# Differences between TripAdvisor and Booking.com in branding co-creation

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

The most popular travel platforms in the world are Booking.com and TripAdvisor. Both these platforms take advantage of users' reviews as a source of information to help other users in their traveling decision processes. These users' reviews are creating, recreating, and destroying online reputation, and consequently affecting firms brand image. Managing a hotel's brand image online can be a major challenge, considering the wide range of user content generated in distinctive platforms. This article focuses on hotel brand image co-creation in TripAdvisor and Booking. Using a sample of 52 hotel units, all located in an island destination, it shows that despite both platforms being supported by user-generated content (UGC), both projected brand identity and image can be quite different. Content analysis was used to assess the brand personality traits communicated as well as sentiment analysis in order to understand the nature of the content better. Results show that hotel profile descriptions in the TripAdvisor platform convey a more sincere brand personality, while the descriptions in Booking.com convey a personality-oriented profile to the scale of excitement. This study demonstrates the utility of looking into electronic word-of-mouth as a source of brand meaning co-creation.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years the presence of online communication platforms has grown significantly in the promotion of tourism, a direct consequence of its great reaching power. As such, industry players need not only to understand its functioning but also make the appropriate use of the Web and emerging information technologies (Holjevac, 2003).

New communication platforms become online information and experience sharing communities (Black & Veloutsou, 2017; T. Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014). Important findings result from studying the use of these platforms in the tourism sector, as they are shown to be authentic and first-hand data sources (Alaei, Becken, & Stantic, 2019; Rodríguez-Díaz, Rodríguez-Díaz, & Espino-Rodríguez, 2018). The most popular travel platforms are Booking.com and TripAdvisor, according to the Alexa ranking (Alexa, , 2020). In these websites, users communicate experiences and opinions through descriptive assessments, quantitative scores, and photographs that assume the format of electronic word of mouth (eWoM) (Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014). The digitization of word of mouth (eWoM) integrates all the communication flows that occur online between peers as well as those between organizations and consumers (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008).

Moreover, this development of digital technology has been shaping the communication and brand image of industry operators, which also happens with destinations (Anagnostopoulou, Buhalis, Kountouri, Manousakis, & Tsekrekos, 2019; Borges-Tiago, Tiago, Veríssimo, & Silva, 2019). Thus, online reviews create a new form of intercommunication, which builds the online reputation of brands overall (Díaz & Rodríguez, 2017). When looking from a branding perspective, it can be noticed that a brand comprises a set of stable elements and other highly dynamic ones (Veloutsou & Delgado-Ballester, 2018). The challenge faced by firms is to be able to manage the highly dynamic elements, constantly monitoring the shared UGC across platforms and their influence on their brand image.

The role of sharing platforms as eWoM sources is well known and studied. However, to the best of our knowledge, only a few studies have paid attention to how eWoM can influence brand image and how different sharing platforms can project different brand meanings. This work aims to contribute to bridging this gap by analyzing brand identity and brand image alignment in sharing platforms. Data retrieved from two major travel platforms were used to assess if these sharing platforms were projecting the same brand meanings of different hotels, using J. L. Aaker (1997) brand personality scale as the brand image measure.

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The remainder of this study is divided into four additional sections. Next section presents the theoretical foundations of this investigation. The conceptual model and methods used to collect the data are subsequently developed. In the last sections, the achieved results are presented and discussed, followed by the identification of the study limitations and some suggestions for future research.

## 2. Research scope

Brand identity and brand image are two interconnected concepts essential to brand management (Nandan, 2005). Nonetheless, the two concepts differ in the sense that brand identity is how firms want their audience to perceive their firm, product, or brand, while brand image is how the different audiences view it. More specifically, brand identity reflects how brands are conceived inside the firms and communicated to different audiences while brand image comprehends how brands are understood by consumers and/or other stakeholders (Nandan, 2005).

D. Aaker (2012) defined brand identity as "…a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain," supported by different internal sources. Kapferer (2006) presents a six-entry matrix that attempts to integrate the key brand identity elements into six dimensions (physique, personality, culture, relationship, self-image, and reflection). Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism can help structure and communicate a unique, different and clear brand identity that is developed within the organization.

Furthermore, as claimed by Dobni and Zinkhan (1990), brand image is considered a relevant concept in consumer behavior research since the early 1950 s. It can be defined as the perception of the brand in customers' minds that is developed over time. Looking through extant studies, brand image can be defined as the full set of impressions that result from consumer interaction and experience with a brand, through observation and/or consumption (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990; Nandan, 2005; D. Roy & Banerjee, 2014; Song, Wang, & Han, 2019). Therefore, brand image links to a brand reputation/perception formed by consumers based on a set of beliefs held about brand identity.

A brand's image and reputation are related to the perception that stakeholders and the external public create about the brand. Brand image is seen here as the perception formed by a member of the external public about the mark after physical or mental contact with the brand (Nandan, 2005). A brand's reputation is derived from the sum of brand images and is addressed here as an aggregated and compressed set of public judgments about the brand (Veloutsou & Delgado-Ballester, 2018) that reflects the gap between brand identity created within **a** firm and **the** brand image created and co-created in the consumer's mind. Therefore, for this study, this perspective of a brand will be considered.

Moreover, a brand image is assumed as a "persona" and is created by all the remaining stakeholders, especially consumers, through a sum of values and the fundamental attributes ascribed to it, culminating in the creation of the essence of the brand (Veloutsou & Delgado-Ballester, 2018).

Veloutsou and Guzman (2017), in analyzing the evolution of brand management in the last 25 years, added to the discussion by highlighting that brands evolved from being transactional tools managed from within companies to being engagement entities co-created with other stakeholders. This change reflects not only the massive use of the Internet by unknown users to express their opinions and share their perspectives/images/feelings towards brands (Borges-Tiago et al., 2019) but also points to brand identity-brand-image linkage (Nandan, 2005). D. Roy and Banerjee (2014) proposed a quantitative model to analyze the gap between brand identity and brand image. Their model assumed that consumers were exclusively getting brand image input from two different sources: (1) from brand marketers through communication; and (2) routed through channel members. However, branding in the digital era implies enhancing the model and considers the peer to peer interactions that result from eWoM.

O'Connor (2010) recognized that consumers are no longer solely dependent on published information. Whenever a consumer becomes a producer of shared content, (s)he becomes a prosumer. Prosumers give form to the concept of eWoM by creating, modifying, sharing, and discussing online content through various platforms such as content-sharing sites, blogs, wikis, and social networks, thus significantly impacting a company's brand reputation, sales, and, ultimately, survival (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011).

Within the social media sphere, people share their experiences, ideas, and opinions freely and broadly, and eWoM can assume a variety of forms and have distinctive value contributions (Amaral, Tiago, & Tiago, 2014). The level of reliability of eWoM has been widely discussed in the literature (Li, Tung, & Law, 2017; Shin, Song, & Biswas, 2014). The eWOM construct and its subdimensions have recently attracted research attention, as the valence and tone of the content can influence consumer brand attitude and purchase intention (Goh, Goh, & Lin, 2011; G. Roy, Datta, & Mukherjee, 2019). Initial studies focused on volume (number of reviews) and emotional valence (assessing if messages were negative or positive) (De Keyzer, Dens, & De Pelsmacker, 2017).

Park, Wang, Yao, and Kang (2011) noted that eWoM reliability could be influenced by eWoM adoption as an information source and, consequently, affected consumer behavior. Bertels, Kolinsky, and Morais (2009) have argued that all the cognitive processes can be stimulated and influenced by emotional content.

The study by Sridhar and Vijay (2001) addressed the motivational process that drives individuals to actively participate in online communities, highlighting that it can be linked to the feelings of contributing to the community or seeking peer approval, and are antecedents of brand co-creation on social networks. Veloutsou and Arvaniti (2016) showed that in online communities, two-way communication occurred when people heard and gave brand feedback, promoting an emotional exchange of feelings and brand closeness. Common traits found in these feelings are curiosity (Schneider, von Krogh, & Jäger, 2013) and authenticity (Oh & Ki, 2019), as users expect to find new peer experiences, described in a transparent and authentic format. Some past studies have suggested that looking at message emotional valence is not enough to understand eWoM dynamics in online communities fully, and pointed to tone of voice as a complementary tool (Barcelos, Dantas, & Sénécal, 2018; G. Roy et al., 2019). Xu (2020) found that users' satisfaction with hotel experiences had a direct effect on their emotional tone use on online reviews in sharing platforms.

The more engaged individuals within digital communities are those presenting higher brand trust and brand loyalty, leading to a more positive contribution to brand co-creation (Black & Veloutsou, 2017). Hajli, Shanmugam, Papagiannidis, Zahay, and Richard (2017) exposed that branding online, based on users and brand interactions, explored the richness of UGC but could also originate more than just one brand identity (Kennedy & Guzmán, 2016). For Tajvidi, Richard, Wang, and Hajli (2018), when a sharing culture is created within a social or brand community, brand co-creation values can be generated. In addition, these authors stressed that the quality of brand co-creation may vary, leading to question if the eWoM found in different platforms leads to the same brand co-creation quality. Building on these elements, it is proposed that:

H1: platforms that present a strong sharing culture are likely to present a more consistent brand co-creation.

and

H2: The emotional tone of reviews will vary according to the sharing platforms used.

The constitution of online communities, such as social media networks, represents one of the most striking phenomena of the digital age (Black & Veloutsou, 2017), leading researchers to focus mainly on studying comment type, credibility, and sentiment analysis content (Boo & Kim, 2013; Hu & Kim, 2018). Over the past twenty years, a wide number of studies related to the usage and effect of social media and its implication for brand management have been published (Moro & Rita,

2018). Lately, some research studies have given special attention to brand personality since it is created inside the firm and co-created by users over the different social media networks (Su & Reynolds, 2017). Understanding the brand personality alignment in the different communication channels became a daily task for brand managers (Borges-Tiago et al., 2019), considering that brand personality is a multi-faceted function that is omnipresent in the firm-consumer relationship as well as within-organization communication. This theory has led the authors of the present study to consider that:

H3: different traits of personality can be found related to the same brand, depending on the information source.

Opinion sharing platforms and experiences have a considerable impact on how communication is disseminated, and brand image is created (Zadeh & Sharda, 2014). Pissard and Prieur (2007) classified them in thematic and non-thematic social platforms, using the notion that in some cases, a baseline theme is used, such as tourism.

Leung, Law, Van Hoof, and Buhalis (2013) claimed that social media has changed the tourism system. The exchange of opinions, comments, experiences, photos, and videos allow users to form an opinion about a destination, product, service, company or brand, exploring the new flows of communication: business-to-business communication, business-to-customer communication, and customer-to-customer communication.

In the last two decades, social networks differentiate themselves by the type of service provided to online users. According to the Alexa, (2020) ranking for 2020, Booking.com and TripAdvisor are the top thematic platforms in tourism. These platforms have the ability to promote this new method of communication, which can be done either through mass communication or individually (Fotis, 2015; Rodríguez-Díaz et al., 2018).

Content is shared in these online communities through lists of comments and scores rating hotels. They seek to summarize the experiences and comments of travelers and are considered more useful and reliable when published on recognized platforms, such as TripAdvisor or Booking.com (Filieri & McLeay, 2014). Thus, sharing platforms have transformed the behavior of tourists in the way they research, read, and value tourism offers (De Moya & Jain, 2013). In addition, users become marketers, designers, producers, and support peers in their travel and tourism experiences (Rodríguez-Díaz et al., 2018) through the co-creation of brand images through these platforms.

Therefore, developing a favorable and unique brand personality on social media is an ongoing challenge for tourism and hospitality firms, which relies on identifying co-creation experience spaces and the transformation of big data available on social media into actual knowledge. Thus, this study examines the relationship between the contents of users' reviews, communicated brand personality traits, and users' emotional tone in two distinctive sharing platforms: Booking.com and TripAdvisor.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research method

This study used a hybrid method that combined qualitative and quantitative analysis for examining the brand personality traits contained in hotel and users' content and the valence and emotional tone used on the different platforms. It used a 2 (online platform: TripAdvisor vs. Booking.com) × 2 (Brand Personality traits communicated: tourists vs. hotel) × 2 (tone of voice: tourists' voice in TripAdvisor vs. tourists' voice in Booking.com) analysis framework. The data analytics procedure adopted is presented in Fig. 1.

Following the most recent studies that used the brand personality scale (BPS) developed by J. L. Aaker (1997) recognizing that social media networks are shaping consumers' perception of brand personality (De Moya & Jain, 2013; Opoku, Abratt, & Pitt, 2006; Zhang, 2017) and that brands can differentiate themselves from competitors based on their
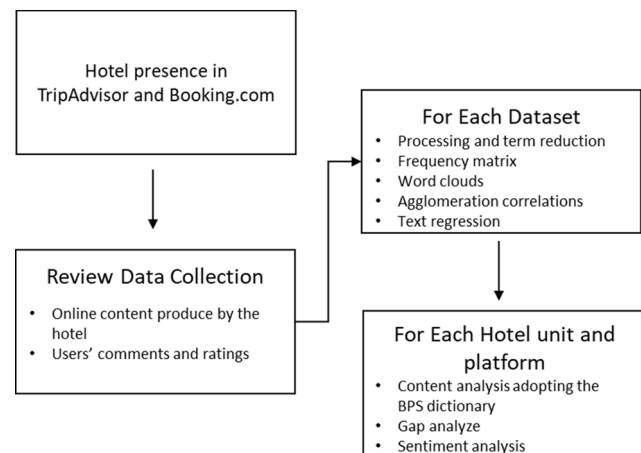


**Fig. 1.** Data analytics procedure.

brand personality traits (D. Aaker, 2012; D. A. Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; J. L. Aaker, 1997; Chan-Olmsted, 2002), in this study the BPS was used to measure the gap between brand identity and brand image, over the different social media platforms.

Sentiment analysis is a well-known technique used to reveal public opinion without having to inquire people, and it has been used to analyze content from different online sources in the tourism and hospitality field (Alaei et al., 2019; Calheiros, Moro, & Rita, 2017). The sentiment analysis conducted aimed to analyze the emotional tone underlying the user comments in the different sharing platforms, adopting an approach that considers not only the valence of the comment (positive versus negative), but also the emotional tone since "emotions are really close to sentiments; indeed, the way of measuring the strength of an opinion is linked to the intensity of certain emotions" (Serrano-Guerrero, Olivas, Romero, & Herrera-Viedma, 2015, p. 20).

QDA Miner and WordStat were considered as the most appropriate tools for the chosen methodology and in responding to the objectives defined in the study. Other academic studies in the area also used this software in their analyses (Borges-Tiago et al., 2019; Tolkach & Tse, 2016). Initially, an analysis was made in WordStat without the application of any categorization dictionary for the assessment and reporting arrangement (ARA) documents, only using the English language dictionary. The procedure resulted in a frequency analysis of words, topics, and entities. The frequency analysis of words was used to produce word clouds highlighting the most salient words found in the content examined. This type of visualization is commonly used in qualitative research, since it assists exploratory textual analysis by identifying words that are more frequently used in the text. In this phase of qualitative content analysis, data were organized based on the key topics under discussion. These topics were then aggregated in categories according to their meaning (G. Roy et al., 2019). Afterward, a weighted term matrix was created, combining the categories found into themes (factors), that were used as independent variables in the multiple text regression model (Husbands & Ding, 2001).

The second path of analysis was done through the application of a predefined dictionary; specifically, the Brand Personality Dictionary developed by Opoku et al. (2006), based on the brand personality of the Aaker Model (J. L. Aaker, 1997). The third path of analysis was also conducted using the Sentiment Dictionary developed by Loughran and McDonald (2011). Considering the field of this study, some domain-specific words were removed, and some domain-specific sentiment words and phrases were added. In both cases, the application then performed a categorization of words found in textual records and produced a frequency analysis based on the categories defined in each dictionary.

### 3.2. Data collection

The focus of the study was on hotels located on an island destination to keep the context of the information search constant. This study used all the hotel units located in the Azores Autonomous Region (RAA) in Portugal, present in TripAdvisor and Booking.com as the unit of analysis. This region was selected to illustrate that even in small destinations, with the efforts of hotel units efforts concentrated in promoting unique nature-based tourism experiences (F. Tiago, Gil, Stemberger, & Borges-Tiago, 2020), the growth of visitors and their online sharing can re(create) hotel brand images.

At the preliminary stage, the list of hotels was determined considering the contents to be extracted from TripAdvisor and Booking.com, the objectives of the work, and the specificities necessary to conduct it. Subsequently, the database was set up, starting with the creation of different support matrices. The first was composed of the list of hotels considered in the study, the information relating to the names of the hotels, the brands and types of hotel chains to which they belong, their category, the number of rooms they have, the subcategory of accommodation (hotel or aparthotel), the location and the island where they are located. The general information presented by the hotels on each of the platforms was then compiled, i.e., the profile of the accommodation unit (Table 1).

From TripAdvisor's platform, information on the general and specific scores of hotel units was gathered to date (April 2019), together with the descriptions placed by the hotels, the indicated hotel style, the number of comments per language and by qualitative score, and the number of photos provided by the hotel and shared by users on the platform. A total of 5,939 comments were extracted in the process – 2,987 of which belonged to Booking.com and 2,952 to TripAdvisor.

### 4. Results

A content analysis was performed on several different aspects to answer the questions formulated in the study. Therefore, the first analysis did not consider any dictionary of categorization to be able to remove the photograph from the sample in its entirety. The dictionary-less analysis allowed for the removal of the frequencies of words, the extraction of topics and the sample phrases from the comments as a whole, and to establish if the sharing culture of the platform influenced the brand co-creation.

It can be noticed that TripAdvisor had a more intense participation of users in rating their experiences (Table 2). The distribution of the ratings in TripAdvisor was quite different, showing that users rated their good and not so good experiences, while in Booking.com, the emphasis was posted on the positive ones (the qualitative scale of Booking.com varied between good to exceptional). The number of stars of the hotel unit did not present significant differences between platforms. Results also showed that about 53% of the comments referred to trips made as a couple, 18% as a family, 11% with friends, 6% alone, and 4% did not contain the definition of the type of trip.

**Table 2**
Number of ratings in both platforms.

| Hotel stars | TripAdvisor Rating | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Terrible | Weak | Average | Good | Excellent | Total |
| 3 | 69 | 128 | 669 | 1920 | 974 | 3760 |
| 4 | 222 | 494 | 2059 | 5420 | 4112 | 12,307 |
| 5 | 79 | 94 | 255 | 572 | 1264 | 2264 |
| Total | **370** | **716** | **2983** | **7912** | **6350** | **18,331** |
| | **Booking Rating** | | | | | |
| 3 | 2 | 0 | 45 | 237 | 430 | 714 |
| 4 | 11 | 21 | 96 | 468 | 1540 | 2136 |
| 5 | 3 | 3 | 15 | 173 | 476 | 670 |
| Total | **16** | **24** | **156** | **878** | **2446** | **3520** |

Looking at the TripAdvisor profile of each hotel in the study, it can be noted that five-star hotels came first in terms of overall score and had the highest score in the location and cleaning categories. Second, in the general classification, four-star hotels had the highest score in service and value. Finally, three-star hotels were slightly below, not standing out in any of the specific classifications, but with results close to five-star hotels in terms of value, and with values similar to four-star hotels in terms of location.

Later, all comments were processed, and 190 open codes were identified in the produced qualitative content analysis. These were then grouped into ten categories, as codes achieved theoretical saturation (Table 3).

The topics found in Booking.com covered a smaller spectrum of elements, mostly linked with the hotel units' characteristics. Nonetheless, in both platforms, some related common points could be found; for example, front desk staff were represented at almost the same frequency in both platforms. The walking distance category presented high internal consistency in the two platforms. Considering the number of comments and the frequency found for each category, it was possible to establish a higher rate of consistent comments in TripAdvisor (58,70%) than in Booking.com (37,18%). A closer look at the keywords used could point to clear brand image co-creation since specific details about the hotels were being offered under a customer point of view. These results in terms of numbers and diversity of topics covered, allowed to infer that TripAdvisor was the platform used by tourists to share their experience more openly.

The categories found were merged according to the similarity of key terms resulting in six common themes: room, staff, location, food, facilities, and walking distance. Using the coordinates of each review vector space on each of these six categories as predictor variables, and the average rating given by the user to the hotel unit in the two platforms as the predicted variables, two regression models were conducted (Table 4). Standard coefficients and their significance are reported here.

Results highlighted that the different dimensions used in online reviews had distinctive effects on experience ratings; its effects varied by platform. Tourists' comments on staff had differently affected ratings on

**Table 1**
General information about the units of analysis.

| Category | Independent brand | International brand | National brand | Regional brand | Regional/national brand | Total |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 3 stars | 8 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 14 |
| Large | – | – | – | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Medium | 2 | – | – | 1 | – | 3 |
| Small | 6 | 1 | 1 | 1 | – | 9 |
| 4 stars | 14 | 4 | 3 | 8 | 5 | 34 |
| Large | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 11 |
| Medium | 7 | – | 1 | 3 | 1 | 12 |
| Small | 6 | 2 | 1 | 2 | – | 11 |
| 5 stars | 1 | – | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Large | 1 | – | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Medium | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| Small | – | – | – | – | – | – |

**Table 3**
Main topics and keyword structure.

| Platform | Topic | Keywords | Internal Consistency | EIGENVALUE | FREQ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| TripAdvisor | OCEAN VIEW | room; comfortable; large; view; rooms; ocean; clean; balcony; bed; bathroom; spacious; beds; shower; big; suite; views; ocean view; | 0,380 | 2,85 | 281 |
| | WALKING DISTANCE | walking; distance; town; walk; ponta; delgada; center; location; beach; restaurants; city; minute; located; hotel; marina; great; harbor; easy; angra; short; centre; drive; sea; ponta delgada; walking distance; minute walk; short walk; city center; great location; | 0,411 | 5,50 | 274 |
| | FRONT DESK FRIENDLY AND HELPFUL | staff; helpful; friendly; desk; front; accommodating; extremely; english; reception; front desk; friendly and helpful; friendly staff; front desk staff; helpful staff; | 0,423 | 2,81 | 234 |
| | SÃO MIGUEL | miguel; sao; visit; hotel; ponta; furnas; delgada; amenities; week; facilities; kind; stay; island; stayed; sao miguel; ponta delgada; miguel island; boutique hotel; são miguel; island of sao miguel; | 0,325 | 2,53 | 192 |
| | BREAKFAST BUFFET FOOD | coffee; breakfast; breads; tea; fruit; fresh; lots; choices; machine; eggs; bread; cold; limited; selection; food; bacon; buffet; including; morning; hot; delicious; making; local; variety; cheeses; breakfast buffet; fresh fruit; buffet breakfast; hot and cold; scrambled eggs; | 0,398 | 3,29 | 186 |
| | HOTEL RESTAURANT | restaurant; closed; bar; food; drinks; dinner; menu; evening; meals; good; pool; ate; season; looked; bit; buffet; half; excellent; good food; hotel restaurant; | 0,347 | 2,56 | 160 |
| | TERRA NOSTRA | terra; nostra; garden; variety; quality; huge; absolutely; gardens; loved; delicious; good; hotel; terra nostra; terra nostra garden; terra nostra garden hotel; terra nostra gardens; terra nostra hotel; terra nostra park; | 0,400 | 2,48 | 136 |
| | POOLS | pools; thermal; spa; sauna; indoor; pool; outdoor; swimming; point; gym; relaxing; inside; long; pretty; water; area; offers; evening; felt; nice; indoor pool; swimming pool; outdoor pool; thermal pools; thermal pool; pool area; indoor and outdoor; | 0,483 | 3,48 | 131 |
| | RENTAL CAR | car; rental; access; parking; park; small; safe; front; needed; extra; open; island; family; euros; street; rental car; car rental; car park; free parking; parking garage; euros a day; rent a car; small car; | 0,336 | 2,65 | 79 |
| | EARLY CHECK OFFERED | offered; check; facing; asked; pm; harbour; arrival; flight; overlooking; drink; arrived; time; sea; early; trip; balcony; early check; check in time; check in early; overnight flight; | 0,356 | 2,40 | 60 |
| Booking. com | FRIENDLY AND HELPFUL STAFF | friendly; staff; front; hear; desk; modern; door; variety; wifi; helpful; good; guests; breakfast; balcony; pillows; excellent; restaurant; rooms; facilities; room; clean; reception; wait; location; comfortable; friendly and helpful; friendly staff; helpful staff; front desk; good breakfast; good location; friendly and helpful staff; | 0,368 | 2,98 | 288 |
| | SWIMMING POOL SAUNA | swimming; sauna; pool; pools; pm; warm; indoor; room; open; bath; thermal; jacuzzi; furniture; hours; nice; end; spa; relaxing; hotel; facilities; area; relax; swimming pool; indoor pool; | 0,382 | 2,95 | 197 |
| | SERVED | served; gardens; swim; dining; paid; booking; closed; cold; buffet; full; dinner; pool; quiet; breakfast; area; views; beautiful; looked; stay; pool area; buffet breakfast; buffet dinner; | 0,455 | 3,31 | 129 |
| | PONTA DELGADA | Ponta; Delgada; wait; convenient; resort; easy; airport; car; style; island; desk; felt; front; stay; great; time; located; lot; Ponta Delgada; center of Ponta Delgada; | 0,445 | 3,17 | 107 |
| | COFFEE MACHINE SELECTION | coffee; selection; bedroom; eggs; offer; tea; places; stayed; experience; morning; water; full; thing; great; breakfast; machine; free; relax; coffee machine; tea and coffee; scrambled eggs; breakfast room; hot water; tea and coffee facilities; | 0,403 | 2,81 | 98 |
| | WALK | walk; street; close; ocean; distance; restaurants; main; minute; centre; center; walking; town; minutes; drive; view; city; side; floor; min; location; walking distance; city center; city centre; good location; minute walk; min walk; close to the city; | 0,462 | 3,44 | 96 |
| | EARLY FLIGHT | early; told; flight; left; arrived; cleaned; charge; check; day; lobby; worth; problem; pm; poor; room; night; bad; early flight; early check; early in the morning; room wasn; | 0,432 | 2,78 | 83 |
| | AIR CONDITIONING | conditioning; fridge; drinks; air; noisy; quiet; night; stunning; working; nice; air conditioning; | 0,448 | 5,70 | 39 |

**Table 4**
Results of the regression.

| | TripAdvisor | Booking.com |
|---|---|---|
| Room | 0,0274*** | 0,0235** |
| Staff | 0,4432 | 0,148 |
| Location | 0,1182 | 0,1799 |
| Food | 0,3137 | 0,2076 |
| Facilities | 0,1479 | 0,1456 |
| Walking distance | 0,1379 | 0,1616 |
| *Remark:* | | |
| Adjusted R square | 0,8185 | 0,9802 |
| $*p < 0.1$; $**p < 0.05$; $***p < 0.01$. | | |

both platforms; on Booking.com, this factor presented a residual influence on the experience rating, whereas on TripAdvisor, it was the most influential dimension. Walking distance was a highly commented dimension, but it presented a small effect on the experience rating.

Afterward, using the Dictionary of Brand Personality, the content was analyzed, and the main brand personality traits were retrieved from the hotel descriptions and the comments generated on the platforms. Fig. 2 presents personality traits, communicated by 52 brands, and co-created on TripAdvisor and Booking by users. The original brand personality dictionary instrument created by Opoku et al. (2006), compiled a set of synonyms to Aaker (1997) five basic dimensions as well as forty-two personality trait norms as set out in her paper, containing 833 words, split into the five BPS categories, namely: competence, excitement, ruggedness, sincerity, and sophistication.

It can be observed in Fig. 2 that the sincerity dimension is the one that most characterized the brand personality transmitted by the hotel descriptions on the TripAdvisor platform (34%), followed by the excitement dimension (22%), the sophistication dimension (20%), the size of ruggedness (16%) and finally, the size of competence (8%). When looking at content shared by users, the excitement dimension prevalence (55,32%) was the highest, followed by the sophistication dimension (19,73%). Thus, it is possible to state that 34% of the textual content on TripAdvisor conveyed a branded personality that was "family-oriented," "humble," "honest, "sincere," "real," complete," "original," "cheerful"
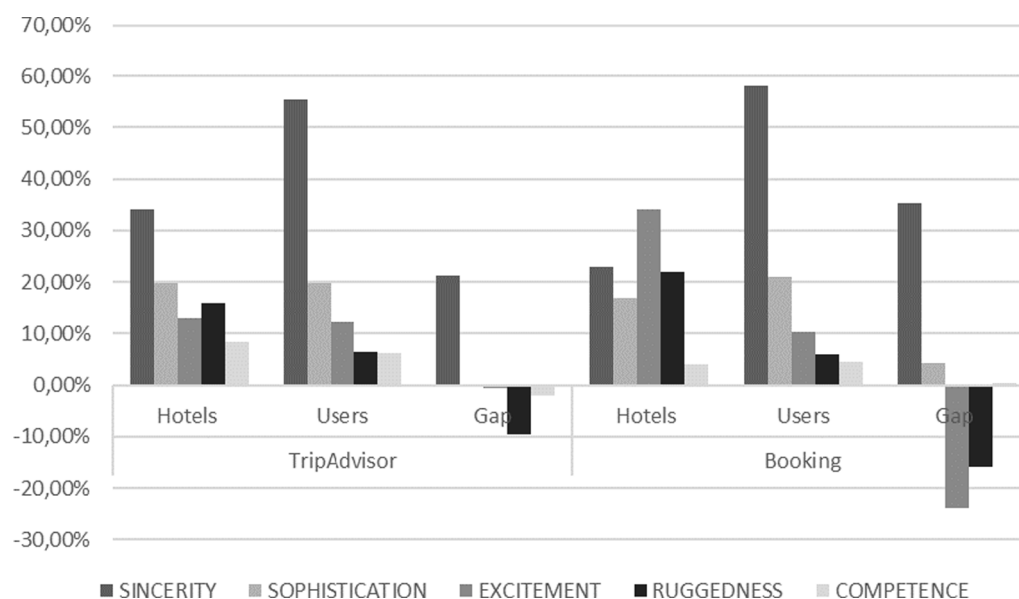
**Fig. 2.** Brand personality traits communicated by the different sources.

and "sentimental," which were attributes related to the sincerity dimension. In this case, the gap between brand identity, communicated by the hotel, and brand image communicated by eWoM assumed a major positive difference in the excitement dimension (21,23 percentual points) and a negative one related to the ruggedness dimension (-9,5 percentual points).

In the case of Booking.com, the dimension that stood out the most was the excitement dimension (35%), with more expression than what was presented in TripAdvisor. The next one was the sincerity dimension (23%) that appeared in these descriptions with less expressiveness than in TripAdvisor. Ruggedness (21%) came with more expressiveness, followed by sophistication (17%) and competence (4%). In the user comments in Booking.com, sincerity (58%) was the dimension with more expressiveness compared to the descriptive ones. Next was the sophistication dimension at 21%, with an expressiveness slightly higher than the records of the descriptions. This aspect was followed by the excitement dimension at about 10%, in contrast with the descriptions which were at 35%. The ruggedness dimension appeared to have 6% expressiveness, a value much lower than the descriptions, which had 21% of the textual records expressing this attribute. Finally, the competence dimension rose to 5%, a value similar to that transmitted by hotel descriptions in this platform. The gap between identity and image for Booking.com occurred mostly in three dimensions: sincerity (35,30%), excitement (–23,74%); and, ruggedness (-15,89%).

Finally, a sentiment analysis was conducted to understand if the emotional tone of content varied with the sharing platform adopted (Table 5).

The main differences found were related to the positive tone, where TripAdvisor had a truly higher percentage of positive comments when compared to Booking.com. The litigious discourse was almost inexistent

in TripAdvisor but was the third category in Booking.com. A correlation test between the "expertise" level of the user, given by the platform based on the useful reviews and the emotional tone of the comment, was conducted verifying a very weak and negative correlation between these two factors (-0,031).

Fig. 3 represents the elements associated with the positive tone mentions in both sharing platforms:

Although differences could be found in terms of intensity and sharing network used, when looking to the elements linked to a positive tone, similarities arose.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

The digital era allows marketers to manage brand identity in a unique and dynamic form, but it also allows users to actively contribute to brand image creation through user-generated content (Borges-Tiago et al., 2019; Calheiros et al., 2017). Thus, both firms and customers are co-creating the brand reputation online, combining the brand identity and personality, with the brand image created and recreated in the consumer's mind by different sources of information (Nyangwe & Buhalis, 2018) in a relatively new process, that is growing fast. In this sense, branding is no longer the internal task of developing and creating a brand identity to the firm, products, and brands; it integrates the contributions of countless anonymous users, who through eWoM co-create brand image on different platforms (Kapferer, 2006; Kennedy & Guzmán, 2016; Veloutsou & Delgado-Ballester, 2018).

The main aim of this research was to assess how eWoM can influence brand image and how different sharing platforms can project different brand meanings. In this endeavor, a first assumption was made considering that different virtual communities can present distinctive sharing culture, more or less aligned with the brand itself. In this sense, it would be expected that TripAdvisor presents a less consistent brand co-creation compared to other platforms created with more focused business-orientation, such as Booking.com. Findings generated through a hybrid method of analyses of the contents shared on these two platforms related to hotel units did not support this idea, since, in terms of number and valence, the contents communicated on TripAdvisor seemed to be more aligned with brand identity, allowing a more consistent brand co-creation.

Regarding the extraction of topics, some coincide with the evaluation points that were found in the evaluation platforms, and it is possible to conclude that the platforms, through their parameterizations, facilitate

**Table 5**
Emotional tone of the message.

| % SHOWN | TripAdvisor | Booking.com |
|---|---|---|
| Positive | 74,26% | 58,06% |
| Negative | 21,39% | 27,96% |
| Uncertainty | 2,02% | 4,30% |
| Interesting | 1,05% | 3,23% |
| Constraining | 0,55% | 0,00% |
| Litigious | 0,47% | 5,38% |
| Modal words strong | 0,15% | 0,00% |
| Superfluous | 0,12% | 1,08% |

TripAdvisor

Booking.com
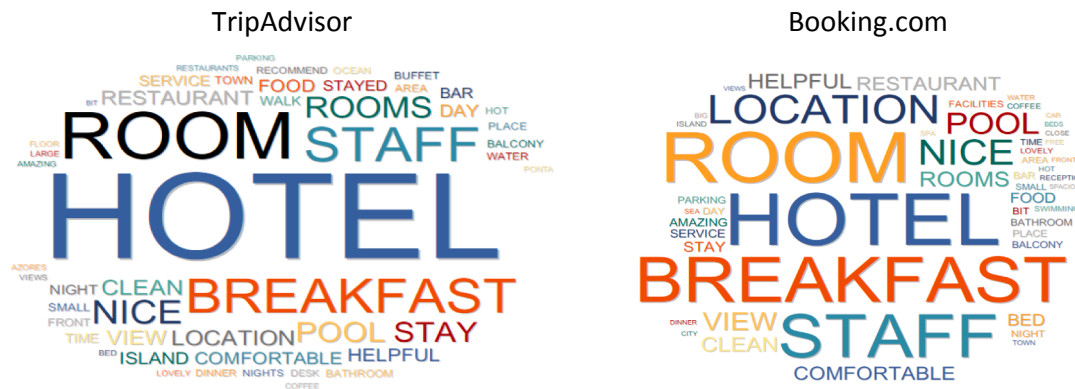


**Fig. 3.** Word clouds in elements found in positive discourse.

and guide comments on key issues. However, as Table 4 shows**,** some highly commented dimensions have a small effect on the experience ratings.

Findings also shed some light related to the brand co-creation processes occurring in the different platforms. It led to the conclusion that hotel profile descriptions on the TripAdvisor platform convey a more sincere brand personality, while descriptions in Booking.com convey a personality-oriented to the scale of excitement. Furthermore, it was found that competence was the least prominent personality attribute in these descriptions on both platforms.

Unlike hotels, users expressed similar brand personality traits in their comments on both platforms. Thus, the most valued dimension was sincerity, followed by sophistication and excitement. Moreover, it was also found that on these two platforms, the least valued dimensions were ruggedness and competence.

When looking at the gap between brand identity and brand image in the different opinion sharing platforms, results obtained led to consider the existence of small differences in the two platforms under analysis. Hence, in the case of the brand personality co-created in TripAdvisor, it can be concluded that the hotel brand personality description is not in line with the content generated by users, as there is a much greater appreciation of sincerity in the content generated by the comments, as opposed to that observed in the hotel description. In the case of Booking. com, a similar situation occurs regarding the sincerity dimension. However, the less aligned dimension is the excitement dimension, highly promoted by hotels, but poorly evaluated by users.

The last assumption made in this study concerned the nature of the tone of the emotional content shared on these platforms. Results from the sentiment analysis showed that TripAdvisor users tended to use a more positive tone of language whereas those in Booking.com, who besides pointing out their preference and positive experiences, also used the platform space to inform peers about their litigious experience. Although looking at the qualitative rating scales of both platforms, Booking.com presented a more positive scale, leading to higher positive ratings. Thus, our findings, to some extent, conflicted with our hypothesis regarding the distinctiveness of emotional tone used in the different sharing platforms. Consequently, there are several points of the theory that should be reconsidered.

By examining hotels' and users' content communicated on two sharing platforms, the results confirm the need to discuss brand identity and brand image alignment in the digital context. These outcomes have both theoretical and managerial implications for online branding. Theoretically, this exploratory study empirically validates some of the concepts presented over the last two decades of previous studies related to brand co-creation (Black & Veloutsou, 2017; Nandan, 2005; Tajvidi et al., 2018; Veloutsou & Delgado-Ballester, 2018). Firstly, our results reinforce the concept presented in Veloutsou and Delgado-Ballester (2018) research, that brand creation shifts from a firm-centric and top-down approach to online social sharing, where new brand meanings

are co-created from the fusion of brand identity and brand image. Secondly, results also enlarge the evidence that virtual communities, depending on their configuration, can generate different brand meanings, in line with the results found by Black and Veloutsou (2017).

Managerially, these findings challenge brand managers and marketers to move to a new branding approach that considers users as active co-creators of brand image. As an initial effort to provide practitioners with information pertaining to users' behavior in the different sharing platforms, it highlights the need to carefully look at the brand personality gaps found in the different platforms. It seems reasonable to assert that the major gaps found reflect a more commercial orientation, instead of a consumer-oriented approach.

This study also indicates that commercial sharing platforms are more suitable to work as complaining channels. Therefore, brand managers should work closely with hotel managers to give a combined response that minimizes brand damage and handles complaints. Additionally, this study finds that some attributes valued by users are not included in the rating scales; thus, managers should pay attention to those when portraying their brand image.

The results and implications of this study are somewhat constrained by the research method employed. This research was conducted within a single category of the tourism and hospitality industry, in an island destination, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Hence, further research is required to examine the phenomenon in more depth, using other industries or regions as a field of study. First, research can be replicated in other hotels, sectors, and countries, testing the robustness of brand personality dimensions. Another line for future research could look at how firms react to consumers who modify their brand personality over time. An additional path could consider analyzing the differences between TripAdvisor and Booking.com in what concerns ghost-writing impacts on brand image.

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