

# The role of user-generated content in tourists' travel planning behavior: evidence from Croatia

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**Abstract** | User-generated content (UGC) can be found in various forms and on many digital platforms, from pictures and videos to reviews, rating stars, and comments. UGC platforms thrive on the content created by end-users to others like them. The objective of this study is to analyze how Internet users use websites and platforms that contain UGC and what is the role of UGC in trip planning in the form of information collection and perceived impact on their decision. This article investigates differences in influence on travelers between several types of popular UGC platforms – a booking platform, a review platform, and a social networking site (Airbnb, TripAdvisor, and Facebook, respectively) and explores how these platforms create interest towards a destination as well as the perceived impact on the decision-making process. Research is extended into the comparison of user perception between user-generated content and business-generated content. The obtained results provide valuable insights for all tourism-related businesses, especially related to the potential of UGC and differences across various types of platforms.

**Keywords** | User-generated content, online reviews, social media platforms, booking platforms, eWoM, destination selection

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## 1. Introduction

The growth of Web 2.0 applications, which empower Internet users and allow two-way information communications in travel and tourism, has generated an enormous number of online user-generated content (UGC) on hotels, travel destinations, travel services, and other tourism-related products and services, among many other industries (Sigala, 2009). User-generated content such as the online comments, profiles, and photographs produced by consumers, particularly travelers, is “a mixture of fact and opinion, impression, and sentiment, founded and unfounded tidbits, experiences, and even rumor” (Blackshaw & Nazzaro 2006, p. 4). As the Internet is recognized as a universal source of information, an increasing number of travelers are using the Internet for travel planning (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008; Sigala, Lockwood, & Jones, 2001). Pan and Fesenmaier (2006) and Xiang and Fesenmaier (2006) stated that even 15 years ago, in 2006, the Internet was a particularly critical source of information for prospective travelers when they are in the research phase of the planning process for a trip. Searching for travel-related information on the Internet is one of the most popular online activities (Zickuhr, 2010). At the same time, travel planning is perceived as a challenging task due to the high risk of visiting an unfamiliar place. To reduce that kind of risk and uncertainty, travelers try to collect reliable and detailed information about that place. Travelers often regarded social media, booking platforms, or travel reviews platforms as trustworthy sources that could lower the perceived risk and uncertainty through their travel (Rathore, 2020). The online interpersonal influence exerted by UGC is referred to as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which can be defined as “all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers” (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan,

2008). Electronic word-of-mouth has a high level of credibility, relevance, and empathy with other members (Xu, 2014).

## 2. Literature review

Iordanova (2015) argued that many authors are pointing out that non-commercial information sources affect tourism destination image (TDI) differently than promotional content, and travelers find it more objective. Online user-generated reviews about travel destinations, hotels, and tourism services have become essential sources of information for travelers (Pan, MacLaurin & Crotts, 2007). Zhu and Zhang (2006) pointed out that user-generated reviews on web platforms are helpful to both consumers and online retailers. Research from Google indicated that 84% of leisure travelers used the Internet as a planning resource (Torres, 2010). These data showed that user-generated content plays an active role in shaping travelers' traveling decisions rather than traditional travel agencies. User-generated content is considered a credible source because it projects the real experiences shared by users on various platforms. Therefore, UGC in social media platforms or booking platforms has a strong influence on generating destination awareness and subsequent decisions in choosing a traveling destination (Dewi & Yuliati, 2018). Xu et al. (2021) argued that UGC indirectly affects tourist loyalty and related behavior by influencing TDI and satisfaction, while Cheung et al. (2021) focused on emotional and rational UGC and its effect on tourists' perceived values. Because of the experiential nature of tourism-oriented products and services for which previous quality cannot be ascertained, WOM and, more recently, eWOM or UGC are much relied on by potential tourists in forming TDI.

Online consumers review not only provide others with information from real users but also

act as recommendations (Wilson et al., 2012; Pan et al., 2007; Cox et al., 2009). Many tourism-oriented businesses are afraid of bad reviews and negative comments because it works as a promotion against their companies. Laškarin Ažić and Bačić (2021) investigated those negative experiences and found out that people who read negative comments and reviews more frequently tend to post less frequently, and vice versa. But what is very interesting, Laškarin Ažić and Bačić (2021) suggested there are no significant differences between younger generations (Gen Y, Gen Z) and older generations (Gen X, Baby Boomers) when it comes to reading and writing negative reviews. However, findings by Chiappa, Gallarza, and Dall’Aglío (2018) based on an experiential value-based approach revealed that substantial differences in travelers’ e-rating behavior exist based on subjects (i.e., gender), objects (i.e., hotel type and size), and circumstances (i.e., time of the stay).

Gretzel and Yoo (2008) stated that travel reviews play an essential role for those who actively read them; their study confirmed the importance of considering demographic variables when modeling information search behavior because one demographic group will find some content more important than other groups. To get a bigger picture, the influence of user-generated content on different communication channels such as social media, travel-reviews platforms, and booking platforms has been tested, and except that, it is crucial to extend the comparison between content created by users and content created by tourism-related businesses. Xiang and Gretzel (2010) pointed out that social media platforms are “ubiquitous” in online travel-related information search, and a significant role in that search for information is played by search engines. Marine-Roig (2019) shows that tourists look for user-generated content and online travel reviews for almost every activity and tourism-related attraction, such as museums, tours, sights and landmarks, nightlife, shopping, transportation, parks, and others.

The focus of this paper is on three specific platforms – Facebook, Airbnb, and TripAdvisor. Several studies about UGC on Facebook in the tourism industry have suggested that Facebook has an influence on travel-related decisions, and they studied the impact of the UGC on Facebook from different perspectives (Barišić, 2017; Rathore, 2020; Mariani, Styven, & Ayeh, 2019; Dewi & Yuliaty, 2018; Jadvah et al., 2018; Stankov, Lazić, & Dragičević, 2010; Rachão & Joukes, 2017; Barman & Sharma, 2021). Chang and Chen (2018) discussed what drives purchase intention on Airbnb, and their study provides a helpful reference to Airbnb hosts and small businesses in the tourism industry about the influence of Airbnb reviews and how significant it is for female respondents in that research. On the other hand, Bridges and Vasquez (2016) ask – If nearly all Airbnb reviews are positive, does that make them meaningless? They continued to argue that the average rating on Airbnb was 4.7 on a 5-point scale, and around 95% of the Airbnb properties were rated as either 4.5 or 5 stars, while properties with ratings lower than 3.5 were scarce. That is not a problem just with Airbnb, but with other sharing-economy platforms such as BlaBlaCar, for example. Slee (2013) found that over 98% of users of BlaBlaCar rate their drivers or riders with a 5-star rating on a 5-point scale, and the remaining ratings mostly are 1-star ratings. A possible reason for the positivity bias on Airbnb is the lack of anonymity. However, a lack of anonymity can also mean that authors of online reviews are less likely to be overly negative. Researchers have shown that other consumers perceive anonymous reviews to lack credibility and trustworthiness (Ayeh, Au, & Law, 2013; Wang, 2010). Regardless of the fact that more than 93% of the Airbnb reviews are categorically positive, they are essential for potential travelers in their planning process, and they usually give positive reviews after their trip, and that might be due to sociological effects influencing people to more tactful in their complaints when reviewing another

human, and even when they are not happy and give bad reviews, it is usually about the location, rather than with the host (Bridges & Vasquez, 2016; Zervas et al., 2015). Different from booking platforms such as Airbnb or Booking, reviews on TripAdvisor can be posted by anyone. Review creators do not need to make an actual transaction or ever visit some hotel or restaurant; that is a possible problem with TripAdvisor. Still, people see user-generated content on TripAdvisor as more reliable because it seems more realistic when rates have some extra content with it, and it is not just a 5-star rating when a customer is happy with a product or service and a 1-star rating when a customer is not satisfied (Chua & Banerjee, 2013). Furthermore, Barišić's (2017) research indicated how travelers rely more on user-generated content than business-generated content. Still, the same research also showed how social media platforms play an essential role in the process of building of tourist destination image, but they don't play such a vital role in the process of searching for travel information, but review platforms and booking platforms do.

### 3. Methodology

The objective of this research was to examine the influence of user-generated content (UGC) on platforms where travelers seek information in comparison to traditional digital information sources such as official destination-oriented websites, destination-oriented Facebook pages, and promotion activities of tourism businesses. The main research goals were to explore which online platforms users utilize for destination research and to which extent, which elements they perceive as important when selecting a destination, and their perception of specific travel-related UGC platforms.

To explore consumers' views on UGC and the perceived impact that UGC has on travelers, a quantitative study was conducted using an online

survey software focusing on Internet users from Croatia who utilize digital sources when planning their traveling activities. The research instrument was created for the purpose of this study but was based on several previous studies (primarily Barišić, 2017 and partially Mehmood, Liang & Gu, 2018; Goh, Heng & Lin, 2013; Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). In order to collect data on user perception of UGC platforms and related information, three popular platforms were selected, each representing a specific type of UGC. Namely, (1) Airbnb was selected as a travel sharing-economy booking platform, (2) TripAdvisor as an online review platform, and (3) Facebook as a social network (but with a focus on Facebook content related exclusively to user traveling activities).

Prior to the primary data collection process, a pilot study was created in order to locate and eliminate any potential questionnaire errors and misunderstandings. The pilot study involved 15 respondents (tester users) in the process selected to represent the subsets of the target audience. The respondents in the pilot study were selected based on several factors, including country of residence, internet experience, prior experience with UGC platforms, and prior experience with travel-oriented online platforms. Each respondent received a brief introduction about the research concept and an inquiry for participation with instructions on necessary feedback regarding the proposed research instrument. Each participant was given a time frame of 7 days to provide feedback regarding the item clarity, relevance of provided scales (or answers), item structure and order, time necessary for the completion, and any potential vagueness related to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was partially adjusted based on respondent input and comments: 3 questions and related items were partially rephrased due to potential misunderstanding, and additional answers were provided for two questions. The final version of the questionnaire consisted of 21 questions and 49 related items, with dominantly closed-ended questi-

ons. A 5-point Likert type scale was used for scaling with the marginal positions described as 1 – Completely disagree (or not significant at all), and 5 – Completely agree (or extremely significant).

In order to recruit respondents, two Facebook groups were contacted and utilized: Facebook group *Putoholičari* (eng. Travelholics) with more than 160,000 members and Facebook group *Savjetnik za putovanja* (eng. Travel advisor) with more than 83,000 members at the time of data-collection (July-August, 2019). A total of 872 respondents were recruited during the data-collection process. An online survey software features were

utilized in order to detect any potential low-quality respondents and related data. All the flagged (suspicious) responses were manually observed and analyzed. Consequently, 190 responses were excluded from the analysis due to survey abandonment, a significant rate of missing data, or otherwise unusable or invalid data. A final, convenience-based sample consisted of N=682 respondents. IBM SPSS Statistics 23 software was used for statistical analysis, which included parametric and non-parametric tests (mainly descriptive statistics, Repeated measures ANOVA test, and Paired Samples T-test).

**Table 1 | Demographic characteristics of respondents**

		Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	99	15.1
	Female	558	84.9
Age	27 and below	146	22.4
	28 – 35	205	31.5
	36 – 45	197	30.3
	46 and above	103	15.8
Education	Elementary school	5	0.8
	High school	159	24.2
	College / Bachelor	74	11.3
	Master's	305	46.4
	Ph.D. or Postgraduate	114	17.4
Income	3,000 HRK and below	102	15.5
	3,001 – 5,000 HRK	117	17.8
	5,001 – 10,000 HRK	332	50.5
	10,001 HRK and above	106	16.1
Social media usage	Less than 1 hour	135	19.8
	1 – 3 hours	382	56.1
	3 – 5 hours	118	17.3
	More than 5 hours	46	6.8
Actively using social media platforms	Facebook	662	97.1
	Twitter	41	6.0
	YouTube	519	76.1
	Instagram	472	69.2
	Viber / WhatsApp / Messenger	550	80.6
	Snapchat	41	6.0
	LinkedIn	137	20.1
	Pinterest	202	29.6
	Something else	26	3.8
	Nothing	1	0.1

Source: Authors' research

#### 4. Study results

Table 2 shows what sources of information respondents use to inform themselves before they travel, and it can be seen that booking platforms are the most frequent answer, with 65.8% of the respondents who stated that. The second most

frequent answer is travel reviews platforms, such as TripAdvisor with 51.5%, and the third most frequent answer is friends' recommendations with 51.3%. Table 2 shows that answers that include reviews or recommendations have more than 50% and others don't, which indicates that people find user-generated content quite important.

**Table 2 | Source of information prior to traveling**

Booking platforms (Booking.com, Airbnb, Trivago, etc.)	65.8%
Travel reviews platforms (TripAdvisor etc.)	51.5%
Friend recommendations	51.3%
Official websites of tourism businesses	37.9%
Other people's profiles on social media platforms	29.5%
Travel agencies	25.0%
Previous visit experience	18.2%
Traditional media (TV, press, radio, billboards)	16.2%
Official websites of national tourism communities	15.5%
Social media pages of tourism businesses	15.2%
Something else	4.6%
None of the above	1.6%

Source: Authors' research

To see the impact of user-generated content on choices of the travelers and potential travelers, three research questions are formed:

- *RQ1 - Which is the most important element for selecting a travel destination based on user perception?*
- *RQ2 - How do users perceive the influence of booking platforms and review platforms on their trip planning behavior?*
- *RQ3 - How do the users perceive travel-related content on social media platforms?*

*RQ1 - Which is the most important element for selecting a travel destination based on user perception?*

In Table 3 Repeated measures ANOVA test is used to check if there is a statistically significant difference between the perceived importance of each element. Mauchly's Test of Sphericity indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated,  $\chi^2(9)=30.73$ ,  $p<0.01$ . Because of that violated assumption of sphericity, Greenhouse-Geisser correction is used ( $\epsilon=.98$ ), and Greenhouse-Geisser correction indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the perceived importance of each element,  $F(3.91, 2621.21) = 347.02$ ,  $p<0.01$ .

**Table 3 | Repeated measures ANOVA test – The most important element for selecting a travel destination based on user perception**

	Low price (1)	Other travelers' reviews (2)	Friends' recommendation (3)	Photos and videos on social media platforms (4)	Promotion (5)
N Valid	672	672	672	672	672
Missing	10	10	10	10	10
Mean	<b>4.01</b>	<b>3.84</b>	<b>3.58</b>	<b>3.54</b>	<b>2.56</b>
Std. Error of Mean	.031	.034	.037	.035	.037
Std. Deviation	.799	.874	.961	.914	.958
Variance	.638	.764	.923	.836	.917

Source: Authors' research

Comparison between each element (Pairwise comparison) indicates that all elements are statistically different from each other ( $p<0.01$ ), except element 3 (friends' recommendation) and element

4 (photos and videos on social media platforms). In other words, the most significant element is the low price, followed by other travelers' reviews, and the third most significant element are recommen-

dations from friends as well as the photos and videos on social media platforms, while the promotion is the least significant element in comparison with other elements. Interestingly enough, user-

generated content in the form of reviews is a more significant element than all other elements, except for the low prices.

**Table 4 |** Pairwise Comparisons – Differences between the most important elements for selecting a travel destination based on user perception

(I) Element	(J) Element	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. <sup>b</sup>	95% Confidence Interval for Difference <sup>b</sup>	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	2	.173 <sup>*</sup>	.040	.000	.061	.284
	3	.430 <sup>*</sup>	.042	.000	.313	.547
	4	.472 <sup>*</sup>	.043	.000	.352	.592
	5	1.452 <sup>*</sup>	.044	.000	1.327	1.578
2	1	-.173 <sup>*</sup>	.040	.000	-.284	-.061
	3	.257 <sup>*</sup>	.040	.000	.145	.370
	4	.299 <sup>*</sup>	.041	.000	.183	.416
	5	1.280 <sup>*</sup>	.045	.000	1.152	1.407
3	1	-.430 <sup>*</sup>	.042	.000	-.547	-.313
	2	-.257 <sup>*</sup>	.040	.000	-.370	-.145
	4	.042	.043	1.000	-.081	.164
	5	1.022 <sup>*</sup>	.046	.000	.894	1.151
4	1	-.472 <sup>*</sup>	.043	.000	-.592	-.352
	2	-.299 <sup>*</sup>	.041	.000	-.416	-.183
	3	-.042	.043	1.000	-.164	.081
	5	.981 <sup>*</sup>	.043	.000	.859	1.102
5	1	-1.452 <sup>*</sup>	.044	.000	-1.578	-1.327
	2	-1.280 <sup>*</sup>	.045	.000	-1.407	-1.152
	3	-1.022 <sup>*</sup>	.046	.000	-1.151	-.894
	4	-.981 <sup>*</sup>	.043	.000	-1.102	-.859

Based on estimated marginal means

\*. The mean difference is significant at the

b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni.

Source: Authors' research

*RQ2 - How do users perceive the influence of booking platforms and review platforms on their trip planning behavior?*

In RQ2, Airbnb and TripAdvisor have been compared to find out how respondents perceive the influence of those platforms and reviews on them. Paired Samples T-test indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in using booking platforms (Pair 1) ( $t=6.785$ ,  $df=233$ ,  $p<0.01$ ).

Test indicate that average values show how Airbnb is used significantly more, but with moderate intensity ( $x=3.08$ ,  $SD=1.25$ ). For Pair 2 test has demonstrated that there is a statistically significant difference in finding a destination through a platform ( $t=5.753$ ,  $df=233$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), and average values show how TripAdvisor helps respondents find a destination more than Airbnb, but with moderate intensity ( $x=3.22$ ,  $SD=1.06$ ). For Pair 3 Pai-

red Samples T-test has demonstrated that there is a statistically significant difference in the perceived influence of booking platforms on purchase decisions of tourism-related products and services ( $t=2.071$ ,  $df=233$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), and average values show that perceived influence is slightly higher on

TripAdvisor than on Airbnb, but what is different from the previous two pairs, here is the case that both average values are above neutral value 3.0, and pair 3 is statistically significant as well, but the difference between platforms is lower than on previous questions ( $x=3.67$ ,  $SD=0.96$ ).

**Table 5 | Paired comparison – The influence of booking platforms and reviews on booking platforms**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 I book tourism-related products and services through Airbnb	<b>3.08</b>	234	1.251	.082
I book tourism-related products and services through TripAdvisor	<b>2.36</b>	234	1.157	.076
Pair 2 Airbnb helps me to find a destination	<b>2.70</b>	234	1.122	.073
TripAdvisor helps me to find a destination	<b>3.22</b>	234	1.064	.070
Pair 3 Reviews on Airbnb helped me to make a purchasing decision on tourism-related products or services	<b>3.48</b>	234	1.158	.076
Reviews on TripAdvisor helped me to make a purchasing decision on tourism-related products or services	<b>3.67</b>	234	.963	.063

Source: Authors' research

**Table 6 | Paired samples T-test – The difference in influence between a booking platform and a review platform**

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 I book tourism-related products and services through Airbnb – I book tourism-related products and services through TripAdvisor	.718	1.625	.106	.509	.927	6.758	233	<b>.000</b>
Pair 2 Airbnb helps me to find a destination – TripAdvisor helps me to find a destination	-.517	1.375	.090	-.694	-.340	-5.753	233	<b>.000</b>
Pair 3 Reviews on Airbnb helped me to make a purchasing decision of tourism-related products or services – Reviews on TripAdvisor helped me to make a purchasing decision of tourism-related products or services	-.184	1.357	.089	-.359	-.009	-2.071	233	<b>.039</b>

Source: Authors' research

*RQ3 – How do the users perceive travel-related content on social media platforms?*

Average values indicate that user-generated content creates an interest; respondents find this kind of content more credible than content from official sites and pages of tourist destinations. Respondents stated that they find information for the

next destination on social media platforms, but they write comments and recommendations much less frequently than they read them. When there is a question of trust in the information available on social media platforms, the average value is near to neutral value.



**Table 7 | Average values of agreement related to content on social media platforms**

		Photos and videos on social media influenced a choice of the planned trip	Finding information for the next destination on Facebook	Facebook posts made by friends after the trip are more credible than official sites and pages of some tourist destination	Writing comments and advice about visited locations on Facebook	Posting photos and videos after the trip on Facebook	Trust the information available on Facebook
N	Valid	662	662	661	662	662	661
	Missing	20	20	21	20	20	21
	Mean	<b>3.61</b>	<b>3.26</b>	<b>3.48</b>	<b>2.40</b>	<b>3.08</b>	<b>3.05</b>
	Std. Error of Mean	.038	.043	.037	.049	.052	.033
	Std. Deviation	.977	1.105	.962	1.257	1.345	.844

Source: Authors' research

## 5. Discussion

In the last couple of years, user-generated content related to tourism has been very popular on social media platforms. However, that is content that users are searching for less frequently but still seeing very often. That type of content could make them interested in the destination. On the other hand, user-generated content on platforms such as TripAdvisor or Airbnb users search more frequently when they are already interested in the destination or tourism-oriented products but want to find out more about them. Social media platforms, especially Facebook, have an entirely different type of UGC than booking platforms and reviews platforms.

Mehmood, Liang, and Gu (2018) were exploring how UGC and e-WOM affect TDI, intention, and attitudes toward a heritage site, and they found out that UGC in the form of online reviews, comments, opinions, recommendations, as well as friends' recommendations, is a more reliable source for the online information seeker than content created by a travel-related business. This study does not focus on heritage sites, but the findings are similar. Barišić (2017) provided very similar conclusions, but it is extended to compare various platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, TripAdvisor, and Booking. In this research, YouTube is remo-

ved from the comparison because domestic travel-related UGC is not very popular on that platform, and Booking.com is replaced with Airbnb in order to explore the differences. Their results showed that TripAdvisor is significantly more used in the search for information, and Booking.com is substantially more used for booking. Even though platforms are different, findings are quite similar. Findings from Barišić (2017) and Jadhav et al. (2018) showed that the main feature of social media platforms is to create an interest for a next trip or even discover some destination for the first time. This research confirmed such findings. However, research from Dewi and Yulianti (2018), which is focused on the influence of Instagram, shows that social media are most useful in the pre-trip phase, where photos and videos can interest users for a travel destination. Results of this research show that Facebook can have the same effect, which is in line with the study by Barman and Sharma (2021).

## 6. Conclusion

Many countries rely heavily on tourism activities, and it represents a large portion of their annual revenue. Croatia is one of those coun-

tries, and tourism-oriented businesses and organizations in Croatia care a lot about TDI. To maintain a good image, businesses and organizations in tourism should care about user-generated content on various platforms because travelers find user-generated content significantly more reliable than business-generated content, and users tend to use multiple sources in different stages of their search for information. An unsatisfied guest today is most likely a lost one tomorrow because of harmful content generated by unsatisfied guests, and vice versa. This research has provided valuable insights for tourism-oriented businesses because it shows the most important elements for selecting a travel destination based on user perception and also users' perception of the influence of UGC-rich platforms such as TripAdvisor and Airbnb. Respondents in this study confirmed that price is the most significant element in selecting a travel destination, and the second most important element is UGC. Respondents rely on user-generated content more than their friends' recommendations and promotional content. In their process of searching for travel-related information, each platform has a different mission, but no matter the platform, the promotion has the most negligible influence. Results of this study indicate that Airbnb is significantly more used for booking than TripAdvisor, but TripAdvisor is considerably more helpful for finding a travel destination. Furthermore, respondents find reviews on both platforms useful, but TripAdvisor reviews are perceived as more valuable for making a purchasing decision. In addition to tourism-oriented platforms, UGC on social media platforms also influences consumer behavior related to tourism. Results of this study show how user-generated content, especially photos and videos, on social media platforms such as Facebook creates interest in their next travel destination. Still, users tend to post travel-related comments and reviews less frequently on social media platforms. The conclusion is that user-generated content not only creates interest in a travel destina-

tion but also plays an essential role in travelers' purchasing decisions, especially if the price is matched with requests and preferences. Both researchers and the hospitality industry professionals will benefit from these findings because they show the importance of UGC-based platforms and their direct implications on travelers and their decision-making process.

## 7. Limitations and future research directions

There are several limitations related to this research that future studies should address or avoid. The sample distribution and sampling procedure are some of those limitations. Because of the non-probability sampling approach, the findings' generalizability is limited. Another limitation is that the sample is focused on a single country, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. This research piece cannot provide the differences between generations because the sample lacks representatives from older generations, and those findings would be beneficial for the hospitality industry. Intergenerational differences are likely to provide exciting insights into how older generations search for travel-related information. The socio-demographic data such as age, education, and social media usage could be used as differentiating variables for a more detailed analysis of the data and related insight. Another important direction for future studies is to extend the number of platforms, especially with Booking and Instagram, but also with some platforms that are not so much explored in this area, such as Reddit or YouTube, for example. Our research provided valuable insights into how users rely on user-generated content differently depending on the platform. The future study on this topic could also consider the possibility of researching travelers' customer journey to find out more about the differences between using each platform.

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