

Airbnb and the inclusion of people with disabilities and reduced mobility

Airbnb e a inclusão de pessoas com deficiência e mobilidade reduzida

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ABSTRACT

Accessibility is a fundamental component for social and economic inclusion, especially in the context of tourism, in which the traveler's experience often begins with booking accommodation online, and so it also refers to issues of digital accessibility in the experience of using digital platforms. This study examines the relationship between the Airbnb digital platform and the needs of people with disabilities or reduced mobility, both in terms of the travel experience and the experience of using the digital platform, highlighting the importance of access to clear and accurate information. The aim is to identify, through User-Generated Content (UGC) and resources, which opportunities for promoting inclusive tourism in the region the platform proposes. Thus, enabling other researchers to delve deeper into the topic, as well as to contribute with the tourism market and their academic journey. The study covered the Piauiense Coast. It was developed through qualitative research, seeking to analyze the process regarding the problem. As a result, the detailed analysis of Airbnb's current accessibility tools and practices in the cities of Parnaíba, Luís Correia and Cajueiro da Praia reveals that there are good opportunities, however, it reinforces the importance of continuous commitment to accessibility, encouraging both hosts, academia, and industry to collaborate to create an inclusive digital environment.

Keywords: Accessibility. Platform. Technology. Tourism.

RESUMO

A acessibilidade é um componente fundamental para a inclusão social e econômica, especialmente no contexto do turismo, em que a experiência do viajante começa frequentemente com a reserva de acomodações online, assim também se refere a questões de acessibilidade digital na experiência de uso de plataformas digitais. Este estudo examinou a relação da plataforma digital Airbnb com as necessidades das pessoas com deficiência ou mobilidade reduzida, tanto no trato da experiência da viagem quanto na experiência do uso da plataforma digital, destacando a importância do acesso à informação clara e precisa. Objetivou-se identificar, por meio de Conteúdos Gerados por Usuários (CGUs) e recursos, quais oportunidades para a promoção do turismo inclusivo na região a plataforma propõe. Assim, possibilitando que outros pesquisadores possam se aprofundar no tema, bem como possam agregar no mercado turístico e em sua jornada acadêmica. O trabalho teve como área de abrangência de estudo o Litoral Piauiense. Foi desenvolvido por meio de uma pesquisa de natureza qualitativa, buscando analisar o processo acerca da problemática. Como resultados a análise detalhada das ferramentas e práticas atuais de acessibilidade do Airbnb nas cidades de Parnaíba, Luís Correia e Cajueiro da Praia revelam que há boas oportunidades, porém, reforça-se a importância de um compromisso contínuo com a acessibilidade, incentivando tanto os anfitriões, a academia quanto a indústria a colaborar para a criação de um ambiente digital inclusivo.

Palavras-chave: Acessibilidade. Plataforma. Tecnologia. Turismo.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, the constant human search to solve their needs has triggered the development of innovative techniques that transformed their reality in several spheres of society, such as tourism.

In this journey of innovations, the current landscape has been transformed with the emergence of tools that have revolutionized the way we plan, book, and experience travel, offering more ease, autonomy, and comfort from the moment of choosing the destination to the stay and the return to the place of origin.

Therefore, before becoming a tangible reality, tourism depends on the exchange of information to generate expectations and desires directed toward a particular place. In this context, the new model of tourists increasingly turns to the internet to plan their trips, as well as to conduct research at the time of purchase or destination selection, whether regarding prices, preferences, complaints, among others (Silva *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, websites, social media, blogs and Booking platforms play an essential role in disseminating these data, connecting travellers, destinations and suppliers.

Aiming to provide enriching and memorable experiences for everyone, it is essential that tourism practices be accessible and inclusive, meeting the needs of all individuals. Thus, this research analyzed the Airbnb booking website. The platform's initial idea began in 2007 when two friends hosted three guests in their home in San Francisco (Airbnb, [s.d.]). "Nowadays, the platform has 5 million hosts that have received more than 1.5 billion guests in almost every country of the world." (Airbnb, [s.d.]). The scope of this research focuses on the cities of Parnaíba, Luís Correia, and Cajueiro da Praia, in the state of Piauí, considering the inclusion guidelines established in the Statute of Persons with Disabilities, Law No. 13.146/2015.

Tourism is an activity of great economic significance in various countries. However, individuals with physical, visual, auditory, intellectual, mental, and deaf-blind disabilities, as well as those with reduced mobility — including the elderly, pregnant women, nursing mothers, people with infants, and individuals with obesity — still face challenges in participating in this sector. These challenges may be physical, such as a lack of accessibility in tourist attractions, or sensory, such as the absence of information in an accessible format. Therefore, using User-Generated Content (UGC) as a source of secondary information is essential, as it serves as an additional source of information (Lamas *et al.*, 2019).

Airbnb, a widely used booking platform among the new profile of tourists, has the potential to foster greater inclusion for all by promoting the democratization of information, which opens up new possibilities for easier accommodation choices. Given this, the following research question arises: "How can Airbnb be a platform that prioritizes the inclusion of people with disabilities (PwDs) and people with reduced mobility (PRM)?"

It is assumed that the use of Airbnb, when directed towards these individuals, can make the tourism experience more accessible and inclusive. Therefore, it is possible that the platform can provide immersive and personalized tourism experiences.

Conducting a study focused on this theme, aiming to add knowledge, could open new opportunities in the tourism sector. In this regard, establishments could develop more accessible practices.

The aim of this work was to examine the relationship between the digital platform Airbnb and the needs of people with disabilities or reduced mobility as a result of tourism activities. The objectives were to discuss the importance of access to information, analyze the availability of accessible accommodations in the Piauí coastline, and identify, through tools and resources, the opportunities the platform offers for promoting inclusive tourism in the region.

This article addresses a current and underexplored theme regarding accessibility within booking websites and/or applications. In doing so, it offers a valuable contribution to academia, enabling other researchers to delve deeper into the topic and, from there, develop new studies that can add value to the tourism market and their academic journey.

Society can benefit from this work by rethinking tourism practices to ensure they encompass all types of people, especially those with physical or mental limitations. This can promote improvements in quality of life, social inclusion, and the economic growth of a region.

Additionally, the research was motivated by the author's personal experience of living with a family member who has physical limitations and who often refrains from exploring new destinations due to a lack of confidence in the accessibility and inclusion that certain establishments may offer.

THEORETICAL REFERENCE

Inclusive tourism

Cockburn-Wooten et al. (2018) state that accessible tourism can only function effectively when stakeholders within an organization and the broader tourism system work together to enable travel for people with accessibility needs, ensuring that the entire journey to, from, and within a destination is accessible, along with their experiences.

It is crucial that tourism be accessible to everyone. In this regard, the 1988 Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil guarantees everyone the right to freedom, equality, and leisure. Tourism, as a global phenomenon, brings people together by significantly increasing travel and connections around the world (Araújo; Oliveira; Perinotto, 2022).

Inclusion of people with disabilities or reduced mobility in tourism, where accommodation establishments must be properly adapted to welcome this population, "both in terms of staff qualifications and infrastructure, as the lack of accessibility hinders the participation of people with disabilities in tourism" (Ferst; Souza; Coutinho, 2020, p. 3).

The statistics on social exclusion in tourism also include different types of people with disabilities and reduced mobility (permanent or temporary, such as some

elderly individuals, obese individuals, pregnant women, people with young children, etc.), as the facilities and equipment in tourist buildings and leisure spaces may not be accessible to everyone, and many service providers are still not prepared to offer inclusive services. In this context, tourism accessibility has become a priority for the federal government, especially since 2007 (Brasil, 2023).

To ensure full virtual accessibility, a website must follow the W3C guidelines and implement the recommendations of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), enabling all people to access content in an inclusive, navigable, and efficient manner. This is essential to effectively convey information about the destination from the first contact, encouraging tourists to explore the location (Araújo; Oliveira; Perinotto, 2022).

Nascimento (2018) points out that the existence and inclusion of accessibility are relevant to promoting the social engagement of people with special needs in tourist destinations, ensuring that their experience during the trip is safe and of the same quality as that of other people. It also takes into account the social behavior of the local population towards people with disabilities.

Tourism is made of travel, encounters, exchanges, and the constant availability of information, which is why part of the population, such as people with disabilities, often ends up excluded from tourism. Therefore, it is essential that tourism communication be available online so that people with disabilities can plan their trips with accessible and accurate information (Rodrigues; Perinotto, 2022).

Devile e Kastenholz (2018) explain that accessible tourism is perceived as a means of promoting individual and social well-being, benefiting not only people with disabilities but also society as a whole. Consequently, it should be viewed in the future as much broader than simply providing a range of support to marginalized target groups, becoming a set of basic rules and codes of practice to help develop all tourism offerings and destinations in an inclusive manner. The authors also emphasize the importance of defining accessible tourism in a way that reflects all its dimensions and multidisciplinary nature.

It is interesting to understand the importance of accessibility in tourism because not all people have their needs met as they should. The products and services offered to people with disabilities have many limitations. People with disabilities face various barriers due to the fact that environments and services are designed without considering the different accessibility needs of a large part of the population (World Tourism Organization, 2020).

Tourism accessibility is not limited to physical issues such as accessible bathrooms, ramps, elevators, and handrails, but is also related to attitudinal and communication issues that can hinder the participation of everyone in tourist destinations (Oliveira, 2023).

Providing tourism activities that promote the autonomy of people with disabilities is a relatively recent policy and has been taking shape in tourism and leisure activities in recent years. This policy stems from an initial concept of proposing the participation of people with disabilities in activities (Nascimento, 2018). In other

words, it is necessary to seek mechanisms and ways to transform inclusive tourism to serve the entire population.

Thus, accessible tourism activities for people with disabilities can take place in numerous ways and perspectives, with what is truly lacking being the recognition of the person with a disability as a tourist, a consumer of activities and tourism services, and leaving aside the misguided impression of incapacity that has been socially attributed to them until today (Rodrigues; Valduga, 2021).

Technology and accessibility in tourism

With the advent of information and communication technologies (ICT), connectivity has become an important part of people's daily lives and that of tourists. Tourist destinations increasingly need to connect tourism with tourists and the modern world. Technology plays a key role in promoting accessibility in the tourism sector, making the travel experience more inclusive and accessible to people with different needs (Giovanini, 2020).

According to Xiang (2018), ICTs have evolved from an initial focus on convenience and functionality to online communication and persuasion tools that understand the needs and desires of travelers. The author states that recent technological advancements have enabled access to a wide range of real-time data, in greater volume and in various formats, allowing for the connection of all the actors that make up a complex tourism system.

Virtual and augmented reality technology has been used to provide virtual experiences of tourist destinations and attractions. This especially benefits people with reduced mobility, allowing them to explore remote or historical sites without leaving home. Additionally, virtual reality can be used to train staff in tourism businesses on how to provide accessible services (Lima, 2020).

Mendes Filho et al. (2017) argue that the internet and its real-time processing affect consumers of tourism products as a tool that can reduce disturbances during travel, provide support, and thus enable them to have a much more enjoyable trip. Beyond the various benefits previously mentioned, technology also serves as a tool to facilitate integration. This can be achieved through the use of assistive applications, which can be defined as software developed for mobile devices and designed to help people with special needs carry out their activities independently and autonomously.

The rapid development of technology in recent years and its widespread use in people's daily lives have led to the development of these new business models. All of this has resulted in changes in consumption habits due to the greater availability of new information technologies, such as the internet and smartphones (Giovanini, 2020).

Assistive devices, such as voice recognition apps and screen readers, make mobile devices and computers more accessible for people with visual impairments or communication difficulties. These technologies allow users to interact with tourism apps and websites more effectively, enhancing their independence during travel.

This “revolution” has created a different reality for consumers: there are no longer just physical agencies, but also so-called virtual agencies, and there are more offers, more information, and more ways to purchase a tourism product. Mendes Filho et al. (2017, p. 184) argue that “the internet offers a wide range of information that can help travelers even without going to a travel agency. This describes a more autonomous behavior.”

Therefore, given the popularity of mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets, and the vast range of applications available to users, the use of assistive apps by people with disabilities can be seen as a way to express their autonomy, providing equal opportunities for consumption, regardless of tourist destinations (Lima, 2020).

Real-time communication tools, such as translation apps and video interpretation services, help overcome language barriers and facilitate communication between travelers and tourism service providers. This is especially useful for deaf or hard-of-hearing travelers, ensuring they can communicate easily during their trips (Mendes Filho et al., 2017).

Technology plays a key role in promoting accessibility in tourism, helping to make travel and tourism experiences more inclusive for people with disabilities.

Overall, technology plays a key role in promoting accessibility in tourism, allowing more people to enjoy meaningful and enriching travel experiences. By continuing to develop and implement accessible technological solutions, the tourism sector can become more inclusive and welcoming for all travelers.

Despite the advances, there are still challenges to be overcome, such as the standardization of accessibility information and the integration of technologies in tourist destinations in developing countries. However, ongoing technological innovation offers great opportunities to create a truly inclusive and accessible tourism experience for all.

Innovations in accessible tourism and Airbnb

With the development of tourism, the use of information has become very important for these activities and is considered a fundamental functionality of tourism activities, requiring the use of various technologies in all tourism sectors, from transportation to accommodation. The development of globalization also allows these activities to evolve alongside technologies (Santos, 2021).

Airbnb is one of the new technologies that emerged in recent times, founded in 2008 in the United States, specifically in San Francisco, California, by Americans Brian Chesky, Joe Gebbia, and Nathan Blecharczyk. Its goal was to create a space where people could list, book, or rent different types of accommodations worldwide (ranging from a single room in a simple house to entire farms, castles, or igloos), using mobile apps or the internet (Damazio, 2020).

Airbnb has been a catalyst for accessible tourism, allowing people with disabilities to explore the world in a more independent and comfortable way through tools on the platform. Through partnerships with organizations dedicated to accessibility

and awareness initiatives, Airbnb has been working to promote inclusion and equal opportunities in the travel sector (Martins, 2023).

Ensuring that accommodations listed on Airbnb are accessible means that people with disabilities or reduced mobility, when it comes to lodging, can enjoy the same travel opportunities as anyone else. This contributes to greater social inclusion and the breaking down of barriers that may limit the participation of certain groups of travelers. Sophie Morgan, a television presenter and advocate for the rights of people with disabilities, comments in a video published on the Airbnb website about how to host guests with accessibility requirements:

I've been in a wheelchair for about 19 years. There's nothing easy about traveling. There is so much lack of transparency around traveling. Even when the listing says it's adapted, it's never really adapted. The hardest things are finding accessible accommodation and not having enough information about where I will stay. [...] I'm looking forward to being an Airbnb host because I'm aware there is such a lack of accessible accommodation. I've worked hard to adapt my home to suit my needs, and I want other people with disabilities to benefit from my space, so I want to share it (Airbnb, 2022b).

When travelers find accommodations that meet their accessibility needs, they have a more positive and stress-free experience during their trip. This contributes to customer satisfaction and increases the likelihood of returning to Airbnb services in the future. Accessibility within Airbnb is of utmost importance as it promotes inclusion and equal opportunities for all travelers, regardless of their physical, sensory, or cognitive abilities (Airbnb, [s.d.]).

Airbnb guests may have different accessibility requirements. People with reduced mobility sometimes use walkers or wheelchairs and want to know if the room meets their needs before making a reservation (Airbnb, [s.d.]).

In summary, Airbnb has played a significant role at the intersection of tourism, technology, and accessibility, providing travelers with a more inclusive and personalized experience. By continuing to innovate and collaborate with various stakeholders, Airbnb is helping to shape a more accessible and inclusive future for the travel industry (Martins, 2023).

"Airbnb now has a category called 'Adapted Spaces'" (Airbnb, [n.d.], p. 1), which highlights spaces approved as suitable for wheelchair users, with step-free entrances and at least one bedroom and one bathroom. Spaces that have all possible adaptations in their listing can be included in this new category. Promoting accessibility is not just a matter of legal compliance, but also a social and business responsibility. Companies that demonstrate a commitment to inclusion and accessibility often receive a positive response from society and build a solid reputation as advocates for diversity and equity (Airbnb, 2022a).

Airbnb has adopted innovative technologies to improve accessibility in its listings. For example, advanced filtering features allow users to find accommodations that meet their specific accessibility needs, such as access ramps, adapted bathrooms, elevators, among others. Additionally, the platform allows hosts to provide

detailed information about the accessibility of their properties, helping travelers with disabilities make informed choices (Martins, 2023).

Accessibility within Airbnb plays a key role in creating a more inclusive, positive, and accessible travel environment for all travelers. By prioritizing accessibility, Airbnb not only meets the needs of its customers but also promotes important social and business value (Airbnb, [s.d.]).

Thus, innovations in accessible tourism and Airbnb's initiatives aim to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for all travelers. Technology plays a crucial role in eliminating barriers and enhancing the travel experience for people with disabilities. As the demand for accessible tourism grows, it is expected that more companies will follow Airbnb's example by investing in accessibility and inclusion.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCESS

The study focused on the Piauí Coast, where research of a qualitative nature was developed, aiming to analyze the process surrounding the issue, which "would then normally involve data collection through social interactions between the researcher and the phenomenon being studied" (Appolinário, 2012, p. 61). Based on this, according to Creswell (2010), qualitative research aims to understand the meanings of social or human problems attributed by individuals or groups.

The exploratory research aims to propose a closer look at the use of technology in the tourism sector to make it more accessible for people with disabilities (PwDs) and people with reduced mobility (PRM). Gil (2008, p. 27) states that "this type of research is conducted especially when the chosen topic is little explored, making it difficult to formulate precise and operationalizable hypotheses," so that the result of this research is "subject to investigation through more systematic procedures" (Gil, 2008, p. 27).

The information constructions were made through the UGC. However, the study was conducted via the internet, where Appolinário (2012, p. 65) also highlights that "[...] although the researcher may be in a 'laboratory,' the subject is in an uncontrolled situation (they could be answering a call or accessing the internet from any location)."

Therefore, since the topic was little explored in the region, it was necessary to obtain sources of documentary information. According to Gil (2008), documentary data are important for providing information regarding past behavior, allowing for the development of a more objective research that is closer to reality.

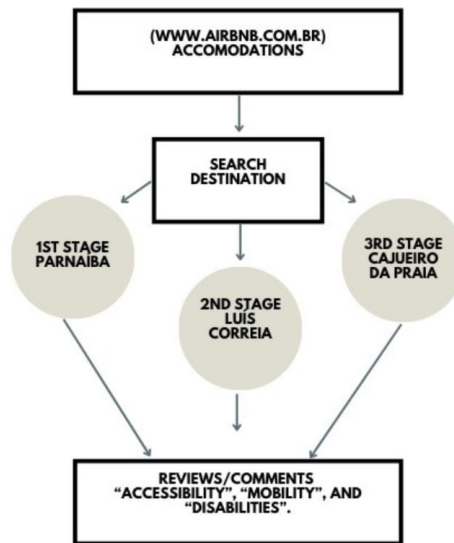
The participants in the research are Airbnb users seeking an inclusive experience, both in accommodation and within the website or app itself. These participants were not distinguished by sex, education, or age. The choice of this group is justified because they provide information about their experiences at establishments listed on the platform, expressing themselves spontaneously (without the researcher's interference) regarding their needs and challenges in participating in tourism activities.

Being qualitative research, a non-probability judgment sampling was applied, in which the researcher intentionally selected the evaluations deemed most significant for the research topic. In this approach, “the researcher chooses the subjects intentionally, believing they are representative of a given population” (Appolinário, 2012, p. 135), meaning they have characteristics or experiences that provide important insights into the issue. Therefore, based on an analysis of the opinions of the selected individuals, who, according to Appolinário (2012, p. 135) “... are chosen because the researcher believes they are the most significant subjects in a particular field,” this strategy was applied to try to ensure that the collected sample represented the diversity of experiences regarding accessibility in Airbnb accommodations, even though the number of UGCs found was very limited. This could, in turn, represent a subgroup of the cities, which, according to Gil (2008, p. 94), “based on the available information, can be considered representative of the entire population,” allowing for the development of improvements in accessibility and inclusion.

The research was conducted in April and May of 2024, using the article *User-Generated Content about Lodging in Natal/RN: Accessibility in the Discourse of Travelers* as a reference and methodological basis for the analytical constructs. The nouns “accessibility,” “mobility,” and “disability” were used as keywords to filter reviews related to the theme. Other nouns were used by the author, who concluded that they should not be applied in this context, as “the terms, therefore, did not directly correlate with the concept of accessibility, which presupposes the possibility and condition for people with disabilities or reduced mobility in lodging options...” (Lamas et al., 2019, p. 208).

With the aim of insertion into the social context to be studied, the first technique used was systematic observation, which, according to Gil (2008, p. 104), is a method that allows research to be conducted in field or laboratory situations, in which “... the researcher knows which aspects of the community or group are significant to achieve the intended objectives,” so that there is an observation plan for the information. The technique of systematic observation was one of the first methodological approaches employed. In this context, observations were made of the interactions of users with the accommodations and the use of the Airbnb platform, aiming to identify significant aspects of the users’ experience related to accessibility. Furthermore, after this analysis, individuals were selected for the next data collection phase, which consisted of a detailed analysis of the UGCs, in order to understand the perceptions and travel experiences in the cities of Parnaíba, Luís Correia, and Cajueiro da Praia.

For the research, there were several steps to be followed. After accessing the Airbnb website, selecting the “accommodations” option and “search destinations” (Figure 1), the first destination chosen was the city of Parnaíba (first stage). Next, the cities of Luís Correia (second stage) and Cajueiro da Praia (third stage) were selected, totaling 853 accommodations, which were analyzed individually. In each of these accommodations, the UGCs were researched in the review/comment options, using the keywords: “accessibility,” “mobility,” and “disability.”



Source: the author (2024).

Figure 1. Stages of User-Generated Content search by Airbnb Users.

Thus, after a thorough analysis of the accommodations, it was found that 447 establishments containing UGCs, despite existing, did not refer to the keywords; 390 accommodations had no reviews; 10 were repeated; and only 6 had UGCs with the mentioned keywords. Of these, one review mentioned the word “accessibility,” but in a context different from what was being sought. Thus, only five UGCs were related to the researched topic, with four referencing “accessibility,” one referencing “mobility,” and none referencing “disability.” The research sample consisted of Airbnb users who expressed their experiences through UGCs in the reviews of the accommodations. The choice of this type of participant was based on the spontaneity of the reviews, which allow direct access to the real perceptions of people who are seeking or have already experienced accommodations with accessibility requirements. Regarding the participants’ profile, for example, related to age, gender, and education, these were not selection criteria, as the focus was on the accessibility experiences reported.

The inclusion criterion was the use of the Airbnb platform and participation in accommodation reviews in the three cities of the PiauÍ Coast, with a particular focus on mentions of the keywords related to accessibility and reduced mobility.

Regarding the limitation of the sample, the biggest challenge of the research was the small number of relevant UGCs. As mentioned earlier, after screening 853 accommodations, it was identified that only five UGCs directly referenced the research topic, meaning less than 1% of the reviews found mentioned keywords such as “accessibility” and “mobility.” These data limit the representativeness of the sample, affecting the ability to generalize the conclusions to the entirety of users or the experiences of PwDs and PRM.

Striving to make the data valid, using Lamas et al.’s (2019) article as a basis, the analyses delved into criticisms, suggestions, compliments, and descriptions present in users’ reviews. Additionally, another method applied for data collection was through documentary research, using secondary sources, which, according to Gil

(2002), can be quite advantageous as they contain enriching sources with concrete data and can be one of the most important means for data sourcing, as they are timeless. The analysis of the criticisms, suggestions, compliments, and descriptions in the UGCs provided a detailed understanding of how users perceive and experience accessibility conditions in accommodations. Based on users' comments, it was possible to identify both positive and negative points, as well as suggestions to improve inclusion and accessibility in the platform's accommodations.

In addition to the analysis of UGCs, a documentary research was conducted using secondary sources to enrich the qualitative analysis. Documentary research is an important data source as it provides information about past behavior and can offer a more complete and factual framework on the accessibility context in accommodations. The documentary research was conducted through data collected from the Airbnb website, which presents exclusive options for PwDs and PMR, in order to make tourism an activity that can be practiced by everyone. Within the platform, there are two explanatory videos: 1. Guides and explanatory videos for Airbnb hosts on how to make their accommodations accessible for people with disabilities and reduced mobility; and 2. A best practices manual on how to photograph spaces so that guests can properly view the dimensions and accessibility of the environments. These secondary sources help to understand Airbnb's effort in making its platform more inclusive and accessible, and how this strategy is applied to hosts, with the aim of promoting inclusion in the tourism sector. Thus, according to Santos et al. (2022), the company has the ability "to provide authentic and memorable experiences."

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The tourist experience, regardless of its purpose, is a right for all, guaranteed by the Statute of Persons with Disability, which states in Article 42 that "the person with a disability has the right to culture, sports, tourism, and leisure on an equal footing with other people [...]" (Brazil, 2015). Thus, all establishments should widely offer inclusion in their services and equipment. As a result, the interest arose to research, through UGCs on the Airbnb website, in the regions of Parnaíba, Luís Correia, and Cajueiro da Praia, as these are essential for platforms, since through opinions and experiences shared in accommodation, they transmit trust between host and guest (Santos et al., 2022).

Through a detailed analysis of the tools and resources available on Airbnb, the aim was to understand how the platform can better meet the needs of all users, promoting a more equitable and accessible tourism. Digital accessibility is a crucial aspect that can significantly influence the travel experience for people with disabilities, thus enhancing inclusion and promoting equity in access to tourism services.

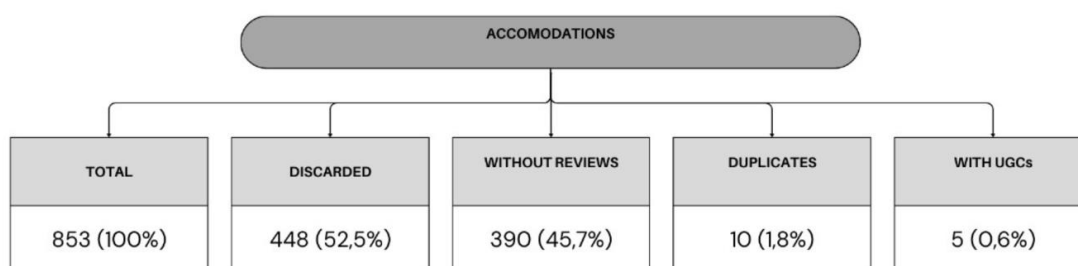
After researching the UGCs, it was found that only five contained the keywords "accessibility" and "mobility." Of these, four referred to accessibility — two in a positive manner (praise), in which users commented that they really liked the accessibility of the location, both in the city of Luís Correia, Macapá — and two in a negative manner (criticism), one in the city of Parnaíba, in which the user mentioned

that the space does not have accessibility for those who need it, and one in the city of Cajueiro da Praia, in the municipality of Barra Grande, where it is stated that the location lacks accessibility. Thus, only one UGC mentions “mobility,” located in the city of Luís Correia, Coqueiro, which describes the structure of a staircase where PMR could have difficulties reaching the upper floor (description).

Accessibility should be incorporated from the planning phase of tourism projects. This includes the construction of ramps, installation of accessible elevators, adapted bathrooms, tactile and auditory signage, among other adaptations, which, according to Law NBR 9050:2020, aims to provide “autonomous, independent, and safe use of the environment, buildings, furniture, urban equipment, and elements to the largest possible number of people, regardless of age, height, or mobility or perception limitations.”

It is also important to highlight the need to maintain and update these adaptations to ensure their continued effectiveness. The practice of tourism activities should be planned and executed to be inclusive for people with all forms of disability. This involves adaptations in infrastructure, services, and communication.

Percentage-wise, as shown in Figure 2, approximately 52.5% of accommodations were discarded for not having UGCs with the relevant keywords, 45.7% did not contain reviews, about 1.8% were duplicates, and only about 0.6% contained the referenced UGC for analysis.



Source: the author (2024).

Figure 2. Percentage rates of accommodations regarding User-Generated Contents.

Such data led to new questions regarding the availability of accessible accommodations on the platform. Thus, the study expanded through the accessibility policies present on the Airbnb website, demonstrating the company’s commitment to including PMR and PwDs, ensuring user satisfaction by offering accessible accommodations for all. According to Airbnb (n.d.), the “community is based on the principles of inclusion, belonging, and respect, which includes welcoming and supporting people with disabilities.”

From this perspective, within the platform, on the homepage below the “search by destination”, “check-in”, “check-out”, and “number of guests” bar, various categories of spaces can be observed, including “adapted spaces”, where the individual can select the accommodation according to their needs and preferences. In addition to this, when searching for a destination, it is possible to use the enhanced search filter, with specific accessibility features, as shown in Figure 3.

The image shows a screenshot of an Airbnb search filter interface. At the top, there is a 'Filters' header with a close button (X) and an expand/collapse arrow (^). Below this, the 'Accessibility resources' section is expanded, showing three sub-sections: 'Entrance and parking for guests', 'Room', and 'Bathroom'. Each sub-section contains several checkboxes for specific accessibility features. The 'Entrance and parking for guests' section includes options for entrance without stairs, entrance width, parking space, and path without stairs. The 'Room' section includes options for room entrance without steps and room entrance width. The 'Bathroom' section includes options for bathroom entrance without stairs, bathroom entrance width, support bars in the shower and toilet, and shower chairs. Below the 'Bathroom' section, the 'Adaptive Equipment' section is partially visible, showing an option for a mobile or ceiling-mounted transfer hoist.

Filters

Accessibility resources

Entrance and parking for guests

☐ Entrance without stairs for guests ☐ Entrance for guests is more than 81 cm wide

☐ Parking space for disabled individuals ☐ Path without stairs until the guests' entry

Room

☐ Access to the room without steps ☐ Room entrance over 81 cm wide

Bathroom

☐ Access to the bathroom without stairs ☐ Bathroom entrance more than 81 cm wide

☐ Support bar in the shower ☐ Support bar in the toilet

☐ Shower without steps or thresholds ☐ Shower chair

Adaptive Equipment

☐ Mobile or ceiling-mounted transfer hoist

Source: Airbnb (s.d.).

Figure 3. Enhanced search filter.

According to Rodrigues and Perinotto (2022), it is essential that tourist destinations, businesses, and attractions know how to communicate with PwDs while they travel, which in this study is referred to as “non-online accessible tourism communication.” In summary, it is crucial that communication is accessible, clear, and in compliance with legislation so that tourism can fulfill its social role, progressively becoming more inclusive, fair, and accessible for people who already face various barriers in their daily lives.

It was revealed that the company is indeed highly concerned with offering adaptable services for those in need. Additionally, it was discovered that the Director of Accessibility Standards at Airbnb, Suzanne Edwards, being a person with a disability, thinks comprehensively about the development of accessible resources. Below is a statement from Suzanne regarding the “Adapted Spaces” category:

For me, navigating this new category isn't just about accessibility features. It's knowing that accessibility is guaranteed and that many of the places are beautiful and fun. When I travel, I need to know if the accommodation meets my needs so that I can feel more confident when making a reser-

vation. Since its launch, I've had amazing experiences traveling and using the Adapted Spaces category. In fact, a recent stay in Carlsbad, California, at a house that was functional for my needs, also had an incredible ocean view. I was able to stay with my friends and enjoy the sunset every night while we cooked dinner (Airbnb, 2022a).

In this context, by conducting a more in-depth search on the website regarding accessibility features, following the steps "resource center," "your space," and "accessibility," it was possible to find two explanatory videos. One is titled "Tips for Hosting Guests with Accessibility Requirements," in which Sophie Morgan, an Airbnb host, and George Dowell, both wheelchair users, share their experiences and expectations when staying in different accommodations. This allows hosts to gain valuable insights into how to make their spaces more accessible and welcoming. The second video, which also follows the same search order, is a "guide to photographing accessibility features." In this video, the same participants from the first video provide valuable tips on how to photograph spaces, highlighting the importance of images when choosing an accommodation adapted to meet individual needs.

To welcome all audiences hospitably in the virtual environment, it is essential for website developers to focus on their target audience, aiming to effectively reach the tourists they wish to attract. Thus, the planning of tourism activities should be carried out in collaboration with tourism experts and multidisciplinary teams, with the goal of analyzing the current situation of the destination and developing an inclusive future vision. This should be done in a way that minimizes negative impacts and maximizes tourism potential, promoting a market offering that also includes PwDs and PRM in the tourism demand (Araújo; Oliveira; Perinotto, 2022).

Tourism encompasses movements, encounters, exchanges, and the continuous distribution of information, which can limit the participation of PwDs. Therefore, it is crucial that tourism communication be accessible online, enabling PwDs to plan their trips with clear and reliable information (Rodrigues; Perinotto, 2022).

Therefore, accessibility should be integrated from the initial stage of planning tourism projects, including platforms like Airbnb. This involves creating both virtual and physical environments that include ramps, accessible elevators, adapted bathrooms, tactile and auditory signage, among other adjustments. It is also crucial to maintain and regularly update these adaptations to ensure their continued effectiveness.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Considering the findings of this study, the relevance and urgency of improving access to information on booking websites and apps in the tourism context, with a particular focus on Airbnb, are highlighted. This research not only fills a gap in the existing literature but also offers practical insights that can be directly applied in the market. Digital accessibility on platforms like Airbnb is a crucial aspect that can significantly influence the travel experience for individuals with disabilities, thus enhancing inclusion and promoting equity in access to tourism services.

However, when analyzing the availability of accessible accommodations in the cities of Parnaíba, Luís Correia, and Cajueiro da Praia, it was possible to identify few UGCs related to the keywords ("accessibility," "mobility," and "disability"), accounting for approximately 0.6% of the accommodations. Only content related to accessibility and mobility was found, and these fell into three categories of analysis (praise, criticism, and description).

According to the data obtained, the majority of the establishments analyzed did not present comments or reviews related to accessibility, which reflects a failure to recognize the importance of this factor for a significant portion of tourists. However, the results also point to a positive initiative from Airbnb, which has been striving to make its services more inclusive through features like the "Adapted Spaces" category and the provision of resources for hosts who wish to adapt their spaces to meet the needs of PwDs and PRM. In general, this research used the method of analyzing UGC in Airbnb reviews, where it was possible to observe the scarcity of mentions related to accessibility, mobility, and disability, with only a small fraction of the accommodations investigated containing relevant reports on the topic.

The research also revealed the importance of a comprehensive approach, combining not only physical adaptations but also the training of hosts and the creation of an accessible virtual environment. In this regard, Airbnb has made progress by offering resources such as explanatory videos and accessibility guides, indicating a continuous effort to improve the experience for users with disabilities.

These results reveal good opportunities for accessibility, but also areas for improvement. While Airbnb has implemented significant accessibility measures, there is still room for substantial progress, such as more effective training for hosts to raise awareness and improve transparency regarding the descriptions of accommodations. This includes clear photos that demonstrate whether the environment is accessible or not, as well as avoiding the omission of information in order to better meet the diverse needs of users with disabilities or reduced mobility.

The limitation of this study was the scarcity of reviews and comments in the UGCs related to accessibility, mobility, and disability in accommodations in the Piauí coastline region (Parnaíba, Luís Correia, and Cajueiro da Praia). Only 0.6% of the accommodations analyzed contained relevant UGCs on the topic, limiting the analysis of tourists' perceptions of accessibility in these accommodations. The sample was not sufficiently comprehensive to assess the entirety of accommodations available on the platform for people with disabilities or reduced mobility. Another limitation is that the research focused exclusively on Airbnb as a hosting platform, which may not reflect the reality of other vacation rental platforms or conventional accommodations. However, Airbnb may be more sensitive to these accessibility issues due to its internal policies, while other platforms may lack similar initiatives.

It is expected that this study will inspire new academic work, as it offers a unique perspective in terms of analyzing "informal" review data, which involves a methodological process that includes study stages, analyzing opinions to encourage ongoing research and innovation in the field of digital accessibility. This is a

relatively underexplored topic, and its scope can extend to other scenarios and areas of study, not limited solely to the tourism sector.

Other suggestions for future research could expand the analysis to other regions of Brazil and even other countries, in order to identify global or local patterns regarding accessibility in tourism. Including other accommodation platforms, such as Booking.com, Expedia, and similar ones, could provide a more comprehensive view of accessibility practices in the sector. Although the study employed a qualitative approach, quantitative research could be conducted to measure the satisfaction of users with disabilities and reduced mobility regarding accessibility on platforms like Airbnb. More structured satisfaction surveys could generate more robust data on unmet needs and the effectiveness of implemented changes. Additionally, research on the level of awareness of accommodation hosts regarding accessibility needs could help develop more effective training programs. This could include studying the effectiveness of educational videos and materials to empower hosts to provide more inclusive hosting experiences. Finally, the considerations of this study reinforce the need for more assertive public and private policies to ensure the effective inclusion of PwDs and PMRs in tourism, with an emphasis on infrastructure, communication, and social awareness projects.

Therefore, the importance of a continuous commitment to accessibility is reinforced, encouraging hosts, academia, and the industry to collaborate in creating an inclusive digital environment. This study is not a final point, but rather a starting point for future investigations and developments that will benefit not only people with disabilities but society as a whole, by promoting a more inclusive and accessible tourism experience for all.

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