Satisfaction with Braga (Portugal) and recommendation: A comparison between information coming from relatives/ friends and from other sources

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Abstract

Recommendation from family and friends is considered to be the most credible source in the travel decision-making process. Since studies on destination loyalty focus on this variable, this study investigated tourists' motivations, perceived attributes of the city and satisfaction obtained from the visit by comparing the following two groups: those who indicated that they obtained travel information from relatives/friends ($n = 120$) and those who obtained information from other sources ($n = 186$). The research methodology consists of a quantitative approach based on a self-administered survey applied to travellers who visited Braga (a medium sized city located in the Northwest of Portugal), during 2017. The results indicated that there were some significant differences between the two groups with respect to demographic characteristics, tourists' motivations and perceived attributes of the city. However, the groups did not differ in their global image of the destination and intention to recommend it to relatives and friends.

Introduction

The importance tourism industry plays nowadays in creating jobs and income in many cities, regions and countries around the world (WTTC, 2016) is quite evident. If this is unquestionable, the fierce competition for attracting tourists and investments in related equipment and services is also an essential dimension of this industry. In such a context, destinations have a lot of work to do to preserve or enhance their images and the satisfaction they are able to provide visitors with.

Tourists' perceptions of a destination depend on the information sources they use: destinations advertising, print and digital/online media, social media, online booking platforms (customers reviews),

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travel agencies and travel guides, word-of-mouth (WOM), and so on (Cho et al., 2014). The image kept and the level of satisfaction play a major role in tourists' choice of destination and returning to the same place again (Chi and Qu, 2008; Ishida et al., 2016; Vanhove, 2004; Yoon and Unysal, 2005). The satisfaction the tourist gets can mean returning to the destination or, at least, recommending it to relatives and friends, i.e. having a similar experience (Cho et al., 2014; Petrick and Backman, 2002). Satisfaction is the overall assessment made by the visitor of the service provided, compared to the service expected (Antón et al., 2017; Chen and Chen, 2010), and relates to the emotions induced by the given tourism experience (Bosque and Martín, 2008).

As stressed by several authors in the last decades (e.g. Cronin et al., 2000; Oliver, 1999), the cognitive and/or affective component plays an essential role in the level of satisfaction attained, but there is also an emotional component (Cronin et al., 2000; Oliver, 1999). Having that in mind, acquiring a good knowledge of the tourist motivation and overall satisfaction achieved from a visit to a destination or a set of its tourism attributes is an essential dimension of the process of planning and managing a destination (Campo-Martínez et al., 2010; Chi and Qu, 2008; Martin and Bosque, 2008; Moreno et al., 2016; Yoon and Unysal, 2005).

In the process of choosing a destination, information takes a very important role. The literature emphasizes, namely the attempt by the traveller to reduce risk and uncertainty on destination (Beiger and Laesser, 2004; Cho et al., 2014; Murphy et al., 2007), which includes the information sources themselves (Beiger and Laesser, 2004; Cho et al., 2014). Of course, the type of travel and the individual characteristics of the travellers must be considered too (Cai et al., 2004; Murphy et al., 2007).

In this paper, we inquire about the level of satisfaction tourists get from visiting Braga, a medium sized city located in the Northwest of Portugal, remarkable for its cultural and religious heritage. From the satisfaction attained by visitors, we address the intention expressed to recommend it to family and friends. This sort of recommendation is usually considered as one of the most credible sources in the travel decision-making process (Beiger and Laesser, 2004; Cho et al., 2014). The question we raise is whether the source of information used makes a difference in terms of satisfaction felt and intention to recommend.

Even if we can find much research on tourist satisfaction and intention to recommend a destination to relatives and friends, the issue of relating recommendation to the way visitors obtained information is less explored. Besides, as far as we know, no similar research was performed taking as the subject a Portuguese destination, and, so, we believe it is relevant to check the comparability of results we obtained and the ones reported by the empirical literature.

We believe this approach is even more valuable in a moment where several sorts of information on any destination are commonly available, including the one posted by travellers in booking platforms (tourist reviews). These online reviews seem to play an increasingly more significant role in the decision-making process because they are fast to check, up-to-dated, and available everywhere, and have become the WOM of the digital age (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

A quantitative approach based on a self-administered survey applied to 306 travellers who visited Braga (Portugal) during 2017 was adopted as research methodology. Different analytical methods to test the hypotheses under inquiring were used.

The present paper is organized as follows: in the first section, we present a review of the literature on tourists' satisfaction and returning intention; in the second section, we have the analytical methodology used; the third section deals with the empirical results and discussion; the last section includes the conclusions and policy recommendations.

Literature review

Satisfaction plays a critical role when considering repeating the acquisition of a good or service (Antón et al., 2017; Baker and Crompton, 2000; Bigné et al., 2001; Cho et al., 2014; Petrick and Backman, 2002). A tourism destination is a set of services, along with an image (Som et al., 2011) and, so, the same applies to it when someone is in the process of taking the decision of repeating a visit. Of course, tourism destinations are more complex than single products (Carvalho et al., 2015; Cetin and Istambullu Dincer, 2014; Ishida et al., 2016). The complexity of destinations relates to the composite nature of the tourism product and its attributes, which are the features of a product or service as perceived by the tourist (Carvalho et al., 2015; Cho et al., 2014; Ishida et al., 2016). Whatever the destination, tourists interact with its many different components (attributes), which confer the destination its own *facies*.

Generally speaking, a destination image represents a set of beliefs and perceptions that people keep on a given city or territory, which is related to its cultural heritage, landscape, nature, art, music, gastronomy, citizens, events and package of auxiliary factors (Agapito et al., 2010; Aksoy and Kiyci, 2011; Getz, 2008; Kotler et al., 1993).

The satisfaction attained from visiting a destination keeps a close relationship with the fulfilment of the provision of that product or service as it was expected by the tourist (Antón et al., 2017; Bigné et al., 2005; Bosque and Martín, 2008; Campo-Martínez et al., 2010; Cho et al., 2014; Oliver, 1999) and has a temporary validity (Grönroos, 2004; Oliver, 1999; Yoon and Unysal, 2005). When dealing with a repeated provision, the level of satisfaction attained can be evaluated post-consumption only and keeps the same precarious validity (Grönroos, 2004; Oliver, 1999; Yoon and Unysal, 2005).

As claimed by Campo-Martínez et al. (2010), when a tourist has already visited a destination his/her perception towards it tends to change, namely the one regarding the risk faced, influencing his/her expectations. If the expectations are met this will contribute to the level of satisfaction attained and to the intention to repeat the visit. The better the experience is when compared to the one expected, the more likely are the visitors to return (Cho et al., 2014; Som et al., 2011), and recommend it to relatives and friends or, even, to general potential visitors, making use of reviews released, namely on booking platforms.

While addressing the issue of satisfaction, research has to consider the attributes of the destination itself (Correia et al., 2013; Moreno et al., 2016), together with the quality of provision of the services and the motivation of the visitor. When addressing the issue, Bosque and Martín (2008) stressed the fact that the individuals' image of a destination has three components: cognitive, affective and holistic. The perceptions of destination attributes are part of the first two components (Bosque and Martín, 2008).

A precedent and not too different approach was taken by Beerli and Martin (2004), who also claimed that destination image was a concept formed by cognitive and affective interrelated components, where the cognitive evaluation refers to the individual's own knowledge and beliefs about the travel and the affective one relates to the individual's feelings towards the travel. Additionally, the model developed by Beerli and Martin (2004) admitted that there was a difference between first-time/new and returning visitors. Of course, the level of knowledge and motivation on the destination would impact the perceived image.

Following Oliver (1993) on the destination attributes, Chi and Qu (2008) have concluded that attributes' satisfaction has significant, as well as positive, influence on the overall satisfaction derived from the tourist experience. Satisfied tourists are more likely to repeat a visit and share their positive experience with relatives and friends (Bosque and Martín, 2008; Campo-Martínez et al., 2010; Yoon and Unysal, 2005).

If satisfaction towards a destination results from the overall experience lived (Bigné et al., 2005; Chen and Chen, 2010; Petrick and Backman, 2002), the destination image influences perceived quality and satisfaction, besides playing a major role in the process of choosing a destination (Chi and Qu, 2008). Besides, tourists' perceptions of a destination and its image depend, of course, on the information sources they use (Cho et al., 2014), that is on their reliability.

Meanwhile, the relationship between satisfaction and returning intention has not been fully confirmed (Bigné et al., 2001; Lee et al., 2007). As highlighted by several researchers (Campo-Martínez et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2007), the intensity of the relationship can differ, depending on the nature of the product and other variables influencing the decision.

Considering what has been mentioned, acquiring a good knowledge of the tourist's behaviour and of his/her overall satisfaction towards a destination or its tourism attributes seems to be essential for managers and marketers to position and advertise it. Additionally, if different travel groups get different levels of satisfaction from visiting a destination, this means that the strategies developed to attract them should address each segment's motivation instead of adopting standardized promotion campaigns.

Besides, as mentioned before, satisfaction plays a major role in the visitor's behaviour in what concerns recommending the visit to relatives and friends. So, there is place to inquire if the way this visitor has acquired the information on the destination he/she decides to visit, that is through recommendation of family and friends or other, affects the level of global satisfaction he/she expresses after the visit. The literature on the issue generally underlines the fact that information is one of the most decisive influencing factors on consumers' behaviour and that the sources of information do make a difference (Beiger and Laesser, 2004; Ishida et al., 2016; Murphy et al., 2007; Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005).

In this process of choosing a destination, the traveller seeks to reduce the risk and uncertainty (Beiger and Laesser, 2004; Cho et al., 2014; Ishida et al., 2016; Murphy et al., 2007; Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005), which comprises information sources themselves (Beiger and Laesser, 2004; Cho et al., 2014). As underlined by Cho et al. (2014), the information acquisition can be regarded as the starting point of the decision-making process. Dealing with tourism, that is with the intangible nature of the product, the availability and reliability of information turns to be more critical for consumers willing to minimize risk in service consumption – in this case, decision-making on a destination (Ishida et al., 2016). In high-risk situations, as claimed by Sirakaya and Woodside (2005), following

other authors, WOM or personal information sources tend to be more influential than non-personal (media) sources. Of course, prior experience leads to more confidence in the decision-making process and less perceived risk (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005).

The information tourists use in the process of taking a decision on a destination is either psychological or internal (e.g. motivation, beliefs and intentions, personal previous experience) or external (e.g. advice from relatives and friends, advertisements, travel agents, travel guides) (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005). The type of travel and the individual characteristics of the travellers must also be kept in mind (Cai et al., 2004; Murphy et al., 2007). First time visitors tend to rely more on external information than returning ones (Cho et al., 2014). Reliability looks to be a decisive factor under the choice of the information sources to rely on, emerging the WOM from relatives and friends as one of them, if not the most influential on the tourists' decision-making (Beerli and Martin, 2004; Beiger and Laesser, 2004; Cho et al., 2014; Ishida et al., 2016). Additionally, as already mentioned, WOM or personal information sources tend to be more influential than non-personal sources in the case of perceived high-risk or more uncertain situations (acquisitions), which is, commonly, the case of the provision of tourism services due to its immaterial and non-standardized nature (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005). Depending on the profile of the visitor, a few differences can be found (Cho et al., 2014).

Going deeper on the issue of assessing the WOM effects on their recipients, several authors, as mentioned by Ishida et al. (2016), found that positive and negative messages impact decisions on buying products or services differently. Research has commonly found that negative messages have a stronger influence on consumers (Ishida et al., 2016). In the case of digital WOM sources, Sparks and Browning (2011) claim that the same effect tends to be found, but other researchers, as invoked by Ishida et al. (2016), have attained not so evident results. In the case of the empirical research conducted by Ishida et al. (2016), on Branson, Missouri, USA, for example, they found that the positive WOM perceptions, both, traditional and digital, have shown to have a greater influence on decision-making than negative perceptions. The same was found for the impact of traditional WOM on the destination image (Ishida et al., 2016).

As already mentioned, there are several sources of information potential visitors can have on a destination and the quality of the services available there, including the one which they can acquire through reviews posted in booking platforms available on the internet (Cetin and Istambullu Dincer, 2014; Gretzel and Yoo, 2008; Ishida et al., 2016; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). In contrast to traditional WOM, the digital version spreads more widely and rapidly, being anonymous and available at any time, theoretically enhancing its range and impact (Jeong and Jang, 2011). Meanwhile, the lack of control and verification of the electronic channel allows to post false information, which undermines its credibility (Cetin and Istambullu Dincer, 2014; Ishida et al., 2016).

All this considered, the question which can be raised is whether or not the sources of information used make a difference in terms of satisfaction towards the tourist experience and intention to recommend it. In other words, we believe it is of major importance to inquire if a positive correlation can be found between the information source used and tourists' satisfaction and intention to recommend, in connection with the reliability of the sources used.

Methods

A quantitative methodology was employed based on a self-administered survey applied to travellers who visited Braga. Braga is a medium sized city located in the northwest coastal area of Portugal, endowed of a historical centre and of a remarkable religious, material and immaterial, heritage. Recently, it hosted the 2012 European Youth Capital, the 2016 Ibero-American Youth Capital and the 2018 European Sports Capital, which contributed to enhance its international visibility.

Braga was settled during the Prehistory, at least in the Early Bronze Age, about 3700 years ago (Sampaio, 2014). However, it was during the Roman Empire that Braga became monumental, with the foundation of the city of *Bracara Augusta*, around 15/16 BCE (Martins, 2010).

On the basis of its historical heritage, several events are being annually organized, as it is the case of *Braga Romana* (the Roman Braga Market), with the recreation of *Bracara Augusta*'s ways of life, and the Holy Week (Easter). The tourism industry has been experiencing a fast growth, profiting from the city's heritage and from the hosting of several events, as the ones already mentioned.

The design of the questionnaire was based on previous questionnaires used and elaborated by Remoaldo et al. (2014a) with the cooperation of the head of the Tourism Office of Guimarães.

The final structured questionnaire was administered between March and July 2017, which allowed us to collect 306 completed questionnaires. The questionnaire was administered face-to-face to Portuguese, English and Spanish speaking tourists in some symbolic sites of the city, and later treated using SPSS software statistical package.

The results section is divided into three main stages. The first stage involved an a priori segmentation of the travellers' sample into two groups according to different types of information sources used to choose the destination to visit (friend/relatives WOM – $n = 120$, and other sources – $n = 186$), and an analysis on their sociodemographic characteristics. Then, in the second stage there was an analysis on whether and how these travellers' groups differed in terms of destination image perceptions. In the third stage there was an analysis on whether and how these travellers' groups differed in terms of satisfaction and recommendation of destination.

Results and discussion

Table 1 summarizes the profiles of the survey respondents by types of information sources obtained on the destination (friends/relatives WOM and other sources) and takes into account the main sociodemographic variables.

Similarly to what happens currently in much research conducted worldwide, and as we are dealing with a cultural destination, we found a predominance of women (Remoaldo et al., 2014b; Silberberg, 1995). This is linked to the mature age of the visitors who travel with other people and with 76.8% of them having, at least, a University degree. The relevant percentage of visitors from other countries (81.7%) derives, perhaps, from their more frequent use of Braga's tourism office when compared to domestic visitors.

The differences between the respondents' characteristics were analysed using chi-square tests. These tests showed statistically significant differences concerning only two of the variables considered: age and residence. We found a greater percentage of younger respondents among tourists who used friend/relatives WOM. Older people made more use of other information sources. It was also possible to verify that Portuguese tourists made more use of family and friends as a source of information on the destination than visitors from other origins.

Table 1. Some respondents' characteristics and travel information sources.

	Family/Friends		Other sources		Total			
	n (120)	% (39.2)	n (186)	% (60.8)	n (306)	% (100.0)	X^2	Sig.
Gender							0.006	0.937
Male	53	44.2	83	44.6	136	44.4		
Female	67	55.8	103	55.4	170	55.6		
Age							7.984	0.046*
0–25	23	19.2	26	14.0	49	16.0		
26–45	62	51.7	77	41.4	139	45.4		
46–65	30	25.0	66	35.5	96	31.4		
More than 65	5	4.2	17	9.1	22	7.2		
Education							6.295	0.098
Basic	1	0.8	1	0.5	2	0.7		
Secondary	31	25.8	37	20.0	68	22.2		
University	64	53.3	86	46.5	150	49.0		
Master/PhD	24	20.0	61	33.0	85	27.8		
Marital status							3.412	0.332
Single	63	52.5	80	43.0	143	46.7		
Married	51	42.5	91	48.9	142	46.4		
Divorced/Widow	6	5.0	15	8.0	21	6.8		
Residence							20.739	0.000**
Portugal	37	30.8	19	10.2	56	18.3		
Other country	83	69.2	167	89.8	250	81.7		
Overnight							0.826	0.363
Yes	84	70.0	139	74.7	223	72.9		
No	36	30.0	47	25.3	83	27.1		
Travelled							0.002	0.966
Alone	14	11.7	22	11.8	36	11.8		
With company	106	88.3	164	88.2	270	88.2		

Source: Authors' own survey data.
*Indicated $p < 0.05$. **Indicated $p < 0.01$.

In order to obtain more information on major destinations included in the trip, respondents were asked which destinations they had visited or planned to visit.

The results presented in Table 2 suggest that touring around the region was important for cities such as Braga. Besides its own attributes, this type of city depends on the attraction capacity of other medium sized cities of the region. Porto (55 kilometres from Braga and the main city in Northern Portugal) emerged as the main destination (indicated by 61.7% of the family/friends recommended respondents and 76.9% of the other travellers). The main circuit included Porto–Braga–Guimarães (this last city is 25 kilometres far from Braga and 45 kilometres from Porto). This fits into one of the tourist segment characteristics of Northern Portugal – cultural and landscape touring – as found by studies made on the Guimarães destination (Remoaldo et al., 2014a). In this regard, Braga keeps a relative autonomy as 72.9% of the respondents admitted that they had stayed in Braga overnight or would do it during their trip.

Regarding Guimarães, and as reported by Remoaldo et al. (2014a, 2014b), it is worth mentioning that it has recently hosted a few events with special attention to the 2012 European Capital of Culture. This gave the city visibility both nationally and internationally, and helped to promote it as a cultural destination. The image of Braga could also benefit from growing visibility acquired by Guimarães as, due to being so close from each other, it is hard to visit Guimarães without passing by or overnighting in Braga, which is endowed of a larger set of accommodation facilities than Guimarães. The results in Table 3 fit that reasoning as 69.3% of the respondents claimed that they were visiting Braga in the aim of a tour, which included the main cities of Northern Portugal ('Touring, visiting cities in the region').

Considering the objective of identifying the motivations behind choosing Braga, as shown in Table 3, taking the whole sample, and as just mentioned, *Touring* emerged as the main motivation for visiting the city, followed by Gastronomy and Wines, which

Table 2. Destinations visited.

	Family/Friends		Other sources		Total			
	n (120)	% (39.2)	n (186)	% (60.8)	n (306)	% (100)	X^2	Sig.
Braga (main destination)	65	54.2	86	46.2	151	49.3	1.835	0.176
Guimarães	40	33.3	98	52.7	138	45.1	11.036	0.001*
Porto	74	61.7	143	76.9	217	70.9	8.187	0.004*
Viana do Castelo	21	17.5	43	23.1	64	20.9	1.392	0.238
Douro	16	13.3	26	14.0	42	13.7	0.026	0.873
Others	23	19.2	37	19.9	60	19.6	0.24	0.876

Source: Authors' own survey data.
*Indicated $p < 0.01$.

Table 3. Tourists' motivations.

	Family/Friends		Other sources		Total				
	n (120)	% (39.2)	n (186)	% (60.8)	n (306)	%	X^2	Sig.	
1. Festivities	9	7.5	17	9.1	26	8.5	0.252	0.615	
2. Touring, visiting cities in the region	69	57.5	143	76.9	212	69.3	12.875	0.000	**
3. Business	2	1.7	8	4.3	10	3.3	1.601	0.206	
4. Religious motivation	6	5.0	10	5.4	16	5.2	0.021	0.885	
5. Gastronomy and Wines	22	18.3	39	21.0	61	19.9	0.317	0.573	
6. Conferences and seminars	3	2.5	7	3.8	10	3.3	0.368	0.544	
7. Cultural activities	11	9.2	35	18.8	46	15.0	5.318	0.021	*
8. Sport events	0	0.0	6	3.2	6	2.0	3.948	0.047	
9. Visit to family and friends	36	30.0	7	3.8	43	14.1	41.572	0.000	**
10. Architectural heritage	17	14.2	40	21.5	57	18.6	2.592	0.107	
11. Recreation and leisure	8	6.7	7	3.8	15	4.9	1.319	0.251	

Source: Authors' own survey data.

*Indicated $p < 0.05$. **Indicated $p < 0.01$.

was reported by 19.9% of the respondents, and architectural heritage (mentioned by 18.6% of the respondents). The increased international diffusion of Portuguese gastronomy (and its certification) and wines (with several recent annual awards) could explain the importance attributed by respondents to Gastronomy and Wines (19.9%) as a component of the motivation for visiting Braga and Portugal, as a whole.

Looking again at the segmentation between friends/relatives WOM and other travellers' recommendation sources, it is worth highlighting the importance that Touring, Cultural Activities, and Architectural Heritage hold to the other travellers, and Visit to Family and Friends to those tourists that got the recommendation from friends/relatives, as evidenced by the chi-square statistics.

One of the main goals of the study was to determine which elements of Braga tourists included in their destination image. These elements are an integral part of the region's image that has been proactively distilled, interpreted, internalized and projected externally to gain recognition and to bring about a favourable outcome.

In this regard, we believe it is worth underlining that a destination image represents a set of beliefs and perceptions that people have about a given city or territory, which refer to its cultural heritage, landscape, nature, art, music, gastronomy, citizens, events and a diverse package of auxiliary factors (Agapito et al., 2010; Aksoy and Kiyci, 2011; Getz, 2008; Kotler et al., 1993). The destination image has a strong impact on how we view it as a destination, a place to invest or live in.

Using the data collected in the survey applied to Braga visitors, the perceived attributes of Braga were a factor analysed in order to determine whether any common factors were somehow responsible for boosting visitor numbers (Table 4).

Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of sphericity were computed to assess the appropriateness of factor analysis. The KMO value was 0.859, and Bartlett's test was significant at the 0.00 levels. Both results demonstrate the factorability of the matrixes being considered (Hair et al., 1998).

A principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation was used to identify the underlying dimensions. A final five-factor model was estimated, including 19 items. The factor solution explained approximately 59.96% of the total variance, with all communalities ranging from 0.47 to 0.747.

The factors represent the overall perception of all respondents regarding Braga's attributes and were labelled: Tourist Entertainment and Shopping, Material Heritage, Tourist Information and Transportation, Cleanliness and Professionalism, and Tourist Hospitality. Factor 1 is related to the supply of tourist activities and the opportunity to shop, and explains 32.21% of the total variance found, with a reliability coefficient of 0.81. It is followed by factor 2 (8.58% of the total variance explained and Cronbach's alpha of 0.71), which comprises items related to the material characteristics of the city. Factor 3, labelled Tourist Information and Transportation, explains 7% of the total variance contained by the original variables, with an alpha equal to 0.78. The fourth factor, Cleanliness and Professionalism, represents 6.23% of the statistical variance and has a reliability alpha of 0.65. This factor is associated with the cleaning and hygiene of the places visited and professionalism in providing tourism services. The final factor, Tourist Hospitality (5.92% of the total variance explained and Cronbach's alpha of 0.67), includes hotel and restaurant offer items.

Considering the internal consistency of the items within each dimension measured by examining Cronbach's reliability alphas, the items show a high consistency for factors 1, 2 and 3, but a lower consistency for factors 4 and 5, although close to acceptable. In fact, Nunnally (1978) suggested that reliability alphas close to 0.70 indicate a high level of internal consistency between the individual scale items and the related factors.

These results indicate that tourists' perceptions can be described in five dimensions. The dimensions were found to be reliable and valid, with Tourist Entertainment and Shopping, and Material Heritage emerging as the main factors, explaining 40.8% of the total variance. Perhaps, this result has to do with the visitors' association of the city with its status as a religious and cultural destination, especially considering the period of implementation of the questionnaire, coinciding with several events, such as Saint John's Eve and Braga Romana (Roman Braga).

Material Heritage, and Cleanliness and Professionalism dimensions aggregate the main attributes that tourists perceived as unique and clearly distinctive of Braga. These factors aggregate attributes that should be the central elements of the city's image positioning and communication mix.

Table 5 presents the perceptions of all respondents regarding the various attributes of Braga by source of information.

The analysis on Braga's attributes shows that it was perceived by tourists as a heritage site and a cultural city, encompassing buildings, historical sites and religious heritage, such as churches and chapels. Interesting is also the role played by gastronomy, which assumes a prominent place. This goes along

Table 4. Factor analysis results using varimax rotation of tourists' attribute perceptions of Braga.

Components	Factor loadings	Item means	SD	Eigenvalues	% of variance	Cumulative %	Reliability alpha
Factor 1: Tourist entertainment and shopping		3.77		6.444	32.221	32.221	0.806
Good offer of entertainment (in what concerns quantity)	0.785	3.59	0.864				
Good offer of entertainment (in what concerns quality)	0.707	3.61	0.847				
Good opportunities for shopping	0.666	3.81	0.897				
Variety and quality of shopping, excluding restaurants, bars and cafes	0.567	3.58	0.787				
Safe city	0.541	4.25	0.765				
Factor 2: Material heritage		4.14		1.716	8.580	40.801	0.707
Relevant artistic and built heritage	0.659	4.19	0.686				
Good offer of religious heritage/churches	0.629	4.44	0.671				
Hospitable city	0.612	4.36	0.712				
Historic centre	0.607	4.34	0.694				
Archaeological heritage and associated events	0.575	3.37	0.717				
Factor 3: Tourist information and transportation		3.28		1.401	7.006	47.808	0.780
Good transport services	0.772	3.08	0.845				
Good signage and tourist information	0.771	3.30	0.992				
Good diffusion of cultural events	0.672	3.44	0.911				
Factor 4: Cleanliness and professionalism		4.05		1.246	6.231	54.038	0.651
Cleaning and hygiene of the places visited	0.755	4.09	0.729				
Professionalism in the provision of services	0.608	4.08	0.704				
Factor 5: Tourist hospitality		3.98		1.184	5.921	59.960	0.666
Quality of the hotel supply	0.683	3.66	0.757				
Variety and quality of restaurants, bars and cafes	0.554	4.07	0.770				
Good value for money for the services provided	0.522	3.87	0.849				
Good gastronomy	0.512	4.34	0.803				

Extraction method: Principal component analysis; rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser normalization; KMO (Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy) = 0.859; Bartlett's test of sphericity: $p = 0.000$.
Rotation converged in seven iterations.

with the national and regional investment in advertising the Gastronomy and Wine touristic products of the region and the country, as a whole, in the past years, and also with the quality of the products supplied.

Regarding the sources of information used by tourists, at the top of the spotted differences in the image of Braga stands Tourist Entertainment and Shopping (factor 1, $t = 2.466$, $p < 0.05$), which includes Good Opportunities for Shopping ($t = 2.653$, $p < 0.01$), Variety and Quality of Shopping, excluding Restaurants, Bars and Cafes ($t = 5.418$, $p < 0.01$), and Safe City ($t = 3.552$, $p < 0.01$).

Apart from factor 1, only factor 5 presents 2 items with statistically significant differences, Variety and Quality of Restaurants, Bars and Cafes ($t = 2.793$, $p < 0.01$), and Good Gastronomy ($t = 2.533$, $p < 0.05$).

Looking at those results, it seems that all tourists are prone to value the physical assets, with no major differences found at this level when we analyse the data considering the sources of information they benefited from. The differences occur between attributes more linked to the variety and quality of services provided. In any case, one should bear in mind that all attributes are ranked positively by tourists, with averages above 3.

One way of getting an idea of the impression made by a given destination is to ask tourists/visitors if they would recommend the city to a friend/relative or

Table 5. Tourists' attribute perceptions of Braga by source of information.

Components	All		Family/Friends		Other sources		
	Mean[a]	SD	Mean[a]	SD	Mean[a]	SD	t-test[b]
Factor 1: Tourist entertainment and shopping	3.77	0.626	3.88	0.654	3.70	0.599	2.466**
Good offer of entertainment (in what concerns quantity)	3.59	0.864	3.68	0.936	3.54	0.813	1.318
Good offer of entertainment (in what concerns quality)	3.61	0.847	3.66	0.884	3.58	0.823	0.783
Good opportunities for shopping	3.81	0.897	3.98	0.884	3.70	0.892	2.653*
Variety and quality of shopping, excluding restaurants, bars and cafes	3.58	0.787	3.64	0.868	3.53	0.729	5.418*
Safe city	4.25	0.765	4.43	0.631	4.13	0.822	3.552*
Factor 2: Material heritage	4.14	0.472	4.16	0.506	4.13	0.450	0.480
Relevant artistic and built heritage	4.19	0.686	4.23	0.704	4.17	0.676	0.658
Good offer of religious heritage/churches	4.44	0.671	4.44	0.708	4.44	0.648	0.079
Hospitable city	4.36	0.712	4.38	0.747	4.35	0.691	0.406
Historic centre	4.34	0.694	4.36	0.696	4.33	0.691	0.307
Archaeological heritage and associated events	3.37	0.717	3.38	0.711	3.36	0.724	0.176
Factor 3: Tourist information and transportation	3.28	0.765	3.19	0.832	3.33	0.716	−1.575
Good transport services	3.08	0.845	2.99	0.815	3.15	0.861	−1.574
Good signage and tourist information	3.30	0.992	3.26	1.017	3.33	0.978	−0.599
Good diffusion of cultural events	3.44	0.911	3.32	1.045	3.52	0.807	−1.777
Factor 4: Cleanliness and professionalism	4.05	0.564	4.12	0.556	4.01	0.566	1.705
Cleaning and hygiene of the places visited	4.09	0.729	4.11	0.719	4.09	0.738	0.261
Professionalism in the provision of services	4.08	0.704	4.14	0.677	4.04	0.719	1.199
Factor 5: Tourist hospitality	3.98	0.562	4.06	0.574	3.94	0.551	1.905
Quality in the hotel supply	3.66	0.757	3.57	0.728	3.70	0.774	−1.273
Variety and quality of restaurants, bars and cafes	4.07	0.770	4.22	0.758	3.97	0.763	2.793*
Good value for money for the services provided	3.87	0.849	3.95	0.977	3.82	0.754	1.283
Good gastronomy	4.34	0.803	4.48	0.778	4.25	0.807	2.533**

Source: Authors' own survey data.
[a]Five-point interval scale, corresponding to 5 (very strong), 4 (strong), 3 (moderate), 2 (weak), 1 (very weak).
[b]T-test for equality of means, assuming equal variances.
*Significant at $p < 0.01$.
**Significant at $p < 0.05$.

whether they intend to return to the city (Table 6). In this case, the results are very positive, attaining a global mean of 4.20 when we look to the whole sample of visitors, but with a clear advantage (4.30) when considering those who got the recommendation about the destination from relatives and friends.

In absolute terms, the results from both segments of tourists inquired on the Global Quality of Destination are not very different from the ones which referred to the level of Recommendation of the destination. The rate attained is also very high but the evaluations produced by the visitors who got their recommendation from relatives and friends are closer to the one of travellers who got theirs from other

sources. From that, we cannot conclude with a high level of confidence that their assessment of it is statically significant, as shown by the *t* statistic.

The results we got in terms of declared overall satisfaction are in line with the ones for attributes satisfaction, which do not question the findings of Chi and Qu (2008), who have claimed that attributes satisfaction can be taken as an antecedent of destination loyalty.

Returning to the issue of the source of information used, keeping in mind that visitors who got the recommendation of the visit to Braga from friends/relatives WOM tend to report a higher level of willingness to recommend the destination, in connection to the

Table 6. Satisfaction and recommendation.

	Family/Friends (n = 120)		Other sources (n = 186)		Total (n = 306)			
	Agree (%)[a]	Average scores[b]	Agree (%)[a]	Average scores[b]	Agree (%)[a]	Average scores[b]	t-value	Sig.
Global quality of destination[b]	94.1	4.25	92.4	4.15	92.5[d]	4.18	1.521	0.130
Recommendation to family and friends[c]	91.6	4.30	92.5	4.13	92.1[e]	4.20	1.904	0.058

Source: authors' own survey data.
[a]Percentage of respondents that agree are those that answered 4 or 5 on the 5-point Likert scales.
[b]Scale ranges from 1 = bad to 5 = excellent;
[c]Scale ranges from 1 = not recommend to 5 = strongly recommend.
[d]Excellent = 25.5%
[e]I would highly recommend = 33.3%

satisfaction attained, the city should strategically pay attention to this category of tourists in its marketing promotion. This is obviously connected with benefitting from and working on the enhancement of the affective dimension of the relationship between the city and its visitors.

No matter the visitors targeted, the city must, of course, go on investing in providing a tourism offer of high quality, which, in this case means keeping at least the general level attained.

In the literature review, we have underlined that, in the process of choosing a destination, the traveller seeks to reduce the risk and uncertainty (Beiger and Laesser, 2004; Cho et al., 2014; Ishida et al., 2016; Murphy et al., 2007; Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005), relating that with the intangible nature of the product and the consumers' willingness to minimize the risk of a choice. That could be a clue, as claimed by Sirakaya and Woodside (2005), for explaining the importance of WOM recommendation in the process of choosing a destination and, also, to the level of satisfaction obtained from a visit, compared to the one of travellers using other sources of recommendation. In the case of Braga, due probably to the common feeling that it is a safe place, the satisfaction expressed (assessed by the global quality of the destination) has been shown to be quite high for both segments of tourists, not revealing a relevant gap between the perceptions of the segments tested.

Still looking at the several sources of information potential visitors can accede on a destination and the quality of the services available there, the results we got seem to underline the ability of traditional WOM to impact on the (affective) relationship to be established between the visitor and the destination. We believe this is the right way to interpret the higher level of recommendation expressed by the segment of travellers who have chosen Braga using the

information on it provided by their relatives and friends' WOM. The lack of control and verification of other channels, including the electronic ones, as claimed by Cetin and Istambullu Dincer (2014) and Ishida et al. (2016), can be a reason for this difference.

However, when we approached the question of whether or not the sources of information used made a difference in terms of satisfaction felt by the tourist, the results we got do not give plain support to the hypothesis that travellers relying on the WOM recommendation from relatives and friends, compared to others using a different source of information on their choice of destination, tend to express a significantly higher level of satisfaction towards the visit to Braga.

At least partially, the before mentioned result do seem challenging the psycho-sociological theories on the efficacy on individuals of the information channels used, namely those which concede a special status to WOM, even if dealing with the provision of tourism services, characterized by its immaterial and non-standardized nature (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005).

With today's individuals attachment to the web channel and the existence of large amount of easy accessible information (big data) on booking platforms regarding the quality of services provided and destinations, this type of source looks to have been gaining greater trust among consumers, partially replacing the need of getting reliable information from nearby personal sources. To this evolution, consumer's reviews posted on service companies' platforms seem to play a major role (Jeong and Jang, 2011).

Even so, when considering the recommendation of the visit to the city to family and friends, those who have acquired information relying on WOM tend to be more enthusiastic than the other segment of travellers, showing that a different sort of relationship was still established between the visitor and the destination.

Conclusion and recommendations

It is not common to investigate tourists' motivations, perceived attributes of the cities and satisfaction obtained from the visit comparing the groups of those who indicate that they obtained travel recommendation from relatives/friends and those who obtained information on the destination from other sources. In Portugal, it is even less frequent. In this particular research, concerning the city of Braga, where cultural and religious tourism are the main tourist driving forces, we have decided to undertake this research approach using data from a survey applied to visitors in summer 2017. The first segment of visitors corresponded to 120 observations, while the second one regarded 186 travellers.

The results obtained by the sample of 306 visitors show that Braga is a quite autonomous destination, competing with the city of Porto in terms of overnight visitors. Tourist saturation in Porto is, perhaps, helping Braga.

The visitors evaluated positively all the destination's attributes, but the attributes linked to factor Tourist Entertainment and Shopping, and Material Heritage emerged as the main ones (explaining 40.8% of the total variance of the original variables). Its status as a religious and cultural destination, together with the shopping opportunities provided, is, in fact, the main motives to visit Braga. The material heritage is very present/visible in all spaces of the historic centre, where the religious patrimony takes on particular relevance.

The positive levels of satisfaction expressed by travellers that got the information on the destination from relatives and friends and, mostly, their willingness of recommending, as well, the visit to Braga to relatives and friends are the distinguishing factors we could capture from the empirical study, when segmenting the respondents according to the sources of recommendation they got in the aim of choosing to visit Braga. This can point to the advantage of a kind of affective dimension in the decision-making process and on the assessment of the tourist experience lived.

Even so, the results we got do not give plain support to the hypothesis raised that travellers relying on the WOM recommendation tend to express a significantly higher level of satisfaction towards the visit when compared to visitors using a different source of information on their choice of the destination. In a certain level, this result seems challenging the psycho-sociological theories on the present efficacy on individuals of the information channels used, namely those which concede a special status to WOM.

With today individuals attachment to the web channel and the existence of large amount of easy accessible information on electronic platforms regarding the services provided and destinations, this kind of source looks to have been gaining greater reliability among consumers, partially replacing the need of getting information from nearby personal sources.

This keeping in mind, it looks that tourism operators and destination managers have to put an increasing concern on and following closer the kind of information on their services and attributes which is being disclosed to the market, namely through the internet channel, and, of course, adjusting their management and advertising according to the needs derived. That is, the empirical results we got do recommend to adopt a policy service and marketing strategy envisaging to serve potential consumers who base their visit decision-making either on recommendation passed by family and friends or on information provided by the internet platforms. This is, certainly, more demanding for the service providers and destinations but it seems they do not have an alternative path to follow.

Even if we could not find a robust statistical difference in the satisfaction extracted from the visit between travellers relying on word-of-mouth recommendation and those using a different source of information, as we still found a difference, we believe the city promoters should go on trying to take profit from the affective relationship the city can develop with its visitors.

Some of the main results show that the Portuguese culture, as it is materialized in Braga, along with the built heritage, the hospitality and the gastronomy, is still highly rated by visitors regardless of the sources of recommendation used by them. Globally, this resulted in a high level of appreciation of the destination's general quality.

Regardless of the visitors targeted, the city must go on investing on a high quality tourism offer.

The obtained results regard a certain destination and do not rely on a sample of respondents covering a whole year. This can, of course, restrict the level of generality in reading those results. Having this in mind, it would be desirable to conduct a similar research on other destinations to check potential resemblances and/or differences regarding the major research objectives.

In the future, it would also be worth investigating if the visitor's nationality, that is the cultural affinity between tourists and the destination along with their residents, can influence the obtained results.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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