Instagram: A Gimmick or a Serious Reputation Builder in the Airline Business?

Rui Vinhas da Silva¹, Catarina Marques¹, Diogo Martinho², Natália Teixeira³ and José Crespo de Carvalho¹

Abstract
The purpose of the research was to shed light on the interrelatedness between Instagram and corporate reputation, on the one hand, and customer service expectations, on the other. A conceptual model was proposed to be tested in the context of the civil aviation economy. A national flagship airline company was chosen in which to conduct the research. An online questionnaire was made available, and 283 responses were collected. Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS SEM) was used to test the research hypotheses derived from the literature. The novelty of the work is in the scarce research found when scrutinising the literature on possible links between Instagram and airline corporate reputation. The study found a positive correlation between social media usage and corporate reputation in the airline sector. Future research needs to replicate this study across other airlines to ascertain the external validity of the current study and its potential for extrapolation.

Keywords
Instagram, airlines, corporate reputation, service expectations, engagement

Introduction
There is a new generation out there, one whose colloquial means of interrelating is via Instagram. Many of these people are not familiar with traditional communications media (Edosomwan et al., 2011). They have never posted a letter, faxed something or even used a regular household telephone. This in itself provides ample justification for the undertaking of research in this area, as it is a novel world we are entering, not only because the technology has not been around for long but also because personal

¹ Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), Business Research Unit, Lisboa, Portugal.
² Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL), Lisboa, Portugal.
³ Instituto Superior de Gestão, Lisboa, Portugal.

Corresponding author:
Catarina Marques, Departament of Quantitative Methods for Management and Economics, Edificio ISCTE, Av. das Forças Armadas, 1649-026 Lisboa, Portugal.
E-mail: catarina.marques@iscte-iul.pt
interdependency and its arbitration through interpersonal communications have found new media and new mechanisms, but also new codes of conduct, both explicit and implicit, as well as new processes and consequences (Safko, 2010). It is into the realm of consequence that we are delving. Does Instagram impact customer service expectations? What about organisational reputation? Because if it does, then companies need to pay more than lip service to Instagram and social media within their communications budget and understand their true importance in the inbound versus outbound mix.

Any noteworthy business needs to know what it is doing with respect to social media for myriad reasons, of which perhaps the most poignant are communicating (inside and outside the organisation), managing stakeholder relationships and their interface with corporate reputation, monitoring customer involvement and engagement through constant adaptation to and improvement of service standards and a variety of other latent reasons, which only the future will disclose (Bergström & Bäckman, 2013).

Social media was defined by Russo et al. (2008, p. 22) as ‘those [infrastructures and platforms] that facilitate online communication, networking, and/or collaboration’ and as ‘a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow for the creation and exchange of User Generated Content’ by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61). Howard and Parks (2012) presented a more exhaustive definition of social media as consisting of three parts: ‘(a) the information infrastructure and tools used to produce and distribute content; (b) the content that takes the digital form of personal messages, news, ideas, and cultural products; and (c) the people, organisations, and industries that produce and consume digital content’ (p. 362). Boyd and Ellison (2007) conceptualise a social network definition by following two distinctive approaches: a C2C (consumer-to-consumer) perspective, which implies that social networks act as virtual consumer communities, on the one hand, and on the other, a more technological perspective, where social networks allow individuals to create a public or semi-public (approval-based) profile, which includes personal information and history, within a bounded system. The profiles are part of a larger ecosystem of similar profiles, allowing for connections to be established and information to be exchanged.

There has been a shift away from the traditional tools of marketing communications and brand building that have been around for decades, often with less than desirable results. Schultz & Schultz, 1998). Firms have had to think long and hard their investments on corporate communications with a view to finding the optimal balance between tradition and cutting edge, between above the line and below the line and through the line digital marketing, often working in the realm of the unknown as the efficacy of digitalisation is yet to be proven for most sectors of economic activity (Fournier, 1996; Sinha, 2008).

Previous studies are scarce on possible connections between Instagram and corporate reputation, as they are on customer service expectations. There are also no known works on the same in the specific context of the airline industry. Therefore, the current study aims to understand the impact of Instagram on corporate reputation and customer service expectations in the airline business. In particular, the current research aims to establish the following:

1. Does the Instagram presence of an airline company influence customer expectations of the organisation and its reputation?
2. Are there any relevant links between customer digital engagement and corporate reputation? How do they manifest themselves?

A national flagship company was chosen to operationalise the research. The airline under scrutiny here, TAP Air Portugal, is a long-established one with an undisputable track record for credibility and worldwide reputation conquered over years of activity in the sector. It is one of the traditional airline carriers, alongside the likes of Air France, Lufthansa, British Airways and other national-aviation household names.
As with any other industry, tourism may also be the beneficiary of a brave new world of online platforms offering a plethora of new marketing tools and opportunities. Social media is only one of the most recent such tools, and its functioning and marketing potential are yet to be fully realised and indeed discovered.

Literature Review

Instagram and Brand Relationships

Services that are consumed before they can be fully evaluated (Dijkmans et al., 2015) are typically those offered in the airline transportation industry, which begs the question of the adequacy of digital strategy in building a relationship between the brand and its current or potential customers, and its role in expectations setting and the accumulation of positive reputational capital for the organisation.

According to Dhote and Kumar (2019), storytelling, especially from a long-duration perspective, can help improve efficiency in brand communication for reaching an intended target audience. ‘As a creative strategy, the format is gaining an immense prominence primarily due to its potential to hold audiences and leave an enduring impact on their minds’ (Dhote & Kumar, 2019, p. 31).

Instagram has, according to its CEO, become an important place for everyone, from celebrities to anonymous people, who express themselves through photographic storytelling. This is a departure from the mission of Facebook, which is to optimise communications for everyone. The clear distinction here is in that storytelling is at the core of Instagram—not so with Facebook. Instagram envisages the platform and its usage as for storytelling, and everything about Instagram, in particular its new tools, corroborates this.

At the very beginning, Instagram was a photo sharing platform, with square-filtered photos posted on a personal timeline for followers to interact with. Followers would express their thoughts through posting a ‘like’ on a photo or leaving a ‘comment’ on it. Photos have also changed considerably over the years, with landscape and portrait formats prevailing. Creators and brands have taken advantage of this trend, as it implies a wider screen coverage of intended content.

Instagram’s ‘stories’ feature is one of its most recent tools. Launched in 2016, this tool allows for the creation of short-timespan pieces, which are deleted 24 hours after posting. It allows for a more raw, unedited but captioned content that has the potential of short message diffusion. This format also allows for easier and more prompt engagement by potential customers. Instagram has a ‘send message’ feature allowing anyone to send a direct message to the content creator in a matter of seconds. Figure 1 presents two Instagram stories of TAP Air Portugal.

With the prevalent paradigm of social media comes the increasing presence of brands in the online environment, but this is by no means indicative of a rising importance of these brands (Holt, 2016). On the contrary, brands may in effect decrease in significance to the consumer to the point where the sheer online clutter renders brands meaningless to consumers. This is attributable to brands failing to generate meaningful interest among consumers. Online engagement may thus lead to a false sense of success, as there is viewership of the brand but little in the way of interest and intention to purchase, let alone brand loyalty. Loureiro et al. (2012) define brand attachment as a stage before brand love and both affective commitment and brand trust as go-betweens for brand love and loyalty.

Consumers now rely on social networks as integral components of a prevailing social media paradigm, integrating them into their day-to-day lives and using them as important aids in complex decision-making processes (Oracle, 2013). The only link between social networks and corporate success occurs
when users are engaged and committed to being active and creating content on the platforms of which they are members. However, social media allow consumers to easily share positive or negative information or experiences, affecting brand reputation (Hornikx & Hendriks, 2015). In this context, it is essential to understand how the different social media work and how they are used to evaluate brands and to communicate these evaluations with others.

The influence some members may exert is also only possible through the number of connections they have with other members (Trusov et al., 2010), implying that they will adapt their own behaviour and beliefs accordingly.

Most studies suggest that this mob-like dynamic that typifies user interaction and communication may have a meaningful impact on user intentions and not only on the intentions of people we hold in our ‘friend’ circle (Gensler et al., 2013; Katona et al., 2011). The authors conclude that with regard to demographic profiling, female members have a stronger peer influence than male members in shaping and inducing subsequent behaviour. Also, this peer influence exerts itself in that the higher the number of connections acquiring a given product, the higher is the likelihood of a non-customer member acquiring the same product. Same-ethnicity users also have a greater persuasion power with their peers than outside their ethnic group. Lastly, older members are less prone to be influenced by these forums. All these demographics are relevant when marketers are developing Instagram strategies, as how close one pays attention to key demographics will translate into higher or lower efficiency in divulging one’s own content.

**Figure 1.** TAP’s Instagram Stories

*Source:* https://www.instagram.com/tapairportugal/
Engaging with Brands

Hvass and Munar (2012, p. 99) refer to social media content in civil aviation organisations, alluding to focused advertisements as the typical content to be found in this context, which ‘fails to exploit the interactivity and development with customers[…]’.

A shift needs to occur in social media content in the airline sector towards relationship building, with social media content not necessarily related to service provision or product sales performance. If this is to happen, consumers ‘will feel a closer connection to the airline and the poster and this in turn may help build a relationship with the company and eventually loyalty’ (Hvass & Munar, 2012, p. 99). A social media platform may thus aid the airline industry in building relationships with potential customers.

Organisations in the civil aviation business cannot be oblivious to this shift and dissociated from its managerial and reputational outcomes. It is an imperative that companies manage social media. There is evidence (an example follows below) of the severe detrimental effects to reputation deriving from a careless approach and (mis)management of social media, in particular, an approach of the kind that fails to treat proactively and with strategic intent the whole business of managing stakeholder expectations. Given the nature of the airline business, the fact that it provides sensitive services, where rumour and innuendo may deeply affect business outcomes, it would be expected that airline companies pay more attention to their online environment and the social media banter, with a view not to control it, as by definition this is uncontrollable, but to monitor it and to treat it proactively, using it as a strategic tool in stakeholder management.

Evidence of the detrimental effects to the reputation of an airline of the kind described above is the case of Dave Carroll, a Canadian musician. He posted a set of three music videos, which he aptly named ‘United Breaks Guitars’ (Carroll, 2009). These videos went online and were perceived as protest songs, featuring real-life chronicles of the musician’s travelling woes when flying from Halifax to Nebraska with United Airlines.

The videos portrayed an event that occurred as luggage was being boarded onto the plane. Dave managed to film the tarmac operators throwing luggage about with no due care. To Dave’s dismay, when he collected his luggage, his customised guitar was broken. It did not take him long to put two and two together. The video drew a lot of attention from the mass media, but United Airlines remained oblivious to the whole thing. Not only did they not do anything about it, but they also felt that the situation would just go away—it would sort itself out.

Carroll however had other ideas, and he took it upon himself to write a book, start a website and even participate in a TED talk as a speaker (TED, 2013). All these initiatives were of course undertaken with a view to divulge the ‘United Breaks Guitars’ theme. This was the umbrella project, the name, the common denominator for every action he decided to undertake to ensure that people knew of his predicament. Dave was fully aware of the power of social media, and he made good use of them for his intents and purposes.

The outcome to United Airlines was not without dire consequences. The company failed to act, and its absence led to an immediate 10% loss in market share, calculated at approximately $180 million (Gulliver, 2009). This is a real-life exposition of the role and impact of social media on civil aviation and how the wrong type of exposure may translate into reputational damage, leading to negative corporate financial performance.

Instagram Content and Brand Engagement

Social media play a critical role in the endorsement of products and services, particularly when it comes to divulging intangible dimensions, such as brand or reputation. Logan (2010) refers to digital media that
are interactive and incorporate two-way communication, allowing for some computing. Sheldon (2015) argues for the use of social media as a means for attaining the satisfaction of individual needs and self-gratification. The author goes on to claim that as Instagram is a mobile photo and video sharing platform, individual gratification is commonly the motive for its usage.

This is important in eliciting an understanding of the use of social media platforms in their interrelatedness with the airline business, the interaction between a brand and its publics, information exchanges and the relationship between Instagram content, brand engagement and corporate reputation (Davies et al., 2003; Dijkmans et al., 2015). Engagement is not consensual, in the sense that it is multidisciplinary in its origins and conceptualisation. However, the construction of a relationship between a brand and consumers produces positive results for both parts (Loureiro, 2013). Hollebeek (2011) looked into the cognitive, behavioural and emotional ramifications in the context of this debate. In the current research, the stance taken was to approach engagement from the viewpoint of its most rudimentary interpretation, that of ‘the consumer’s familiarity with a company’s social media activities (i.e., cognition) and the online following of these activities (i.e., behaviour). Engagement is in this context about one being familiar with a company's online activities, which leads subsequently to their close following by individuals, who interact online, leading to brand loyalty. For Boateng and Okoe (2015), the factors such as credibility, value corruption and corporate reputation have an effect on consumers’ attitudes towards social media advertising. Likewise, online brand engagement can result in loyalty and brand love (Loureiro et al., 2017).

Online engagement manifests itself through different types of behaviour, experiences, expressions of interest/emotions, interactions, contributions and participation (Dijkmans et al., 2015). Thus, the nature and intensity of the relationship between social media usage and brand engagement at an airline company and the interface with the organisation’s reputation is at the crux of this research.

Sama (2019) analyses how advertisements on different media platforms have implications for consumer behaviour. The study shows that the Internet plays an important role in creating awareness, interest and conviction. In addition, Leung and Bai (2013) suggest that the intensity of use of a social media platform and engagement with a company’s social media content are related (see Figure 2). Therefore, the first hypothesis is defined as follows.

**H1:** There is a positive relationship between Instagram usage and engagement with an airline company’s Instagram content.

### The Futile yet Critical Attempt to Manage Social Media and Corporate Reputation

Airlines are becoming quickly aware of the importance of digital marketing, in particular the role of social media in contemporary business. The way in which airlines look at the world of online banter is...
quickly changing. Companies in the civil aviation business are undoubtedly becoming more engaged in the online game and leaving nothing to chance, as what someone says about you on social media is way too important to leave to the whim of just about anyone out there.

There is also a widely held belief that corporate reputation is indeed a vital source of value to a company. It can also be key for the purposes of establishing a direct communication channel with consumers. Fombrun (1996) looks at the decisive role of reputation in attracting latent consumers and capturing future customers. The work produced by Dijkmans et al. (2015) considers it of utmost importance that a company establish a connection with its members online, as if it does so, it would be able to improve substantially its relationship building abilities.

Aula (2010) states that not every engagement situation is necessarily beneficial, as this dynamic takes place in an environment that may be characterised as one of minimal control over both participant and content, leaving open the possibility of just about any individual out there jeopardising the reputation of any organisation. Nonetheless, it is believed that the use of social media in the airline industry generates positive vibes for a company and generally enhances its reputation. In effect, the higher the intensity of online consumer engagement, the higher is the number of users engaging in exchanging company content, and the more favourable is their take on the company, or in other words, the more positive is the corporation’s reputation. Thus, the second and third hypotheses are defined as follows.

$$\textbf{H}_2:$$ There is a positive relationship between consumers’ level of engagement with an airline company’s social media activities and its corporate reputation.

$$\textbf{H}_3:$$ There is a positive relationship between customers’ intensity of engagement with an airline company via Instagram and corporate reputation.

**Airlines and the Management of Customer Expectations**

A good reputation is indeed a gateway to positive organisational outcomes. This may be derived from what a favourable reputation does to consumer expectations of a company’s product offering, as well as its services. Corporate reputation is thus a very valuable asset and certainly one worth managing and preserving (Schmalensee, 1978; Shapiro, 1983; Yoon et al., 1993). Tellis and Fornell (1988) corroborate this thinking by building the notion that the seller’s reputation should be utilised as a significant ingredient in corporate communication, thus augmenting buyer response to advertising and marketing effectiveness generally.

The very notion of expectations is conceptually defined differently depending on whether one searches for it under service quality or consumer satisfaction (Teas, 1993). Expectations as a concept does not represent the idea of predicting or forecasting service performance but instead a notion of how such service should perform, or what it ‘should’ offer. It is in this sense not the idea of guessing what to expect but an a priori definition of what should be there. Thus, the following hypothesis ensues.

$$\textbf{H}_4:$$ Customer perceptions of a brand’s reputation will induce expectations as to that brand’s offerings.

**Methodology**

**Data Collection**

The study has been conducted on TAP Air Portugal. Although TAP Air Portugal was created in March 1945, only by the end of the twentieth century did the company manage to just about break even and indeed
attain a modicum of profit. Its fleet reaches the hefty heights of 40 aircraft. A fifth brand makeover was launched—‘TAP Air Portugal’—aligned with modernity, brightness and a Portuguese feeling expressed via the brand. This was the time when TAP Air Portugal entered one of the biggest and most significant airline alliance networks in the world—Star Alliance—and became a case study at Harvard Business School. Across the years, TAP has continued to receive distinguished accolades from its industry peers, receiving several awards and prizes.

As the main aim of the research is to provide useful insights regarding the impact of Instagram on corporate reputation and customer service expectations, an online questionnaire was administered to those who use social media platforms. It was thus distributed via social media platforms, mainly Instagram and Facebook, and by email.

The questionnaire was split into four main parts. The first part included questions regarding travelling habits, frequency of travel and travel with TAP Air Portugal, with a view to ascertaining brand awareness. The second part of the questionnaire aimed to query respondents on issues related to online activity and engagement, more precisely, the amount of time spent on Instagram, as well as the level of engagement during the time punters spend on that social network, the awareness generated by TAP’s Instagram and its level of engagement. The third part of the questionnaire included ‘service expectations’ and ‘corporate reputation’ scales. The last part consisted of a demographic characterisation, with questions drawn for the purpose of profiling the sample. The questionnaire was built and divulged via the Qualtrics tool.

After concluding the design phase of the questionnaire, a pre-test with 25 Instagram users was conducted. Certain loopholes and ambiguities in language and translations, as well as questionnaire logic flow issues, were identified and corrected. The sample was collected during August 2018. A total of 292 respondents compose the sample, from which 283 are valid answers, in a validity rate of nearly 97%.

Measures

The measures for each of the model constructs were chosen from the literature as follows.

**Instagram intensity of use:** The existing work of Dijkmans et al. (2015) was used as a basis to assess the level of intensity of Instagram usage. Six questions measured on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) through 5 (totally agree) were used.

**Instagram user engagement:** Hollebeek (2011) described engagement as not only a behavioural but also a cognitive construct. This notion blends with the concept of awareness. In this study, engagement was measured through interaction (behavioural component), rather than cognition, as suggested by Hollebeek (2011). According to numerous unofficial reports, Instagram will greatly empower those users (brands or people) who have a higher interaction with it (likes, shares, comments), consequently projecting their content further than others. Engagement was therefore measured through observation of users’ frequency in posting ‘likes’ on the platform and ‘commenting’ on publications. The variables like ‘How often do you “like” an Instagram post?’ and ‘How often do you comment on an Instagram post?’ were doubled to obtain the respondents’ rating for Instagram general publications and TAP Air Portugal content. They were rated on a 5-point Likert scale of frequency ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always).

**Expectations for TAP Air Portugal:** The instrument used for measuring expectations was taken from Gilbert and Wong (2003), which in turn was based on an adapted SERVQUAL scale (Parasuraman et al., 1991) for the airline industry. Pakdil and Aydin (2007) adopted the same strategy to measure expectations for a Turkish airline. The scale measures the expectations of the
airline service quality in terms of seven dimensions: reliability, assurance, facilities, employees, flight patterns, customisation and responsiveness. Respondents were asked to rate each of the 26 items on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all important) to 7 (extremely important).

**Perception of corporate reputation:** To measure this construct, the corporate-personality scale proposed by Davies et al. (2004) was used. The scale presents seven dimensions and 49 items; however, two of these dimensions were not used. The scale adopts the organisation as a person metaphor, and the dimensions ruthlessness and machismo were identified as potentially not useful as characterisations of an airline company, as these dimensions have been used more in the context of financial institutions or construction businesses (Davies et al., 2004). Respondents were asked to answer the following question: ‘Imagine that TAP Air Portugal comes to life as a person. Would he/she be?’ by rating the personality trait items using a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

**Data Analysis**

Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to test the research hypotheses. A two-stage process was considered (Anderson & Gerbing, 1982). In the first stage, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) models were estimated in order to assess the construct validity of the scales. CFA models were estimated through covariance-based SEM. In the second stage, the structural model was estimated to test the hypothesised relationships between the latent constructs. As followers of the TAP Instagram page were limited to begin with, in terms of sheer numbers, sample size was an issue. The last stage of the process consisted of using variance-based SEM and partial least squares (PLS) SEM (Hair et al., 2017). AMOS and Smart-PLS were used in the first and second stages, respectively.

**Data Findings**

**Sample Profile**

The sample consists of 283 individuals. More than a half of the respondents were aged between 18 and 24 years, and 70% were younger than 35. Most respondents are also female (70%). Over half of the sample have a university degree (71.2%) and are currently employed (62.1%) or still studying (33.8%). Almost every respondent is Portuguese.

Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents per frequency of travelling. The results indicate that respondents that travel by air are just 9.9% of the sample. In addition, only 25.4% said that they had never flown TAP Air Portugal before. With regard to the main reason for travelling, most respondents stated that they had travelled due to family-related issues, holidays or other non-business purposes (73.3%). This may be explained by the relatively young profile of the population surveyed.

**Instagram Use and Engagement**

Most respondents have an Instagram account (89.5%; see Table 1), implying a strong likelihood of being in contact with TAP Air Portugal’s content. Also, the respondents who have an Instagram profile spend an average of 30 minutes every day using the app (81.9%). Analysing the mean distribution for the variable
Table 1. Distribution of Respondents’ Travel Habits and Instagram Usage

| Respondents’ travel habits | N   | %  |
|---------------------------|-----|----|
| Number of trips since 2015 (n = 283) |     |    |
| Never                     | 28  | 9.9|
| 1–3 times                 | 83  | 29.3|
| 4–6 times                 | 76  | 26.9|
| 7–9 times                 | 31  | 11.1|
| 10 or more times          | 65  | 23.0|
| Reasons for travelling (n = 255) |     |    |
| Business                  | 13  | 5.1|
| Family/particular         | 187 | 73.3|
| Both                      | 55  | 21.6|
| Number of trips with TAP since 2015 (n = 248) |     |    |
| Never                     | 63  | 25.4|
| 1–3 times                 | 115 | 46.4|
| 4–6 times                 | 35  | 14.1|
| 7–9 times                 | 14  | 5.6|
| 10 or more times          | 21  | 8.5|
| Respondents’ Instagram usage |     |    |
| Do you have an Instagram account? (n = 276) |     |    |
| Yes                       | 247 | 89.5|
| No                        | 29  | 10.5|
| Last week, how much time did you spend on Instagram per day? (n = 238) |     |    |
| Less than 10 minutes      | 21  | 8.8|
| 10–30 minutes             | 43  | 18.1|
| 31–60 minutes             | 49  | 20.6|
| 1–2 hours                 | 1   | 0.4|
| 2–3 hours                 | 29  | 12.2|
| More than 3 hours         | 55  | 23.1|

Source: The authors.

of ‘Instagram intensity of use’ (Table 4), there is overall a high intensity of use and high sense of belonging to the Instagram community.

Regarding awareness of TAP Air Portugal’s Instagram profile, over half of the sample (51.9%) were unaware of the existence of the profile, and among those who were aware, only 53% (n = 61) were followers of TAP Air Portugal’s Instagram page.

Engagement levels on Instagram were also measured. Table 2 shows the respondents’ distribution of ‘likes’ and ‘comments’ on Instagram’s general content and specifically on TAP-related content. Instagram interactions are on average very low and are even lower on TAP’s Instagram page, where 93.4% of the respondents never commented on a post and only 57.5% ‘liked’ some post.

Construct Validity Assessment

CFA was first conducted to assess the validity and reliability of the measurement model of each construct. An overview of the assessment measures applied is presented in Table 2 for the ‘Instagram usage’ and ‘engagement’ constructs, ‘corporate character’ model and ‘customer expectations’ model. Some items were removed during the purification procedure because of low item reliability values or to improve the corresponding construct average variance extracted (AVE) value.

The AVE and composite reliability (CR) values of the constructs were clearly placed above the recommended thresholds of 0.5 and 0.7, respectively, for all latent constructs. Additionally, all loadings
Table 2. Descriptive and Validity Assessment for Items of the Model Constructs

| Construct                                | Mean     | Standard Deviation | Loading |
|------------------------------------------|----------|--------------------|---------|
| **Instagram usage and engagement**       |          |                    |         |
| (sample n = 201; model fit statistics: chi-squared = 35.886, df = 13, p < 0.05; CFI = 0.964; IFI = 0.964; RMSEA = 0.094, 90% CI = [0.058, 0.131]) |          |                    |         |
| Instagram usage intensity (AVE = 0.539; CR = 0.851) | 3.89    | 1.101              | 0.875   |
| I feel proud when I tell people I am on Instagram. | 2.94    | 1.003              | 0.668   |
| Instagram is part of my daily activity.  | 3.74    | 1.101              | 0.914   |
| I feel part of the Instagram community.  | 3.25    | 1.010              | 0.647   |
| I would feel sorry if Instagram shut down. | 3.58    | 1.168              | 0.631   |
| Instagram engagement (AVE = 0.679; CR = 0.807) |          |                    |         |
| How often do you ‘like’ a post?         | 3.00    | 0.592              | 0.703   |
| How often do you ‘comment’ on a post?   | 2.06    | 0.554              | 0.565   |
| TAP Instagram engagement (AVE = 0.539; CR = 0.700) |          |                    |         |
| How often do you ‘like’ a post?         | 2.10    | 1.012              | 0.708(a) |
| How often do you ‘comment’ on a post?   | 1.10    | 0.396              | 0.759(a) |
| **Corporate character scale** (sample n = 255; model fit statistics: chi-squared = 651.083, df = 161, p < 0.05; CFI = 0.855; IFI = 0.857; RMSEA = 0.097, 90% CI = [0.090, 0.107]) |          |                    |         |
| Enterprise (AVE = 0.510; CR = 0.838)    | 5.15    | 1.214              | 0.801   |
| Trendy                                   | 4.76    | 1.229              | 0.811   |
| Up to date                               | 4.68    | 1.201              | 0.828   |
| Innovative                               | 4.33    | 1.292              | 0.740   |
| Extraverted                              | 4.13    | 1.180              | 0.713   |
| Daring                                   | 5.52    | 1.257              | 0.890   |
| Reliable                                 | 6.09    | 0.889              | 0.602   |
| Secure                                   | 4.42    | 1.390              | 0.821   |
| Chic (AVE = 0.503; CR = 0.721)           | 5.03    | 1.316              | 0.787   |
| Charming                                 | 5.38    | 1.092              | 0.727   |
| Stylish                                   | 4.88    | 1.221              | 0.644   |
| Agreeableness (AVE = 0.516; CR = 0.905)  | 4.71    | 1.440              | 0.756   |
| Elegant                                   | 4.74    | 1.260              | 0.763   |
| Sincere                                   | 4.64    | 1.320              | 0.802   |
| Trustworthy                               | 4.66    | 1.297              | 0.902   |
| Open                                      | 4.60    | 1.299              | 0.876   |
| Socially responsible                      | 5.00    | 1.308              | 0.859   |
| Informality                              | 5.04    | 1.307              | 0.794   |
| Informality                              | 5.14    | 1.146              | 0.998   |
| **Reliability** (AVE = 0.519; CR = 0.764) |          |                    |         |
| TAP Air Portugal provides good ground/in-flight services constantly. | 6.39    | 0.801              | 0.760   |
| TAP Air Portugal performs the service right the first time. | 6.07    | 1.044              | 0.699   |
| TAP Air Portugal provides quality food and beverages. | 5.71    | 1.102              | 0.700   |

(Table 2 continued)
Assurance (AVE = 0.647; CR = 0.844)

| Item                                                                 | Mean | Standard Deviation | Loading |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------|--------------------|---------|
| The behaviour of TAP Air Portugal employees gives you confidence.    | 6.41 | 0.902              | 0.850   |
| TAP Air Portugal makes you feel safe.                               | 6.64 | 0.785              | 0.785   |
| Employees of TAP Air Portugal have the knowledge to answer your     | 6.15 | 0.840              | 0.591   |
| questions.                                                          |      |                    |         |

Facilities (AVE = 0.503; CR = 0.752)

| Item                                                                 | Mean | Standard Deviation | Loading |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------|--------------------|---------|
| The aircraft has clean and comfortable interiors and seats.         | 6.40 | 0.813              | 0.705   |
| TAP Air Portugal has up-to-date in-flight entertainment facilities   | 4.91 | 1.265              | 0.733   |
| and programmes.                                                     |      |                    |         |
| TAP Air Portugal has comfortable waiting lounges.                   | 5.30 | 1.249              | 0.744   |
| Employees (AVE = 0.511; CR = 0.774)                                  |      |                    |         |
| Employees of TAP Air Portugal are consistently courteous with you.   | 6.23 | 0.910              | 0.808   |
| Employees of TAP Air Portugal appear neat and tidy.                 | 5.71 | 1.126              | 0.646   |
| Flight patterns (AVE = 0.545; CR = 0.780)                           |      |                    |         |
| TAP Air Portugal has non-stop service to various destinations.       | 5.88 | 1.037              | 0.768   |
| TAP Air Portugal has convenient flight schedules and enough         | 5.91 | 1.046              | 0.809   |
| frequencies.                                                        |      |                    |         |
| TAP Air Portugal has global alliance partners in order to provide a  | 5.92 | 0.929              | 0.615   |
| wider network and smoother transfers.                               |      |                    |         |

Customisation (AVE = 0.549; CR = 0.709)

| Item                                                                 | Mean | Standard Deviation | Loading |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------|--------------------|---------|
| Employees of TAP Air Portugal understand your specific needs.       | 5.11 | 1.222              | 0.842   |
| Employees of TAP Air Portugal give you individual attention.       | 4.46 | 1.411              | 0.808   |

Responsiveness (AVE = 0.586; CR = 0.809)

| Item                                                                 | Mean | Standard Deviation | Loading |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------|--------------------|---------|
| Employees of TAP Air Portugal give your prompt service.             | 5.40 | 0.973              | 0.748   |
| TAP Air Portugal has an efficient check-in and baggage handling     | 6.31 | 0.786              | 0.683   |
| service.                                                           |      |                    |         |
| Employees of TAP Air Portugal are never too busy to respond to your  | 5.03 | 1.336              | 0.783   |
| request or complaint.                                              |      |                    |         |

Source: The authors.

Note: Loadings were obtained through partial least squares structural equation modelling.

were significant and greater than 0.5, indicating item reliability. Consequently, convergent validity and reliability were verified. Regarding the discriminant validity assessment, Fornell and Larcker’s (1981) criterion was verified for almost all constructs per Tables 3 and 4. Therefore, it can be argued that each construct is unique and distinct from the other constructs.

**Hypotheses Testing**

The hypotheses were tested by estimating the construct regression coefficients and their significance using PLS SEM. The current study set out to understand how a brand like TAP Air Portugal can derive reputational benefits from using efficient Instagram strategies. There is theoretical background to support the idea that the concepts are positively related, and consequently H1 was derived. Two models were estimated—one just for followers of TAP Air Portugal’s Instagram page (model M1) and the other for followers of general content (model M2)—with the aim of comparing effects.
Figure 3 presents the path diagram of the structural model, including the standardised regression coefficient estimates using the subsample of followers of TAP Air Portugal’s Instagram page. Non-significant path estimates are represented by dotted lines.

The results from the structural equation model show that only one hypothesis is supported. As the estimated coefficient of the relationship between brand user engagement and perception of corporate reputation is the unique significant coefficient (0.464, \(p < 0.05\)), there is support for only H2. Consumer perception of corporate reputation is only explained through the level of engagement with brand content (\(R^2 = 0.214\)), since the influence of the intensity of use of the platform is not significant (total effect estimate = 0.115, \(p = 0.643\)); therefore, H3 is not verified. H4 was defined to understand how the perception of reputation influences service expectations. The estimated model allows for the conclusion that there is no relationship between the two constructs (coefficient = 0.126; \(p = 0.464\)).

The results regarding H1 and H2 differ when users of general content of Instagram are considered instead. Figure 4 presents the results of model M2.

Comparing the M1 and M2 models, it is possible to say that users that have a higher intensity of use of Instagram will also be driven to interact at a higher level with general content from their feed and network (coefficient = 0.588, \(p < 0.05\) [model M2]). However, as mentioned above, there is no relation between the intensity of use of Instagram and the level of engagement with the content of TAP Air Portugal (coefficient = −0.255, \(p = 0.469\) [model M1]); therefore, H1 is not verified.

It is worth noting that user interaction with the general content of Instagram has no effect on brand reputation (coefficient = −0.171, \(p = 0.058\)), although it may exist and be negative, if the reference level of significance is 6% or higher; in this case, the higher the users’ interaction, the lower is their evaluation as to corporate reputation.

Table 3. Correlation Matrix of Corporate Character Factors

|                | Enterprise | Competence | Chic | Agreeableness | Informality |
|----------------|------------|------------|------|---------------|-------------|
| Enterprise     | 0.714      |            |      |               |             |
| Competence     | 0.601      | 0.763      |      |               |             |
| Chic           | 0.829      | 0.653      | 0.709|               |             |
| Agreeableness  | 0.671      | 0.807      | 0.745| 0.718         |             |
| Informality    | 0.514      | 0.411      | 0.509| 0.582         |             |

Source: The authors.
Note: * Diagonal values represent the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) values.

Table 4. Correlation Matrix of Service Expectation Factors

|                | R       | A       | F       | E       | FP      | C       | RS      |
|----------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Reliability (R)| 0.720   |         |         |         |         |         |         |
| Assurance (A)   | 0.759   | 0.804   |         |         |         |         |         |
| Facilities (F)  | 0.761   | 0.705   | 0.709   |         |         |         |         |
| Employees (E)   | 0.777   | 0.865   | 0.794   | 0.715   |         |         |         |
| Flight patterns (FP) | 0.607 | 0.512   | 0.634   | 0.578   | 0.738   |         |         |
| Customisation (C) | 0.418 | 0.419   | 0.640   | 0.527   | 0.485   | 0.741   |         |
| Responsiveness (RS) | 0.607 | 0.560   | 0.679   | 0.720   | 0.621   | 0.666   | 0.766   |

Source: The authors.
Note: * Diagonal values represent the square root of AVE values.
Conclusions

The current study aims to provide useful insights regarding the influence of an Instagram strategy on perceived corporate reputation and consequently on customer service expectations. Two models were tested for an airline business, more precisely in the context of TAP Air Portugal, one just for followers of TAP Air Portugal’s Instagram page and the other for followers of general content.

Of the respondents, 99.3% knew the TAP Air Portugal brand, and 89.5% had an active Instagram account, but only 47% were aware of TAP Air Portugal’s presence on Instagram. TAP therefore needs to capture a new audience and increase its brand awareness through Instagram engagement.

With respect to engagement levels, the sample presents conservative levels of Instagram engagement, with the mean values of likes and comments being just under mid-scale for general engagement on Instagram and even lower when we shift towards engagement with TAP Air Portugal. Thus, TAP Air Portugal’s Instagram profile is yet to become a broad channel for communication. This may indicate that TAP Air Portugal is not investing in sponsored content and failing to capture potential followers. Although it is true that awareness does not lead to followers, investment on sponsored content and paid promotion using Instagram’s available tools would be of great value in attaining a positive brand image and general awareness.

The first hypothesis refers to the relationship between the intensity of use of the Instagram platform and engagement with TAP Air Portugal’s Instagram content. Dijkmans et al. (2015) had already proven this relationship, as there is in effect an influence of intensity of use on the level of engagement, although this is true for certain types of engagement. The work of Dijkmans et al. (2015) measured engagement
mainly through a cognitive approach. However, Hollebeek (2011) proposed a different approach to this concept, as engagement should be considered as interaction and not just as awareness or familiarity. Results from the model are different for general engagement with Instagram and engagement with the brand. Users that showed a higher intensity of use of Instagram’s general content were also driven to interact at a higher level with general content from their feed and network. In contrast, this relationship did not occur among the followers of TAP’s Instagram page.

The second and third hypotheses state that a customer’s level of engagement and intensity of use of the Instagram platform influence their perception of corporate reputation. Engagement and corporate reputation were predicted to have a positive relationship according to Dijkmans et al. (2015). Our study shows that users who interact at a higher level with TAP Air Portugal’s Instagram content tend to have a better perception of its brand reputation. However, user interaction with the general content of Instagram has no effect on perceived brand reputation. In addition, the influence of the intensity of use of the platform on the perception of corporate reputation is not significant.

The fourth hypothesis regards the relationship between perception of corporate reputation and service expectations. Yoon et al. (1993) point to a positive influence of reputation on service expectations, albeit in a different industry (insurance). Contrary to what was expected, the study results show that airline service expectations are not influenced by any of the model constructs, particularly that of brand reputation.

The question then is: How can TAP Air Portugal strategically benefit from its presence on Instagram? Is there a connection between the latter and customer digital engagement and the relationship between all of this and corporate reputation? If recommendations were to be drawn for TAP’s Instagram page strategy, the key one would be to shift strategy towards low level of awareness pundits. The brand could benefit in the long term if awareness levels increase, as awareness can be linked to engagement, in that active users with high levels of intensity do engage more with the brand.

A possible way forward strategically for TAP is also to promote the brand via ‘ambassadors’, with employees taking over the brand page, a week at a time. Such an approach may prove successful if adopted with consistency and cohesion (much like what Swiss airlines has been doing since 2018). The constant shift of content type may also diversify the type of audience targeted, but it may also disperse engagement levels across the same audience, with no strongly defined trend pursued.

Regarding recommendations on reputation and service expectations, TAP Air Portugal is not benefitting from a possible relationship between these two variables, but corporate reputation enhancement goals need to be kept in mind as a communication priority.

**Theoretical and Practical Contributions**

The academic and practical contributions may be aggregated for the purposes of convenience here and can best be summarised in a few key points: (a) Users who interact at a higher level with TAP Air Portugal’s Instagram content tend to have a more positive perception of the brand’s reputation; (b) Users that have a higher intensity of use of Instagram’s general content are also driven to interact at a higher level with general content; (c) User interaction with the general content of Instagram has no effect on perceived brand reputation; and (d) Airline service expectations are not influenced by any of the model constructs.

In this context, we conclude that the way companies communicate on social networks, especially via Instagram, for which the study was developed, is critical for the effectiveness of communication. The study allows companies to define concrete means and tools in which to reach different consumer segments and increase the effectiveness of communications with their target groups.

Companies must take into account that social networks are a tool of excellence for targeted communications but must be worked properly in order to achieve the purposes and aims at hand. Consumers are
subject to numerous and constant approaches, and companies must be effective in their communications in order to achieve distinctiveness and reach consumers.

**Limitations and Future Research**

As with all studies, this study has limitations, specifically with regard to the availability of data. The subsample of followers of TAP Air Portugal’s Instagram page is small \((n = 61)\). Future research should guarantee that more data is collected. Future research could also gauge knowledge on travel habits, including travel frequency, with a particular airline, and its impact on varying perceptions of reputation, thus incorporating the moderating role of travel frequency in model building. The incorporation of other variables that are not directly related to the flight experience but relate to other organisational dimensions is seen as desirable and worthy of future scrutiny. Also, the type of content produced by TAP Air Portugal could trigger different patterns of response—not all of them conducive to or aligned with organisational strategy. It is also suggested that a more in-depth qualitative analysis with regard to content be performed.

The same study may be replicated in different areas of activity, particularly within the tourism sector. Despite its distinct traits and characteristics, the same analytical framework may be utilised, leading to social media pathways and the application of social media tools that are more effective in reaching relevant consumer segments. More and more consumers seek differentiated communications that are directed at their choice criteria and requirements, leading them to obtain information that they consider unique and specific. Those companies that manage to excel at managing social media effectively are capable of differentiating themselves, access their potential customers better and enhance loyalty with their customer base, a critical advantage in today’s cut-throat markets.

**Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

**Funding**

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

**ORCID iD**

Catarina Marques [ID](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2159-738X)

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**Authors’ Bio-sketch**

**Rui Vinhas da Silva** is at Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL) of Business Research Unit in Lisboa, Portugal.

**Catarina Marques** is at Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL) of Business Research Unit in Lisboa, Portugal.

**Diogo Martinho** is at Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL) of Business Research Unit in Lisboa, Portugal.

**Natália Teixeira** is at Instituto Superior de Gestão.

**José Crespo de Carvalho** is at Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL) of Business Research Unit in Lisboa, Portugal.