

Role of Social Media in Generation Y travellers' travel decision making process

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Submitted to Mr. Daniel Leung

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Affidavit

I hereby affirm that this Bachelor's Thesis represents my own written work and that I have used no sources and aids other than those indicated. All passages quoted from publications or paraphrased from these sources are properly cited and attributed.

The thesis was not submitted in the same or in a substantially similar version, not even partially, to another examination board and was not published elsewhere.

23.05.2015

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Abstract

Nowadays, the Internet and particularly social media platforms are evolving into an inevitable information source in various decisions in people's daily life. This study aims to identify the extent to which these sites are utilized by the Generation Y-ers (also known as Millennials) once they plan, undertake, and reflect on their trips. Using the grounded theory method, interviews with students studying in Austria were conducted and analysed thoroughly. The findings illustrated the Generation Y-ers' preference of consuming rather than producing relevant information on social media sites. Moreover, the sequence of gathering desired knowledge about a specific destination appears to have changed. This study furthermore discusses possible managerial as well as future implications, based on the outcomes provided.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	7
1.1	Technology-mediated life.....	7
1.2	Research rationale and objectives	9
2	Literature Review	11
2.1	Generation Y.....	11
2.2	Generation Y in tourism and hospitality	12
2.3	Social media in tourism and hospitality	14
3	Methodology.....	17
3.1	Data Collection	18
3.2	Data Analysis	21
4	Findings.....	22
4.1	Pre-Trip Stage	22
4.2	During-Trip Stage.....	28
4.3	Post-Trip Stage	35
5	Conclusion.....	40
5.1	Theoretical Implications	40
5.2	Managerial Implications.....	41
5.3	Limitations and Future Implications.....	42
6	Bibliography	43
7	Appendices.....	46
7.1	Respondent A	46
22.1	Respondent B	49
22.1	Respondent C	52
22.1	Respondent D.....	55
22.1	Respondent E.....	58
22.1	Respondent F.....	61
22.1	Respondent G	64
22.1	Respondent H.....	67
22.1	Respondent I.....	70
22.1	Respondent J	73

List of Tables

Table 1. Profile of Respondents	18
Table 2. Respondents' Information Search in the Pre-Trip Stage	24
Table 3. Usage of online reviews during the trip	34

List of Figures

Figure 1. Number of social network users worldwide from 2010 to 2018 (Source: Statista.com, 2014a)	8
Figure 2. Leading social networks worldwide ranked by number of active users (Source: Statista.com, 2014b)	8
Figure 3. Information needs in the three stages of tourism consumption (Source: Gretzel and Fesenmaier, 2009).....	10
Figure 4. Influence of online reviews prior to a trip	26
Figure 5. Ways of staying in contact with family & friends during the trip	29
Figure 6. Depiction of the utilization of social media at the three stages of a trip .	38

1 Introduction

1.1 Technology-mediated life

With more commercial and daily activities have been transforming from offline to online, it is no longer an option for individuals to devise their optimal way of accommodating and integrating Internet technology into their daily life. Indeed, since the late-1990s, the advent of Internet technology and particularly social media revolutionizes people's information searching, shopping, social networking, and even travel planning activities (eMarketer, 2014a).

Some people posit that adapting to the online consumerism era poses great challenges to them as the emerging technologies are new to them. For those who were born between 1980 and 2000 (also known as the Generation Y-ers or the Millennials), however, the usage and integration of the Internet technology and social media with their daily life activities are not a challenge as they have a natural boundary and understanding of how these technologies can affect and simplify their daily life, given that they grew up with them. It is said that nowadays approximately 70% of Generation Y-ers regard shared online information or opinions from their friends as influential in their purchasing decision (eMarketer, 2014b) and that Millennials do consider travel review websites with a high number of personal experience statements as influential on their travel plans (eMarketer, 2012). This is also reflected in the travel decision making process by the Millennials as social media do no longer stand for cultivating friendships only, but are also considered as an important information source to help them decide where to go, how to get there and at which particular accommodation they should stay.

The constant growth in the number of worldwide social media users also reflects the significance of social media. As shown in Figure 1, the number of worldwide social network users rose almost constantly from 2010 to 2014 and it is expected to further rise until 2018. While in 2010 only 0.97 billion people made use of social media, it is expected that in 2018 already 2.44 billion people will utilize them. This indicates that social media are not just a temporary hype or trend. Instead, they are likely to be further developed and used more intensively in the upcoming years by Generation Y and Z.

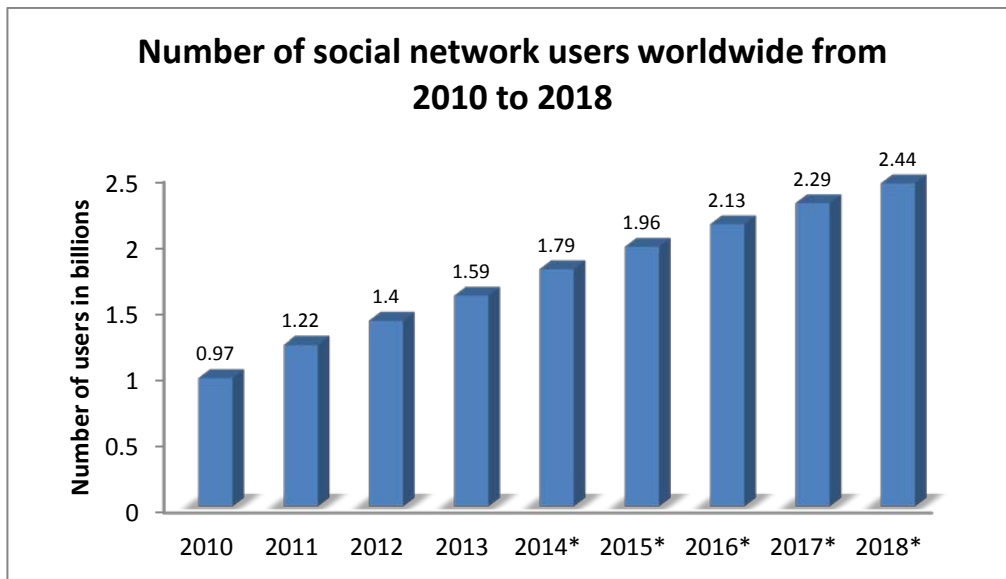


Figure 1. Number of social network users worldwide from 2010 to 2018
(Source: Statista.com, 2014a)

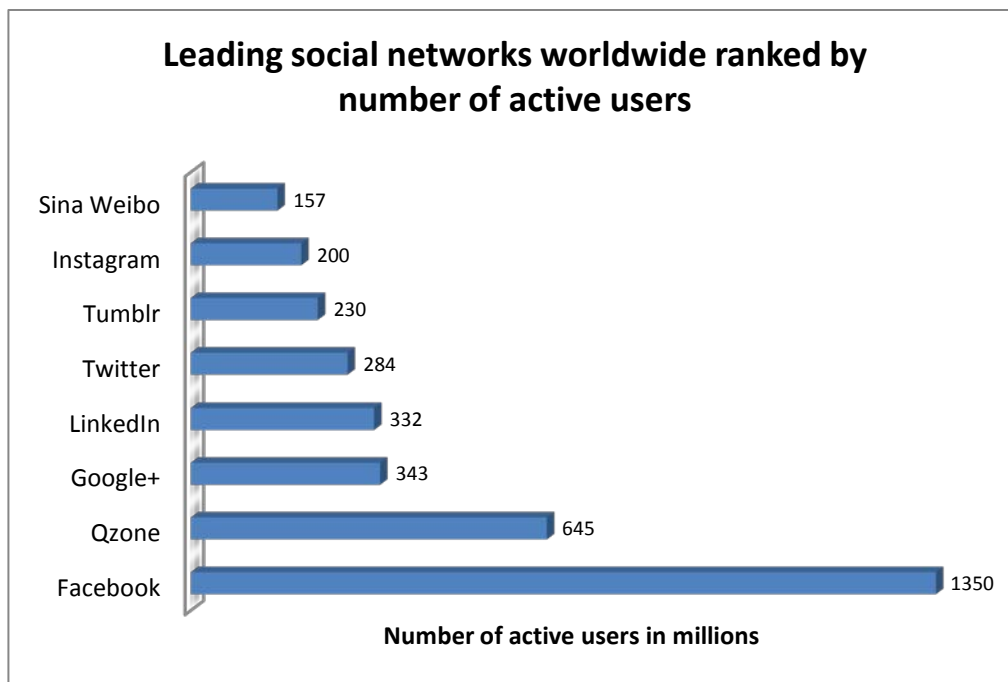


Figure 2. Leading social networks worldwide ranked by number of active users
(Source: Statista.com, 2014b)

According to Figure 2, one can acknowledge that Facebook is by far the most popular social media platform in the year of 2014, with approximately 1,350 million active users. It is followed by QZone, the largest social media site in China, with more than 600 million active users (China Internet Watch, 2014). Although Google+ was only introduced in 2011, it already counts more active users than Twitter which was launched in 2006. Apparently, various social media platforms are used for different purposes by Internet users. To Generation Y-ers, Twitter is particularly popular and widely used to discuss hair and beauty products while Facebook is more common when talking about technology and electronic devices (eMarketer, 2014b).

1.2 Research rationale and objectives

Nowadays, social media are inseparable from the life of the broad majority of Generation Y-ers. Sites like Facebook, Twitter, TripAdvisor, Google+, LinkedIn and Pinterest play a crucial role in many young people's daily life. Constantly, new social media sites are implemented, for which the vast majority of the Millennials is willing to try and find out, whether they contribute in a positive matter to their lifestyle.

In the tourism industry, many changes occurred in the last few decades. While Generation X is used to inform itself at travel agencies or tour operators and book there, the Millennials are more critical and tend to compare prices, check reviews and useful information rather online at social media sites and form an opinion about different offers. It is therefore expected that social media have a substantial influence on Generation Y travellers' decision to purchase a product. In the tourism and hospitality literature, a number of studies already discussed how Internet technology influences travellers. For instance, Gretzel and Fesenmaier's (2009) study discusses how different technologies (e.g., online customer support, e-mail and online travel communities) are used throughout the three stages of tourism consumption process (see Figure 3). Although substantial effort has been made on examining how Internet technology impact travellers, there is still a knowledge gap regarding the role of social media on travel decision making process by travellers in general and Generation Y travellers in particular.

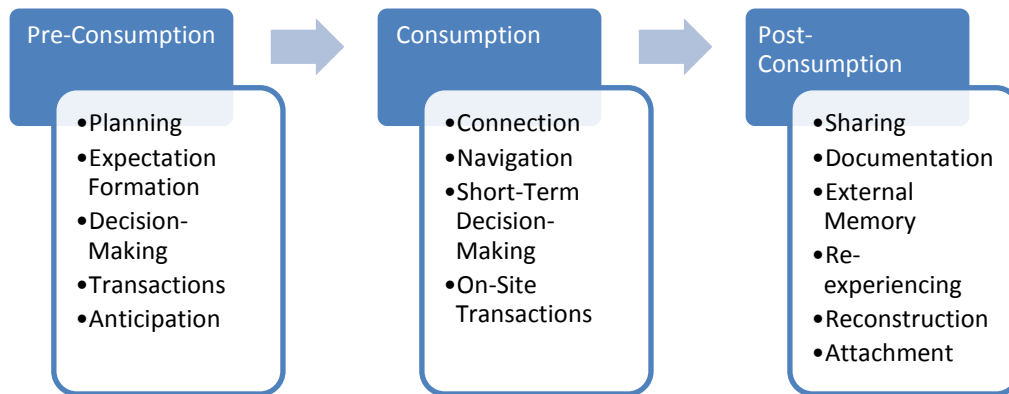


Figure 3. Information needs in the three stages of tourism consumption (Source: Gretzel and Fesenmaier, 2009)

Considering that an answer to the research question of “how do social media influence Generation Y travellers’ travel decision making process” is not identified yet, the aim of this study is to fill this research gap and ascertain how much and in which way social media influence Generation Y travellers’ travel decision making process. Due to the fact that not many research studies have yet been provided on the topic of how social media influences Generation Y’s travel decision making process, this study is exploratory in nature and a qualitative research approach would be employed. A series of in-depth interviews with undergraduate students at multiple universities in Central Europe would be conducted. The qualitative data solicited from the interviews would then be analyzed using the grounded theory approach, a qualitative research approach for formulating theoretical frameworks, in order to provide a closer insight into how the Millennials make use of social media when it comes to planning a trip. By applying this methodology, the expected contribution of this study would be threefold:

- (1) to provide answers to the research question stated above;
- (2) to provide tourism marketers with clues about devising marketing programs to attract this lucrative market; and
- (3) to contribute to the literature by offering first-hand and new knowledge on this unexplored albeit important topic.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Generation Y

Generation Y-ers are also known as Millennials, echo-boomers, Generation We, Net Generation, Peter Pan Generation and children of baby boomers (Bleedorn, 2013). There is no fixed and consensus time frame for the birth of Generation Y-ers (Bolton, Hoefnagels, Migchels, Kabadayi, Loureiro & Solnet, 2013). But in general, people who were born in the time period of 1980 to 1999 is widely defined as the Millennials (Bolton et al., 2013). According to Teller Vision (2009), the Millennials count more than 75 million people and are therefore ranked on the second place after the Baby Boomers (representing those who were born between 1946 and 1960).

Generation Y distinguishes itself from other generations through several unique characteristics. First, the Millennials are distinctive through their natural use of technology that they grew up with. In contrast to their predecessors, they are bound to technology even on an emotional basis (Bolton et al., 2013), which explains their everyday usage of diverse electronic devices like smartphones, laptops, and tablets, for personal and business purposes. Some researchers also indicated that the Millennials consider a stable work-life balance, as well as flexibility in their working position, as important (Brown, Carter, Collins, Gallerson, Giffin, Greer, Griffith, Johnson & Richardson, 2009). Thus it becomes apparent that the value of the family became an even more significant factor in this generation.

Furthermore, it is stated that the Millennials are “known for their optimism, education, collaborative ability, open-mindedness, and drive” (Spiro, 2006, p. 16). They respect their supervisors and aim to follow their rules. Simultaneously, it is also believed that they rather complete tasks with a professional team than on an individual basis (Brown et al., 2009). Ellin (2014) confirmed and supplemented that “In the ideal Millennial office environment, everyone would work collaboratively, with less emphasis on old-school rules.” (p. 59). However, in contrast to people in other generations, monetary terms are considered less important (Crampton & Hodge, 2009) since they prefer spending more time with the children and improving or maintaining relationships (Spiro, 2006). When they set themselves a goal,

however, they are very eager in achieving it (Yeaton, 2008). Generation Y-ers further tend to spend just as much money during an economical crisis as in a stable environment to keep up their values and lifestyle. Thus they are denoted to be “the most optimistic generation” (Bleedorn, 2013, p. 26) so far.

Concerning the incessantly development of technology, a study by Brown et al. (2009) indicates that the Millennials “use social networking websites more often than non-Generation Y respondents” (p. 48). Their intention of technology utilization distinguishes itself notably from their predecessors’ in a way that they do not only use it for information search but also for entertainment and communication (Bleedorn, 2013; Bolton et al., 2013; Chordas, 2008). “They view computers merely a part of life.” says Yeaton (2008, p. 69). Following this notion, it is a natural expectation for them to rely on online information search and make their decisions based on the information available online (Ellin, 2014). Social media is therefore an influential source or tool to Generation Y-ers since this technology is able to facilitate on-time communication with rapid information search.

2.2 Generation Y in tourism and hospitality

As mentioned in section 2.1, Generation Y-ers define themselves through various unique characteristics. Thus, it is essential for researchers and practitioners to take notice of the preference as well as values of this group and respond accordingly. Both sides, including customers as well as employees, need to be considered since they are known to be very demanding (Maxwell, Broadbridge & Odgen, 2010).

When examining the consumer point of view, Mihaiu (2013) advised hoteliers that they need to remain “competitive in both the product offered and the services provided” (p. 4) in order to keep this generation of customers close and loyal. Munro (2014) stated that the Millennials are eager to communicate their needs towards a company, for instance the airline industry, which can be of a great advantage for the firms nowadays. Barrhead Travel, an online travel agent,

understood very well that they need to answer any concerns or wishes, to adapt their product and establish specific marketing strategies (Munro, 2014).

In terms of the Generation Y workforce, it is stated by Cairncross and Buultjens (2007) that they expect from their working position “a wide variety of information technologies” (p. 14), on the basis of the knowledge they have gained naturally whilst growing up. Cairncross and Buultjens (2007) conducted a study with focus groups of tourism and hospitality managers, in which they identified various difficulties with Generation Y that the majority of supervisors feels itself confronted with. Although the Millennials are seen as technologically savvy and highly educated, their interest in becoming independent is lower in comparison to their predecessors’ (Crampton & Hodge, 2009). This might also reflect in their working attitude and their aim of a balanced business and private life. A study undertaken by Maxwell et al. (2010) shows that almost half of the respondents, who have worked in the hospitality industry sector, consider their working experience as “unattractive as their first career location after graduation” (p. 57). Thus, the employee engagement of potential entrants is expected to be rather low from the beginning on (Maxwell et al., 2010). Generation Y-ers were found to appreciate teamwork and be eager to work with ambitious people they get along with very well. The regular change of colleagues might therefore bother one or another (Cairncross & Buultjens, 2007). Another explaining reason might be that Generation Y was able to watch the Baby Boomers work hard and committed but got downsized in return (Crampton & Hodge, 2009). This could possibly lower their engagement and motivation.

A study carried out by Leask, Fyall and Barron (2014) indicates that the Millennials differentiate themselves in particular through “their willingness and ability to seek alternatives” (p. 468) from other generations. Thus, they are almost expected to await new opportunities from the industry on a regular basis. Generation Y-ers are identified to acknowledge and contemplate extraordinary experiences as highly valuable in their travel decision-making process (Leask et al., 2014), which challenges companies or puts them under a permanent pressure to add exciting alternatives to the offers that this Generation is familiar with already. Due to the fact that the Millennials are highly educated in using technological devices, the majority clearly wants to make use of its knowledge before, during and

after its visit and the experience made away from home. Leask et al. (2014) ascertained that this characteristic of the Generation Y-ers gives attractions the “opportunity to build relationships with Gen Y, as does it serve as a very valuable direct marketing channel and a platform for the creation of Internet-enabled social space for visitors at large” (p. 468). In order to accommodate and to meet their expectations, companies or industries may want to consider a change in their overall business strategy to enhance their attractiveness for Generation Y-ers (Leask et al., 2014). Long opening hours, for instance, are generally an efficient option to please all types of Millennials (Leask et al., 2014) and thus, most likely results in a desired word-of-mouth, positive online feedback or even loyalty.

2.3 Social media in tourism and hospitality

Nowadays, it is almost impossible to imagine a world without social media. Not only do they influence the daily life of individuals, but also impact various industries, particularly tourism and hospitality, in factors like promotion, business management and research functions (Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013), due to their permanent global growth (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014).

The Internet empowers customers to have a stronger capability and impact on the “production and distribution of information” (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010, p. 179) than that companies provide. Due to this massive usage of social media platforms, such as sharing and commenting on content, the power of consumers gained more weight remarkably over time. Travellers do have the possibility to “search, organize, share, and annotate their travel stories and experiences” (Leung et al., 2013, p. 4) through a large number of different types of social media sites, which a formidable number of people make us of during their trip planning process (Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, Buultjens, 2009). Hence, more and more customers consider electronic word-of-mouth as a reliable source of information, specifically for products that can be searched for, booked and purchased online (Sparks & Browning, 2011).

Today a large variety of social media platforms exists, these include blogs/podcasts (e.g., Wordpress), social networks/online communities (e.g.,

Facebook, XING), social bookmarks (e.g., Mister Wong), reviews (e.g., TripAdvisor, Holidaycheck), social news (e.g., Digg), microblogs (e.g., Twitter) and media-sharing-communities (e.g., Flickr, YouTube) (Cleffman, Feuerabend, Howald, & Kollmann, 2010). On all of these platforms, customers do have the option to spread their opinions, questions and requests. Xiang and Gretzel (2010, p. 186) illustrated that “social media websites are “ubiquitous” in online travel information search in that they occur everywhere”.

In particular, review sites like TripAdvisor are expected to get increasingly employed in the future and have the potential to become one of the most important online travel information sources (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). According to a study conducted by Gretzel and Yoo (2008), “travel review readers are highly educated, have high incomes, travel rather frequently, use the Internet extensively and plan in advance” (p. 43). Therefore it becomes explicit that travellers select online offers very carefully.

Since social media spread messages easily and they get adopted by the Millennials, one can say that it is inevitable for the tourism and hospitality industry to pay attention to any new technological inventions that occur. However, Leung et al. (2013) discovered in their study that the vast majority of their studied hotels still did not make use of social media to its full extent. This is why particularly review sites need to be carefully considered and dealt with in marketing strategies that offer intangible and inseparable products (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2009). These include for instance accommodation facilities which cannot be tested or experienced until the arrival at the destination and checking in.

Cox et al. (2009) do see the chance for the tourism and hospitality sector to improve their online B2C strategies by implementing user generated content features in the organization’s site, since travellers are interested in contributing information. Also, further reviews on the accommodation can be gained by asking for the e-mail address from travellers. Thus, hotels and travel agencies can send them a request for constructive feedback (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008).

A study conducted by Parra-López, Bulchand-Gidumal, Gutiérrez-Taño, & Díaz-Armas (2011) suggests that it is of great importance for managers of tourism

companies to pay close attention to their “clients’ needs for information in the social media so that they can respond actively and favor the perception of functional benefits” (p. 651). Therefore, it can be of high value for tourism firms to build a relationship with (potential) customers and stay interactive on social media platforms to keep them close (Parra-López et al., 2011).

By communicating to consumers that their opinions and ideas are highly appreciated and valued, the likelihood of feedback is feasible to increase remarkably. Furthermore, Parra-López et al. (2011) illustrate in their study that “community managers should recognize and be thankful for the tourists’ participation in terms of contribution (photos, videos, comments, etc.) about their products” (p. 651-652). By sharing their personal media online, they give prospective customers the opportunity to see the offers provided by the touristic firm from a different perspective. Thus, they might even consider this information more trustworthy than the one provided by the company, which can result in both positive and negative influences for the respective firm.

However, the question of why people use electronic devices to share their personal tourism experiences with others online arises. Munar and Jacobsen (2014) aimed to reveal the answers in their study through the application of a quantitative research approach and the distinction between several media types. Forty percent of the respondents in their study agreed that they share their information on social media sites due to their willingness to help others and prevent them from making bad product choices. Furthermore, it is illustrated in their study that nearly 60% of the respondents who travelled to Mallorca wrote blogs or posted their experiences on Facebook in order to keep in touch with their friends and acquaintances. Concerning the reason for sharing online media, like photos and videos, it is indicated that these tourists “were led by self-centred motivations such as wanting to contribute to websites that were useful to them, liking to share their impressions through the Internet, and being more recognised for their experiences” (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014, p. 51).

Through the examination of all the studies mentioned in section 2, it is discernible that both main components of this paper, namely Generation Y and social media in the tourism and hospitality industry, have been analysed to a certain

extent. However, it becomes evitable to notice that there have not been drawn any lines between Generation Y travellers and their preferences regarding the usage of social media throughout the travel decision making process so far. Moreover, it is aspired in this paper to explore the influence, that social media has on the Millennials, in all three stages of the tourism consumption process (see Figure 3). Thus, this paper aims to contribute to the literature and fill these knowledge gaps, while generating academic value to the academia.

3 Methodology

After a thorough scrutiny of the applicable literature, this chapter aims to communicate a pertinent research approach, give a closer insight into the data collection as well as the data analysis in order to provide answers and carefully draw a conclusion on how social media influences Generation Y travellers' travel decision making process.

To be able to examine and answer the objectives described in section 1.2, the author adopted a qualitative research approach by preparing a set of 22 interview questions. The main and decisive advantages of this research method are the opportunities of acquiring in-depth answers and being able to gather additional information on the topic by querying probing questions. Furthermore, the interviewees had the possibility to inquire the interviewer in case of any misunderstanding or uncertainty. As this paper focuses on the whole travel decision making process, the questions for the interviews were divided into the pre-trip stage, during-trip stage and post-trip stage, which were explained to the respondents beforehand. Therefore, a concrete outcome of the extent to which social media are used in each phase is aimed to become more apparent, as well as the stage which is most intensively used for social media purposes.

3.1 Data Collection

The author conducted 10 interviews. Equal number of male and female respondents was recruited in order to guarantee a gender balance. The respondents were engaged using the convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, due to the time and resource constraints. All of the respondents are from Central Europe (eight students are Austrian, one is German and one is French). They all belong to Generation Y and are currently studying at one of the public and private universities in Austria. Table 1 provides a detailed profile of all respondents. As illustrated in Table 1, one can see that the average age of the respondents is approximately 24. Interestingly, the number of trips taken within the last two years varies remarkably. Out of the 10 interrogated students, one person travelled nine times, while another one only took one trip in the settled time frame.

Respondent	Age	Gender	Nationality	University	No. of trips
Respondent A	27	Male	Austrian	Johannes Kepler University Linz	3 trips
Respondent B	27	Male	Austrian	University of Vienna	6 trips
Respondent C	24	Male	French	MODUL University Vienna	9 trips
Respondent D	22	Male	Austrian	University of Vienna	4 trips
Respondent E	22	Male	German	University of Vienna	3 trips
Respondent F	23	Female	Austrian	MODUL University Vienna	5 trips
Respondent G	22	Female	Austrian	MODUL University Vienna	1 trip
Respondent H	24	Female	Austrian	Vienna University of Technology	2 trips
Respondent I	23	Female	Austrian	University of Vienna	5 trips
Respondent J	24	Female	Austrian	University of Vienna	4 trips

Table 1. Profile of respondents

Face-to-face interviews were conducted under the author’s moderation, while a mobile device was used to record the answers to prevent any loss of information. Furthermore, all uncertainties concerning the definition of social media and various categories of it (see section 2.3) were well explained to the respondents prior to the interviews. On average, the interviews lasted for around 35 to 40

minutes where the respondents are free to express their opinions throughout the interviews.

Regarding the interview questions, for each stage of the decision-making process, various key questions were asked. In the pre-trip stage, three main questions were designed. The first one is “Imagine that you decide to go on a leisure trip somewhere. What are the very first steps you undertake in planning your vacation?” Hereby the interviewer intended to give the respondents the freedom to think about how they prepared their last trip or what options of information search they usually would use for planning their journey (e.g., ask family and friends for advice, visit travel agencies or online platforms). The second question is “What criteria do you use to decide on which hotel suits best for you?”. The aim is not only to find out about the principles an accommodation needs to achieve in the respondents’ opinion, but also to examine how they differentiate between the massive offer of hotels and where they extract the information from. Another essential question in the pre-trip stage is “Do you read online reviews? If yes, how do they influence your final booking decision?” As already indicated in section 2, review sites tend to become increasingly popular and used. Thus, the interest lies in finding out whether this is also the case specifically for Generation Y-ers or whether they only use it as a further information tool with limited influence.

In the during-trip stage, the interviewer considered it to be important to ascertain how the respondents stay connected with their family and friends at home and whether they use social media platforms to do so. As mentioned earlier, a vast majority of people integrates social media in their daily life activities but it is uncertain if it is the case when they are on vacation. Therefore, several questions were asked to examine the Millennials’ point of view and their usage of social media during their trip. Furthermore, the interviewer drew specific attention to the questions “Do you write blogs during your trip? If yes, what aspects of your trip do you consider in your blog?”. The microblog Twitter, for instance, counts approximately 288 active users per month, where “77% of accounts are outside the U.S.” (Twitter, Inc. 2015). Thus, it is interesting to explore whether these blogs are also popular among students studying in Austria. Furthermore, the interviewer considered it to be important to acknowledge whether the Generation Y-ers make

use of free Wi-Fi opportunities at specific spots to connect to social media platforms. From this question one may identify how strongly the Millennials feel the need to share their experiences right on point and how bound they are to their mobile devices while exploring attractions. The last outstanding question of this stage focuses, like in the pre-trip stage, on online reviews: “If you read online reviews: Do you consider tips of where to eat, what to do etc.?” From the respective answers, the interviewer aimed to identify how big the influence of sites like TripAdvisor and Holidaycheck are, once the respondents are already on-site. Through this question, one is able to draw a careful conclusion on which stage online review platforms are being used the most.

In the post-trip stage, the interviewer lays the focus on two main questions. The first one is “Do you share your personal photos and videos online?” Through the performance of the interviews, it is inter alia the objective to get a closer insight into Generation Y-ers usage of social media sites once they are back at home. It is aimed to find out how important it is to the Millennials to convey to others what they have experienced during their trip. Hereby, a related question is “Do you share your personal experiences on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and/or other social media platforms?”, which should support the analysis of the first main question. The second key question of the post-trip stage is “Do you write reviews about your accommodation on online review sites?”, as it is considered to be also essential to not only find out if the Millennials use TripAdvisor and Holidaycheck for information search, but also if they want to let other travellers know about their experiences on-site.

Before the conclusion of the interrogation, one additional query was asked which is “After answering all of these questions, at which stage do you think you use social media the most?” Hereby the interviewer requires the respondents to reflect on their whole travel decision making process, and have in view how much time effort they put into the research of their trip with the help of social media platforms. The questions and responses by each respondent can be found in the appendices (see section 7).

3.2 Data Analysis

As already notified, a qualitative research approach has been adopted since it is intended to being able to “understand the contexts or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue” (Creswell, 2007, p.40). Hereby, it is aimed to make use of a theory in order to explain the existing problem. For this study, the grounded theory method (GTM) was utilized. Corbin and Strauss (2014) state, that this approach gives researchers the opportunity “to examine topics and related behaviors from many different angles- thus developing comprehensive explanations.” (p. 11). Furthermore Corbin & Strauss (2014) acknowledge that hidden meanings can be identified, through the application of the grounded theory. By analysing the respective interviews, it was furthermore intended to identify the sequence and information sources used before, during and after the trips undertaken by the Millennials.

4 Findings

4.1 Pre-Trip Stage

In this very first stage of the travel decision making process, the findings exhibit that the sequence of information search can vary across different people remarkably.

As alluded to in section 3.1, one key question identified in the pre-trip stage is “Imagine that you decide to go on a trip somewhere. What are the very first steps you undertake in planning your vacation?” The vast majority of the respondents already has an idea of where they want to go before they start an active research. “First of all I ask my friends and family if they have been to that destination already and would have some advice for me”, explained respondent G. This student considers it to be the first information source when she plans a journey. Respondent C has a similar habit of gathering the needed information, which makes it visible that each one male and one female respondent recognize family and friends as an important and reliable source of information when they are eager to collect general knowledge about the desired destination. This might also include personal experiences concerning accommodation, transportation and attractions. If a relative, for instance, might have had a very positive experience at a hotel, it is very likely that respondent C and G would at least inform themselves about it and might even choose to stay there. Student A, in contrast, stated “I like to watch documentaries about places I have a general interest in. Some of them really catch me where I then go to my laptop and search for further information about the city or the place.” Hereby one may acknowledge that this respondent is highly interested in finding out more about the attractions first, before he is concerned about transportation and accommodations. This, however, tends to be a rather seldom approach, which was used by only one student in the conducted interviews. A more frequent way of gathering general information is, as shown in Table 2, the usage of Google. Six students would use the search engine to find out more about the destination that they have in mind. Respondent B mentioned “I would just type into Google some keywords and look what pops up. Usually I then go to TripAdvisor, because it is always one of the first sites that appear and you can find so many reviews from

other travellers there, which can be very helpful when you plan your trip!” A similar process can be noticed by the analysis of Respondent F’s answer. After she looks for general information on the search engine, she said “I sometimes watch YouTube videos about the place or look on TripAdvisor for some nice pictures that travellers have shared.” What is noteworthy after a scrutiny of student A, B and F is the fact that all of them mention the review site TripAdvisor already in the very beginning. Even Respondent A, who watches documentaries first, uses in his next step this type of social media platform to gather further information for a prospective trip. Furthermore, YouTube tends to become a more popular media-sharing-community site. Three respondents make already use of it during the pre-trip phase. “Sometimes I also watch videos on YouTube, if the destination has a channel there. Their videos really get me in the holiday mood and motivate me to do some research on the destination.” stated respondent G. Thus, one can acknowledge the importance of social media sites when the respondents are still in the progress of basic information search.

Once the students were asked how they collect all the necessary information about transportation, accommodation and attractions prior to their trips, eight out of ten mentioned TripAdvisor at some point. As noted in Table 2, it becomes apparent that it is by far the most used online review site from this group of respondents. In general, however, the interviewed students tend to use at least two review platforms in order to compare the various opinions and experiences of other travellers concerning accommodation and attractions. Besides TripAdvisor, Holidaycheck, Booking.com, Expedia and Trivago were mentioned by the respondents. Nevertheless, they appear to be less popular than TripAdvisor. Respondent A stated “There, you can find the section “Best of 2015”, for instance, where you can find the hotel and destination award winners of that year. I always have a look at it to get an even clearer picture of the destination I have in mind and see, if it is considered to be worth it to travel there.” Hence, it becomes evident how carefully the Millennials research and how important it is to them to find out as much as possible before they book a trip. Thus, one may ascertain the necessity of online reviews, especially in the pre-trip stage of the travel decision making process. Regarding the research of the transportation to the desired destination, 50% of the interviewed students use Checkfelix to find the best flight offer. In this study it

appears to be the most popular transportation search engine due to the user-friendliness and several “travel hints” from other travellers in South America, for instance. Further minor information sources used by the ten respondents can be identified in Table 2.

Pre-Trip Stage				
	General	Accommodation	Transportation	Attraction
Booking.com		2 (C; F)		
Checkfelix			5 (E; F; G; I; J)	
Destination website	3 (A; C; J)		1 (C)	5 (C; E; F; G; J)
Documentaries	1 (A)			1 (A)
Expedia		1 (I)	3 (A; D; J)	
Family/Friends	2 (C; G)			
Fluege.de			1 (rl)	
Google	6 (B; D; E; F; H; I)	1 (G)		1 (D)
Holidaycheck		2 (B; G)	1 (B)	
Online Reviews	2 (B; G)	6 (A; B; C; D; E)	1 (G)	3 (B; E; G)
Travel Agency	1 (E)	1 (H)	1 (H)	
Travel Blogs				1 (A)
TripAdvisor	2 (A; F)	7 (A; B; C; D; G; H; I; J)		3 (A; B; D)
Trivago		1 (B)		
YouTube	3 (F; G; J)			

Table 2. Respondents’ information search in the pre-trip stage

The second main question “What criteria do you use to decide on which hotel suits best for you?” confirmed the findings from the analysis of the first question. As exhibited in Table 2, half of the respondents use online review platforms in order to search for an appropriate accommodation. Interviewee A responded “Usually I just go to review sites where various aspects are compared. I always choose hotels which are rated very positively in all aspects”. Hereby the ease of use of these platforms tends to comprise a profound advantage. Due to the fact that several components, that contribute to the decision on which hotel to choose, can be compared and read about in more detail, TripAdvisor and similar sites become increasingly utilized. Respondent E mentioned “When thinking about it, it actually surprises me to realize that nowadays I never make a booking decision without having a look at online reviews.” This statement accentuates even more the importance of this type of social media in many Generation Y-ers accommodation research. Certainly, the location of the hotel as well as the cleanliness of the rooms, the competence of the staff, the price factor and its relationship to the offered services are further highly important for the respondents. Nevertheless, these components have most likely always been considered as basic and crucial elements in the vast majority’s planning phase. The newer innovation is definitely the option to use review sites, which enable travellers to do a more independent research, according to their own interests and needs.

The last key question in the pre-trip stage builds on the previous one: “Do you read online reviews? If yes, how do they influence your final booking decision?” As identified above, they are used by the majority of this study’s respondents group. In Figure 4 it becomes explicit that online reviews are essential for the vast majority, due to the fact that 80% of the interviewed students claimed that they are strongly influenced by the opinions and experiences of other travellers. “I believe they influence me strongly, as I think it is important to know how well the hotel I want to stay at is managed and how well they treat their customers and how they respect them. If I have a bad feeling about the hotel after reading its online reviews, I would surely not book it!”, stated Respondent J. Respondent H shares this opinion and mentioned furthermore “But you also have to be aware that some people are very picky and complain about every minor mistake, or that the hotel might have paid somebody to write positive reviews.” This leads to the assumption that Generation

Y-ers are absolutely careful while reading online critiques. They tend to analyse the reviews very consciously, which is why the Millennials do not always fully trust the travellers statements on these social media platforms. Two respondents, respectively 20%, sensed a medium impact through online reviews when they plan a trip. Respondents C explained “I would compare the aggregated and individual reviews and look for a couple of negative ones, see when they were posted (because sometimes they are really old and might not apply anymore).” Although this student does not feel highly influenced by the reviews, he nevertheless appears to analyse them in detail while planning the trip. Respondent D, who also feels more or less impacted by them, said “I always read reviews very carefully because some people are very demanding and might complain about every little problem.” Herewith it becomes clear that several respondents face a trust issue while using this type of social media, due to their precise and detailed analysis of the critiques. Thus, for them many reviews are essential in order to being able to compare them and to get an overall impression of the accommodation presented online. This characteristic might significantly identify the Millennials, as they grew up with the Internet and technology in general, and therefore have a general know- how of how to use social media sites efficiently without getting trapped by any hidden traps. Correspondingly, it is very interesting that all respondents declared that they still feel either strongly or more or less influenced by the critiques they read online. None of them completely rejected online reviews, which results in a zero percentage for a little or no influence in Figure 4.

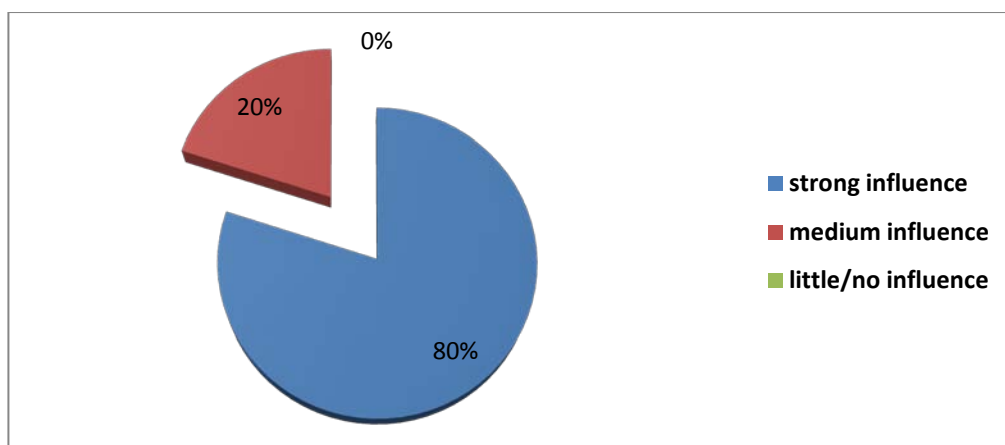


Figure 4. Influence of online reviews prior to a trip

Overall, it can be acknowledged that the majority of interviewed students follow a specific selection process when they search for an accommodation on online review sites in the pre-strip stage. Seven respondents perceive the entire rating or percentage of a hotel as being of great importance, which is usually the first criterion they have a look at. “Often you see how they score in various sections or the overall percentage that people who have been there give the hotel. It depends on the destination, but usually I decide to take a hotel with a percentage above 90”, mentioned Respondent G. Respondent J represented a similar opinion and said “In general, a hotel should have at least 3 out of 5 stars, in my opinion. If its rating is below that, I would for sure not book it.” Four other students share this point of view and would only choose a hotel with 3-star level or higher. Respondent C stated that “a hotel needs to have a lot of reviews and needs to score at least a four star on TripAdvisor.” This indicates that all listed criteria, such as price-performance ratio, location, accessibility to public transportations, cleanliness etc., need to be fulfilled to a certain extent in order to be considered as a prospective accommodation by the Millennials. Once they have chosen and picked out several convenient hotel options, the next stride tends to be the analysis of the review quantity. In case that only a few critiques were written or if they are not recent anymore, the Generation Y-ers often feel alienated and would rather continue the search and inspect other preselected hotels. Finally, once they have narrowed down the offers accordingly, they are routinely left with two or even one final option. “If there are for instance two hotels that are similar concerning prices, I would definitely pick the hotel with the better reviews”, stated by Respondent E.

To sum up, one cannot deny the inevitable necessity of online review platforms for the Millennials in the pre-trip stage of the travel decision making process. The vast majority uses them naturally when planning a trip and puts an intense focus on credible reviews. Thus, critiques, especially on TripAdvisor, make a remarkable contribution to the final booking decision regarding the accommodation. For concrete information about transportation, Checkfelix appeared to be the most popular site for Generation Y-ers in order to inform themselves about the best price offers and special flight deals all across the world. Furthermore, YouTube videos for tourists provided by destinations tend to become increasingly important and used as a further travel information source concerning popular attractions on-site.

In the pre-trip stage it can be ascertained that online reviews are the most used form of social media by the Millennials. As the respondents usually have an idea of where they want to go, they start looking for accommodation and transportation straightaway, for which online critiques are a crucial information source. In this study, none of the respondents stated to have a look at the hotel's own website regarding prices, location and others. This indicates that it is essential for a hotel to either be well presented on these social media platforms or have an exceptional word-of-mouth propaganda. Otherwise it might be a complex challenge to keep up with competing accommodations.

4.2 During-Trip Stage

In this phase, the aim is to emphasize on the usage of all different types of social media which are utilized once the Generation Y-ers are at the travel destination. It is intended to ascertain whether social media platforms are used more or less during their trip, and whether online reviews still play a crucial role as in the pre-strip stage.

The first main question identified is "How do you stay connected with your family and friends at home?" The associated sub question aims to determine whether the Millennials use social media platforms in order to keep them updated. Figure 5 illustrates different forms of staying in contact with relatives and friends used by the ten student respondents. Herewith it needs to be clarified that the majority listed more than one contact option. Nevertheless, one may ascertain that Facebook and WhatsApp are leading the rank remarkably with 29% usage during the Generation Y-ers' trips. Respondent I stated "It became some kind of a custom within my friend circle to share pictures of trips online and we comment on each other's posts. [...] It is nice if someone is interested in what you are doing and comments on the media you post." Respondent D shared this thought and explained "I want my friends to be at least indirectly a part of my holidays and give them the possibility to see how nice the vacation is. I enjoy getting "likes" and answering comments that my friends post under my pictures or posts." The advantages of Facebook and WhatsApp, which tend to attract a large number of Generation Y-ers,

are the free-usage, the possibility to send voice recordings, the exact location of where you are, and the ability to send and receive pictures and videos immediately. However, some respondents prefer having a conversation in a private chat, where it is also possible to exchange media. These students prefer to inform their family and friends in a more personal way, rather than letting all friends in the contact list know. This also applies to Respondent J who explained “I never post pictures on my timeline on Facebook or on Instagram. I use these sites more to check out what others share and what they have experienced.” Hot spots and free Wi-Fi, nevertheless, play an essential role for both active and more passive users of social media platforms. If the Millennials would have to spend extra money on the usage of social media sites, they would either utilize it rarely or not at all. Thus, the overwhelming majority of respondents aim to prevent this by making sure to have free Wi-Fi at least in the accommodation. This illustrates that some young adults might even have the feeling of being able to maintain or improve relationships on an easier basis, while increasing their self-esteem through getting attention from others. Although Respondent F has a similar point of view, she also mentioned that it is of importance to not exaggerate with pictures and statuses on social media platforms. This may also be an important reason why 18% rather prefer to call or send text messages, than being active on social media platforms.

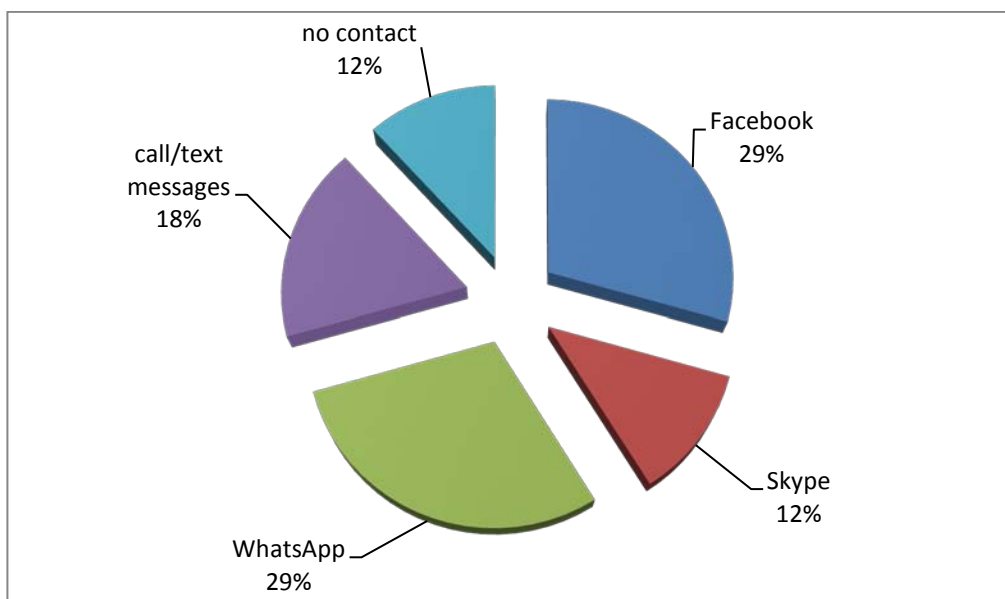


Figure 5. Ways of staying in contact with family & friends during the trip

In contrast to the interrogated students who use Facebook and WhatsApp, these respondents do not feel the impulse to inform others through social media as they rather want to address specific family members or friends directly and on a more personal basis. 12% of the interviewees mentioned Skype as a tool to stay in contact with others, especially during a journey which lasts for more than one week. The advantages of Skype are the option to use it via laptops and mobile devices, and to talk via camera while being able to send messages to others at the same time. These benefits are specifically for Generation Y-ers who miss their friends and families quickly. The remaining 12% who prefer not to stay in contact with others at all stated that they appreciate and enjoy their time away from home and aim to benefit from the privacy. Together with their trip partner, these respondents intend to focus on themselves and their recreation on their journeys.

However, it furthermore needs to be clarified that several Millennials mentioned the importance of differentiating between trips within Austria and foreign countries. Within Austria, they would use social media platforms more intensively, due to the fact that free Wi-Fi is not necessary for them. If this component is not provided abroad, these respondents tend to use social media sites less or abstain from them completely. The duration of their trips also plays an essential role regarding the usage of these platforms. If they stay away for a few days or a maximum of one week, they often do not feel the necessity to keep others updated of what they are doing during their trip.

Interestingly, none of the respondents utilizes Instagram, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube and other similar platforms in order to share experiences online. Hence, one may ascertain that Facebook is evidently the leading social media site, which is used the most to stay in contact with friends during a journey, albeit not as extensively as one might expect. Thus, it can be acknowledged that the trend of using these sites during trips rather tends to drop. If the Millennials utilize them, they aim to limit textual information, as well as pictures and videos to a certain extent, or even solely communicate through private chats in order to maintain their privacy. Even though Generation Y-ers like to inform themselves well and in detail about destinations and accommodations in the pre-trip stage, e.g.: via online reviews, they tend to keep their own experiences to themselves and are not always

willing to reveal them through the Internet. This caution of the Millennials might be caused by the uncertainty whether the shared information stays within the privacy range they selected, or if it is unwillingly communicated to search engines or other platforms.

Another key question in this study is “Do you write blogs during you trip? If yes, what aspects of your trip do you consider in your blog?” Hereby, all respondents without exceptions answered it in the negative way. Respondent E explained that “I think on a trip of one or two weeks you don’t experience so many interesting things about which you could write a really nice blog about, except if you are a travel blogger and are able to write frequently about your trips. I think nobody would read your blogs if you only write once or twice a year.” Respondent F commented that “I don’t read blogs myself so I would not expect from others to read a whole story of what I have been up to on a specific date.” Other respondents mentioned the high time-consumption and effort as negative components of blogs. Thus, one may acknowledge that for Generation Y-ers rapidness and minimal expenditure of time are essential and well appreciated once they are away from home. As already visible in the analysis of the first main question, they often prefer to enjoy their trips in absence from friends and acquaintances, and are not highly interested in providing them with updates and information about their vacations. Therefore, it becomes discernible that writing blogs does not lie in the interests of the majority of this generation.

The analysis of the subsequent question is aimed to discover whether the Millennials use the opportunity of free Wi-Fi at specific spots in order to connect to social media platforms. Hereby, half of the respondents indicated that they make use of this possibility due to various aspects. These five interviewed students, however, share one main reason for the frequent utilization of free Wi-Fi. Facebook is, again, the outstanding and most used social media platform, which they utilize during their experiences and activities at sightseeing places. Respondent B said “Sometimes I use it to tag my friends and myself at the place we are or I also take a picture and upload it directly on Facebook.” Furthermore, he explained that “it is nice to have some memories of the trip. I like to scroll through my Facebook page and have a look at them, even months later. Another reason is that my friends want

to see pictures from my trip as well. Thus, it is the easiest way to simply upload some of them to my page.” Interviewee G shares this point of view and stated “I think it is cool to have the opportunity to let your friends know at which place you are at the moment. So that’s what I do via Facebook. I would just quickly let them know where I am and leave a short note.” To Respondent I, who uses this type of social media platform as well, the map is the exceptional advantage to use this site at hot spots or where free Wi-Fi is available: “I think it is great to have such an overview because often I do not really realize to how many places I have been already.” Hereby, one may acknowledge that for this respondent the usage of Facebook goes beyond the information sharing. She sees it furthermore as a personal benefit to being able to mark the destinations where she has been. Respondent J represented herself as well as an active user, who perceives a free Wi-Fi connection as an opportunity “to connect to Facebook but also to quickly read on review sites what else is near this spot, like other attractions or good and cheap restaurants.” Respondent D is the exceptional one who asserted to use another type of social media: “I also like to take pictures of attractions, edit them on Instagram and post them there.” Through the analysis of the statements of the respective question it becomes apparent that the various types of social media platforms are barely considered once the Millennials are at specific sites or attractions. Merely Facebook appears to be the only social network that is being used to a certain extent. 30% of the respondents claimed to usually not use social media platforms at all, even if free Wi-Fi is available. Respondent F explained that she prefers to upload pictures to Facebook once she is back at the hotel, as she opts for the enjoyment of her discursions and not the distraction of any social media applications on a mobile device. Respondent A also claimed that “For me a vacation is more about expanding your own horizon, getting to know another country and not permanently thinking about updating others, just because there is a free Wi-Fi connection.” Respondent H shared this point of view, as for her new adventures and experiences are in the foreground. Thus, one may identify that for this group of respondents, social media platforms are not part of the destination exploration, but are rather considered to be used in the pre-trip stage. In comparison to them, the trip’s location plays a significant role for Respondent C to decide whether to connect to social media sites or not at public places. The French respondent explained “In Paris, for instance, I

would not because I don't want to get robbed but in Austria I might." Respondent E generally refuses to use the opportunity of free Wi-Fi as well, as he prefers to inform his family and friends in person about his experiences away from home.

Through the examination of the respondents' answers, one may draw the conclusion that half of the Generation Y-ers appreciate free Wi-Fi connections and use them actively for information sharing purposes. Herewith, Facebook is by far the most used and popular social media site. The other half, however, aims to focus on its travel companions and the exploration of unknown spots and attractions only. Technological devices retreat into the background during that time. Thus, it becomes apparent that a concrete answer to whether social media play an important role when free Wi-Fi is available at sightseeing places, cannot be provided. The argumentations from the interrogated Millennials are highly diverse.

The last key question of this stage is "If you read online reviews: Do you consider tips of where to eat, what to do etc.?" For this purpose, Table 3 was created in order to illustrate a clear overview. As delineated, four out of ten respondents are willing to inform themselves via online reviews about various things to do at the destination they are at. These students highly appreciate any advices provided by other travellers, who have been to the destination already. Respondent B, for instance, explained that he utilizes them "because there might be some "insider tips" not everybody knows about. On Holidaycheck you can find the reviews of travellers who have tried different things to do. If many people talk positively about a certain thing I would of course want to do it as well." For three out of these four respondents, online reviews about restaurants are not of great relevance- they tend to be spontaneous as they are not fastidious and would try out different types of food, without informing themselves beforehand. "I try out everything! As soon as I am near a restaurant that looks fancy, I go in and simply try out what they have." affirmed interviewee B furthermore. Thus, one may ascertain that Millennials often prefer to eat close to the attractions they are at. Student G mentioned furthermore that "people are often very picky on food and not easy to please". Thus, one may identify that some Millennials are more easy-going and rather perceive attractions as more important than the food provided on-site. For Respondent J both components, things to do and where to eat, are of interest on online review sites

and stated “they are very useful to know which places are best to go and enjoy a better trip. Years ago, when online reviews weren’t so popular yet, I just went to restaurants and hoped for it to be good but was often disappointed and the perceived quality of my trip somehow decreased.”

As shown in Table 3, four respondents noted that their usage of online review sites during the trip consists mainly of finding out which restaurants meet their expectations and were well rated by other visitors. Respondent A explained “This way it is very easy to find good local restaurants and the route to them without much effort.” He specifically uses TripAdvisor to observe various restaurants and identify the ones which meet best his preferences. Hereby, it is evident that the Millennials choose their favourite online review site to get more information, rather than doing a general investigation via search engines. Although they are not looking for expensive or classy options as they do not seem of great importance to them, they highly value the price-performance ratio and are eager to receive a good quality of food along to an acceptable price.

	Things to do	Where to eat	Sometimes/maybe	Not considered
Respondent A		X		
Respondent B	X			
Respondent C		X		
Respondent D				X
Respondent E			X	
Respondent F		X		
Respondent G	X			
Respondent H			X	
Respondent I	X			
Respondent J	X	X		

Table 3. Usage of online reviews during the trip

Respondent F underlined this statement: “When I go on a trip with my friends I would probably choose a nicely described restaurant from TripAdvisor.” Respondent C considers online reviews furthermore as a time-saving advantage. He

aims to enjoy his trips to the fullest and thus likes to make his decisions concerning restaurants before he leaves the hotel. Two out of the ten interrogated students use online reviews to make decisions regarding activities and eating out on a rather irregular basis, while one respondent does not perceive them as a decisive tool. He explained that “Although I read through them, I do not really follow the advices. I rather go to a restaurant that is near the place I would be in the moment I am hungry.” Through the analysis of the latter question, one may realize the significant importance of other travellers’ opinions for the overwhelming majority of respondents once they are at the desired destination. Only one student stated that he is not influenced at all by online review sites, concerning things to do and where to eat. This outcome allows the assumption that the technology, with which the Millennials grew up with, constantly influences important decisions during their trips. They appear to consider online review platforms as a reliable form of social media and therefore utilize it when necessary.

4.3 Post-Trip Stage

The last phase of the Generation Y-ers trip experience is considered to be once they are back at home and reflect on their vacation. Herewith, it was aimed to (1) identify whether social media is still utilized in order to share knowledge and experiences about the journey they undertook, (2) find out to which extent they are used, in comparison to the pre-trip stage and during the trip.

To the first question which is “Do you share your personal photos and videos online?”, eight people confirmed to do so while four respondents were rather sceptical. Similar to the during- trip stage, the respective students who use social media platforms share pictures and videos to a minor degree. Respondent E mentioned “I would pick just one or two pictures which I would then post on Facebook and Instagram, just to transmit my friends the positive experience I have made during my trip.” Comparably, Respondent D stated “If you post too much, people will get annoyed and won’t be interested in your trip anymore, following a lower number of likes.” He declared, similar to Respondent E’s statement, to only post a very limited number of pictures. Although these respondents are interested in

sharing personal media about their latest trip, they are concurrently very careful about the amount of information they provide on social media sites in order to avoid a declining number of people who are interested in it. Respondent H, for instance, claimed to only change her profile and/or title picture on social media sites, without any extra pictures or albums. Thus, private conversations on Facebook are often preferred, through which the Millennials are able to directly address the people they want to. Furthermore, they have a greater control over their own privacy rights, which appear as an increasingly important issue. This can be put down to the criticism concerning the protection of data privacy in Europe. Specifically Facebook is often named as a social media platform, which does not meet the requirements on this continent.

However, even though the Generation Y-ers are aware of this problem, they continue to utilize this site due to its features and the ease of use. It can be assumed that, as long as no similar social media platform is available, they linger on this site while trying to find an appropriate balance of usage and privacy protection. In general, it can also be ascertained that the Millennials are not interested in sharing personal videos from their trips on social media sites, which might as well be coherent with the willingness of protecting their own privacy. One out of the two respondents, who answered in the negative way, explained that she would rather share personal media during her trip experience, instead of posting them back at home. This clarifies that Generation Y-ers have different preferences regarding the utilization of social media platforms when it comes to updating others about their latest trips.

Furthermore, it was aimed to acknowledge whether the Millennials are motivated to write reviews about their accommodations on online review sites. Herewith, the level of satisfaction appears to play an essential role for the overwhelming majority of respondents. Respondent A mentioned "When I am very disappointed by the hotel I want other travellers to know about it and prevent them from experiencing the same mistakes that I did." Another six interrogated students share this point of view. Respondent B, for instance, explained it in detail: "If I am extremely satisfied with the service, which I would not have expected in advance, I would surely want to let others know. That also applies for the opposite: If I

surprisingly experience a very bad service where nobody cares about me and doesn't treat me the right way, it would be the first thing for me to do to go on a review site and let others know about it." Hence, one may recognize that the Generation Y-ers are especially motivated to express their opinions if an extreme or unexpected situation occurred (either in a positive or negative way), for which they were not prepared for in advance. In contrast, if the expectation is met by the accommodation, the millennial travellers generally do not feel impressed or excited about the service. Thus, they would not necessarily feel pushed to state their experiences on online review sites. This outcome displays their rather passive usage of these platforms and makes their stronger utilization before and during their trips even more visible.

Finally, the last question of the post-trip stage is "Do you share your personal experiences on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and/or other social media platforms?" Hereby, the focus lies solely on the Millennials' trip opinions which they are willing to spread through these sites rather than on the uncommented media they would share online. The findings are thus very interesting. Overall, the ten respondents mentioned that they do not consider Facebook and other in the question stated social media sites as appropriate platforms to share their experiences. Only Respondent D said "If something was really great or where I have the feeling it needs to be spread, I share my experience on Facebook and Instagram." However, he also added to generally not do that. Although the vast majority of respondents do not necessarily feel motivated to write reviews in order to express their feelings regarding their accommodations, the attractions, and more, they consider online review platforms as the most appropriate type of social media. Respondent H aimed to explain why she, and possibly other Generation Y-ers, is not eager to share personal experiences: "I went to a technical high-school where I learned a lot about social media and their lack in security. That's why I am very careful of what I post on these platforms. Even if you delete your posts later on, they can still be found on Facebook." Herewith, one may acknowledge the resemblance to the first posed question in this stage. Due to their high educational level and awareness of privacy issues in the field of social media, the Millennials appear to be very conscious about every step they undertake on these platforms, inter alia the sharing of personal trip experiences.

After a thorough analysis of the main questions of each stage of the Millennials' trips, probing questions were asked to ascertain which phase(s) social media platforms is/are used the most by the respondents. Herewith, the interrogated students were asked to reflect on these in order to determine for themselves at which stage they use social media to the highest extent. The results are illustrated below, in Figure 6. Through its examination, it becomes impressively apparent, that all ten respondents claimed the pre-trip stage to be most important regarding the usage of social media platforms.

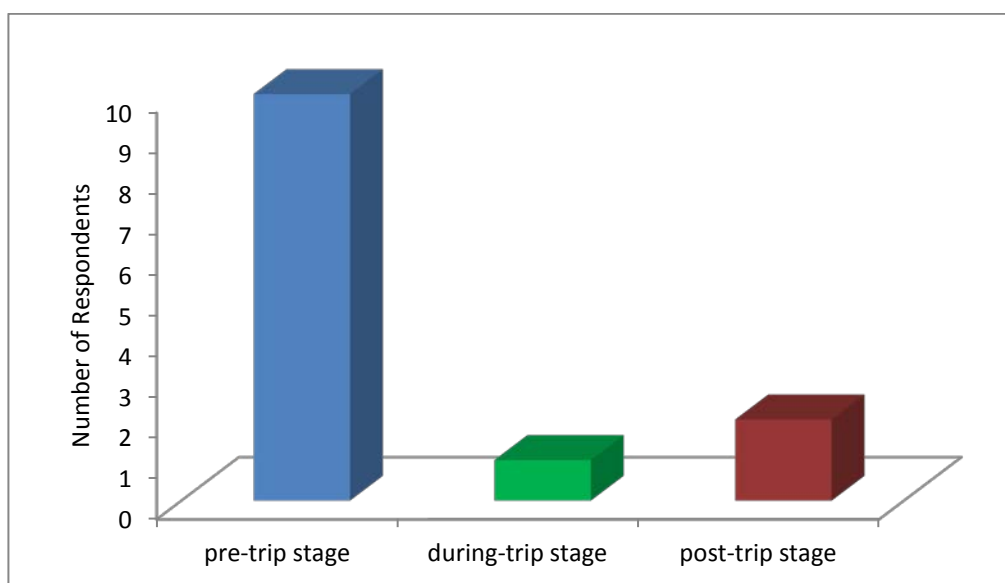


Figure 6. Depiction of the utilization of social media at the three stages of a trip

Due to the massive information search into which the Generation Y-ers are investing before they go on their journeys, they consequently spend a lot of time on social media sites in order to prepare for their trips. Thus, the expenditure of time spent on these platforms is a critical factor for the Millennials. Respondent D explained that he spends a lot of time on the comparison of prices of different hotels, the information search on attractions and more. Respondent E also mentioned the importance of online reviews for the analysis of these various factors. In contrast, three students claimed to use, in addition to the pre-trip stage, one out of its following two phases of a trip. Respondent G said that she believes to use social media sites the most in the pre-trip and post-trip stage: "Before, because I

have to search for all the information I need and back at home I have time to post pictures and have conversations about them with my friends.” Through this statement it becomes apparent that this student takes her time off from social media sites once she is at the desired destination. However, she utilizes them intensively in order to investigate various accommodation options and to share some pictures on Facebook once she is back at home. Respondent I, who uses social media intensively during her trip, specifically pointed TripAdvisor out as a crucial information source when rapid tips are needed. By analysing Figure 6, one may ascertain that she is nevertheless the only student who mentioned the second stage to be essential regarding the utilization of social media. This might be due to the Millennials’ perception that a journey away from home should be spent with only a limited number of technological devices, in order to focus on their travel companions and the destination.

5 Conclusion

To recapitulate, it can be acknowledged that the overwhelming majority of Generation Y-ers draws its attention noticeably to the pre-trip stage where online reviews, such as TripAdvisor, are dominating in order to get a great overview of what is offered. Furthermore, YouTube videos emerge to become increasingly popular. As mentioned above, the Millennials' evidently consider social media platforms the least important once they are at the desired destination. Hereby, the difference to the pre-trip stage becomes highly visible. In the post-trip stage, the social network Facebook is the leading and most essential type of social media, through which the Generation Y-ers share their personal experiences via pictures. Videos, however, are posted very seldom and are rather preferred to be shown to the Millennials' friends in person. Concerning the usage of reviews in the post-trip stage it was ascertained that it is dependent on the Generation Y-ers' level of satisfaction on-site. If they were highly satisfied or dissatisfied with the perceived experiences, they are motivated to write online reviews for other prospective travellers and for themselves to share their excitement or disappointment. Furthermore, it was described that blogs, social news and bookmarks, microblogs and media-sharing communities do not noteworthy catch the Millennials interest hereby. Thus, as illustrated in Figure 6, it becomes discernible that only 20% of the respondents use social media as intensively in the post-trip stage as before their travels.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

Due to the fact that all three stages of the travel decision making process were considered in the current study, it is believed that it complements and provides new knowledge about the usage of social media by young travellers in the travel decision making to both academia as well as industry.

Concerning the pre-trip stage, travellers generally recall their own memory and consult friends and relatives for more information and personal opinions regarding a trip. Only when they cannot gather sufficient information from the primary search, they would search for information from external sources like the Internet and social

media. However, according to the analysis of this study, one may identify the Millennials' tendency towards the utilization of external information sources, such as search engines and YouTube videos, before approaching family and friends. Hence, it becomes apparent that Generation Y-ers share a different sequence of information search. By referring to online reviews, for instance, it was ascertained that the Millennials mainly consume but seldom contribute information. Specifically in the pre-trip stage, the demand of relevant comments and advices on online review platforms are crucial to many young travellers.

In comparison to the pre-trip and post-trip stages, one may identify that Generation Y-ers use social media during their trip in a very limited extent. The possible reason is that most information search tasks were generally done prior to the trip. Hence, the planning phase is often already concluded before they arrive at the destination. Furthermore, the unavailability of free Wi-Fi may play an essential role and can partially explain why they use social media less once they are at their desired destination. Depending on whether or not the Generation Y-ers are allowed to use the Internet for free, they appear to spend more or less time on social media platforms. Another still arising aspect may be the privacy policy issue, mentioned in section 4.3. It tends to make the Millennials more cautious about the content they share online, as they do not want their information to leak after they have finished their trip.

5.2 Managerial Implications

Through the analysis of this study, one may ascertain several aspects that still can or need to be improved by the tourism industry in order to maximize the benefit gained from usage of social media. As mentioned above, the Generation Y-ers strongly rely on search engines. Therefore, it becomes evident that travel agencies, for instance, need to focus on the search engine optimization (SEO). Thus, their chance of being ranked more visible and therefore being more recognized can increase remarkably.

Once the Millennials inform themselves about the accommodation on social media platforms, online review sites like TripAdvisor play an essential role and have a strong impact on the decision making of this generation. Therefore, especially hoteliers or social media managers may need to monitor positive and specifically negative comments closely and deal with them promptly. Prospective customers may feel more valued and recognized by the companies, resulting in a more positive and reliable impression of the firm that may lead to the consumption of a product or service. Also, in order to reduce the uncertainty of privacy during the information sharing process, tourism suppliers are advised to establish a secure platform where information can be shared amongst each other. Thus, they would remarkably contribute in providing a higher level of service quality and give the Millennials another option of sharing their opinions and experiences about trips on a more trustworthy basis.

5.3 Limitations and Future Implications

Regarding the limitations of this study, it needs to be acknowledged that a small sample size has been used. Hence, the findings may not represent the overall thought of Generation Y-ers. Furthermore, the geographical coverage of respondents is another limitation as all respondents lived and studied in Austria when they were interrogated. Research findings may be generalized to the certain group of youngsters only. As no second person was involved to validate the content analysis results, the reliability may be affected due to the personal bias of the author.

To redress the problems listed above, future researchers are encouraged to expand the sample size to get a better overview of Generation Y travellers' preferences regarding the utilization of social media throughout their trips. As illustrated in the profile of respondents (see Table 1), one may ascertain frequent and non-frequent travellers. Thus, by providing of a bigger sample size, it is suggested to conduct a comparison between them. Also, due to the fact that males and females may show different preferences and behaviour, one may distinguish the results by gender or nationality and conduct further analysis.

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7 Appendices

7.1 Respondent A

Gender: Male

Age: 27 years

Nationality: Austrian

Educational level: Student at Johannes Kepler University Linz

1 Imagine that you decide to go on a leisure trip somewhere. What are the very first steps you undertake in planning your vacation?

I like to watch documentaries about places I have a general interest in. Some of them really catch me where I then go to my laptop and search for further information about the city or the place. For that I use TripAdvisor or the destination website itself. Once I decided which city I want to go to, I look online on how to get there the fastest and then I search for hotels.

2 Where would you get all the necessary information about transportation, accommodation and attractions from?

For that I use TripAdvisor a lot. There, you can find the section "Best of 2015", for instance, where you can find the hotel and destination award winners of that year. I always have a look at it to get an even clearer picture of the destination I have in mind and see, if it is considered to be worth it to travel there. For information about transportation I like to compare prices online, mainly on Expedia. Concerning the attractions, I gather a lot of information via the documentaries but also TripAdvisor and sometimes travel blogs, if I find an interesting one.

3 Do you search by yourself or do you prefer a travel agency to do that?

I always search by myself since a couple of years, as the Internet became a much more secure place and the information spread is much broader than any travel agency's data base.

4 What criteria do you use to decide on which hotel suits best for you?

Usually I just go to review sites where various aspects are compared. I always choose hotels which are rated very positively in all aspects, like the price-performance ratio, friendliness of the staff, cleanliness of the rooms, location etc.

5 Does a hotel, which offers a free Wi-Fi connection, have an advantage when you make a decision on where to stay?

Yes, for sure. Not only do I think it is an advantage for me as I can go online and search for any information I need while I stay there, but also for the hotel itself, as I usually tag myself on Facebook and share at which hotel I stay during my trip.

6 Do you read online reviews? If yes, how do they influence your final booking decision?

They influence my final booking decision very strongly. I would not book a hotel without first checking out its rating on online review sites. For me a hotel should not have a rating below 3.5 to 4 out of 5 stars. In between these ratings I expect the hotel to be convenient.

7 Where would you book your trip? In a travel agency or on an online platform?

Generally, I book online because I never take a trip which is longer than two weeks. For that time range I feel capable of managing my travel plans on my own.

8 During your trip: How do you stay connected with your family and friends at home?

When I travel I rarely stay in contact with them, except if there is an emergency. Otherwise, I would wait until I am back at home to call them by phone or send them an e-mail.

9 Do you keep them updated via social media sites?

I don't do that a lot. As mentioned before, I would tag myself at the hotel I stay at and maybe share a picture of the attraction but that's it. I think that our generation doesn't want to share so much on Facebook, Twitter, etc. anymore.

10 If yes, why?

-

11 How do you navigate yourself to the places/attractions you want to visit?

I would simply use my phone to plan the route on Google Maps. It is the easiest and fastest way to get to the place you want to visit.

12 Do you write blogs during your trip?

No, I don't.

13 If yes, what aspects of your trip do you consider in your blog?

-

14 Do you use the opportunity of free Wi-Fi at specific spots to connect to social media platforms?

I use this opportunity very rarely. For me a vacation is more about expanding your own horizon, getting to know another country and not permanently thinking about updating others, just because there is a free Wi-Fi connection.

15 If yes, why?

-

16 If you read online reviews: Do you consider tips of where to eat, what to do etc.?

Yes, I like to read through them before I go out to eat. This way it is very easy to find good local restaurants and the route to them without much effort. On TripAdvisor I always like to have a look at the restaurants because you can also find ratings and reviews there, so I can really use my days away from home in the best way I can.

17 Once you are back at home: Do you share your personal photos and videos online?

Back at home I would share more pictures in group conversations on Facebook, but I would not want to “spam” all my contacts on that site, so I rather just post one or two pictures on the timeline.

18 Do you write reviews about your accommodation on online review sites?

Yes, sometimes.

19 If yes, why?

When I am very disappointed by the hotel I want other travellers to know about it and prevent them from experiencing the same mistakes that I did. If just minor unpleasant things appeared, I would not complain about it because little mistakes can happen to everybody. It wouldn't be fair to point them out.

20 Do you give the accommodation you stayed at feedback?

If I give feedback, I do it via online review sites. This way, the hotel and travellers will be informed about my experience at the same time.

21 Do you share your personal experiences on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and/or other social media platforms?

No. I would again let my friends know about my experiences in a private chat but I would not post it on my timeline on Facebook.

22 After answering all of these questions, at which stage do you think you use social media the most?

I think I use it the most when I plan my trip because of the massive information search I do. During and after my trip I don't use social media that much. Actually I think that, once I am back at home, I use these platforms the least because the trip is over and I would have to focus on my studies again anyway. During my trip I only use TripAdvisor to see what there is to do at the destination and check for nice restaurants but of course, at that time, the main aspects of my trip (like the hotel and transportation) are already fixed.

22.1 Respondent B

Gender: Male

Age: 27 years

Nationality: Austrian

Education level: Student at Juridicum- Rechtswissenschaftliche Fakultät (University Vienna)

1 Imagine that you decide to go on a leisure trip somewhere. What are the very first steps you undertake in planning your vacation?

First of all, I inform myself about the location of the trip that I have on my mind. Then, I would want to know about the culture, the attractions and, if necessary, the currency. For getting this information I use the Internet a lot. I would just type into Google some keywords and look what pops up. Usually I then go to TripAdvisor, because it is always one of the first sites that appear and there you find so many reviews from other travellers, which can be really helpful when you plan your trip!

2 Where would you get all the necessary information about transportation, accommodation and attractions from?

I get this information also from pages like TripAdvisor, trivago and maybe Holidaycheck. Sometimes I also compare the hotel ratings on these sites to see whether they are similar.

Especially when I inform myself about accommodations, I think that they are very helpful. It is interesting to read what people who have been to that destination before have experienced and what they recommend to others.

3 Do you search by yourself or do you prefer a travel agency to do that?

Usually I search by myself for the information I am looking for, especially when I travel within Europe. Let's say I would plan on going to Asia, where I do not know the language and the culture. Then I would consider a travel agency as more appropriate because it makes me feel more safe and secure, and it would take me less time and effort to plan everything.

4 What criteria do you use to decide on which hotel suits best for you?

Price is definitely the most important factor but I also consider public transportations as very important. Of course it is an advantage if the hotel lies in the centre but it is not necessary if connections are good from and to the hotel.

Nowadays it is very easy to get all of this information from online review sites from people who have been to the hotel.

5 Does a hotel, which offers a free Wi-Fi connection, have an advantage when you make a decision on where to stay?

Yes, definitely. I think every hotel should have free Wi-Fi connections. It is not only good for us consumers to be able to stay in contact with friends easier, but the hotel also gains benefit from it if customers tag the hotel they are staying at.

6 Do you read online reviews? If yes, how do they influence your final booking decision?

Yes, I do read online reviews. Before I decide on at which hotel I want to stay, I always inform myself what people have said about the hotel or the surrounding of

the hotel. If many people wrote something similar about it, either in a positive or negative way, I strongly consider in changing my opinion or, if the reviews are positive, I feel more secure and confirmed in the decision I was going to make.

7 Where would you book your trip? In a travel agency or on an online platform?

As mentioned before, I usually only book on online platforms because I can compare the offers available and can really book everything according to my preferences.

8 During your trip: How do you stay connected with your family and friends at home?

I simply use Skype and Facebook. Whatsapp is also a great application! Since they are all free to use where you have the opportunity to chat, send voice recordings as well as pictures and videos, I think they are great to stay in contact with your beloved ones.

9 Do you keep them updated via social media sites?

Yes, I use Facebook to do that.

10 If yes, why?

Because it is very practicable and basically free (if you have a free Wi-Fi connection).

11 How do you navigate yourself to the places/attractions you want to visit?

Either I have a look at the places online before I go out to see them and see what others recommend of how to get to the attraction or what to keep in mind when going there (like scams, for example). When I am already somewhere near the attraction but cannot find the way, I would most likely use Google Maps.

12 Do you write blogs during your trip?

No, I don't write blogs.

13 If yes, what aspects of your trip do you consider in your blog?

-

14 Do you use the opportunity of free Wi-Fi at specific spots to connect to social media platforms?

Yes, of course! Sometimes I use it to tag my friends and myself at the place we are or I also take a picture and upload it directly on Facebook.

15 If yes, why?

First of all, it is nice to have some memories of the trip. I like to scroll through my Facebook page and have a look at them, even months later. Another reason is that my friends want to see pictures from my trip as well. Thus, it is the easiest way to simply upload some of them to my page.

16 If you read online reviews: Do you consider tips of where to eat, what to do etc.?

I surely consider tips of what to do at the destination because there might be some "insider tips" not everybody knows about. On Holidaycheck you can find the reviews

of travellers who have tried different things to do. If many people talk positively about a certain thing I would of course want to do it as well.

When it comes to food I don't plan it advance as I am not picky. I try out everything! As soon as I am near a restaurant that looks fancy, I go in and simply try out what they have. I would not really go to online reviews to see what others have written about this or that hotel.

17 Once you are back at home: Do you share your personal photos and videos online?

Yes, I do- mainly for my friends and family.

18 Do you write reviews about your accommodation on online review sites?

Not really- except when I am highly impressed or very disappointed of the hotel.

19 If yes, why?

If I am extremely satisfied with the service, which I would not have expected in advance, I would surely want to let others know. That also applies for the opposite: If I surprisingly experience a very bad service where nobody cares about me and doesn't treat me the right way, it would be the first thing for me to do to go on a review site and let others know about it. However, this has never happened so far.

20 Do you give the accommodation you stayed at feedback?

Yes, I would consider doing that- for the same reasons as I just mentioned. When I am very happy with what I have experienced or when I am very disappointed. If I experienced what the hotel promised in advance, I would be pleased but would not give them extra feedback that everything was alright.

21 Do you share your personal experiences on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and/or other social media platforms?

Well, I only have Facebook but would not really use it to talk about my experiences. The place to do so is rather on online review sites. In general, I am not a person who writes on a continuous basis on Facebook. I would rather read comments about trips and give them a "like".

22 After answering all of these questions, at which stage do you think you use social media the most?

It depends- either I would use it the most when I plan and inform myself about the trip I am going to do or when I am back at home. In general I think I use it the most in the first stage because there is so much to plan before you can go on a journey.

22.1 Respondent C

Gender: Male

Age: 24 years

Nationality: French

Educational level: Student at MODUL University Vienna

1 Imagine that you decide to go on a leisure trip somewhere. What are the very first steps you undertake in planning your vacation?

I would check out the location first by asking friends who have been there already for their advice. Then, I would check out the destination website for tourists to find more information on accessibility, accommodations etc. Also, I would have a look at the maps to have a better overview in my mind of what the city looks like.

2 Where would you get all the necessary information about transportation, accommodation and attractions from?

For information on transportation and attractions I would look at the destination website. For hotels, I would go to TripAdvisor or booking.com because you get so many different opinions and experiences at a glance. I consider these two sites as very trustworthy. I think TripAdvisor is the number one review site nowadays. Everybody knows it and I guess if you want to write a review, you do it there.

3 Do you search by yourself or do you prefer a travel agency to do that?

Usually I search by myself, except when I am under pressure and don't have much time- then, I would ask a travel agency to provide me with all the information I am looking for.

4 What criteria do you use to decide on which hotel suits best for you?

Number one would be accessibility for me and number two is price. I don't care much for too much quality- I just want something clean and comfortable enough so I can sleep.

5 Does a hotel, which offers a free Wi-Fi connection, have an advantage when you make a decision on where to stay?

Yes. A hotel where I have to pay for Wi-Fi is definitely not one that I would choose.

6 Do you read online reviews? If yes, how do they influence your final booking decision?

Yes, I do read online reviews. I would compare the aggregated and individual reviews and look for a couple of negative ones, see when they were posted (because sometimes they are really old and might not apply anymore).

Overall, a hotel needs to have a lot of reviews and needs to score at least a four star on TripAdvisor. So for me, online reviews are very important.

7 Where would you book your trip? In a travel agency or on an online platform?

In the end, I prefer booking on an online platform because it is cheaper.

8 During your trip: How do you stay connected with your family and friends at home?

I don't. If I travel alone, I might drop a text to say at which location I am but usually I don't stay in touch since I want to use my vacation for myself.

9 Do you keep them updated via social media sites?

No, I don't.

10 If yes, why?

-

11 How do you navigate yourself to the places/attractions you want to visit?

First I would look for city maps or walk into a hotel and ask for directions, but usually I check out where I want to go before I leave the hotel (I would have a look at Google Maps and maybe take a screenshot).

12 Do you write blogs during your trip?

No, I would be too lazy to do that.

13 If yes, what aspects of your trip do you consider in your blog?

-

14 Do you use the opportunity of free Wi-Fi at specific spots to connect to social media platforms?

Depending on where I would spend my leisure trip I would use my phone or not. In Paris, for instance, I would not because I don't want to get robbed but in Austria I might.

In general however, I don't really feel the need to connect to social media sites.

15 If yes, why?

-

16 If you read online reviews: Do you consider tips of where to eat, what to do etc.?

Yes, definitely. I would check out restaurants before I leave the hotel so I don't have to run around for hours and don't find anything I would like on that day. For what to do I would inform myself at home already on TripAdvisor. They have specifically a section for that where travellers describe their experiences of tours, for instance. I think they are really helpful.

17 Once you are back at home: Do you share your personal photos and videos online?

Usually I just have a couple of photos and videos but I do not share them a lot.

18 Do you write reviews about your accommodation on online review sites?

If I was really pleased with it or if I was very disappointed I write.

When I experienced what I expected right from the beginning, I would not write reviews.

19 If yes, why?

If I am really pleased with the place I think they deserve to get a positive feedback. If it is negative I do it for two reasons: 1) to let people know that this could also happen to them, and 2) to let the hotel know they have to fix it.

20 Do you give the accommodation you stayed at feedback?

No, directly not. I would rather give them feedback on a review page but I would not send them an e-mail or call them.

21 Do you share your personal experiences on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and/or other social media platforms?

No, I don't think so. I would rather tell my friends in person if they are interested but I don't feel like I have to "force" others to see what I have been experiencing during my vacation.

22 After answering all of these questions, at which stage do you think you use social media the most?

I would say before because I would ask my friends on social media for their advice and because I look up a lot of information before I travel to a place. During my trip I prefer to rather stay away from social media and once I am back at home I share my experiences and media in person but not really online.

22.1 Respondent D

Gender: Male

Age: 22 years

Nationality: Austrian

Educational level: Student at University Vienna

1 Imagine that you decide to go on a leisure trip somewhere. What are the very first steps you undertake in planning your vacation?

First I have to have the trip budget on my mind. Then I search on Google for more information about the location. There, I search within the first page for concrete information that helps me in planning the trip.

2 Where would you get all the necessary information about transportation, accommodation and attractions from?

I get it all from the Internet, mainly from Expedia and TripAdvisor. I always compare the different flight options I have. Usually I first look on which date the flight is the cheapest and book that one right away. According to that, I plan the rest of the trip and search via TripAdvisor for nice hotels which are in the range of what I am willing to spend. This way you can find out what others, who have a similar budget, liked and disliked about their accommodation.

3 Do you search by yourself or do you prefer a travel agency to do that?

It depends whether I already have an idea of what my trip should look like or not. If I have, I prefer to search by myself. If not, I would go to the travel agency to ask for brochures etc. However, most of the time I already have an idea of what I want.

4 What criteria do you use to decide on which hotel suits best for you?

I think the price offers and location are most important, as well as the reviews that you can find online. I don't read the reviews very carefully but want to get a general overview of how the travellers have assessed the hotel. A hotel which has more than 3 stars out of 5, is a good one I think.

5 Does a hotel, which offers a free Wi-Fi connection, have an advantage when you make a decision on where to stay?

It is not decisive but it is great if there is free Wi-Fi. I would surely make use of it a lot.

6 Do you read online reviews? If yes, how do they influence your final booking decision?

Yes, I read them. I always read reviews very carefully because some people are very demanding and might complain about every little problem. I would say they influence me more or less- depending on how many negative reviews there were.

7 Where would you book your trip? In a travel agency or on an online platform?

For longer holidays I still prefer to book at a travel agency but for short ones I book online.

8 During your trip: How do you stay connected with your family and friends at home?

If there is free Wi-Fi in the hotel or at hot spots I would use WhatsApp and Facebook to message them or send them some pictures. Otherwise I write text messages or call them.

9 Do you keep them updated via social media sites?

Yes, as long as I have free Wi-Fi I do.

10 If yes, why?

I want my friends to be at least indirectly a part of my holidays and give them the possibility to see how nice the vacation is. I enjoy getting “likes” and answering the comments that my friends post under my pictures or posts.

11 How do you navigate yourself to the places/attractions you want to visit?

Most of the time, I search for the directions and attractions I want to visit on that day but before I leave the hotel. I do that online, by having a look at Google Maps. When I am already on the road I simply use street maps.

12 Do you write blogs during your trip?

No, I don't write blogs at all.

13 If yes, what aspects of your trip do you consider in your blog?

-

14 Do you use the opportunity of free Wi-Fi at specific spots to connect to social media platforms?

Yes, sure!

15 If yes, why?

Through WhatsApp, for instance, it is so easy to stay in touch with your friends. Sometimes I also tag myself at the spot I am at the moment and post it on Facebook. I also like to take pictures of the attraction, edit them on Instagram and post them there.

16 If you read online reviews: Do you consider tips of where to eat, what to do etc.?

Although I read through them, I do not really follow the advices. I rather go to a restaurant that is near the place I would be in the moment I am hungry. If I am on a longer vacation, I would probably look for things to do on TripAdvisor because then I would maybe run out of ideas myself.

17 Once you are back at home: Do you share your personal photos and videos online?

Yes, some of them but not very much. If you post too much, people will get annoyed and won't be interested in your trip anymore, following a lower number of likes. That's why I usually post one or two pictures from a one-week vacation trip.

18 Do you write reviews about your accommodation on online review sites?

No, not really. Except if there are many negative reviews about the hotel where I had an amazing experience or vice versa; then, I would share my impressions.

19 If yes, why?

If I feel like the ratings of other people are not correct, I write my opinion to let future customers of the hotel know how it was for me.

20 Do you give the accommodation you stayed at feedback?

No, the effort is too high. If I write something, I do it on the review site.

21 Do you share your personal experiences on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and/or other social media platforms?

If something was really great or where I have the feeling it needs to be spread, I share my experience on Facebook and Instagram. In general, I don't.

22 After answering all of these questions, at which stage do you think you use social media the most?

I do that before because I look for the prices, various hotels, attractions etc. During the trip I use it the least as I just want to enjoy my vacation.

22.1 Respondent E

Gender: Male

Age: 22 years

Nationality: German

Educational level: Student at University Vienna

1 Imagine that you decide to go on a leisure trip somewhere. What are the very first steps you undertake in planning your vacation?

I think my first step is to take a look on the Internet, although it always depends on the type of vacation and where I am going. If I travel to a country far away I would also request information from travel agencies.

2 Where would you get all the necessary information about transportation, accommodation and attractions from?

For accommodation, I usually compare hotels on various platforms and choose one that is most appropriate for my type of vacation. If I am for instance in a city which is very expensive, I would choose a hotel or hostel that is very cheap and maybe more outside of the centre, but with a good connection to public transportation. For transportation I also usually compare the different offers, for instance on checkfelix.com.

Concerning the attractions, I do not really search a lot online before my trip because most of the time I would already have a picture in my mind of what I want to visit at the place I am going to, like it was on my trip to Trieste. However, if I would go to an exotic country where I do not know much about the culture, I would search on the destination website for tourists about the most popular or unknown spots to visit. If I am not satisfied with the options, I would also inform myself on online review sites where people might provide some "insider tips".

3 Do you search by yourself or do you prefer a travel agency to do that?

It depends on the type of my trip, but usually I travel within Europe for not longer than one week. That's why I mostly just go online to compare hotels, flights etc. on my own. At travel agencies you do not necessarily get the best price offer, depending on the program they use, they have a limited number of hotels listed and not all of the available ones.

4 What criteria do you use to decide on which hotel suits best for you?

In the first instance the price-performance ratio is very important. As I mentioned before, I would take online reviews as a sort of guideline to decide on the hotel or hostel I choose. When thinking about it, it actually surprises me myself to realize that nowadays I never make a booking decision without having a look at online reviews. It became so natural to check out others' opinions.

5 Does a hotel, which offers a free Wi-Fi connection, have an advantage when you make a decision on where to stay?

Yes, I forgot to mention before that Wi-Fi is also an essential service the hotel I book needs to have. For me it would be too expensive to pay additionally for it, so I definitely check if the hotel I want offers this service.

6 Do you read online reviews? If yes, how do they influence your final booking decision?

They influence my decision very strongly. First of all, I would only select hotels with good review ratings. After this selection, I would go into detail about the various opinions. However, I always keep the aspects that I consider as important, like cleanliness of the room for instance, in my mind as people sometimes seem to exaggerate with their descriptions.

If there are for instance two hotels that are similar concerning prices, I would definitely pick the hotel with the better reviews.

7 Where would you book your trip? In a travel agency or on an online platform?

Usually I book on online platforms because I feel more secure when I can compare and choose really the best prices on my own, rather than trusting the word of a travel agency.

8 During your trip: How do you stay connected with your family and friends at home?

Normally via WhatsApp and text messages.

9 Do you keep them updated via social media sites?

No, not really. I am not a fan of informing others of what I am up to on my trip.

10 If yes, why?

-

11 How do you navigate yourself to the places/attractions you want to visit?

Depending on how lost I feel, I would even use GPS to get me to the right track again (even if I would have to pay for it). It is so quick, simple and less time-consuming, to check the route on Google Maps, in comparison to street maps

If I am still in the hotel, I often look up online which tram or bus I have to take and would take a screenshot of it.

12 Do you write blogs during your trip?

No, I don't. I think on a trip of one or two weeks you don't experience so many interesting things about which you could write a really nice blog about, except if you are a travel blogger and are able to write frequently about your trips. I think nobody would read your blogs if you only write once or twice a year.

13 If yes, what aspects of your trip do you consider in your blog?

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14 Do you use the opportunity of free Wi-Fi at specific spots to connect to social media platforms?

Yes, I would use it if I am really excited about the spot I am in that moment but usually I don't feel the need to talk with my friends about it right away. I would rather do that back at home.

15 If yes, why?

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16 If you read online reviews: Do you consider tips of where to eat, what to do etc.?

Usually I like it more to explore the place I visit on my own, rather than planning every detail in advance. Now, if I would make bad experiences in restaurants three times in a row, I would go online to read what other travellers would recommend.

17 Once you are back at home: Do you share your personal photos and videos online?

I would pick just one or two pictures which I would then post on Facebook and Instagram, just to transmit my friends the positive experience I have made during my trip.

18 Do you write reviews about your accommodation on online review sites?

No, I have never done that. Most of the time my experiences were similar to the reviews I read online, which is why I never felt the need or the urge of letting others know what my experience with the hotel or hostel was. If, however, I have the feeling that the accommodation deserves a better rating or if it's very bad, I would want to let others know.

19 If yes, why?

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20 Do you give the accommodation you stayed at feedback?

No, I would not do that. If I have something to say, I would want other travellers to know about it as well. That's why I would only write online reviews if I really want to tell them about my experience.

21 Do you share your personal experiences on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and/or other social media platforms?

On Facebook I post very seldom, also about my trips. I would rather post a picture than explicitly writing about my experiences. The place to do that is, in my opinion, on online review sites. On Twitter I read and follow discussions about vacations but I do not share my own experiences there, and on Instagram I simply share one or two pictures of my trip.

22 After answering all of these questions, at which stage do you think you use social media the most?

I would say before I travel as I do a lot of information search about accommodations, their online reviews, transportation and comparison research.

22.1 Respondent F

Gender: Female

Age: 23 years

Nationality: Austrian

Educational level: Student at MODUL University Vienna

1 Imagine that you decide to go on a leisure trip somewhere. What are the very first steps you undertake in planning your vacation?

First of all I search on the Internet for some destinations where I could go and what is important to have when I go there. To get in the holiday spirit, I sometimes watch YouTube videos about the place or look on TripAdvisor for some nice pictures that travellers have shared.

2 Where would you get all the necessary information about transportation, accommodation and attractions from?

I would get most of the information from the destination website. When I look for transportation and accommodations, I go to booking.com, checkfelix.com or similar sites because for me it is important to see what others said about the hotels in that destination I am planning to travel to and because I want to find the best pricing offer.

3 Do you search by yourself or do you prefer a travel agency to do that?

I prefer a travel agency, but it is cheaper to search by my own. So, if I travel with my parents, I go to a travel agency. When I travel with my boyfriend or friends, I would search on my own.

4 What criteria do you use to decide on which hotel suits best for you?

With my budget at the moment it should be clean, 3 stars and it should be close to the centre or public transportations. Therefore reviews are very helpful. I rather trust other travellers' experiences than the beautiful pictures and other exaggerated information on the hotel website itself.

5 Does a hotel, which offers a free Wi-Fi connection, have an advantage when you make a decision on where to stay?

Yes. I think that nowadays a hotel needs to offer free Wi-Fi anyway. Obviously, if I go abroad, I want free Wi-Fi because I want to stay in touch with my family or friends and it is the easiest way to do that over the Internet or rather social media.

6 Do you read online reviews? If yes, how do they influence your final booking decision?

Yes, I read them and they influence me a lot. Of course you have to be careful because some reviews might not be "real" but overall I think they are very helpful when you plan your trip. This way you can minimize the risk of making a wrong decision or one that you would regret later on.

7 Where would you book your trip? In a travel agency or on an online platform?

Usually I book on an online platform- it is fast, easy, secure and I always have the feeling that I got most out of the price I pay.

8 During your trip: How do you stay connected with your family and friends at home?

I would mainly use Facebook but also WhatsApp.

9 Do you keep them updated via social media sites?

Yes, I would write a status of where I am and post some pictures to let them know what I am up to on my vacation. However, I would not exaggerate with it.

10 If yes, why?

Especially my mom and some friends are interested in these things and it is the easiest way to keep all of them updated at the same time, with minimum time effort.

11 How do you navigate yourself to the places/attractions you want to visit?

I use Google Maps because you find your way so easily with it. If I don't have my phone with me I would use street maps.

12 Do you write blogs during your trip?

No I don't. I don't read blogs myself so I would not expect from others to read a whole story of what I have been up to on a specific date.

13 If yes, what aspects of your trip do you consider in your blog?

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14 Do you use the opportunity of free Wi-Fi at specific spots to connect to social media platforms?

No, not really. I rather post a picture later on, on Facebook, when I am back at the hotel, but while I am at the spot I just want to enjoy the location and don't think about social media.

15 If yes, why?

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16 If you read online reviews: Do you consider tips of where to eat, what to do etc.?

Yes, TripAdvisor is very helpful for that! When I go on a trip with my friends I would probably choose a nicely described restaurant from TripAdvisor.

17 Once you are back at home: Do you share your personal photos and videos online?

No, actually I don't. I used to do it but nowadays I am not really interested in sharing them anymore.

18 Do you write reviews about your accommodation on online review sites?

I know I should but I don't. There are so many people who write reviews, so one experience more or less does not really count I think- especially when my opinion about the accommodation is similar to the ones that are already there.

19 If yes, why?

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20 Do you give the accommodation you stayed at feedback?

No, I don't do that either.

21 Do you share your personal experiences on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and/or other social media platforms?

If someone is asking me directly, I would tell them in a private chat on Facebook but I don't post it for everyone to see. I think it would annoy others to see me talking over and over about my trip.

22 After answering all of these questions, at which stage do you think you use social media the most?

I would say before the travel because I have to look up all the information for my trip. That takes a lot of time.

22.1 Respondent G

Gender: Female

Age: 22 years

Nationality: Austrian

Educational level: Student at MODUL University Vienna

1 Imagine that you decide to go on a leisure trip somewhere. What are the very first steps you undertake in planning your vacation?

First of all I ask friends and family if they have been to that destination already and would have some advice for me. Sometimes I also watch videos on YouTube, if the destination has a channel there. Their videos really get me in the holiday mood and motivate me to do some research on the destination. I have often found some interesting things there which I then included in my travel plans. After that I go online to sites where you can compare flight offers, hotels etc. I also look which website offers the price.

2 Where would you get all the necessary information about transportation, accommodation and attractions from?

I would use the search engine and look there about the possibilities I have to get to the destination. Once I know that, I usually use checkfelix.com and compare the various offers from different airlines, for instance. For knowing more about the attractions and hotels, I go to TripAdvisor and HolidayCheck, the destination website and maybe some other online review sites.

3 Do you search by yourself or do you prefer a travel agency to do that?

I prefer to search on my own because I think that travel agencies are more expensive. That's why I rather look by myself.

4 What criteria do you use to decide on which hotel suits best for you?

The price and the reviews are very important for me, as well as the accessibility or the location of the hotel. I always look up how good the ratings of the hotels are. Often you see how they score in various sections or the overall percentage that people who have been there give the hotel. It depends on the destination, but usually I decide to take a hotel with a percentage above 90.

5 Does a hotel, which offers a free Wi-Fi connection, have an advantage when you make a decision on where to stay?

Yes, free Wi-Fi is definitely a plus.

6 Do you read online reviews? If yes, how do they influence your final booking decision?

Yes, I read them and they influence me a lot. But you also have to be aware that some people are very picky and complain about every minor mistake, or that the hotel might have paid somebody to write positive reviews. So I ignore these ones if they sound unimportant or fake to me and rather look at the overall impression I get from the hotel. I always read online reviews before I book, so they are definitely a part of my booking process.

7 Where would you book your trip? In a travel agency or on an online platform?

I always book on online platforms because I feel more comfortable and secure that I really found the best price offer.

8 During your trip: How do you stay connected with your family and friends at home?

I mostly stay connected with them through Facebook. Actually, when I am only away for one week or so, I don't really stay connected with them because I want my privacy and enjoy my time away from home.

9 Do you keep them updated via social media sites?

Yes, when I am away for longer, I post pictures and short notes of what I am up to.

10 If yes, why?

I do that to let them know that I am alright, that I am having a good, save time and to give them a little bit of the feeling that I am experiencing during my trip.

11 How do you navigate yourself to the places/attractions you want to visit?

I would use Google Maps on my smartphone but I prefer to have a real map in my hands.

12 Do you write blogs during your trip?

No, I think it is too time-consuming to do that during a trip. I never really read blogs either.

13 If yes, what aspects of your trip do you consider in your blog?

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14 Do you use the opportunity of free Wi-Fi at specific spots to connect to social media platforms?

Yes, of course. I like to use Wi-Fi, especially when it is free.

15 If yes, why?

I think it is cool to have the opportunity to let your friends know at which place you are at the moment. So that's what I do via Facebook. I would just quickly let them know where I am and leave a short note.

16 If you read online reviews: Do you consider tips of where to eat, what to do etc.?

Yes, I like to get ideas from others, especially for what to do they might have some interesting insider tips. For the restaurants, I do not care that much about reviews because people are often very picky on food and not easy to please. So I would rather go and search by myself or ask at the hotel reception.

17 Once you are back at home: Do you share your personal photos and videos online?

I would post some pictures on Facebook, yes.

18 Do you write reviews about your accommodation on online review sites?

No, I never take the time to do that.

19 If yes, why?

-

20 Do you give the accommodation you stayed at feedback?

No, I never give feedback. Sometimes I want to, especially if the service was good, but back at home I always forget about it.

21 Do you share your personal experiences on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and/or other social media platforms?

No, not really. I don't post much on Facebook. All I would post on Facebook are pictures but I would not talk about my experiences I had.

22 After answering all of these questions, at which stage do you think you use social media the most?

I would say before and after my trip. Before, because I have to search for all the information I need and back at home I have time to post pictures and have conversations about them with my friends.

22.1 Respondent H

Gender: Female

Age: 24

Nationality: Austrian

Educational Level: Student at Vienna University of Technology

1 Imagine that you decide to go on a leisure trip somewhere. What are the very first steps you undertake in planning your vacation?

If I have no idea of where to go I look online to search for beautiful places, look for things to visit on vacation and then I would search for a suitable hotel. If I already know where I'll go I would start looking for hotels and flights right away.

2 Where would you get all the necessary information about transportation, accommodation and attractions from?

In general, I use the Internet and online review sites, like TripAdvisor, to inform myself about the best offers which suit best for my vacation plans. Sometimes I also like to inform myself through travel brochures, which I get from travel agencies or from supermarkets (like Hofer and Billa).

3 Do you search by yourself or do you prefer a travel agency to do that?

For me it depends on the trip: If I plan on going to a foreign country I would choose to let a travel agency organize my trip because I do not travel that much abroad and feel more secure if specialists put a plan together for me. However, if I go on vacation in Austria I search by myself.

4 What criteria do you use to decide on which hotel suits best for you?

First: How much money do I want to spend? I consider this is the most important criteria when I travel.

Second: Where is the hotel located? It does not have to be in the very centre but public transportation is of course very important because taking a cab would probably be too expensive.

Third: What services can I expect from the hotel for the money I pay?

And fourth: What have other travellers experienced at that hotel? I either go to holidaycheck or TripAdvisor to have a look at the ratings of the hotels and choose then the one which looks most convenient to me.

5 Does a hotel, which offers a free Wi-Fi connection, have an advantage when you make a decision on where to stay?

For me my vacations are basically internet-free. If I would need Internet and I am within Austria, I would use it on my mobile phone with the 3G signal. If I would be in a foreign country, free Wi-Fi could be useful, so I would probably prefer a hotel which offers it.

6 Do you read online reviews? If yes, how do they influence your final booking decision?

Yes, sometimes. If I travel to a country that I have not been to before and if it is a hotel/hotel chain that I have not personally been to, I read online reviews prior to my trip.

If I get a good recommendation of a friend, I would still want to check it online if others are just as satisfied with the service of the hotel or if the general feedback is rather bad. It is always good to get an overall perspective of the accommodation by reading online reviews.

7 Where would you book your trip? In a travel agency or on an online platform?

As mentioned before: it depends. When I want to visit a foreign country I book in a travel agency, but if it is within my own country I book on an online platform.

8 During your trip: How do you stay connected with your family and friends at home?

As I like to travel a lot within Austria, I usually just stay in contact with them via my mobile phone, by either calling them or sending them a message because of the great tariff I have. In a foreign country, I would use Whatsapp or Skype.

9 Do you keep them updated via social media sites?

I rather prefer not to use social media sites, but if something urgent comes to my mind which I need to talk about with my friends right away, I would use social media sites. If I, for instance, have to tell my mother something I would call her on the phone or send her an e-mail.

10 If yes, why?

Via social media sites it is very easy to reach people quickly, usually without any costs if you have free Wi-Fi.

11 How do you navigate yourself to the places/attractions you want to visit?

I would use the Internet, Google Maps or a road map. The probably easiest and quickest way is by using Google Maps.

12 Do you write blogs during your trip?

No, I have a calendar and a pencil to take short notes when I go on a trip. I note down every little thing, like the person I travel with, where and what we eat, at which hotel we stay, what we do on each day etc. Although it is more effort than simply posting it online in a blog, I think in the long-term it is much more personal and means much more to have those notes, kept in a special place and have a look at them from time to time.

13 If yes, what aspects of your trip do you consider in your blog?

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14 Do you use the opportunity of free Wi-Fi at specific spots to connect to social media platforms?

No. I don't like to share every step I make on an online platform. If I go on vacation, it is because I want to experience new things with the ones who join me.

15 If yes, why?

-

16 If you read online reviews: Do you consider tips of where to eat, what to do etc.?

Yes, sometimes. If I am in a country which I have not been to before I surely read online reviews first which recommend what to do. When I am hungry, however, I just look around while I am walking and decide which restaurant offers a great variety for an acceptable price.

17 Once you are back at home: Do you share your personal photos and videos online?

I do that rarely. Sometimes I change my profile or title picture, if I have got a beautiful one, on the social media sites.

18 Do you write reviews about your accommodation on online review sites?

No, I usually don't do that.

19 If yes, why?

-

20 Do you give the accommodation you stayed at feedback?

No. I rarely stay at the same hotel twice, so I do not want to take the effort to give it feedback.

21 Do you share your personal experiences on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and/or other social media platforms?

No, I don't like to do that. I went to a technical high-school where I learned a lot about social media and their lack in security. That's why I am very careful of what I post on these platforms. Even if you delete your posts later on, they can still be found by Facebook. That's what worries me the most.

22 After answering all of these questions, at which stage do you think you use social media the most?

Since I rarely use social media platforms on vacation, I can definitely say that I use them the most during my information search. At that stage, these platforms are very helpful when I make my decisions on accommodation, of what activities I can do there etc.

22.1 Respondent I

Gender: Female

Age: 23 years

Nationality: Austrian

Educational level: Student at University Vienna

1 Imagine that you decide to go on a leisure trip somewhere. What are the very first steps you undertake in planning your vacation?

First I need to have a country or city on my mind where I want to go. Then, I go on the Internet to generally search for information about it, like what attractions there are, if I like the architecture etc.

2 Where would you get all the necessary information about transportation, accommodation and attractions from?

For information about accommodation and attractions I would visit pages like TripAdvisor and expedia.at because the personal information there is so broad that you surely find what you want to know. For transportation I usually go to checkfelix.com or fluege.de to compare the various offers.

3 Do you search by yourself or do you prefer a travel agency to do that?

Nowadays I always book online, regardless if I travel within or out of Europe. Some years ago, when the Internet and online booking platforms were not so well developed yet, I preferred to go to a travel agency to provide me with all the information and offers I wanted.

4 What criteria do you use to decide on which hotel suits best for you?

Price and the closeness to public transportation are crucial, in my opinion. Also, it should be at least a three star hotel. Once I know the basic criteria I expect from the hotel, I go to review sites to look for the best options and decide upon the rates the hotels got there.

5 Does a hotel, which offers a free Wi-Fi connection, have an advantage when you make a decision on where to stay?

Yes, definitely. Actually, I always search for hotels which have free Wi-Fi; others which don't offer it, are no option for me because I think it should be standard already. Free Internet connection is crucial for me.

6 Do you read online reviews? If yes, how do they influence your final booking decision?

Yes, online reviews are very important to me. I never book a hotel without having a look at what others experienced there. For me, a hotel should have at least 4.5 stars on these online ratings; otherwise I would most likely not choose it.

7 Where would you book your trip? In a travel agency or on an online platform?

I always book online. Nowadays it is very secure but I also have to say that, in the end, I always book on the same platform. I have made a very bad experience when I booked and paid a flight online, but I never received a confirmation and found out

that my seat was not reserved on the flight either. That is why I always stick to the same site where I know they do not trick people.

8 During your trip: How do you stay connected with your family and friends at home?

When I stay within Austria, I call my family and friends, text them or I stay connected with them via Facebook. When I am abroad, I only use Facebook and WhatsApp because it would be too expensive to do otherwise.

9 Do you keep them updated via social media sites?

Yes, I use Facebook to send them messages and post pictures sometimes.

10 If yes, why?

It became some kind of a custom within my friend circle to share pictures of trips online and we comment on each other's posts. This way we can get a clear picture of what the trip someone of us took must be like. It is nice if someone is interested in what you are doing and comments on the media you post.

11 How do you navigate yourself to the places/attractions you want to visit?

Usually I would first find the way online, on Google Maps for instance, take a screenshot or quickly note it down so I won't get lost later on. When I am already on the way I just take a city map and try to find the way.

12 Do you write blogs during your trip?

No, I never thought about doing that.

13 If yes, what aspects of your trip do you consider in your blog?

-

14 Do you use the opportunity of free Wi-Fi at specific spots to connect to social media platforms?

Yes, I often do. Usually I take a picture of the attraction, post it on Facebook and tag my travel companion and myself on it.

15 If yes, why?

I do not really do that for others to know that we are at this spot right at the moment but for myself: On Facebook you have a map and you see the places where you have been to. I think it is great to have such an overview because often I do not really realize to how many places I have been already.

16 If you read online reviews: Do you consider tips of where to eat, what to do etc.?

Yes, for sure- not so much for where to eat because I usually eat somewhere near the place I am at the moment I get hungry but for what to do I always read reviews and search for advices from others.

17 Once you are back at home: Do you share your personal photos and videos online?

I mainly do that during my travel, less at home. I never share videos, however. I think that is too personal or not so appropriate for being posted on social media sites.

18 Do you write reviews about your accommodation on online review sites?

Sometimes I do. When I am just satisfied with the hotel I would not write something but if I am extremely satisfied or dissatisfied I do write about my experiences.

19 If yes, why?

I think it is just fair for others to know what they might experience what I did, either in a positive or negative way. Especially when I booked a hotel due to the reviews and then it was different from what I expected, I write it.

20 Do you give the accommodation you stayed at feedback?

No, I don't. When review sites were not so well established, I sometimes sent them an e-mail but nowadays I would not do that anymore. They are able to see the ratings on the review sites anyway.

21 Do you share your personal experiences on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and/or other social media platforms?

No, I don't do that. My own experiences are too private to be shared there. I think pictures are enough.

22 After answering all of these questions, at which stage do you think you use social media the most?

I mainly use social media before and during my trip. When I search for all the information about the destination, the accommodation etc., I do all of that online and mainly on review sites. During my travel I go a lot to TripAdvisor and similar pages for advices, navigation etc.

22.1 Respondent J

Gender: Female

Age: 24

Nationality: Austrian

Educational Level: Student at University Vienna

1 Imagine that you decide to go on a leisure trip somewhere. What are the very first steps you undertake in planning your vacation?

Usually I already have an idea of where I want to stay at. But if not, I would first look online for options of places to go to. It depends on how much money I have to spend, for how long I can stay away, with whom I am going to travel etc. Once I know all of this, I then search for information about the place, the culture, the religion, the inhabitants etc. online. I like to take a look at the destination websites, which are specifically created for tourists because you always find a lot of helpful information there. Then, before I look for flights and hotels, I watch some videos on YouTube.

2 Where would you get all the necessary information about transportation, accommodation and attractions from?

Usually I just use the Internet to find what I am looking for. There, I use TripAdvisor, Expedia, checkfelix and similar sites to decide on the transportation options I have, which hotels would suit best for me etc. I think this is the most comfortable and the quickest way of getting the information you are seeking for.

3 Do you search by yourself or do you prefer a travel agency to do that?

I search by myself only because it is much cheaper and I can compare several offers and choose the one that fits best to my planned leisure trip.

4 What criteria do you use to decide on which hotel suits best for you?

The location of the hotel is very important for me, as well as how much it's going to cost. If I am satisfied with these two components, I look at the ratings of the hotels I pre-selected. I choose then the hotel with the highest rating. In general, a hotel should have at least 3 out of 5 stars, in my opinion. If its rating is below that, I would for sure not book it. For me it is also an advantage if the hotel has many reviews. If there are just a few, it gives me slightly a negative feeling about the hotel.

5 Does a hotel, which offers a free Wi-Fi connection, have an advantage when you make a decision on where to stay?

It surely does work as an advantage if the hotel has a free Wi-Fi connection. Especially when I book a trip to a foreign country it is essential for me. When I stay within Austria, it is not that important because I would be able to use the Internet on my phone for free, at least. However, it is always an advantage if you also have free Wi-Fi on your laptop.

6 Do you read online reviews? If yes, how do they influence your final booking decision?

Yes I do read online reviews. I believe they influence me strongly, as I think it is important to know how well the hotel I want to stay at is managed and how well

they treat their customers and how they respect them. If I have a bad feeling about the hotel after reading its online reviews, I would surely not book it!

7 Where would you book your trip? In a travel agency or on an online platform?

I always book on online platforms. At a travel agency, I feel like they don't offer me that much of a variety of available offers as I can find online by myself!

8 During your trip: How do you stay connected with your family and friends at home?

I mostly stay in contact with them through phone calls but also via social media networks. If I stay away for longer, I would also call them via Skype.

9 Do you keep them updated via social media sites?

Yes, but only via conversations. Actually, I never post pictures on my timeline on Facebook or on Instagram. I use these sites more to check out what others share and what they have experienced. I guess I am more of a passive user of social media sites.

10 If yes, why?

For them it is interesting to know how our trip is going and what we are up to. As not all of the people in my contact list on Facebook, for instance, might be interested in reading what I do all the time during my trip, I do not post this information on my timeline. I think it is just not necessary!

11 How do you navigate yourself to the places/attractions you want to visit?

It depends on the place- walking to the attractions is the choice because this way we can get to discover the surrounding more carefully. However, if we are totally lost I would use Google Maps to guide us to the attraction.

12 Do you write blogs during your trip?

No, I am not much of person who shares personal experiences online.

13 If yes, what aspects of your trip do you consider in your blog?

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14 Do you use the opportunity of free Wi-Fi at specific spots to connect to social media platforms?

Yes, I do. If my friends and I spend some time at an attraction, we always search for a free Wi-Fi connection to connect to Facebook but also to quickly read on review sites what else is near this spot, like other attractions or good and cheap restaurants.

15 If yes, why?

It is time-saving to do all of that online than go ask in the hotel beforehand where they might not even have an answer to what you want to know.

16 If you read online reviews: Do you consider tips of where to eat, what to do etc.?

Yes, they are very useful to know which places are best to go and enjoy a better trip. Years ago, when online review sites weren't so popular yet, I just went to restaurants and hoped for it to be good but was often disappointed and the perceived quality of my trip somehow decreased.

17 Once you are back at home: Do you share your personal photos and videos online?

Yes, I share them with my family and close friends in private conversations but I do not post them for everyone to see. I think it is something very personal which not the whole world needs to see.

18 Do you write reviews about your accommodation on online review sites?

I rarely do that.

19 If yes, why?

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20 Do you give the accommodation you stayed at feedback?

Yes, I do give the hotel feedback on what I thought was very good and on things I thought should have been better. For them this is important to know so they can improve their services.

21 Do you share your personal experiences on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and/or other social media platforms?

I do not really do that. I may share them on conversations with friends through social networks, but not on public photos.

22 After answering all of these questions, at which stage do you think you use social media the most?

Well, I think I am most active before the trip when I search for information about the destination, about tips, opinions etc., but also when I am back home when I use social media to talk to my friends and family and tell them about the trip and share photos, videos and information about how did everything go.