidimensional term as in Maoz (2007). In other words, it is common to have more than one level of motivation to travel, like a set of different needs in the ladder level (Pearce & Lee, 2005). Also, the model defends that tourists' motives to travel change according to their travelling experiences, and are always adjusting their position in the ladder along their lifespan and/or accumulated travelling experiences (Pearce et al., 2005).



1. Travel Career Ladder Model (TLC) (Pearce, 1988)

By considering the TLC model, Loker-Murphy's (1996) analysis is done by conducting a study in Australia. Four different motivation-based clusters were reached: "Escapers/Relaxers, Social/Excitement-Seekers, Self-Developers and Achievers". Loker-Murphy (1996) concludes that all backpackers are not on the same ladder level and do not always share the same reasons to travel.

2.2 Online Travel Communities & User-Generated Content (UGC)

Preece (2000) defined an Online Community as a group of people that gathers online with an objective, which interactions are ruled by norms and standards. All of them share two fundamental traits: 1) every action can be seen by every participant; 2) the communication is ruled by a set of norms that command what can be shared and in what way and form (Lampel & Bhalla, 2007). Nonnecke, Andrews and Preece (2006) identified two different users: posters and lurkers. Concerning the first user, they are characterised for having a better sense of membership and community. Additionally, these users are actively uploading content in the online community. The latest is represented by those who want to enter into the community to have access to the information available in the community. This group constitutes the majority of the community's participants, since posting a contribution online represents a public good and therefore, does not represent any reward and satisfaction for the contributor, except the contribution to the common good (Lampel et. al, 2007).

Nowadays, consumers are valuing more the computer-mediated communication to make their decisions regarding the product and brand decisions. The contact between the community's participants is seen as being an objective and trustworthy information source which has a potential effect on changing the consumer's behaviour (Kozinets, 2002). Even though there are several types of communities, the following analysis is only focused on one kind of online community: Online Travel Community. As Goeldner and Ritchie (2012) referred, these communities are a group of individuals, frequently with a common interest, who constituted a travel organisation for their mutual benefit.

Travellers before departing on their journey have to plan it carefully. This leads to a previous online search to facilitate their decision process making (Grant, Clarke, & Kyriazis, 2008; Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998). Personal Travel Blogs are turning into one relevant source for collecting travel information (Chen, Shang, & Li, 2014). By engaging in this search, they can

exchange their recommendations and experiences about multiple destinations and tourism products with other communities' participants (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). Depending on its users, the purpose of the blog varies according to the type of traveller. However, only focusing on the backpackers, they mainly use online communities to keep in contact with other travellers and to tell their family and friends that they are safe, while they remain their journey on the road (Axup & Viller, 2005).

The Blog is one of the fastest growing media forms for online communication and publication (Singh, Veron-Jackson, & Cullinane, 2008). One of the reasons that explain this phenomenon is the personalised way that the blogger writes and, consequently, expresses their point of view and personality (Hollenbaugh, 2010). According to Ku (2014), "the online travel community allows travellers to obtain information from fellow travellers" (p. 34). Therefore, this gives more credibility to their opinions and recommendations when comparing to the traditional tourism information sources, since this way the travellers can have a prior evaluation of the travelling experience from a traveller as well (Senecal & Nantal, 2004). In this regard, a blog can be seen as "asynchronous and many-to-many channel for conveying travel-related electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM)" (Chen et al., 2014, p. 787) and as user-generated content (UGC) (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008). The following "constitutes the data, information, or media produced by the general public (rather by professionals) on the Internet" (Arriaga & Levina, 2008. p. 2), and it is profoundly changing the tourism industry's dynamics. UGC, such as Online Travel Reviews, are available on websites like Tripadvisor (www.tripadvisor.com). The users of this kind of websites are simultaneously producers and consumers of content (Arriaga et al., 2008). Furthermore, this kind of platform brings together individuals in discussion forums, enabling them to make the best decisions regarding their trip (Buhalis & Law, 2008)

2.2.1 Online Travel Reviews & e-WOM

In order to reduce the uncertainty and perceived risks, as mentioned above, the travellers not only go online to read and use information during their choice process but also share it (Bronner & De Hoog, 2010). They rely on this online content, which can be created by consumer reviews and ratings, to plan their trips (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). Figures from Google report that 80% of people search online about their trip and, on average, they visit a total of 26 websites and spend more than 2h on their research (Trend, 2013).

Usually, people tend to trust more in reviews when a buying a high involvement product, and since travel is a product with such characteristics, one can expect that this kind of reviews is broadly important in the tourism industry (Gretzel et al., 2008). Therefore, Online Reviews are promoting a renewed expansion of word-of-mouth (WOM) in the tourism sector, the e-WOM (Filieri & McLeay, 2013).

The online reviews are gaining considerable importance among the e-travel agencies that present products that are sponsored with customer reviews or promote their users to share their thoughts on their websites (Filieri et al., 2013).

2.3 Travel Decision-Making Process (TDMP)

Travel and Tourism is a promising sector in the world's economy and depends a lot in information since it is highly essential for travellers' decision-making process. Nowadays, the way travellers use this information in their TDMP has changed, and it is justified by the emergence of new Web 2.0's platforms, like social media, which offers a better interaction between its users (Dwityas & Briandana, 2017). Through these interactive-based sites, UGC available in online travelling communities has increased and, consequently, changed the consumer behaviour. These communities triggered the emergence of Travel 2.0 concept (Dwityas et al., 2017) where "sharing experience activity from one person to another person" (Dwityas et al., 2017: 193) plays a huge influence in the changing of the decision-making process. Also, it is responsible for minimising the perceived risks of the complex process of travelling since relationships with other (traveller to traveller) are made (Buhalis & Costa, 2006). In fact, more than 80% of the total travel product purchasers admitted that their purchasing intentions were influenced by UGC available online (PhoCusWright Market Research, 2008).

This evolution in the tourism sector, the Travel 2.0, has triggered the appearance of a new type of customer. They are described as being more informed, independent, individualistic, and involved. Additionally, these empowered customers have cheaper and better access to a various number of information sources and communities (Windham & Orton, 2001) which allows them to have more control and responsibility of their personal preferences' development (Dwityas et al., 2017). Therefore, in order to have a better understanding regarding these contemporary tourists, it is important to consider three main roles of them: 1)

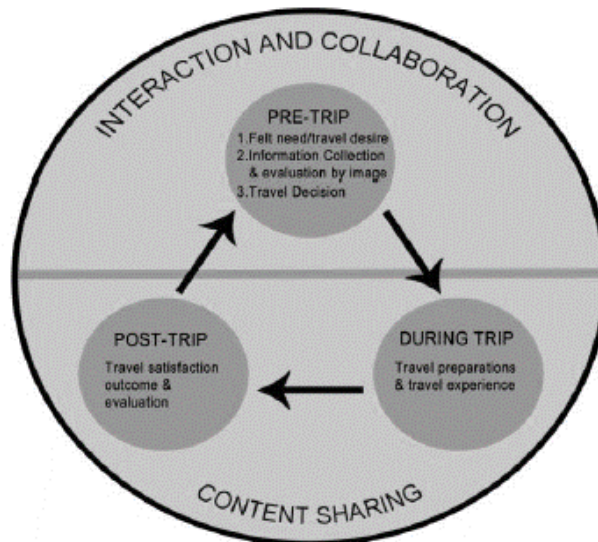
travellers are those who use technological users; 2) travellers are those who are co-producers of experience, and lastly 3) travellers are storytellers (Buhalis & Law, 2006; Gretzel, Fesenmaier, & O'Leary, 2006).

Since this industry has great potential, there is an extensive list of literature available regarding the travel decision-making process (Decrop & Snelders, 2005; Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002). Travel behaviour models (Mathieson & Wall, 1982) and Consumer Behaviour in tourism (Wahab, Crompton, & Rothfield, 1976) back the idea that the first stage of this process commences with a perceived need to travel, which corresponds to the identification of the problem stage.

Dwityas and Briandana (2017) studied an online traveller community in order to understand how travellers use information according to the stage of the TDMP that they are. They consider that social media is the primary source of information at every point of the decision-making process. Moreover, the UGC available in these social media's platforms and apps helps and guides the traveller in every stage of the process.

According to earlier academic literature (Jenkins, 1978; Sharma & Christie, 2010), tourism decision making's dynamic process is unstructured and full of contingencies, and often travellers break the decision into smaller and more familiar factors such as transportation, lodging and key activities at the destination.

Adapted from the Travel Decision Making Model (Mathieson & Wall, 1982) and the Activities of Information Use in Social Media (Universal McCann, 2008), the following model represented below depicts the importance of social media use in the decision-making process in tourism. The use of information on social media takes place in a kind of interaction, collaboration, and content sharing (Universal McCann, 2008). The TDMP is divided into three main phases: *pre-trip*, *during-trip*, and *post-trip*.



2. Model adapted from *TRavek Decision-Making Model* (Mathieson & Wall, 1982) and *the Activities of Information Use in Social Media* (Universal McCann, 2008). (Dwityas et al., 2017: 196)

Regarding the first one, this phase happens before the departing date. During this phase, first, the traveller feels the need to travel and then starts to collect and interpret information regarding the journey like the travel destination, the best time of the year to go, what activities to do, among others. Fesenmaier and Jeng (2000) found that travellers search for information in the initial stages of the TDMP to avoid an unfavourable travel decision. At last, the traveller purchases some products/services before going to its destination, like the aeroplane tickets and some accommodation facilities.

Secondly, the *during-trip* phase, which occurs at the time of travelling, is characterised by the continuation of searching for additional information regarding the trip. Also, when travellers are undergoing through some travelling experiences, they still have to make some decisions concerning accommodation, food, transportation, and others.

Lastly, the final phase corresponds to the moment that the traveller is back home. Here, they evaluate their trip's experiences by rating their satisfaction level. Their future travelling experiences will be influenced according to their satisfaction level of previous trips.

2.4 Netnography & Tourism sector

Netnography, or Ethnography of the Internet, was a concept developed by Kozinets (2002) due to the increasing popularity of online communities where people would share interests, and build social ties (Kozinets, 1999). The concept refers to a qualitative research methodology for exploring the online cultures and communities. It is a naturalistic and predominantly unobtrusive technique that can identify, collect and understand the data available online, like valuable consumer insights (Kozinets, 2002).

When comparing to the traditional ethnography approach, netnography has some advantages. First, it has a broader scope and therefore, enables to reach a higher number of individuals and for this reason to a considerably larger amount of data (Smith, 2015). Secondly, it provides easier access to certain groups of people that otherwise would be harder to study. Since there is some anonymity among computer-mediated communications, its users are more willing to share their comments and recommendations regarding their experiences (Langer & Beckman, 2005); the data is more reliable and accurate. Lastly, it is an approach that is more time-saving and inexpensive. On the other hand, just like any other method, it has some downsides like the ethical issues raised by using the data available online (Langer et al., 2005); it is only focused on online communities; the researcher needs to have developed interpretive skills to analyse the results drawn; and at last, the distress to extrapolate the online results to the general population (outside the online community sample) (Kozinets, 2002).

Since the number of Internet users is growing every day, the number of people that uses it as an advanced communication device is also expanding. Therefore, this allows the creation of more online communities and cultures which may be further study when online research methods are being conducted. A leading approach among those mentioned is netnography (Bowler, 2010). Furthermore, netnography's different steps of the process provide exactness and may be adapted and complemented with other methodologies (Costello, McDermott, & Wallace, 2017). To conclude, several reasons justify the use of netnography to gather qualitative data among computer-mediated online communities.

Netnography's procedural steps are going to be further explained in the Methodology's chapter.

3. Methodology

In this paper, only qualitative methodologies are used to study backpackers.

As stated above in the Literature Review, netnography is a qualitative research methodology developed by Kozinets (2002). This tool is characterised by its naturalistic and unobtrusive technique used to identify, collect and understand the data available in online cultures and communities (Kozinets, 2002). Essentially, this approach was chosen due to the reason that netnography is a cost-effective, unobtrusive, and accurate technique used to bring to light the data that organisations are constantly seeking for (Smith, 2015).

Like any other methodology, netnography is composed of several steps that researchers should go through while doing their research. Considering that netnography, just like ethnography, is "inherently flexible and adaptable to the interests and skill-set of the individual marketing researcher" (Kozinets, 2002: 4), the steps may be adapted and act according to the researchers' interests. Furthermore, the netnography process that should be followed while conducting the research is the coming: 1) Research Planning; 2) Entrée; 3) Data Collection; 4) Interpretation; 5) Ensuring Ethical Standards; 6) Research Representation. Therefore, the approach used by the researcher of this paper is going to be based on the latter.

Firstly, while doing the Research Planning, the research questions were named to address the research problem. Also, it was chosen the appropriate online communities to explore and then gather data. In order to do the latter, a five criteria approach was used to identify which communities are preferred to analyse: 1) if the community's topic, segment or group is relevant; 2) the amount of traffic of posts; 3) the number of discrete message posters; 4) if it is detailed or descriptively rich data, and lastly 5) the volume of between-member interactions (Kozinets, 2002: 5). By bearing this in consideration, four different types of online communities were selected: Blogs, Forums, Online Travel Agencies' websites and Social Media (Facebook Groups and Instagram accounts).

Secondly, the Entrée part, where researchers should learn as much as they can by immersing themselves in the online community. It is important to get to know its participants and learn the culture and rituals that characterise the community. Thus, it is going to be easier to

understand the participants' behaviours and the content that they generate online. Moreover, this is the moment for researchers to introduce themselves to the community. In this research, a message was sent only to a Facebook Group's administrator since he is the same of every backpackers' group analysed. Even though no answer was obtained from this interaction, the researcher still used these communities to collect data. However, the data's confidentiality was taken care very rigorously by the researcher, since the content retrieved and further analysed is anonymous on this paper.

Data Collection and Interpretation are the following two steps. Regarding the first, researchers can gather three different types of data: 1) Archive, which is the data that is downloaded directly from the community without having no involvement with the researcher; 2) Elicited, that corresponds to the data that came up due to the co-creation between the researcher and members and lastly, 3) Field Notes, which result from the observation and reflection of a specific phenomenon made by the researcher in an unobtrusive manner (Kozinets, 2015, p. 99). In this study, only Field Notes and Archive Data were gathered, and the total number of posts was limited to 240 posts in order to maintain a manageable degree of data. All of them were captured by doing screenshots and then brought together in an Excel file. For this reason, manual coding was used in this study in contrast to Kozinets's instruction (2002): "Software solutions such as the QSR NVivo and Atlas.ti qualitative analysis packages can expedite coding, content analysis, data linking, datadisplay, and theory-building functions" (p. 6). The researcher decided to follow this path since this is a three-month netnography study and therefore, the amount of data gathered did not justify the use of software solutions.

In order to complement the data collected with additional insights, and the possibility of clarifying some misunderstandings, the researcher chose to conduct six in-depth interviews. According to Boyce and Neale (2006), in-depth interviews is a qualitative research approach that requires conducting an extensive individual interview with a limited number of interviewees. This method aims to collect and explore their "perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation" (p. 5). Therefore, a significant advantage when choosing this approach is the collection of a detailed understanding of an individual's thoughts and behaviours regarding the backpacking's topic. Besides providing complementary data, this approach was chosen since people may feel more comfortable to express themselves individually, rather than in an online community (Boyce et al., 2006). The researcher decided to differentiate the interviewees according to their usual length of travels; whether if they make occasional trips or if they are full-time travellers. Therefore, the researcher drew two interview guides (see

APPENDIX I) in order to explore the different perceptions and thoughts of both groups of backpackers. It is important to stress that all the backpackers that were selected already had one backpacking experience at least. All the answers collected are gathered in APPENDIX II. Moving into the Interpretation part, it is necessary to construct a classification system. Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1967) was used in this research to conduct the researcher to develop a theory that has many conceptual relationships. Therefore, the posts were pre-classified according to their relevance to the several research questions. Then, various codes were defined in order to organise the data into several different categories, and later to three themes (see APPENDIX III).

Regarding the Ensuring Ethical Standards section, it is especially important that the researchers strictly follow ethical guidelines while conducting a netnographic study. There are two “nontrivial, contestable and interrelated” (Kozinets, 2002, p. 8) ethical issues that should always be born in mind: are 1) Are online forums a private or public site? and 2) What constitutes “Informed Consent” online? (Kozinets, 2002). Therefore, in this study, it was followed the four ethical research procedures recommended by Kozinets (2002): 1) The researcher’s identity and intentions were fully presented to the community members; 2) It was ensured the anonymity of the community’s participants; 3) It was sought and incorporated feedback from the members in the research and ultimately, 4) It was obtained the permission from the participants to publish their posts.

The last part of the methodology corresponds to the Research Representation which constitutes the member checks where the research is presented to the people that have been studied. According to Kozinets (2002), member checks allows the establishment of ongoing information exchange between researchers and consumer groups, when comparing to traditional qualitative research methodologies. This is vital for the Netnography's methodology because it is possible to obtain and stimulate new insights, correct any potential misunderstandings, and alleviate any adversity raised by the ethical issues mentioned on the previous section. Also, “netnographic” member checks (Kozinets, 2002, p. 10) are more simple and convenient which allows organisations to detect and react faster to consumer’s shifts in the market.

4. Results Analysis: Ethnographic Themes

This chapter is dedicated to the results of the netnography study complemented with in-depth interviews.

4.1 Motivational Theme

After collecting some data in several online communities, it was possible to confirm that Backpackers' motivations diverge among them.

The most common reason that triggers a traveller to start their journey is usually the need to feel more independent and free. By being tired of their normal routine and being willing to do some changes in their lives, they challenge themselves to get out of their comfort zone and have a break from their lives. They have a moving and natural eagerness to learn more about the world, to meet new people and to be overwhelmed by the landscapes that generally are only seen in "postcards and photographs". This way, they achieve and experience more of what life has to offer. As it is possible to retrieve from an interview made to a female backpacker, getting out of the comfort zone is the biggest motivation to travel:

“In order to be completely out of your comfort zone: go out into the world and be whomever you want to be.”

Regarding the feeling of freedom and independence that they seek, it was possible to confirm from an interview with a 25-year-old male backpacker that this feeling is responsible for a reinvention of their character and persona, and therefore, they can grow up as a person. By being free from their society's rules and acquainted circle of people, they can finally appreciate the small things in life that usually pass right through them in their everyday lives. This picks up on the point alluded by Maoz (2007) that this new self's identity is only based on personal experiences and feelings that they have been facing during their journey. Therefore, their identity is no longer mutual with the other society's members as it was once before. Since no, or less, superficial concerns and unnecessary judgments are borne in mind while travelling, it is easier to achieve the happiness and freedom's level that they desire with the new self. For instance:

“At a certain point, I didn't even care if I haven't taken a bath in 2 days (lol), or if I was wearing the same t-shirt for days in a row. I had no one to judge me, just lots of amazing inputs around me to make happy.”

Moreover, it is important to stress that some of these travellers usually choose a different path for their lives when comparing to the society that they were born. By doing this, they might decline a professional career and a traditional family; they might only chase the thrill of discovering other places and cultures of the world. Blog L is written by a young couple that got married and then started an ever ending journey together. Since 2016, they have been mostly writing about the places that they have been, and topics that they consider essential for the readers' trips. In this blog was stated the following:

“After returning home, we realised quickly that there's more to life than working 9-5 hours and, only getting three weeks of holidays each year! (...) we decided to backpack to all 7 continents around the globe and, have the world's longest honeymoon! We turned down career opportunities and promotions to live out our dream of an endless honeymoon. We're currently living life on our own terms, (...)”

Other backpackers that are bloggers started their journey to be an example to other people. Their primary purpose is to inspire others to get out of their comfort zone and begin a long holiday to get in touch with new people, cultures, places and most importantly, to know themselves. By doing this, they might help the readers discovering their strengths and weaknesses and how to cope with them after going back to their normal lives.

While conducting the collection of online data, several blogs that are responsible for the promotion of values were found. For instance, Blog G is focused on motivational and empowering speeches and values promotion regarding "Girl Power". Its posts are made to show that girls can do the same type of trips as men do, and have the same adventures and experiences as well. As it is possible to deduct from the following statement:

“I'm passionate about encouraging you to face your fears, push your boundaries and reach your full potential through solo female adventure travel. I've been rocking feminist, girl power travel for 7 years now.

I threw myself out of my comfort zone to see what I could really do as a woman.

Blog G is a travel blog for strong women like you.”

Furthermore, for some backpackers that are full-time travellers and bloggers, one of their motivations to travel is the fact that they can share their experience and knowledge by posting in and managing their blog. By doing this, they can teach and help all the others that are about to start their trip or, in fact, are already travelling. Blog B has been managed by a male backpacker for the last ten years and declares that:

“I started Blog B with the aim of teaching others how to hit the road in search of a real adventure and how to travel on the cheap.”

Blog T, which is included on the 2016's TOP 15 (by Rise) of most influential travel bloggers in the world, also mentions that what motivates him to manage his blog is not only inspiring people to travel more but also to travel in a better way. By helping them with personal and reliable recommendations and tips, storytelling and various online content, he fulfils his motivation:

"This website has the purpose to inspire you to travel... travel more and better. Here I'll share my experiences, tell honestly what went well and sometimes where it went wrong. I will also have a personal selection of my favourite spots around the world based on "been there, done that!". My content ranges from travel narratives, to video blogging, travel photography, reviews, itineraries, suggestions of countries to visit, hotels to stay and tips to help you organise your vacations."

Moreover, some of the full-time travellers mentioned above, manage a blog because they like filming and editing their trips. Therefore, one of their motivations is to share the various episodes that happen while travelling by posting their videos online. By doing this, they can make every blog's reader travel with the blogger, while they stay at the same place. For instance, Blog T mentions:

“Filming and editing is one of the things I love the most, not only to share with you the incredible places I visit and to give you the chance to “travel” without leaving your couch, but also because I like to memorize the moments that I have lived.”

Additionally, it was discovered that backpacker's motivations are not the same through their lifetime. All the interviewees agreed on the fact that their motivations changed since their first trip. When they were younger, travelling was more related to meet and “hang out” with other people, especially with their family. However, as they kept growing up and travelling, their

trips are more about discovering themselves and being completely free from any authority's norms and rules. The willingness to learn more about the world and its cultures, to discover a bit more of themselves, to formulate new opinions, and most importantly, to grow as a person are some of the motivations that trigger them to travel around the world and changed since they started backpacking. Furthermore, one of the respondents emphasised that travelling is a tool that he found to bring up his state of mind. Since the day that he buys the plane tickets, he feels better because "a precious time" to solve all his internal questions is ahead of him.

On the other hand, another male backpacker mentioned that his motivations stopped changing at a certain point. However, his travelling addiction does not cease to grow, and it is continually evolving as he mentions below:

“The only thing that changed in my years of travelling was the addiction to do it. It grows with every single trip. I can't spend a year without going somewhere abroad.”

4.2 Commercial Theme

As time passes by, these bloggers have to start thinking about how to sustain themselves while they keep travelling. Since some of them gave up on building their professional career, they have to come up with alternative ways to keep travelling. Usually, they choose between two approaches to raise financial support. However, both of them are responsible for turning the majority of these online communities significantly commercial.

Firstly, they can start by promoting products and services that they don't own; for example, products that the travellers might need in their future trips, recommendations for places to stay and where to go. The use of hyperlinks that leads the blog's reader to the website, where they can buy the service or product, is the most common method used among bloggers. With the experiences and knowledge that backpackers have been having through their trips make them confident to suggest an option, among several alternatives in the market. According to the example down below, Blog I uses a hyperlink to promote a possible paid insurance service that Backpackers should use in every adventure that they start:

“Travel Insurance: I use [World Nomads](#) which is what Lonely Planet recommends and you can read here what is and isn't included in their plans.”

Nevertheless, most of them advertise their own products, like guides/e-guides that they wrote about the places that they have already been. The several years that they have been on the road let them collect several different adventures and knowledge to write down their personal experiences and challenges while travelling. By gathering all of them in a book, these guides can make the life of other backpackers much easier and simpler, when they are planning their own itinerary and travel schedule. According to Blog I's post, the use of a hyperlink is the chosen approach:

“My essential guide to Goa. I wrote a 170-page ebook the Insider’s Guide to Goa which you can [buy with this link](#). It’s all my secrets to make sure you have the BEST time here.”

In addition, it was frequent to find among the data collected in online communities, that many bloggers had their own excursions company. For instance, the company’s mission created by Blog T stays in line with several basic backpacker's drivers, since it aims to "show the best of each country to the travellers, (...) the most incredible places, the most typical food... We'll take you to get to know the culture and daily life of a new people, a new country". However, these organised excursions go against Pearce's definition (1990) that is used to identify a Backpacker. One of the criteria stresses out that a backpacker should never travel with a planned itinerary and schedule. Also, they should be independent, and therefore, a real Backpacker is not usually willing to travel with an excursion company. Even Blogger T mentioned that he does not appreciate to travel under these circumstances on his personal trips. However, it does not stop him when comes raising financial funds by owning an excursion company; according to his post:

“Despite having a travel agency that organizes amazing (modesty aside eheh) group tours to certain destinations – ABC.com, when it comes to my personal travels I like to be very independent, no hotel booked and go totally in to the adventure.”

These practices of self-promotion products can be beneficial for the bloggers in the short-run, since this way they can gather the necessary funds to keep their trip while travelling at the same time.

On the other hand, in the long run, this can damage the blogger’s credibility since they are perceived more like a traditional tourism information source from now on. The backpackers trust on their suggestions and recommendations less then they used to, due to the fact that

they do not know if the blogger was paid to say something or if it is their real opinion or belief. In other words, they are not seen as their peers anymore which makes them less reliable. This information was retrieved from an interview:

“When a blog becomes more commercial and contentless, it just loses credibility and I stop following that person.

Because a person who is paid, for example, by Thailand’s embassy to promote the country, it makes its content on social media totally fake.

I usually follow people that make travel a living and lives for travel and is not corrupted by brands to start selling as a person.”

Most of the backpackers interviewed share both the knowledge and point of view regarding the community's commercial turn. They mentioned that these full-time backpackers embrace their trips and online communities as their job. Therefore, it is understandable that they do some changes in the content that is published and that they start looking for sponsors and collaborations with other brands. Even though some of this content is still useful and can be used to plan their trips, they prefer to follow regular backpackers who share their personal travel experiences on their social media, regardless of the financial situation that they are at the moment. According to the citation below, a backpacker admits that he does the same; he posts what is convenient for him:

“I feel that the great majority of social pages are more eager about getting followers and money than about sharing great experiences and tips. It all feels fake to me and created with the purpose of sharing. The process is less natural in my opinion. I have an Instagram account I do the same. The great and most honest stories aren't there.”

After analysing these two themes, it was possible to create two different types of backpackers. The disparity found among backpackers’ motivations allowed the establishment of the following personas:

Persona 1 - the originals: Backpackers that are motivated by a new adventure which will let them get to know more about the world and construct a new identity. The search for independence and freedom drives them. They always come back to their normal life.

Persona 2 – the influencers: They started as a typical backpacker however they decided that they wanted to do it longer. Therefore, they needed money, which made them look for opportunities where they could earn it in order to keep travelling. These full-time travellers manage their online communities and consider their travels as their job which usually makes them turn their communities into a business. They are also moved by the possibility of sharing their experiences and recommendations with their followers.

4.3 Travel Decision-Making Theme

Regarding this theme, the majority of findings were retrieved from the six in-depth interviews that were conducted by the researcher. Yet, these findings were also observed among the online communities that were studied.

Backpackers can be split into two different groups concerning their travel decision-making process. On the one hand, there are the backpackers that rigorously organise their trips; every detail is cautiously thought and thoroughly planned beforehand. On the other side, there are those who are not planners and only have the flights, and some possible places and activities organised ahead of the departure date.

Some of the respondents admitted that they carefully plan their trip in advance. Some months beforehand was the most common answer observed, when asked about the beginning of the process. By analysing the conducted interviews, it was possible to draw a possible travel decision-making process that backpackers might adapt to plan their travels.

At the outset of the process, they start by thinking about "where to go"; the possible travel destinations, writing them down and sort them according to their preference. This hierarchy facilitates the travel decision-making to reach the final travel destination. Moreover, this ultimate choice is strongly influenced by their surrounding environment; usually, their decision is biased by what they have seen online and by previous travels that their friends did.

After choosing the final place, they start looking for the best flights deals. This stage of the process is long since the price plays a considerable weight on the decision, as it is further explained in this paper. Therefore, several months of search in online travel agencies like momondo.com, booking.com, edreams.com, and skyscanner.com are usual.

Hereinafter, the searching and planning stages begin in order to come up with a possible and flexible plan. Since gathering information is needed, backpackers mentioned that not only online content but also content available in travel books and guides are a valuable tool at this point.

In order to draw the alleged plan, backpackers usually start following some Instagram accounts of the elected country where they can gather a broad scope of valuable information for their trips. Likewise, travel blogs with "... day trip plan to ..." posts are used.

The extensive research done before the departure allows them to get to know better the place that they are going to travel to, and its main places that they cannot miss during the journey. As it is characteristic of the backpacker nature, a fully-detailed and solid plan is not what they seek for when planning in advance. On the other hand, a plan which is subject to constant changes along the way is the best outcome. This happens due to the fact that a backpacker wants to feel free and not dependent on an untouchable itinerary and schedule. Also, they want their journey to be as much unique as them, and consequently, all the adventures attached to it as well. Therefore, they are always keen to deviate from their initial plan. As one backpacker mentioned:

"For these types of trips I like to plan the things I really don't want to miss, but not plan to much so that along the way you can really understand where you want to go. (...) we decided to study a bit all the countries where we were going to travel, what were the main places to go and we set a route that made sense, but which could (and was) be changed. It was really important to be able (...) to walk a bit more and discover an amazing landscape that is completely breathtaking."

The second group is characterised for not organising their trip except the flights, as one interviewed said:

"I'm not a planner. I like to leave it open. I love to be surprised and to decide in the moment what I want to do."

However, they initiate their trip by bearing the big picture of how their itinerary and schedule are going to be. This group of backpackers considers the logistics related to the means of transportations and the timeline with high regard. By doing it this way, they can avoid a lot of unpleasant situations that would decrease the total travel experience. However, they cannot always fully respect the plan. They change it according to what they have been hearing from

other backpackers and locals. Thus, the content available online plays a significant influence on their plans. Along the way, they usually check Facebook Groups and other social media platforms to facilitate their TDMP and help them to come up with the best itinerary and plan. This way, it is important to stress that the different communities are used differently in every stage of the decision-making process.

As it was found in a Facebook Group, travellers post in it to get recommendations from other travellers and consequently plan their trip:

“I’m running out of time and I’m desperate for some sun! At Koh Phangan where it is just raining, at the moment and wondering if I should bother going to Koh Tao or just go to Koh Phi Phi, anyone in Koh Tao right now, how’s the weather?”

Since they do not have a carefully organised plan, they are aware that they are more dependent on online and offline content along the travel. To a certain extent, one traveller mentioned that Lonely Planet was his "best-friend" during his travels. It is essential for him since he knows that he can trust and use it even in the most extreme circumstances like for instance:

"If It's too late in some random city in a poor country and I have to find a comfortable place to sleep".

Furthermore, these backpackers depend a lot from their friends' tips, especially those that know exactly the traveller's tastes and preferences when travelling. By considering these tips along the journey, the travel decision-making process is easier since they do not have to do extensive research and be concerned about it.

To conclude, the travel decision-making process depends a lot from content available online and offline for both groups, whether it is before or during the journey. Concerning the online content, in particular, Online Travel Reviews, it plays a huge role in every stage of the process and also influences almost every decision made. As one backpacker mentioned, every traveller uses the OTR, even if they try to deny its importance:

“I believe it has a huge impact. The most adventurous backpackers will try to deny and maybe go without any info to the unknown but if you are a regular backpacker, the online review helps to ensure a better trip in several ways.”

This topic of OTR is going to be further explained in this paper, especially its effects.

4.3.1 Decision Factors Subtheme

During their travels, backpackers are drowned with decisions, big and small. Every day, they have to decide where to eat, where to go, how to spend their money, and where to sleep. Just like any other individual, they gather and interpret information, with the purpose of choosing the optimal choice for them and their travels. In order to reach the latter, some decision factors are considered and play a part in the backpacker's decision-making process.

On this study, it was possible to determine that the decision factors do not diverge much among the backpackers. By looking at the interviews conducted by the researcher and to the data collected from the online communities, in particular, Facebook Groups, TripAdvisor.com, and Booking.com, some factors are relevant in every content available online and offline.

Since these travellers are always travelling with a strict budget, it is not surprising that price is one of the decision factors that plays a big part in the decision process. This segment of travellers is price sensitive, and therefore, the search for "cheap and nice" places in the online communities is constant. Furthermore, the balance between price and quality is crucial for these travellers, and when they believe they have better alternatives available, they do not mind search for them even if it means an extra effort that has to be done.

Location and safety are other two important decision factors that are used in the decision-making process. Both of these two factors are vital for backpackers due to the reason that allows them to experience the journey at its fullest. Regarding the first factor, they endeavour for places which its location permits them to connect to other travellers, and also to the local people. Thus, they may learn the place's history and culture, where are the unknown attractions, and the way of living of that specific place. Concerning safety, it is essential for them to be aware of all the dangers that they are facing in order to avoid any unfortunate situation. Moreover, if they feel safe along the way, their family and close friends do not have to be worried all the time, and therefore, backpackers do not have to be concerned to calm them down.

This paper demonstrates that the factor's relevance in the decision-making process can change according to the country's standards and expectations. For instance, one interviewee

mentioned that he cannot expect the same from a European hostel's room when comparing to one in India. In this case, the factor is hygiene which its requirements depend on the place that they are travelling:

“The hygiene factor would depend on the country and place. In India something similar to a bed was enough, for example.”

The same way that motivations change as backpackers keep travelling, the decision factors also change. For Persona 2 backpacker that was interviewed, there was a shift from only considering the factor price during the process to consider a broader scope of factors like location and hospitality. Since he is travelling most of his time, he enjoys having better conditions, even if higher costs are implied. For instance, the preference of having a single room with a private bathroom is a need that he always likes to fulfil in his present travels.

Finally, some decision factors that are directly linked to backpackers were found in this research. In this case, the degree of tourism is highly considered in the decision-making process of this type of travellers. For them, as stated above, they prefer places that are not touristy, and that can provide unique experiences. As it was found in a Facebook group, someone is suggesting a place because it is less touristy:

“Maybe Phu Quoc in Vietnam? I heard really good things about and less touristy than Koh Tao and Koh Samui.”

4.3.2 Effect of Online Travel Reviews on TDMP Subtheme

During the data analysis, several effects were identified. However, the following effects are the most predominant ones in both Blogs and Facebook Groups.

Firstly, the effect of OTR in blogs is mainly the motivation that arises among its readers when going through the blog's posts. Bloggers usually use a storytelling approach in order to communicate all the adventures and experiences of their trips. This method is responsible for leaving the readers intrigued and with the desire to experience the same reality that the blogger previously had. After reading the posts, and as a result of the reader's engagement, the community's emotional state is characterised by excitement and curiosity regarding the place described and that they plan to travel now. Also, the fact that they consider blogs as a reliable and truthful source of information, at least when it does not hold too many advertisement

links, better explains why readers engage in an easier way when comparing to the traditional sources of information.

Without reading the blog's post, perhaps the traveller would have never considered that place as the travel destination. Therefore, by promoting a travel destination, OTR may work as a "Referral Tourism", since they want to travel and explore the same place as the blogger described in their community. Blog A is managed by "thirty-something dreamer, traveller and lost soul" that quitted her normal life and decided to travel the world just with her backpack. In one of her posts, it was possible to find a comment that describes the effect described above; the way she described her trip made one reader consider that place as the next destination:

"I've never been to Ireland and I'm intrigued having read a couple of your articles from your tour around Ireland. Seeing your photos of the Cliffs of Moher make me want to go so bad. (...) This is a great detailed article and a country on my bucket list."

Secondly, it is important to emphasise that the blogger usually has a lot of experience and knowledge regarding travelling. Therefore, by writing down all their knowledge that they have been collecting through the years and later share it online, the reader has access to new and valuable information that they can use on their trips. These tips will give to the traveller not only new perspectives but also recommendations that emerged along the blogger personal journeys.

The knowledge shared with the readers can appear in different ways; however, they are usually titled as "tips & recommendations" like packing lists, what to do, where to go, where to stay, among others. By allowing the access to this type of information, the blog's readers do not have to experience some of the bad experiences that the blogger had, which increases the traveller's satisfaction about the journey. As mentioned above, these may be caused by several reasons like lacking some materials in their backpacks or even going to the wrong attraction, staying in the wrong place, and others. This way, the readers are going to have a better version of the blogger's trip. At least, they are now prevented from making the same mistakes as they did.

These posts are crucial to readers due to the fact that firstly, helps them to be better prepared for their trips; secondly, are responsible for improving the experience during their trips. Thus it is possible to find among the blogs' posts the rise of engagement and sharing of their experiences. At a certain point, the reader is so grateful for the blogger's tips and

recommendations that they are also willing to share their knowledge and personal experiences from their previous trips. Once again in Blog A, among the post's comments, it is possible to find this appreciation and engagement. By sharing their personal travel experiences, new questions frequently come up which is responsible for the arising of interaction:

“I wouldn't even have thought of the acclimating to the elevation part. Excellent tip! (...) I once had mini altitude sickness on a snowboard trip, since I was from Florida and knew nothing of mountains. How long did it take you to acclimate for such extensive travels through the area? Did you have to readjust after you got home?”

Regarding the Facebook groups, the interactions of this online community are slightly different from the blogs. This type of online community is more oriented for travellers that are already on their trip. Here, the members go there to clarify some urgent doubts, ask for suggestions and recommendations like where to stay, what to do, where to go. They rely on their peers to engage in an exchange of personal experiences that are beneficial to everyone in the community. By posting their questions in the group, they are expecting that the other members are going to be there to help them almost instantaneously. As long as the members respect the several group's rules, they are free to post what comes to their mind and what they in need at the moment. There are several types of questions that can be made, as said before; however, technical related topics, suggestions and recommendations are the most common ones:

“What is the best backpack to buy for 2 months backpacking in South East Asia? And how many liters would be the best?”

“Hey guys, I am currently in Chiang Mai and I am looking for the most ethical elephant sanctuary here. Does anybody have any recommendations? Just as I've seen some reviews of sanctuaries where the elephants do not look happy. Looking to get someone's first-hand experience. Thanks”

“How much is the entrance fee to Angkor Wat? And what other must-see attraction in Siem Reap? And how to get there? Pls and thank you in advance for your answers.”

To conclude, it is important to stress that both communities have different effects on backpackers. However, they share the fact that they are used to facilitate and minimise the Travel Decision-Making Process. By providing essential information to the travellers, and therefore mitigate the perceived risk and uncertainty that come along with the travel. This is responsible for increasing the traveller's satisfaction towards the trip.

5. Conclusions and Implications

This chapter's purpose is to state the main academic findings as well as its implications, both theoretical and managerial. These findings resulted from the online data collection and its later interpretation. All the insights presented in this paper were complemented by conducting six in-depth interviews.

5.1 Conclusions

***RQ₁*: How do Backpackers make use of online travel reviews?**

In general, backpackers use online travel reviews to plan their travels. They are used in every stage of the process: since the initial stages until the end of the trip when the backpacker is back home. By using them, backpackers are better prepared for their travels which saves them from feeling and experiencing some unpleasant situations during their journey. Then, the backpacker's satisfaction is consequently increased.

By using them, the travel decision-making process is simplified. Since OTR provide essential information to them, the perceived risk and uncertainty that come associated with the travel are both mitigated.

***RQ₂*: What is the effect of Online Travel Reviews on Backpackers?**

The present research identifies that OTR have different effects on backpackers. They differ according to the online community that they are originated as well as the different stage of the backpacker's travel.

When travellers are in the early stages of trip planning, they inspire themselves when they go to other backpackers' blogs and Instagram accounts. These online communities are mainly used in order to help them choose the travel destination, and pre-travel preparation tips and recommendations, like the best itinerary and the packing list. On the other hand, backpackers use Facebook groups with another purpose in their minds. They join these online groups to clear some questions and doubts that might appear during their journey. This easy and simple questions, like "How much...?", "Where should I stay?", "When to go?", among others, appear while they are already travelling to increase their travel experience.

Ultimately, they trust in their peers' previous experiences and consider the online communities mentioned above as being reliable. Therefore, all the information available there is mainly used to help them and consequently facilitate their travel decision process.

RQ₃: What are the main decisions' factors that Backpackers consider during their Travel Decision Process?

The travel decision-making process varies between backpackers. Some of them prefer to start their journey with an already well-designed plan. On the other hand, some of them favour beginning their journey with a small number of aspects planned and taken care of. Nevertheless, all of them rely on offline and online content to plan their trips, even if it is in the pre-trip or during trip stages.

During their travels, their decision-making process is oriented to the optimal choice for them and their trips. In order to reach it, they consider some factors that have different weights in their process. Price was the most recurring factor among the online communities and also from the interviews. Their price sensitivity makes them always look for the best offer during their travels. Location and safety are also important factors for backpackers to experience their trip to the fullest.

It is important to point out that some factors can change according to the country's standards and expectations that the traveller has beforehand. In this paper, for instance, it is the hygiene factor that varies according to the traveller's location. Furthermore, it was found in this study that some decision factors change according to their experiences. As they keep travelling, the decision factors may change in their decision-making process.

Ultimately, some factors were found to be directly associated with backpackers' characteristics. Since they look for not touristy places, the degree of tourism of that place is really important for backpackers.

RQ₄: Do Backpackers share the same travel motivations?

Regarding the fourth research question, the travel motivation most shared by backpackers is the need to feel more free and independent. They desire to construct a new self stemmed from the travel experiences and adventures that they are going to face through the up-coming trip. This new self is as free as possible from their society's norms and traditions, and also from their previous identity. Moreover, by getting out of their comfort zone, they are eager to learn

more about the world and its cultures; they want to meet new people and interact with them in order to know their ways and how they think.

Some of the backpackers start their journeys to inspire people and to promote some values that they believe and stand for. Regarding the inspirational topic, many backpackers stated that what motivated them to start travelling in the first place was the feeling of boredom towards their previous life and a constant search for something else in their daily life. Regarding the values promotion, blogs that promote girl's rights were the most found. By using motivational and empowering speeches, their primary purpose is to encourage girls to travel the world. They want to show to everyone that girls can do the same travels and have the same level of fun and adventures as men.

Full-time backpackers that manage an online community like a blog or Instagram account are known for turning their communities to a business. Due to the reason that they gave up on their past professional career, they embrace their travels as a job. Therefore, this makes them a lot more commercial when comes managing their communities. Usually, they resort to hyperlinks to promote other brands, and also their own products and services. This commercial turn triggers negative outcomes in the long-run since the communities' members cease to trust and rely on them. They prefer to follow people like them afterwards; their 'peer backpackers' that are in for the experience, and not for the money.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

Regarding backpackers' motivations, the results are consistent with the existing literature. However, it was found that some backpackers start their journey for selfless reasons, which it has not been mentioned yet. For instance, some online pages were found to promote some values and to fight some society's prejudices. Their motivation is inspiring people and being an example to them.

The same way, as it was possible to find in the TLC model, some travellers change their motivations as they keep travelling. Nevertheless, it was found in this study that some backpackers change their motivations completely and consequently, start looking at their travels as their job since they have to sustain themselves while they keep travelling. This may challenge some existing literature, like Pearce's multifaceted definition (1990) and Sørensen

(2003), since the concept of backpacker is being tested: it is said that they travel for a limited time. However, it was found that there are some of them that travel forever.

The different backpackers' motivations allowed the establishment of two personas: the originals and the influencers.

Concerning the travel decision-making process, it was possible to divide the backpackers into two different categories. The following two differ according to the fact if they plan their trip in advance or not; as they mentioned, if they are "planners" or not. Furthermore, it was also found in this study that there are decision factors that are only restricted to backpackers. Lastly, it was discovered that OTR have different effects among backpackers. They differ according to the online community that they are originated as well as the different stage of the backpacker's travel. The last three concepts are not included in the literature of these days, and therefore they may complement it.

5.3 Managerial Implications

After conducting this research, it is important to stress two takeaways.

First, since backpackers try to avoid commercial, over-priced, and touristy places and activities, B2C producers should implement marketing strategies to prevent the escape of backpackers from their products and services. Therefore, in order to not fail the implementation of those marketing strategies, the companies of the tourism industry should implement a co-creation initiative. By collaborating with Persona 2 backpackers, who have a high knowledge of backpackers, the companies may jointly produce a mutually valued outcome (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004) for Persona 1 backpackers.

Secondly, since UGC that is available in online communities plays a vital role in the decision-making process of the travellers, the C2C interactions create an immeasurable value for all its users. Therefore, travel organisations should focus on their websites and permit the exchange of C2C communications on their platforms. Also, it is important to emphasise that digital marketing strategies, like influencing marketing, should be conducted very carefully to not go against the backpackers' characteristics and consequently, drive them out from their businesses.

6. Limitations and Future Research

This final chapter gives an overview of this paper's limitations as well as some possible suggestions for future research.

This paper is a significant development in the study of backpackers, especially when it comes to the understanding of Online Travel Reviews. However, it is still important to point out the limitations that come along with this dissertation. Netnography is a qualitative methodology that has far more advantages than disadvantages. Yet, several limitations come attached to these studies.

Firstly, the majority of the data comes from online communities. As mentioned in the Methodology chapter, various communities were analysed: TripAdvisor and Lonely Planet (Thorn Tree) forums, Instagram, nine Facebook Groups, and several Personal Blogs. However, this limitation was reduced due to conduction of six in-depth interviews which allowed to enriched the qualitative data even further. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasise that five of the interviewees are Portuguese and between 21 and 27 years old, which is not representative for the entire population of backpackers and therefore, biasing the results.

Secondly, only archive data was gathered and later analysed. The researcher was not involved in the computer-mediated communications of the online communities; the pre-existing data was directly retrieved from the community.

Thirdly, the scope of this research is small. The duration of the data collection of this netnographic study corresponds to a 3-month period. The researcher unsuccessfully attempted to interview the facebook group administrator and several full-time backpackers that manage their own online community. However, it was possible to interview a full-time backpacker which allowed to gain an in-depth understanding of the topic.

Fourthly, all the paper's findings have resulted from the researcher interpretative skills which may bias the findings.

Last but not least, since it is a netnographic study, the extrapolation of the online results to the general population (outside the online community sample) may be difficult. In order to generalise the findings from the online communities analysed of this paper, careful evaluations of similarity and the use of diversified methods of triangulation are needed (Kozinets, 2002).

About future research, there is still a lot to explore. Firstly, broader and longer research with more types of data collected and analysed is recommended. Furthermore, more online communities should be included in the study, and also a more active netnographic approach should be applied which means that the researcher should interact with the communities.

Moreover, the Backpacker concept is not a frequent topic in the literature available. Therefore, more updated literature and concept should come up; including the new and updated technologies, online communities, and trends related to this type of travelling.

Ultimately, would also be interesting to study the relation between backpacking and E-commerce, since it is a trend that is largely used and beneficial for them as previously said on this paper. Understanding to what extent this represents a viable tool will provide several managerial implications that can be later adapted to several industries.

7. References

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APPENDIX I – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, different interviews guide were sent according to their type of persona:

Persona 1:

1. In general, which are the motivations that trigger backpackers to start their trip?
2. In your case, you are a full-time traveller. What motivates you to travel? Do you believe that the motivations remain the same after travelling for a long time?
3. Do you think that as time passes by and the blogger/Instagrammer gets more famous, the blog/Instagram account suffers some changes? Do you have any example?
4. In your opinion, what is the effect of Online travel Reviews on the Backpackers' behaviour?
5. When they go online for this type of content, what do you think they are looking for? Is it important for you? If not, what alternatives would you use?
6. To finish, what are the decision factors (price, locations, hospitality, etc) that you consider, when planning your trips?

Persona 2:

1. What motivates you to travel? Do you believe that your motivations remain the same or did they changed since the first time you travelled?
2. How do you plan your journey?
3. Do you follow any travel blog / Instagram account / Facebook page our group? Why?
4. Do you think that as time passes by and the blogger/Instagrammer gets more famous, the blog/Instagram account suffers some changes? Do you have any example?
5. In your opinion, what is the effect of Online travel Reviews on the Backpackers' behaviour?
6. When they go online for this type of content, what do you think they are looking for? Is it important for you? If not, what alternatives would you use?
7. To finish, what are the decision factors (price, locations, hospitality, etc) that you consider, when planning your trips?

APPENDIX II - RESPONSES

Interviewee 1

1. What motivates you to travel? Do you believe that your motivations remain the same or did they changed since the first time you travelled?

What motivates my travel is the natural eagerness to learn more about the world, to meet new people and be overwhelmed by landscapes you only see in photographs.

These were always the motivations since I was young.

What came new in these motivations were the fact that nowadays I discovered that traveling also helps you to discover yourself and sometimes when I am feeling down i usually buy a ticket plane because i know that time will be precious to know me and to solve my "internal" questions.

2. How do you plan your journey?

First, i have a set of countries i want to visit and that list is written on a paper on a hierarchy of importance.

So first I see for the whole year when can i take vacations and after that i see the countries that are on that list.

After i spend almost 3 months searching in momondo seeing the best time to buy the ticket plane.

After buying the plane ticket, i immediately order the lonely planet book of that country (it's something i started doing is buying a lonely planet book at the moment I buy a ticket plane, almost an "officialization" of the trip).

Then i have an excel template with days, places to visit and i start to fill it with all the tips of friends and people i know that have already been there.

I do this for months, as i usually buy the ticket plane 6 months before i go so a lot of time till the day of the trip i am just organizing my trip in the excel.

Then i just go :)

3. Do you follow any travel blog / Instagram account / Facebook page our group? Why?

Yes, for sure. Whenever i choose a destination for my vacation i start following 5/6 IG pages of that country so I get excited about it and to see places worth to go, and then put on my excel as places to go on that destination.

4. Do you think that as time passes by and the blogger/Instagrammer gets more famous, the blog/Instagram account suffers some changes? Do you have any example?

For Sure. But when that happens just loses credibility and I stop following that person.

Because a person who is paid by for example thailand embassy to promote the country makes its content on social media totally fake.

I usually follow people that make travel a living and lives for travel, and is not corrupted by brands to start selling as a person.

5. In your opinion, what is the effect of Online travel Reviews on the Backpackers' behaviour?

I only choose a place to stay if the review is good.

I have never gone to a place where the review was really bad.

So the reviews are kind of a certificate to stay in one place or another.

6. When they go online for this type of content, what do you think they are looking for? Is it important for you? If not, what alternatives would you use?

Nowadays, you do not go see reviews of countries in big websites or something.

You trust in instagrammers, bloggers, people that are just like you but make travel a living.

So for me, the most trustful content is from normal people that share experiences on their social media.

7. To finish, what are the decision factors (price, locations, hospitality, etc) that you identify as being relevant for Backpackers?

1. Location.

2. People.

3. Places to sleep.

I think these are the three more important.

Location as a place that you are really blown away.

People of that destination or even if you are going to find other backpackers and meet new people.

Places to sleep if you have places where you have cool hostels where you can get along and live the trip at its fullest.

Interviewee 2

1. What motivates you to travel? Do you believe that your motivations remain the same or did they changed since the first time you travelled?

I have always travelled because I want to go to iconic and remarkable places in the world and to discover new cultures and ways of living.

2. How do you plan your journey?

I book in advance the planes and then closer to the date of departure I make a very flexible plan.

3. Do you follow any travel blog / Instagram account / Facebook page our group? Why?

I go to the ones that have "... day trip plan to ..." but none in particular and I try to gather information from several.

4. Do you think that as time passes by and the blogger/Instagrammer gets more famous, the blog/Instagram account suffers some changes? Do you have any example?

No, I don't. I don't follow anyone in particular. Therefore, i don't have an example but I think i think they have to make some changes in order for their survival.

5. In your opinion, what is the effect of Online travel Reviews on the Backpackers' behaviour?

I believe they have a huge influence in what I visit and the hostels I book because I really value what is recommended there and what other travelers recommend.

6. When they go online for this type of content, what do you think they are looking for? Is it important for you? If not, what alternatives would you use?

I look for nice places to go that are less known and recommendations of activities to do and places to stay

7. To finish, what are the decision factors (price, locations, hospitality, etc) that you consider, when planning your trips?

Price is the number one for me, then if the location and after if the place and environment are cool

Interviewee 3

1. What motivates you to travel? Do you believe that your motivations remain the same or did they changed since the first time you travelled?

I'm addicted to learn new things and traveling is learning. My dream is to get in touch with every single country in the world, at least once. However I'm not just motivated by the opportunity of getting to know other amazing cultures and places, or at least different from the reality from where I was born, but also for the feeling of freedom. The single fact that you're not surrounded by the people that know you and the rules that you normally follow in the context molded by your culture and your daily life, gives you the chance to reinvent yourself. You can put everything in perspective and start to appreciate lot's of small things that pass right through you in a daily basis. For instance in India, at a certain point, I didn't even care if I haven't taken a bath in 2 days (lol), or if I was wearing the same t-shirt for days in a row. I had no one to judge me, just lots of amazing inputs around me to make happy.

The only thing that changed in my years of traveling was the addiction to do it. It grows with every single trip. I can't spend a year without going somewhere abroad.

2. How do you plan your journey?

I'm not a planner. The only thing that I book in advance are the plain tickets, because of the price. Then, a few weeks earlier, I start to plan more a less the places where I wanna go. But I like to leave it open. I love to be surprised and to decide in the moment what I want to do. My best friends for this are the Lonely Planet Travel Guides. One of my essentials. It's Guide that I know I can trust, even if It's to late in some random city in a poor country and I have to find a comfortable place to sleep. I also love to hear the opinion and story of close friends or friends of friends. Specially close friends that knows my taste and the things that I appreciate. I also Google some stuff in Trip Advisor or travel blogs for example, normally to check if a certain place is dangerous or difficult to reach.

3. Do you follow any travel blog / Instagram account / Facebook page our group? Why?
I just follow some random instagram pages, but I don't use them to collect information. It works as a way of giving me ideas about where to go next and to discover places that I didn't know about. Like I said, I also check some travel blogs on the internet and Tripadvisor for comments.

4. Do you think that as time passes by and the blogger/Instagrammer gets more famous, the blog/Instagram account suffers some changes? Do you have any example?
I totally agree with it. I feel that the great majority of social pages are more eager about getting followers and money than about sharing great experiences and tips. It all feel fake to me and created with the purpose of sharing. The process is less natural in my opinion. I have an Instagram account I do the same. The great and most honest stories aren't there.

5. In your opinion, what is the effect of Online travel Reviews on the Backpackers' behaviour?
I more less answered this above. Specially Lonely Planet and TripAdvisor comments have an impact in my decision making process. If see lot's of negative comments about a certain thing I normally don't do it. For example, I read terrible stuff about the speed boats that cross part of the Mekong River in Laos. They are quicker, but must more dangerous. I ended up choosing another transportation that would take me more time, but safer.

6. When they go online for this type of content, what do you think they are looking for? Is it important for you? If not, what alternatives would you use?
I find this kind of content important. There's always someone honest commenting and the fact that you're behind a computer, gives you the possibility to be say the truth without being afraid. It also a nice way to check lot's of different opinions in a same spot.

7. To finish, what are the decision factors (price, locations, hospitality, etc) that you consider, when planning your trips?
Price and location first. Then hospitality and safeness. I normally choose also places that are in the Lonely Planet Guides. The hygiene factor would depend on the country and place. In India something similar to a bed was enough, for example. But it's obviously also important. In my backpack trips I also like to go to places where I could meet other travelers or locals,

like hostels or local guest house's. It's a great way to share experiences and learn about the way of living in that specific site.

Interviewee 4

1. What motivates you to travel? Do you believe that your motivations remain the same or did they changed since the first time you travelled?

I like to travel mainly for two main reasons: firstly, to know new cultures, or even only new habits/type of food/language and secondly, to have a break from my routine and de-stress. My motivations obviously changed, since I am 1, I have been moving around and travelling was simple to hang out with my family somewhere else. Now, it is a way of learning, a way of adding news opinions, and most importantly to grow up as a person. I think it is very important for someone's independence to learn themselves out there. The reactions, the cultural shock, the "adaptation".

I will say what most of the people say but travelling alone made me know myself better, I could see my biggest fears. I could see how I manage to enjoy my time, how I do not stress and could think a lot about life. And most importantly, I understood that my reflex is to not be very friendly to people I don't know, I would not trust people right away because I wanted to be safe.

2. How do you plan your journey?

I have to confess I am not a big of a planner. I always have a list of things to do, then I check the schedules that I can do each and most importantly the logistics related to locations. It is important to know what is far or close, for then plan the transportation and the timeline. But I mostly don't respect my plans 100%. I often find new ideas, from speaking or through the internet.

Plus, if I stay in a hostel or hotel, it is inevitable to ask the staff (younger staff and older, it is important both visions) for tips. Everything from food to nightclubs.

3. Do you follow any travel blog / Instagram account / Facebook page our group? Why?

No, but I strongly rely on my friends' trips on Instagram. I have friends worldwide and a numerous group of them have the means to travel a lot. I prefer to go through their pictures, and maybe ask for places/tips.

4. Do you think that as time passes by and the blogger/Instagrammer gets more famous, the blog/Instagram account suffers some changes? Do you have any example?

As time goes by, it is becoming a profession so yes, some changes are present but I don't have an opinion about it.

5. In your opinion, what is the effect of Online travel Reviews on the Backpackers' behaviour?

I believe it has a huge impact. The most adventurous backpackers will try to deny and maybe go without any info to the unknown but if you are a regular backpacker, the online review helps to ensure a better trip in several ways.

6. When they go online for this type of content, what do you think they are looking for? Is it important for you? If not, what alternatives would you use?

I am sure they are looking for monetary revenue, sponsors and fame. If you are just a regular traveller that wishes to share and help others, you will have content about it but not editing all the pictures to the higher level, you will not wait for a lot of followers and likes. You will just have fun and not worry about those factors. It doesn't matter to me their reasons because obviously, everyone can see that this type of content can always be useful but as I said above, my alternative is to look for content posted by my friends or even look for blogs that mention hidden spaces/secret spots that can always be amazing.

7. To finish, what are the decision factors (price, locations, hospitality, etc) that you consider, when planning your trips?

The decision factors will be, by order: safety, price, food. It is really important that I feel safe, in the case for example of my trip around Asia, I had to be conscient about the dangers and make sure that my family was not worried every minute. Then, the price definitely matters. It can be a cheap or expensive place, but It is important to find alternatives when it's an expensive place beforehand and find the best places to go, in the cheaper destinations. You have the make the most of both cases. Then, food. I think that food is an important element, for me, as I really enjoy food, I will be very curious about the location's cuisine and I want to ensure that I can be satisfied and also, not get sick because that will ruin the whole trip. On the other side, things such as hospitality, will be also relevant but it is not an issue, I have been already in "bad" hostels and when you think about it, you will not spend your trip there.

Ok, it is important to make sure our stuff is safe and that you can get some sleep but it is a small concern.

Interviewee 5

1. What motivates you to travel? Do you believe that your motivations remain the same or did they changed since the first time you travelled?

I believe there are different ways of travelling, which inevitably result from different motivations. From my point of view you can travel in the very "short-term" as a tourist (1 weekend to 1 week) which you mostly do to go to places you've heard about, where someone you know has been and in which you just want to get to the "attractions" that you so much hear about. Then there is another type of travel, which is something I only realized after I backpacked for two months where you just want to live the journey! You want to get to know the life, the culture and where it comes from, the food, the soul and the people - what motivated me to do this journey at the time was to experience change! In order to be completely out of your comfort zone: go out into the world and be whomever you want to be.

2. How do you plan your journey?

For these types of trips I like to plan the things I really don't want to miss, but not plan too much so that along the way you can really understand where you want to go. I went with a small group, and we decided to study a bit all the countries where we were going to travel, what were the main places to go and we set a route that made sense, but which could (and was) be changed. It was really important to be able to follow the tips we were given along the way, or to be able to walk a bit more and discover an amazing landscape that is completely breathtaking.

3. Do you follow any travel blog / Instagram account / Facebook page or group? Why?

I do actually! Because it inspires me and reminds me that there is a whole world out there which is much bigger than whatever it is I am doing.

4. Do you think that as time passes by and the blogger/Instagrammer gets more famous, the blog/Instagram account suffers some changes? Do you have any example?

I don't have any example, but I always wonder where they find money to go to all those places 🤔

5. In your opinion, what is the effect of Online travel Reviews on the Backpackers' behaviour?

I think it can have a lot of different outcomes. On the one side, it keeps "the spirit" alive such that it motivates the Backpacker to do other trips in order to feel again as alive as he/she felt in his/her journey. On the other hand, it awakens some sort of curiosity when it reveals some places that we never thought about but look so incredible that make you want to be there.

6. When they go online for this type of content, what do you think they are looking for? Is it important for you? If not, what alternatives would you use?

I never really thought about that...obviously visibility is important because they are probably showing off some brand that pays them or something. For me, this isn't really important I guess.

7. To finish, what are the decision factors (price, locations, hospitality, etc) that you consider, when planning your trips?

There are a lot of decision factors that weight. I try not to narrow it down to price, even if I have to wait a long time to raise enough money so that I don't have to worry about it. Weather is also a concern, as I feel that it constrains the way you enjoy where you are.

Location for me is the most important: the history, the sights and culture you are visiting.

I also prefer to take longer travels than smaller ones, those are the ones that really change your perception of life.

Interviewee 6 – The Persona 2 backpacker

1. In general, which are the motivations that trigger backpackers to start their trip?

When I started backpacking, I figure it out I could see a lot of the world without spending much money. It was an option: instead of spending money in intens and in physical stuff, I would invest in experiences. I was curious to know new places and meet people. Learn new stuff and see more of the world, like to open our minds. Basically, what moved me to start travelling was curiosity.

2. In your case, you are a full-time traveller. What motivates you to travel? Do you believe that the motivations remain the same after travelling for a long time?

What motivates me, I think it is pretty much what I have told you above. I am a very curious person and whenever I'm travelling, I feel more free. I also love meeting new people, to see how they live, how they think and act. One of my basic motivations is to see wildlife in their natural habitats. When you travel, you get to know yourself: thanks to my initial trips, I was able to accept myself and I came out of the closet. I think travelling only brings positive stuff; some people say "Travel is the only thing you buy that makes you richer" and I agree 100% with it.

3. Do you think that as time passes by and the blogger/Instagrammer gets more famous, the blog/Instagram account suffers some changes? Do you have any example?

I think if you want to make it for living, yes! So, once you start living out of this, you have to be more political and to take care of what are you posting and what you are not posting. Due to reason that is not just sharing with your friends. I think it is another source of media that people start using so you have to be really careful with what you post. But yes, people definitely change their content. For instance, I love birds but as you can imagine birds for my business is not so good. Therefore, I opened a different account just for birds because when I was posting a lot of birds people were like "ok no, I don't like birds that much". So you start adapting to your context and having a balance between what you want and what your followers want. Once you start learning, you know what type of pictures and content that people want, especially your followers. So yes, to conclude I believe there is a change.

Instagram is changing the way to travel: nowadays people decide their travel destination just for the picture and social media. Last week, I was in Rainbow Mountain and I talked to a lot of people and I concluded that a lot of them just went there to take a picture, which is weird in my opinion. I think it changes the real purpose of a trip: like people just trying to show off instead of connecting to themselves.

4. In your opinion, what is the effect of Online travel Reviews on the Backpackers' behaviour?

People, especially Backpackers, are willing to pay more for the same service if the review is good. So if there is an nice atmosphere, service, staff and parties, the chances to achieve better reviews are bigger. So I think, if the hostel / tour agency has a really good rate, they can differentiate themselves and consequently, they can charge more. Therefore, I think that is

why there is so much focus on good reviews among the backpackers. They trust on the reviews to make their decisions. Therefore, I believe that the effect of Online Travel Reviews is mostly helping the backpackers to plan their travels.

5. When they go online for this type of content, what do you think they are looking for?

Is it important for you? If not, what alternatives would you use?

Personally, I don't read much TripAdvisor when I'm booking a hostel. I base my decisions according to the reviews: so not only about pictures and price but also on the reviews. So I think nowadays, the fact that people use their times to write reviews is something that is helpful to the other travellers. I trust more in a hotel that is better reviewed than one that is not reviewed.

Yes, it is really important for me. I used to use a lot Lonely Planet but nowadays I am using way more online information like Hostelworld.com and Booking.com.

6. To finish, what are the decision factors (price, locations, hospitality, etc) that you consider, when planning your trips?

I base my decision a lot in reviews. When I was like a real Backpacker, the price was my main decision factor. Now since it is my job it has changed; I am willing to pay more for being comfortable: like not sharing my room with so many people. I spent 25 days a month travelling so nowadays I really appreciate having my own room and bathroom. Also, location, reviews, friendly staff are my top decision factors.

APPENDIX III – Mind Map with Categories and Themes

