

MEANINGS OF COLLABORATIVE CONSUMPTION IN TOURISM BASED ON AIRBNB CONSUMERS

SIGNIFICADOS DO CONSUMO COLABORATIVO NO TURISMO A PARTIR DOS CONSUMIDORES DO AIRBNB

SIGNIFICADOS DEL CONSUMO COLABORATIVO EN EL TURISMO DE LOS CONSUMIDORES DE AIRBNB

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DATE SUBMITTED: 07/08/2019 – **DATE ACCEPTED:** 09/12/2019

ABSTRACT: Collaborative consumer platforms that facilitate person-to-person transactions, and enable new social connections, have been established in the travel marketplace, propagating meanings that are shared by their target audience. By understanding and reproducing the discourses constructed by organizations, consumers can contribute to the establishment of collaborative services in society, actively participating in the interpretation and reformulation of ideas transmitted by the platforms. In this context, this study aimed to analyze the meanings of discourses involving collaborative consumption in tourism, through the interpretation of its consumers. Qualitative in nature, the research was based on semi-structured interviews with individuals who had consumed the services of the Airbnb travel platform, emphasizing the interpretation of messages passed through the website. Using the technique of discourse analysis, it was observed that there was among a common perception among the interviewees that the discourse propagated by the platform transmits the ideas of ease, safety, economy and hospitality. The perception of other, less emphasized meanings was also identified, as well as others that were added due to the consumers' previous experiences and knowledge, indicating that the consumers themselves participate in the process of constructing discourses that permeate their reality.

KEYWORDS: Meaning of consumption; Collaborative Consumption; Tourism.

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RESUMO: Plataformas de consumo colaborativo que facilitam as transações de pessoa para pessoa e possibilitam novas conexões sociais vêm se estabelecendo no mercado de viagens, propagando significados que são compartilhados pelo seu público-alvo. Ao perceberem e reproduzirem os discursos construídos pelas organizações, os consumidores podem contribuir para o estabelecimento dos serviços colaborativos na sociedade, participando de forma ativa na interpretação e na reformulação das ideias passadas pelas plataformas. Nesse sentido, este estudo se propôs a analisar os significados dos discursos que envolvem o consumo colaborativo no turismo a partir da interpretação de seus consumidores. De natureza qualitativa, a coleta dos dados foi realizada por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas com indivíduos que haviam consumido os serviços da plataforma de viagens *Airbnb*, dando ênfase à interpretação das mensagens passadas pelo *website*. Utilizando da técnica de análise do discurso, observou-se que havia entre os entrevistados uma percepção comum em relação ao discurso propagado pela plataforma, que é de facilidade, segurança, economia e hospitalidade. Fora identificado também a percepção de significados pouco enfatizados e ainda outros que foram acrescentados em função das experiências e conhecimentos prévios dos consumidores, indicando a participação dos indivíduos no processo de construção dos discursos que permeiam sua realidade.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Significado do consumo; Consumo colaborativo; Turismo.

RESUMEN: Plataformas de consumo colaborativo que facilitan las transacciones de persona para persona y permiten nuevas conexiones sociales se establecieron en el mercado de viajes, propagando significados que son compartidos por su público objetivo. Al comprender y reproducir los discursos construidos por las organizaciones, los consumidores pueden contribuir al establecimiento de servicios de colaboración en la sociedad, participando activamente en la interpretación y reformulación de las ideas transmitidas por las plataformas. En este sentido, este estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar los significados de los discursos relacionados con el consumo colaborativo en el turismo por la interpretación de sus consumidores. De naturaleza cualitativa, la investigación se realizó a partir de entrevistas semiestructuradas con personas que habían consumido los servicios de la plataforma de viajes *Airbnb*, haciendo hincapié en la interpretación de los mensajes transmitidos a través del sitio web. Utilizando la técnica de análisis del discurso, se observó que entre los entrevistados había una percepción común sobre el discurso de la plataforma, que es de comodidad, seguridad, economía y hospitalidad. También se identificó la percepción de significados poco enfatizados, y otros que se agregaron debido a las experiencias y conocimientos previos de los consumidores, lo que indica la participación de los individuos en el proceso de construcción de discursos que impregnan su realidad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Significado del consumo; Consumo colaborativo; Turismo.

INTRODUCTION

Recent periods of global economic crisis, and the debates on sustainability and technological advances, have brought changes in the traditional consumption patterns of society. The spread of a greater critical awareness among the population in relation to excessive consumption, and the apparent change of in thinking with regard to the sense of ownership, have opened the way for the development of new forms of consumption, such as collaborative and/or shared consumption (Gasser & Palfrey, 2008; Möhlmann, 2015). The idea of 'having' no longer seems to be as advantageous and people are starting to put more emphasis on the action of using a product rather than owning it, i.e., preferring to pay for the temporary experience of accessing things rather than owning

them (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Gansky, 2010; Maurer *et al.*, 2012). Through p2p (person to person) digital platforms it became possible, for example, for ordinary people to start sharing with each other, with greater facility and lower cost, resources such as bicycles, automobiles, workspaces, accommodation, meals and household items (Villanova, 2015). Through such opportunities, these initiatives have become a viable option in several countries, changing the traditional logic of the market (Maurer *et al.*, 2012; Vaquero & Calle, 2013).

In tourism, the expansion of access and the diversification of travel-related services offered through digital platforms have fundamentally changed tourist activity, leading public and private managers to rethink their strategies of action. The active and independent participation of people in their travel processes, and the resulting cost reductions, for example, have attracted individuals' attention to shared services, promoting what has been considered a more collaborative and accessible form of tourism (Kiiski & Arente, 2006; Cánovas & Villanueva, 2015; Forno & Garibaldi, 2015).

The opportunity to experience unique experiences is another point that is usually associated with this kind of consumption. With the massive growth of tourism and the negative impacts resulting from this activity, such as environmental problems and cultural depredation, the figure of the tourist has come to be associated with negative issues, such as inauthenticity of the place (Galani-Moutafi, 2000). On the other hand, authenticity has been stimulated by collaborative tourism and by society itself (Week, 2012; McWha *et al.*, 2016). It is common, for example, to find in the marketing strategies of collaborative travel platforms, discourses that refer to more authentic and less "touristy" travel experiences (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015).

It is believed that advertising discourses around travel consumption can influence consumers and consumption practices in the tourism market as a whole, creating and reinforcing myths and meanings that come to represent certain individuals and places (Caruana & Crane, 2011; Cristofori, 2015; Firat & Dholakia, 2006; McWha *et al.*, 2016). But the consumer, as an active interpreter of these discourses, also plays an important role in the formulation, understanding and reformulation of these messages (Bezerra & Covaleski, 2013; Firat & Dholakia, 2006). It may even be the case that with technological advances, individuals are themselves able to create and control travel information, through the Internet and digital social networks (Navarro & Berrozpe, 2016).

Considering that reality is a process of cultural construction, and that the discourses disseminated by organizations, when contributing to the formation of the meanings of people's lives due to consumption, play an important role in the establishment of ideas and behaviors that can lead to changes in society (Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001; Firat & Dholakia, 2006), this study sought to gain a better understanding of how consumers interpret the discourse proposed by the Airbnb travel platform through the messages published on its website. The choice of this platform for our analysis is justified by the representativeness it has in the market (Hamari, Sjöklint & Ukkonen, 2016; Perren & Grauerholz, 2015; Piscicelli, Cooper & Fisher, 2015), as it is considered a successful, competitive and representative tool for collaborative consumption in tourism, providing a model for the area (Schor, 2016).



As a contribution to the discussions proposed in the academic field, we highlight the gap that exists regarding the investigation of the relationship between persuasion and tourism with the application of discourse analysis. This is especially true when it comes to the collaborative consumption of travelling (Cheng, 2016; Salima *et al.*, 2012). This research may therefore provide a greater understanding of the possible meanings involving travel platforms in current sharing economy scenario, clarifying consumers' ideas that are linked to this type of business. For the market, and society in general, this study may also elucidate the role of marketing and consumers in establishing new forms of consumption in contemporary times.

The following sections discuss the meanings surrounding the discourses of collaborative consumption, with an emphasis on travel consumption. Next, this work details the methodological procedures used to achieve the central objective of the research, followed by the presentation and discussion of the collected data, reflections on the results, and final considerations.

COLLABORATIVE CONSUMPTION AND ITS MEANINGS

The term collaborative consumption involves the new forms of access and consumption that have appeared on the market through digital platforms, allowing people to organize themselves more easily, create networks of relationships and simplify the collective use of goods and services (Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2015; Forno & Garibaldi, 2015; Vaquero & Calle, 2013). These new forms of consumption have been well accepted and disseminated among young people i.e. those born after 1980, as it is believed that this generation is already used to online sharing (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). By allowing access to products and services without the need to own them, or even pay for them, collaborative consumption is a way of meeting an individual' needs and desires in a more sustainable, attractive and inexpensive way (Botsman & Rogers, 2010).

The economy that involves collaborative consumption includes the shared production and distribution of goods and services by people and organizations, without transferring ownership to the user (Ganksy, 2010; Lamberton & Rose, 2012). These transactions may or may not be mediated by the market (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012), but in general, they involve a process in which people coordinate the acquisition and distribution of a resource (p2p) for financial value or other form of material compensation (Belk, 2014).

Although the various forms of collaborative consumption offer different services and products and differ in their essence, Botsman and Rogers (2010) consider that they all have four principles in common: trust between strangers, the power of idle capacity (taking advantage of products in disuse), critical mass (availability of services and products so that they are attractive and sustainable) and a belief in the common good, which underscores the notion that sharing can bring benefits to everyone, given that it promotes collaboration in addition to consumption.

Other benefits of collaborative consumption are generally related to the economic sphere, due to the cost reduction; to the social sphere, due to personal

relationships and friendships; and also to the ecological sphere, as it promotes more conscious consumption with less harm to the environment (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Vaquero & Calle, 2013). By enabling sharing and collaboration between consumers of diverse goods and services, collaborative business models can help to redistribute the market, generating new opportunities for entrepreneurship and allowing people to diversify their source of income (Dubois, Schor & Carfagna, 2014). These businesses can also bring benefits to the environment due to reduced consumption, and for society in general, since collaborative lifestyles can generate collective innovations and increase the sense of cooperation among people (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Maurer *et al.*, 2012).

However, alongside discourses that reinforce the benefits of collaborative business, there are criticisms and questions related to the possible problems these platforms can bring and/or reinforce, including environmental problems (Martin, 2016). Those who participate in these networks may, for example, use the money received or saved to buy other goods that are not sustainable at all (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). If more people have access to cars, for example, more fuel will be needed. In this case, there may be a discrepancy between what is shown by the platforms and what actually happens in the market (Schor, 2016).

There are also some barriers to society joining collaborative services. Many people choose not to use these platforms because they are not sure whether they will be able to access the products and services at the time they want (Lamberton & Rose, 2012). Mistrust in people and lack of knowledge about how to use technological innovations are other factors that can lead the non-use of collaborative consumption (Tussyadiah, 2015).

In tourism, the scenario is similar and sharing platforms have brought alternatives for access to travel consumption, changing the traditional market (Molz, 2013; Oskam & Boswijk, 2016). However, the meanings linked to these practices can vary depending on the place and conditions. In large cities, such as Paris and Lisbon, Airbnb's service has been limited by the government in an attempt to ensure compliance with real estate laws and as a response to residents' dissatisfaction with increasing rental prices.

In order to understand how people build meanings from discourses, it is worth considering that in postmodernity, reality is believed to be a process of cultural construction and not something created independently of human action (Firat & Dholakia, 2006). Thus, the marketing of organizations and consumers actively participates in the establishment of meanings in people's lives, based on consumer practices fostered and carried out by individuals (Bezerra & Covaleski, 2013; Firat & Dholakia, 2006). Individuals own identities can also be built based on consumer choices and the meanings that these decisions carry for themselves and others (Gabriel & Lang, 1995; Mcadams, 1997). Tourism is, in this case, an example of consumption generally related to personal and social meanings shared with the market.

MEANINGS RELATED TO COLLABORATIVE TRAVEL CONSUMPTION

Due to the growth of collaborative services in the tourism sector, researchers have sought to investigate the impacts of new forms of access to the travel market,



emphasizing topics such as identity, motivation and consumer experiences (Hellwig *et al.*, 2014; Zervas, Proserpio & Byers, 2017; Russo, Lombardi & Mangiagli, 2013). However, few seem to take into account the discourses propagated by tourism and, more specifically, those linked to collaborative travel consumption (Cheng, 2016; McWha *et al.*, 2016).

When analyzing the motivations of Airbnb users, Tussyadiah (2015) found that people with high financial incomes were interested in the Airbnb service and that, in addition to the financial benefits, users were motivated by sustainable consumption and the social connections that the platform makes possible. In other words, there were meanings in this consumption that relate to sustainability, in the sense of reusing disused spaces, and the idea of being part of a community, differentiating Airbnb from traditional forms of accommodation through the closer contact between guests and hosts.

Consumer interest in direct relations between host and guest and in staying at locations outside the popular tourist regions were also motivations found in a similar study (Tussyadiah & Zach, 2017). The diversity of the offer, contact with residents, participation in the local community and staying in residential neighborhoods were values highlighted by Oskam and Boswijk (2016). These points raised may indicate the importance of social relations and the search for authenticity as motivators for the use of collaborative travel platforms, this authenticity generally being understood as outside the traditional tourism itineraries.

Possible barriers to the development of collaborative tourism have also been cited by scholars. For example, the issue of trust (whether in people or technology) and doubts about the effectiveness of the system, i.e., a lack of knowledge about how these services work and doubts over whether they can really provide cost savings (Tussyadiah, 2015; Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2018). There are, therefore, different discourses and meanings related to sharing services in general.

Based on an analysis of the Airbnb website, Silva (2018) identified thirteen concepts that stand out in the discourse of this platform: exclusive service; being a traveler; consumption of experiences; diversity of supply; being a host and having an extra income; be part of a community; sharing; trust and security; technology; gratuity; practicality; innovation; and hospitality. Some of these concepts had already been linked to collaborative consumption by other authors. The message of an exclusive service, for example, seems to be related to the perception that the platform, as well as collaborative tourism consumption in general, is an alternative to the traditional travel market, directing its discourse to those seeking to consume another type of tourism (Molz, 2013; Oskam & Boswijk, 2016; Schor, 2016). This positioning, in turn, may be linked to the desire to distance oneself from mass tourism, and the anti-tourist concept (Dann, 1996; McWha *et al.*, 2016), represented in Silva's analysis (2018) by the message of being a traveler.

By treating consumers as travelers and guests rather than as tourists and/or customers, Airbnb seems to propose a differentiation and reinforce the anti-tourist discourse that is also seen in the studies of Kiiski and Arente (2006) that focus on the home-exchange platform. This discourse of differentiation may also point to the consumption of status that permeates tourism, indicating the existence of power relations and social distinction between those who consume it and those who use other services (Silva, 2018;

Wang, 2000). The emphasis on unique and exclusive places may suggest a relationship with the authenticity promoted by collaborative travel platforms (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015; Silva, 2018; Trivett & Staff, 2013) since these, in general, represent spaces that are outside the traditional tourist routes. Even the conventional accommodation format may be different, with website users being offered the chance to stay on a boat, in a tree house, or even in a castle.

The consumption of experiences is a recurrent theme in this type of transaction. The search for new experiences is a characteristic of contemporary tourists, and the offer of services and spaces that differ from those of the traditional tourist offer seems to meet this demand for constant novelty (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015; Füller & Michel, 2014; Silva, 2018; Urry, 1988). The diversity and scope of services offered by the Airbnb website reinforce the idea that collaborative consumption provides greater access to the travel market, as they offer a wider range of options to consumers (Cánovas & Villanueva, 2015; Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2015; Gansky, 2010; Silva, 2018). Oskam and Boswijk (2016) also identified this diversity of offers as a motivating factor for the use of Airbnb. The website itself declares that it has more than seven million listing worldwide, in more than 100,000 cities and more than 220 countries (Airbnb, 2020).

The message of being a host and having an extra income transmitted by the platform (Silva, 2018) is an attractive element of collaborative consumption and relates to the use of idle resources, giving people an opportunity to increasing their incomes and be part of a community (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Dubois, Schor & Carfagna, 2014; Silva, 2018). Likewise, the discourse of community and sharing (Silva, 2018) represents meanings associated with the social relations that support this type of consumption, reinforcing values that go beyond utilities, and stimulating aspects such as collaboration and trust between people (Oskam e Boswijk, 2016; Zekanovic-Korona & Grzunov, 2013; Vaquero & Calle, 2013; Silva, 2018).

The discourse of confidence and security identified by Silva (2018) is another aspect of collaborative platforms, as is that of technology, which refers to computerized services and support (Navarro & Berrozpe, 2016). The presentation of technological solutions and the possibility of self-service are meanings usually linked to collaborative consumption (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Cánovas & Villanueva, 2015), and may also be related to the message of practicality found on the Airbnb website (Silva, 2018). Such information highlights that the services are easy to use, and may be linked to the discourse of the independent traveler, who organizes his/her own trips (Caruana *et al.*, 2008; Forno & Garibaldi, 2015).

The message of gratuity on the Airbnb website (Silva, 2018) can mean lower costs and the increased access made possible by the platforms, which is consistent with the idea of innovation arising from collaborative consumption (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). And the hospitality discourse also present on Airbnb (Silva, 2018) highlights the person-to-person relationships and the social values related to this type of consumption, permeating other discourses, such as sharing and community (Vaquero & Calle, 2013). It is seen, therefore, that the discourses identified by Silva (2018) on the Airbnb hosting platform can represent meanings linked to collaborative consumption, since they are consistent with



the findings of academic studies in general. It should be considered that this information, comparing it with the consumers' perceptions of the platform, can contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between what is declared by organizations and what is understood and/or modified by individuals.

METHODOLOGY

For this study, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with people who had used the Airbnb platform in the past three years. For the interview, a script was used, with guide topics, aiming to direct the conversation and allow the interviewees to develop their narrative in their own words (Bauer & Gaskell, 2017; Flick, 2013). Through this script, we sought to understand the interviewees' profile, the context that led to consumption, the perception of their consumption experience and the interpretation of the messages propagated by the platform on the website. Our aim was to understand the aspects that most caught the attention of consumers, the ideas that were being transmitted, and what they meant to them. This procedure allowed the interviewees to report their perceptions of the use of the website, both when searching for information about accommodation and for making reservations, and also their experience with the use of the hosting service.

To achieve the objectives of this study, we used a qualitative approach, based on the constructivist paradigm, considering the discourses and meanings attributed by the respondents to a given consumption practice, their context and the social relations that are part of the users' experiences (Creswell, 2010; 2014; Flick, 2013). The participants were selected intentionally, as certain characteristics were required for the development of the research (Creswell, 2010), The snowball technique (Penrod et al., 2003) was used to identify new interviewees. As the purpose of qualitative research is to explore different representations of a subject (Gaskell, 2003), the principle of data saturation (Gouveia et al., 2016) was used to produce data with sufficient quantity and quality to enable consistency in the analyses, which occurred when the interviews did not bring any new information.

The twenty-eight interviews were carried out in person, by telephone or using digital tools, such as (Skype, Hangout) and emails, according to the interviewees' availability and location. Eleven of the interviews were recorded and seventeen were conducted by email, following the procedures listed by Meho (2006), which include individual contact with each participant, sending explanations about each topic of the interview, exchanging emails with more detailed information, sending reminders, and deleting interviews that lacked depth. The interviews lasted around twenty to twenty-five minutes, and for those conducted by email, an average of four emails were exchanged for responses and details. It should be noted that the use of emails for qualitative interviews has certain benefits, such as reducing transcription errors and the fact that they enable individuals to respond in a more honest way, due to the sense of anonymity they provide (Meho, 2006; Opdenakker, 2006; Kazmer & Xie, 2008). It was observed, during our research, that many people preferred to be contacted by email as they felt more comfortable about having a chance to reflect, and say what they wanted.

The interviews were conducted between November and December 2017. The data were transcribed, and a critical analysis of the generated corpus was carried out. This analysis stage included encoding the information, seeking to identify the main contents and divergent opinions (Chaves, 2016; Gill, 2003); analysis of the encoded information, observing the variability and regularity of the data (Chaves, 2016; Gill, 2003; Vaara, 2015); and elaboration of the results, writing them up in detail, including the context (Chaves, 2016; Fairclough, 2003; Gill, 2003; Vaara, 2015). To encode the information, the interviewees' discourses were grouped in lines and columns according to the guide topics of the interview, highlighting what was expressed in each discourse and the key message being conveyed. Having grouped the discourses into topics and identified the central themes, the positions and opinions that differed between the participants were analysed, in order to identify the coherence and deviant cases in each discourse as well as in the set, thus enabling the variability or regularity of the data to be analysed.

Concerning the research validation criteria, a pre-test of the interviews was conducted with three consumers; one in person and two by email, and the research instrument was tested and adjusted as necessary. The information obtained from some of the participants was also checked during the interviews, as well as the documentation of the research procedure, and a complete description of the results was given, following the guidelines of Creswell (2010) and Flick (2013).

RESULTS

To understand how consumers interpret the discourse proposed by the platform, we sought to find out what the interviewees thought of the website, what most caught their attention, and what message the platform conveyed to them. This information was divided into the following subsections: Profile of the respondents; Perceptions about the website; Interpretation of the messages presented by *Airbnb*.

PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

The profile of the users interviewed consisted of people with different occupations, including journalists, plastic artists, teachers, receptionists, engineers and civil servants. Some were students, and only one person had no occupation at the moment. Their levels of education were mostly complete higher education and post-graduation, with only three people with incomplete secondary school education. The age group was between 22 and 40 years old, with most users between 22 and 30 years old, characterizing the group as young, and therefore probably already used to online sharing (Belk, 2010; Maurer *et al.*, 2012).

Most of the users interviewed identified themselves as female, and with individual monthly incomes of between R\$1000 and R\$11,000. One person who did not report their income and two currently did not have incomes. Most of the users earned between R\$1000 and R\$2500 per month, which can be considered an average income by Brazilian standards, and a smaller number reported earning between R\$3000 and R\$6000 per month, which would be considered a high income.



All the respondents were Brazilian, and several of them were living abroad (10 out of 28). In regard to the frequency of travel, there were some who travelled once a year and others who travel up to twelve times a year, indicating that they are regular travel consumers. In terms of company, users stated that they usually travel as a couple and/or in a group; only six indicated that usually travel alone. Of these six, two said they only used Airbnb to find accommodation when they were travelling alone. Most of the informants used Airbnb to find accommodation outside Brazil, and were travelling in a group or as a couple. In regard to period, they stayed at the accommodation for between two and seven days.

Among the reasons that led people to use the platform, three utilitarian factors were mentioned more frequently: **cost saving, convenience and privacy**. In the informants' discourses, cost saving was generally related to comments such as better price, fair value and affordable price. Cost reduction is therefore a meaning perceived by consumers (Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Vaquero & Calle, 2013). Convenience was linked to the fact that all the facilities of a house were available for use, such as cooking and laundry facilities, and not only the bedroom, while privacy was linked to the fact that it is possible to rent house for exclusive, private use. These factors are related to the discourse of exclusive service and practicality identified by Silva (2018) in her analyses.

Privacy was frequently cited as a reason for using the platform by people travelling in a group or as a couple, indicating the preference of this public for private accommodation. Cost saving was also frequently cited by group travelers, indicating the prevalence of this utilitarian factor. It was noticed, however, that social and environmental aspects were not frequently cited as reasons for using the platform.

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE WEBSITE

When asked what they thought of the website itself, the users were satisfied with the usability of the platform, describing it as **easy to use, to access information and to learn**. This ease of use was related to the fact that people are familiar with digital tools and used to online sharing (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012), and to the fact that the website looks intuitive even for those who are not used to it.

Other features frequently cited in relation to the website were: practical, visually well presented (layout and design) and with clear, transparent and simple content. The users also cited dynamism, interaction with the user, the security conveyed to the user, and objectivity as positive points. These ideas reinforce the **facility** and **practicality** of using the platform (Silva, 2018) and reinforce the idea that collaborative businesses facilitate transactions and simplify consumption processes in tourism (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015). The users also mentioned **security and trust**, basic principles of collaborative platforms (Cánovas & Villanueva, 2015; Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2015; Navarro & Berrozpe, 2016). Thus, the aspects of practicality, security and trust cited by Silva (2018) were observed in the consumers' discourses.

Another positive aspect of the website mentioned by the users was the search filters, enabling them to customize the search, i.e. to obtain targeted information for each

consumer profile. This perception can be linked to the discourses of **exclusive services and diversity of offer** conveyed by Airbnb (Silva, 2018), which are seen as motivating factors for the use of the service (Oskam & Boswijk, 2016).

Only one person rated the site negatively, saying it was confusing and slow and mentioning non-standardized ads. That the fact that the exact address does not appear until the accommodation is reserved was a contradictory issue. Some people understood that omitting the address would provide greater security for the host, while others felt it created the view that the platform was not being transparent enough with its consumers. This example may indicate the view that collaborative platforms are not being transparent or emancipatory enough, but producing new power relationships between users (Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2015).

In relation to the aspects that most caught the attention of Airbnb users, there was an emphasis on the rating system, i.e., the comments that people leave evaluating the accommodation and the guests and hosts they had contact with. The following comment exemplifies this issue:

The interesting thing is that the host responds to the testimonials, so you create a relationship of trust with the host who will also evaluate you (Interview 10 - 15/11/17).

As people have been looking for information from media other than traditional intermediaries, these comments are important for consumers, as they tend to lend **confidence and credibility** to the platform (Cánovas & Villanueva, 2015; Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2015). It is observed that in addition to the security perceived on the website itself, the **hospitality** experienced in the consumption had a striking meaning for the individuals, reinforcing the social issues surrounding this type of service (Silva, 2018; Vaquero & Calle, 2013).

Two central principles of collaborative consumption stand out from the meanings perceived by users in relation to the website. These are: **trust between strangers** and the **ease of transactions** based on technology. These characteristics distinguish collaborative services from traditional ones as they allow transactions to be carried out on their own (autonomy), reducing or eliminating the need for intermediaries (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Botsman & Rogers, 2010), and allowing direct person-to-person contact.

INTERPRETATION OF THE MESSAGES PRESENTED BY AIRBNB

In regard to the discourse that individuals perceive when using the Airbnb website, it was seen that the ideas of **ease** and **security** were the most cited among the interviewees, confirming the impressions previously presented. The message of ease relates to the convenience of making reservations, the simplicity of the website and the agility of the service. Security was referenced along with the notion of trust, security in financial transactions and the fact that the platform fulfills what it promises. Assumptions in collaborative consumption, trust and practicality are also part of the discourse and meanings shared among users (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015; Cánovas & Villanueva, 2015; Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2015; Silva, 2018). An excerpt from the interview demonstrates this interpretation:



I would say that the message the website sends is that it facilitates our journey. It's because we have more accommodation options too, it doesn't just depend on hotels and hostels, we have more, let's say, flexibility (Interview 26 - 22/11/17).

Together with the ease and security, people said they also perceived the message of **cost saving and hospitality** on the website. The cost saving referred, for example, to the cost reduction enabled by the platform and the cost benefit of having quality at low prices from Airbnb. Hospitality was related to the p2p contact, cultural immersion and integration with people. Although cost saving was not clearly identified in Silva's study (2018), it is possible to associate this meaning to the variety of prices and accommodation options, which makes this service more accessible to the consumer, as it expands the opportunities of choice (Cánovas & Villanueva, 2015; Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2015). As Gansky (2010) points out, p2p practices enable access to varied products and services and facilitate cost reductions for consumers. In the case of hospitality, it was observed that its meaning is associated with interaction with people, sharing space, culture and knowledge. This meaning is consistent with the discourse identified on Airbnb (Silva, 2018) and with the central purpose of collaboration platforms (Schor, 2016).

The sharing message, in turn, was rarely mentioned by users, indicating that it does not significantly influence Airbnb users. On the other hand, other messages were interpreted as **an alternative to the traditional market, diverse and accessible options, modernity of the service, the experience and independence**, which referred to autonomy. The ideas of alternative service, diverse options and experiences referred to the fact that people are increasingly looking for new experiences (Urry, 1988). And the message of independence reflects the view that these platforms allow travel to be organized more autonomously (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015; Cánovas & Villanueva, 2015).

Messages referring to the discourse of **experiencing the place as a resident and feeling at home** were also identified, but were cited less frequently. It is interesting to mention that one person noted the issue of immersion in the locality, with the residents, but stressed that this message from Airbnb may be changing to something more commercial. Another interviewee expressed the idea of experiencing the place, but questioned it, saying that it is not always possible to have this experience. This information casts doubt on the notion of authenticity generally associated with collaborative travel consumption (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015; Trivett & Staff, 2013), as exemplified by the following comment:

A message that I think the website sends is a message of easy hosting, low cost. Also of an immersion accommodation, you know, but today it has changed so much. I think that in the beginning it conveyed this image more of immersion, today it is so commercial, right, that it really became a low cost hosting, for those who want something easy, fast, cheap, you know? This practical message. (Interview 06 - 14/11/17).

Perhaps the social values are being used only as a discourse of service differentiation or as an experience that they traveler may or may not have, depending on the circumstances of the trip. Therefore, the discourse of tourism creates myths and meanings that impact the perceptions of those people who travel, whether concerning places or services, as well as their own experiences (Caruana & Crane, 2011; Cristofori,

2015). For some of the interviewees, for example, there is the meaning of immersion perceived in the service, but it feels like an illusion due to the commercial characteristics of the platform.

Concerning the service proposal of the platform, the interviewees interpreted it as a form of cheaper accommodation, more affordable, and different from traditional accommodation. This perception highlights the fact that p2p services provide greater access to travel consumption (Gansky, 2010; Forno & Garibaldi, 2015) and more alternatives for those who want to get away from mass tourism (Cánovas & Villanueva, 2015; Molz, 2013). The role of Airbnb as an intermediary was also highlighted by users, indicating that the platform facilitates interaction between people and the accomplishment of new business transactions (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). Some of the users perceived the possibility that everyone involved gains somehow from this service, which is similar to the notion of belief in the common good (Botsman e Rogers, 2010).

Also regarding the proposal of the platform, it is worth mentioning that while some people see Airbnb as a more comfortable service, with the guest having all the conveniences of a home available to him/her, others saw it as a form of accommodation with less amenities, since it required them to cook and clean themselves. There were, therefore, two different perceptions in relation to this issue of convenience, but it was the first that was most cited by the interviewees of this research.

The sense of belonging to the visited place, living in a home not specifically designed for tourists, was also a meaning perceived by very few users, indicating that this discourse may not have much impact on consumption. This differs from the what is suggested by other studies (Firat & Dholakia, 2006; Trivett & Staff, 2013). The message of being a host and having an extra income was also interpreted in the platform service by few of the respondents, suggesting that Airbnb consumers perceive the benefits of using its services, but may not be willing or interested in offering or sharing their space with other people.

REFLECTION ON THE RESULTS

Analyzing the information obtained from the interviews, together with that identified in the literature review, it was found that Airbnb users perceive many of the concepts identified in the discourse of the platform (Silva, 2018). Among the main messages cited by the interviewees were those of **ease, safety, cost saving and hospitality**, meanings constantly associated with collaborative consumption. The practicality and trust perceived on the website were fundamental factors for research participants, indicating the possibility that they may be extended to consumers of collaborative services in general.

The concept of cost savings proved to have a significant meaning for consumers, although, according to Silva (2018), this is a discourse that appears on the website in a subtle form. This may indicate that some ideas, though not clearly informed by organizations, are interpreted by users. In this case, consumers showed that they perceive meanings that are not being directly communicated by the platform, adding values



that match their motivations for use and their consumption experiences (Norton, 1996; Jenkins, 2003). This was confirmed by information from the context of use of the service and the impressions left by it. These meanings may also be related to other forms of communication used by the company, to which users are exposed. Therefore, the idea is emphasized that consumers seek to validate the organization's discourse according to their knowledge, reinterpreting it and creating their own fantasies (Norton, 1996).

The concepts of consumption of experiences, diversity of offer, sharing, trust/security, autonomy of the computerized service, innovation, alternative to the traditional market and p2p contact were all meanings perceived by consumers, indicating that the p2p contact platforms appear to present new consumption dynamics in tourism (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015). In addition, Airbnb seems to foster more collaborative and accessible tourism for consumers, as it provides more accommodation options and prices for users, and allows greater contact with hosts and local residents of the locality visited (Cánovas & Villanueva, 2015; Forno & Garibaldi, 2015). The platform also conveys the idea that it is possible to organize trips independently and more economically (Forno & Garibaldi, 2015; Cánovas & Villanueva, 2015), reinforcing the meaning of autonomy.

Some of the discourses perceived on the website by Silva (2018) were present in the consumers' discourse when they mentioned their experiences, impressions and consumption context of the platform. Among the points mentioned were: the targeted, individualized and exclusive service, the scope of the platform, the service and support for users, and the possibility of making money and having an extra income. The idea of being part of a community, for example, was mentioned by one person, who described the platform as similar to a social network, in this case, a virtual community. The concept of gratuity, on the other hand, was the only message that was never mentioned by users, which suggests that the participants perceive the platform as a company; a business. This shows the importance of understanding the context of the situation studied, in order to derive the meanings surrounding the construction of social reality and give meaning to the individuals' discourses (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2010; Pinto & Freitas, 2017).

It was observed that some of the messages interpreted by the users had opposing meanings, depending on the consumer's profile. Some factors highlighted by Airbnb in a positive way (e.g. the support and autonomy of the hosts) were perceived in a negative way by some interviewees, which suggests that the messages presented by the company may be given different interpretations, depending on the users' personal experience (Norton, 1996; Bezerra & Covaleski, 2013). The discourses of experience, more authentic travel and immersion in the local culture, besides being perceived by few people, did not always match the users's reality, showing that these ideas may not have a direct influence on the consumption and identity of consumers. It is seen, therefore, that the texts may have implicit meanings, but the actual meaning of the messages will depend on the reader's interpretation, as Jenkins (2003) points out.

Also in relation to the discourse of the platform, few of the respondents noticed contradictions between the discourse of Airbnb and the service actually provided. Some questioned the increase in prices, the idea of living like a local, and the more commercial than collaborative aspects of the platform, as points that could generate divergences

between the discourse presented and the service actually consumed. But in general, they thought the platform fulfilled what it promised, meeting and even exceeding their expectations. Questions regarding non-regulation of the service and neoliberalism found by Martin (2016) in his studies on the sharing economy were not present in the interviewees' discourses.

Based on the above, it can be said that the discourse of authentic experiences perceived by McWha et al. (2016) in contemporary travel magazines and identified by Silva (2018) on Airbnb was presented in the interviewees' discourse when referring to the unique experiences, and contact with the community and with local residents. The ideas of economic opportunities and new consumption possibilities were also present, consistent with the findings of Martin (2016) on discourses around the sharing economy. The negative view of the tourist and mass tourism were points hardly mentioned by the users, indicating that the information that reinforces the anti-tourist discourse has only a subtle influence on the consumers' perceptions. Thus, the dilemma of being a traveler or tourist cited by Kiiski & Arente (2006) and Mcwha et al. (2016) in their studies on the sharing economy is present, but not to a high degree (Silva, 2018). The same occurred with the aspect of searching for responsible tourism, a meaning that was not strongly linked to the interviewees' use of the Airbnb platform.

Contrary to the literature, aspects related to the risk of scarcity about what is being offered by the platform were not found in the users' discourses (Lamberton & Rose, 2012), and the same was true of environmental, sustainability and anti-consumption issues (Möhlmann, 2015; Villanova, 2015; Maurer et al., 2012; Schor, 2016). Consumers were not insecure about the possible failure of the service, nor did they highlight aspects related to care for the environment and reduced consumption. These meanings do not seem to be promoted by the platform on their website (Silva, 2018), and neither were they added by the consumers.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the information presented, it is seen that the consumers interviewed interpret the Airbnb discourse mainly through the aspects of ease, security, cost saving and hospitality. This discourse is consistent with the service proposal perceived by them, which is to be financially accessible, to stand out as different from traditional options, to facilitate contact between people (p2p) and to provide practicality and quality. The ease resulting from technology, the reduction of costs due to the diversity of options and the hospitality related to the opportunity for person-to-person contact were all factors present in the individuals' perceptions, and reveal the existence of utilitarian and social meanings related to the practice of collaborative consumption of travel.

However, when considering the context of use of the service informed by the interviewees, it should be noted adherence to collaborative travel consumption seems to be centered on utilitarian motivations more than any other aspect. The factors listed as motivators for the chosen platform are mainly related to the cost benefit provided, with the issues of sharing and relationship present in the motivation, albeit in the background. Further research is needed on issues such as consumer identity and identification with



the cause, in order to better understand how these aspects relate to collaborative travel consumption, as both the tourist and traveler dilemma and environmental concerns were meanings that were only occasionally mentioned in the interviewees' discourse.

It was also observed that the users of the platform identified ideas that were not emphasized by the platform, and added others, such as the issue of experiencing the place visited as a resident, and a sense of feeling at home. Other consumers questioned some of the perceived discourses, such as the experience of living like a resident, arguing that such a promise cannot always be fulfilled, and is not even of interest to those who use the platform. Therefore, it was seen that the users actively participated in the construction of meanings propagated by the platform. The consumer profile and the context surrounding the decision and the experience of consumption are decisive in these variations of meanings.

Contrary to the literature reviewed, a critical awareness of excessive consumption was seen, but the environment does not seem to impact this type of consumption. On the contrary, those looking to save costs using the platform stated that this enabled them to consume and spend more on other items during the trip. Some even mentioned the possibility of being able to travel more, as they were able to save on the accommodation. This would imply that the greater access to such services, and the cost savings they enable, would result in increased consumption. Thus, the meaning related to the use of the platform would not be to reduce consumption, but rather, to increase it.

Among the hindrances encountered during the research were the difficulty scheduling the interviews due to the respondent's lack of availability, and the perceived resistance to being interviewed in person, perhaps because the respondents preferred to use digital means of communication for this purpose, as stated in the analyses. Conducting interviews by digital means enabled us to reach more people, but also created obstacles, such as the extra time needed to complete an interview due to the need to exchange of emails, and the inability to analyze other dimensions of speech, such as tone of voice and facial expressions. However, this did not prevent the richness of the data collected. The researchers also found that some people found it difficult to talk about what message they perceived, perhaps because they are not in the habit of reflecting on what is being said by the websites they usually use. This difficulty was overcome by providing the respondents with further clarification.

It is believed that our analyses will contribute to broadening academic debate on discourses and meanings related to the collaborative consumption of travel, mainly by consumers. By revealing issues that may be linked to the consumption practices of the shared economy in general, the study also provides data to think empirically about the theme, bringing theory and practice closer together. More formally applied, this study contributes to reflection on consumer's perceptions of the concepts promoted by a prominent organization in the travel market, indicating its influence on them, but also way in which individuals actively interpret its services and meanings.

By presenting the congruence between the discourses proposed by the website and those perceived by consumers, the study highlights the power of advertising, but also reveals that there is active participation by consumers in the construction of their

reality, in a two-way process. This relationship between the individual, the organization and the discourses aimed at promoting consumption can continue to be investigated in future studies, including, for example, other collaborative consumption platforms and other user profiles, in order to extend the results of this study. Other research might also follow the discourses related to the shared economy over time, noting possible variations and changes in meaning.

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Luana Alexandre Silva: Defining the research problem and objectives. Developing the theoretical proposition. Bibliographic review and theoretical foundation. Choice of methodological procedures. Data collection. Data analysis. Writing the manuscript. Adapting the manuscript to the norms of the journal.

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Miriam Leite Farias: Developing the theoretical proposition. Choice of methodological procedures. Data analysis. Critical review of the manuscript. Writing the manuscript. Adapting the manuscript to the norms of the journal.

