

## Blogs Entries about Agadir as a Tourism Destination: Analysis of Bloggers Profiles

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### ABSTRACT

With the advancements of Internet technologies, increasing numbers of travelers are using Internet to seek destination information and to conduct transactions online. Travel blogs are becoming one of the most appreciated platforms that allow bloggers to share stories, comments and reviews about tourism destinations and tourism services for other people to read. In the present work, the main objective is profiling bloggers posting blog entries about Agadir as a tourism destination. To achieve this, we will first select the most relevant blogs entries, after that, we study bloggers' profiles by analyzing their sociodemographic information such as: gender, age, country of origin... This allows us to get a better idea about tourists visiting Agadir and the differences between their demographic characteristics. At the end of our work, we will discuss the results and their implications for the Destinations Management Organizations in Agadir.

**Keywords:** Travel blogs, Agadir, bloggers, sociodemographic characteristics.

### INTRODUCTION

The marketing potential of blogs for tourism business is well recognized by the industry [1]. As online word-of-mouth and specially blogs could spread positive comments quickly and act as a cost-effective way of marketing in tourism industry [2]. It is alleged that online word-of-mouth marketing is more effective than traditional marketing activities [3]. The authors Douglas and Mills (2006) suggested that the travel blogs are able to provide in-depth information about consumer's attitudes to destinations [4]. Therefore, tourism marketers could find out the strengths and weaknesses and the perceived image of a tourist destination through blog analysis [5]. Before getting to study the perceived image of a destination, it is essential to study the personal characteristics or factors of people holding blogs or writing blog posts [6].

From the perspective of consumer behaviour, personal factors refer to socio-demographic characteristics of the individuals (gender, age, level of education, family life cycle, social class, place of residence, etc.) as well as those of a psychological nature (motivations, values, personality, life style, etc.). Those personal factors affect the individual's cognitive organization or evaluations of stimuli and therefore also influence the perceptions of the environment and the resulting image [7].

Analysing sociodemographic characteristics of bloggers has two main objectives: the first one is to allow Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) to have a better insight about tourists visiting or willing to visit the destination. The second objective is to be able to target the main bloggers that can be solicited as a means to put into action the Destination Marketing strategy.

It is important for us to mention that this paper is the foundation slab for a complex process that is leading to analyse the perceived image of the destination Agadir. Before getting to study deeply the image held by bloggers, we (realized) conducted this research to study the personal characteristics of the bloggers communicating about the destination Agadir.

To answer the main objective of our paper, we believe that it is first important to start with a literature review that will allow us to contextualize our research. To do so, we will begin our literature review with defining the concept of Word-of-Mouth and its evolution from a "traditional" to an "electronic"

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form. This will conduct us to talk about the main channels used to diffuse communication. We will linger on Blogs, in general, that constitute the core of our research and we will define blogs and talk about their structure.

Afterwards, we will talk about the specific case of Travel blogs and will explain why they gained importance recently. We will also explain the motivations behind writing travel blogs entries. And finally will make a review about what was stipulated about the bloggers profiles in the literature.

Afterwards, the methodology used would be explained. We will explicit the blogs used to constitute our database, the criteria used to select the blog post to consider, and we will also explain the method used to extract the needed information about bloggers. The final axis of our paper is about presenting and discussing the results of our study.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Consumers talk to each other about the consumption experience, share information and opinions towards and away from specific products, brands, and services [8]. This communication is called Word of Mouth (WOM). In the early years, WOM was defined as face-to-face communication about products or companies between those people who were not commercial entities [9, 10]. Later, Westbrook described WOM more broadly, to include “all informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services or their sellers” [11]. The main characteristic of WOM is the perceived independence of the source of the message. Over time, WOM has become both more pervasive and amorphous. Litvin & al. give the following definition: “WOM is the communication between consumers about a product, service, or a company in which the sources are considered independent of commercial influence” [12].

The key WOM player is the opinion leader who plays the role of an active user that interprets the meaning of media message content for others, i.e. opinion seekers [13]. Interested in a particular product field, opinion leaders make an effort to expose themselves to mass media sources and are trusted by opinion seekers to provide knowledgeable advice [14, 15, 16].

The expected outcomes from the dissemination of WOM are a probability of purchase increased by a favourable WOM and a negative WOM has the opposite effect [17].

In the past, WOM participants have included family, friends and fellow travellers and it has been relatively limited by the need for proximity between sender and receiver [18]. Before, it has been assumed that WOM messages come from known associates, and therefore some assumptions can be made about the credibility of the source and its influence [19].

Consumers are more relying on online opinions for their purchase decisions [20]. Searching and reading others' opinions about a product can help a consumer save time in decision making and make better decisions [21].

With the rise of the internet and particularly Web 2.0 applications which allow greater exchange of information between consumers who are geographically distant and may never have met before has started to alter how word of mouth marketing is viewed in a tourism context [22]. Advancements of Internet technologies, have allowed more travellers to use the internet to seek destination information and to conduct transactions online [23].

Besides, the internet has enabled new forms of communication platforms. These empower both providers and consumers and (allow a vehicle) provide a means for the share of information and opinions both from Business to Consumer, and from Consumer to Consumer. It is within these contexts that the concept of eWOM has been developed. People are now reliable to access not only opinions from close friends, family members, and co-workers, but also from strangers located all around the World [24].

Based on the definition of WOM by Westbrook, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) can be defined as “all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers” [25].

E-WOM includes many types of channels such as News groups, websites, products reviews and hate sites, chatrooms, emails, instant messaging, virtual communities and Blogs [26]. Blogs are “one form of a suite of internet-based tools grouped under the descriptor of ‘Web 2.0’. They are essentially

media through which individuals and organizations may present opinions or information about specific topics” [27]. They can be described as a form of diary, which is presented usually in reverse chronological order via a web page interface. The structure of a blog normally involves some sort of header with information about the author, title and date of the entry and so on. The body of the blog contains text, images and other media files. The footer often contains tools for readers to make comment and enter into a dialogue not only with the blog author, but with other readers [28]. Blogs also usually contain links to other sources of information, thus connecting them to the broader World Wide Web [29]. Due to the specific character of blogs, socio-demographic information is not a compulsory requirement and bloggers may choose to visualize all or only part of their personal information on the website. However, some of socio-demographic profiles might be identified by reading narrative texts and photographs carefully [30].

On the World Wide Web, Travel and tourism subjects are amongst the most popular subjects, and it is likely that they are also popular subjects in the blogosphere [31]. Travel blogs are the equivalent of personal “online diaries” and are made up from one or more individual entries strung together by a common theme. They are commonly written by tourists to report back to friends and families about activities and experiences during trips [32]. They are becoming a more important mechanism for exchanging information among tourists, and for destinations and businesses to learn about the attitudes of their markets [33].

Compared with destination websites, which tend to focus only on the positive aspects of a destination, travel blogs contain more authentic information that is built on the bloggers’ personal experiences of a destination [34]. As one of the more popular online activities, travel blogs can be used to obtain a deeper understanding of tourists and the places they visit because blog contents reveal detailed experiences at specific destinations [35]. They represent useful sources for destination marketing organizations by which to monitor the tourism “health” of their location [36]. Travel blogs are valuable for the evaluation of satisfactions and consumer relationship management [37].

The reasons or motivations behind creating travel blogging are multiple, however, it seems that they are mainly used to write about activities and travel experiences online and to keep in contact with and inform family and friends [38,39]. Bosangit and Mena (2009) summarize very accurately the main motivations and benefits for tourists who create travel blogs: Update family and friends of whereabouts; Share experiences with others; Find information about places; Keep a record of travels; Keep in touch with friends who are also blogging; Network or meet new people; Express self by writing; Entertainment; For passing time [40].

As for bloggers profiles, in his study about Australia’s northern territory, Carson (2004) found that most likely bloggers were relatively young travellers on relatively long trips [41]. There has been no published research on what type of travellers is likely to author blogs, or what types of trips to what types of destinations are more likely to generate blog content. Personal internet use is most popular among teens and young adults, although there are growing markets among retired people and young families [42]. Internet use continues to increase across the population, particularly in developed countries [43].

## **METHODOLOGY**

All To study the sociodemographic characteristics of bloggers posting blog entries about the destination Agadir, three main steps were followed to conduct this research. The first step is about searching individual and specialized travel blogs that that will constitute the database of our study. The second step consists of analysing these blogs, and extracting only the relevant ones by eliminating those that do not meet certain criteria. The third and final step extracting information from each blog entry. The main purpose of our work is to gather Information about bloggers such as their name, gender, country of origin, and any other additional information such as marital status, occupation...

As it was observed that travel blogs may be located as individual (isolated) online devices or be located within specialized websites hosting travel blogs. Individual blogs usually consist of several entries (separate posts of information) posted by the same author/s. Within travel blog hosting websites the disposition of information is similar (by entries as separate posts of information), but posts do not belong to the same author, but to multiple authors. The information there is not ordered

by author but by other criteria (entries are mainly classified by date and geographical region or destination [44]). In this article, both individual blogs and specialized websites hosting travel blogs were included in the data base to study. To build our database, we did two main researches: one related to individual blogs and one on specialized blogs.

For the individual blogs, we started with a research on [blogsearch.google.com](http://blogsearch.google.com) using the keywords: “travel blogs Agadir” in English and “Blog voyage Agadir” in French. Following the two searches using key words in French and English, we extracted 80 personal blogs with entries written about Agadir.

As for specialized websites hosting travel blogs, we based our research on former works to define the main specialized travel blogs to include in our study. As we did a literature review on former works, we were able to bring out the most common travel blogs analysed by other authors. The main websites found are: [Travelpod.com](http://Travelpod.com), [Travelblog.org](http://Travelblog.org), [Travbuddy.com](http://Travbuddy.com), [Travellerspoint.com](http://Travellerspoint.com), [mytripjournal.com](http://mytripjournal.com).

For each one of these cited blogs, we used the keyword “Agadir” to extract the blog entries written about the destination. We extracted 50 blog entries on [Travellerspoint.com](http://Travellerspoint.com), 20 on [Travelblog.org](http://Travelblog.org), 60 on [Travelpod.com](http://Travelpod.com), 20 on [mytripjournal.com](http://mytripjournal.com) and 10 on [Travbuddy.com](http://Travbuddy.com).

After storing all the findings of our primal researches, we started the second step. This step is about sifting the different results obtained from the first step. So, for both individual and specialized travel blogs, we retained only the entries written by writers who choose to give information about themselves. For individual blogs, we also excluded the ones written with a commercial connotation. For Specialized blogs, we detected blog entries written by the same person and deleted them from our list so the results won't be biased.

This step lead to the reduction of the number of blog entries to analyse. For individual blogs, only 53 blogs met the criteria. Regarding the specialized travel blogs the final number of blogs entries is as hereinafter: 30 blog entries on [Travellerspoint.com](http://Travellerspoint.com), 16 on [Travelblog.org](http://Travelblog.org), 58 on [Travelpod.com](http://Travelpod.com) (As some blog entries are private and cannot be read), 10 on [mytripjournal.com](http://mytripjournal.com) and 5 on [Travbuddy.com](http://Travbuddy.com).

The final step previous to mining data is the extraction of personal information about blogger. And as mentioned before, the information sought is about names, gender, country of origin, marital status, and occupation.

For individual blogs, bloggers choose the kind of information to share, and in almost all cases, bloggers write a blog post about themselves, where they specify their name, and gender... They even mention an email address to be contacted. For the specialized travel blogs, the situation differ. On [Travellerspoint.com](http://Travellerspoint.com), [Travbuddy.com](http://Travbuddy.com) and [Travelpod.com](http://Travelpod.com) bloggers have to fill specific fields related to their age, as for [Travelblog.org](http://Travelblog.org) and [mytripjournal.com](http://mytripjournal.com), bloggers had to write a blog post about themselves without being obliged to provide specific information. All blog posts were read and information was extracted and organized in a table.

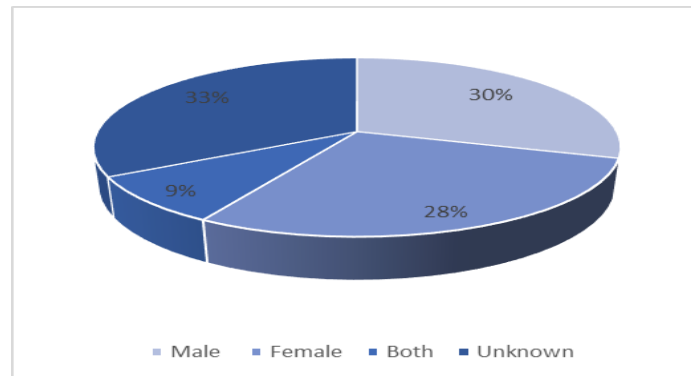
## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

After gathering all information available, we collected both data about individual and specialized travel blogs so we could proceed to the analysis of trends for each and every type data. First, tendencies about providing bloggers' names were analyzed. Second, the gender of blog posts writer were also scanned. Third, we counted and presented the main native countries of the bloggers. Subsequently, the age of bloggers has been studied. Afterwards, we realized a cross analysis that allows us to relate the gender of bloggers and their country of origin. Hereafter, we analyzed the marital situation of the studied bloggers' profiles and did a cross analysis to study the marital situation of bloggers according to their gender. Last but not least, the bloggers' occupations has been presented.

Concerning names, only 10 bloggers of 172 didn't provide a name. All the 163, either provided a full name, a first name or just a nickname.

**Majda El Boukhari & Aziz Sair “Blogs Entries about Agadir as a Tourism Destination: Analysis of Bloggers Profiles”**

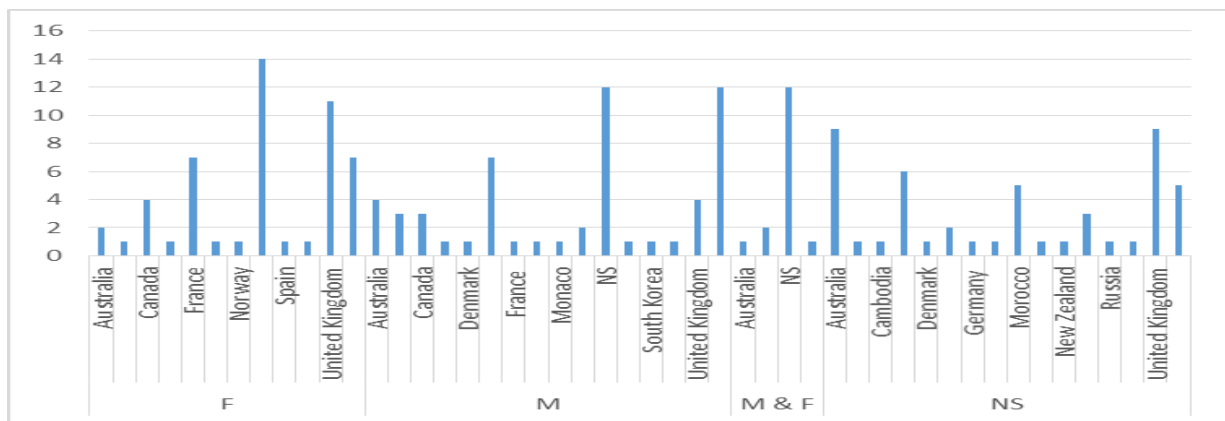
As for gender, 124 blog entries mentioned the gender of the blogger. In 55 blog entries, the writers identify themselves as males, as in 53 blogs, they identify themselves as females. We should also mention that 16 blogs were written by two people: a man and a woman. The percentages are presented in the figure 1.



**Figure1.** Gender of bloggers

As for the country of origin, 24 countries were identified. As for bloggers, 54 of them didn't precise where they live or where they come from. For all remaining 118 bloggers, statistics are as follows: 25 bloggers are from the United Kingdom, 24 are from the United States of America, 12 are from Canada, 7 are from Morocco. Besides, 5 bloggers live in Belgium, 3 in Spain, 2 in Denmark and 2 others in New Zealand. Cambodia, China, Finland, Germany, Indonesia, Ireland, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Qatar, Russia, Slovenia, South Korea and Switzerland are, respectively, the country of origin of one blogger.

The distribution of bloggers depending on their gender and country of origin is as follows:



**Figure2.** Country of origin/ Gender

*Inter alia*, 4 female blogger are from Belgium, and 4 are from Canada, 7 declare coming from France, 1 respectively from New Zealand and Spain, as 11 female state that the UK is their country of origin. As for the USA, it seems to be the homeland of 7 females. Regarding male bloggers, they are respectively 3 to declare being from Canada and Belgium, 1 state being respectively from France, Indonesia and Monaco. Among others, 1 male blogger is from Spain and 1 from Slovenia. Moreover, 4 male bloggers state that their country of origin is the UK.

Regarding age, 150 bloggers didn't mention theirs. For the other bloggers, the youngest one is 21 years-old, the oldest one is 75 years-old. The age ranges are presented in the figure 3.

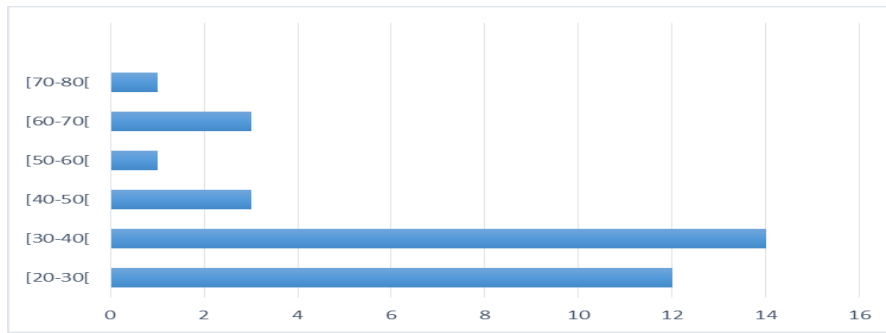


Figure3. Age of bloggers.

Analyzing marital situation was rather problematic. By reading blog posts, some bloggers noted that they were in a relationship, other clarified they were married, other choose to talk about their partners without specifying the kind of their relationship. While 151 bloggers didn’t specify their marital situation, 9 bloggers declared being single and 24 in a relationship. Percentages are as follows in figure 4.

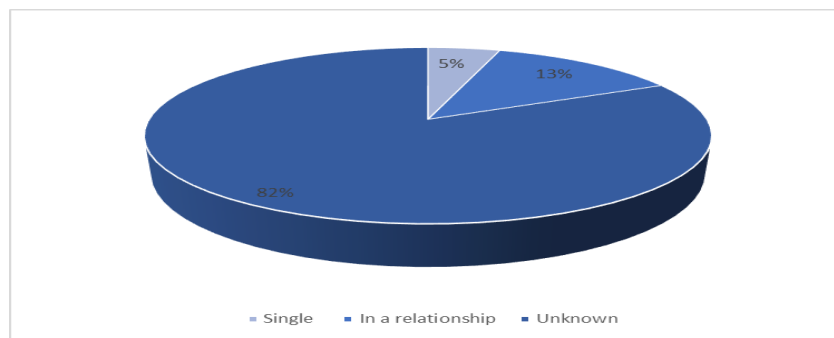


Figure4. Marital situation of bloggers.

As we did a crossed analysis of the gender of bloggers and their marital situation, we found the following results:

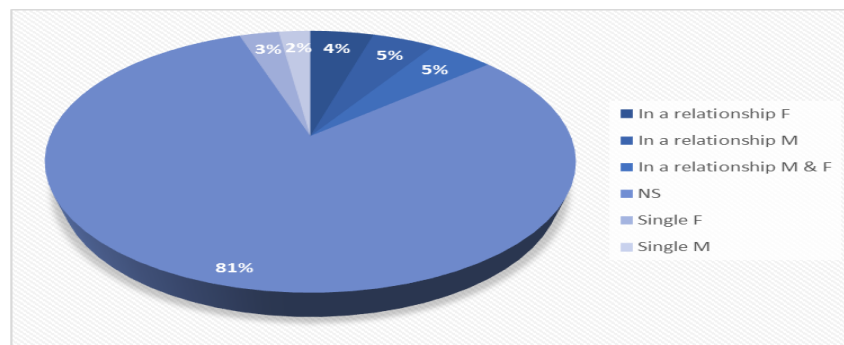


Figure5. Marital situation / Gender.

Actually, respectively 8 females and 8 males declared that they were in a relationship, it is the same case for 8 male and female bloggers writing the same blog posts who declared being in a relationship. 139 bloggers didn’t specify their marital situation. In addition, 5 females declared being single, as for males, they were 4 to stipulate being single.

The occupation is the least communicated information, since only 25 bloggers indicated their occupation. There was: a Medical Officer, a marketing and advertising professional, 4 students, a TV producer, a professional surfer and photographer, 2 journalists, a beauty section editor, a social

worker, a marketer, an art performer, Speech and Language Therapist, a post-doctorate, a Software Test Consultant, a Feng Shui Expert, a businessman, a preschool teacher, a psychologist, a journalist-photographer and 3 retired people.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study of the sociodemographic characteristics of bloggers allowed use to extricate certain tendencies that should be taken into consideration by Agadir’s Destination Management Organizations. The research offers some insights into the use of blogs about travel to Agadir for travel recommendations, and as a mean to express ones intention to revisit, or no, the destination.

The result of our research showed that female bloggers outnumbered male bloggers and take the lead by holding blogs more than male bloggers. Concerning age, it seems like the most significant age group blogging about the destination Agadir is the 30 to 40 years old group. This group is followed by people between 20 and 30 years old, as less people over 40 have less blogs entries about the destination. Regarding the marital situation, it appears that it is a matter in which little importance is given since more than 82% of bloggers didn’t mention their marital situation. On the subject of the country of origin of the bloggers, it appears that a considerable number of bloggers posting about the destination Agadir reside in the UK, the USA, France and Canada.

The results presented above will allow Destination Marketing Organizations in Agadir to have a better understanding of the market. Nevertheless, we should emphasize that the information found in this paper should be used in combination with the study related to the perceived image so the DMOs would be able to understand this matter as a whole.

In addition, the results presented in this paper will permit DMOs to center their attention about specific bloggers and try to use them as communication agent about the destination image. About this matter, there has been very little research into how blogs can be used as part of a marketing communications mix, and much more needs to be done on this topic [45]. We think that a future research should take a closer look at this topic.

To conclude, we can say that we believe that one of the limitations of our research is the sample size used, we plan to revise it upwards for a better representation and a better understanding of the sociodemographic characteristics of tourists and their behavior.

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