EFFECTIVENESS OF ONLINE TRAVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

DETERMINING THE IMPORTANCE OF AND PREFERENCE FOR TYPES OF ONLINE TRAVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

WRITTEN BY ANOUK DOHMEN

SUPERVISED BY BENDEDICT DELLAERT

ERASMUS UNIVERSITY ROTTERDAM

DEPARTMENT ERASMUS SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

PROGRAMME MARKETING

14/12/2013

Table of Contents

Abstract 4

Acknowledgements 5

Introduction 6

Online versus Offline 7

Online Recommendations and Reviews 7

Effects of Recommendations on behaviour 8

Types of Recommendations and Reviews 10

Word of Mouth 10

Social Media 10

Blogs 11

Travel Agencies 11

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses 13

Construction Variables 14

Study 1: Online versus Offline 14

Study 2: Effectiveness within different types of online recommendations 18

Methodology 22

Participants 22

Design 22

Measurements 22

Dependent Variable 23

Independent Variables 23

Moderating Variable 25

Stimulus 26

Analysis Findings 27

Study 1: Online versus Offline 27

Study 2: Effectiveness within different types of online recommendations 34

Conclusion 46

Managerial Implications 49

Limitations 50

Bibliography 51

Appendices 54

A. Scales Survey 1 54

B. Scales Survey 2 55

C. Survey Questions Study 1 57

D. Survey Questions Study 2 63

E. Stimulus Survey 2 71

# Abstract

In this research will look at the travel industry in particular at recommendations and reviews written for travellers about destinations, experiences and other contents concerning travel. We started by determining the importance of the online world for travel recommendations. We quickly realized that this is an upcoming sector for many businesses and industries as it turns out to be for the travel industry as well. We studied different perceptions between the online and offline recommendations. The factors tested were the reliability, credibility and usage of travel recommendations. We discovered that online travel recommendations are indeed used more often and people tend to prefer online travel recommendations to offline sources.

After we established this importance of the digital world, we wanted to increase the provided information about online travel recommendations. Many different types exist within this phenomenon and therefore we wanted to define in which context, which type of recommendation is preferred to be able to give advice to different players within the industry and on what to focus their marketing efforts.

We examined 151 respondents and their indicated preferences between two distinct types of online recommendations. We differentiated two main types of online travel recommendations; namely experience and advice formats. We tested the respondents in two groups and primed the sample size at random into the two first stages of travel. After the data collection we found that even though the decision stages gave significant different results among all factors (reliability, suitability and credibility), in the end the preference was won by the advice format (official travel website). This implies that when marketers want to focus their efforts online, they should take into account that official websites are regarded as most reliable, credible and suitable for most people. Not to neglect the effects that experience formats have on visitors of these websites, but when faced with the decision, the majority would trust and therefore chooses advice formats.

**Key terms:** online travel recommendations & reviews, social media, travel websites, (electronic) word-of-mouth, blogs

**Variables**: Preference, Reliability, Suitability, Experience and Credibility

# Acknowledgements

I am Anouk Dohmen, master student of Erasmus School of Economics, finishing my master’s degree in Marketing. During my second bachelor year I took my first class in Marketing. I quickly realized that I had a profound passion and interest for this direction. I voluntarily and with pleasure read the entire book of the course. After majoring in Marketing in my final bachelor year, the choice for my masters’ degree was fairly obvious.

Throughout my masters degree I interned at L’Oreal and participated with MAEUR’s International Research project. Two achievements, which took place within the marketing sector, which made me even more determined to persist a career in marketing. Throughout my studies I also experienced a great fascination with online marketing and e-commerce. Adding up these interests and combining it with a personal interest in travelling this research was right up my alley.

My special thanks goes out to my thesis coach Dhr. Dellaert, whom encouraged this subject of research and supported and improved my ideas throughout the process of my thesis.

Throughout this thesis a significance level of alpha = 0,05 is maintained with a confidence interval of 95%.

I declare that the text and work presented in my Master thesis is original. No sources other than those mentioned in the text and its references have been used.

The copyright of this Master thesis lies with the author. The author is responsible for its content. The Erasmus School of Economics of the Erasmus University is only responsible for the educational coaching and beyond that cannot be held responsible for the content.

# Introduction

The aim of this thesis will be to further research the phenomena of online travel recommendations. Globalization is becoming a key factor in our everyday lives; news travels faster than ever through Internet and other media forms. Air travel has made travelling to far destinations easy, quick and accessible for almost everyone. Business is not bounded to the office anymore; you travel to multiple offices all over the world. This causes for a change in our behaviour as opposed to a decade earlier (Burns, 2006). The developments of the Internet have overthrown the standard business model it has also changed the consumers’ searching method of relevant product and service information (Chang, Lee, & Huang, 2007).

Nowadays people of all ages have travelled to all kinds of destinations, the farther the better. You do not ask yourself “will” I go on vacation this year, but “where” will I vacation this year? The Internet, with all its’ content, provides a part of the “how” in this matter.

Therefore I want to examine the different types of travel advices that are available. A decade ago people visited the local travel agency after saving their income for a year to plan their 10-day holiday abroad. Nowadays you can easily open your laptop and find numerous travel information sites, online agencies, blogs with experiences and recommendation sites and book your flight ticket within a couple of clicks. Using the Internet is an easy trait for anyone with access to a computer, laptop, Smartphone or tablet. It provides more and better information in an efficient and compact method. Internet can be personalized and tailored for your own needs and wants but also opens your view to many other opportunities not yet known to you. For example when searching for a holiday destination you may stumble onto destinations you were not familiar with before due to advertising or click through links recommended to you according to your search pattern (Filieri & McLeavy, 2013). The research question therefore states: *Which factors influence the effectiveness of online travel recommendations?*

The research will be conducted via two studies in two steps. The first mainly to determine the hype and popularity of the “online” world of travel information, we want to establish the importance of online travel recommendations. The Internet is booming (Hauble & Murray, 2003). Practically every industry is dependent on the Internet (Chang, Lee, & Huang, 2007). But how booming is travel industry online? The second study will be conducted to show in which situations which types of online travel recommendations are preferred.

This study will provide implications for travel recommendation providers, travel destinations, advertisement for these destinations, governments, bloggers and social media experts. As we will look into the importance of the online world for the travellers world and specifically look into what attracts people, what they look for what they value the most throughout their search and in the end their ultimate preference. Literature Review

Throughout my literature review we will look at the different methods, types and effects of travel recommendation. Which methods are popular and which effects have been proven in previous studies?

## Online versus Offline

As mentioned before Internet is an increasing medium and has become an important sales channel (Law & Bai, 2008). It is being used more and more for uncountable purposes. Looking at online retail sales in the US alone 136 billion dollar was spent in 2007 which was an increase of 19% compared to the previous year (Scheleur and Carol, 2008). Due to the rapid growth of the Internet we see a shift in field of interest for businesses in every segment mainly to promote and sell their product or service (Wallace et al., 2004). It provides marketers of businesses with opportunities to influence consumers and their preferences to eventually influence the purchase decision (Hauble & Murray, 2003).

Online channels are all caught up to brick and mortar channels when we consider the diversity of products that are offered online and offline (Cheema and Papatla, 2010). However the Internet provides an overwhelming amount of sources of information, which can be confusing for the consumer. Therefore it is important to understand the consumer when you decide to approach them through an online or offline channel (Keller and Staelin, 1987).

We see this growth in the online travel industry if we look at the well known website of Tripadvisor (www.tripadvisor.com). This consumer-orientated website is a good example of an experience format which provide travel information in the form of reviews. Numbers state that traffic on this website improved from 20 million to 60 million monthly visitors between 2010 and 2013 with their membership rising from 15 million to 20 members in 2013 (Buhalis & Law, 2008). This growth provides some bases that these services, online travel sites play a large role, and will continue to play a large role, in the travel industry (Filieri & McLeavy, 2013).

## Online Recommendations and Reviews

Online reviews and recommendations can guide people into the decision making process, whether this is buying a product, service or consulting for advice. They affect the consumer in the beginning of this process by broadening their consideration set, influencing their purchase intention and eventually the sales (Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009), (Lin and Horng, 2011), (Park, Lee and Han 2007).

In the Local Consumer Review Survey in 2012[[1]](#footnote-1)\* research is conducted to study opinions and effects of online reviews. It asks consumers about their specific perceptions on online reviews and in which amount they use or view these reviews. The results where as follows: 72% of the respondents said to trust online reviews, a similar amount said to trust a personal recommendation or review. 27% of the surveyed uses online reviews often, while only 25% of the respondents never use online reviews. Leaving close to 50% of the surveyed that indicated to look at online reviews only once a while.

Another interesting result found in the research was the actual amount of reviews provided online. Research shows a decline in the amount of reviews being read by the same person, this implies that people trust the Internet quicker and their opinion is being formed faster. It is important to take the quantity of online reviews into account. We see that more reviews on the Internet gives a higher confidence level. People see that a lot is being written about a certain subject, which gives them more confidence in the rating (Local Consumer Review Survey, 2012). This leads to more trust of the review and acceptance of the content becomes greater.

PorterNovelli did a similar survey for the European people in 2011 where they specifically researched the term social media and the influences amongst consumers. They found that of all Dutch surveyed 78% claimed to “sometimes” read online reviews and 27% “often” read online reviews. Considering trust and reliability 20% mentioned to rely on the information provided. Interestingly though is that this amount is higher than the trust people say to have in company and product websites. Here only 13% of the respondents say to trust the information provided (PorterNovelli, 2011). We can conclude that opinions are trusted more than factual information provided by the source directly. The variables trust and reliability will therefore be considered in our upcoming model.

In order to broaden the implications of online reviews it would be interesting to see whether reviews show an accurate distribution of the opinion of a larger group instead of solely the writer of the review. Do online reviews measure opinions of more people than just its’ writer? In 2007 Dellarocas researched this matter, to see if online reviews could be extended onto a greater sized population. He conducted this research by asking a sample of subjects to rate movies, these subjects had never provided an online review before, after which he compared these ratings to online ratings for the same movies. His research showed that the offline ratings provided by the subjects correlated strongly with ratings found online. So we can that the ratings online are a good substitution of offline ratings, which are often word-of-mouth sources (Dellarocas, Awad and Zhang, 2007).

## Effects of Recommendations on behaviour

Online reviews are crucial for one’s purchase intention and consideration set (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) confirmed that positive online reviews had a more positive impact on book sales, but negative online reviews also showed a positive impact on sales. This effect can be explained by the variables: awareness and exposure. Every type of online review widens the consumer’s consideration set and influences his or her decision. Even though you would think that negative reviews could damage or lower the attitude, its’ positive influence on awareness compensates this effect (Lin, Lee, & Horng, 2011).

Human decision processes are influenced by many factors. Their preferences are revealed when they actually make their purchase or choice decision. This preference is constructed on the spot, when forced to make choice. Human behaviour is determined by interaction between knowledge, information and their processing system (Lynch, 1990). Knowing this a marketer can frame information and present options in a way to influence this process. With the Internet accessible, this framing has become a lot more difficult and a lot less clear. The Internets’ increasing popularity as information source has made digital marketplaces the place where consumers’ purchase decisions are made (Hauble & Murray, 2003). A consumer can be influenced by online recommendations due to awareness and exposure as Lin, Lee and Huang stated. But on a very primary base, reading negative information on a certain subject can divert the consumer from purchasing or visiting this particular subject. More particular it can also initiate confirming these negative experiences and reposting negative messages. Positive associations can intrigue a traveller to book the hotel or visit the destination, and later maybe even encourage him to post online about his experiences online (Hauble & Murray, 2003).

Lin, Lee and Horng (2011) also studied the effects of online reviews by defining two different forms of Word-Of-Mouth. They researched the term: electronic word-of-mouth (abbreviated as E-WOM). E-WOM can be described as: “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or company, made available to a multitude people via the internet” (Hening-Thurau, Thorsten, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). The difference between E-WOM and traditional WOM is that within the traditional form, the source is someone you know, while the source of E-WOM communications are users of a product who mainly wish to stay anonymous. Electronic WOM can be found in platforms where opinions are formed, such as blogs.

An advantage of online recommendations opposed to WOM is that online comments and opinions are provided on a voluntarily base. If you test consumer satisfaction on an offline manner, people are put on the spot with pre-specified questions and asked at that moment in time for their opinion. When this is provided online, consumers can actually “speak their mind” and are not faced with a certain direction, which surveys often do imply (Chang, Lee, & Huang, 2007).

## Types of Recommendations and Reviews

### Word of Mouth

Earlier we spoke of Word-of-Mouth as an offline platform. Word of Mouth can take a lot of forms, the most common and known is the personal review of a friend or family member. Research claims that word-of-mouth is more effective than advertisements because WOM gives the receiver the feeling of ‘people like me’. Therefore WOM is considered one of the most influential communication channels and when it is positive, it is considered one of the best predictors of business growth (Lee, Lee and Kim, 2012).

The difference between Word-of-Mouth communication and online reviews is merely the context (online and offline) in which they are provided. But they are both consumer-generated information sources (Silverman, 1997). Word-of-Mouth is perceived as reliable, credible and trustworthy because of the following two reasons. First this form of communication is always face-to-face, direct as opposed to the many forms of indirect communications. Secondly in Word-of-Mouth communication it concerns consumers instead of marketers. The communicator does not have a hidden agenda; he is independent from the marketer (Arndt, 1967).

As mentioned earlier a new term has been introduced, written about by Jalilvand, Esfahani and Samiei (2011, p. 42), WOM in the digital world; namely electronic WOM (EWOM). EWOM is also known as “word of mouse” which was introduced in 2002 by Gelb and Sundaram (Gelb & Sundaram, 2002). Electronic WOM has a couple of advantages when compared to with regular or traditional WOM. Within electronic WOM the message is not only shared via a conversation between two (or more) acquaintances but also viewable for a larger group of people. Offline conversations are hard to observe, and make it almost impossible to control. However when these “conversations” are displayed online, marketers can view them, react and respond to these shared opinions. (Park & Kin, 2008).

### Social Media

Internet is closely associated with the term Social Media. Not only the youth use a broad assortment of social media platforms but companies are now also hiring social-media experts to create new opportunities (Zheng & Gretzel, 2010). Academic papers are in overflow concerning social media and new channels of social media are created every day.

Blackshaw (2006) states that social media can be best described as “Internet- based applications that carry consumers-generated content which encompasses media impressions created by consumers, typically informed by relevant experience and achieved or shared online for easy access by other consumers.” (Blackshaw, 2006)

In fact Social Media provides a platform for people to connect, communicate and interact with one another in a fashion that can be anonymous but does not necessarily have to be (Correa, Hinsley and Gil de Zuniga, 2010). Therefore social media can take several forms, consider Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pintrest, within the framework of this thesis social media is placed in the online *experience* format. As we feel that social media mainly shares experiences, whether it concerns photos, messages, tips or facts, these are all gathered by a person and shared. Therefore we can state that social media shares primary information (directly from the source), while travel agencies or other advice formats primarily share secondary information (Zheng & Gretzel, 2010).

### Blogs

Blogs can be seen as a type of Social Media. It provides every individual to write about anything they feel like they want. Concerning the travel business it also provides opportunities and possibilities to share experiences, recommendations, other content for one who is interested. In a blog there are no limitations, it is opinion and consumer generated without any form of marketing prospects.

Due to “the experiential nature of tourism, the dramatic evolution of technology and travellers’ willingness to share information” (Gelb & Sundaram, 2002) an opportunity arose for blogs to become popular and used to massive extent. People have opened up to learn from others’ (often unknown others) experiences. As tourism is not a materialistic product on first hand, but more a marketplace of experiences, it provides opportunities for travellers to provide information or a “mental place” to share experiences (Volo & Fisichella, 2007).

Pan et all (2007) studied forty travel blogs on the same destination to research the term “blogging” in general. He concluded in his research that bloggers in general cover all aspects of their travels: from the anticipation toward the trip (dreaming stage) to the actual experience at the destination (experience stage), and after the destination (sharing stage)[[2]](#footnote-2). These stages cover the first and the final two stages that Google describes in the five-stages of travel (Bitzzer, 2012). Bloggers cover their experiences from attractions to conveniences to the general impression they had overall (Pan, McLaurin, & Crott, 2007).

Heiders' Balance Theory covers the actual relationship of the implicit concepts of blogging. He describes the power of blogs and summarizes it in two objectives that destinations can play into; first he says that they try to influence a substantial number of future visitors and secondly that they try to position the destination “in the mind” of future travellers (Woodside, Cruickshank, & Dehuang, 2007).

### Travel Agencies

Gaston Leblanc defines travel agencies as follows; “travel agencies are important intermediaries in the tourism industry”. The key objective of a travel agency is to analyse the market from a customer’s perspective and to design a service delivery system that meets the expectation and needs of markets (Harrel 1977). Travel agents are seen as the intermediary between destinations, suppliers and consumers, whom sell products on commissions (McKercher, Packer, Yau, & Lam, 2003). Their nature of business is to sell travels in a market of high volume and low margin (Case & Unseem, 1996)

However we see a clear decline in the importance of travel agencies due to the upswing of the Internet and other developments of channels for the travel industry (Baum & Mudambi, 1994). Travel agencies are facing new challenges each day competing with the online world, making it hard to stay profitable. Therefore nowadays they mainly try to sell package deals, as these are more time and cost efficient for agencies to sell (Dube & Renaghan, 2000). These package deals are set travel plans, which for many travellers is less appealing because people want unique experiences (Case & Unseem, 1996). Here lies the crutch. The American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA) also notices an intense decline in business as well as a shift in customer base and demand. Where travel agents used to serve mostly typical middle class families they now generally assist people with a yearly income of $100 000 or more with special and complicated wishes (Green, 2013). This is an interesting fact for our first study, as we will be examining online versus offline platforms. As we ask our respondents to indicate to which extent they use and prefer travel agencies as opposed to online sources we can test this theory.

Even though travel agents have a broad range of business, they practice in every branch of the procedure of booking with a broad knowledge of travel; their knowledge is not deep enough to compete with the Internet (Provost & Soto, 2001). The strengths of travel agencies lies mainly with their close and personal ties to hospitality services abroad, logistics and planning (Green, 2013) but, excluding very particular trips, the Internet also provides these services. Moreover, the Internet provides a wide range of comparison opportunities in which the consumer can look into.

# Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The main research question in this thesis is: *Which factors influence the effectiveness of online travel recommendations?*

To clearly define the difference between online and offline and the division of formats we created the chart below. Two formats were differentiated within travel recommendations, namely the advice and the experience format. The main difference is the manner of the recommendation is written and the type of recommendation. The advice format is based on a professional base; these types of recommendations include travel agencies and travel websites that are mainly businesses that make a profit of the recommendations and advice that is given. These sources primarily use secondary data and information. While the experience formats are on a more personal note and are consumer-created. The consumer-created information influences the decision making process as it provides indirect experiences for the user. This influence has a double role; i.e. the role of the informant and that of the recommender. The informant, the recipient of the review is provided with additional user-oriented information. While the recommender, the provider of the review, provides a positive or negative signal of the product popularity (Park et al., 2007). These are mostly experiences of the source providers that they share. A respectable example would be a travel blog where the writer shares his or her experiences and recommendations for future traveling, information provided in experience formats are mainly primary information.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Online Channels | Offline Channels |
| Advice format  (Professional) | *Travel websites (tripadvisory.com)*  *Deal websites (Groupon)*  *Recommendations (lonely planet)* | *Travel agencies*  *Advertising (television)*  *Written Media (brochures)* |
| Experience format  (Personal) | *Blogs (tripod.com)*  *Social Media (Facebook)*  *Electronic Word-Of-Mouth* | *Word- of- Mouth* |

Focus Study 1

Focus Study 2

Throughout the research we will keep this division of sources and platforms in mind. In the first study we will mainly look at the table vertically: the difference between online and offline channels. The second study will focus only on the online column, as we hope to find a significant importance for the online travel recommendations. Here we will look at the difference between professional and personal platforms. With this study we hope to be able to establish which platforms are most effective and preferred in which state. Eventually we will be able to determine whether and which travel recommendations are most effective and in which manner to use which type of recommendation.

## Construction Variables

Online travel recommendations provide a consumer with information; this information can influence beliefs and attitudes, which in turn influences people’s behaviour (Sparks, Perkens, & Buckley, 2013) (Dickinger, 2011). This is the key for our research, as we want to determine in which stage, which types of online travel recommendations are most effective (preferred). When this is known, you can influence people in the right manner and adjust your efforts to this knowledge. As previous literature has stated, attitudes and beliefs can be influenced by three main terms; message source, trustworthiness and credibility (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). In our research we maintained these variables and adjusted them to fit in our two studies. We transformed message source into suitability and trustworthiness into reliability.

## Study 1: Online versus Offline

In the first study we wish to determine the general perception that people have about online and offline sources. The main goal of this study will be to establish which platform is most popular, used most often and by which type of people. What are peoples’ preferences and perceptions of online versus offline recommendations when concerning travel plans? Are offline sources still used as much as they used to be? This study will illustrate the importance of online travel recommendations. Considering the table above we will focus on both (online and offline) columns, as this difference is the main consideration. Furthermore to establish the difference between online and offline we will solely focus on the advice format to ensure conclusive results and because these sources are easier to compare. Word-of-Mouth in offline content is less tangible to measure.

Graphic reproduction for Study 1

**Online recommendations are more popular than offline recommendations**

H1: *Intention to use is greater for online travel recommendations than for offline travel recommendations.*

Variable testing: *intention to use*

This first hypothesis will determine whether online is used more frequently than offline travel recommendations. We believe that people nowadays use the Internet more to consult on travel advice rather then heading to a travel agency. The Internet (online sources) is accessed every day and provides an easy, quick and efficient method of looking up information (Gelb & Sundaram, 2002). Buhalis and Law find similar results in their paper on technology in the tourism market: “developments in search engines, carrying capacity and speed of networks have influenced the number of travellers around the world that use technologies for planning and experiencing their travels” (Buhalis & Law, 2008).

**Online recommendations are used more when experience is greater than offline recommendations.**

H2: User experience is higher for online recommendations than for offline recommendations

Variable testing: *experience*

As mentioned in the literature review we see that people that use the Internet often have more “experience” with the Internet and might be more likely to consult the Internet for travel recommendations (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). On the other hand we expect that “light users”, people whom rarely use the internet, and thus are less experienced might be more likely to consult offline sources. Above you see a graphic point-of-view of what we expect to find.

**Online recommendations are perceived less reliable than offline recommendations**

H3a: Perceived reliability is higher for offline recommendations than for online recommendations

H3b: Perceived credibility is higher for offline recommendations than for online recommendations

Variable testing: *reliability* and *credibility*

The third hypothesis is constructed to see whether online recommendations are perceived less credible and reliable than offline recommendations. Reliability of the source, credibility of the content and value of the information for the consumer determine trust in the Internet (Dutton & Sheperd, 2003). Even though the Internet is easy, quick and extremely popular, it is also accessible for anyone to upload information, which can lead to devalued trust in the Internet (Dutton & Sheperd, 2003). Take Wikipedia for example, you can add any information about any subject you desire, therefore the “trust” in this particular Internet source is extremely low. As literature shows that trust in a certain source is composed of both reliability and credibility of the source, and the Internet provides an open opportunity for anyone to deliver information we rationally expected this to be higher for offline sources. Here the source is direct instead of unknown and indirect (Dutton & Sheperd, 2003). My question here is whether people have enough trust in online sources. As most offline sources are “advice formats” and thus in general based on facts, we believe these platforms will have a higher level of credibility and reliability as opposed to the online sources. We also believe that the greater the experience the lesser the trust will be in the Internet; a heavy user of the Internet notices the input of the non-factional information and therefore might have less trust in sources on the Internet.

**Usage of Online and Offline recommendations**

H4a: During the *Dreaming stage* online recommendations are used more than offline recommendations.

H4b: During the *Planning stage* online recommendations are used more than offline recommendations

H4c: During the *Booking stage* online recommendations are used less than offline recommendations

H4d: During the *Experience stage* online recommendations are used more than offline recommendations

H4e: During the *Sharing stage* online recommendations are used more than offline recommendations

To test the preference between online and offline we tested their indicated usage in every stage. The respondents will be asked to determine in which amount they use the platforms in every stage.

With these hypotheses we wish to determine whether people use both forms of recommendations (online and offline) and in which manner. People will be tested in which stages of their travelling they use online sources or offline information. Google establishes five stages of travel, which they feel travellers go through when travelling (Bitzzer, 2012). By logic we conducted the above stated hypotheses, taking into account what the main purpose of each stage inclined.

Below the stages are briefly described[[3]](#footnote-3).

1. Dreaming: The idea of travelling is created through an impulse.

2. Planning: The customer visits different websites to inform him/herself about possibilities.

3. Booking: The actual booking of the trip, confirming the travel.

4. Experience: During this travels people look up information/tips/advice.

5. Sharing: After the traveling people like to share their experiences

According to the description provided above and in the appendix, we expect that in general in every stage online platforms will be preferred above offline platforms. This is mainly due to easy and worldwide access to Internet that in general online will be used more often than the offline platform (Buhalis & Law, 2008). We expect one exception in the preference for online, namely in the booking stage. We believe that a great deal of the respondents and people in general are still a bit hesitant for booking their travels online . The trust in the Internet is not entirely similar to transactions face-to-face yet. Especially amongst the older generations certain distrust is present when it concerns personal information in particular banking information (Giannakoudi, 2010) (Dutton & Sheperd, 2003). Therefore our hypothesis concerning the booking stage reads the opposite direction compared to the others, here we expect that offline will have more preference than online sources.

After this study I will be able to determine the trends and preference that exist within the travel recommendation market and define the correct relationship between online and offline formats. This study will provide a general overview of the perceptions between online and offline and hopefully prove the importance and shift in usage from offline to online (Gelb & Sundaram, 2002). It will illustrate the importance of the following study, which focuses on the online travel industry.

## Study 2: Effectiveness within different types of online recommendations

In this second study we will focus on the online sources of travel recommendations. The goal is to see which forms of online travel recommendations are most effective for customers. Looking back at the table above we will focus on only the left column (online channels) but consider both formats. The distinction between experience and advice formats will be tested on the variables shown below to determine how people view different types of online recommendations due to which components. To narrow my study, and make it possible to test my hypotheses we chose one form of each format.



Conceptual model for study 2

**Within the online content advice formats are perceived less identifiable than the experience formats**

H5a: Suitability will be higher for Blogs than for Recommendations during the Dreaming stage

H5b: Suitability will be higher for Recommendations than for Blogs during the Planning stage

Variable testing: *suitability* (connection to the source)

This hypothesis will test the suitability of the type of recommendation. This will show us to which type of online travel recommendations the user can identify him/herself with the best (Sparks, Perkens, & Buckley, 2013). We expect that people will have a higher “suitability” with experience formats as these provide a more personal contribution to which a viewer can relate. We feel this variable is important because it will provide the user with a better (or worse) emotional connection and thus will influence his or her perception on the website as a whole (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). Furthermore, we expect that the suitability level will be higher for blogs than for recommendations when respondents are primed to the dreaming stage, because during this stage there is no concrete plan yet and so they can get more inspired by personal experiences than official websites. Vice versa, we believe that recommendations will have a higher suitability throughout the planning stage, because people have an idea of what they want and will want to look into this plan further and more specifically.

**Within the online content advice formats are perceived more reliable than the experience formats**

H6a: Reliability will be higher for Recommendations than for blogs during the Dreaming stage.

H6b: Reliability will be higher for Recommendations than for Blogs during the Planning stage.

Variable testing: *reliability*

In this hypothesis we will test the formats on their perceived reliability. Similar to the first study we expect that the reliability will be higher for advice formats as these sites state more facts and are not solely based on experiences by individuals (Bhattacherjee & Sandford, 2006). Literature also shows that reliability is closely associated with trustworthiness, a term that in general will be higher for official and factual sites as opposed to online reviews (Yoo, Lee, Gretzel, & Fesenmaier, 2009). Dickinger (2011) also believes that throughout the entire process of ones’ travels, official recommendations sites will be trusted more than blogs. Usage will be relevant in this hypothesis as well; as usage is linked to the individual (age and generation) will affect experiences on the Internet. Younger and heavier users who use the Internet frequently know where to look and will trust experience format more often than older generation users (light users).

**Within the online content advice formats are perceived more credible than the experience formats**

H7a: Credibility will be higher for recommendations than for blogs during the Dreaming stage.

H7b: Credibility will be higher for recommendations than for blogs during the Planning stage.

Variable testing: *credibility*

In this hypothesis we will take credibility into consideration. Do people take the source as to be true? Regarding this variable a lot of diversity exists in opinions. Where Gretzel and Yoo state that online reviews have a higher level of credibility than any other source of information provided online others say the contrary (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). Akehurst for instance argues that third-party reviews are less credible than official websites because the context is based on one’s perception (Akehurst, 2009; Dickinger 2011). We feel Akehursts’ and Dickingers’ arguments fit more with our study. We expect that credibility will be higher for recommendations in both stages because the information provided on recommendation sites is more factual. Blogs consist of experience information, which is less factual (Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Scwartz, 2004).

**The experience formats are used more above the advice formats**

H8a: For weekend trips perceived preference will be higher for Blogs than for Recommendations during the Dreaming stage

H8b: For weekend trips perceived preference will be higher for Blogs than for Recommendations during the Planning stage

H8c: For business trips perceived preference will be higher for Recommendations than for Blogs during the Dreaming stage

H8d: For business trips perceived preference will be higher for Recommendations than for Blogs during the Planning stage

H8e: For a vacation with friends perceived preference will be higher for Blogs than for Recommendations during the Dreaming stage

H8f: For a vacation with friends perceived preference will be higher for Blogs than for Recommendations during the Planning stage

H8g: For a vacation with family perceived preference will be higher for Recommendations than for Blogs during the Dreaming stage

H8h: For a vacation with family perceived preference will be higher for Recommendations than for Blogs during the Planning stage

H8i: For a monthly travel to a unknown destinations perceived preference will be higher for Blogs than for Recommendations during the Dreaming stage

H8j: For a monthly travel to a unknown destinations perceived preference will be higher for Blogs than for Recommendations during the Planning stage

Variable testing: *usage*

In these hypotheses we will try to determine whether Blogs or Recommendations are used more often per decision stage and per type of travel. We added this extra moderating variable to refine the factor usage. To add the most common types of travel, according to Calantone and Schewe, can better determine in which situation which platform is preferred more (Calantone & Schewe, 1987).

In general we expect that experience format is used more amongst heavy Internet and young users, as they are active on the Internet and play into the social media hype (Gelb & Sundaram, 2002). This hype consists of reading blogs, tweeting about experiences and posting about experiences abroad (Dickinger, 2011). On the contrary we expect that the older generation might prefer advice formats, such as travel websites, as these state more facts and general useful information. Furthermore we expect that the decision stage will vary the usage even more. As the two stages we look into differ in means of usage; during the planning stage people will want to inform themselves about their options where in the booking stage they will want to look at certain sites more directly and more specifically adjust their search pattern (Lin, Lee, & Horng, 2011).

After this study we will be able to determine which format provides the most reliable and credible information, which formats are preferred and which format provides the best insight and connection to the consumer given the decision stage the consumer is in. This will offer website providers and bloggers a better insight into different aspects to focus on, attract and maintain viewers.

# Methodology

## Participants

We will conduct two online questionnaires that we will distribute through different Facebook groups, several LinkedIn circles and mailings to friends and acquaintances of parents and other family members. We chose for LinkedIn and mailings because this will expand the population tested with people who are more likely to be “light users”. People that do not have Facebook, that are older and more professional will be included in my research so we can compare different social groups to make conclusions more conclusive.

## Design

To research the hypotheses two surveys were conducted and distributed online. They were distributed individually so respondents were not asked both sets at the same time. This was done to ensure responsiveness amongst respondents and so they were not compromised by questions between the two studies.

The first study was conducted via a questionnaire with in total 19 questions. The first questions were some general questions about age and education followed by the manner in which they use the Internet, about their travel habits and use of offline and online travel recommendations. Then the respondents were asked to answer questions about two images, one displaying an offline travel recommendation platform (a travel agency) and the other displaying an online travel recommendation. This study mainly focuses on the difference in use between online and offline platforms.

The second study was conducted in the online atmosphere. This study was preformed to examine the difference between experience and advice types of recommendations. A stimulus was added to prime the respondents into one of the two decision stages. The questionnaire consisted of 29 questions in total, starting again with some basic information about the respondents and his/her habits on the Internet. After which they were primed, via a short message, and asked to answer questions about two images once again. The first image represented the experience format; a blog (travelpod.com) and the second image represented an advice format, an official travel recommendation site (the lonely planet). Blogs are a well-known platform for sharing experiences about previous travel destinations and future plans.

We chose recommendations to represent the advice format as these reviews are most often written to advice others about certain travel aspects. We used a well-known travel website, the lonely planet.

## Measurements

In this part of the thesis the variables used in the thesis will be explained and framed. As mentioned a general link exists between *usage* and *age/generation*. This entails that “*heavy users*” are usually of the younger generation with a lot of experience with the Internet. They are always online and use social media as a second nature. “*Light users*” are people of the older generation, who did not grow up using the Internet and are slightly less aware of the possibilities the Internet provides. This will also be tested in the general part of the survey.

### Dependent Variable

*Preference*

Preference is the dependent variable in our research. For both studies it was one of the main questions which platform was preferred. In the first study whether it was online or offline and in the second study in which situations advice sources or experience sources are preferred. Measuring preference however showed some difficulty. As testing choice data, amongst survey respondents in our case, can have low validity over the population (Grune, 2004). Testing an actual preference for a larger population asks for a well-defined scale and broad sample size (Locke, Piche, & Windsor, 1994). We tested preference according to a scale provided by the handbook of scales in our first study (Bearden & Netemeyer, 1998). Also to ensure that we got a good perspective on preference in general we added an independent variable namely *intention to use*. As preference would logically lead to a greater intention to use, we found that this was a good addition to test this variable.[[4]](#footnote-4) In the second study we tested preference via a regression analysis.

### Independent Variables

Below you find a description of the independent variables we used to conduct the surveys and set up the conceptual models. The marketing scales used to test these variables were extracted from the book “Handbook of Marketing Scales” written by William O. Bearden and Richard G. Netemeyer (Bearden & Netemeyer, 1998).

*Reliability*

The term reliability is an essential key in statistical research, as we feel it is in our research as well. When consumers feel products and services are reliable they are more inclined to use them, advice others about them and re-use them in the next cycle (Long, Muir, & Golding, 1995). To test this variable we used the “Handbook of Marketing Scales” and adjusted the propositions at minimal level to correspond with our research about travel recommendations. [[5]](#footnote-5)

*Credibility*

As previous literature finds, a large amount of experience may raise more superstition to the credibility of online sources. As we are well aware, that the Internet provides a base for anyone to post anything online. As Kalthenheuser states “the internet gives scam artist a new cloak for anonymity while making it easier to lure larger number of victims online” (Kalthenheuser, 2000, p.10). When an Internet user has a lot of “experience” on the Internet they are exposed to many sources and thus to many different types of information. This can lead to less credibility. Experienced consumers more often rate offline sources as more credible than online sources (Klein and Ford, 2003). The scale used to measure credibility can be found in the appendices.

*Suitability*

Suitability is a term in this research used to indicate to which content the reader/user “connects” to and with the sources. It measures the content to which he or she can identify him/herself to the recommendation. We felt this is an important aspect to our research because when the reader of a recommendation (whether online or offline) feels connected to the source, he will value the source higher. When he or she completely disagrees with the read recommendation this can have several impacts; he may dislike the content of the source even further making it unlikely to travel to this specific content, visit this specific area or even retain from using this source in general (Lankford & Howard, 1994). Asking respondents to answer six propositions on a 5-point Likert scale tested the variable suitability.[[6]](#footnote-6)

*Experience/ Usage*

When we consider the variable experience this is mainly to measure the difference amongst generations. Were kids nowadays are raised not knowing a world without the Internet or the access to it, elderly people are desperately trying to keep up with the fast moving and changing world. Therefore we included a variable that establishes this difference, especially for Study 1 as we believe people with a lot of experience with the Internet are more likely to consider online information sources than people with less experience (Klein and Ford, 2003). To define the variable “experience” we used the “time that a person has used the Internet”. (Cheema and Papatla, 2010). Richard and Chandra (2005) confirm this relationship by stating that they believe that “*consumers that consider themselves to be more skilled with the use of Internet are more likely to use the Internet for exploratory behaviour such as information seeking*.” (Richard and Chandra, 2005)

I expect that the relationship will be mostly positive for the more experience a person has using the internet the less the search costs will be and thus the faster the results will come about which will lead to more online usage. Secondly Hoffman and Novak (1996) also suggest a positive relationship because they state that more experienced people will enjoy the Internet more (easier to use) and be more accepting of the information found online. This then would lead to and increase in use of online information sources and circling back to a growth in experience (Novak et al., 2000).

### Moderating Variable

The moderating variable in the second study is the phase in the decision stage the consumer is in. Google has constructed “Five Stages of Travel” which paints a clear picture of the different phases a potential traveller goes through during his/her travels. (Bittzer, 2012)

Stage 1: Dreaming: In this stage the idea is created via any kind of impulse. The consumer becomes a potential traveller. In 2011, 49% of leisure travellers reported researching online travel information after having spotted an online ad. This phase can be influenced through different channels online: e-mail marketing, social media or for example blogs.

Stage 2: Planning: Throughout this phase the customer visits different websites to inform him/herself about possibilities. On average a leisure traveller visits over twenty different travel websites before continuing to the next phase. Also researched is that 62% of these leisure travellers actually using the Internet for researching their trip. Confirming the statement in study 1, that online is used often for travel information.

Stage 3: Booking: For most travel websites this phase is the most important stage. This confirms the arrival or booking of the traveller, and guarantees the receiver the payment.

Stage 4: Experience: This phase takes place during the travelling. As 53% of the travellers use a mobile device to find travel-related information, it is important to maintain the standard promised.

Stage 5: Sharing: After the traveling people like to share their experiences (53% of leisure travellers say they share their vacation pictures online). It works the other way around as well, 49% of the leisure travellers confirm that they like reading about other experiences online, reviews, opinions and other general travel information. (Bittzer, 2012)

Within this research will in particular look at the first two stages; the *dreaming* and the *planning* stage. We feel that these two stages are most interesting for Internet users. Online travel recommendations are read the most throughout these two stages. We expect that there will be a significant difference of platform use in each stage. The first stage will be included because within this stage the general idea of travelling is started. A seed is planted in a soon to be traveller, a stage in which provides of travel recommendations can influence the consumer to great length (Bittzer, 2012). In the second stage, the planning starts, to make more descriptive plans about their travels. The difference we suspect to find is that people are more likely to use blogs in the dreaming stage and more official recommendations during the planning stage.

The remaining three stages are left out of my research, as these stages are completely separate from the use of different platforms. The *booking stage* concerns actual payment processes which blogs almost never offer.

### Stimulus

To test the moderating variable “decision stage” a stimulus was included in the second survey. At random the respondents received a version of the survey. Each survey included one of the two primes halfway through the survey. The prime was a short story about a certain situation (decision stage) they were supposed to read before answering the questions. Below you can read the stimuli that the respondents received. They were primed in either the dreaming stage or the planning stage.

The stimulus for the dreaming stage was the following text:

Imagine you next vacation.. Where do you want to go?

Imagine you are at the airport right now.. What is your destination of choice?

Traveling starts with a dream..

Has an idea entered your head?

After reading this stimulus, the respondents would unintentionally start fantasizing about travelling to a certain destination. An idea has popped in their head, and with these thoughts they will proceed answering the survey questions.

The stimulus for the planning stage is stated below:

Suppose you have just decided on the destination of your next vacation.

You know exactly where you want to go, when you will be doing this and with whom..

How do you proceed?

Here the respondent is asked about a procedure, triggering him or her to actively think about how they would plan or go about their travels. Unintentionally they are primed to think in action instead of dreaming.

# Analysis Findings

## Study 1: Online versus Offline

Factor Analysis

Before starting the analysis of our first study we ran a factor analysis to detect a structure in the relationships between variables, to check for dimensionality of the constructs and to create a more manageable dataset. As there are sufficient inter-correlations amongst most variables we used the MSA (measure of sampling adequacy) method to see if factor analysis would be possible. We found high values for all variables (above 0,55) except for one; preference proposition 6 which had an MSA value of 0,351. This variable was removed from the data set. Via the extraction method we preformed a Principal Component Analysis and removed variables that had a value below 0,30.

Then we looked at the Eigen Value and the Scree plot; 12 components had an Eigen Value above 1, the elbow in the scree plot confirmed this. We then rotated the initial solution an interpreted the factors. Twelve variables remained in the study. Later in this chapter’ findings they will be separately tested on Cronbachs alpha to test them on reliability.

General findings population

In total 108 people where surveyed, of whom 93 finished the survey entirely. The 15 respondents with missing values were eliminated and excluded from the research. The remaining 93 respondents consist of 42 males and 51 females. Most respondents (45%) are aged 19 to 23 years old, 29% where slightly older; 24 to 28 years, only 4,1% are 19 to 34 years old, almost 19% are 35 years or older and only 3% are 18 years or younger. This provides a wide variety of ages, which provides a good base for the research as we have young respondents but also a significant amount of 35 and older respondents, whom are more likely to use offline sources than younger ages. The majority of the respondents are highly educated, almost 65% have a University degree or are studying at University and 22,5% indicates to have an HBO-diploma. The remaining 12 respondents indicate to have finished or study at MBO-level (7) and 5 respondents’ highest achieved education is high school at the moment.

When questioning the respondents about their Internet usage on daily basis not a single respondent indicated to never use Internet on daily basis. Only 4% reported to use the Internet less than one hour a day. 36,5% of the respondents claimed to use the Internet 1 to 3 hours a day, as well as 3 to 6 hours a day, both answer possibilities had 34 responses. 19 (20,4%) respondents said to use the Internet six to nine hours a day and two respondents (2,1%) revealed to use the Internet more than 9 hours a day. When comparing age to the daily access of the Internet we get the following results.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| INTERNET ACCESS | | | | | | |
| AGE | LESS THAN AN HOUR | 1- 3 HOURS | 3 – 6 HOURS | 6 – 9 HOURS | MORE THAN 9 HOURS | TOTAL |
| 18 YOUNGER | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 3 |
| 19 – 23 YEARS | 0 | 11 | 18 | 11 | 2 | 42 |
| 24 – 28 YEARS | 1 | 6 | 15 | 5 | 0 | 27 |
| 29 – 34 YEARS | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| 35 AND OLDER | 3 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 17 |
| TOTAL | 4 | 34 | 34 | 19 | 2 | 93 |

We see that ages 19-28 use the Internet on very regular basis with an average of 4 hours a day. The ages of 29 and older use the Internet significantly less, on average mainly between 1 to three hours a day, with an outlier in the age category 29-34 whom uses it 3 to 6 hours a day. The negative but significant (α = 0,00) correlation (Pearson correlation = -0,576) between age and usage confirm these results.

The survey also asked about the respondents about their yearly travels, they were asked to indicate how many weeks they travel throughout a year. Only one respondent said to never travel as well as the one respondent who said to travel less than one week a year. Twenty respondents (21,5%) travel 2 to three weeks, while the majority of the population travel 3 to 4 weeks (32,3%). Nineteen people say to travel 4 to 5 weeks, eight people travel between 5 to 6 weeks and the rest of the respondents indicate to travel more than six weeks a year (14%). When comparing age to yearly travels we find interesting results. One might think that the older the respondent is, the more they travel, more money to spend, more business trips to take. However, if we look at the 14 respondents that indicated that they travel more than 6 weeks a year, these respondents are all located in two age categories namely (19-23 & 24-28). This is interesting for the research, as we saw earlier that these age categories use the Internet the most. If we turn it around, and merely look at the highest two age categories, which are ages 19 to 34 & 35 and older, containing 21 respondents, we see that they travel on average in the categories 3-4 weeks and 4-5 weeks a year.

Intention to use/preference

H1: *Intention to use is greater for online travel recommendations than for offline travel recommendations.*

To test the preference between online and offline sources seven propositions[[7]](#footnote-7) according to the marketing scales handbook, were respondents could choose between the two platforms, were posed in the survey. To assess whether the reliability of the scale was sufficient, we tested the correlation between these five propositions. All five propositions showed a slightly low result (Cronbach alpha = 0,675). Given that the cut-off point is around 0,70 we examined if it was necessary to remove a proposition, but no other proposition would heighten the alpha.

The new variable “preference” shows the following results; 24 people prefer offline sources significantly more than online, while 69 respondents claim to prefer online sources to offline sources. As a value of 1,5 for the mean of the population would entail “no clear preference,” any value under 1,3 would entail a clear preference for online sources and when the value would be above 1,7 we could conclude the population prefers online sources, as the mean for the whole population is 1,27.

The respondents were also asked to indicate to which probability (0% - 100%) they would use websites and travel agencies when travelling. The average of the respondents using websites was 91.44% (with n = 93), which is extremely high, indicating that almost all respondents use websites when considering travelling, as the lowest probability was 10%. In contrary the same respondents had an average of 23,60% when asked about travel agencies, here the minimum was 0.

Overall we can conclude that online is preferred above offline, when considering that offline sources are mainly considered as travel agencies. Even though most respondents might still use travel agencies their intention to use these offline sources is fairly low, especially compared to the probability of them using websites when considering travelling.

Experience

H2: *User experience is higher for online recommendations than for offline recommendations*

To test this hypothesis we looked at several components within the dataset. The initial base of this hypothesis was to test whether “heavy” Internet users are more likely to use online sources and to greater extent than less heavy users.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Light users  Heavy users | INTERNET ACCESS DAILY | N | PROBABILITY USING OFFLINE | PROBABILITY USING ONLINE | USE OFFLINE | | USE ONLINE | |
| VALUE 1 & 2 | 4 | 37% | 86,25% | 2 | 0,40 | 2,5 | 0,36 |
| VALUE 1- 3 | 38 | 29,13% | 89% | 1,74 | 0,35 | 2,84 | 0,40 |
| VALUE 4 – 6 | 55 | 19,78% | 93% | 1,67 | 0,33 | 3,15 | 0,45 |
| VALUE 6 | 2 | 7,5% | 95% | 1,2 | 0,24 | 4 | 0,57 |

To confirm whether heavy users indeed use more online sources and in contrast, if less heavy users use offline sources more, we sorted the respondents on their indicated base of Internet usage. For example in the first row we see the respondents whom claimed to use the Internet less than an hour a day. On average these respondents are likely to use a travel agency when considering traveling 37% of the time, while 86,25% of the time they would use websites. Furthermore on a 5-point scale, varying from never (1) to always (5) on average they scored a value of 2, when asked to indicate how often they use offline recommendation sources for travelling. The use of online sources was tested on a monthly base, on a 7-point scale, varying from never (1) – daily (7) and the ‘light’ users scored a 2,5. Both measures are fairly low, which makes it hard to distinguish the difference in use. However comparing these figures with heavier users we can see a clear difference.

We see a clear and steep decline in “probability to use offline sources” when respondents are heavier users, as well as a clear increase in “probability to use online sources”. So as expected we see that the more experienced the user is regarding the use of Internet, the more they are likely to use online sources when considering travel recommendations. Also we see that the more “lighter” the users are, the more they tend to use offline travel recommendations (travel agencies). We see the same patterns in the last two columns. The first value is the average amongst the respondents, the second provides a percentile value according to the scales, and so we can compare the values.

Reliability & Credibility

H3a: *Perceived reliability is higher for offline recommendations than for online recommendations*

To compose the output for the variable reliability the survey contained five propositions[[8]](#footnote-8) per platform, which needed to be tested whether the results showed a high enough correlation. The respondents were asked to indicate to which degree they agreed or disagreed (5-point Likert scale) for both online and offline recommendations. For the offline recommendations we found a significantly high reliability of the scale (Cronbach alpha = 0,883). If the second proposition would be deleted this would be even higher (Cronbach alpha = 0,888). However this proposition will remain in the results, as the difference is not significantly higher. Regarding the same propositions for the online source we also found a significant result (Cronbach alpha = 0,880) meaning there is enough evidence that these can be combined into one output figure. Removing the second proposition would also give a better result (Cronbach alpha = 0,881) but again not significantly high enough to remove one out of the five propositions.

The two new computed variables indicate per source (online & offline) how reliable respondents feel the source is. The reliability of offline sources have a slightly wider range (3,80) than online sources do (3), meaning the opinions of the reliability of offline sources are more varied. Offline reliability varies from 1,20 to the maximum of 5, while online reliability varies from a higher minimum (2,00) to the same maximum of 5. This means that the reliability of online sources in general is perceived higher.

Comparing the means with a dependent paired t-test we see that there is significant difference at both 95% and 99% confidence interval (t (92) = -5,033 with p = 0,00). Online reliability shows a higher (difference = 0,35914) average mean (3,6366) than the average mean of offline reliability (3,2774). So we can state that the perceived reliability of online sources is higher than offline sources. This is in contrast with our hypothesis. As we expected that is would be higher for offline sources.

H3b: *Perceived credibility is higher for offline recommendations than for online recommendations*

Just as for the previous variables, for the variable credibility we first needed to check whether the correlation would be high enough to be able to combine the results into one variable. As expected we found a high correlation between the eleven propositions[[9]](#footnote-9) (Cronbach alpha = 0,901) and as opposed to the previous variables the value would only lessen by removing a proposition.

This variable was tested differently from the variable reliability, as the propositions where tested paired instead of individually. This measure the compared difference directly, as in the propositions the respondents were asked to indicate to which degree they agreed/disagreed with the statement that offline recommendations were valued higher (proposition) than online. Entailing that a low value meant they did not agree that offline is valued higher and vice versa. The results of the one-sample t-test compared the output to the standard average of 3 (values have the range of 1 -5). The mean average of the output was 2,9589, which is very close to the average 3. The t-test showed the same result T (92) = - 0,547 with a significance level of (p = 0,586). Therefore we can assume that there is no significant difference between the platforms concerning their credibility.

Usage

For the hypotheses concerning the different stages and the opinions between online and offline, we conducted five separate paired sample T-tests, for each decision stage. To test whether significant differences between online and offline sources exist. Respondents indicated per decision stage to which extent they used online and offline sources.

H4a: *During the Dreaming stage online recommendations are used more than offline recommendations*

We test the theory that the mean of the usage of online sources is significantly higher than the use of offline sources when people are in the dreaming stage of their travel plans. We find T (92) = 12,772 with a significance level of (p = 0,00). Therefore we can determine that there is significant difference between the uses of the sources. As the mean difference is given at 2, 183 on a 5-point scale, we can also conclude that online recommendations are used significantly more than offline recommendations during the dreaming stage (mean online dreaming = 3,90 and mean offline dreaming = 1,72).

H4b: *During the Planning stage online recommendations are used more than offline recommendations*

For this stage of travel we also expect that online recommendations are used more than offline recommendations as the traveller is still in its’ early process of choosing and deciding. The Internet provides free and numerous possibilities to look into destinations and other specifics. For this hypothesis we found the following results. T (92) = 14.698 with a significance level of p = 0,00, stating that the difference between the two means is significant (mean difference = 2,097) and confirming our hypothesis that online recommendations are used more than offline recommendations.

H4c: *During the Booking stage online recommendations are used less than offline recommendations*

As opposed to the previous two hypotheses we expect that the usage of the different sources will be the other way around. In this stage the actual booking is being done and as “trust” can be still be lower for money transactions (Giannakoudi, 2010), it is likely to assume that travellers prefer to book at offline sources. Test results show a significant difference (p = 0,00) between the two sources, but not the way expected. On average people use online booking sources more (mean = 3,96) than they book offline (mean = 1,98). Our hypothesis is rejected.

H4d: *During the Experience stage online recommendations are used more than offline recommendations*

The experience stage takes place during the travel, and considers all the sources that travellers use to look up information needed for their experience. Therefore we expect that online sources will be used more than offline, as most accommodations (restaurants, bars and hotels) have Wi-Fi and every corner has an Internet-café. Our expectations conclude with the test results, as they show a significant difference in means (difference = 1,505 with p= 0,00). Online recommendations are indeed used more than offline sources.

H4e: *During the Sharing stage online recommendations are used more than offline recommendations*

The final stage in the five-stages-of-travel from Google is the sharing stage. This stage has existed for years, as people share their experiences in different ways. Nowadays, via the Internet, sharing has become more popular as possibilities to do so have increased (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Sharing photo’s, tips and other experiences online has become one of the main purposes of social media and blogging (Zheng & Gretzel, 2010). Therefore we expect that the online use of recommendations will be higher than offline recommendations in this stage of travel.Like the above found results, for this hypothesis again the results show significant difference between means (mean difference = 1,183 and significant p = 0,00). So our hypothesis is not rejected so during the sharing stage online sources are preferred to offline sources.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| HYPOTHESIS |  | EXPECTED | RESULT | SUPPORTED? |
| H1: INTENTION TO USE |  | ONLINE > OFFLINE | ONLINE | YES |
| H2 EXPERIENCE |  | ONLINE > OFFLINE | ONLINE | YES |
| H3 RELIABILITY | A | ONLINE < OFFLINE | ONLINE | NO |
| H3 CREDIBILITY | B | ONLINE < OFFLINE | NO SIG DIFFERENCE | NO |
| H4 USAGE | A | DREAMING: ONLINE > OFFLINE | ONLINE | YES |
|  | B | PLANNING: ONLINE > OFFLINE | ONLINE | YES |
|  | C | BOOKING: ONLINE < OFFLINE | ONLINE | NO |
|  | D | EXPERIENCE: ONLINE > OFFLINE | ONLINE | YES |
|  | E | SHARING: ONLINE > OFFLINE | ONLINE | YES |

In conclusion we see that in every stage online is used significantly more than offline platforms. We see the biggest differences in usage between the first two stages (dreaming & planning). This provides a good base for the second research, as we look further into the types of online travel recommendations and focus on the first two stages of travel. The smallest difference is found at the “experience” stage, which can be due to the extreme different platforms of offline recommendations, this can be seen as Word-of-Mouth and as travel agencies, which makes the results more variable. Our results are summarized in the table above.

## Study 2: Effectiveness within different types of online recommendations

As mentioned previously the second study contained two different stimuli to research the difference between two of the five decision stages. As well as determining in which stage, which type of recommendation was most efficient and preferred.

Factor Analysis

As explained in the previous study, in order to preform statistical analysis on the dataset required by the second survey we needed to preform a factor analysis. For this dataset we were not sure that some of the variables would be correlated we looked at the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure (KMO) to test whether a factor analysis was appropriate. The output gave us enough insurance that it correlated strongly enough: KMO= 0,853 with a significance level of 0,00. As this value is lies between 0,8 and 0,9 it is significantly high enough (meritorious). None of the questions needed to be removed (also checked via MSA, no values were below 0,55). We then used the principal component analysis as extraction method, none of the measures showed a result below 0,30 (minimum = 0,683). Finally we looked at the Eigen Values and Scree plot and found that 14 factors underlie the data. As in the previous study, they looked at each factor separately below and tested them on reliability individually.

General findings population

The second study was conducted online and received 151 respondents (N= 151). The sample size was almost evenly distributed with 50,3% males (m= 76) and 49,7% females (f=75). Furthermore the stimulus was assigned randomly via the Internet resulting in 74 respondents being primed in the “dreaming” stage and the remaining 77 in the “planning” stage.

If we look at the age distribution we see two main categories of respondents; the highest volume age-category was ages 24 to 28 which contained 61 respondents (40,4%) and the second highest surprisingly was ages 35 and up, which took 35,1% (53 respondents). Additionally 19,9% of the respondents have the age between 19 and 23 with a total of 30 respondents and 2.6% indicated to be between the age of 29 and 34 (4 people). Finally only 3 people were 18 years old or younger (2%). As we mentioned previously, it is important for the research to have a wide distribution of ages because different generations use the Internet different, directly influencing their online travel recommendation usage and also travel differently, because of their household and income situations. Therefore this turns out to be good for the research as we have two main categories of significant different generations.

Respondents were also asked to indicate their highest achieved education; education eventually influences income and preference, which leads to different travel plans and destinations. Nine respondents’ highest education was high school and nine respondents who had MBO-level, both taking 6% of the respondents. 46 respondents revealed to study or have finished at HBO-level (30,5%) and the remaining 57,6%, more than half of the respondents have studied/are studying at University.

Similar to the first study the question about the average access to Internet was tested. The largest two categories took 37,1% of the respondents (in total 56 people) and indicated to use the Internet 3 to 6 hours a day. The second largest group was 33,1% of the respondents (in total 50) and indicated to use the Internet 1 to 3 hours a day. Furthermore 23 respondents said to use the Internet 6 to 9 hours a day (15,2%). The tails of the answer possibilities took up 6% at the top (more than 9 hours a day) and 8,6% (less than one hour a day).

If we look at the correlation between the abovementioned variables we see that indeed the expected negative slope between age and Internet usage is confirmed (correlation = -0,336 with significance of 0,00). Internet is used more amongst younger people. We also tested the correlation between education and Internet access, here we would expect a positive slope. The higher the education, the more use of Internet (correlation = 0,233 and is significant at 0,004), which also turned out to be true.

Usage online travel recommendations

Within the general questions part of the survey respondents were asked about their usage of online travel recommendations. Here the subjects were not yet primed into a travel stage, so the results are conclusive for the entire sample size (n=151).

We first asked the respondents to indicate their usage of online travel recommendations in general a month, similar to the first survey. Of the total respondents 20 said to never read online travel recommendations (13,20%). The largest group took 27,20% per cent and said to read online travel recommendations only once a month. 23,17% claimed to read recommendations online two to three times a month. Following this amount are the people who said to read travel recommendations online once a week which totalled up to 17,90% of the respondents. 10,50% claimed to read online travel recommendations two to three times a week, while 8% said to read them daily.

Another question included in the survey concerning the use of online travel recommendations is which types people use. Here we gave them five different types of online travel recommendations and they were asked to check the boxes of the types that they used. These figures are displayed in the table below.

We see that the majority of the online users use social media types, which include blogs and official travel websites. Combined websites such as tripadvisory.com are very popular as well, they combine the blog aspect of sharing experiences and the official travel website aspect of giving advice. The reason for the last column is because 20 respondents claimed to never read any type of online travel recommendations (see paragraph above).

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Types of Online Travel Recommendation | Amount of Respondents | Percentage on total sample size | Percentage with  N=131 |
| Social Media | 85 | 56,3% | 64,89% |
| Official Travel Websites | 90 | 59,6% | 68,70% |
| Deal Websites | 41 | 27,2% | 31,30% |
| Travel Websites | 43 | 28,5% | 32,82% |
| Combined Websites | 80 | 53% | 61,08% |

Regression Analysis

The dependent variable in our model entails the site or message evaluation, which we measured by testing the respondents perceived preference. Similar to the first study we asked the respondents 6 propositions in order to test their preference. These propositions were tested by asking respondents to indicate which they preferred per proposition, between blogs (=1) or recommendations (=2). Testing this variable on reliability we found a Cronbach alpha of 0,913; high enough to assume that we can combine the propositions. Furthermore, deleting any one of the propositions would only generate a higher Cronbach alpha when deleting proposition 2. However the alpha would rise to 0,921 and we found that this difference was not significant enough.

As the propositions had a range from 1 to 2, so does our new dependent variable. Therefore we can say that from now we see a clear preference for blog when the value lies between 1 (complete preference) to 1,35 (slight preference). Likewise for recommendation we see a clear preference when the value takes 2 and a less, but still significant preference when the value takes 1,65. The values in between 1,36 to 1,64 would entail no significant difference in preference between recommendations or blogs (alpha = 0,05).

As stated in the conceptual model in the methodology chapter we want to test whether and to what content the three main variables in this research influence preference. We preformed a regression analysis to test this extent of influence. Our three main variables, suitability, credibility and reliability are tested in the model and later on in this chapter reviewed individually. As these variables are also assembled from several propositions we preformed comparable reliability analysis to construct separate variables. This is also described later on, but for the regression analysis these variables are used. The following equation was tested:

PREFERENCE = B0 + B1\*Suitability\_Blog + B2\*Suitability\_Recommendation + B3\*Reliability\_Blog + B4\*Reliability\_Recommendation + B5\*Credibility\_Blog + B6\*Credibility\_Recommendation + e

We tested whether other general variables would influence this equation, but found that adding *gender, age, education, and internet\_access* were not significant in the model and effected the impact of the model shown above. Therefore we left the model as described above and looked at the inter correlations separately. Running the dataset through SPSS we found the following results:

PREFERENCE = 1,757 - 0,31\*Suitability\_Blog + 0,10\*Suitability\_Recommendation – 0,25\*Reliability\_Blog + 0,13\*Reliability\_Recommendation – 0,52\*Credibility\_Blog – 0,64\*Credibility\_Recommendation + e

This model has an explanatory value of R2=0,832 which shows that these variables explain 83,20% of the dependent variable. Using this model we have significance for almost all variables in their highest value. The only variable that shows no significance is the last variable; credibility\_recommendation (significance = 0,531). This is also the only variable that shows a different direction than expected because we assume in general that the variables concerning recommendation are expected to be positive. As the value of preference increases this means that the preference goes out to recommendation, while if the value decreases the preference tilts more towards preference for blogs. We see this in our results, all variables concerning blogs are negative and most recommendations have a positive link with the dependent variable. Therefore it makes sense that the last variable is not significant as it is not logical that when credibility for recommendations rises the preference will tilt towards blogs. Looking at the value even further we see that it shows the highest value of all variables in the model.

However, when we delete this variable from the regression we get a less explanatory model, also the deleted variable would be added to the error term. This weighs more heavily than if we leave the variable in the model. Therefore we decided to leave this insignificant variable in our model, to avoid creating a new model with regressors that are estimated with bias for the inter-correlations will be eliminated as well.

Interpreting the results from the model we see that without looking at the variables and purely at the constant (significance = 0,00) the preference leads to a value of 1,757, which shows a clear preference for recommendations. Adding the variables one by one we see a decrease of 0,31 preference with every increase in the suitability of blogs (significance = 0,001). In words; we can say that if the suitability for blogs grows, the preference will tilt more towards blogs (decrease in value of variable preference). We find the same results for other variables of blogs. If the perception of reliability\_blogs (significance = 0,00) of blogs increases the preference will tilt with 0,25 points toward blogs. The highest effect for influencing the preference for blogs is for the variable of credibility (significance = 0,034) with a coefficient of -0,52. This is a quarter shift in the total range of 2. As mentioned the recommendation variable should logically show a positive effect on the dependent variable. We see this for the suitability for recommendations (significance = 0,00) with the coefficient of 0,10 the variable reliability also has a small but slightly higher effect of 0,13 with a significance of 0,005.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Regression Model with n= 151 | | | | |
| Variables | Beta in regression | Beta | Standard Error | P-value |
| Constant (Intercept) | B0 | 1,757 | 0,330 | 0,00 |
| Suitability\_Blog | B1 | -0,31 | 0,002 | 0,001 |
| Suitability\_Recommendation | B2 | 0,10 | 0,003 | 0,00 |
| Reliability\_Blog | B3 | -0,25 | 0,74 | 0,00 |
| Reliability\_Recommendation | B4 | 0,13 | 0,74 | 0,005 |
| Credibility\_Blog | B5 | -0,52 | 0,94 | 0,034 |
| Credibility\_Recommedation | B6 | -0,64 | 0,101 | 0,531 |
| Logistic Regression without outliers preformed at a 5% confidence level  \* Dependent variable = Preference | | | | |

We also see that the variables of recommendations have a smaller effect than the variables for blogs we can explain this on the basis of the constant. This constant is very high indicating an obvious preference for recommendations. Therefore the coefficients for blogs have a higher value, as they have to tilt the preference back to blogs. We can also conclude from the model that preference is influenced more by perceptions on blogs than for recommendations. So when a perception of a blog increases or decreases this will affect the preference more than when the same change is noticed for recommendations.

Suitability

As in the first study we needed to combine most variables into one value in order to test the hypotheses. Again we preformed the reliability analysis to test the propositions on the Cronbach Alpha to see if they correlated highly enough. We found two significant values for the dreaming stage as well as for the planning stage.

*Dreaming\_Blogs = 0,956*

*Dreaming\_Recommendations = 0,941*

*Planning\_Blog = 0,947*

*Planning\_Recommendations = 0,975*

As all these values are well above the border of 0,70 we can safely assume that the propositions are correlated highly. For each of the four values deleting a proposition would not generate a significantly higher alpha. Therefore all propositions were included. Because of theses high values we could form four new variables to test the following hypotheses.

To test to see if there is significant difference between the suitability between Blogs and Recommendations per both stages, we performed a paired sample t-test. The propositions of suitability were tested with a probability factor, which could take the values between 0 and 100.

*H5a: Suitability will be higher for Blogs than for Recommendations during the Dreaming stage*

First looking at the dreaming stage, we find mean differences that on the first hand seem to lie closely together (suitability blogs mean = 63,65, suitability recommendation mean = 70,31) with a mere difference of 6,66. In general these figures are higher than the test value average (50) meaning that the overall respondents feel connected to the source. The t statistic shows a significant difference (T (73) = -2,585, significance level = 0,012). We can conclude that the suitability is higher valued for recommendations (lonely planet) than it is perceived for blogs (travelpod). This contradicts with our hypothesis, we expected that people would feel more connected to blogs than to recommendations during the dreaming stage. This means that we reject the hypothesis.

*H5b: Suitability will be higher for Recommendations than for Blogs during the Planning stage*

Suitability during the planning stage shows slightly different results. The average of both platforms show much lower results (suitability blogs mean = 48,80, suitability recommendation mean = 61,96) but a higher difference (mean difference =13,165). As this is a higher difference we would expect that this difference is significant as well. Out t-test results establish this (T (76) = -5,042) with a significance level of 0,00. This significance level is higher than the previous one, establishing that the difference is significantly higher than the difference in the dreaming stage. Here we can now state that indeed the perceived suitability for recommendations is higher than for blogs during the planning stage.

Reliability

To test the variable reliability we included similiar questions in the survey as we did in the first study. This makes the variable testing similar to the previous one. The variables were tested separately between blogs and official recommendations, also because the respondents were primed, we tested Cronbach alpha on four different groups. The following results were found.

*Dreaming\_Blogs = 0,847*

*Dreaming\_Recommendations = 0,904*

*Planning\_Blog = 0,892*

*Planning\_Recommendations = 0,881*

For each value it was possible to make it higher by deleting a variable, although the difference was not significantly higher. Also in each case it were different propositions to be deleted, and we found that this would lessen the textual value of the study. Four new variables were combined to test the below stated variables.

To test the difference of perceived reliability on blogs and recommendations we preformed a paired sample t-test per travel stage. The value that each given propositions could assume was based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (strongly disagree (1) – strongly agree (5)).

*H6a: Reliability will be higher for Recommendations than for blogs during the Dreaming stage.*

In total, 74 respondents were primed in the dreaming stage and were asked to indicate their perceived reliability of a blog and recommendation. The average value of blogs was 3,6, which indicates that for most respondents find blogs fairly reliable. The average given for recommendations was slightly higher (reliability recommendation mean = 3,7). Test results show no significant difference between the perceived reliability between the two platforms (T (73) = -1,027, significance level = 0,308). As we see 0,308 is larger than 0,5 so we can assume that the perceived reliability does not differ between the two stages, and the hypothesis is rejected.

*H6b: Reliability will be higher for Recommendations than for Blogs during the Planning stage.*

Looking at the second stage of the travel stages we find different results. Where in the dreaming stage there was no significant difference between the platforms, here in the primed planning stage results show a significant difference (T (76) = -6,728 with significance level = 0,00). Looking at the averages of both platforms we see that recommendations (lonely planet) scores higher (mean = 3,7) than the perceived reliability of blogs (mean = 3,6). Overall these values are higher than average (3) meaning that the overall reliability is fairly high. We can conclude that the hypothesis given above is supported; the perceived reliability for recommendations is higher than for blogs during the planning stage.

Credibility

Concerning credibility, we tested this variable differently than in the first study. In this study we tested the eleven propositions separately per type of online travel recommendation (blog and official website). Therefore we have four new variables with significant correlation within the groups to combine them into four new variables. The Cronbach alphas are shown below.

*Dreaming\_Blogs = 0,881*

*Dreaming\_Recommendations = 0,913*

*Planning\_Blog = 0,887*

*Planning\_Recommendations = 0,924*

After establishing that the new variables are correlated enough (all above 0,70) we preformed two paired sample t-tests to determine whether the perceived credibility differs between the two stages. The values of the proposition used to test the variables are on bases of a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree (1) – strongly agree (5)).

*H7a: Credibility will be higher for recommendations than for blogs during the Dreaming stage.*

The primed respondents in the dreaming stage were tested to which matter they found both platforms credible. A t-statistic of -4,892 was found at a significance level of 0,00, indicating that there is a significant difference between the platforms. The total average of the blog platform was found at 3,42 where the average of recommendations was 3,82. This means that credibility is significantly higher for recommendations than it is perceived for blogs. Therefore we can assume that our hypothesis is correct.

*H7b: Credibility will be higher for Recommendations than for Blogs during the Planning stage.*

For the planning stage we also expected that blogs would have a higher average value than it would have for recommendations, because recommendations are of more official and factual content than blogs. Here we found an average of 3,10 for blogs, which indicates credibility to some extent but as the value 3 indicates neither agree or disagree, the credibility is left in the middle. For recommendations the average takes a higher value, 3,76, which indicates a higher level of perceived credibility. The t-statistic here is also significant at 0,00 (T (76) = -7,765), this shows us that there is a significant difference between the perceived credibility between the platforms. Again here, we can assume that our hypothesis is correct, credibility for recommendations is higher during the planning stage than it is for blogs.

Intention to use/usage

To test the intention to use between blogs and recommendations we added an extra moderating variable namely: the type of travel. We differentiated five different types of travel, which we found most common amongst people in our society today (Calantone & Schewe, 1987). To test their intentions we constructed different hypothesis per type of travel and per decision stage. First we researched whether there was a significant difference between the use for blogs and recommendations per decision stage. We preformed one sample t-tests to compare the differences between blogs and recommendations per travel type. As the values of the answer could take 1 or 2, we tested on 1,5 level. Later we examined whether there was a significant difference between the decision stages as a whole.

* Weekend trips

*H8a: For weekend trips Blogs will be used more than Recommendations during the Dreaming stage*

We found a mean of 1.43, which lies closely to the tested value. The t-statistic -1,165 shows a significance level of 0,248, which indicates that there is no significant difference between the preference for blogs or recommendations during the dreaming stage.

*H8b: For weekend trips Blogs will be used more than Recommendations during the Planning stage*

We found the same conclusion for the weekend trips during the planning stage. Here the mean was tilted the other way (1,52), which indicates that more respondents indicated to prefer recommendations. However the test results show no significant difference (T (76)= 0,340 with significance level at 0,735).

* Business trips

We expect that recommendations will be used more when people are travelling on business trips, as these trips are on official business with less leisure aspects.

*H8c: For business trips Blogs will be used less than Recommendations during the Dreaming stage*

The results show a t-statistic of T (73) = 8,439 with a clear significance level of 0,00. This shows us that there is a clear difference in perceived preference, namely for recommendations; 85,1% of the respondents indicated to prefer recommendations. The mean of the test confirms this clear preference (mean = 1,85) as well.

*H8d: For business trips Blogs will be used less than Recommendations during the Planning stage*

The majority of the respondents in the planning stage also indicated to prefer recommendations to blogs (88,3%). The test results confirm this conclusion; T (76) = 10,396 with a significance level of 0,00, tell us that there is a distinct difference between the preferences (mean = 1,88) and that recommendations are preferred.

* Vacation with friends

For the type vacation with friends we expect that usage of blogs will be higher as travelling with friends is often associated with leisure and activities.

*H8e: For a vacation with friends Blogs will be used more than Recommendations during the Dreaming stage*

Within the respondents of the dreaming stage our results corresponds with our hypothesis. The test result show a significant difference between the perceived preference of the respondents: T (73) = -2,143 with a significance level of 0,035. With an average of 1,38 we can conclude that the perceived preference indeed is with blogs (62,2%).

*H8f: For a vacation with friends Blogs will be used more than Recommendations during the Planning stage*

When we look at the respondents primed in the planning stage however, we see no significant difference between the platforms. T (76) = -0,113 with a significance level of 0,910, this indicates that the perceived values do not differ significantly (mean = 1,49). Looking at the percentages in the survey we see this confirmed: Blogs = 50,6% and Recommendations = 49,4%.

* Vacation with family

As family vacations include a household with different ages, and thus different wants and needs within the household, we expect that the perceived preference will be higher for official recommendations. The head of the family, whom is more often than not the eldest, usually books the travel plans and he/she probably uses sites that state more facts and official information.

*H8g: For a vacation with Blogs will be used less than Recommendations during the Dreaming stage*

As expected we find a significant difference between the preferences; T (73) = 3,493 with a significance level of 0,001. The mean within this group is 1,69, indicating that recommendations indeed are preferred to blogs within the dreaming stage (68,9%).

*H8h: For a vacation with family Blogs will be used less than Recommendations during the Planning stage*

As in the dreaming stage, the planning stage shows similar results. The t-statistic (7,707) shows a significant difference between the perceived difference of blogs and recommendations (significance level = 0,00). As the mean is tilted toward the value 2 (1,83) we can conclude that recommendations (83,1%) are highly preferred to blogs.

* Monthly travel to a unknown destination

*H8i: For a monthly travel to an unknown destination Blogs will be used more than Recommendations during the Dreaming stage*

During the dreaming stage future travellers are still in their first process of deciding about their travels. Therefore we expect that blogs will be preferred in this stage, as people look at tips and experiences of other travellers to determine where they would like to go. They might already have a slight idea or dream of where they would like to go; blogs could confirm their expectations in a great manner. However, the test results show no significant difference between the preference between blogs and recommendations; T (73) = 0,463 with a significance level of 0,645, indicating no significant difference. The mean of the test is 1,53, indicating a slight preference for recommendation (52,7%) opposed to blogs (47,3%), but not of significant value.

*H8j: For a monthly travel to an unknown destination Blogs will be used more than Recommendations during the Planning stage*

For the planning stage we would expect a slightly less obvious preference for blogs compared with recommendations, because here people will start planning their trip and official sites are a safer source for these activities. The results confirm this, as the mean (mean = 1,57) is tilted more towards recommendations than it was for the dreaming stage; however again there is no significant difference between blogs and recommendations as T (76) = 1,258 with a significance level higher than 0,05 (0,212).

* Comparison amongst stages

For most types of travel the results show similar means of usage. We can compare these results by looking at the mean of the different types and stages. The range of the values lies between 1 (preference for blogs) to 2 (preference for recommendations). Below you find the table with the means, summarizing the analysis below.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Dreaming stage | | Planning stage | |
| Type of Travel | **Mean** | **Difference in usage** | **Mean** | **Difference in usage** |
| Weekend trips | 1,43 | No sig difference | 1,52 | No sig difference |
| Business trips | 1,85 | Recommendations used more | 1,88 | Recommendations used more |
| Vacation with friends | 1,38 | Blogs used more | 1,49 | No sig difference |
| Vacation with family | 1,69 | Recommendations used more | 1,83 | Recommendations used more |
| Monthly travel to unknown destination | 1,53 | No sig difference | 1,57 | No sig difference |

We see two incoherent results when examining the table. The first thing that we notice is the higher usage for blogs for vacation with friends during the dreaming stage, while during the planning stage we see that there is no clear difference between the two. A reason could be that during the dreaming stage, they merely look for ideas and experiences, whereas during the planning stage they look into a broader range of information. Therefore the usage during the dreaming stage goes out to blogs and later on, during the planning stage they use both equally and hence have no significant difference, even though they are still both tilted towards blogs (below 1,5).

The second aspect we notice is that for most types the mean is tilted in the same direction during both stages; they are either both below the standard average of 1,5 or both above 1,5. However for weekend trips we see that they vary between stages. Both stages indicate no significant preference for either blogs or recommendations, but during the dreaming stage they tend to use more blogs more and during the planning stage they lean more towards recommendations. This is in line with our hypothesis, however no statistical significant evidence is found.

# Conclusion

The data analysis provided us with some expected but also some unexpected results. The lay out of our research was a two-sided research into the phenomenon of travel recommendations. In our first study we analysed whether online travel recommendations are used to significant extent nowadays and to test what the perceived opinions are on the difference between online and offline use of travel recommendations. We expected to find a positive result; that the use of online travel recommendations is indeed of high demand and usage for people that are planning to or are in fact travelling.

To test this difference and usage we formed four hypotheses, considering the accompanying variables and to see which effect they had on the preference of the respondents. As you see in the table below online travel recommendations are preferred in almost every tested manner[[10]](#footnote-10). One exception was found where respondents indicated to have no significant preference between online and offline travel recommendations. This was when we tested the variable credibility. What we can conclude from this data is that when asking about credibility people have no distinct perceived preference between the two types of sources.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| HYPOTHESIS |  | EXPECTED | RESULT | SUPPORTED? |
| H1: INTENTION TO USE |  | ONLINE > OFFLINE | ONLINE | YES |
| H2 EXPERIENCE |  | ONLINE > OFFLINE | ONLINE | YES |
| H3 RELIABILITY | A | ONLINE < OFFLINE | ONLINE | NO |
| H3 CREDIBILITY | B | ONLINE < OFFLINE | NO SIG DIFFERENCE | NO |
| H4 USAGE | A | DREAMING: ONLINE > OFFLINE | ONLINE | YES |
|  | B | PLANNING: ONLINE > OFFLINE | ONLINE | YES |
|  | C | BOOKING: ONLINE < OFFLINE | ONLINE | NO |
|  | D | EXPERIENCE: ONLINE > OFFLINE | ONLINE | YES |
|  | E | SHARING: ONLINE > OFFLINE | ONLINE | YES |

Additionally we see that most hypotheses are supported as we constructed them according to found literature and rational. However this is not the case for the variable reliability. We expected that travellers would perceive offline sources more reliable than online sources, but our results show the contrary. Concerning the last hypothesis where we included the five stages of travel we expected that in any given stage, online would be most popular, which is the case. Our thought that preference would go out to offline sources during the booking stage was rejected. Online is preferred during this stage as well. Our first study provides enough bases to conclude that online world has conquered a lot of ground in the past years concerning the travel world and has become a popular source for people in all stages of their travels.

The second study in this research was aimed to outline certain difference between types of online travel recommendations and define the preference between these types within the first two stages of travel (Bitzzer, 2012). We tested the respondents, primed in one of the two stages, on their preference between the two types of online travel recommendations. Below you find the results.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| HYPOTHESIS |  | EXPECTED | RESULT | SUPPORTED? |
| H5: SUITABILITY | A: DREAMING | BLOG > REC | REC | NO |
|  | B: PLANNING | BLOG < REC | REC | YES |
| H6: RELIABILITY | A: DREAMING | BLOG < REC | NO SIG DIFFERENCE | NO |
|  | B: PLANNING | BLOG < REC | REC | YES |
| H7: CREDIBILITY | A: DREAMING | BLOG < REC | REC | YES |
|  | B: PLANNING | BLOG < REC | REC | YES |

We see that besides one exception, preference goes out to official travel recommendations in both stages. The respondents indicated for all three variables in both stages that they prefer these official travel recommendation sites. The exception was found in the dreaming stage when respondents where asked about their perception of reliability of the sources. Here no significant difference between preferences was found.

The preference between the two types was tested in a regression analysis, which provided a good summary of the model and hypotheses as well as an overview of how the variables are correlated and influenced by the other.

PREFERENCE = 1,757 - 0,31\*Suitability\_Blog + 0,10\*Suitability\_Recommendation – 0,25\*Reliability\_Blog + 0,13\*Reliability\_Recommendation – 0,52\*Credibility\_Blog – 0,64\*Credibility\_Recommendation + e

We see that preference varies when the variables change, when a variable linked to blogs increases, the preference tilts towards blogs in general. For recommendations it tilts towards the other direction when concerning suitability and reliability. However as mentioned before, the odd one out is the movement that the preference tilts towards is credibility for recommendations. In our regression we see that when credibility for recommendations grows preference goes out to blogs. However to prevent complications this insignificant variable was left in the regression.

# Managerial Implications

Our study not only show the importance of online travel recommendations, but also in which manner people prefer to use certain types of online travel recommendations. We feel our study provides a clear base for several groups of people. For instance for travel agencies, they can learn from the developments in the online world and play into the wishes of travellers by committing to digital or internet services at a certain level. This has been established by some sort, here travel agencies are now called e-travel agencies and provide a base for online reviews on their site (Filieri & McLeavy, 2013). However we feel that by looking at different aspects, studied in this paper, can give travel agents offline as well as online a big advantage. Playing into the travel stage and certain aspects of the travel plan are essential when helping travellers.

In general apart from the sincere importance of the online world, we can also see the importance of the difference between the experience and advice format. Contrary to our expectations we see that the advice formats are still preferred in the greater sense. As literature and experience shows the upcoming of social media and the third-party reviews, people still tend to prefer official websites above shared experiences and opinions. For managerial purpose we can advice agencies, hotels, travel sites, governments and any other party that has input into travellers perception should focus their information and opinions on “advice format” sites. Not that social media, such as blogs should be neglected, but in the end our research shows that official sites are valued greater than others.

So to attract travellers to a location, event or travel manner marketers should put their means into official recommendation sites, in our case a site as the lonely planet.

# Limitations

As every research has certain limitations, so does our research. To start at the most obvious limitation is the sample size. Even though both our studies showed a good spread of demographics; age, gender and education ranged in all categories, the total population might still not be representable for a wide population across several countries, cultures and preferences. In our first study we obtained 93 full surveys and in the second we obtained 151 respondents.

If you recall the manner of which we tested Internet usage, you might question in which content respondents answered the question. Basically it was not specified in the survey for which purpose Internet was used. Therefore some respondents might have answered in general, including work purposes and pleasure, others might have picked one or the other. This might have influenced the respondents and diffused the answer set.

Another limitations in our research are the formats chosen in our survey. Take the first study; here we aimed to define the importance of online formats as opposed to offline formats. We tested this theory by asking respondents to rate their opinions between these two formats by using an online travel site and the same source in an offline format. However, an important offline format, as indicated in this thesis is word-of-mouth. This was not tested in the survey, while in fact this might be one of the most dependable forms of recommendations. Also, in our survey testing preference was asked by asking respondents to indicate either “online” or “offline” with certain propositions. Here respondents might have taken word-of-mouth into consideration while answering the questions. Nevertheless the online sources still had the majority of the preference, so in fact this diffusion was not significant enough.

Our research solely includes social recommendations, that is, recommendations with opinions from experiences and advice provided online. We did not take “rankings” into consideration. It would complicate the studies too much. As mentioned in the literature review, rankings are a type of online recommendations, which provide the opportunity to rank a location, hotel, bar or destination. To outline our research we left these types out of research. Future research can add these and form a whole.

# Bibliography

Akehurst, G. (2009). User Generated Content: The use of Blogs for Tourism, Organisations and Tourism Consumers. *Service Business* *, 3* (1), 51-61.

Anderson, E. (1998). Customer satisfaction and word of mouth. *Journal of Service Research* , 7-24.

Arndt, J. (1967). Role of product related conversations in the diffusion of a new product. *Journal of Marketing Research* , 290-298.

Baum, T., & Mudambi, R. (1994). A Ricardian analyses of the fully inclusive tour indusry. *Service Industries Journal* *, 14* (1), 85-93.

Bearden, W. O., & Netemeyer, R. G. (1998). *Handbook of Marketing Scales.* Califfornia: SAGE Publications.

Bhattacherjee, A., & Sandford, C. (2006). Influence processes for information technology acceptance: an elaboration likelihood model. *MIS Quarterly* *, 4* (30), 803-830.

Bittzer, M. (2012, 2 27). How To Target Customers In Each Of The 5 Stages of Travel. *Online Marketing* .

Bitzzer, M. (2012). *Five Stages of Travel*. Retrieved 9 29, 2013 from Think with Google: www.thinkwithgoogle.com/insights/emea/featured/five-stages-of-travel/)

Brown, T., Barry, T., Dacin, P., & Gunst, R. (2005). Spreading the word: Investigating antecedents of consumer's positive word-of-mouth intentions and behaviours in a retailing context. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* *, 20* (33), 120-140.

Buhalis, D., & Law, R. (2008, 1 17). Progress in information technology and tourism management: 20 years on and 10 years after the Internet—The state of eTourism research. *Tourism Management* , 609-623.

Burns, E. (2006). *Online retail sales grew in 2005.* Retrieved 10 1, 2013 from www.clickz.com: www.clickz.com/stats/sectors/software/print.php/3578366

Calantone, R. J., & Schewe, C. D. (1987). Psychographic Segmentation of Tourists. *Journal of Travel Research* *, 16* (3), 14-20.

Case, J., & Unseem, J. (1996). Six Characteristics in searching of a Strategy. *INC.* *, 18* (3), 46-55.

Chang, L., Lee, Y.-J., & Huang, C.-L. (2007, 5 18). *The Influence of E-Word-Of-Mouth on the Consumer’s Purchase Decision: a Case of Body Care Products.* From www.jgbm.org: http://www.jgbm.org/page/2%20Yu-Je%20Lee.pdf

Chau, M., Lam, P., Shiu, B., & Xu, J. (2009). A Blog Mining Framework. *IT Professional* *, 11* (1), 39-41.

Correa, T., Hinsley, A., & Gil de Zuniga, H. (2010). Who interacts on the Web? The intersection of users' personality and social media use. *Elsevier Computers in Human Behaviour* .

Dellarocas, C., Awad, N., & Zhanf, X. (2007). Exploring the value of online product reviews in forecasting sales: the case of motion pictures . *Journal of Interactive Marketing* , 22-44.

Dickinger, A. (2011). The trustworthiness of online channels for experience- and goal- directed search tasks. *Journal of Travel Research* *, 50* (4), 378-391.

Dickinger, A. (2011). The Trustworthiness of Online Channels for Experience- and Goal-Directed Search Tasks. *Journal of Travel Research* *, 45* (4), 1007-1016.

Diehl, K., & Zauberman, G. (2005). Searching Ordered Sets: Evaluations from Sequences under Search. *Journal of Consumer Research* *, 31* (4), 824-832.

Dube, L., & Renaghan, L. M. (2000). Marketing your hotel to and through intemediaries. *Cornell HRA Quarterly* *, 41* (1), 73-83.

Dutton, W. S., & Sheperd, A. (2003, 10 15). Trust in the Internet: the Social Dynamics of an Eperience Technology. *Oxford Internet Institute* .

Filieri, R., & McLeavy, F. (2013). E-WOM and Accomondatoin:An Analysis of the Factors that influence Travelers' Adoption of Information from Online Reviews. *Journal of Travel Research* *, 53*.

Gelb, B. D., & Sundaram, S. (2002). Adapting to word of mouse. *Business Horizons* *, 45* (4), 21-25.

Giannakoudi, S. (2010). Internet Banking: The digital voyage of banking and money in cyberspace. *Information & Communication Technology Law* *, 8* (3), 205-243.

Green, B. (2013, 9 5). The death of the Travel Agent has been greatly exaggerated. *News Channel* .

Gretzel, U., & Yoo, K. (2008). Use and Impact of Online Travel Reviews. *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism* .

Grune, T. (2004). The Problems of Testing Preferene Axioms with Revealed Preference Theory. *Analyse & Kritik* , 382-397.

Harrel, G. D. (1977). Market Planning to Increase Travel Agency Profits. *Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly* (17), 44-48.

Hauble, G., & Murray, K. B. (2003). Preference Construction and Persistence in Digital Marketplaces: The Role of Economic Recommendation Agents . *Journal of Consumer Psychology* *, 13* (1-3), 75-91.

Hening-Thurau, Thorsten, Gwinner, K. P., Walsh, & Gremler, D. D. (2004). Electronic Word of Mouth via Consumer-Orientated Platforms: What motivates Consumers to atriculate themselves on the Internet. *Journal of Interactive Marketing* *, 18* (1), 38-52.

Henning-Thurau, T., Gwinner, K., Walsh, G., & Gremler, D. (2004). Electronic word-of-mouth via consumer-opinion platforms: what motivates consumers to articulate themselves on the Internet? . *Journal of Interactive Marketing* .

Jalilvand, M., Esfahani, S., & Samiei, N. (2011). Eletronic word-of-mouth: challenges and opportunities . *Elsevier Procedia Computer Science* (3), 34-45.

Lankford, S. V., & Howard, D. R. (1994). Developing a Tourism Impact Attitude Scale. *21* (1), 121-139.

Law, R., & Bai, B. (2008). How do the preferences of online buyers and browsers differ on the design and content of travel websites? *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality* *, 20*, 388-400.

Leblanc, G. (1992). Factors Affecting Customer Evaluation of Service Quality in Travel Agencies: An Investigation of Customer Perceptions. *Journal of Travel Research* , 10-15.

Lin, C., Lee, S., & Horng, D. (2011). The Effects of Online Reviews on Purchasing Intention: the Moderating Role of Need for Cognition . *Social Behaviour and Personality* (39), 69-82.

Locke, P. A., Piche, L. M., & Windsor, J. (1994). Preference Testing: A comparison of two presentation methods. *Research in Developmental Disabilities* *, 15* (6), 439-455.

Long, D., Muir, A., & Golding, R. (1995). A Longitudinal survey of Internet Host Reliability. *Reliable Distributer Systems* , 2-9.

Lyons, B., & Henderson, K. (2005). Opinion leadership in a computer-mediated environment. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* , 318-328.

McKercher, B., Packer, T., Yau, M. K., & Lam, P. (2003). Travel Agents as facilitators or inhibitors of Travel. *Tourism Management* *, 24* (4), 465-474.

Nardi, B., Schiano, D., Gumbrecht, M., & Scwartz, L. (2004). Why we Blog? *Magazin Communications ofthe ACM* *, 47* (12), 41-46.

Pan, B., McLaurin, T., & Crott, J. C. (2007). Travel Blogs and the implication for destination marketing. *Journal of Travel Research* *, 46* (1), 35-45.

Park, D., & Kim, S. (2008, 7). The effects of consumer knowledge on message processing of electronic word-of-mouth via online consumer reviews . *Electronic Commerce Research and Applications* .

Park, D., Lee, J., & Han, I. (2007). The effects of on-line consumer reviews on consumer purchasing intention: the moderating role of involvement. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce* *, 4* (11), 120-138.

Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. (1981). Attitudes and persuasion: classic and contemporary approaches. *Dubuque* .

PorterNovelli. (2011). *EuroPNstyle Survey.* Retrieved 8 3, 2013 from http://www.e-commercefacts.com/background/2011/12/europeans-and-online-revi/.

Provost, S., & Soto, J. C. (2001). Predicators of pretravel consultation in tourists from Quebec. *Journal of Travel Medicine* *, 8* (2), 66-67.

Sparks, B. A., Perkens, H. E., & Buckley, R. (2013). Online Travel Reviews as persuasive communication. *Tourism Management* *, 39*, 1-9.

Sun, T., Youn, S., Wu, G., & Kuntaraporn, M. (2006). Online word-of-mouth (or mouse): an exploration of its antecedents and consequence. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* , 11.

Vermeulen, I., & Seegers, D. (2009). Tried and Tested: the Impact of Online Hotel Reviews on Consumer Consideration. *Elsevier Tourism Management* .

Volo, S., & Fisichella, C. (2007). Evaluating tourist experiences. *Classification and Data Analysis* *, 1*, 12-14.

Woodside, G. A., Cruickshank, F. B., & Dehuang, N. (2007). Stories visitors tell about Italian cities as destination icons. *Tourism Management* *, 28* (1), 162-174.

Yoo, K., Lee, Y., Gretzel, U., & Fesenmaier, D. (2009). Trust in Travel-Related Consumer Generated Media. *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism* , 49-59.

Zheng, X., & Gretzel, U. (2010). Role of Social Media in online travel informatin search. *Tourism Management* *, 31* (2), 179-188.

# Appendices

## A. Scales Survey 1

Preference propositions

* Overall, which platform do you think is better?
* Which platform do you think is more successful?
* Which platform do you think will stick in people's minds more?
* For travel recommendations, which form do you think is more of a typical way of usage?
* If you were considering traveling what would convince you more?
* *Which platform do you think would create a more favourable image for traveling?* (Removed)

Answer possibilities: online source/ offline source

Reliability propositions

* This source is dependable and reliable
* This source has always been good to me
* If this source makes a claim or promise about its products, it is probably true
* I feel like I know what to expect from this source
* I feel I can trust this source

Answer possibilities: 5-point Likert scale (disagree-agree)

Credibility propositions

* I find an offline platform more trustworthy than an online platform
* I find an offline platform more credible than an online platform
* I find an offline platform more unbiased than an online platform
* I find an offline platform more believable than an online platform
* I find an offline platform more reputable than an online platform
* I find an offline platform more experienced than an online platform
* I find an offline platform more knowledgeable than an online platform
* I find an offline platform more qualified  than an online platform
* I find an offline platform more uncompromising than an online platform
* I find an offline platform more ethical than an online platform
* I find an offline platform more objective than an online platform

Answer possibilities: 5-point Likert scale (disagree-agree)

## B. Scales Survey 2

Preference propositions

* Overall, which platform do you think is better?
* Which platform do you think is more successful?
* Which platform do you think will stick in people's minds more?
* For online travel recommendations, which form do you think is more of a typical way of usage?
* If you were considering traveling what would convince you more?
* Which platform do you think would create a more favourable image for traveling?

Answer possibilities: experience formats “blogs”/ advice formats “official website”

Suitability propositions

* How likely is it that you would accept advice that you would expect to find on this site about traveling?
* How likely is it that the advice that you would expect to find on this site would be useful to you?
* How likely is it that opinions you would expect to find on this site will be informative for you?
* How likely is it that you would allow advice that you would expect to find on this site to choose a travel plan for you?
* How likely is it that you would be confident in accepting the advice that you would expect to find on this site?
* How well do you recognize yourself in the advice that would expect to find on this site?

Answer possibilities: probability indication (0% – 100%)

Reliability propositions

* This source is dependable and reliable
* This source has always been good to me
* If this source makes a claim or promise about its products, it is probably true
* I feel like I know what to expect from this source
* I feel I can trust this source

Answer possibilities: 5-point Likert scale (disagree-agree)

Credibility propositions

* I find an offline platform more trustworthy than an online platform
* I find an offline platform more credible than an online platform
* I find an offline platform more unbiased than an online platform
* I find an offline platform more believable than an online platform
* I find an offline platform more reputable than an online platform
* I find an offline platform more experienced than an online platform
* I find an offline platform more knowledgeable than an online platform
* I find an offline platform more qualified  than an online platform
* I find an offline platform more uncompromising than an online platform
* I find an offline platform more ethical than an online platform
* I find an offline platform more objective than an online platform

Answer possibilities: 5-point Likert scale (disagree-agree)

## C. Survey Questions Study 1

Q1 What is your gender?

* Male (1)
* Female (2)

Q2 What is your age?

* 18 and younger (1)
* 19 - 23 (2)
* 24 - 28 (3)
* 29 - 34 (4)
* 35 and older (5)

Q3 What is your highest education?

* High-school (1)
* MBO (2)
* HBO (3)
* WO (4)

Q4 How often do you access the Internet on average (in general) per day?

* Never (1)
* Less than an hour a day (2)
* 1 - 3 hours a day (3)
* 3 - 6 hours a day (4)
* 6 - 9 hours a day (5)
* more than 9 hours a day (6)

Q5 How often do you read travel recommendations online per month?

* Never (1)
* Less than Once a Month (2)
* Once a Month (3)
* 2-3 Times a Month (4)
* Once a Week (5)
* 2-3 Times a Week (6)
* Daily (7)

Q6 How often do you travel a year? (weekend-trips / business-trips /vacations)

* Never (1)
* less than a week (2)
* 2-3 weeks (3)
* 3-4 weeks (4)
* 4-5 weeks (5)
* 5-6 weeks (6)
* more than 6 weeks (7)

Q7 When traveling, do you consult offline sources? (travel agencies)

* Never (1)
* Sometimes (2)
* Occasionally (3)
* Often (4)
* Always (5)

Q8 The following question concerns your perception between online (social media, blogs, travel websites) and offline (word-of-mouth, travel agencies) travel recommendations.

Overall, which platform do you think is better?

* Online sources (1)
* Offline sources (2)

Q9 Which platform do you think is more successful?

* Online sources (1)
* Offline sources (2)

Q10 Which platform do you think will stick in people minds more?

* Online sources (1)
* Offline sources (2)

Q11 For travel recommendations, which form do you think is more of a typical way of usage?

* Online sources (1)
* Offline sources (2)

Q12 If you were considering traveling what would convince you more?

* Online sources (1)
* Offline sources (2)

Q13 Which platform do you think would create a more favourable image for traveling?

* Online sources (1)
* Offline sources (2)

Q14 What is the probability that you would use websites to look for information? (would definitively not use (0) – would definitively use (100%))

Q15 What is the probability that you would use travel agencies to look for information? (would definitively not use (0) – would definitively use (100%))

This image represents an offline source of travel recommendations. It concerns a travel agency (D-risen).



Q16 Please indicate in which matter you agree-disagree with the following statements concerning the image above (online sources

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Strongly Disagree (1) | Disagree (2) | Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) | Agree (4) | Strongly Agree (5) |
| This source is dependable and reliable (1) |  |  |  |  |  |
| This source has always been good to me (2) |  |  |  |  |  |
| If this source makes a claim or promise about its products, it is probably true (3) |  |  |  |  |  |
| I feel like I know what to expect from this source (4) |  |  |  |  |  |
| I feel I can trust this source (5) |  |  |  |  |  |

This image resembles an online source of travel recommendations.



Q17 Please indicates in which matter you agree-disagree with the following statements concerning the image above (online sources).

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Strongly Disagree (1) | Disagree (2) | Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) | Agree (4) | Strongly Agree (5) |
| This website is dependable and reliable (1) |  |  |  |  |  |
| This website has always been good to me (2) |  |  |  |  |  |
| If this website makes a claim or promise about its products, it is probably true (3) |  |  |  |  |  |
| I feel like I know what to expect from this website (4) |  |  |  |  |  |
| I feel I can trust this website (5) |  |  |  |  |  |

Q18 To which content to do you agree with the following statements?

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Strongly Disagree (1) | Disagree (2) | Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) | Agree (4) | Strongly Agree (5) |
| I find an offline platform more trustworthy than an online platform (1) |  |  |  |  |  |
| I find an offline platform more credible than an online platform (2) |  |  |  |  |  |
| I find an offline platform more unbiased than an online platform (3) |  |  |  |  |  |
| I find an offline platform more believable than an online platform (4) |  |  |  |  |  |
| I find an offline platform more reputable than an online platform (5) |  |  |  |  |  |
| I find an offline platform more experienced than an online platform (6) |  |  |  |  |  |
| I find an offline platform more knowledgeable than an online platform (7) |  |  |  |  |  |
| I find an offline platform more qualified  than an online platform (8) |  |  |  |  |  |
| I find an offline platform more uncompromising than an online platform (9) |  |  |  |  |  |
| I find an offline platform more ethical than an online platform (10) |  |  |  |  |  |
| I find an offline platform more objective than an online platform (11) |  |  |  |  |  |

Q19 To which amount do you use online and offline sources in the following stages of travel?

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Online Sources | | | | | Offline Sources | | | | |
|  | Never (1) | Rarely (2) | Sometimes (3) | Very Often (4) | Always (5) | Never (1) | Rarely (2) | Sometimes (3) | Very Often (4) | Always (5) |
| Dreaming (1) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Planning (2) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Booking (3) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Experience (4) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Sharing (5) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

\*end of survey\*

## D. Survey Questions Study 2

Q1 What is your gender?

* Male (1)
* Female (2)

Q2 What is your age?

* 18 and younger (1)
* 19 - 23 (2)
* 24 - 28 (3)
* 29 - 34 (4)
* 35 and older (5)

Q3 What is your highest education?

* High-school (1)
* MBO (2)
* HBO (3)
* WO (4)

Q4 How often do you access the Internet on average (in general) a day?

* Never (1)
* Less than 1 hour (2)
* 1 - 3 hours a day (3)
* 3 - 6 hours a day (4)
* 6 - 9 hour a day (5)
* more than 9 hours a day (6)

Q5 How often do you read travel recommendations online a month?

(tripadvisor, blogs, lonely-planet, etc..)

* Never (1)
* Once a Month (2)
* 2-3 Times a Month (3)
* Once a Week (4)
* 2-3 Times a Week (5)
* Daily (6)

Q6 Which types of online travel recommendations do you use/follow?

* Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc) (1)
* Official travel websites (www.d-reizen.nl, www.klm.com) (2)
* Deal websites (groupon) (3)
* Travel blogs (www.travelpod.com, www.waarbenjijnu.nl) (4)
* Combined websites (www.tripadvisor.com) (5)

\* STIMULUS\*

The following image represents an online Blog, there are diverse types of blogs.

On www.travelpod.com for instance you can create your own page, share your ideas and experiences. But more importantly you can also read about experiences of others on almost any destination in the world. Dinner tips, day activities they did, sights they saw and much more..

Please examine the image below carefully and answer the questions below.



Q7 How likely is it that you would accept advice that you would expect to find on this site about traveling?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Probability

Q8 How likely is it that the advice that you would expect to find on this site would be useful to you?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Probability

Q9 How likely is it that opinions you would expect to find on this site will be informative for you?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Probability

Q10 How likely is it that you would allow advice that you would expect to find on this site to choose a travel plan for you?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Probability

Q11 How likely is it that you would be confident in accepting the advice that you would expect to find on this site?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Probability

Q12 How well do you recognize yourself in the advice that would expect to find on this site?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Probability

Q13 Please indicate in which matter you agree-disagree with the following statements

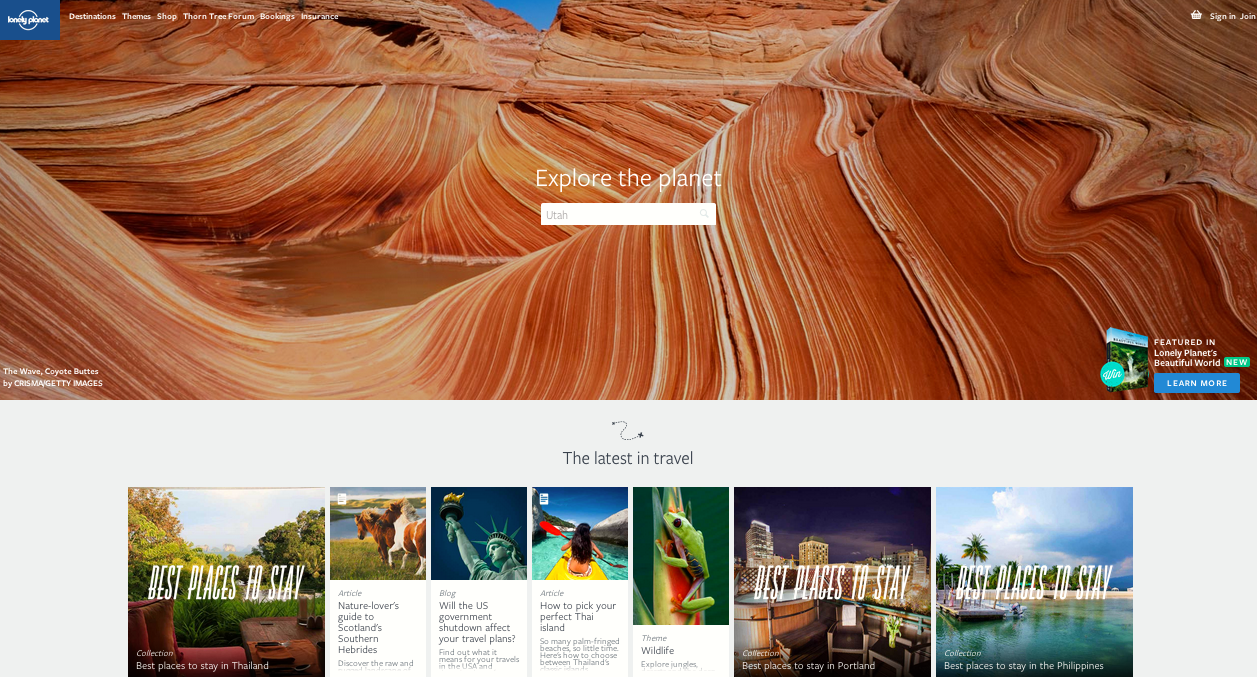
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Strongly Disagree (1) | Disagree (2) | Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) | Agree (4) | Strongly Agree (5) |
| This website is dependable and reliable (1) |  |  |  |  |  |
| This website has always been good to me (2) |  |  |  |  |  |
| If this website makes a claim or promise about its products, it is probably true (3) |  |  |  |  |  |
| I feel like I know what to expect from this website (4) |  |  |  |  |  |
| I feel I can trust this website (5) |  |  |  |  |  |

Q14 Please indicate in which matter you agree-disagree with the descriptions about the site

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Strongly Disagree (1) | Disagree (2) | Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) | Agree (4) | Strongly Agree (5) |
| Trustworthy (1) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Credible (2) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Unbiased (3) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Believable (4) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Reputable (5) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Experienced (6) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Knowledgeable (7) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Qualified (8) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Uncompromising (9) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Ethical (10) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Objective (11) |  |  |  |  |  |

This image represents an official online travel recommendation site.   The lonely planet is a well-known platform for travel advice. On this site you can read about places to visit, sights to see, restaurants in the area, where you can find hotels and much more, all composed by professional who researched all destinations.

Please examine the image below carefully and answer the questions below.



Q15 How likely is it that you would accept the advice that you would expect to find on this site?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Probability

Q16 How likely is it that the advice that you would expect to find on this site would be useful to you?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Probability

Q17 How likely is it that the opinions that you would expect to find on this site will be informative to you?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Probability

Q18 How likely is it that you would allow advice that you would expect to find on this site to choose a travel plan for you?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Probability

Q19 How likely is it that you would be confident in accepting this sites' advice about traveling?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Probability

Q20 How well do you recognize yourself in the advice that would expect to find on this site?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Probability

Q21 Please indicate in which matter you agree-disagree with the following statements

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Strongly Disagree (1) | Disagree (2) | Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) | Agree (4) | Strongly Agree (5) |
| This website is dependable and reliable (1) |  |  |  |  |  |
| This website has always been good to me (2) |  |  |  |  |  |
| If this website makes a claim or promise about its products, it is probably true (3) |  |  |  |  |  |
| I feel like I know what to expect from this website (4) |  |  |  |  |  |
| I feel I can trust this website (5) |  |  |  |  |  |

Q22 Please indicate in which matter you agree-disagree with the descriptions about the site

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Strongly Disagree (1) | Disagree (2) | Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) | Agree (4) | Strongly Agree (5) |
| Trustworthy (1) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Credible (2) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Unbiased (3) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Believable (4) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Reputable (5) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Experienced (6) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Knowledgeable (7) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Qualified (8) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Uncompromising (9) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Ethical (10) |  |  |  |  |  |
| Objective (11) |  |  |  |  |  |

Q23 Comparing the images which would your prefer for the following travel opportunities?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Blogs (1) | Official Recommendations (2) |
| Weekend trips (1) |  |  |
| Business trips (2) |  |  |
| Vacation with friends (3) |  |  |
| Vacation with family (4) |  |  |
| A monthly travel to an unknown destination (5) |  |  |

Q24 The following question concerns your perception between the two previously mentioned types of recommendations.

Overall, which platform do you think is better?

* Blogs (1)
* Travel Recommendation site (2)

Q25 Which platform do you think is more successful?

* Blogs (1)
* Travel Recommendation site (2)

Q26 Which platform do you think will stick in peoples' minds more?

* Blogs (1)
* Travel Recommendation site (2)

Q27 Which form do you think is more of a typical way of usage?

* Blogs (1)
* Travel Recommendation site (2)

Q28 If you were considering traveling what would convince you more?

* Blogs (1)
* Travel Recommendation site (2)

Q29 Which platform do you think would create a more favourable image for traveling?

* Blogs (1)
* Travel Recommendation site (2)

\*end of survey\*

## E. Stimulus Survey 2

Dreaming

Imagine you next vacation.. Where do you want to go?

Imagine you are at the airport right now.. What is your destination of choice?

Traveling starts with a dream..

Has an idea entered your head?

Planning

Suppose you have just decided on the destination of your next vacation.

You know exactly where you want to go, when you will be doing this and with whom..

How do you proceed?

1. \* 2000 respondents where surveyed in two groups in the United Kingdom, United States and in Canada [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See methodology chapter for the five stages of travel [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For a detailed explanation of the five stages of travel see chapter methodology [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See appendix A for the scale of “preference” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See appendix A & B for the scale on “reliability” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See appendix B for detailed scales of Suitability. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See appendix A for the scale of “preference” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See appendix A for the scale “reliability” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See appendix A for the scale “credibility” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See the column of “Result” indicating the found preference [↑](#footnote-ref-10)