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## ONLINE TRAVEL AGENCIES: ANALYSIS OF EVALUATIONS IN TRAVEL-RELATED DECISION-MAKING

**Abstract:** This research aimed to analyze the impact of feedback available on OTAs platforms in the decision-making process of Brazilian consumers for lodging services. To achieve the proposed objective, an online questionnaire was applied and shared through Google Docs. The study has a descriptive aspect, with a qualitative-quantitative approach. The results show that Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) are frequently used by respondents, even if some have some reservations about the booking platforms. The public mostly tends to use the services of the sites and analyze the available reviews. It is recommended that future studies seek to understand the strategies adopted by managers in order to work more efficiently on research of the impact of online comments, and it is also suggested that studies be carried out on the basis of comments generated by users.

**Keywords:** OTAs, feedback, decision-making process.

### Introduction

The internet has brought multiple ways to communicate, and millions of people have started to use this network to talk, debate, and exchange information and experiences.<sup>1</sup> This applies to the hospitality and tourism industry as well, with its diversified market and tourism activities expanding. When planning their trips, individuals began to use the internet and its broad source of information to decide the destination they want to visit and the hotels where they will stay.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> **Silva, P. G.** *O processo decisório do turista em ambiente virtual: fatores que influenciam as etapas de compra*. Tese (Doutorado em Administração). São Paulo: Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo [online], 2017, 115 f. [Accessed: 16 October 2021]. Available at: <https://tede2.pucsp.br/handle/handle/20552>

<sup>2</sup> **Katsoni, V., D. Laloumis.** The influence of online reviews on customers and travel agencies. The *Małopolska School of Economics in Tarnów Research Papers Collection* [online], vol. 23 (2), 2013. [Accessed: 16 October 2021]. Available at: <https://zn.mwse.edu.pl/index.php/zn/article/view/611/578>

But in addition to all the information about the attractions and lodging that the internet can make available, it offers reviews left by guests who have already had their experience and, based on that, describe their stay experiences.<sup>3</sup> This information and feedback are mostly made available in Online Travel Agencies (OTAs).

Because of this context, the question that this study seeks to answer is: What are the impacts that the evaluations made by guests on OTAs platforms have on the decision-making process of Brazilian consumers looking for lodging?

The emergence of several internet applications in the hotel industry has generated the production of online reviews, such as TripAdvisor, considered one of the largest online platforms in the world, with more than 859 million reviews.<sup>4</sup>

Realizing the changes that the internet has brought, where doubts, opinions, criticisms, and compliments about the means of lodging are widely and practically available, it is understood that this information can cause a positive or negative impact on the decision-making process for a particular hotel. Because of this, the study's general objective is to analyze the impact of feedback made available on OTAs platforms in the decision-making process of Brazilian consumers for lodging services.

According to Bentivegna, "an interpersonal network of contacts helps individuals deal with uncertainty regarding new products and ideas and relieve the tension caused by very positive or negative experiences with the product".<sup>5</sup> With the reach that the internet has nowadays, the reviews left on OTA, cause several impacts on consumers of lodging services, because on those sites there will always be someone describing their experience, be it positive or negative, therefore, the importance of this study in the sense of collaborating to a better understanding of the decision-making process of Brazilian tourists about means of lodging.

## Theoretical Framework

### *Online Travel Agencies and Their Importance to the Hotel Market*

The internet has brought several benefits to the hotel industry, where companies began to know their audience better. Through having a more comprehensive and easily accessible way of disclosure, they started to know their competitors and better organize their sales policy and price, through the information available on the network, thus creating a more effective and targeted service.<sup>6</sup> As an example, OTAs (Online Travel Agencies) have emerged from all technological development.

About the importance of the internet, it can be stated that: the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), especially the internet, have produced real mutations in the process of buying and selling tourist products and services. The use of intermediaries, especially travel agencies and tour operators, has been progressively replaced by direct contact between customers and service providers, especially through online channels. The internet has promoted the emergence of new platforms and projects, as traditional media adapt to new consumer needs and demands.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> **Boaria, F., C. A. Frantz dos Santos.** Análise do Impacto do Conteúdo Gerado pelos Usuários nas Mídias Sociais e Agências de Viagens Online na Gestão Hoteleira. *Marketing & Tourism Review* [online], vol. 3 (3), 2018. <https://doi.org/10.29149/mtr.v3i3.4594>

<sup>4</sup> **Tripadvisor.** *Sobre o Tripadvisor* [online], 2019 [Accessed: 10 November 2021]. Available at: <https://tripadvisor.mediaroom.com/br-about-us>

<sup>5</sup> **Bentivegna, F. J.** Fatores de impacto no sucesso do marketing boca a boca on-line. *Revista de Administração de Empresas* [online], vol. 42 (1), 2002, pp. 79–87. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0034-75902002000100008>

<sup>6</sup> **Pereira, F. R., et al.** Internet no setor hoteleiro: uma investigação sobre o uso da internet por hotéis e pousadas de Sant'Ana do Livramento/RS. *Revista Acadêmica São Marcos*, vol. 3 (2), 2013, pp. 79–100. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314151889\\_INTERNET\\_NO\\_SETOR\\_HOTELEIRO\\_UMA\\_INVESTIGACAO\\_SOBRE\\_O\\_USO\\_DA\\_INTERNET\\_POR\\_HOTEIS\\_E\\_POUSADAS\\_DE\\_SANT'ANA\\_DO\\_LIVRAMENTORS](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314151889_INTERNET_NO_SETOR_HOTELEIRO_UMA_INVESTIGACAO_SOBRE_O_USO_DA_INTERNET_POR_HOTEIS_E_POUSADAS_DE_SANT'ANA_DO_LIVRAMENTORS)

<sup>7</sup> **Dias, J. A. R.** *MUSICTRIP: Agência de viagens online especializada em festivais de música*. Dissertação de Mestrado. Estoril: Escola Superior de Hotelaria e Turismo do Estoril [online], 2012 Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10400.26/4455>

The emergence of OTAs emerged with the advent of GDS (Global Distribution Systems) in the 1980s, where there was a predominance in tourism distribution that continued until 1990. In the 1950s, the first initiatives to create a CRS (Computerized Reservation System) were made, a collaboration of IBM and American Airlines, but due to the fledgling technology of that time, the system was not maintained. In 1980, some CRS became GDS, offering airline tickets, hotel reservations, and car rentals, with two of these GDS created in Europe: Galileo in 1980, by British Airways, KLM, and Swissair in union with United Airlines; and Amadeus, which was the cooperation between Lufthansa, Air France, Iberia, and SAS. Besides these, Microsoft Travelocity and Expedia stood out, considered the largest in the world, possessing the ability to compare prices concerning destinations, dates, airports, stopovers, and connections.<sup>8</sup>

According to Brito, Online Travel Agencies “are online businesses, where websites allow consumers to book travel-related services directly via the internet.”<sup>9</sup>

As a result of the popularization of online reservations, most hotel companies started to create offers to be made available virtually. Therefore, OTAs started to be used as one of the main sources for online reservations. Their platforms allow reservations in hotels, restaurants, car rentals, and cruises. Besides containing information and feedback that help the guest to choose a safe place that meets his expectations. The vast majority of companies that advertise in OTAs use the positive reviews left by customers who have stayed in their hotel company as a way to attract new guests, thus using this information as a form of marketing to promote their company. It is also noteworthy that, when well managed, negative reviews allow hotel establishments to evaluate and adopt measures to correct possible failures pointed out by guests, observing compliments and criticisms exposed there.

According to Cunha, Nascimento and Teixeira, the internet is increasingly present in our daily lives, whether for searches on certain subjects, news or even to help us choose a destination to travel to. With the hotel sector, it has an even greater impact, because it is practically present at every stage of the trip. For both Brazilian and foreign tourists, digital media are increasingly becoming the main source of information about the travel sector. When considering the need for information, we can say that it is emphasized by certain characteristics of the tourism product, including intangibility, where the tourism product cannot be inspected before purchase.<sup>10</sup>

Currently, there are several online booking platforms available to the public, including those listed in Table 1.

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<sup>8</sup> **Lohmann, G.** A tecnologia e os canais de distribuição em turismo. In: Braga, D. C. (org.). *Agências de viagens e turismo: práticas de mercado*. Rio de Janeiro: Elsevier, 2008. Available at: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235969320\\_A\\_Tecnologia\\_e\\_os\\_Canais\\_de\\_Distribuicao\\_em\\_Turismo](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235969320_A_Tecnologia_e_os_Canais_de_Distribuicao_em_Turismo)

<sup>9</sup> **Brito, T. F. L.** *Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) e marketing digital na hotelaria: estudo de caso do Praia Mar Hotel*. Monografia (Graduação em Hotelaria). São Luís: Universidade Federal do Maranhão, 2017, p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> **Cunha, K. B. O., et al.** Sistema de reviews: a importância dos sites de avaliações on-lines na tomada de decisão dos consumidores da hotelaria: Reviews system: the importance of online review sites in the decision making of hotel consumers. *Brazilian Journal of Development*, vol. 8(8), 2022, pp. 56826–56831. <https://doi.org/10.34117/bjdv8n8-131>

**Table 1.** Online Booking Platforms

<b>Booking.com</b>	Founded in 1996 by Geert-Jan Bruinsma, in Amsterdam — Holland, it was initially named Bookings.nl. In 2006, Princielli, now properly called Booking Holdings, merged Active Hotels and Bookings and created Booking.com, thus creating one of today’s largest travel agencies. <sup>11</sup> (Schaal s.d). Today, the company has more than 198 offices distributed in 70 countries. <sup>12</sup> (Booking n.d). The website has “over 28 million listings in more than 200 countries with over 50 million verified guest reviews,” available in 43 languages. <sup>13</sup>
<b>TripAdvisor</b>	TripAdvisor, created in February 2000, by Langley Steinert and Stephen Kaufer. Its headquarters is located in Newton / Massachusetts, in the USA (United States). Currently, the site has more than 8.6 million ads. <sup>14</sup> (Tripadvisor 2019; Forbes sd). In addition to the wide network of products and information offered by the site, more than 465 million ratings are also available, which are analyzed by potential customers when choosing that service. <sup>15,16</sup>
<b>Expedia</b>	Expedia was the first internet tourism site, launched in 1996 by Microsoft. The idea was initially brought up in 1994, by the Brazilian Soraya Bittencourt, a former employee of Embratel, who was working for Bill Gates. She made sure her idea would reach him and as the company was already planning to create some product in the travel area, they invited her to be part of the team that would implement her idea. After 2 years of development, the project was launched in October 1996. In 2001, USA Networks acquired 75% of Expedia. <sup>17</sup> (Hofmeister 2001). Currently, the site has “more than 590,000 properties and 1.8 million vacation rentals in over 70 countries with 40 million guest reviews”. <sup>18</sup>
<b>Despegar.com</b>	The website, translated into Portuguese, was created in 1999 in Argentina by Roberto Souvion, with contributions from Martín Rastellino, Alejandro Tamer, Mariano Fiore, and Christian Villate, and is considered the leader in tourism in Latin America. The platform has more than 174 million views and operates in more than twenty countries.
<b>Trivago</b>	It was created in 2005, in Düsseldorf (Germany), by three friends: Rolf Schrömmgens, Peter Vinnemeier, and Stephan Stubner. When in 2006 Stephan became a teacher, he was replaced by Malte Siewert. The current leadership team consists of Axel Hefer, Matthias Tillmann, James Carter, and Anja Honnefelder. In 2013, Expedia achieved 62% performance on Trivago. It is one of the most conceptual websites in Europe and operates in 54 global markets, having more than 5 million accommodations and hotels distributed in 190 countries. <sup>19</sup>

### The Importance of Marketing for Hospitality

With the hospitality market being so broad, lodging facilities need to consolidate themselves in the market, and therefore, it is “necessary to think of a product that meets the taste of customers more than other competing products and that continues to be preferred over time.”<sup>20</sup> In the face of this, marketing

<sup>11</sup> **Schaal, D.** The oral history of travel’s greatest acquisition Booking.com. *Skift* [online] [Accessed: 16 October 2021]. Available at: <https://skift.com/oral-history-of-booking-acquisition/>

<sup>12</sup> **Booking.com.** *Sobre a Booking.com* [online] [Accessed: 25 October 2021]. Available at: <https://www.booking.com/content/about.pt-pt.html>.

<sup>13</sup> **Cloudbeds(s.d).** *Análise das Agências de Viagens Online – OTAs.* [online] [Accessed 5 September 2021] Available at: <https://www.cloudbeds.com/pt-br/artigos/analise-das-agencias-de-viagens-online/>

<sup>14</sup> **TripAdvisor.** Op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> **Cloudbeds(s.d).** Op.cit.

<sup>16</sup> **Valdivia, A., M. V. Luzón, F. Herrera.** Sentiment Analysis in TripAdvisor. *IEEE Intelligent Systems*, vol. 32, 4, 2017, pp. 72–77. <https://doi.org/10.1109/MIS.2017.3121555>

<sup>17</sup> **Hofmeister, S.** Diller’s USA to Buy 75% of Expedia. *Los Angeles Times*. 2001. Available at: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2001-jul-17-ft-23034-story.html>

<sup>18</sup> **Cloudbeds(s.d).** Op.cit.

<sup>19</sup> **Trivago** Our mission. [online] [accessed 16 October 2021] Available at: [https://company.trivago.com/?\\_\\_gl=1%2A1ybrch1%2A\\_gcl\\_au%2AMTIyNjIwODQzOS4xNzcyNDY3NTU3](https://company.trivago.com/?__gl=1%2A1ybrch1%2A_gcl_au%2AMTIyNjIwODQzOS4xNzcyNDY3NTU3)

<sup>20</sup> **Mota, K. C. N.** *Marketing turístico.* Fortaleza: UAB/IFCE, 2011. Available at: <https://educapes.capes.gov.br/bitstream/capes/206762/2/Marketing%20Tur%3%ADstico%20-%20Livro.pdf>.

strategies are created to publicize your lodging facility and its services. When publicizing the company, managers need to be faithful to the product and services they offer, because poorly applied marketing can bring negative points for your establishment. As Kotler defines it, marketing is fundamental for the company's growth, since it is "responsible for identifying, evaluating, and selecting market opportunities and establishing strategies to achieve excellence, when not dominance, in its target markets". However, the author makes a caveat, explaining that "marketing conveys various images, good and bad, accurate or inaccurate, regarding the company and the general public."<sup>21</sup>

Marketing in the means of accommodation "is responsible for all disclosure, a good relationship with customers and all the innovation and market analysis to attract new users and specifically, acts in conjunction with the reservation system in the actions and sales channels."<sup>22</sup> Good exposure is vital for attracting guests, taking into account the modern era in which humanity lives, understanding that some methods of old disclosure do not have the same efficiency today. Therefore, it is understood that, according to Albuquerque<sup>23</sup>, "digital media are a large part of the current hotel marketing and online presence refers to the inclusion of these environments in the marketing strategies of companies, making them present in the most diverse channels and online platforms."

Consumers are using the internet as a communication channel, where they share their opinions and experiences about a certain company. For the purpose of targeting this audience, companies started to invest in marketing strategies.<sup>24</sup>

In this sense, in hospitality "new products are put on sale configured according to the customer profile since organizations that do not excel in competitiveness cannot achieve and maintain a positive market positioning," according to Correia.<sup>25</sup> With this, the consumers obtained more detailed information about that company, its products, and services, and companies began to know more about the profile of their audience, using this knowledge to create strategies, to retain these customers, and attract new ones.<sup>26</sup>

It is of fundamental importance that the means of accommodation adequately use marketing, since it is responsible for conducting a market analysis and an analysis of the hotel company itself, highlighting and identifying its strengths and weaknesses compared to its competitors, and from this, seek to "offer a structure appropriate to the wishes and desires of its customers, with services that delight them and can attract and, if possible, retain their loyalty. The success of a hotel is innovation with new and attractive products and services."<sup>27</sup>

The success of a hotel will depend on the degree of satisfaction that the customer is having with the service offered. Therefore, hotel marketing always tries to be attentive to this feedback, so that it can understand what is pleasing or displeasing to its audience. By gaining such knowledge, the places of accommodation can identify what changes will be necessary to make, aiming to offer a quality service,

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<sup>21</sup> **Kotler, P., H. Kartajaya, I. Setiawan.** *Marketing 5.0 Tecnologia para a Humanidade*. Rio de Janeiro: Sextante, 2021.

<sup>22</sup> **Romão, L. M.** *O sistema de reservas hoteleiro: O marketing e a atuação das agências intermediadoras*. Trabalho de Conclusão de Curso (Graduação em Tecnologia em Hotelaria) Universidade Federal Fluminense. 2018, p. 7. Available at: <https://app.uff.br/riuff/handle/1/10002>.

<sup>23</sup> **Albuquerque, T. V.** Presença Online e Turismo: uma reflexão acerca dos meios de hospedagem de Fernando de Noronha-PE. In: Brambilla, A., Portigliatti, A., Monteiro, R., & Vanzella, E. (Orgs.) *T&H no Contexto da Tecnologia*. João Pessoa: Editora CCTA, 2020, p. 168.

<sup>24</sup> **Kotler, P. K., H. Kartajaya, I. Setiawan.** *Marketing 4.0 do Tradicional ao Digital*. Rio de Janeiro: Sextante, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> **Correia, B. I.** *Estratégia de Marketing na Hotelaria: O Caso da The Leading Hotels Of The World no Brasil*. Curitiba: Universidade Federal do Paraná [online], 2013 Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/1884/51066>.

<sup>26</sup> **Limeira, T. M. V.** *E-Marketing o marketing na internet com casos brasileiros*. (2 ed.). São Paulo: Saraiva, 2007. Available at: <https://pdfcoffee.com/e-marketing-6-pdf-free.html>

<sup>27</sup> **Freire, S. M. S. et al.** Estratégias de marketing como ferramenta de gestão estratégica na pequena hotelaria: estudo de caso em hotéis de Fortaleza/CE. *Revista Eletrônica de Administração*, vol. 6 (1), 2007, p. 8.

because “more than just meet the desires and needs of customers is necessary to enchant them,” as stated by Luz et al.<sup>28</sup>

Based on the above, it is evident that adopting marketing strategies for the hotel industry as a way to keep the means of accommodation competitive in a highly competitive market is of significant importance.

### Decision-Making Process in Marketing

Companies are constantly having to deal with the expectations of their customers. Although society has always sought to base itself on some information before making any decision, what has changed nowadays is the ease of obtaining it. Difficult access to and scarcity of information affect companies in the development of strategies as well as consumers when choosing a product or service. Nowadays, the scenario is different, as much more information is available, and what is published on the web can reach thousands of consumers even without them leaving their homes. Kotler et al. reaffirm this when they state that:

Social media have transformed consumers’ attitudes and expectations of companies. Most consumers believe that their social networks go beyond simple advertising and expert opinions. Today, purchasing decisions are not only guided by individual preferences, but also by a desire for social belonging. Social media also raises expectations.<sup>29</sup>

The decision-making process in marketing has changed over the years, this change is directly linked to technological advances and the emergence of the internet, through which customers now know the service or product they want to consume. Consumers began to use the information found on the web as a parameter when making their choices. In the face of this source of research that the internet provides, many companies have gained prominence in the market and others have lost their share. All this is due to the influence that consumers currently have in the market. And for the hotel business, it would be no different, the opinions of people who have already stayed, who have already had their experience, have greater relevance than any advertisement made about accommodation.<sup>30</sup>

Online booking sites are one of the main sources of research when you want to know the ratings of that particular place of lodging, and they provide an effective means for consumers and hotel managers to analyze what is the reputation of the place in question.

Most online travel agencies aim to focus their efforts on providing quality services to ensure the satisfaction of their consumers, “especially on customer knowledge, to retain a competitive advantage. The impact of the service provider’s access to it and the integration of customer information in travel agency companies is essential,” according to Monterey and Borbon.<sup>31</sup>

### Material and Methods

The study adopts a qualitative-quantitative approach, with data collected and processed using questionnaires with open and closed questions that enabled the objective given in this study to be answered. Data was therefore collected from a primary source, using an online questionnaire created on Google Docs and applied to the study’s target audience, which consisted of participants who traveled and used lodging services.

The questionnaire was developed to answer the key question of the text, ‘What impact do guest reviews on OTAs platforms have on the decision-making process of Brazilian consumers looking for

<sup>28</sup> Luz, B. S. da, et al. Gestão hoteleira: estratégias de prospecção e fidelização de novos clientes mediante a crise. *Revista Vianna Sapiens*, vol. 8 (2), 25, 2017, p. 157. <https://doi.org/10.31994/rvs.v8i2.237> Kotler, P. *Marketing para o Século XXI*. Rio de Janeiro: Alta Books, 2021, p. 68–69.

<sup>29</sup> Kotler, P. *Marketing para o Século XXI*. Rio de Janeiro: Alta Books, 2021, p. 68-69.

<sup>30</sup> Lima, L. et al. l proceso de búsqueda de información en línea de servicios hoteleros. *Razón Y Palabra*, vol. 25 (110), 2021, pp. 218–238. <https://doi.org/10.26807/rp.v25i110.1760>

<sup>31</sup> Monterey, J.M., N. M. D. Borbon. Service quality of online travel agencies in CALABARZON region. *International Journal of Research Studies in Management*. vol. 9 (3), 2021, p. 92. (91-102) <https://doi.org/10.5861/ijrsm.2021.m7734>

lodging?’ To this end, 13 questions were drawn up, 6 open and 7 closed, including 3 questions with a Likert scale.

The purpose of drawing up the questionnaire was to create a profile of the participant and, using the information gathered, learn something about the individual, as well as whether they used the services of online travel agencies, and which platforms are most popular among the respondents.

The research data collection instrument was applied in March and April 2022. Data collection concluded with 150 completed questionnaires. In order to reach this number of participants, the questionnaire was created using Google Forms and shared via social networks, ensuring a national reach. To acquire the results, an analysis of the participants’ responses was conducted, to identify the impact that online reviews have on consumer decision-making processes.

Therefore, the closed responses to the questionnaire were obtained by statistical calculations, where the questionnaire provided the total number of answers for each question, in which the screening occurred, allowing the computation to be carried out. However, since the open questions were assessed differently, each of the described answers had to be evaluated separately before the results could be analyzed.

## **Analysis and Discussion of the Results**

### ***Profile***

The respondents of the survey were asked about their age, gender, level of education, and profession. According to the total number of answers, 70% are female and 30% male, the majority being in the age range between 21 and 31 years, representing 67% of respondents. Additionally, 6% in the sample represent those aged between 16 and 20, 17% are between 32 and 42 years old, 7% are in the age between 45 and 60, and 3% correspond to those over 61 years of age.

Regarding the level of education, 46% of the participants of the survey have completed higher education, 31% have incomplete higher education, 19% stated complete middle school education, 2% — incomplete middle school education, and 2% have a technical degree. Regarding professions, 10% of the respondents are in the healthcare area, 25% are liberal professionals, 27% are students, 32% work in the management area, 19% are professionals from other areas, and 6% of the respondents are unemployed.

### ***Use of OTAs and Their Frequency of Use***

When asked if they used the services of Online Travel Agencies when planning their trips, 60% of the survey participants said they have used the OTAs services.

Among these users, 79% are between 21 and 31 years old, 66% are female and 34% are male. According to the survey, 45% have a college degree and 35% have an incomplete college degree, of which 34% are students, 10% are health professionals, 16% are in management, and 26% have other professions.

Respondents who use OTAs highlighted the importance of knowing the place where they want to stay, and that the information present on the websites of online agencies provide details. Pereira et al. corroborate this result, when they consider that the internet has brought several benefits for the hotel market.<sup>32</sup> One word that can define an Online Travel Agency for these research participants is “practicality”, because it offers a service that the customer can access from anywhere, makes price comparisons, has various types of lodging facilities, expanding the options and offers for customers.

Online Travel Agencies provide an opportunity for the customer to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of each means of accommodation. And because they are already consolidated in the market, they bring security to the individual who is searching for a hotel.

Therefore, we questioned how often the OTAs are used by those who use their services to plan a trip, and we found that 55.1% use online booking sites whenever they travel, 34.6% use the platforms

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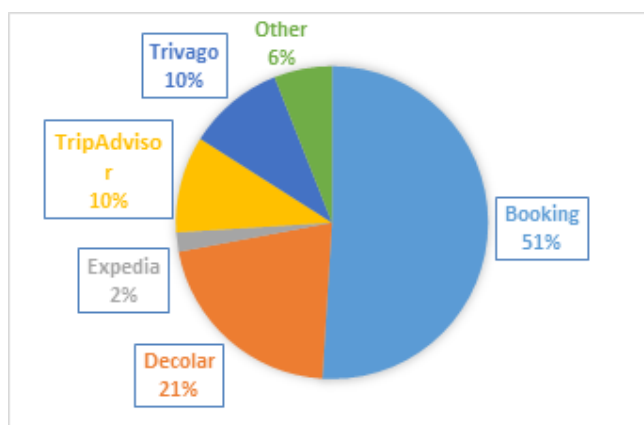
<sup>32</sup> Pereira, F. R., et al. Op.cit.

sometimes, and 10.3% rarely use them. These results prove that online channels are increasingly replacing the contact between customers and travel service providers.<sup>33</sup>

### *Most Used OTAs by Respondents*

Since their creation, Online Travel Agencies have been conquering their place in the market, and technological advances have facilitated this popularization of platforms and access to them, with new OTAs created and those that already existed — increasingly consolidating before consumers. The online booking sites have a vast source of research with information on prices and types of accommodation, which is a positive point for the customer because he has several options at his disposal.

Even with the wide choice available today, the OTAs most used by respondents were: Booking (51%), Decolar (21%), TripAdvisor (10%), Trivago (10%), Expedia (2%), and the other 6% correspond to other OTAs mentioned.



**Figure 1.** Most Used OTAs.

Source: survey data, 2021/2022

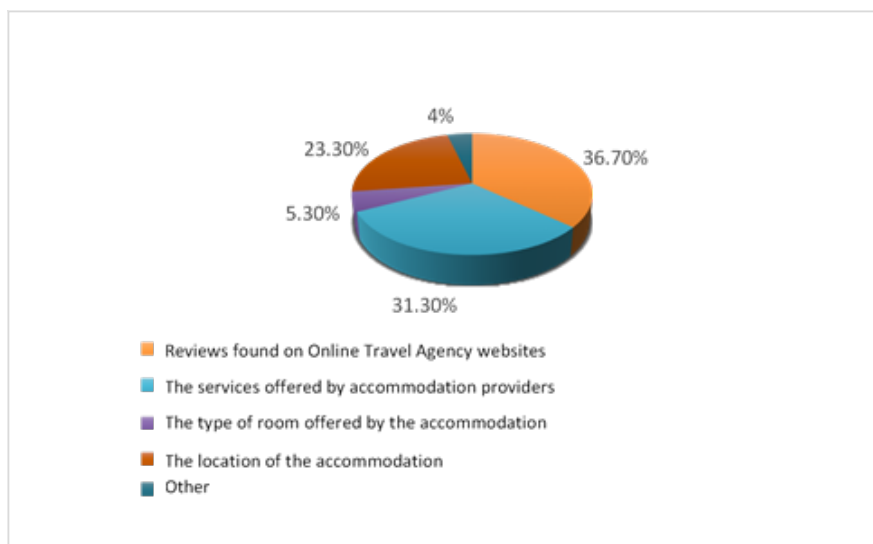
### *Main Criteria When Choosing a Lodging Facility*

Several factors contribute to the consumer's decision-making process, and with the ease that the internet has provided, access to this information has become more practical, so before making a decision the customer does some research, analyzes the means of accommodation, and thus identifies whether it fits the criteria predetermined by themselves.

The participants were asked what they take into consideration the most when choosing lodging. As shown in the graph below (Figure 2), 37% take into consideration the reviews found on the websites of Online Travel Agencies, 31% the services offered by the means of lodging, 5% the type of housing unit that is offered, 23% the location where the means of accommodation is located and finally 4% of respondents described that, in addition to these factors, they also take into account accommodation values, indications from travel agencies, the relationship they have with the means of accommodation when contacting for information.

On OTAs platforms, in addition to the feedback available on the website, there is some information and details about the lodging, provided by the platform itself, which become useful for the customer, including detailed information about the housing units, the services offered by the hotel company, location of restaurants and tourist attractions that are in the vicinity of the lodging, among other factors.

<sup>33</sup> Dias, J. A. R. Op. cit.



**Figure 2.** Decisive Criteria for Consumers

Source: Survey data, 2021/2022

### ***Credibility of Online Reviews for Consumers and Their Influence on Consumers' Decision-Making Process***

The respondents who make use of OTAs were asked if they believed the reviews found in the Online Travel Agencies. Data obtained indicates that 76% believe, 19% partly believe and 5% do not take into consideration the reviews that are found in the online booking sites, at the time of decision making. The results found demonstrate what was exposed by Lima et al. when they stated that the opinions of people who have already stayed and who have already had their experience, have great relevance and constitute an important decision-making factor.<sup>34</sup>

Another important factor is that human beings like to share their experiences, and those who have a negative experience will make it a point to report their dissatisfaction with the place of accommodation, thus making it necessary that the hotel company, when having access to these comments, shows attention, tries to solve the complaint or at least contacts the consumer with an apology. Thus, the customer will feel heard and cared for by the company, and other consumers who have access to this feedback, when they see the company's interest in the customer, will end up taking this factor into account in their decision-making, because, according to Pezzino, understanding the needs of its customers is essential to retain their loyalty.<sup>35</sup> Such feedback ends up helping the company realize where it is going wrong so that it can improve, pay more attention, and understand its positive points towards the public, a thought that agrees with Limeira.<sup>36</sup>

In general, it appears that, of the research participants who use the services of OTAs, 95% take into account online reviews, seeking through them to avoid possible inconveniences on the trip, being aware of the opinions of customers who have stayed, because as explained by Kotler et al., customers have used the internet as a communication channel, sharing their experiences.<sup>37</sup> Consumers like to know about other experiences, the positive and negative points stated by customers, how was the accommodation from the guest's point of view, information about services and care, and even being aware that not everything in the comments can be taken into consideration, that is, it is necessary to filter what may or

<sup>34</sup> Lima, L. C., et al. Op.cit.

<sup>35</sup> Pezzino, F. S. R. *Marketing Hoteleiro: ferramenta gerencial na conquista da fidelização de clientes em um empreendimento hoteleiro*. Monographs. Universidade Candido Mendes, 2011 Available at: [http://www.avm.edu.br/docpdf/monografias\\_publicadas/k216362.pdf](http://www.avm.edu.br/docpdf/monografias_publicadas/k216362.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> Limeira, T. M. V. Op. cit.

<sup>37</sup> Kotler, P., H.Kartajaya, I. Setiawan. *Marketing 4.0 do Tradicional ao Digital*. Sextante, 2017.

may not be useful and what may be relevant to their decision making. Online reviews are a marketing tool for lodging facilities, so the content generated by customers on online platforms can convey positive or negative images of a company, according to Kotler.<sup>38</sup>

In Figure 3, the Likert scale was used to indicate the degree of importance of online reviews for the decision-making process of the research participants. It was identified that 54% of consumers find the comments posted on reservation sites extremely important, 37.30% very important, 8% consider themselves neutral and 0.70% think they are not very important. This result is in agreement with Albuquerque when he says that “the virtual environment is one of the major features responsible for hotel marketing.”<sup>39</sup>

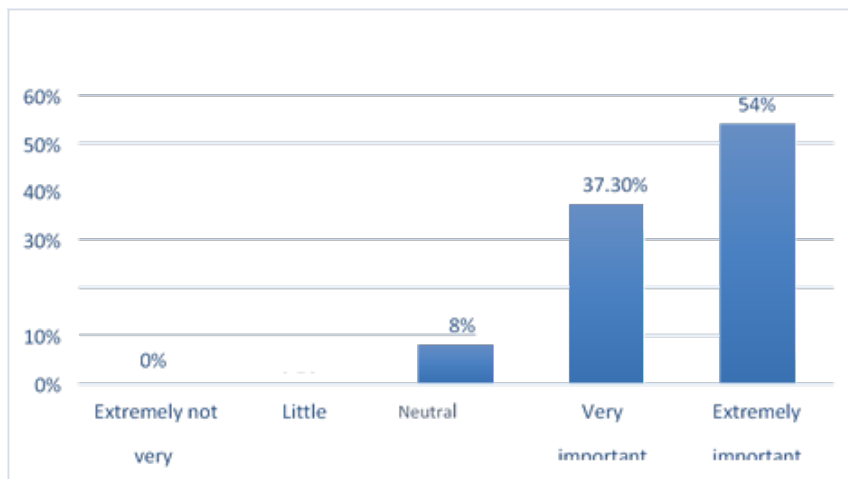


Figure 3. Degree of the Importance of Online Assessments in the Decision-Making Process.

Source: survey data, 2021/2022

The respondents who use OTAs were asked if they had already chosen a lodging by the positive reviews and also if they had already given up a reservation on the number of negative comments. By implementing the Likert scale, Figure 4 displays the positive influences of feedback, where 55.30% agree completely, 28% agree, 11.30% are neutral, 2.70% partially disagree and 2.70% disagree. Conversely, Figure 5 represents the negative influences of online reviews: 57% totally agree, 19.30% agree, 14% are neutral, 5.30% partially disagree, and 5% disagree. These results corroborate Silva when he says that reputation in an online environment is fundamental for the growth of the hotel company.<sup>40</sup>

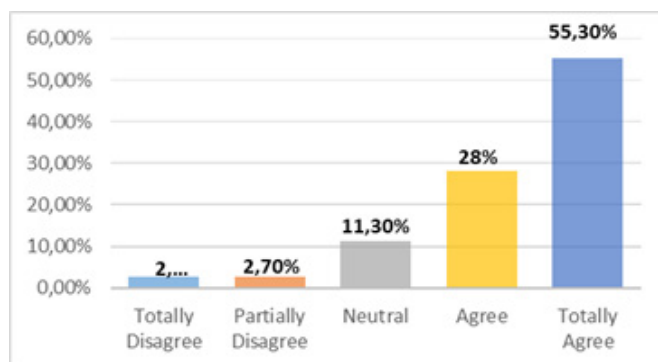


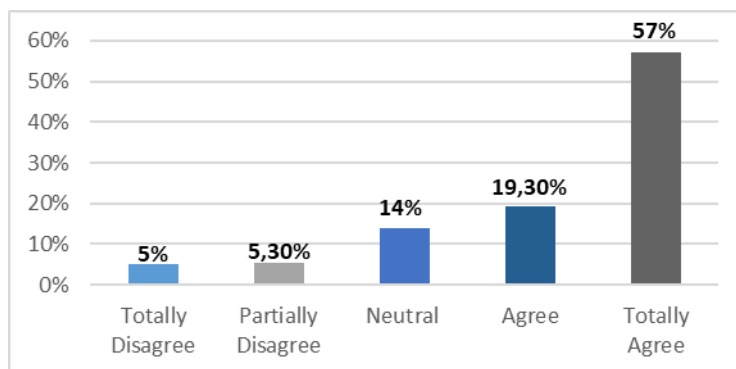
Figure 4. Positive Influence.

Source: survey data, 2021/2022

<sup>38</sup> Kotler, P., H. Kartajaya, I. Setiawan. *Marketing 5.0 Tecnologia para a Humanidade*. Sextante, 2021.

<sup>39</sup> Albuquerque, T. V. Op. cit.

<sup>40</sup> Silva, P. G. Op. cit.



**Figure 5.** Negative Influence.

Source: survey data, 2021/2022

### ***The Habit of Sharing Online Assessments***

Over the years, the creation of the internet and technological advances, among other things, have led to a virtual approach among human beings. They now have more contact with and access to various people and information. Consequently, these factors influence the decisions and behaviors of society today where people have started to share more about themselves, about their experiences with some product or service on trips, making recommendations and even criticisms.

This is what happens in online travel agency reviews, where guests describe how their stay was, pointing out the positive and negative points so that those who are accessing the platforms can draw their conclusions from this feedback. But a negative experience drives the customer to describe their stay more than a positive experience. Luz et al. validate this information when they say that “more than satisfying customers wants and needs, it is necessary to delight them.”<sup>41</sup>

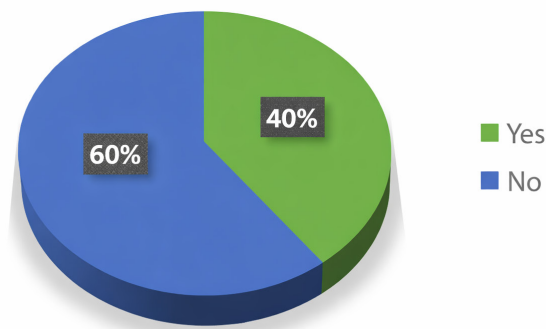
The customer who has experienced unpleasant situations wants to pass this information forward so that other people become aware of the way he/she was treated by that establishment. This ends up generating an influence on that customer, because if it is something recurring and has several comments reporting the same problems, it is natural that he/she does not opt for that means of lodging.

These reviews can boost that hotel company in the market, or they can destroy its reputation. It also helps companies to evaluate themselves and identify whether they are on the right or wrong path of treating their guests.

Virtually every accommodation place will have some negative comment, but the customer takes into account the quantity because if they are sporadic comments, it is likely that they will not give so much importance, but if not, the accommodation has very little chance of being chosen.

An important factor that directly influences online reviews is the habit of customers to share or not their experiences, because it is understood that not all people who have used that accommodation service, make a point of sharing their experience with others. According to the analysis of the questionnaire, 60% of the respondents do not have the habit of sharing their experience on online booking sites, while 40% share their experiences on OTAs platforms.

<sup>41</sup> Luz, B. S., et al. Op. cit. p.157.



**Figure 6.** Sharing of Feedback.

Source: survey data, 2021/2022

### Conclusion

The results showed that consumers of accommodation facilities are increasingly looking for quality services and accommodation, and online travel agencies have been a great help in that quest.

There are several OTAs sites on the web, which, in addition to allowing consumers to book accommodation, provide a space where users can submit their reviews and even analyze feedback from customers who have already used the lodging service.

As a result, the study found that the impact these reviews have on consumers is quite important. Based on the evaluations provided, the consumer will decide whether or not to stay at that particular lodging establishment. Another factor that can impact the decision is that consumers will not recommend a property based only on reviews, even if they have not stayed there. This is because the feedback on the OTAs website is what matters to them.

The results suggest that, in general, the respondents believe in online reviews and report feeling influenced in their decision-making. Despite having some reservations and understanding that experiences are relative, the participants tend to choose a hotel with a mostly positive rating.

The internet has provided the population with unprecedented reach and access to data and news, making them more demanding and critical. This broad access can also benefit hotel companies because, based on this feedback, they can find out how their image is perceived by the target audience and what measures can be taken to improve the situation.

It is recommended that future studies seek to understand the strategies adopted by managers to work more efficiently on studies of the impact of online comments. Furthermore, it is suggested that research be carried out based on comments generated by users.

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