Moroccans' Behavioural Response to the Development of Digital Tourism

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Abstract

Electronic tourism was born at the crossroads between tourism and electronic commerce. Electronic tourism developed in the 1990s and became widespread with the emergence of the Internet 2.0. This article examines this new disintermediated form of tourism by looking at the new requirements and attitudes of today's tourists. The analysis focuses on tourists' behaviour regarding technological tools. It relies on both the conceptual and theoretical frameworks and a qualitative study carried out with four focus groups composed of Moroccan Internet users aged between 16 and 64 years. The results of the study indicate that these technological tools have become an integral part of tourists' behaviour because they not only facilitate the accommodation search but also significantly influence purchasing behaviour.

Keywords: e-tourism, tourist attitudes, online travel agencies, tourist behaviour

Introduction

The use of the Internet in trade represents a turning point in the global economic landscape and has resulted in the upheaval of economic and societal paradigms (Hudson & Thal, 2013). The Internet has fundamentally changed today's business world through a strong digital transformation. In this context, the majority of business activities have been forced to keep up with technological developments and adapt their business models to the new requirements of demand. Digital tourism has emerged in the wake of digital transformation as a new era of economic disintermediation in the tourism sector. Tourists have become increasingly informed and curious (Law, Leung & Buhalis, 2009). Now, travellers prepare their trips in advance, validate their choices, get information from other Internet reviewers, and get in touch directly with other users who have already visited the destination.

New tourist's expectations mark the end of classical tourism based on intermediaries and the shift towards a disintermediated tourism in which users can find attractive deals through aggregator sites such as TripAdvisor, book a flight through Airbnb and even rent a car through Uber. Notably, emerging tourist behaviours in a digitalised context do not take a unified form but rather are gendered (Cefrio, 2011), are linked to an age range (Expedia, 2017) and evolve as a consequence of improvement and the changes in living standard (Cefrio, 2011). The main objective of this paper is to explore emerging tourism behaviours in the digital era. We study tourists' interactions with online distributors in terms of interpretation, use and trust as per the following questions: How do tourists behave in response to the development of e-tourism? Are tourists interested in online distributors? How do they use them? How do they interpret the content conveyed? To answer these questions, we first present the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of e-tourism by explaining the profile of today's tourists (I). Secondly, we present the methodology used for data collection and the qualitative research conducted with four focus groups composed of Moroccan Internet users aged between 16 and 64 years old (II). Finally, the last part details and discusses the results (III).

Literature review

The objective of the literature review is to analyse the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that define the research topic, namely e-tourism. In doing so, this new form of tourism is defined and clarified, along with the profile of tourists in the era of e-tourism.

From tourism to e-tourism

Tourism is a very old practice that initially involved only the bourgeoisie and nobility. However, the economic development of the glorious thirties (between 1945 and 1973) favoured the emergence of an extensive and massive tourism industry encouraged by the relative distribution of wealth and the development of Fordism (Cuvelier, Torres & Gardey, 1994). The tourism phenomenon underwent a major change in the 1980s following the emergence of the concept of sustainable development and the questioning of the Fordist economic model for its basis on an approach that was disrespectful both to the environment and to cultural identities. In reaction to this model, an 'alternative' model of tourism appeared that favours the emergence of resources specific to territories, breaking with the standardised vision of tourism (Zaoual, 2007). It is not only the sea and sun that incite tourists to travel but also the discovery of authentic experiences and the exploration of cultural identity and local heritage. Thus, in this paradigm shift, new actors in the tourism field have appeared to manage destinations' offerings and to oversee emerging economic activities (Landel, Gagnol & Oiry-Varacca, 2014). These actors also create an environment conducive to the development of alternative activities (innkeepers, hikers, outdoor guides…), thus generating positive spillovers for the local population. Since the 1990s, when the Internet emerged, tourists have used technological tools, to get in touch directly with tourism activity providers in what has become known as disintermediated tourism (De Becdelièvre, 2015).

Table 1: The history of tourism

Type of tourism	Meaning	Nature of the relationship between supply and demand
Elitist tourism (from antiquity to 1940)	Developed since antiquity but took defined shape at the beginning of the 18th century. In England, the sons of nobles were sent abroad for two or three years to gain the openness and knowledge they would need for their future diplomatic work.	**Intermediated tourism**: the existence of distributors between supply and demand (tour operators, agencies...).
Mass tourism (between 1940 and 1980)	Developed in the post-war period of economic prosperity from 1945 until 1973 alongside mass production and access to holidays for a large section of society. Tourism with a uniform vision of nothing other than beach and sun (Cuvelier, Torres & Gardey, 1994).	
Alternative tourism (from the 1980s to the present)	Tourism that highlights the local peculiarities and aims to offer tourists an authentic human experience by inviting them to immerse themselves in the local culture and discover specific and unique experiences that cannot be reproduced (Pecqueur, 2005).	
Digital tourism (from the 90s to the present)	A form of tourism that lies at the crossroads between e-commerce and tourism. It aims to reduce intermediaries between supply and demand by utilising new information and communication technologies. E-tourism refers to electronic tourism, while m-tourism refers to the use of mobile phones as an intermediary between suppliers and tourists (De Becdelièvre, 2015).	**Disintermediated tourism:** the tourist makes direct contact with the supplier using technological tools.

Source: The author

In the early 1990s, with the development of new information and communication technologies, the mode of consumption underwent a profound change, particularly with the gradual introduction of Internet 2.0. Technological tools became anchored in consumption habits, making consumers more dependent than ever on technological gadgets. In this context, a new

economy called 'e-commerce' emerged due to the increase in computers in offices and homes as well as technological progress and the availability of broadband. Thus, digital tourism has emerged at the crossroads between e-commerce and tourism. The definition of tourism as a complex phenomenon has never achieved a general consensus. In this respect, this disciplinary field is characterised by a striking semiological lack (Boyer, 1999). This definitional deficit is increasingly remarkable in light of emerging tourism activities and renders the tourism field a multidisciplinary laboratory wherein each discipline, interested in tourism, develops its own definition. The term 'digital tourism' is also called e-tourism or online tourism or cyber tourism. To clarify the meaning of digital tourism, we summarise below several useful definitions from various specialised websites (Table 2).

Table 2: Summary of definitions of e-tourism

Authors	Definition	Note
ecommercemag.fr (french online communication agency specialised in e-commerce and e-tourism)	E-tourism refers to all activities related to online tourism. From the user's point of view, e-tourism consists of collecting information about a travel destination, booking a trip online and comparing offers from several airlines.	This site brings together e-tourism and online tourism and requires an Internet network as an intermediary between supply and demand.
World Tourism OrganiSation (WTO)	E-tourism is a virtual way for tourists to travel. It gives Internet users overviews of possible trips by offering them electronic brochures and efficient navigation of tourism offers.	We found this definition in two references published online. However, it was difficult to locate it in WTO reports.

Source: The author

As it can be seen in Table 2, the concept of e-tourism has attracted increasing attention in relation with the development of new information and communication technologies and simplified with the emergence of the Internet 2.0. However, the use of the term 'electronic' is reductive, as this refers to the medium (computer tools) and not the content (digitalised content). It is the concept of digital tourism that is more significant rather than electronic tourism because digitalisation refers to digitalised content. Thus, digitalised destinations are created and presented on the Internet. The various definitions of tourism reflect *'The vivacity of a tourism phenomenon in perpetual evolution'* (Scheou, 2009:162) but they also create some ambiguity. Hence, there is a need to reach a consensus in the tourism field. With the development of digital technology and the democratisation of the Internet, technological tools have become an integral part of the tourism sector. These digital tools have favoured the emergence of a new profile of tourists with different expectations and attitudes. The new tourist seeks to explore destinations remotely prior to visiting; to share their experiences; to post photos, videos and comments; and so on.

Digital tourism and the new tourist profile
According to a large study (2019) conducted by the online travel agency Booking, 46% of travellers are willing to use an app that allows them to quickly and easily discover and book activities during a trip. The rise of digitalisation has shaped a very specific profile of consumers with new habits and expectations (Ait Soudane, 2019). This consumer is highly informed (Bilgihan, Berrada, Okumus & Nusair, 2016). With one click, the tourist can access the chosen destination, obtain information, get in touch with other tourists and search for good deals (Perez-Vega, Taheri, Farrington & O' Gorman, 2018). Since 1990, when digital technology became democratised, tourists have taken advantage of the possibilities provided by the Internet to track down the best offers and services. Tourists search online for all the information they need before planning their trips. They share opinions about the places they have visited, consumed services, tasted dishes and ratings places on social networks via images, videos and

comments. This feedback contributes either to further promoting the tourism product or to dissuading potential tourists (relative non-consumers) from visiting poorly rated destination (Chung & Koo, 2015; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

Although there are major differences in online consumers' behaviour according to age (Cefrio, 2011), scientific literature does not provide very detailed portraits of this reality. Nonetheless, the new profile of tourists on the Internet can be divided into four profiles according to age: Generation Z (20 years old and under), Generation Y (between 20 and 34 years old), Generation X (between 35 years old and 49 years old) and baby boomers (50 years old and over) (Expedia, 2017). We use the results of two studies, one by Expedia in 2017 and the other by Booking in 2019, to identify the main profiles of tourists in the digital age.

Table 3: New tourist behaviours in the digital Age

Generation	The new expectations
Generation Z (20 years and under)	▪ Highly connected on smartphones; ▪ Uses smartphones to be inspired about the places to visit; ▪ Influenced by commercials; ▪ Often uses social media to share experiences of trips; ▪ Inspired by blogs and articles for travel destinations.
Generation Y (20 years to 34 years)	▪ Scans comments; ▪ Favours online travel agencies (OTAs); ▪ Logs into social networks and instant messengers every day, mainly Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram; ▪ Inspired by blogs and articles about travel destinations.
Generation X (35 years to 49 years)	▪ Less active on social networks; ▪ Looks for promotions and good deals.
Baby Boomers (50 years and older)	▪ Less active on smartphones; ▪ Ready to dare and venture out.

Source: Expedia (2017) and Booking (2019)

The rise of Information Technology (IT) tools encouraged the emergence of new tourists behaviours regardless of age. Tourists are very active on social networks, browsing and sharing comments; in fact, in 2017, 500 million comments were published on TripAdvisor (Smith, 2017) and 760 million overnight stays were reserved on Booking in 2018 (Yung, 2019). Tourists desire a disintermediated and personalised journey and install applications that facilitate their stays and allow them to plan the best trip for their need.

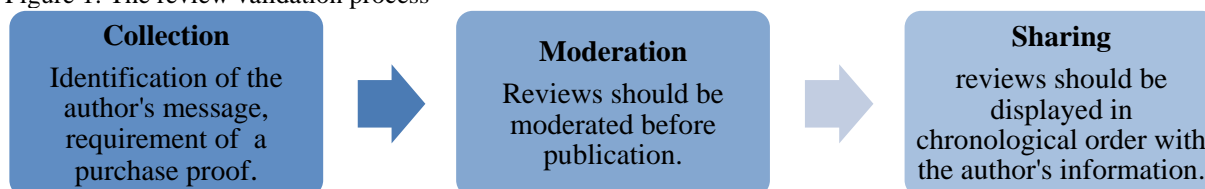### The new tourist's behaviours in a digitalised context according to social network theory

The analysis of interactions between tourists in a digitalised world is part of the sociological paradigm governing social networks (Granovetter, 1992). This paradigm, based on research at Harvard University, allows for the analysis of individuals' actions in terms of links and nodes. Nodes are generally the social actors in an environment strongly governed by links or relationships. Actors' behaviours are significantly influenced by other actors. The theory also allows analysis of the network's efficiency for social actors. A closed network may be less useful than an open one because an open network is more likely to be promising and allows access to a large amount of information. According to the teachings of social network theory, it is considerably more profitable for individuals to be linked, even to a small degree, to several networks than to have several very close connections within a single network. Individuals can exert influence or act as bridges within their social networks by bridging two networks that are not directly connected, thus filling structural gaps (Burt, 1992).

The question of social influence is fundamental because an individual can disseminate and modify their modes of thought and actions during social interactions with others. The

Harvard mathematical school underlines the social dimension of interactions and their influence on actors' behaviours. The theory of social influence (Beauvois, Mugny & Oberlé, 1995) allows to square the typology and the spheres individuals' influence. Deutsch and Gerard (1955) distinguish two categories of influence: informational influence, which consists of basing oneself on the opinions of others to make a decision and normative influence, which consists of accepting and adhering to group norms. As per the theory of differentiated socialisation (Mead, 2006), the informational impact is gendered because we intervene differently depending on the user's gender.

The term 'influencer' emerged following the rise of social networks and the large numbers of 'followers' users accrue on YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram and so forth. Influencers propose content that's likely to impact the followers' behaviour. In the Moroccan context, the Moroccan National Tourist Office (ONMT) broadcasted a video (Boom Boom song) in 2018 featuring a famous singer to promote Morocco as a tourist destination. Informational impact on social networks has become very important, especially in a highly digitalised and connected environment. This analytical framework based on informational influence can be fed by the outcomes of the expectations theory (Duguay, 2014). In this regard, there are 10 representations of expectations: functional, symbolic, imaginary, sensory, financial, relational, societal, aesthetic, informational and temporal (Duguay, 2014). This study focuses on the informational aspect and its impact on consumers' purchase decisions. The veracity of opinions posted online is doubtful because companies seek to create falsely positives reputations through comments posted by fictitious people. To combat this, 'NF ISO 20488' was implemented in 2018 and can be applied by all sites wishing to improve the quality of their customer relations. This standard defines the principles and requirements for collecting, moderating and sharing consumer reviews on the Internet and includes the prohibition of buying reviews, the commitment to publish positive as well as negative reviews and the publication of the most recent reviews first.

Figure 1: The review validation process

Collection	Moderation	Sharing
Identification of the author's message, requirement of a purchase proof.	Reviews should be moderated before publication.	reviews should be displayed in chronological order with the author's information.

Source: ISO 20488:2018 standard

This standard aims to certify online reviews, thus guaranteeing authentic information and eliminating false reviews that could mislead users. In Morocco, scientific literature on e-tourism in a Web 2.0 context has been limited to the study of e-tourism in relation to trust (Ait Soudane, 2019), factors influencing the development of ICT in the Moroccan hotel industry (Ezzaouia & Bulchand-Gidumal, 2020) and the influence of social networks on travel agencies in Morocco (Boukherouk & Ben Marzoug, 2019). This study therefore focuses on Moroccans' emerging behaviours in response to the development of digital tourism. To understand this subject, we conducted a qualitative study with four focus groups composed of Moroccan Internet users with online travel experience.

Methods

In order to understand Moroccan Internet users' views of online distributors and to explore emerging attitudes towards the development of information and communication technologies, we interviewed Moroccan Internet users about their online experiences. All studies of perceptions, attitudes and behaviours are based on a multisource approach that triangulates

several sources of evidence (Yin, 2011) that allows a good interpretation of the data (Abric, 2011; Andreani & Conchon, 2005). In This study, we triangulated two sources of qualitative data collection: focus groups (Table 4) and verbal association.

Table 4: Profiles of participants in the focus groups

Level	Participants	Sex	Age	Region	Held position
Generation Z Focus group (FC1)	1	M	18	Marrakesh-Safi	Student
	2	F	18	Casa-Settat	Student
	3	F	17	Marrakesh-Safi	Student
	4	M	16	Tangier-Tetouan- Al Hoceima	Student
	5	F	19	The Oriental	Student
Generation Y Focus group 2 (FC2)	1	M	20	Marrakesh-Safi	Professor
	2	M	26	Marrakesh-Safi	Banker
	3	F	30	Casa-Settat	Fiduciary
	4	F	30	Fez-Meknes	Accountant
	5	F	34	Souss-Massa	Housewife
	6	M	28	Marrakesh-Safi	Student
	7	M	31	Rabat-Salé-Kénitra	Calls operator
	8	F	29	Marrakesh-Safi	Graphic designer
	9	M	27	Marrakesh-Safi	Travel agency owner
	10	F	24	Marrakesh-Safi	Public servant
Generation X Focus group 3 (FC3)	1	F	38	Marrakesh-Safi	Engineer
	2	F	40	Marrakesh-Safi	Merchant
	3	M	44	Marrakesh-Safi	Public servant
	4	M	42	Marrakesh-Safi	Unemployed
	5	F	39	Rabat-Salé Kénitra	Influencer
Baby Boomers Focus group 4 (FC4)	1	F	55	Marrakesh-Safi	Public servant
	2	M	60	Souss-Massa	Guesthouse owner
	3	M	64	Rabat Salé-Kénitra	Retired

Source: The author (2020)

The participants in the focus groups all met the theoretical sampling criteria proposed by Hlady Rispal (2002).

Table 5: Hlday Rispal's (2002) theoretical sampling criteria

The criteria	Projection on focus groups
Theoretical representativeness	The participants chosen are between the ages of 16-64 years; this is representative of the four generations defined by Expedia (2017).
Variety	The participants occupy different jobs in different regions.

Source: The author

The focus groups were coupled with a verbal association, which consists of attributing a qualifier to a subject of study. At the end of the focus groups, we asked the interviewees to associate the term 'online distributor' with a series of words and ord their responses according to importance. The instructions were as follows: *'What words or expressions come to mind when you think of online distributors such as Expedia, Booking, etc.?'.*
The focus group guide included the following themes:
•   Interpretation of online distributors (8 items)

- Online distributors use (11 items)
- Purchasing behaviour with online distributors (13 items)

The questions were mostly open-ended, allowing the interviewees to express themselves freely. 32 questions were formulated based on elements from previous research. Data collected from the focus groups was transcribed manually. Two types of analysis were carried out: a thematic analysis was conducted using the focus group transcripts following the framework proposed by Bardin (2001). An analysis grid was established using the codes provided by Tropes software and was purified and recoded into nodes using the InVivo software. For the verbal association data, a prototypical analysis Vergès (1992) was performed, which consists of analysing the number of associations produced by the participants. This method of analysis consists of crossing the frequency of appearance of a word. The postulate is that the more a word appears in the corpus, the more it appears at the top of the list. The prototypical analysis attributes to each term an average frequency and rank.

Results and discussion
To avoid being ejected from the market, classical tour operators must migrate to digital format. Indeed, more than 75% of international flight and accommodation reservations to Morocco are made online (ONT, 2014). The Internet's centrality in tourism marks the rise of a new era of economic dematerialisation. The results of this study are presented in this part according to the emerging behaviour of tourists in the digitalised context. We first discuss the use of online distributors. Then, we explore the representation of Internet users in relation to these new digital objects. Finally, we dissect the trust in and influence of these gadgets on the Internet users' purchasing behaviour.

Online distributors: Interpretation and uses?
Direct online distributors are gradually gaining ground among Moroccan Internet users. Indeed, all the interviewees were familiar with these online sites and used them often. However, there was a particular preference for Booking because 'Booking has the advantage of centralising several offers and provides various services' as an interviewee from FC 1 explained. In addition, these sites offer several advantages in terms of payment, online booking and information accessibility. Some specialised websites have the advantage of giving users the possibility to post comments and contact other tourists to obtain information about an area, restaurant, monument and so on. As one interviewee (FC3) explained, 'these sites have saved our lives; the leap into the unknown has become a nightmare of the past. With a simple click, all the information is available'. These digital tools also save time thanks to the simplicity of the Internet and mobile phone applications that make it easier for users to access data. With the evolution of smartphones, m-tourism has emerged to describe electronic tourism that uses high-tech mobile devices. Online distributors are generally used throughout trips, from pre-departure to post-return. Indeed, the interviewees reported that they do preliminary research to choose where to visit, find good deals, compare prices and contact other users to validate their choices. Websites are used not only prior to departure but also during trips, meaning that travellers post photos, videos and comments as well as rate service to make recommendations or dissuade potential customers from visiting a given place using a particular service. 'With just my mobile phone, I can get recommendations, choose unusual places and even meet very nice people' shared an FC1 interviewee.

However, there are also drawbacks to these tools, including the risk of scams and the high price of fares. 'I find it unacceptable to be charged large fees for cancellations', an interviewee from FC 2 noted. Services also may do not meet expectations. To prevent these

frustrations, participants sometimes visited intermediary sites to do research and to obtain information on the place to be visited. Afterwards, they contact the provider directly without going through the distributor. As an interviewee from FC3 explained, 'The providers ask us to contact them directly because the sites take a commission of each reservation made through their platforms'. The use of these platforms is not perfect. Some behaviours are seen as very intrusive, particularly advertising banners that overload mobiles and computers. Some recommendations that appear may be useless and are advertisements rather than an actual recommendation. 'Instead of doing quick researches, we are faced with endless ads and cookies that weigh down our devices', an interviewee from FC 4 lamented.

Online distributors: How are they viewed among Moroccan Internet users?

To study how online distributors are viewed among Moroccan internet users (their perception), participants were asked to associate one or more words with online distributors. We showed them pictures of well-known brands to determine which words occurred most frequently. Ranking order (rank) and frequency of occurrence (frequency) are decisive.

Table 6: Word rank and frequency

	Low average rank	High average rank
High frequency	-Online booking -Travel } central core -Good plans	-Hotels -Relaxation
Low frequency	-Stays -Freedom	-Applications -Europe

Source: The author

The prototypical analysis confirmed the results of the content analysis. Interviewees conceived online distributors to be online booking sites for travel that offer good deals. Gendered verbal association slightly modified the prototypical analysis (Table 6). Female participants consider online distributors as online booking sites, while relaxation is second, followed by good deals. Male participants consider, like female participants, online distributors as online booking sites, followed by hotels and good deals. The gendered verbal association does not change significantly the prototypical analysis (Table 6). However, relaxation is not synonymous with travel. For men, digital gadgets represent a means to travel, while for women they are an opportunity to discover and relax. As such, commercial actions should be adapted according to the preferences of the target audience.

Online distributors: How do they influence user behaviour?

The Internet has revolutionised the world and has catalysed numerous changes (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). Today's consumers are no longer passive; in fact, they produce their own content and make it available online. The Internet has ushered the digital consumption mode, and the profusion of information available online, social networking opportunities, and mobile digital tools are all factors that influence purchasing behaviour. The information websites publications depend on the business model of the individual distributor. As a general rule, websites include data related to the service offered, tabs dedicated to comments, ratings, and sometimes means of direct interaction with other consumers. The interviewees underlined the influence of the content conveyed. 'Personally, before ordering a service, I look at the comments attached to the sites in question; they have a huge impact on me' (interview from FC 2). The virtual community uses the internet to do research, discover deals and seek advice (Wang, Yu & Fesenmaier, 2002), corroborating the results of the verbal association activity, which found online booking, travel and good deals to be the most frequent and important words.

The issue of social influence has become very important in this digitalised context. Kelman (1974) identifies three distinct type of influence: compliance (change of behaviour to avoid rejection), identification (change of behaviour to identify with a group) and internalization (change of behaviour for internal conviction). Some researchers have examined the importance of influence in social networks (Chiu, Hsu & Wang, 2006; Hau, Kim, Lee & Kim, 2013) to understand the relationship between online content and changes to user behaviour. Commenting on the influence of comments, ratings and other content, interviewees stated that they consider online information to be reliable and so use it to guide their purchasing decisions. They place great importance on reviews and are willing to read several to obtain an overall idea of a given service. As one interviewee (FC3) shared, 'Sometimes I spend a day reading the comments and looking at the ratings. What the online community says is always true'. This study aimed to understand the emerging behaviours of Moroccan Internet users in relation to the development of digital tourism. We explored users' expectations alongside the rise of digital tools. The main results of the study are summarised in Table 7.

Table 7: Main results

Topics	Subtopics	Main results
Interpretation of online distributors	Representation and perception	Online booking sites and discovery of good deals
Use of online distributors	Periodicity	Use throughout the journey
	Advantages	Time savings and ease of use access to information
	Drawbacks	Risk of scam and additional costs incurred
	Intrusive behaviour	Excessive advertising
Purchasing behaviour with online distributors	Influence on purchasing behaviour	Strong informational influence
	Confidence in content	Valid and reliable content

Source: The author

The study demonstrates that the majority of participants consult the Internet to prepare their trip, including decisions about accommodation. Online tools benefit both accommodation establishments and customers. The internet allows hotels to have better visibility on social networks, strengthening their E-reputation. For customers, the Internet allows people to search for a destination, validate their decision, compare choices and interact with other customers… Hence, online travel agencies (OTAs) are emerging in the tourism industry and are likely to replace traditional travel agencies. According to the findings, Booking is the most used and recommended distributor among interviewees due to its generalist approach of offering hotel reservations, plane tickets, train tickets and even car rentals. It is a global service that saves Internet users' time. However, distributors also present several disadvantages particularly the risk of scams because websites sometimes include false advertisements. Customers may also find themselves in complicated situation due to cancellations (e.g., in case of trip cancellation during the COVID-19 pandemic, OTAs hardened the cancellation conditions).

OTAs can be used not only for trip preparation but also for the periods during and after the trip. Tourists search for good deals while travelling as well as post images and videos. Content sharing on social networks is understood as a mark of social differentiation because users seek social acceptance by interacting through comments or sending pictures (Sedera, Lokuge, Atapattu & Gretzel, 2017). Tourists are highly influenced by comments, images and this could impact customers' purchase decision. We propose a several suggestions based on the information collected in this study:

- Digital tools attract everybody. Travellers increasingly use the Internet throughout trips (Before, during and after).
- Since the beginning of the 20th century, consumers have become very informed and much more curious (Law, Leung & Buhalis, 2009) due to the Internet, which has paved the way for information and communication technology. As such, the desire for information and recommendations is a reality that will persist into the future (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Published information must accurately reflect the service provided. In this way, service providers can establish strong E-reputations and cultivate a trusting relationship with customers.
- Consumer purchasing behaviour is strongly influenced by others *'Nothing influences people better than the recommendation of others'* (Zuckerberg, 2017). The content on social networks and comment sharing sites (e.g., TripAdvisor) is to be taken seriously because it can not only improve the e-reputation of the tourism product but is also likely to damage its image if feedback is negative. Content's influence is both gendered and linked to age. Hence, it is necessary to tailor digital marketing for all ages and both sexes.

Conclusion

This study analysed tourist behaviour in the era of digital transformation. We sought to understand whether tourists are interested in online distributors, how they use them, and how they interpret content. The results demonstrate that online distributors have become an integral factor in Moroccan tourists' behaviour because they streamline research, save time and facilitate interaction between tourists. The study also indicated that online distributors are used throughout trips, underling the significant influence of content on the purchasing behaviour. However, online distributors have the disadvantage of presenting possible scams and excessive advertising, and tourists seek safe and trouble-free transactions with easy to navigate interfaces. The diversity of participants in the focus groups tried to conform to the mapping set by Booking (Generation X, Y,Z and baby boomers) as well as to observe the nature of interactions in each focus group. We conclude that Generations Z and Y are more interactive and ready to exchange personal data on the web. In contrast, Generation X and baby-boomers are reserved but have a remarkable desire for the Internet, adventure and novelty. The research has certain limitations, especially in qualitative approach to studying purchasing behaviour. A quantitative study would allow study of the explanatory variables behind emerging tourist behaviours. We recommend that future studies use a multivariate analysis with an econometric model to validate hypotheses regarding the significant relationship between age/sex and changes in tourist behaviours in a digitalised context.

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