SEARCHING AND SHARING OF INFORMATION IN SOCIAL NETWORKS DURING THE DIFFERENT STAGES OF A TRIP

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ABSTRACT

There are three phases in the use of online social media by tourists: before, during and after the trip. The aim of this study is to determine what social network users use to find information before and during the trip, the type of information they search, and where they share information. The study also identifies the relationship this has with the trustworthiness social networks provide them, especially distinguishing the social networks managed by the destination organizations. Therefore, we conduct a survey of 800 tourists who are social network users. Results show that social networks are not a major source of information before or during the trip but are very important for sharing contents after the experience, and that the most searched information concerns the main attractions of the destination. Moreover, there is a relationship between the use of social media and their perceived trustworthiness. In this case, for those who use social networks managed by destinations, these give them greater confidence.

Keywords: Social media; social networks; trustworthiness; searching for information; sharing information; destination-managed social networks; trip stages.

**Búsqueda y compartición de información en las redes sociales
durante las distintas fases del viaje**

RESUMEN

Existen tres fases en el uso de los medios sociales en línea por parte de los turistas: antes, durante y después del viaje. El objetivo de este estudio es determinar qué red social es la más utilizada por los usuarios para encontrar información antes y durante el viaje, qué tipo de información buscan, y donde comparten información. El estudio también identifica la relación que esto tiene con la confianza que las redes sociales les aportan, distinguiendo especialmente las redes sociales gestionadas por las organizaciones de destino. Para ello, se administró un cuestionario a 800 turistas que son usuarios de medios sociales. Los resultados muestran que las redes sociales no son una fuente principal de información antes o durante el viaje, pero sí son muy importantes para compartir contenidos después de la experiencia y que la información más buscada concierne las atracciones principales del destino. Además, hay una relación entre el uso de los medios sociales y la confianza percibida por los usuarios. En este caso, para aquellos que utilizan las redes sociales gestionadas por los destinos, estas les aportan mayor confianza.

Palabras clave: Medios sociales; redes sociales; confianza; búsqueda de información; compartición de información; redes sociales de destino; fases del viaje.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media have transformed the communication of tourist destinations (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010) and the ways that tourists search, find, co-create, and share tourist information (Sotiriadis, 2017). Their main contribution is to allow user-generated content (UGC) such that different stakeholders, and especially tourists (Marine-Roig and Anton Clavé, 2015), can share information (Buhalis and Law, 2008) and travel experiences (Munar and Jacobsen, 2013). Hence, social media and social networks have become one of the main sources of information for potential tourists when they organize or go on a trip (Buhalis and Law, 2008; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010).

The survey Eurobarometer (2016) on the preferences of more than 30,000 European respondents towards tourisms in 2015 showed that the most important information sources for making decisions about travel plans are websites hosting social media in the form of comments, reviews, and ratings (34%), followed by the shared personal experience of others (33%). Social media pages for accommodations, restaurants, transport companies, etc. (12%) have also grown four points over the 2014 survey, and are also important.

In this context, tourist destinations have striven to create multiple promotional profiles on social networks, though often without having a clear communication or segmentation strategy for their use (Huertas and Marine-Roig, 2016). Social networks raise great expectations for Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) with

regard to communicating and engaging with the public, due to their nature and the trustworthiness conferred on them (Huertas and Marine-Roig, 2014; Sotiriadis, 2017). Social networks can be considered highly trustworthy for users or potential tourists and their UGC has great influence on tourism-related decisions (Liu, Karahanna and Watson, 2011; Yoo and Gretzel, 2012) because they contain co-created (Sigala, Christou and Gretzel, 2012) and disinterested information (Ayeh, Au and Law, 2013; Casaló, Flavián, Guinalíu and Ekinci, 2015; Gretzel and Yoo, 2013; Leung, Law, Van Hoof and Buhalis, 2013; Sigala et al., 2012), they are bound to the emotional side of sharing experiences (Jacobsen and Munar, 2012) and to the e-Word-Of-Mouth (e-WOM) effect (Ladhari and Michaud, 2015; Munar and Jacobsen, 2013).

However, while the use of social media is increasingly relevant as a tourism practice, there is still a lack of empirical data on tourists' creation and use of various types of online content (Munar and Jacobsen, 2013). Moreover, no analyses have been conducted to determine whether users equally use official networks managed by DMOs and the profiles on the networks of individuals or third parties, and the trustworthiness they give to each type of social network. Therefore, tourist destinations should take steps to identify how users use social networks to find information and which ones provide them with greatest trustworthiness in order to steer their communication strategy in these media.

On the other hand, the destinations must also know that potential users or tourists have different information needs according to the stage of their trip because they use online reviews during all stages of the trip (Öz, 2015; Sotiriadis, 2017). There are three main stages: preparing for the trip, during the trip, and after the trip. The search for information is usually performed in the first two stages and the third is usually for sharing information (Leung et al., 2013; Öz, 2015), although today with social media and mobile technologies, information sharing also occurs during the trip (Marine-Roig, 2017). In the preparation stage, users search a great quantity of information for travel planning (Xiang, Magnini, and Fesenmaier, 2015). Social media as a source of information has matured and stabilized at this stage.

In the same line, Björk and Kauppinen-Räisänen (2015) identified searching for information as an ongoing process that does not end with the purchase of the trip, but continues with obtaining further information such as: weather, restaurants, and leisure activities. Choi et al. (2012) recognized the existence of two stages in the search for information: before and after the purchase; and Hyde (2008) identified three stages in the initial behaviour of trip preparation: the search for information, planning the trip, and booking the trip, all in the run-up to the trip itself., DMOs must understand, however, that the information users seek is different in each stage. Consequently, to understand how tourists use the Internet before, during, and after the trip is essential to designing effective communication and successful campaigns (Xiang, Wober and Fesenmaier, 2008).

Previous studies have focused on how tourists search for information to plan their trips, but there are fewer studies about the use of the Internet during and after the trip (Ip, Lee and Law, 2012). However, the use of technology is changing. Due to new technologies and the new necessities of tourists, the information search through smartphones and mobile devices has increased the information search during the trip

(Xiang, Magnini, et al., 2015). And with blogs, photo- and video-sharing sites, or even sites like TripAdvisor, tourists can share their memories and experiences on the Internet (Hjalager and Jensen, 2012), both during and after the trip (Marine-Roig, 2017). This is why it is also important to analyse the search and sharing of information during and after the trip.

Thus, the aim of this study was to ascertain the use of social media by tourists who are already users of social networks at each moment of the trip (target public): (A) searching for information mainly during the preparation stage and during the trip; (B) identifying what type of information users search for before and during the trip through social media; (C) assessing specifically the social network use per trip phase, including the post-trip phase to share information; and (D) determining whether the use of social networks is related to the trustworthiness users assign them. This study distinguishes between the social networks managed by DMOs and social networks of individuals or third parties regarding to use and trust among users, with the ultimate purpose of helping tourist destinations manage their online communication.

2. RELATED WORK

2.1. Social media and social networks use and contents

Studies about social media have been evolving. First, they were more focused on a consumer perspective to understand the use, impact, and effects of online reviews; later, they became more focused on the influence of social media in tourism behaviour; and nowadays, such studies are more inclined to analyse the effects of social media in the evolution of the tourism sector (Sotiriadis, 2017). Generally, the marketing and economic perspectives are dominant, but there is a lack of studies from the communicative perspective.

Social media are considered the most important source of information during the planning of a trip, especially among young people (Xiang, Wang, O'Leary and Fesenmaier, 2015). Xiang et al., (2015) affirmed that new information and communication technologies (ICTs) continue evolving and changing the way tourists obtain information. Shao (2009) asserted that tourists use social media consuming, participating in, and producing online content, but most of them only consume, that is, they only seek information on certain aspects of the destination or of their trip. Hjalager and Jensen (2012) established a typology of tourists based on their intentions of search online information before, during, and after the trip.

Yoo and Gretzel (2012) showed that sources where users most seek information during the trip planning stage are: search engines (51%), online travel agencies (43%), and service providers (35%). Among social media, social networks, which are distinguished by their goal to create personal and business relationships, are also used, but in a much smaller proportion (12%). In this research social media include travel blogs and reviews, and social networks (such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or YouTube).

In the same vein, Xiang and Gretzel (2010) highlighted the growing importance of social media in the search for tourist information. They showed that search engines

are used by 64% of American users to plan their trips. Furthermore, social media are increasingly used in the search for information. This is also enhanced because social media are updated very quickly and includes many links, which means that an increasing number of social media links appear in search engine results. On the other hand, when an increasing number of social media appear in search engine results, this also indicates that they have many inputs by users, i.e., great success, relevance of content, and extensive connectivity with other parts of the network.

More recent studies have shown that user searches are changing (Xiang, Wang, et al., 2015). Over the years, social media have increased and stabilized as a source of information, and with the emergence of smartphones and new channels the information, user searches during the trip has also increased. Users are changing their behaviour related to their search for information when planning a trip.

Pabel and Prideaux (2016) showed that the most popular social media sites used to search for information include Tripadvisor (45.5%), travel blogs (42.2%), Facebook (4%), and Twitter (3.3%). In their study of a small destination, only 27.9% of users looked for information in social media. These results are quite coherent with previous studies (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010; Xiang, Wang, et al., 2015).

Yoo and Gretzel (2012) showed that the information that users look for on social media sites influences their subsequent travel-related decisions. A high percentage of users who consult social media acknowledge that decisions about their trips are influenced by what they find. They are especially influenced as to where to go and where to stay, although they are also greatly influenced concerning food and leisure activities. Other authors have also highlighted the impact of social media on the image that users create of the destinations (Lim, Chung and Weaver, 2012; Llodrà-Riera, Martínez-Ruiz, Jiménez-Zarco and Izquierdo-Yusta, 2015; Marine-Roig, 2017; Seabra, Abrantes and Lages, 2007). According to Llodrà-Riera et al. (2015), users gain knowledge and form an image of destinations, which influences their tourism-related choices, based on the different sources of information of stakeholders who post their information and content on social media.

Jacobsen and Munar (2012) showed that users mainly use social media to research information related to accommodations, dining, and activities. It should be noted, however, that while 24% of users consulted information on social networks such as Facebook, they assert that they do not consider these social media sites as being important for their tourism-related decisions. Thus, social networks may not be so important in influencing their decision to visit a destination, but are for sociability and the creation of social relations (Marine-Roig, Martin-Fuentes and Daries-Ramon, 2017). Whatever the case, social networks can be more influential and used more intensely for those users who do use them (Cox, Burgess, Sellitto and Buultjens, 2009), hence the interest in analysing the use of social networks in the different stages of the trip by those travellers who are regular users of social networks.

The majority of studies conducted in this field concentrate on the search for information, either focusing on the destinations (Yoo and Gretzel, 2012), and how they look for information; their search behaviour (Ho, Lin and Chen, 2012; Jun and Holland,

2012); the content (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010); or how they use the information they find (Choi et al., 2012), but most are related to the trip preparation and organization stage (Hudson and That, 2013; Kang and Schuett, 2013; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). Therefore, there is a need to conduct a study that considers the search for information during the trip, including searches performed at the destination itself, since searching for information does not stop at the tourism-related decision or the purchase of the trip. Moreover, in a context in which DMOs have striven to create and manage profiles on several social networks, it is important to identify the usefulness and credibility of destinations' official social networks for finding information before and during the trip, and compare it to the search for information on personal social network profiles or profiles managed by third parties.

It is also important to understand the relationship between the use of social networks before and during the trip with their subsequent use after the trip (Choe, Kima and Fesenmaier, 2017). After the trip (post-trip) the use of social networks is no longer for finding information but for sharing content, experiences, or comments with others (Kim and Fesenmaier, 2017). Compared with the pre-trip stage, the use of social networks has been less studied in the on-site and post-trip stages (Leung et al., 2013). In fact, the use of social networks is much more intense in the post-trip stage (Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides, 2011). Therefore, this study analyses the use of social networks in all three phases of the trip: pre-trip, on-site, and post-trip, and specifically distinguishes post-trip use by DMO-managed social networks.

2.2. Trustworthiness in the use of social media and social networks

With the emergence of the Internet and social media, potential tourists seek information to make their tourism-related decisions (Jacobsen and Munar, 2012), because it reduces the risk of their decisions (Björk and Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2015; Gursoy and McCleary, 2004). But this search for information must be based on the trustworthiness of the media and sources. Although some users are afraid of biased information, false comments (Hensel and Deis, 2010), and have trouble determining whether to believe official websites or users reviews (Ruzic and Bilos, 2010)s, 2010), the reality is that they trust social media (Pirolli, 2018) because consumers do not make reservations before searching for online advice or information (Kim, Chung and Lee, 2011; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010).

Three reasons explain the high trustworthiness that social networks have for users or potential tourists and the great influence of UGC on travel-related decisions. The first is that UGC turns tourists into co-creators of tourism experiences (Sigala et al., 2012) and is more trustworthy than the official information supplied by the destination because the creators of the former information are simply sharing their travel experiences and have no vested commercial interest in the destinations, (Ayeh, Norman and Law, 2013; Casaló et al., 2015; Gretzel and Yoo, 2013; Leung et al., 2013; Sigala et al., 2012). However, DMOs always provide positive information about destinations and have a clear vested interest in promoting tourism and economic investment in the place.

The second reason that influences trust is based on the emotional aspect on the sharing of the previous experiences of other users (Jacobsen and Munar, 2012). These experiences, which are often shown by means of photographs, videos, or emotional reviews, have a great emotional impact on potential tourists, who imagine or virtually live the experiences of others. Potential tourists through social networks do not receive objective and rational information but experience the subjective experiences and emotions of others, which have a far greater impact on their tourism-related decisions.

The final reason that explains trustworthiness is the type of channel. Within social media, social networks involve greater trust than other media due to the effect of word-of-mouth from friends, acquaintances, and interpersonal relationships (Ladhari and Michaud, 2015; Munar and Jacobsen, 2013), which has always had a great influence on tourism-related decision-making. Through social networks, friends and acquaintances provide travel information and experiences that are far more credible than information supplied by strangers. In addition, social relations also generate greater trust and impact (Munar and Jacobsen, 2013).

Indeed, trust is one of the factors influencing the use of social media (Hur, Kim, Karatepe and Lee, 2017; Yoo, Lee and Gretzel, 2007). That is to say, the greater the trustworthiness provided by the media, the more users will consult them (Yoo et al., 2007) and the greater the impact the information will have on their decisions. Parra-López et al. (2011) showed that users or potential tourists use social media more when they believe this will benefit them, when they are altruistic, and when they have an individual predisposition or greater trust and credibility in the medium. In fact, there has recently been a big increase in the influence and use of social media in the search for information regarding tourism-related decisions (Huang, Chou and Lin, 2010; Flatt, 2010). Younger generations have more trust in the Internet and use more diverse sources on the Internet to organize a trip, make online reservations, and find activities and experiences at the destination (Xiang, Wang, et al., 2015).

In this context, do some social media sites provide greater trustworthiness than others? Do some sites have more influence at different stages of travel or according to the different types of information sought? Are there differences in the trust of information on DMO-managed social networks and the information found on personal social network profiles? Munar and Jacobsen (2013) showed that users conferred greater credibility on two types of social media: review sites, because through them they obtain assessments of tourist destinations and services from other people's experiences, despite not being known to them; and social networks, because they have the word-of-mouth effect from friends and acquaintances. This personal link, or the social relationship of social networks, generates greater trustworthiness. However, they also observed that younger users gave greater trust to social networks, while older users did so to review sites. Previous studies along the same lines showed that potential tourists prefer personal information sources to impersonal ones before deciding on their destination (Prebensen, Skallerud and Chen, 2010) or tourist services. Thus, it appears that there may also be different places for searching and levels of trustworthiness for different stages of the trip.

However, as Munar and Jacobsen (2013) point out, trust also increases relative to the level of social relations and varies widely between the different types of social media. According to previous studies, users could be expected to find personal social networks (of their friends, family, or peers) more trustworthy than DMO-managed profiles. However, no study has been found that specifically analyses whether DMO-managed social networks are more or less trustworthy than personal or third party profiles. In this sense, there may be significant differences; according to Gartner (1993), overt induced information sources (managed by DMOs with a specific interest in attracting people to their destinations) are the least trustworthy in the eyes of tourists, while organic sources (advice from friends and relatives), which could be assimilated to peer-to-peer communication through personal social networks, are the most trustworthy. Previous works identify a need to look deeper into the study of user information searches in social media according to the trustworthiness conferred on each media, to the different stages of the trip, and distinguishing between DMO-managed and personal profiles.

Thus, in relation to previous studies, this research aims to contribute by providing a comprehensive understanding of the use of social media by tourists throughout the three stages of the trip, by focusing on: information searching and sharing through social networks; the types of contents searched through social media in the different trip stages by different user profiles; the specific use of social networks distinguishing between personal profiles and official DMO-managed social network profiles and the trustworthiness users assign them. All of this is done with the ultimate aim to provide useful information for DMOs in implementing their communication strategies.

3. METHODOLOGY

The proposed methodology includes a general analysis of travel information sources used and then a focus on several aspects related to social media use for travel-related purposes. The methodological framework scheme includes the analysis of:

A) Travel information source use and the role of social media among them (before and during the trip);
B) Type of information searched in social media per trip phase and user profile;
C) Social network use per trip phase (before, during, and after the trip); and
D) Trustworthiness of social media as travel information sources (including both DMO-managed and personal social network profiles).

Guest surveys or surveys on travellers have proved to be an effective way to study trip planning behaviour and social media use (Cox et al., 2009; Leung et al., 2013). In the present study, an online survey was conducted with a panel of 800 residents in Spain who had travelled for leisure purposes in the past two years and had at least one personal profile in a social networking site. The selected sample of individuals was divided into proportional quotas of gender and age. The geographical area of residence (corresponding to the Nielsen areas, which are seven geographical regions of Spain with relative homogeneous market characteristics) and the level of finalized studies were gathered, among others (see Table 1).

Table 1
DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

		No. Individuals	Percentage
Gender	Hombre	392	49
	Mujer	408	51
Age	18-30 years	267	33.4
	31-45 years	266	33.3
	46-60 years	267	33.4
Geographic Nielsen Area of residence	NortEast/Catalonia/Balearic Islands	97	12,1
	Levante	104	13,0
	South / Andalucía	128	16,0
	Centre	70	8,8
	Northwest	64	8,0
	North Centre	72	9,0
	Canary Islands	24	3,0
	AMB (Metropolitan Área of Barcelona)	105	13,1
	AMM (Metropolitan Área of Madrid)	136	17,0
Finalized study level	Primary studies (Spanish EGB)	19	2,4
	Secondary studies (Spanish EGB, ESO, FP1)	106	13,3
	Non-university post-secondary studies (Spanish BUP, Bachiller, COU, FP2)	218	27,3
	University studies	456	57,0
	DK/NA/REF	1	,1

The survey was conducted through NetQuest (https://www.netquest.com/) from the 24th April to the 4th May 2015. The sample was obtained in accordance with the ISO 26362:2009 rule for access panels in market, opinion, and social research, and addresses the Spanish population who travels and has social network profiles. Almost all surveyed users had profiles on Facebook, with fewer on Twitter, Instagram, and Linkedin, among others (Fig. 1).

Figure 1
SOCIAL NETWORK PROFILES OF USERS (%)
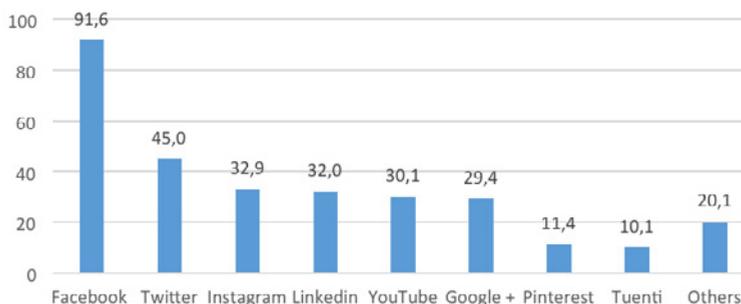
Participants were asked several questions about the aspects of interest explained in the methodological framework (see original survey questions in Spanish in the Appendix):

A) Travel information source use and the role of social media among them (before and during the trip):
   – What are the two main information sources you consulted for trip information and trip planning? Those who said social media were then asked to identify which social media they consulted. Finally, they were asked to score the extent to which they agreed with this statement: Social networks are useful to plan my trips (1 totally disagree to 7 totally agree).
B) Type of information searched in social media per trip phase and user profile:
   – What type of information about your trip did you mainly look for in social media before the trip? (Mark up to 3 types).
   Options: Main attractions, (day-)Trips, Weather, Accommodation, Most visited places, Restaurants, Culture, Leisure activities & Shopping, Transportation, Other, DK/NA/REF
   – What type of information about your trip did you mainly look for in social media during the trip? (Mark up to 3 types).
   Options: Main attractions, (day-)Trips, Weather, Accommodation, Most visited places, Restaurants, Culture, Leisure activities & Shopping, Transportation, Other, DK/NA/REF
   This section also uses information about age, gender, and level of education.
C) Social network use per trip phase (before, during and after the trip):
   – Have you posted any comments or content (photographs, etc.) of your trip on social networks? If so, in what type of social network profile (own individual/ private profile, DMO-managed destination profile, others)? And in what social network specifically?
   After that, users where asked if they had made any online recommendations or complaints concerning their trips.
D) Trustworthiness of social media as travel information sources (including both DMO-managed and personal social network profiles):
   – I fully trust the information on destinations' social media (1 totally disagree to 7 totally agree).
   – Among different social media, which three do you trust the most as sources of trip information (including DMO-managed social networks and personal profiles)?

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A) Travel information source use and the role of social media among them (before and during the trip)

Of the 800 participants, 129 indicated they did not search for information before the trip (16.1%) compared to 671 who did (83.9%). During the trip, the search for information was less intense, with only 71.1% of participants engaging in this search.

Of the participants who searched for information before and during the trip (Fig. 2), most listed search engines as one of their two main sources of information (40.1% pre-trip, and 33.7% on-site), followed by DMO Websites, travel-related websites, TripAdvisor, and then friends and family. Remarkably, 48.5% of people listed social media (travel review sites such as TripAdvisor, travel blogs and social networks, both personally or DMO-managed) as one of their two main sources of information before the trip, and 35.8% during the trip. Only 10.4% of people used a social networking site as one of their main sources of information before the trip and 9.7% during the trip. In general, the use of social media and other information sources declines during the trip, except for the use of tourism guidebooks, which increases, as well as other types of sources (which include tourism offices) and social networks, which remains rather constant. These results are consistent with Yoo and Gretzel (2012), who found that search engines are the main information source and that social networks are used by about 12% of users.

DMO social networks are used slightly more than personal social networks for trip planning before and during the trip. Important differences can be seen in the perception of social networks as useful sources of information for trip planning. Those for whom social networks were a main information source (i.e. one of the two main sources) had a much more positive perception of their usefulness for trip planning (5.4, on average, on a scale from 1-not useful to 7-very useful) than those who did not use them as a main information source (4.5, on average). However, these data also suggest that social networks are still considered useful to very useful for most users as trip information sources. Therefore, the potential influence and usefulness of social networks as complementary or secondary sources of information for trip planning should be seriously considered.

Figure 2
**MOST USED INFORMATION SOURCES PER TRIP PHASE (%)**
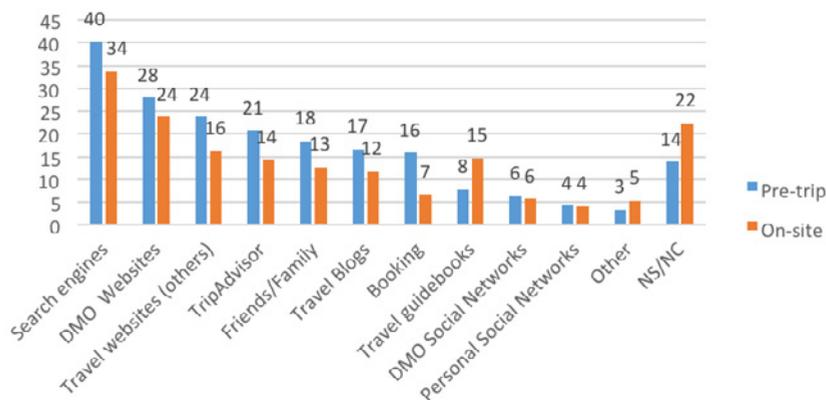
This study found some significant differences among those who did not list social media as one of their main information sources. Using the student t-test with a 95% confidence level, results show that the average age of users who use social media as a main information

source (36.7 years) is significantly lower than those who do not (39.1), even if both ages can be considered within the same age range. The level of education of those who use social media as a main travel information source (4.8 on a 1 to 5 scale) is significantly higher than those who do not (4.2). Remarkably, there was no significant difference in terms of gender (with a 95% confidence level) of social media use for travel information searches.

B) Type of information searched in social media per trip phase and user profile

Among users who listed social media (personal social networks, official destination social networks, review sites, or blogs) as one of their main sources for information in the pre-trip phase, the type of content they searched (Fig. 3) was related to the main attractions at the destination (in more than half of cases). Users also searched for information about trips, the weather, and remarkably about 1/3 looked for information about accommodations and restaurants. Cultural issues, shopping, leisure activities, and transportation are not the main types of information searched through social media before the trip. It is remarkable that users primarily seek information on activities in social media, and after that, look for practical issues such as accommodation. Conversely, the type of information searched on-site or during the trip through social media is remarkably different. During this phase of the trip users search more often for restaurant information, followed main attractions, the weather, and the most visited places. An important difference is that social media are not used to look for accommodation during the trip, because users usually book accommodation before leaving for the destination.

Figure 3
**TYPE OF INFORMATION SEARCHED IN SOCIAL MEDIA**
PER TRIP PHASE (%)
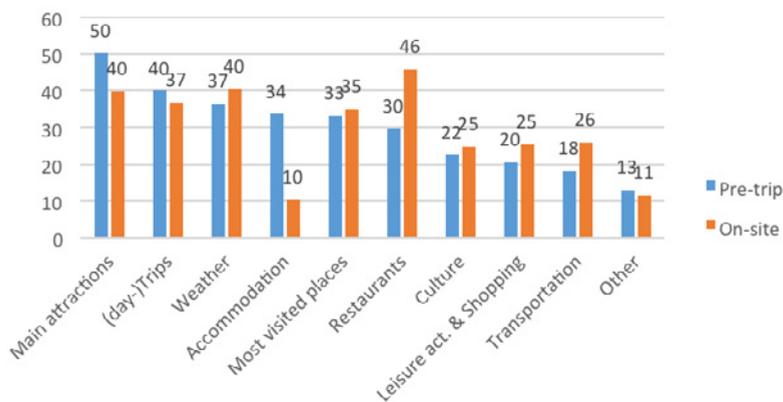
If we analyse the type of information searched for on social media by trip phase, gender and age groups we find some remarkable differences (only the most remarkable differences are explained). Before the trip, men look much more intensely than women

for information about transportation on social media, while women search much more information on trips and restaurants. During the trip, it is women who look most intensely for transportation, leisure activities, and shopping information, while men search more than women for information about trips. In terms of age groups, before the trip, users aged (18-30) search more information on accommodation, most visited places and transportation. Users aged (31-45) focus on the main attractions and trips, while users aged (46-60) focus especially on issues such as the weather, leisure activities, and shopping when compared to the other age groups. Finally, during the trip, users aged (18-30) search on social media for information related to weather and transportation, users aged (31-45) on restaurants and most visited places and users aged (46-60) for information on the main attraction and culture (e.g. museums and exhibitions) while on-site when compared to other age groups.

Separating those who consulted social networks (such as Facebook) from those who consulted travel reviews (TripAdvisor) or travel blogs, Fig. 4 shows that social networks are more intensely used than travel blogs and reviews to search for trips, the weather, shopping, and leisure activities. Conversely, as expected, travel blogs and reviews are more often used to look for accommodation, restaurants, and transportation. Remarkably, travel blogs and reviews are used to look for the main attractions and most visited places in the destination, which was an unexpected result. This may demonstrate the importance of sections such as "Things to Do" on TripAdvisor or the websites hosting travel blogs on certain destinations.

Figure 4
**TYPE OF INFORMATION SEARCHED THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA (%)**
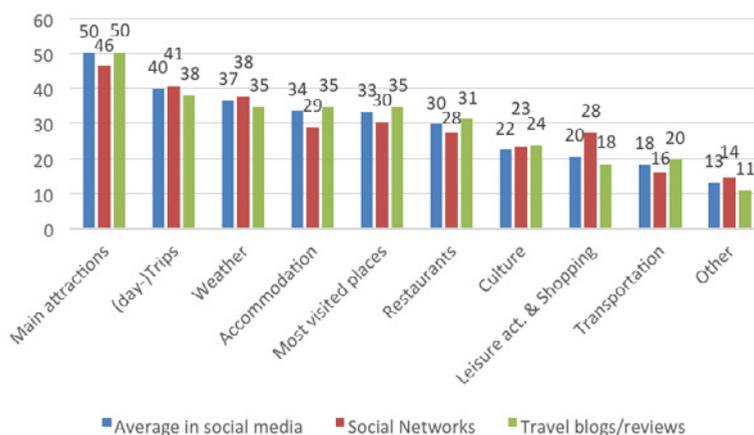
C) Social network use per trip phase (before, during, and after the trip)

Only 10.4% of participants used a social networking site as one of their main sources of information before the trip, and only 9.7% did so during the trip; thus related results must be considered preliminary. However, this trend completely changes during the post-

trip phase, as 521 individuals (65.1%) commented or posted pictures of their latest trip on social network sites. Among those who listed social networks as one of their main information sources, their use after the trip was also higher (75.4%). These results disagree with earlier findings by Shao (2009) who claimed that people searched for more tourist information on social media than they produced. In this respect, our results indicate that people use social networks more to produce and/or share tourist content than to search for information, which indicates a tendency change, and support the results of Fotis et al. (2012) who noted that social networks are mostly used in the post-trip stage. Of those posting content on social networks after the trip, 77.9% did so on their own personal social networking profiles, 6.3% on DMO official social networks, 15% in social media profiles of other people or organizations, and 0.8% in other types of profiles.

As shown in Fig. 5, Facebook was used by most users who search for information before (73%) and during (75%) the trip, with Google+, YouTube, and Twitter quite far behind. Social networks based on pictures (Instagram and Pinterest) were not among the most used as information sources. It is interesting to note that, although the most used social network (Facebook) is also the network with most user-profiles, the fact that people have profiles on certain sites does not automatically make them main information sources. For example, Google+ is the second most used social network, but is not among the most popular networks in profile numbers. YouTube is the fifth in number of profiles but third in terms of being an information source, while Instagram is the third in terms of profiles but negligible as a tourist information source.

Figure 5
SOCIAL NETWORK USE PER TRIP PHASE (%)
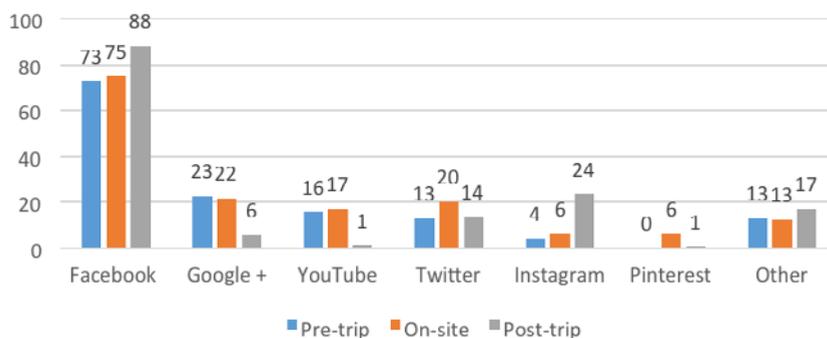
Of those who posted comments or multimedia about their trips on social networks after the experience, Facebook also dominates the scene (88.1%), followed by Instagram (23.6%) and Twitter (13.8%). Except for Facebook, which dominates in all trip phases, the most used social networks as sources of information do not coincide with the networks used to post contents after the trip, as Instagram comes second and Twitter third. According to Fig. 4, some networks are especially used for information searches such as Google + or YouTube. Facebook is used in all phases most intensely but specially to post contents post-

trip. Twitter and Pinterest are most intensely used during the trip and Instagram is clearly used most intensely to post content after the trip. Hence, results showed a specialization of certain social networks at specific stages of the trip, which could give valuable indications to DMOs for strategic communication.

Moreover, 43.5% of users noted that they had recommended some elements of their trip online and 9.2% had posted a complaint after the trip. These percentages are considerably higher among users who listed social networks as one of their two main sources of information (60.9% and 11.6%, respectively). Those who use social networks as an information source are more likely to make recommendations or complaints online.

D) Trustworthiness of social media as a source of information when planning a trip, including both DMO-managed and personal social network profiles

In general, preliminary results on this issue showed a slight difference in the average trust of people who listed DMO social networks as one of their two main sources of information (Fig. 6). These people awarded a score of 4.3 (on a scale from 1 to 7 points), which means they positively trust these sources. However, those who do not use them as a main source of information award them a below average trust score of 3.7 points. Although this means that those who use DMO social networks as an information source usually put greater trust in them, it does not mean that others who do not use them as a main source also find them trustworthy. In general, however, very few people consider them very trustworthy or totally trustworthy, which may outline a possible credibility problem and back up Gartner's (1993) theory on overt induced sources of information (DMO-managed sources), which are seen as the less trustworthy than organic sources.

Figure 6
MOST TRUSTWORTHY SOCIAL MEDIA SOURCES (%)
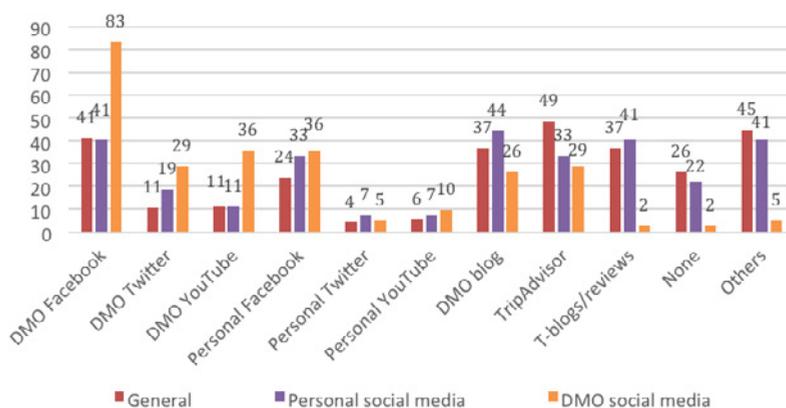
Additionally, from a list of social media sources, participants were asked to note which three they considered to be the most trustworthy. In general, participants considered

TripAdvisor to be the most trustworthy, followed by the DMO Facebook page, and then travel blogs and reviews (other than TripAdvisor). Among those who mentioned personal social media as one of their main sources of information, the DMO blog, the DMO Facebook page, and then travel blogs and reviews (other than TripAdvisor) were considered the most trustworthy, which indicates that the fact that these segments of the public chose personal social networks as one of their main sources of trip information and not DMO social media or other sources is not related to the trustworthiness they attach to these media.

Conversely, it is a clear that those who indicated that DMO social networks were one of their two main information sources consider DMO-managed sites (especially Facebook, but also YouTube and Twitter) to be especially trustworthy in comparison to the general public and to those who used personal social networks most. This may indicate that those who use DMO social networks as an information source do so because of their high perceived trustworthiness of the source.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND IMPLICATIONS

The results show that social media sites (especially TripAdvisor before the trip) are one of the main information sources for trip planning among travellers with social network profiles. However, very few participants (about 10%) use social networks themselves as a main source for trip information both before and during the trip. Indeed, it is after the experience that social network users most intensely use these media to post contents (about 65%). Moreover, participants who used social networks as a source of information find them more useful and use them more across all stages of the trip than those who did not, reaching 75% in the post-trip phase. These users also tend to post more recommendations or complaints online. Social media information sources are used to socialise the experience after the trip; however the influence that these messages and posts have on other pre-trip information-searching behaviour may be limited at the moment. However, most users still find them useful for information searching, so the potential influence of social networks as complementary or secondary sources of information for trip planning should be considered.

Hence, strategic management and communication through social networks is a great opportunity for DMOs. Despite the fact that social networks are more used after the experience than for seeking information, users also take advantage in the post-trip stage to post reviews, ratings, and complaints. This subsequently influences the opinions that other users have of destinations and the tourism-related decisions they make. The influence that social networks have on users' opinions and decisions should not be underestimated just because they are used more in the post-trip stage.

An accurate assessment should not only consider the main information sources people use when organizing a trip but also the total influence that these networks have on users' opinions and final decisions, considering that personal opinions (from friends and acquaintances) have a greater influence than impersonal ones (from official tourist destination websites) (Munar and Jacobsen, 2013).

This research found that the type of content searched for on social media is different before and during the trip. Remarkably accommodation, trips, and main attractions information is searched on social media before the trip, while restaurant and weather

information is searched more on-site. Moreover, not only is information search different by trip phase, but also by gender and age group, which is an interesting insight for customer segmentation when using social media for marketing purposes. Specifically, social networks are most intensely consulted to look for information about trips, the weather, leisure, and shopping, while travel blogs and reviews are more commonly used to find accommodation and restaurants. This information demonstrates the importance that sections such as "Things to Do" in TripAdvisor may have for destinations and can help content curation strategies for destinations to adjust information in different media to tourists' needs. Moreover, although all surveyed users had at least one social media profile, not all of them used it as a main information search tool. Nevertheless, those who used social media most intensely to look for travel information were significantly younger and more educated than those who do not, enabling certain public segmentation. Therefore, having a social networking profile does not mean that social networks will be used for travel information search, and DMOs need to develop specific strategies to engage tourists with social networking information and make it useful for their planning.

Facebook is the most used social networking site at all stages of the trip process, but some social networks are mostly used before the trip (Google+ and YouTube), during the trip (Twitter), or after the trip (Instagram and Pinterest). This can give indications to DMOs as to what content to post and what social networks to use at each moment to reach their target publics. One of the contributions of this study has been to demonstrate that users have different needs in terms of communication and of social network use at different stages of their trip. Despite the fact that many tourist destinations still use social networks indistinctly and publish the same contents on them without considering the users' needs for information at each stage of their trip, the results show that the success of communication by destinations lies in strategic communication that varies according to the social network and stage of the trip. In fact, the results provide useful information to help DMOs steer their strategic communication along the right lines.

DMO-managed social networks are used as trip information sources slightly more than personal profiles, but are very weakly used in the post-trip phase, where users prefer using their own personal networks to communicate. Among different social media sources, TripAdvisor was considered the most trustworthy (and accordingly is the most used social media site as a source of information), followed by the DMO Facebook page and blogs, in front of personal social network profiles. In general, DMO-managed social networks are not considered very trustworthy (supporting Gartner's 1994 theory of overt-induced sources) by users, except for those who actually used them for information searches, who found them especially trustworthy. These results indicate a relationship between use of social media and perceived trustworthiness for travel planning purposes. Therefore, destinations face a challenge to engage with customers and build a trustworthy relationship with them to improve their communication strategy and reach their target public. They especially need to pursue their engagement after the trip, through specific campaigns or competitions, when users are most active in social networks.

One important contribution of this study was to show the use of social networks in the travel information search and in all stages of the trip. The results indicate that the most used social networks do not coincide with the ones more consulted to plan a trip. Equally,

the most used social networks as sources of information do not coincide with the networks used to post content after the trip. The results also show that users consult different social networks depending on their perceived trustworthiness of the source. Certain content search behaviours in different social networks and stages of the trip have been observed. The paper provides interesting implications that will help DMO communication managers create successful content strategies more segmented by social networks and stages of a trip.

Although this study has shown that a low percentage of tourists use social networks as one of the main information source, the current technological changes indicate that their use will increase in the future. Xiang et al. (2015) showed that the emergence of smartphones and mobile devices has increased and will continue to increase the amount of information that users seek during the trip. Moreover, if travellers use social networks to search for more information about day-trips, weather, leisure, and shopping during the trip, the use of social networks will certainly increase. Furthermore, with the development of all these mobile technologies, the information that users share in the destination during the trip and in real time is also increasing. Further research should focus on how this is changing the research behaviour of users, which new applications of social networks (live videos and stories for example) allow users to share and seek information at the destination, and which contents users now prefer to find and share during the trip.

A limitation to this study is that due to the low percentage of users using social networks before or during the trip as a source of information, results related to the perceived trustworthiness of these media as information sources must be seen as a preliminary approximation, which should be validated by future more extended studies. It would also be interesting to further analyse the emotional impact of social relationships and word-of-mouth communication through social networks on travel decisions and how social relationships influence the trustworthiness of social networks. Regarding the issue of source trustworthiness, future studies should analyse this in relation to the content searched for through them to gain a better understanding.

Finally, it would be useful to analyse whether the young people who now trust and use more social networks will reduce this behaviour with age or if this is a social trend in which more users will trust and use social networks as primary information sources.

6. ACNOWLEDGEMENTS

7. APPENDIX

We present the survey questions used in this study. The survey contained more questions and sub-questions addressing other issues not relevant for this study which are not displayed. Depending on previous answers, some questions were skipped for some participants.

1. VARIABLES DE CLASIFICACIÓN AUTOMÁTICAS

1.1 **PROVÍNCIA DE RESIDENCIA** AUTOMÁTICO PANEL

1.2 **AREA NIELSEN AUTOMÁTICO PANEL**

Noreste/Cataluña y Baleares	1
Levante	2
Sur / Andalucía	3
Centro	4
Noroeste	5
Norte Centro	6
Canarias	7
AMB (Area Metropolitana Barcelona)	8
AMM (Area Metropolitana Madrid)	9

1.3 **EDAT_CLASIFICADA AUTOMÁTICO PANEL**

De 18 a 30 años	1
De 31 a 45 años	2
De 46 a 60 años	3

1.4 **GÉNERO AUTOMÁTICO PANEL**

Hombre	1
Mujer	2

2. FILTROS

2.1 **¿Ha realizado un viaje por motivos de ocio en los últimos 2 años?**

SI	1
NO	2 **ACABAR ENTREVISTA**

2.2 **Marque las redes sociales donde tenga perfil que utilice**
ROTAR RESPUESTAS

Facebook	1
Tuenti	2
Twitter	3
Google +	4
Myspace	5
Pinterest	6

Badoo	7	
Linkedin	8	
Hi5	9	
Flickr	10	
Instagram	11	
Youtube	12	
FourSquare	13	
Tumblr	14	
Otras _____ (especificar)	77	
Ninguna	99	**ACABAR ENTREVISTA**

3. PROCESO DE SELECCIÓN DEL DESTINO/ANTES DEL VIAJE

3.1 **¿Antes de elegir su destino, buscó información sobre él en medios sociales (puntos de interés, alojamiento,…)?**

Si
Yo no, pero sí alguien que viajaba conmigo
No

3.2 **¿Qué tipo de información buscó principalmente? (Puede marcar tres informaciones)**
ROTAR RESPUESTAS

Alojamientos	1	1	1
Excursiones para hacer	2	2	2
Actividades de ocio y compras	3	3	3
Restauración (bares de copas, restaurantes,…)	4	4	4
Cultura (museos, exposiciones,…)	5	5	5
Principales atractivos turísticos	6	6	6
Lugares más visitados	7	7	7
Clima/tiempo/temperatura	8	8	8
Elementos de transporte/transporte público/alquiler coche	9	9	9
Otros_____ (especificar)	77	77	77
Ns/Nc	99	99	99

3.3 **¿Del siguiente listado de fuentes de información… ¿Cuál consultó para buscar la información? ¿Consultó alguna más?**
ROTAR RESPUESTAS

Web oficial del destino	1	1	**Saltar al bloque siguiente**
Web sobre viajes (otras)	2	2	**Saltar al bloque siguiente**
Redes sociales **oficiales** del destino (Facebook, twitter,…)	3	3	
Otras redes sociales **no oficiales** (de familiares, amigos, otra información no oficial…)	4	4	

Información general en buscadores	5	5	**Saltar al bloque siguiente**
Guías en papel	6	6	**Saltar al bloque siguiente**
Blogs de viaje	7	7	**Saltar al bloque siguiente**
Tripadvisor	8	8	**Saltar al bloque siguiente**
Booking	9	9	**Saltar al bloque siguiente**
Amigos/familiares	66	66	**Saltar al bloque siguiente**
Otros_____ (especificar)	77	77	**Saltar al bloque siguiente**
Ns/Nc	99	99	**Saltar al bloque siguiente**

3.4   Si dicen red social **¿Qué red/es social consultó? Respuesta múltiple**
ROTAR RESPUESTAS

Facebook	1
Tuenti	2
Twitter	3
Google +	4
Myspace	5
Pinterest	6
Badoo	7
Linkedin	8
Hi5	9
Flickr	10
Instagram	11
Youtube	12
FourSquare	13
Tumblr	14
Otras_____(especificar)	77

4. DURANTE SU ESTANCIA

Hablemos de su estancia

4.1   **¿Durante su estancia buscó información sobre el lugar donde estaba en medios sociales?**

Si	1	
Yo, no pero sí alguien que viajaba conmigo	2	
No	3	**Saltar al bloque siguiente**

4.2   **¿Qué tipo de información buscó principalmente durante su estancia? (Puede marcar tres informaciones)**
ROTAR RESPUESTAS

Alojamientos	1	1	1
Excursiones para hacer	2	2	2
Actividades de ocio y compras	3	3	3
Restauración (bares de copas, restaurantes,…)	4	4	4
Cultura (museos, exposiciones,…)	5	5	5

Principales atractivos turísticos	6	6	6
Lugares más visitados	7	7	7
Clima/tiempo/temperatura	8	8	8
Elementos de transporte/transporte público/alquiler coche	9	9	9
Otros_____ (especificar)	77	77	77
Ns/Nc	99	99	99

4.3 **¿Del siguiente listado de fuentes de información… ¿Cuál consultó para buscar la información? ¿Consultó alguna más?**
ROTAR RESPUESTAS

Web oficial del lugar	1	1	**Saltar al bloque siguiente**
Web sobre viajes (otras)	2	2	**Saltar al bloque siguiente**
Redes sociales **oficiales** del destino (Facebook, twitter,…)	3	3	
Otras redes sociales **no oficiales** (de familiares, amigos, otra información no oficial…)	4	4	
Información general en buscadores	5	5	**Saltar al bloque siguiente**
Guías en papel	6	6	**Saltar al bloque siguiente**
Blogs de viaje	7	7	**Saltar al bloque siguiente**
Tripadvisor	8	8	**Saltar al bloque siguiente**
Booking	9	9	**Saltar al bloque siguiente**
Amigos/familiares	66	66	**Saltar al bloque siguiente**
Otros_____ (especificar)	77	77	**Saltar al bloque siguiente**
Ns/Nc	99	99	**Saltar al bloque siguiente**

4.4 Si dicen red social **¿Qué red/es social consultó? Respuesta múltiple**
ROTAR RESPUESTAS

Facebook	1
Tuenti	2
Twitter	3
Google +	4
Myspace	5
Pinterest	6
Badoo	7
Linkedin	8
Hi5	9
Flickr	10
Instagram	11
Youtube	12
FourSquare	13
Tumblr	14
Otras_____(especificar)	77

5. DESPUÉS DE SU ESTANCIA

5.1 **¿Después de su viaje. Ha comentado su viaje por la redes sociales (con comentarios, fotos,...)?**

Si	1
Yo no, pero sí alguien que viajaba conmigo	2
No	3

5.2 **¿Qué tipo de red era? Respuesta múltiple**

Red propia	1
Red del destino oficial	2
Red de otras personas o entidades	3
Otros_____(especificar)	77

5.3 **¿En qué red/es social? Respuesta múltiple**
ROTAR RESPUESTAS

Facebook	1
Tuenti	2
Twitter	3
Google +	4
Myspace	5
Pinterest	6
Badoo	7
Linkedin	8
Hi5	9
Flickr	10
Instagram	11
Youtube	12
FourSquare	13
Tumblr	14
Otras_____(especificar)	77

5.4 **¿Ha recomendado algún elemento de su viaje a través de internet?**

Si	1
Yo, no pero sí alguien que viajaba conmigo	2
No	3

5.5 **¿Ha hecho alguna queja sobre algún elemento de su viaje a través de internet?**

Si	1
Yo, no pero sí alguien que viajaba conmigo	2
No	3

5.6 **Me podría indicar su grado de acuerdo con las siguientes afirmaciones, donde 1 es nada de acuerdo y 7 muy de acuerdo**

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Me resultan útiles las redes sociales para planificar mis viajes	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D	Confío plenamente en la información de las redes sociales de los destinos turísticos	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

6. INFORMACIÓN DE CONFIANZA

6.1 **SI tuviera que elegir una fuente de información, ¿Cuál de estas le genera más confianza?** No mostrar la marcada anterior **¿Y la segunda?** No mostrar la marcada anterior **¿Y la tercera?**

ROTAR RESPUESTAS

Facebook oficial de un destino	1	1	1
Twitter oficial de un destino	2	2	2
Youtube oficial de un destino	3	3	3
Facebook **no oficial** (amigos, familiares, información,…)	4	4	4
Twitter **no oficial** (amigos, familiares, información,…)	5	5	5
Youtube **no oficial** (amigos, familiares, información,…)	6	6	6
Flikr, Instagram o Pinterest de oficial de un destino	7	7	7
Blog de un destino	8	8	8
Tripadvisor	9	9	9
Wiki Travel	10	10	10
Blogs o reviews de viaje (aparte de TripAdvisor)	11	11	11
Ninguna más		55	55
Ninguna de ellas	66		
Otras_____ (especificar)	77	77	77
Ns/Nc	99		

7. DATOS PERSONALES

7.1 **Nivel de estudios finalizados**

Sin estudios primarios	1
Estudios primarios (primaria, EGB)	2
Estudios secundarios (EGB, ESO, FP1)	3
Estudios posteriores no universitarios (BUP, Batxiller, COU, FP2)	4
Estudios universitarios	5
Ns/Nc	99

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