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Exploring the Potential of Online Traveller Reviews from People with Disabilities to Assess the Perceived Accessibility of Tourist Destinations

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Objectives | This research probes the analysis of online traveller reviews (OTR) from tourists with disabilities to examine the perceived accessibility of tourist destinations. Specifically, it aims to: 1) pinpoint and categorize the primary barriers and facilitators of accessibility from digital feedback; 2) investigate the correlation between perceptions of accessibility and factors such as review year, tourist resource type, reviewer gender, and disability type; 3) perform sentiment analysis to ascertain the prevailing sentiment about destination accessibility.

Methodology | This study adopted a mixed-methods analysis approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques. It focuses on 252 OTR published between 2013 and 2023 extracted from Google Maps and TripAdvisor. Recognized as platforms housing the most substantial number of OTR, both serve as rich reservoirs of spontaneous and undirected opinions, contrasting with the structured feedback obtained from questionnaires (Lozano-Monterrubio & Huertas, 2020; Marine-Roig & Ferrer, 2018). These reviews were gathered from tourism resources managed by the councils of Aveiro (Portugal) and A Coruña (Spain). With their unique geographical attributes, both cities presented themselves as ideal candidates for this exploration (Domínguez et al., 2015; Leiras & Eusébio, 2023). The extraction process was performed in June 2023 using the free application Data Miner 5.7 tool for Google Chrome. To delve deeper into the nuances of perceived accessibility, the study examined several variables, including the year of the review, the type of tourist resource (e.g., museums, historical heritage), the gender of the reviewer, and the type of disability. This multi-variable approach aimed to provide a holistic understanding of the factors influencing perceptions of accessibility (Sun et al., 2021). Furthermore, a sentiment analysis was conducted to capture the emotional undertones of the OTR — positive, or negative—. The data was also analysed using two freely available tools. Quantitative data were statistically analysed using PSPP, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis using QDA Miner Lite. This dual approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of both the numerical trends and the nuanced sentiments expressed by the reviewers (Creswell, 2003).

Main Results and Contributions | The analysis unveiled both strengths and critical areas in the accessibility conditions of both destinations. Notably, museums emerge as the better-adapted tourist resources (Cerdan-Chiscano & Darcy, 2023; Reyes-García et al., 2021), while historical heritage exhibits accessibility shortcomings (Rucci & Porto, 2022; Wan et al., 2022), which could be mitigated through low-cost solutions, the integration of technology, and staff training (Doan & Nguyen, 2023; Eusébio et al., 2022; Tilili et al., 2021). As observed in previous studies (Gillovic et al., 2021; Reyes-García et al., 2021), there is a predominance of comments focused on challenges related to reduced mobility over other disabilities. From a theoretical perspective, this research marks a progression in the field of accessible tourism (AT) by introducing and validating methodologies grounded in digital data analysis. Practically, it provides essential insights for Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) to optimize their offerings. Societally, it underscores the pressing need to incorporate the voices and perspectives of people with disabilities into tourism strategy and planning.

Limitations | This investigation acknowledges certain constraints that might shape the interpretation and extrapolation of the findings. While Google Maps and TripAdvisor are heralded as preeminent platforms for traveller insights, broadening the scope to encompass platforms like Twitter or Instagram could have potentially infused the study with richer, multifaceted perspectives. Furthermore, Google Maps limits data extraction to 1,140 reviews per tourist asset and does not disclose the country of origin of the travellers. In addition, OTRs fall short in offering a comprehensive sociodemographic tapestry of the reviewers, such as age or level of education, which could have augmented the depth of understanding. The inherent spontaneity of online reviews, devoid of the structured cadence of survey responses, might usher in variability in the granularity and calibre of shared insights. While the research lens was meticulously trained on the public tourism resources of two distinct cities, Aveiro and A Coruña, the findings, though robust, might tread cautiously when generalized to broader tourist landscapes, and including the private tourism offer. It is also conceivable that not all tourists, especially those with disabilities, are comfortable sharing their experiences online, potentially introducing an element of bias in the tapestry of insights. Lastly, it is essential to underscore that while 252 reviews can provide valuable qualitative insights, such a small sample may limit the validity of the quantitative approach.

Conclusions | The present investigation has underscored the burgeoning significance of online platforms where travellers chronicle their journeys. These digital platforms, rich with spontaneous narratives, serve as valuable sources of insights, especially in the field of AT (Leiras & Eusébio, 2023; Lozano-Monterrubio & Huertas, 2020; Marine-Roig & Ferrer, 2018). Notably, while the volume of reviews from tourists with disabilities remains nascent, it is imperative to monitor its trajectory. These reviews not only offer a snapshot of the present but can potentially illuminate

trends, signalling the evolving participation of individuals with disabilities in tourism activities. As these individuals increasingly embrace the joys of travel, their shared experiences will burgeon, offering richer and more diverse insights.

Expanding the scope of such studies to a national level could unveil intriguing patterns, spotlighting destinations that are magnets for travellers with disabilities. Such destinations could serve as benchmarks, offering a blueprint of best practices that others can emulate. In essence, as the world becomes more interconnected and travel becomes more democratized, ensuring accessibility will be a moral and strategic imperative. Destinations that heed the voices of all travellers, especially those with disabilities, will enrich their tourism tapestry and position themselves as frontrunners in the inclusive tourism paradigm.

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