ONLINE TRAVEL AGENCIES AND THEIR ROLE IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to present the evolution of online travel agencies, the main themes, authors, and methodologies, through a systematized review. The analysis has focused on 61 papers published from 2009 until 2020. The research was limited by the journal ranking in the subject category tourism, leisure and hospitality management in the Scimago Journal and Country Rank. Field research is the most frequent in studies in the area. However, the interest in experiments and content analysis grows, using the content generated by customers in the online travel agencies. This study helps to collaborate in the authors' decision-making regarding the methodology to be used and which authors are being negotiated in future research. The results showed how the theme has evolved, changes in approaches, the way online travel agencies report to their partners (often in a conflictual way) and customers, pointing out new trends to be studied. There was no literature review about online travel agencies published in the journals used for this research, to the best of our knowledge. Cover many years and expand the search to other academic journals is our suggestion for future research.

INTRODUCTION

The first Online Travel Agencies (OTA) emerged at the end of the last century and became an important asset of the distribution channel in the travel industry in the last two decades. They were the first to make online sales and invest heavily in technology, promotions, online and offline

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advertisements (Mellinas, 2019). In the beginning, the main focus of OTAs was the airline companies. However, due to the low margins and crisis in the airline industry, lately, commissioning has decreased, and the focus has shifted to other touristic services, such as hotel bookings (Dutta et al., 2017).

The rapid expansion of OTAs around the world, their growing popularity and intense market competition, has been reflected in the growing interest in academic research on consumer behavior using platforms (Talwar et al., 2020). The first OTAs to appear on the market were Expedia in 1996 in the United States by Microsoft and in 1997 Priceline in Europe (Barthel & Perret, 2015).

OTAs arose to expand the distribution channels of hotels and increase business opportunities (Lv et al., 2020), thus playing a critical role in the distribution of tourism products, facilitating the reach of potential customers from all over the world (Park et al., 2019). There is an exchange between these partners, while the hotel feeds OTAs websites with information and OTAS attracts customers to hotels (Chang et al., 2019). However, in this relationship between hotels and OTAs, as high commission rates charged by the platforms, can reduce the profit margins of the hotels (Lv et al., 2020). In addition, in a multichannel environment, hotels and OTAs also compete with each other. (Chang et al., 2019).

Many OTAs on the market attract their customers by selling various tourist products, in addition to accommodation, such as airfare and car rental, as they seek to offer the full service, where customers can make a complete purchase in one channel (Ku & Fan, 2009). By offering several options of hotel prices, the OTAs end up being the best alternative for casual travelers or those not used to the destination, as they are not loyal to a specific brand (Toh et al., 2011). For this reason, there is a great need for hotels, especially small ones, to be available in OTAs for greater visibility when searching by customers (Toh et al., 2011). The reasons for the expansion of online reservations and OTA include: (1) the intangibility factor of services, mostly hotels, since there is no need for physical verification of the product, as the detailed description of the items is enough to make the purchase decision; (2) the expectation that customers find lower prices on the Internet due to lower distribution costs (Toh et al., 2011); and (3) the direct connection to the seller, without the need for intermediaries (Toh et al., 2011).

Tourists often share their travel experiences in OTAs and thus influence others and provide information for those are seeking (Hou et al., 2020). According to Verma et al. (2012, p.184), *when a hotel has negative*

comments, we found that the respondents gave a probability of about 2 out of 5 that they'd book that hotel. When they see a positive review, they estimated a likelihood of 3.5 to 4 out of 5 that they'd book that hotel. Different contexts obtained in the academic area about OTAs, as they form partnerships with various branches of tourism and online reviews are a secondary source of information that can be easily accessed for those seeking a greater understanding of consumer behavior. This research is justified by the scarcity of systematic reviews addressing OTAs, to improve knowledge in this type of company, which in addition to the tourism area, is also part of the technology area and is in constant innovation, in addition to its importance for the tourism industry.

OTAs have been approached from different points of view in the literature, therefore, there is a large volume of research addressing the theme. Therefore, it was chosen by the researchers used only as the first 20 journals in the Scimago classification. The SCImago Journal Rank (SJR indicator) is updated based on the number of citations received by a journal. High values indicate the importance and brand of the journal. In this case, we consider a reliable indicator for choosing the journals used for this research.

This article aims to present the evolution of OTAs, their positioning in the market and how they relate to customers, partners, and suppliers. Through a systematized review, the main themes mentioned in the existing literature on OTAs are presented. We sought to present the most used research methodologies; the topics being covered in the research; and more prolific countries and authors. The results showed the way OTAs relate to their partners, how the theme has evolved over the past 10 years and changes in approaches, pointing out new trends to be studied.

In this paper, we discuss the evolution of online travel agencies. The section 2 presents the methodology followed for the research. In Section 3, we introduce the reader to the data driven OTAs sector and presents the results of the systematized literature review. Finally, Section 4 discuss the findings, the main conclusions and indicate some directions for future work.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research was focused on studying papers published in journals of acknowledged prestige in the fields of Hospitality and Tourism (Gonzalez et al., 2019). The analysis has focused on 61 papers published between 2009

and 2020. The research was limited by the journal ranking in the subject category Tourism, Leisure and Hospitality Management from the Scimago Journal and Country Rank, following the criteria defined by Gonzalez et al. (2019) in which the study was based on articles published in periodicals of recognized prestige in the field of tourism and hospitality. Therefore, just the articles published in the 22 first journals in the ranking were revised. The authors used to develop the research methodology based on the studies conducted by Gonzalez et al. (2019) and Zupic and Čater (2014).

The type of analysis and the counting method from the VOSviewer Software for map formation were based on bibliographic data. The type of analysis was based on the co-author relationship; the analysis unit was authors; the counting method was completed; the maximum number of authors per document was 25; the minimum number of authors per document was one; the number of authors selected was 146. Co-author analysis can analyze co-authorship patterns among contributing scientists and produce a social network of the research field (Zupic & Čater, 2014).

The co-word analysis tries to answer the dynamics of a field's conceptual structure: to uncover the conceptual building blocks of literature, what the topics associated with a particular line of research are, and to track the evolution of the concept. *Co-word analysis uses the text of the titles, author-designated keywords, abstracts, or even full texts to construct a semantic map of the field* (Zupic & Čater, 2014, p. 440).

In the present research, keywords were used for the construction of the co-word map. The themes were analyzed inductively, through content analysis, without necessarily falling into pre-existing themes or categories (Thorpe et al., 2005). Some topics were selected by the study by Gonzalez et al. (2019) due to the similarity of the theme treated by ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) in hotel management. From the analysis of co-words performed in the VOSviewer Software, new topics were used.

Our study used bibliometric methods with a quantitative approach to describe, evaluate, and monitor registered research. However, seeking to find a better classification of this study, we also can not consider this paper a systematic review, as it does not aim to answer a specific question, such as the systematic review produced by Perkins et al. (2020). Gonzalez et al. (2019) classified their review as a research review, but they are limited to a review of only seven journals. Given this aspect, we consider our research a systematized review that includes one or more elements of the systematic review process adopted by Grant and Booth (2009). We prioritize our data collection or focus on knowledge, how it evolved and how researchers

contributed. This scenario should be the starting point for all studies, without it being able to declare an exhaustive literature review effectively.

RESULTS

From the individual search for journals with the phrase *online travel agency* by keyword or abstract, in the 22 journals with the best positioning in the Scimago ranking in 2019, only nine journals reverted results. Table 1 shows the researched journals, as well as their classification. The ranking shows seven journals from the United States, 13 from the United Kingdom, and two from Netherlands.

Table 1. *Ranking of the 22 Best Journals Classified by Scimago*

N	Journal	Country	N	Journal	Country
1	Journal of Travel Research	USA	12	Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	USA
2	Tourism Management	UK	13	International Journal of Tourism Research	UK
3	Annals of Tourism Research	USA	14	Journal of Service Management	UK
4	International Journal of Hospitality Management	UK	15	European Sport Management Quarterly	UK
5	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research	USA	16	Applied Geography	NL
6	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	UK	17	Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism	UK
7	Current Issues in Tourism	UK	18	Cornell Hospitality Quarterly	USA
8	Sport Management Review	NL	19	Tourism Geographies	UK
9	Cities	UK	20	Journal of Vacation Marketing	USA
10	Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	USA	21	Tourism Management Perspectives	USA
11	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	UK	22	Leisure Sciences	UK

Source: Scimago

Journals and Authors of the Articles

After searching for the keyword used in the study, Chart 1 shows the journals that have publications about online travel agencies and how many articles were published by each of them between 2009 and 2019. The 61 articles are distributed in 9 academic journals. Only American and English magazines had publications on OTAs.
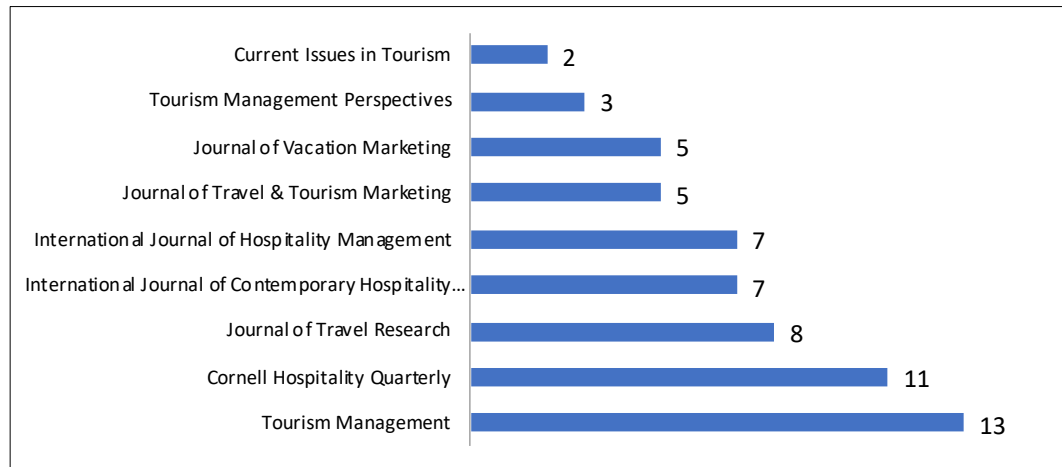
Chart 1. *Journals and number of publications about "online travel agency"*

Among the publications on the proposed theme, 21% are in Tourism Management, 18% in Cornell Hospitality Quarterly, and 13% in Journal of Travel Research. A predominance of American and English academic journals addressing the theme can be noticed as shown in Chart 1. Chart 2 shows the production of scientific articles by country, not considering the author's nationality, but his/her university.
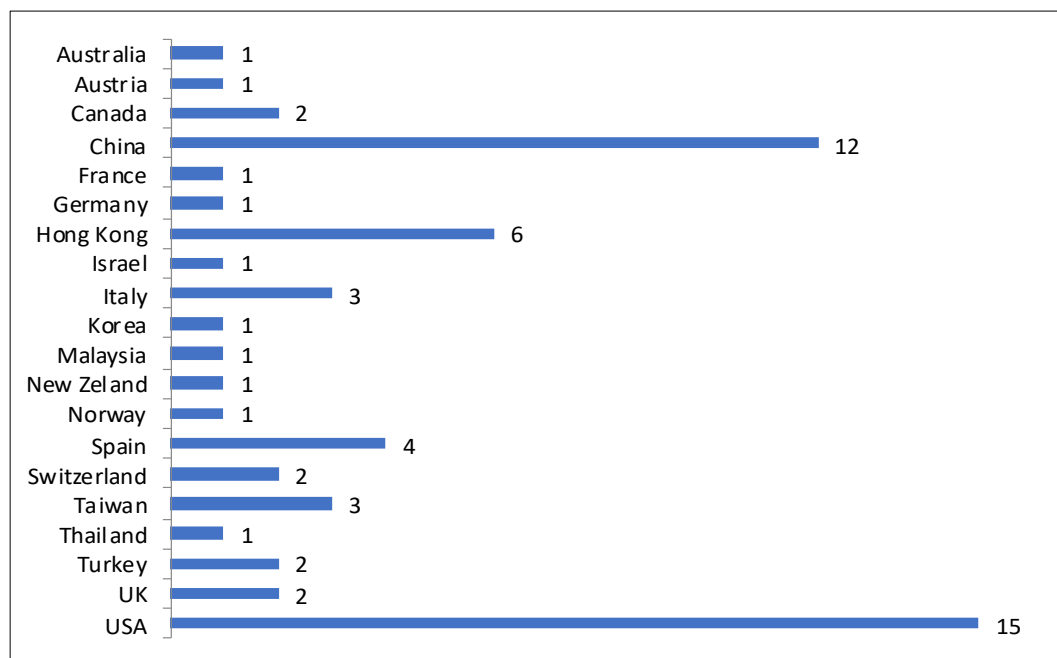

Chart 2. *Production by country from the first author's university*

From the university of the main author of the articles, the United States still maintains its high production on the theme; China appears in second place, with relevant production, followed by Hong Kong. However,

despite many British academic journals, the country's universities did not present a volume of publications on the subject.

Topics of the Articles

The reading of abstracts and keywords of the 61 articles used for this review was considered other topics of articles with bibliometric analysis (Gonzalez et al., 2019) with similar themes those treated in this article. Analysis of keywords was carried out in the VOSviewer software, and the 16 topics were defined. An open format was adopted (Gonzalez et al., 2019), and a new topic about OTAs was included in the research. Co-word analysis with VOSviewer Software was used to search new terms and perspectives.

As seen in Figure 1, the viewer's graphic contains four clusters: (1) green cluster with seven terms directly related to OTA; (2) yellow cluster with six terms, highlighting the word website and words relating to hotels and OTA; (3) blue cluster with six terms and the word hotel highlighted; and (4) red cluster with eight terms related to the strategy.

The analysis of co-words shows a network with relations that represent a conceptual structure of the field. For emerging research fields, it is especially useful for mapping new fields (Zupic & Čater, 2014), mainly in online travel agencies that are continually changing and innovating in their services. Some of the following terms were based on the keywords presented in Figure 1: relationship, distribution, customer satisfaction, cooperation. Chart 3 shows the frequency and incidence for years when the terms are referred to in the paper.

The revised papers were segmented from the client, hotels, and OTAs presented in chart 4 for every two years, and chart 5 with the evolution per year. Subsequently, a new subdivision was carried out on topics that are being researched by the academy. The papers that used customer information and opinions were subdivided into disintermediation, quality service, online booking, e-WoM/user-generated content, social media, customer satisfaction, perceived value, customer experience, competition, and cooperation.
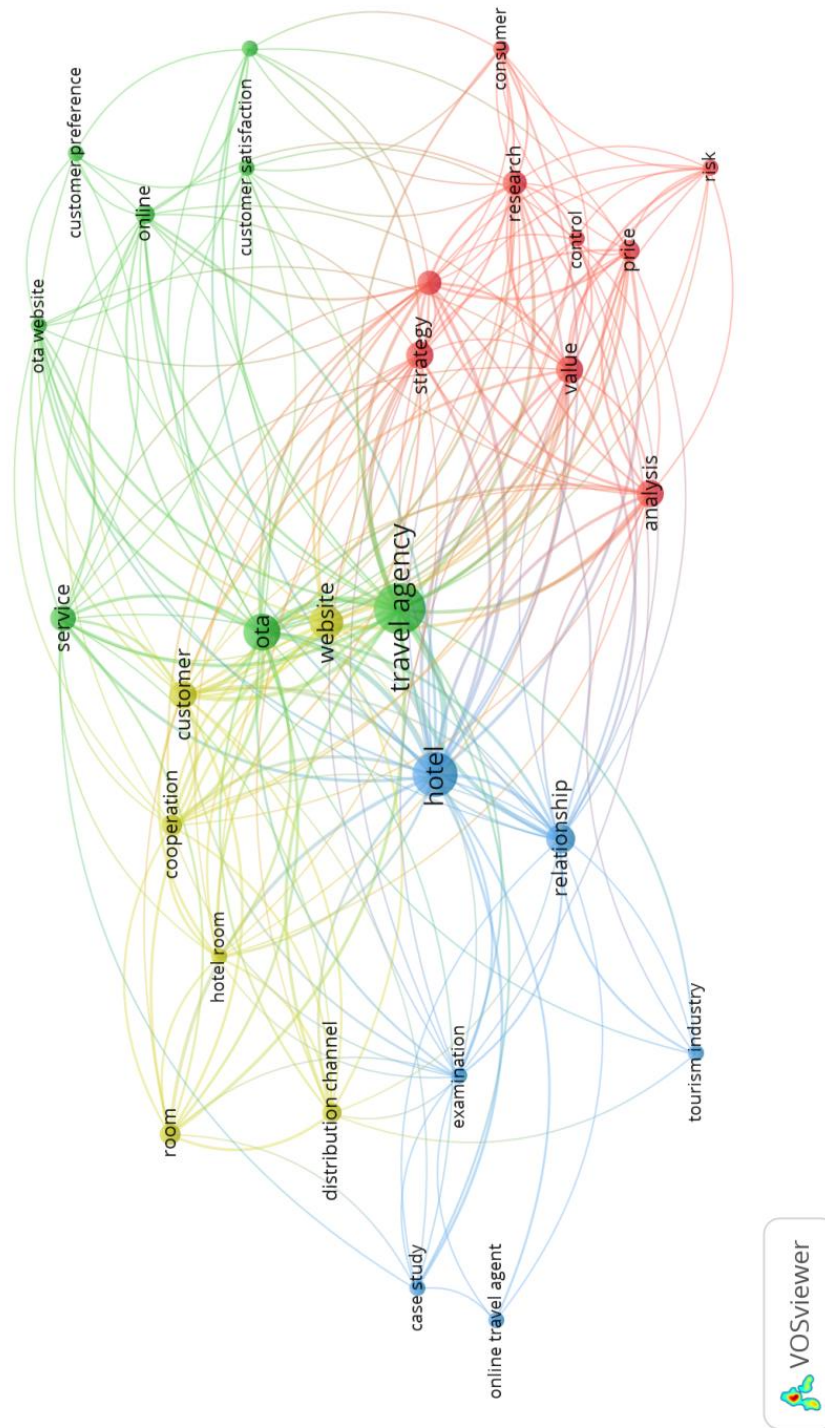
Figure 1. *Network visualization*
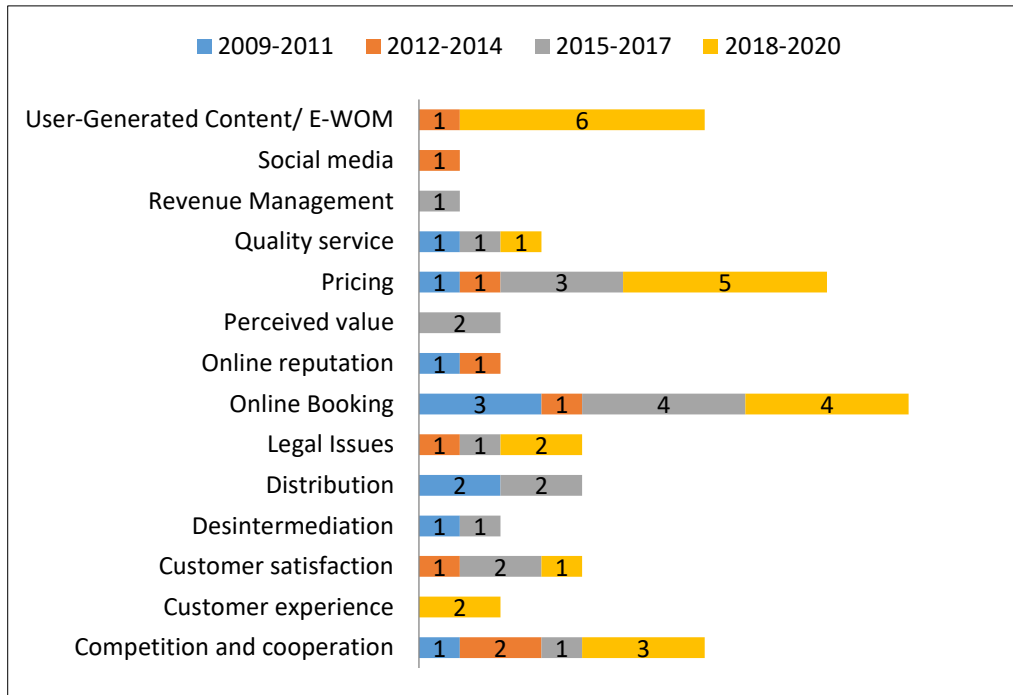
Chart 3. *Topics related to OTAs*
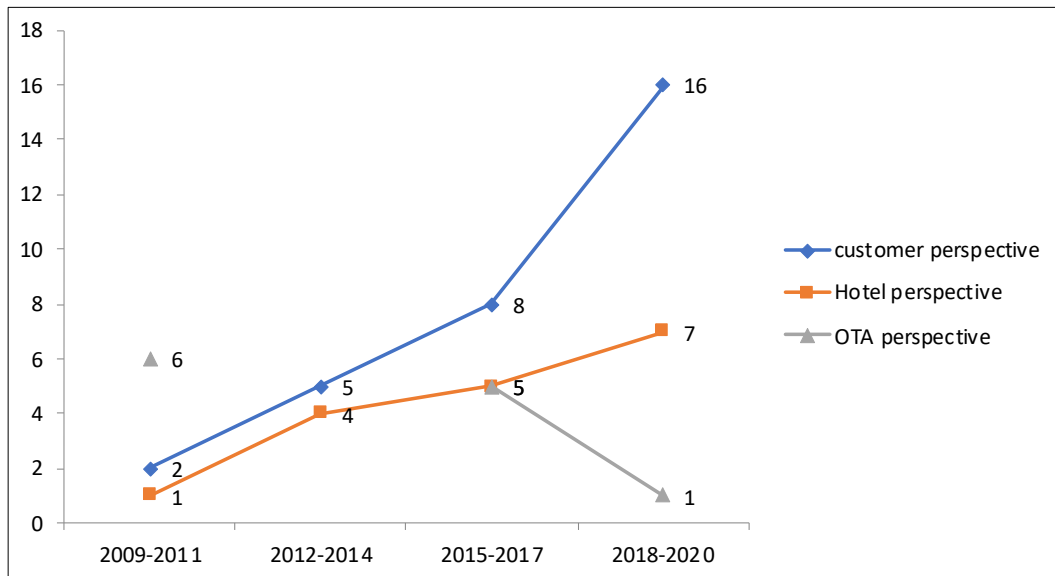
Chart 4. *Topics and perspectives*

The papers that present the hotel's perspective and OTAs dealt mostly with strategies, solutions, and companies' cases. Therefore, the papers from the hotel's perspective were subdivided into pricing, competition and cooperation, distribution, legal issues, and revenue management; the articles were showing the OTA's perspectives were separated into: disintermediation, online bookings, e-WoM/user-generated

content, customer satisfaction, pricing, competition and cooperation, distribution and online reputation (See Table 2).
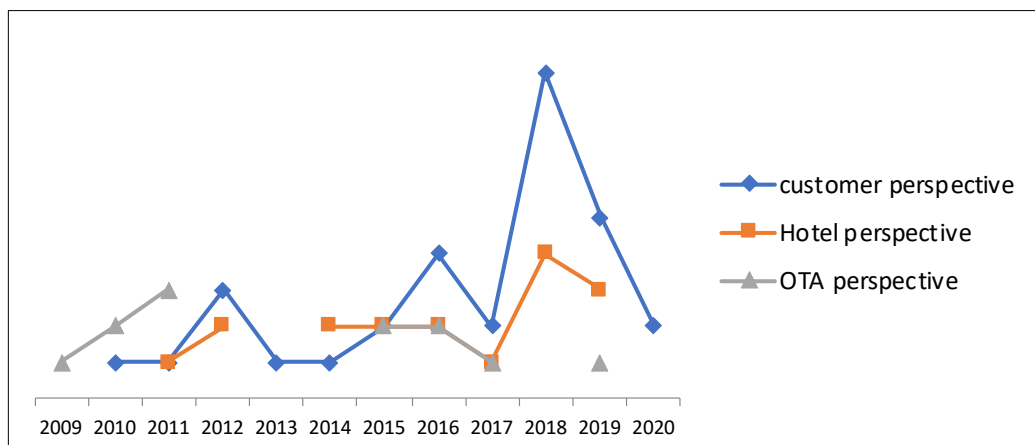
Chart 5. *Topics and perspectives by year*

Competition and cooperation between hotels and OTA were researched by authors (Chang et al., 2019; Christodoulidou et al., 2010; Guo et al., 2014; Long & Shi, 2017; Yin et al., 2019), presented by the three perspectives (client, hotel, and OTA). The study by Chang et al. (2019) presented, through field research with the client, how the channels (hotel and OTA) attract the client and how they compete to attract future visits, based on the O2O model (online for offline), also adopted by Long and Shi (2017). They approached tour operators and OTAs' ideal pricing strategies through cooperation between channels. The research by Christodoulidou et al. (2010) also presented yet another intermediary involved in the complex travel distribution system, which are the meta-search engines (such as Tripadvisor). Yin et al. (2019) point to an even more complicated future scenario for the hotel distribution scenario and suggest that to build a long-term sustainable relationship, OTAs will need to innovate and develop a strategic relationship capable of contributing to the tourism value chain.

Travel agencies and agents, one of the first vocations in the world, needed to reformulate themselves to remain in the market since the Internet-enabled the direct interaction between the consumer and the supplier, eliminating the intermediary (Díaz et al., 2015; Grønflaten, 2009). The disintermediation topic was addressed between 2009 and 2015, when after the growth of online sales, travel agents and physical agencies' future began to be questioned. Grønflaten (2009) used binomial logistic regression to predict the result of travelers' choice between two sources (travel agent vs. service provider) and two information channels (in-person vs. internet).

Table 2. *Authors, Perspectives, and Themes*

| AUTHORS	THEMES													
	Disintermediation	Service Quality	Online Booking	User-Generated Content / E-Wom	Social Media	Customer Satisfaction	Perceived Value	Customer Experience	Pricing	Competition And Cooperation	Distribution	Legal Issues	Revenue Management	Online Reputation
(Grønflaten, 2009)	x													
(Fu Tsang et al., 2010)		x												
(Toh et al., 2011)			x											
(Pan et al., 2013)			x											
(Horster & Gottschalk, 2012)				x										
(Verma et al., 2012)					x									
(Del Chiappa, 2013)				x										
(Aslanzadeh & Keating, 2014)						x								
(Ha & Janda, 2015)		x												
(Hao et al., 2015)						x								
(Sabiote-Ortiz et al., 2016)							x							
(Beritelli & Schegg, 2016)			x											
(Ozturk et al., 2016)							x							
(Rianthong et al., 2016)			x											
(Melis & Piga, 2017)									x					
(Xie et al., 2017)			x											
(Rajaobelina, 2018)								x						
(Mohseni et al., 2018)								x						
(Kirillova & Chan, 2018)		x												
(Falk & Vieru, 2018)			x											
(Belarmino & Koh, 2018)				x										
(Toral et al., 2018)				x										
(Park & Jang, 2018)									x					
(Park et al., 2019)			x											
(Leung et al., 2018)			x											
(Casaló & Romero, 2019)				x										
(Chang et al., 2019)										x				
(Liu et al., 2019a)				x										
(Kim et al., 2019)									x					
(Li et al., 2019b)				x										
(Sun et al., 2020)			x											
(Chen et al., 2020)						x								

CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVE

AUTHORS		THEMES													
		Disintermediation	Service Quality	Online Booking	User-Generated Content / E-Wom	Social Media	Customer Satisfaction	Perceived Value	Customer Experience	Pricing	Competition And Cooperation	Distribution	Legal Issues	Revenue Management	Online Reputation
HOTEL PERSPECTIVE	(Toh et al., 2011)											x			
	(Lee et al., 2013)										x				
	(Hamilton et al., 2012)												x		
	(Ling et al., 2014)									x					
	(Guo et al., 2014)										x				
	(Ling et al., 2015)											x			
	(Haynes & Egan, 2015)												x		
	(Stangl et al., 2016)											x			
	(Viglia et al., 2016)									x					
	(Ivanov & Ayas, 2017)													x	
	(Tekin Bilbil, 2018)										x				
	(Yang & Leung, 2018)									x					
	(Mcleod et al., 2018)												x		
	(Anderson & Han, 2018)												x		
	(Nicolau & Sharma, 2019)									x					
	(Yin et al., 2019)										x				
	(Guizzardi et al., 2019)									x					
OTAS PERSPECTIVE	(Ku & Fan, 2009).			x											
	(Christodoulidou et al., 2010)										x				
	(Law et al., 2010)									x					
	(Yacouel & Fleischer, 2012)														x
	(Chiou et al., 2011)			x											
	(Koo et al., 2011)											x			
	(Díaz et al., 2015)	x													
	(Bui et al., 2015)						x								
	(Murphy & Chen, 2016)			x											
	(Sun et al., 2016)									x					
	(Long & Shi, 2017)									x	x				
	(Hou et al., 2019)				x										

The relationship between hotels and OTAs, often present in a conflictual way involving legal issues, as shown (Anderson & Han, 2018; Hamilton et al., 2012; Haynes & Egan, 2015; Mcleod et al., 2018) ended up provoking the exit of hotel chains and cities from online distribution

platforms, showing the results of being out of OTAs. The Columbus case was addressed by Mcleod et al. (2018) and Anderson and Han (2018) and reported the impacts of the case in 2006, when Columbus had all its hotels removed from the OTAs for more than four years. The authors presented the differences in occupation during the departure and after returning to OTAs and the reflexes in the drop in occupation in neighboring cities.

Parity clauses are often widely discussed in the market, and each country has defined different approaches. The broad parity clause guarantees OTA the possibility of offering prices, room availability, and more advantageous conditions to customers in relation to those offered directly by the hotel in the sales channels or in another competing OTA, which results in limiting competition and entry of a new OTA on the market, since a lower commission charge would not reflect prices for the final consumer (Hoskins & Arnesson, 2018). Haynes and Egan (2015) assessed the long-term effects of parity agreements in the UK perspective from in-depth interviews with experts responsible for hotel price decision making. The removal of parity agreements for closed groups can bring benefits to customers through greater knowledge of prices and increasing power in negotiations; it will also be an opportunity for small OTAs to compete with large OTAs, using more aggressive discounts their competitive strengths. (Haynes & Egan, 2015).

Thematic distribution was addressed in 4 articles from different points of view. The survey considers that there is a dominance of OTAs in hotel distribution (Stangl et al., 2016; Toh et al., 2011); others considered the ways of managing availability through the cooperation of distribution platforms in the hotel industry (Ling et al., 2015), and in the air (Koo et al., 2011). The online presence in the distribution process was also investigated (Pan et al., 2013). The offline and online distribution channels that are often chosen by hoteliers in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland were investigated by Stangl et al. (2016). The authors stressed the dominant role of traditional channels (telephone, fax, letters, and walk-ins), especially for German and Swiss hoteliers. In Austria, e-mail reservations were the most used.

Tierean (2018) conceptualized Revenue Management (RM) as a way to optimize revenue from fixed and perishable inventory, such as housing units, conference rooms, restaurants, and airplane seats, so that they are sold to the appropriate customer, at the right price and at the ideal time, this being the real challenge of revenue management. The main objective of RM is to maximize yields (Wang & Bowie, 2009) and, through it, to get as close

as possible to the goal potential (Cross, 1997). Revenue management practices were investigated in Turkey by Ivanov and Ayas (2017) from a sample of 105 managers. The study results showed that there is no standard in RM practices in the country; in many properties, there is no revenue manager and no intention of hiring, leaving this responsibility to the General Manager, Front Office, or Marketing manager. Revenue Management practices are generally better developed in high-class hotels, which are part of chains and have many rooms.

The most qualified hoteliers regularly monitor OTAs, managing their presence, prices, and parity rate to maximize profits and occupancy (Toh et al., 2011). Different pricing dynamics scenarios, such as last-minute discounts applied to mobile apps and competitive rate strategies between hotels (Kim et al., 2019). Price strategies used in platforms and hotels were the subject of 10 articles presented from the guest, the hotel, and the OTA (Guizzardi et al., 2019; Law et al., 2010; Ling et al., 2014; Long & Shi, 2017; Park & Jang, 2018; Yang & Leung, 2018). Among the topics covered are tariff parity (Nicolau & Sharma, 2019; Yang & Leung, 2018) and tariff fluctuation (Melis & Piga, 2017; Sun et al., 2016; Viglia et al., 2016).

Seeking to understand how tourism companies set their prices online, Melis and Piga (2017) analyzed hotel prices in hotels of four destinations in Mediterranean. They observed the trend of not fluctuating rates except in 4 and 5-star hotels. What is the impact of different degrees of price dispersion on hotel preference? According to Kim et al. (2019), travelers prefer a hotel option with a wide dispersion of price dominance. Online reservations were presented from the customer's perspective (Beritelli & Schegg, 2016; Falk & Vieru, 2018; Leung et al., 2018; Pan et al., 2013; Park et al., 2019; Rianthong et al., 2016; Sun et al., 2020; Toh et al., 2011) and in the perspective of OTAs (Chiou et al., 2011; Ku & Fan, 2009; Murphy & Chen, 2016; Yang & Leung, 2018). Chiou et al. (2011) applied a strategic structure to evaluate sites to examine the consistency of the site's presence and its intended strategies. Sun et al. (2020) investigated how aspects of functionality and usability affect the intention to repurchase in mobile payment for hotel reservations. The results showed that subjective norms and perceived behavioral control are mediators in the relationship between mobile usability and customer satisfaction. However, they are not mediators in the relationship between mobile functionality and customer satisfaction.

Multi-channel strategies have also been investigated to increase online sales (Beritelli & Schegg, 2016; Ku & Fan, 2009; Murphy & Chen,

2016; Sun et al., 2016; Rianthong et al., 2016; Falk & Vieru, 2018) rate fluctuation and booking cancellation are among the topics covered in online reservations. The study by Murphy & Chen (2016) sought to understand the relevance of using information sources. The results reinforced the importance of OTAs as an entry point and reference for information. The studies by Park et al. (2019) investigated the buying behavior of online travel consumers to identify the factors that affect each stage of the process, using observation and research methods. The results corroborate the findings of Murphy & Chen (2016) and add that, in addition to being sources of information, they also enable customers to share their experiences through a uniform platform.

Customer behavior in purchases made through virtual platforms and mobile devices when planning a trip, when using an OTA to research brands, services, rates, and the experience reported by other travelers has been addressed in different perceptions such as: Customer Experience (Mohseni et al., 2018; Rajaobelina, 2018); Customer Satisfaction (Aslanzadeh & Keating, 2014; Bui et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2020; Hao et al., 2015); Perceived Value (Ozturk et al., 2016; Sabiote-Ortiz et al., 2016). Customer satisfaction was surveyed through technology using a learning algorithm (Hao et al., 2015) and how customer opinion is formed on booking platforms based on quality in communication and services (Bui et al., 2015). Also, customer satisfaction on the cruise was discussed (Chen et al., 2020). The impact of the customer experience on the quality of the relationship with travel agencies in a multi-channel environment (in-store and online) was researched by Rajaobelina (2018). The study results showed that the cognitive and affective dimensions were the factors that most positively affected the quality of the relationship. The participant's gender also affected the customer experience in the impact of the relationship (Rajaobelina, 2018).

The comparison between Spanish and British tourists' perceptions in the formation of the perceived value in the hotel purchase decision process was researched by Sabiote-Ortiz et al. (2016). The study showed that the relationship between responsiveness and satisfaction with travel agencies is significant for Spanish tourists with collectivist cultural characteristics, while for the British, with individualist characteristics, it was not significant. The ease of use of the electronic medium has positively affected British tourists' satisfaction, but Spaniards do not consider ease of use to be a determinant of satisfaction.

The concern of tourism companies with the quality of the services provided is constant. How will the quality of the electronic service affect customer satisfaction? Does the experience on the website and the quality of the electronic service affect customer satisfaction? How do these channels attract and retain customers? These were some of the questions raised by the authors about customer satisfaction. (Fu Tsang et al., 2010; Ha & Janda, 2016; Kirillova & Chan, 2018). The findings that stood out were the importance of personal value as a distinguishing factor of the user that can affect the intention to purchase online (Mohseni et al., 2018) and the mediating effects between mobile usability and customer satisfaction (Sun et al., 2020). Personal value was considered a distinguishing factor of the user that can affect the intention to purchase online (Mohseni et al., 2018) and the mediating effects between mobile usability and customer satisfaction. (Sun et al., 2020).

In the context of service quality, Fu Tsang et al. (2010) examined online customers' perceptions about the quality of the electronic service provided by online travel agencies. From a regression analysis, four factors of perceived quality of service that were significant for customer satisfaction were identified: (1) functionality of the website, (2) content and quality of information, (3) relationship with the customer, and (4) safety and protection. The high-quality reviews shared on the websites are essential for both customers and websites (Liu et al., 2019a). The motivation to write reviews (Belarmino & Koh, 2018; Liu et al., 2019a) and the co-creation of value through the sharing of tourist experiences (Casaló & Romero, 2019) were some of the ways of approaching e-word to mouth, a theme that has been highlighted by five articles in the last two years and that did not appear in studies before 2018. The attributes of destinations were also studied through customer reviews (Liu et al., 2019b; Hou et al., 2019; Toral et al., 2018).

Based on the equity theory, Belarmino and Koh (2018) investigated whether guests write comments on different sites for different internal motivations. From the collection of 12,000 reviews of 40 hotels in the United States, the study showed differences in star rating on different channels (hotel website, OTA website, and third-party website), with the hotel website having the best star rating, followed by OTAs. When investigating the motivations for writing reviews, Liu et al. (2019a) found that the increasing number of reviews for a hotel can also induce future users to commit themselves to comment. From 36,148 online comments from Chinese tourists, the authors Liu et al. (2019b) realized that Chinese tourists often have more critical feelings than other international tourists. The

differences between occasional, moderate, and frequent online shoppers were also investigated by Del Chiappa (2013) and showed that frequent shoppers are more optimistic about hotel bookings over the Internet compared to moderate or occasional shoppers.

The business case for investing in online reputation has received increasing attention in recent years (Xie et al., 2014). OTAs play an essential role in building the hotel's reputation and contribute to the quality of service, encouraging better hoteliers' performance, since the information provided by previous guests generates value for hotels of good reputation (Yacouel & Fleischer, 2012). Consumers are participating in information processes through social media and can shape the reputation of companies and influence the booking decision (Horster & Gottschalk, 2012). The authors (Verma et al., 2012) investigated the use of technology by consumers to search and purchase electronic media and social media's impact in the hospitality sector.

Methodologies of the Articles

According to the methodology, the classification of articles was segmented by theorists, which are based on conceptual and empirical ideas and structures. The empiricists were subdivided into field research, expert panel, content analysis, case study, and experiment. The review was carried out from the individual reading of the articles and classified using the EXCEL software. The references for classifying the articles were from the authors Gonzalez et al. (2013). Some studies combined two research methods. However, the present study opted for only one classification. Like the study by (Fu Tsang et al., 2010), which carried out a panel with specialists and subsequently carried out a field study, it was classified as a field study, as with the panel of experts, the results cannot be generalized.

Table 3. *Methodologies Used at Each Two Years*

Methodologies	Total	%	2009-2011	%	2012-2014	%	2015-2017	%	2018-2020	%
Empricial	56	92%	8	13%	7	11%	17	28%	24	40%
Case studies	6	11%	1	2%	2	3%			3	5%
Content analysis	16	29%	1	2%			3	5%	12	20%
Experimental	12	21%			3	5%	6	10%	3	5%
Experts' panel	4	7%	2	3%			1	2%	1	2%
Field studies	18	32%	4	6%	2	3%	7	11%	5	8%
Theoretical	5	8%	2	3%	2	3%	1	2%		
Total	61	100%	10		9		18		24	

The study showed an increase in articles on the 2015 OTA theme. From 2009 to 2011, 31% of all articles reviewed were published. Content analysis, which uses secondary sources already available in databases and websites (Gonzalez et al., 2019), was the method chosen by 29% of the authors. 12 out of a total of 16 articles were published between 2018 to 2020. Often, the content analyzed was collected by the online travel reviews (Belarmino & Koh, 2018; Beritelli & Schegg, 2016; Casaló & Romero, 2019; Chen et al., 2020; Falk & Vieru, 2018; Guizzardi et al., 2019; Hou et. al., 2019; Law et al., 2010; Leung et. al., 2018; Liu et al., 2019b; Melis & Piga, 2017; Nicolau & Sharma, 2019; Sun et al., 2016; Toral et al., 2018; Yang & Leung, 2018).

The field research represented 32% of the published articles (Bui et al., 2015; Chang et al., 2019; Del Chiappa, 2013; Fu Tsang et al., 2010; Grønflaten, 2009; Hao et. al. 2015; Ivanov & Ayas, 2017; Ku & Fan, 2009; Mohseni et. al., 2018; Ozturk et al., 2016; Park & Jang, 2018; Rajaobelina, 2018; Stangl et al., 2016; Sun et al., 2020; Toh et al., 2011; Verma et al., 2012). The method usually uses a quantitative perspective to collect data, gather information about uncontrolled situations, and avoid possible changes in its object of study (Gonzalez et al., 2019).

Experiment was the method chosen by 21% of the articles (Aslanzadeh & Keating, 2014; Ha & Janda, 2015; Kim et al., 2019; Kirillova & Chan, 2018; Long & Shi, 2017; Murphy & Chen, 2016; Pan et al., 2013; Park et al., 2019; Rianthong et al., 2016; Viglia et al., 2016; Ling, et al., 2014; Xie et al., 2017). The method analyzes a phenomenon within a scenario (an environment) causing a simulation of certain circumstances, which can be a set of equations or symbolic representation of a problem (Gonzalez et al., 2019).

The case study examines the phenomenon in its natural environment, obtaining data through interviews and analyzing documents or direct observation, being this the method chosen by 11% of the studies as seen in Table 4 (Anderson & Han, 2018; Christodoulidou et al., 2010; Díaz et al., 2015; Hamilton et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2013; Mcleod et al., 2018; Sabiote-Ortiz et al., 2016; Tekin Bilbil, 2018).

The expert panel was used in 7% of the reviewed articles (Chiou et al., 2011; Haynes & Egan, 2015; Toh et al., 2011; Yin et al., 2019). It uses interviews with specialists in a given subject. Researchers recognized the importance of recruiting experts from diverse backgrounds in the tourism and hospitality industry, industry operators, public policymakers, tourism and travel associations/organizations, and government and general public

tourism departments (Lin & Song, 2015). As seen in Table 4, of the 61 articles reviewed; 64% were qualitative, 33% were quantitative, and 3% used both methodologies. Of the 61 articles surveyed, 8% were theoretical, and 92% empirical.

Table 4. *Methodologies X Academic Journals*

Journal	N	Case Studies	Experimental	Experts' Panel	Field Studies	Content Analysis	Theoretical	Empirical	Quantitative	Qualitative	Mixed Method
Cornell Hospitality Quarterly	11	4	3	1	3			11	4	7	
Current Issues in Tourism	2	1			1			2	1	1	
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	7	1	1			5		7	6	1	
International Journal of Hospitality Management	7		1		3	2	1	6	5	2	
Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing	5		1	2	2			5	2	2	1
Journal of Travel Research	8		2		4	1	1	7	7		1
Journal of Vacation Marketing	5		1		1	2	1	4	3	2	
Tourism Management	13		1	1	3	6	2	11	9	4	
Tourism Management Perspectives	3		2		1			3	2	1	
Total	61	6	12	4	18	16	5	56	39	20	2

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The OTAs brought about many changes to the tourism and hotel market. As a result of media modernity and evolution, it brought agility and dynamics to the tourist market. This bibliometric review aimed, based on the Scimago Image Ranking, along with the best academic journals, to present what has been published about OTAs in recent years, the methodologies that have been used, authors, and countries with greater production and approached topics. From 22 journals surveyed, 8 contained some publications on the topic. This study helps make the current body of knowledge about Online Travel Agencies and their evolution in the scientific field more organized. From the analysis of different issues addressed in the literature, a basis is created to search for gaps for future research. The comprehensive literature investigated in this study can be used as a literature guide for academics and professionals in the tourism market, contributing to stimulating new interests and deepening the theme.

Due to the characteristic of intermediation of OTAs, which offers services from other companies, the article showed what has been published regarding those partnerships. With the emergence of OTAs in the early 2000s, researchers began to question physical travel agencies' future, which have reinvented themselves to remain in the market, focusing mainly on corporate customers. We can see that the approach to physical travel agencies has decreased over the years. Some articles present the challenges that OTAs have to face to stand above the competition, frequently change, revise strategies, improve customer experience, and invest in new products and promotions. The entire tourism market undergoes a re-adaptation, especially in the world pandemic scenario. Some articles present a relationship between agencies and airlines, which have also ended up, in recent years, infrequently appearing, possibly due to new sales strategies with direct sales by airlines. The number of airlines is significantly less than the number of hotels; competition in the hotel sector is greater, making the market dependent on this means of distribution (Toh et al., 2011). For this reason, hotels have been frequently related in OTAs surveys, as it is a critical accommodation partner, and that end up having a meaningful impact on hotel sales.

Theoretical Implications

As a contribution, this work shows a new perspective of online travel agencies and their importance, not only as an intermediary but also a new dynamic to the market. The way it relates to its partners, often conflicting, as shown by some articles dealing with legal issues and new solutions that need to be rethought, such as parity, online reputation, and e-WoM. From the analysis of words in the VOSviewer, it was possible to detect new trends to be studied and that deserve attention in future research. It was noticed that comments are an increasingly frequent source used in content analysis methods, as they show the customers' view. Based on the topics analyzed, this article shows that some topics initially approached were updated in a decade as technological innovations were emerging and reflected in the market.

OTAs, which are technology companies, are characterized by constant innovation, distinguishing themselves from other branches of tourism, which do not advance with such speed because they are small companies and do not have the resources to invest in technological innovation, as an example of individual hotels, which do not belong to a chain and do not invest in their websites.

Another factor highlighted in the research for the relationship of OTAs. There is an evident coopetition, when OTAs reduce to bringing new customers to the hotel and after the hosting experience, the customer can book again through the same channel that he booked directly through the hotel, at this moment the competition between companies starts, because the quality of service on OTA sites negatively affects the customer's intention to book again through hotel sites (Chang et al., 2019). Thus, OTAs need to strive to improve the quality of the website to attract repeat customers and hotels can take advantage of direct contact with the customer during the hosting experience to increase the customer's perception of value during an interaction and try to do with the customer to return by direct channel with the hotel.

Managerial Implications

OTAs are platforms that offer tourism products and services. Some of them offer specific services, such as *Airbnb* with room rental in houses and apartments, and *Rentalcars* specializing in car rental. *Booking.com*, which was once a hosting site, now includes booking home and airline tickets among its services. This review can be a source of search for other articles, especially for hotels, being possible to extract distribution strategies, revenue management, channel management, and relationship with platforms. It also contributes to a better understanding of the client since many articles used in this article present their perspective. The themes related to customer behavior on online platforms show the greatest growth, such as e-WoM. Online bookings demonstrate growth in researchers' interest because, increasingly, the customer becomes a co-creator together with the company, being essential for consolidating and defending the brand and creating new services.

Limitations and Future Research

The research's relevance must be constant in the evolution of OTAs, always seeking to implement new strategies and services. There was no review of the literature on OTAs published in the journals used for this research, to the best of our knowledge. This article does not cover the entire publication on OTAs, and only the past 10 years have been revised. The searches were carried out using keywords, so there may be articles that dealt with OTAs, but the term was not included among the keywords. Little was discussed about the internal management of OTAs, about the management of employees and strategies. For the next research, it is suggested to cover a larger number of years and expand the search to other academic journals.

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