Gamification in trip planning mobile applications and websites: The case of TripAdvisor

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Gamification in trip planning mobile applications and websites: The case of TripAdvisor

RIT Croatia

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Abstract

Gamification combines funware with motivational affordances to trigger behavioral outcomes. TripAdvsior has gamified aspects of its website in order to motivate their users to engage in active co creation of content, which is then rewarded with points and prizes. A questionnaire was distributed to participants to measure the awareness of TripAdvisor gamification elements and their relation to the TripAdvisor community. The research decribed in this paper indicates that the *heavy-hitters* (those contributing highly with their reviews/comments) feel disconnected to the TripAdvisor community, but yet continue to actively engage in content creation.

Introduction

After elevating the economy and moving from agrarian economy to industrial, following the service economy, two eminent authors, Pine and Gilmore, argue that we have reached the experience economy. These authors describe it as the economy in which the companies need to "orchestrate" the product or service with memorable events, so that the memory itself becomes the product-"the experience" (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). They reason that the experience is constructed from fore elements, the so called 4 E's; education, esthetics, escapism and entertainment.

The element of entertainment in today's world is present in all industries; education system, health care, business, etc., thus professionals started to create and modify products and services by adding elements of games in to non-game systems. The process of using game-play mechanics for non-game applications is defined as gamification (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, Nacke, 2011). Deterding, in his theory, is mainly concentrated on the process of creating a game mechanism rather than on the end user experience. Gamification, form a point of experience, is defined as a process of combining services with their motivational affordances in order to create a gameful experience and trigger further behavioral outcomes (Hamari 2013; Huotari and Hamari 2012; Shneiderman 2004). The goal of gamification is to engage and motivate the end user in order to create psychological outcomes to the user, which lead to behavioral outcomes-purchase of product or service. This was defined as "gamification engagement flow" (Xu, 2011) or "total gamification engagement" (Reeves and Read, 2009). According to the book Gamify (Gartner, 2011), 50 % of the most innovative companies introduced gamification in to certain aspects of their business by 2015. In today's experience economy, it is of curtail importance to understand which of the experiences service managers create are triggering the behavioral outcome of the purchasing decision.

The shift toward the experience economy was drastically influenced by the change in the role of the consumer. The consumers moved from being isolated to connected, unaware to informed, passive to active, etc. The evolution of information technologies made the information more accessible, which gave the consumer a more global view of the market and the products on the market (Duncan, 1990).

For example, a firm specialized in producing average normal cars would fulfill the car goals of an average teenager, but because of the broad global view of the car industry, today's average teenager will want a Tesla, or a Concept One super car. (Prahalad, 2004).

Authors argue that consumers today are going through a "bottom up transformation", influenced by the empowerment they received through digital technology. Consumers are moving away from being passive receivers of the products/services the companies provide, and becoming active shapers of the same. If we look at the example of Nike online store which allows the consumer to design a personal unique pair of shoes, or companies which use 3D printed personalized products, we can see that the role of the consumer is to design the product which he/she will eventually purchase (Gramer, 2012).

Consumers today are willing to experiment with new products and like to share their experience with other consumers. The consumer networking trend has created thematic consumer communities in which individuals share their ideas and experiences.

Consumers are more likely to "pool" the product information by looking for inspiration in other consumer's social media, rather than having the companies "push" the product information using traditional advertising. This is why firms have to use crowd-sourced ideas and actively engage in conversation with active followers to design the product or service (Perkins, 2014).

Internet and digitalization made the networking communities expand rapidly. This has created space for a new type of value, centered on developing personalized experiences in which the consumer co-creates the experience by interacting with company networks and consumer communities. The value originates from the consumer interaction with the network, and the consumer becomes an active stakeholder in defining the context (Nasrallah, 2001).

In order for the co-creation to be successful, the element of dialogue is key. Dialogue brings interactivity and deep engagement, by focusing on issues that are of interest both for the consumer and the company (Evans, 2013).

By converting the dialogue in to a digital format, and implementing specific rules of engagement, it becomes a global network in which all consumer/stakeholders add their own value to the experience.

“Value lies in the co-creation experience of a specific patient, at a specific point in time, in a specific location, in the context of a specific event” (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

The technological developments such as mobile technologies, cloud computing, etc. have made it possible, for all stakeholders of the co-creation of the experiences, to be connected to the network 24/7. According to Euromonitor International, by 2030, 50% of total world population will be online and mobile (Euromonitor International, 2015).

One of the building blocks of the experience economy is the element of entertainment. Entertainment in today’s world is present in all industries; education system, health care, business, etc., thus professionals started to create and modify products and services by adding elements of games in to non-game systems. According to Gartner (2010), Gamification originated form the digital industry, and was first mentioned in “Google trends” in September 2010.

The process of gamification involves implementation and use of elements of game design and game thinking, game mechanics and analytics, computer game technology in business models, framework activities, services and procedures with the goal of improving employee and/or customer/user experiences, skills, engagement, effectiveness and productivity outside pure entertainment (Uskov & Sekar, 2014).

Gamification, from a point of experience, is defined as a process of combining services with their motivational affordances in order to create a gameful experience and trigger further behavioral outcomes (Hamari 2013; Huotari and Hamari 2012; Shneiderman 2004). Some argue that gamification has enormous potential for marketing, as the goal of marketing is to persuade, motivate and manipulate consumers. (Zichermann & Linder, 2010). Others describe gamification as a perfect tool to build loyalty, increase brand awareness and reach effective engagement (Daniels 2010; Detering et al. 2011).

Gamification has revolutionized the human-computer interaction and user experience with the use of motivating gameful experiences (Hamari, 2013).

The M2 Advisory Group shows research in which gamification market expenditures reached $2,8 billion by 2016.

When it comes to tourism authors argue that the synergy of sustainability and gamification is key for further development, because both focus on emotional responses of the customer. (Benett & Williams, 2015).

According to UNWTO (2015), “game mechanics have the potential to create positive experiences for the customers such as: fun, excitement, arousal, pleasure, sense of achievement, and to provide costumers/tourists with both entertainment and information.” They argue that there is a strong

chance that gamification in tourism will influence tourists to adopt a more sustainable behavior if provided with a way to measure their progress and reasons to move on, collect points to get discounts, goals to achieve (ex. New levels for new facilities), a chance to compete with other tourists and win awards (UNWTO, 2015).

Funware and gamification concentrate on motivational affordances and experiential values. TripAdvisor has gamified several aspects of their website in order to motivate their users. TripAdvisor users have the option to upload and update their profile with personal information, so that they can receive personalized notifications which push them to upload content and purchase travel offers.

Travelers are also motivated to write reviews, because they collect points in return. To ensure the quality of the reviews written, TripAdvisor has a “helpful vote” option, which is used by users to complement each other if their reviews are found useful. By generating experiential values such as autonomy, achievement, competence and competition, users are pushed and motivated to use the website, but also to improve their travel profile, which compliments their ego and self-esteem. It is a perfect example of how gamification is used to create gameful experience which triggers travelers and increases their interaction with the website (Marianna Sigala, 2015).

Methods

The aim of this study is to measure the awareness of TripAdvisor users of the gamification and funware elements present in the app and to potentially link the *heavy-hitters* (those contributing highly with their reviews/comments) and their relation with the Tripadvisor community. Funware and gamification elements of TripAdvisor were derived from previous research paper written by Marianna Sigala (2015), on the topic of "The application and impact of gamification funware on trip planning and experiences: the case of TripAdvisor's funware".

Qualitative method of data gathering for this research paper was the use of a questionnaire method, due to its easy and cheap distribution and creation, possibility of multiple types of questions and quick turnover (Trochim, 2006).

This questionnaire was distributed to travelers visiting Dubrovnik area and use TripAdvisor. This specific audience was chosen because it represents TripAdvisor users which are in the focus of this research. The sample was limited to a 137 people.

The questionnaire was distributed to tourists in some of the most frequent tourist sites in Dubrovnik (Pile Gate, Old town, etc.) in a face to face encounter.

When it comes to age and gender, the targeted sample was both male and female age 20-60 years.

The sample error is influenced by the size of the sample and its willingness to say the truth, also the time in which the data was collected does not represent the general tourist population of Dubrovnik, only the specific demographics that came to Dubrovnik in April, 2018, which includes people from UK, USA, Argentina, Germany, etc.

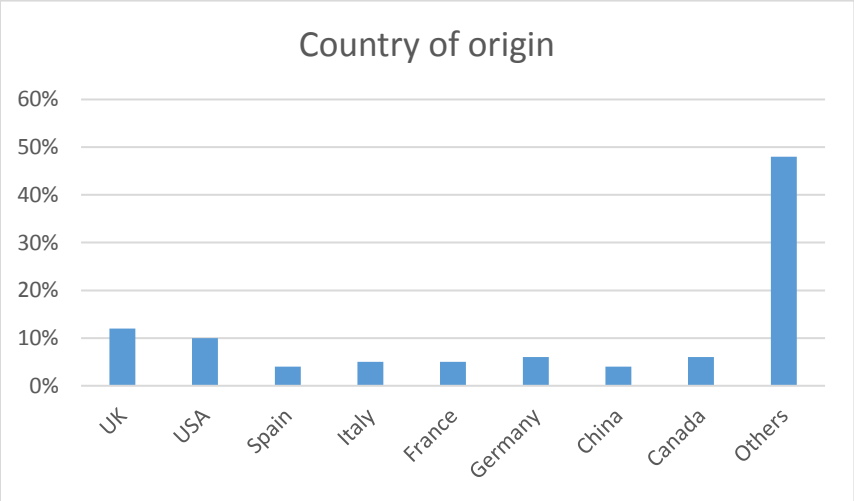
Data Analysis

The data collected through the questionnaire was entered into an Excel spreadsheet and added to the IBM statistical analysis software SPSS. One of the independent variable analyzed was the Number of reviews written and the other was Education level completed. Both of the independent variables were analyzed in relation with dependent variables, that we identified as gamification elements of TripAdvisor; Point motivation, Helpful vote, TripAdvisor community, TripAdvisor levels and Value. Variables were analyzed in relation among each other. A one way analysis of variance was used to examine the relationship between variables and to see to what extent do variables influence each other. Means and standard deviations were examined between variables to see the statistical significands in the relation between them.

Results

The participants of this questionnaire were very fragmented, they come from 34 different countries. Most of the participants come from the UK (12%), USA (10%), Germany (6%) and Canada (6%) presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Country of origin*



The population examined majority has a University degree of higher advanced professional degrees.

Table 2. *Education level*

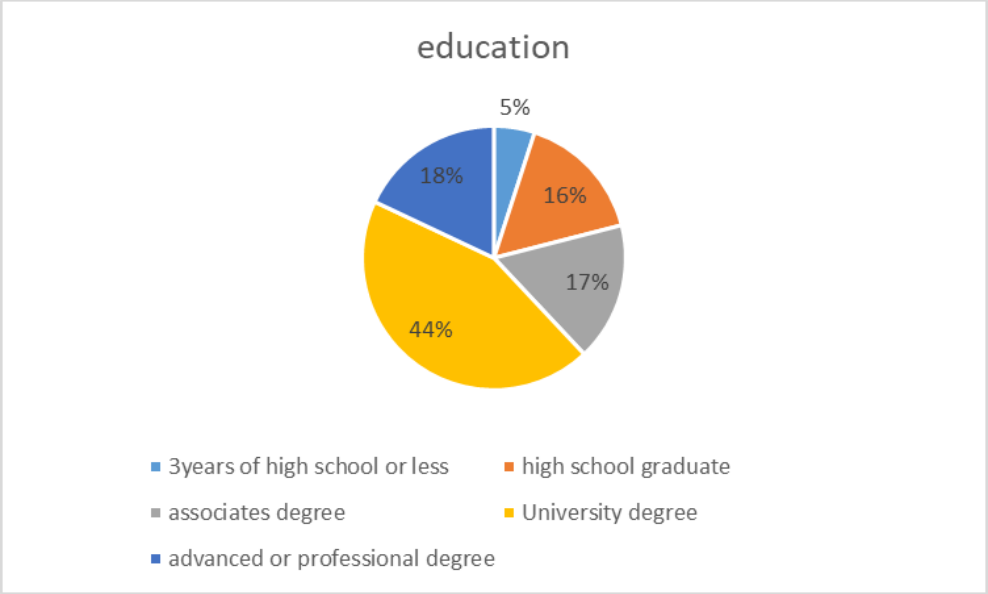


Figure 27. *Average value for gamification elements*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.Deviation
Point motivation	100	1	5	2.90	1.150
Value	100	1	5	2.87	1.125
TA Elements	100	1	5	2.86	1.110
Helpful vote	100	1	5	2.84	1.098
TA levels	100	1	5	2.66	1.121
TA community	100	1	5	1.40	.492

Results obtained in the sample indicate that generally participants are not very familiar with the TripAdvisor gamification elements, nor do they think that the mentioned elements are important. The data in table 1.1 shows the average grades given by the participants when asked about TripAdvisor gamification elements such as point collecting, badge collecting, level advancement, etc. Generally participants are not very familiar with TripAdvisor gamification elements (M=2.84, Sd=1.11), nor do the elements motivate them to continue writing reviews (M=2.9, Sd=1.15). The participants are also not motivated by receiving a „helpful vote“ from other TripAdvisor users (M=2.84, Sd=1.1). Level advancement on TripAdvisor is also not very motivating for the sample (M=2.66, Sd=1.12), but most of the sample think of themselfs as being a part of the TripAdvisor community (M=1.4, Sd=.49). The results show that the participants think that TripAdvisor gamification elements do not improve the value of the user experience (M=2.87, Sd=1.13).

In the examination of independent variable; Education level, in relation to the dependent variables, there is no effect recorded (Table 4).

Figure 19. *Significands score*

	Sig.
TA Elements	0.836
Point Motivation	0.268
Helpful vote	0.148
TA community	0.195
TA levels	0.135
Value	0.836

One way analysis of variance showed that the effect of number of TripAdvisor reviews written was significant F (3,96) =31.36, p =0.00. Participants who wrote up to 5 reviews reported being

much less familiar (M=2.09, Sd=.84) with TripAdvisor elements than those that wrote 6 to 20 reviews (M=3.18, Sd=.67), 21 to 50 reviews (M=3.67, Sd=.970) or more than 51 reviews(M=2.86, Sd=1.110).

Figure 20. *Awareness of TripAdvisor elements*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
TA Elements	Up to 5	46	2.09	0.839
	6-20 reviews	28	3.18	0.67
	21-50 reviews	18	3.67	0.97
	51+ reviews	8	4.38	0.518
	Total	100	2.86	1.11

When being asked about how does colecting point motivate them when it comes to writing reviews the population which wrote up to 5 reviews (M=2.33,Sd=1.156) reported that they are much less motivated than those that wrote 6 to 20 reviews (M=3.18, Sd=.772), 21 to 50 reviews (M=.3.39,Sd=.979) or more than 51 reviews (M=4.13, Sd=.835).

Figure 21. *Point motivation*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Point motivation	Up to 5	46	2.33	0
	6-20 reviews	28	3.18	0
	21-50 reviews	18	3.39	0
	51+ reviews	8	4.13	0
	Total	100	2.9	0

The results conducted also show that the population who wrote more than 51 reviews (M=4.13, Sd=0.835) are more motivated by receiving a “helpful vote” by other TripAdvisor users, than those who wrote between 21 and 50 reviews (M=3.56, Sd=0.856), between 6 and 20 reviews (M=3.56, Sd=0.856) or the ones who wrote up to 5 reviews (M=2.22, Sd=1.009).

Figure 22. *Helpful vote*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Helpful vote	Up to 5	46	2.22	0
	6-20 reviews	28	3.07	0
	21-50 reviews	18	3.56	0
	51+ reviews	8	4	0
	Total	100	2.84	0

The population who wrote up to 5 reviews is the one that feels most as a part of the TripAdvisor commmunity (M=1.61, Sd=0.493), while the other groups do not feel the conection.

Figure 24. *Sense of belonging to TripAdvisor community*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
TA Community	Up to 5	46	1.61	0.493
	6-20 reviews	28	1.29	0.46
	21-50 reviews	18	1.17	0.383
	51+ reviews	8	1.13	0.354
	Total	100	1.4	0.492

Participants who wrote up to 5 reviews reported being less motivated by level advancement (M=2.02, Sd=0.954), than the participants who wrote between 6 and 20 reviews (M=3.04, Sd=0.838), 21 and 50 reviews (M=3.06, Sd=0.998) or more than 51 reviews (M=4.13, Sd=0.835).

Figure 25. *Importance of level advancement on TripAdvisor*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
TA Levels	Up to 5	46	2.02	0.954
	6-20 reviews	28	3.04	0.838
	21-50 reviews	18	3.06	0.998
	51+ reviews	8	4.13	0.835
	Total	100	2.66	1.121

The percieved valu of the user experience is much higher according to the participants who wrote more than 51 reviews (M=4.13, Sd=0.835), than those wrote in between 21 and 50 reviews (M=3.50, Sd=0.924) , between 6 and 20 reviews (M= 3.11, Sd=0.786) or those who wrote up to 5 reviews (M=2.26, Sd=1.063).

Figure 26. *Gamification contribution to value of experience*

		N	Mean	Std.Deviation	F	Sig
Value	Up to 5 reviews	46	2.26	1.063	14.13	0
	6-20 reviews	28	3.11	0.786		
	21-50 reviews	18	3.5	0.924		
	50+ reviews	8	4.13	0.835		
	Total	100	2.87	1.125		

Discussion

The intention of this research was to find out whether gamification and funware elements, which are embedded in TripAdvisor create a better, more fun user experience, a sense of community, feeling of belonging, motivation for future use, etc., fulfilling their purpose. This study attempted to measure the awareness of TripAdvisor users of the gamification and funware elements present in the app and to potentially link the *heavy-hitters* (those contributing highly with their reviews/comments) and their relation with the Tripadvisor community.

Firstly, it is worth commenting the relationship between the education level of the participants and their awareness and usage of the TripAdvisor gamification elements. Surprisingly there was no significant connection recorded in the examined sample. There is a possibility that an error accrued because of the limitations of the time lapse (period of the tourist season) in which the research was conducted and the sample size.

The relationship that is worth to be discussed as well relates to the number of reviews that the participants wrote, and their user habits and awareness of the gamification elements of TripAdvisor. The assumption was that the participants who wrote more reviews are going to be more connected and familiar with gamification and funware elements. The assumption was mostly proven to be correct. The participants who written the highest number of reviews are very familiar with gamification elements of TripAdvisor, they are highly motivated by them to continue writing reviews and they perceive those elements as significantly improving the value of the experience of TripAdvisor. However, they do not feel as a part of the TripAdvisor community. The participants who wrote the lowest number of reviews are not aware nor they are motivated by the TripAdvisor gamification elements, but they feel as a part of the TripAdvisor community. One of

the results in this section may be labeled as unusual. Participants who are experienced TripAdvisor users feel disconnected or want to think of them self's as not being a part of the TripAdvisor community, while those who are at the beginning of their TripAdvisor journey feel or want to belong to the TripAdvisor community. This research shows that the gamification and funware implemented in TripAdvisor is more concentrated on attracting new users and motivating them to become a part of their community, but does not work well when it comes to the more experienced users. Although attracting new users is very important for the business to grow, retaining the already loyal and valuable users (customers) is critical in order for the business to be sustainable. This finding is very surprising because of its own contradiction in the gamification system. The users who are a higher level on TripAdvisor are the ones who create the value for the business, because the game rules present in TripAdvisor are set that way. When a TripAdvisor user, who is a very high level, writes a review all the other users in that area get a notification to check out what did their experienced TripAdvisor colleague wrote. Yet, those 'most valuable users' feel disconnected. This finding is not expected, and must be explored further to confirm our result or to eliminate any possible research flaws that we might have unintentionally caused.

Every game has its rules and logic, when it comes to levels and prizes. The logic is that the bigger the level, the bigger the prize. The feeling of not belonging or not wanting to belong to the TripAdvisor community may be present due to small value of the prize in high advanced levels. The suggestion for future research would be to examine only the advanced TripAdvisor level users to see where this gap is coming from and what can be done in order to keep the experienced users connected to the community which they helped create.

The study can be applied on any other web site, e-commerce, mobile application, etc. As presented, these results can help companies who are fully digitalized, or are thinking about shifting their

business towards a more digital model, so that they can implement gamification and funware elements in order to attract more customers, increase customer loyalty, build a strong customer relationship, and get the customer to actively participate in the co-creation of his own experience.

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Appendix

Figure 1. *Country of origin*

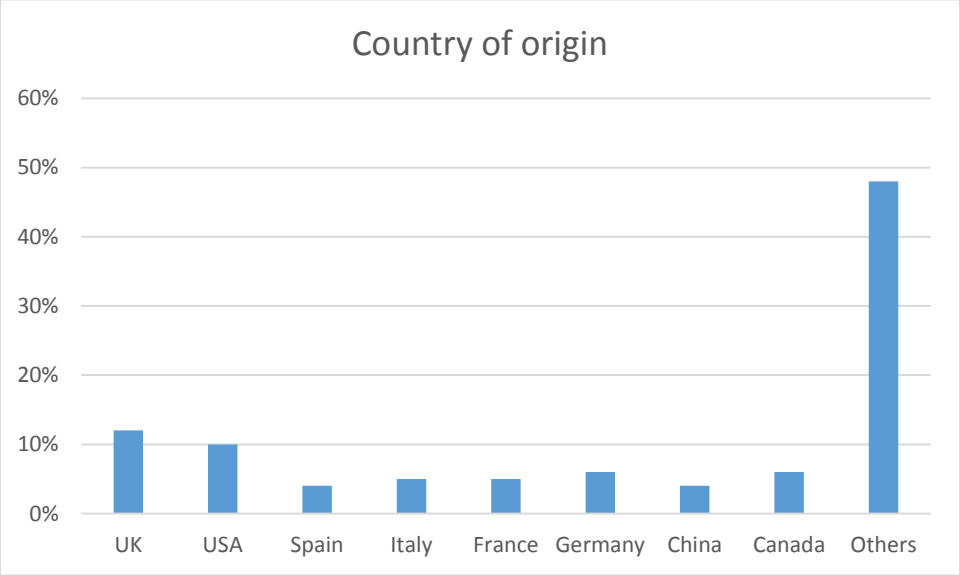


Figure 2. *Education level*

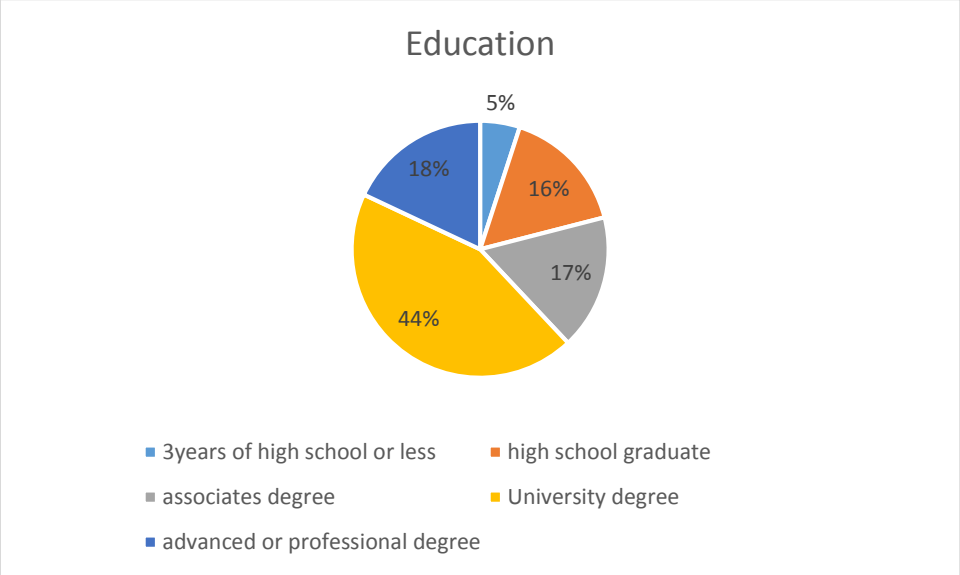


Figure 3. *Age*

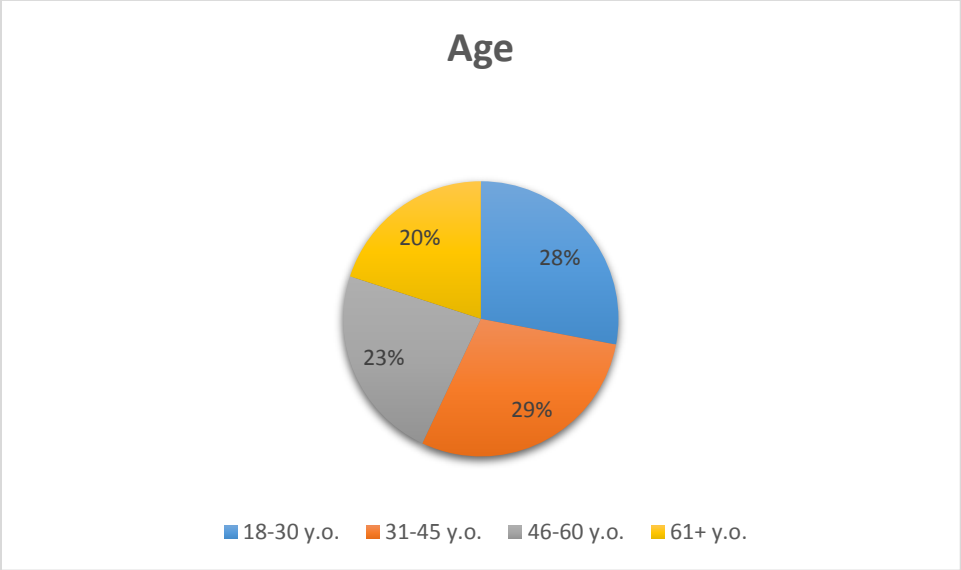


Figure 4. *Frequency of going of holidays*

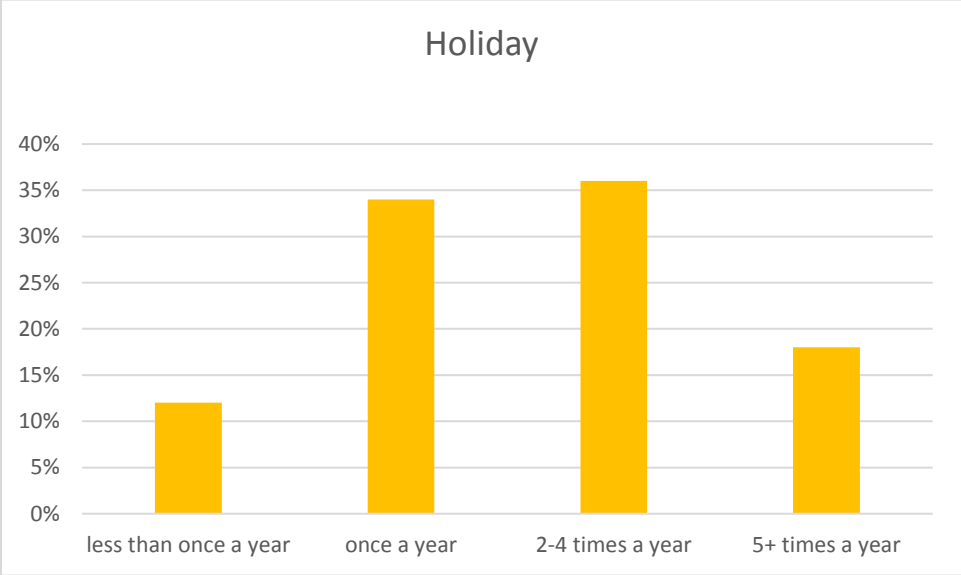


Figure 5. *TripAdvisor use expressed in number of years*

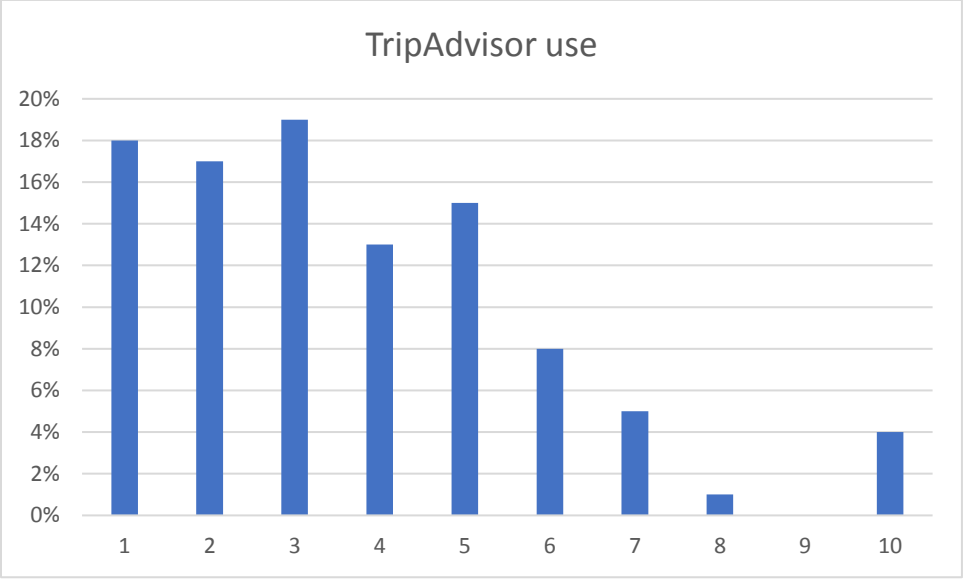


Figure 6. *Number of reviews written*

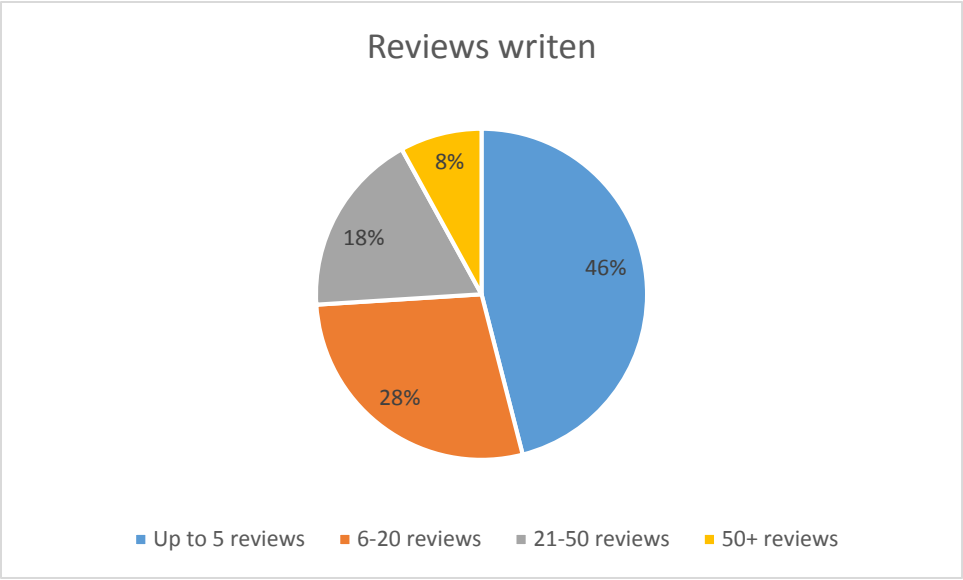
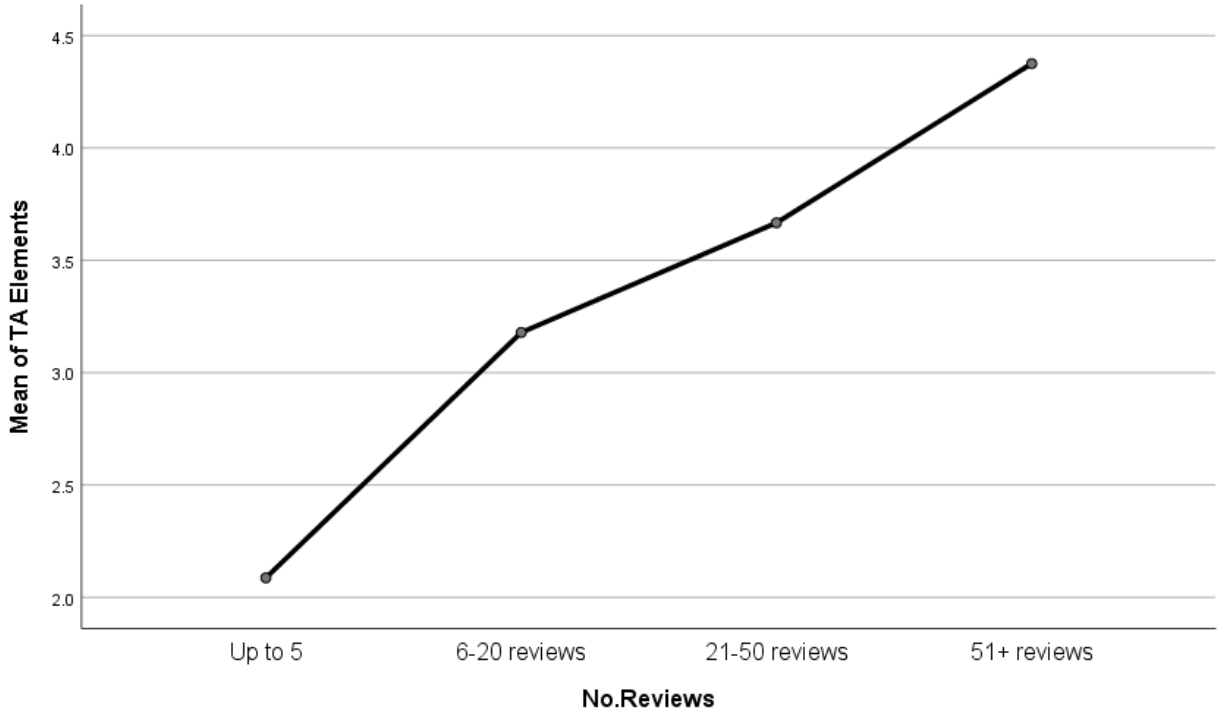


Figure 7



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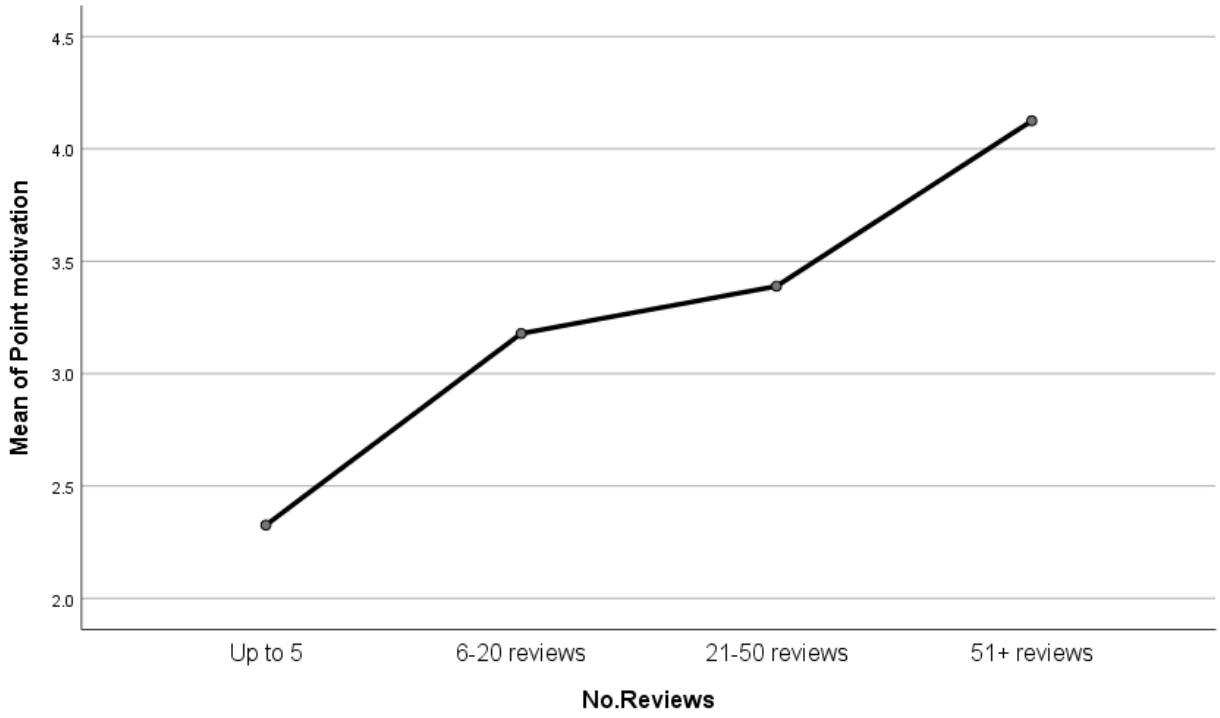

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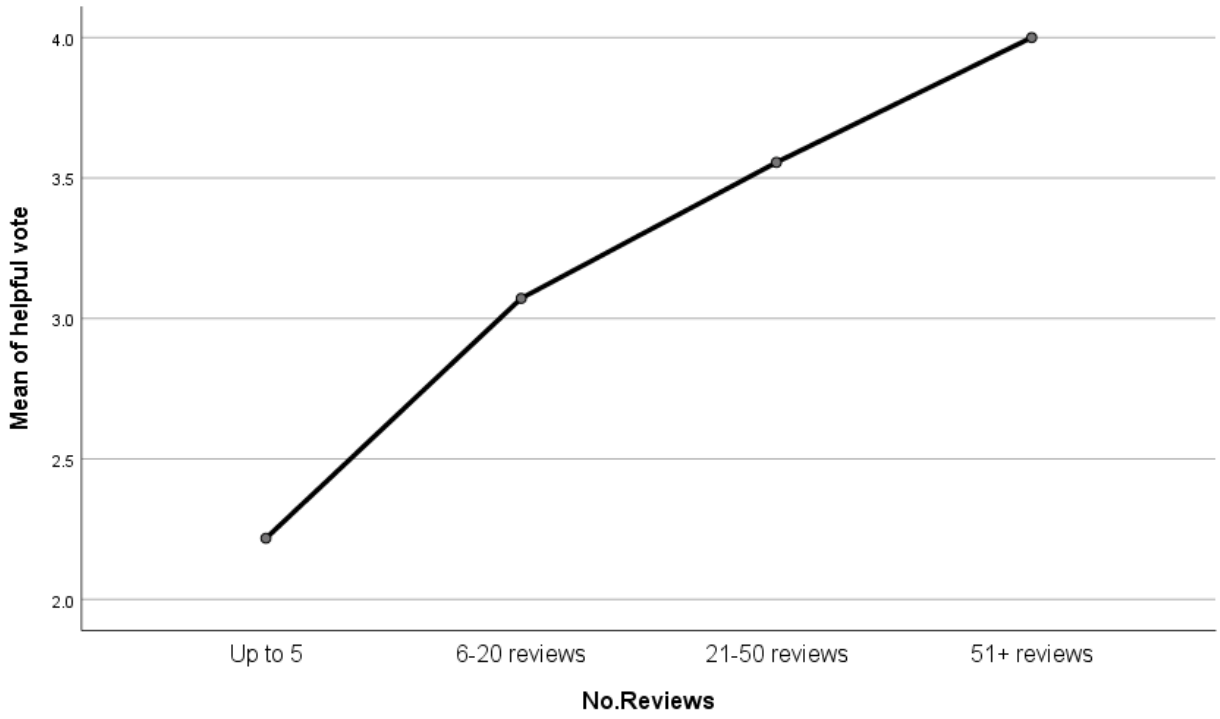


Figure 10

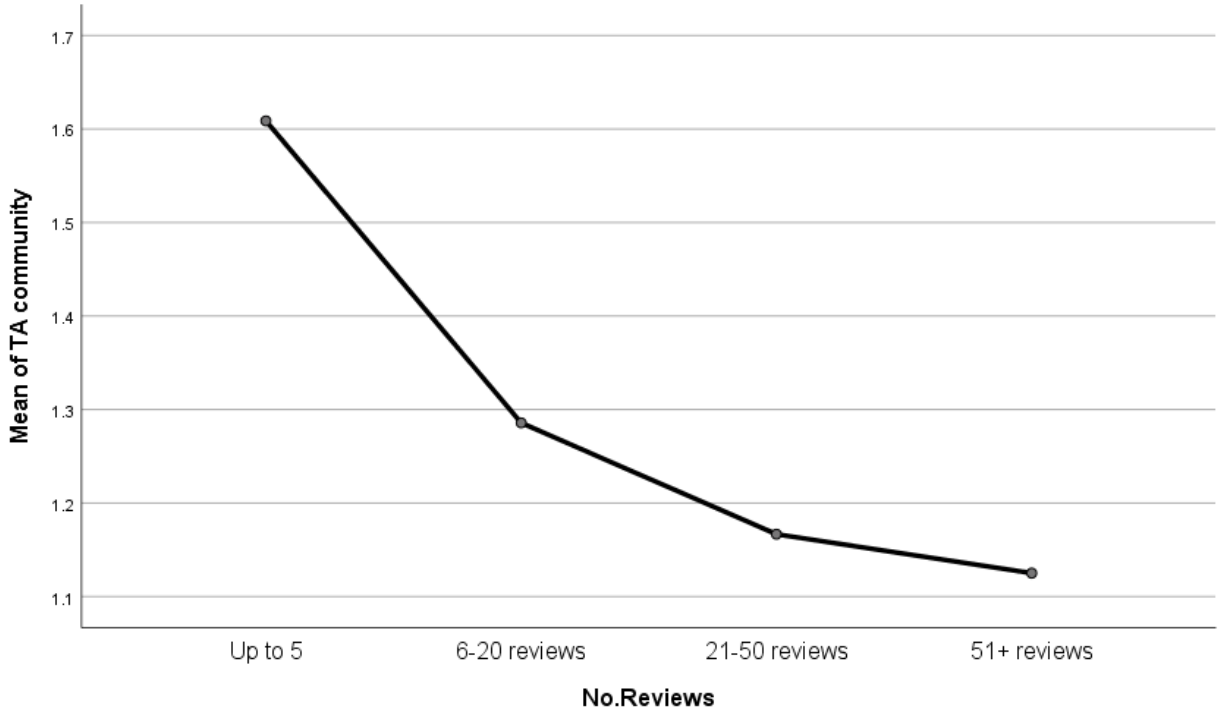


Figure 11

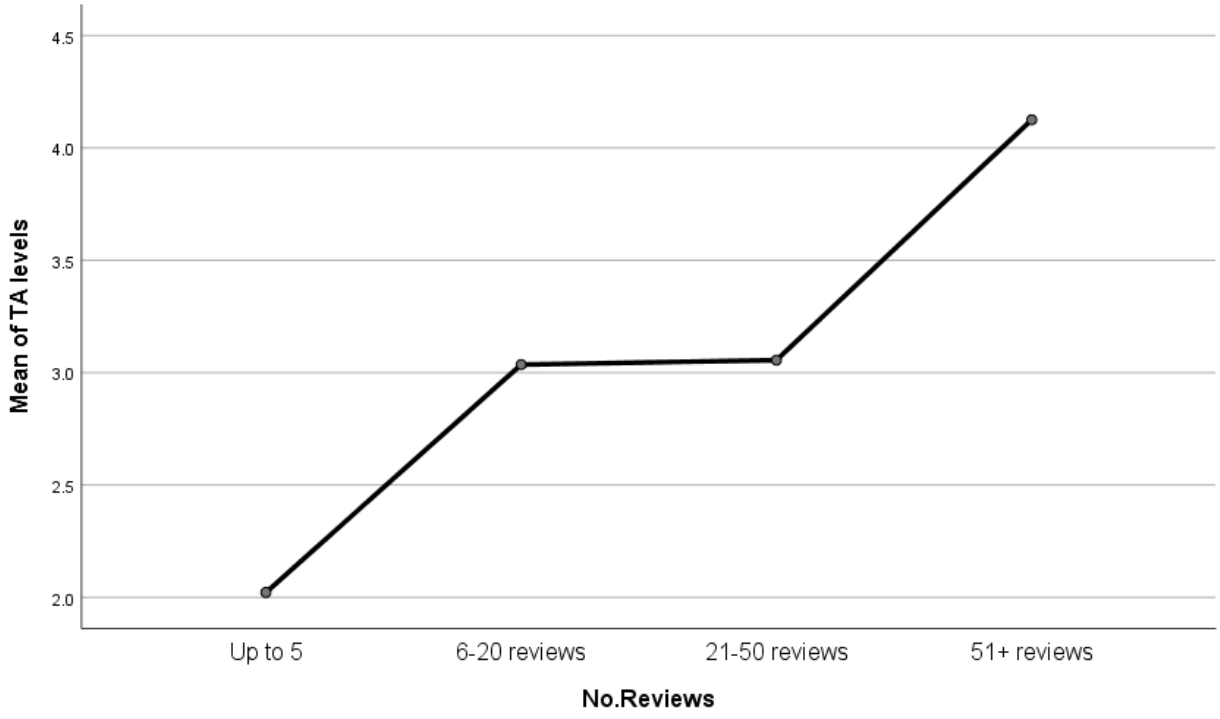


Figure 12

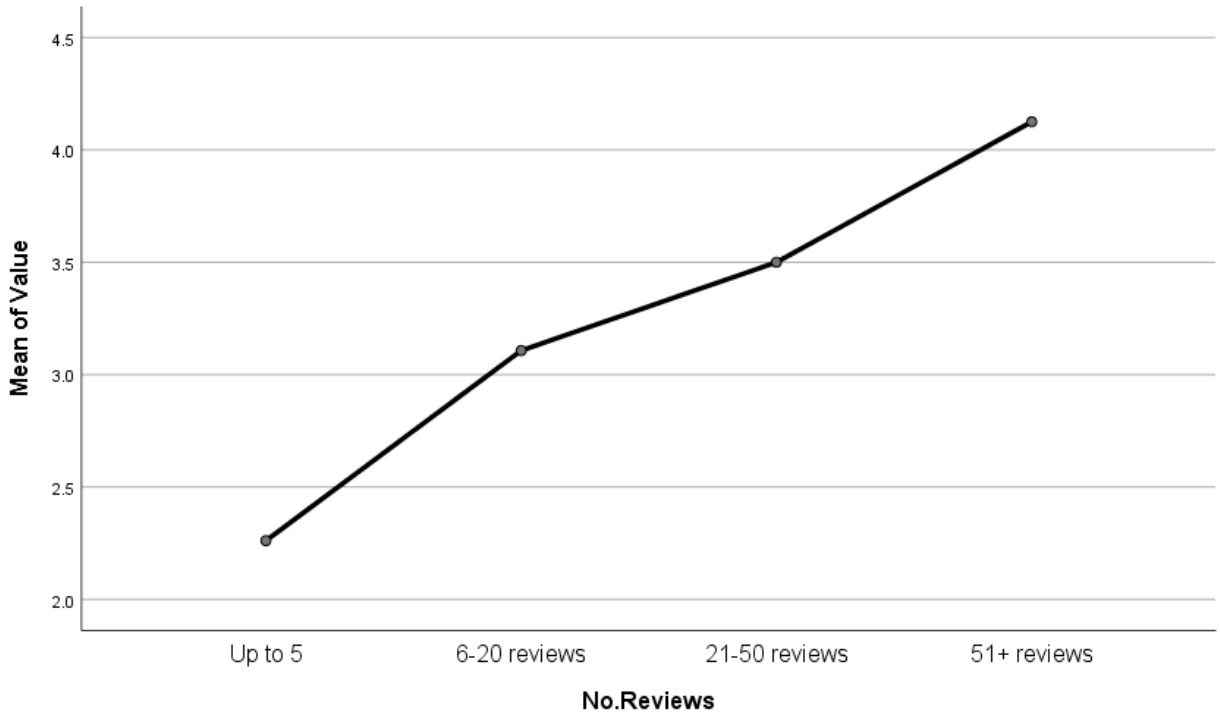


Figure 13

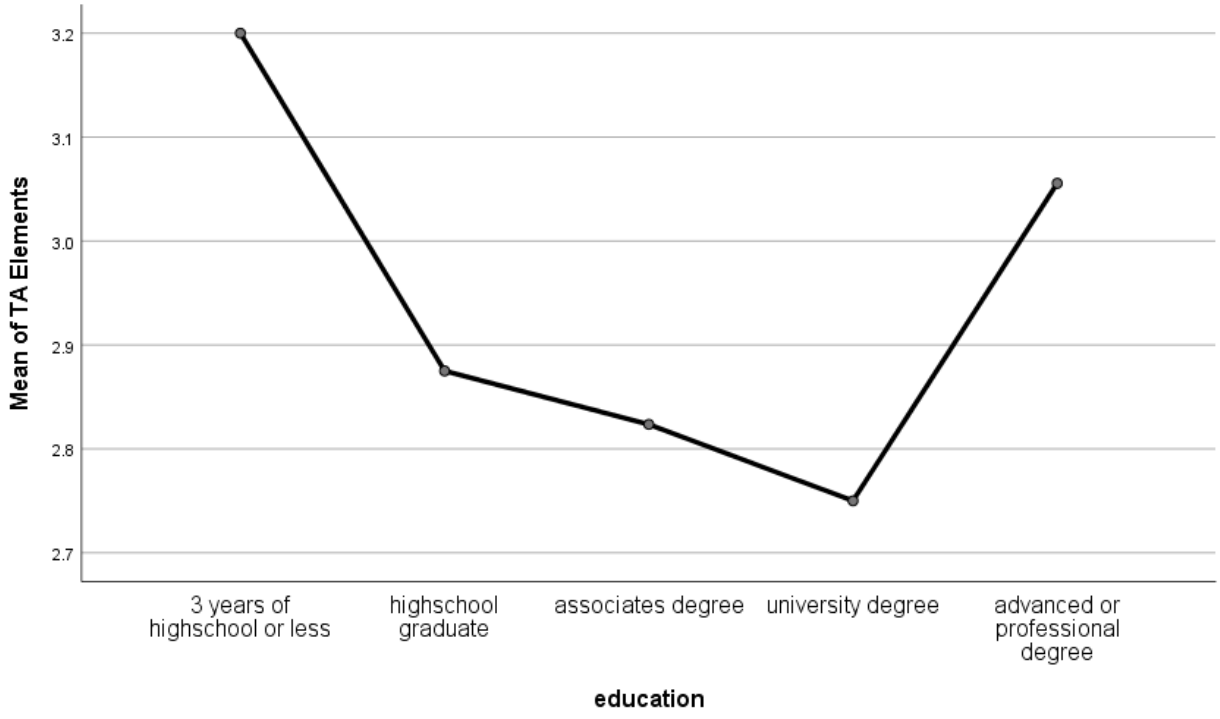
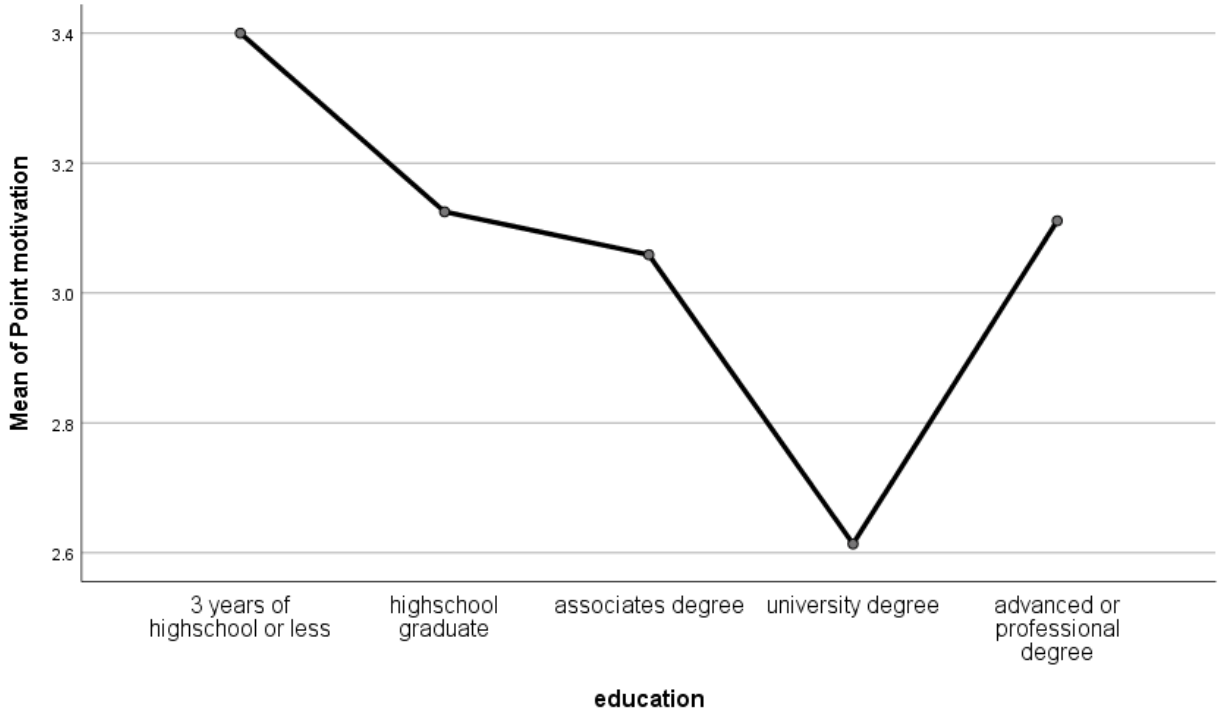


Figure 14



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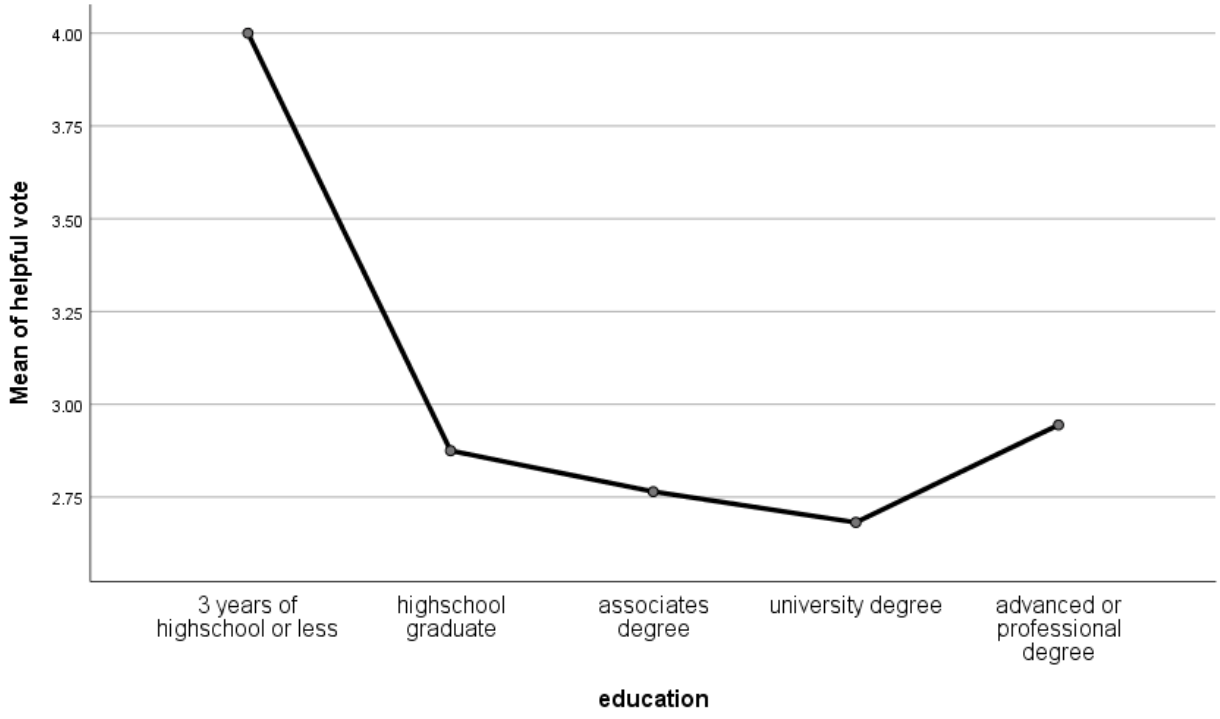

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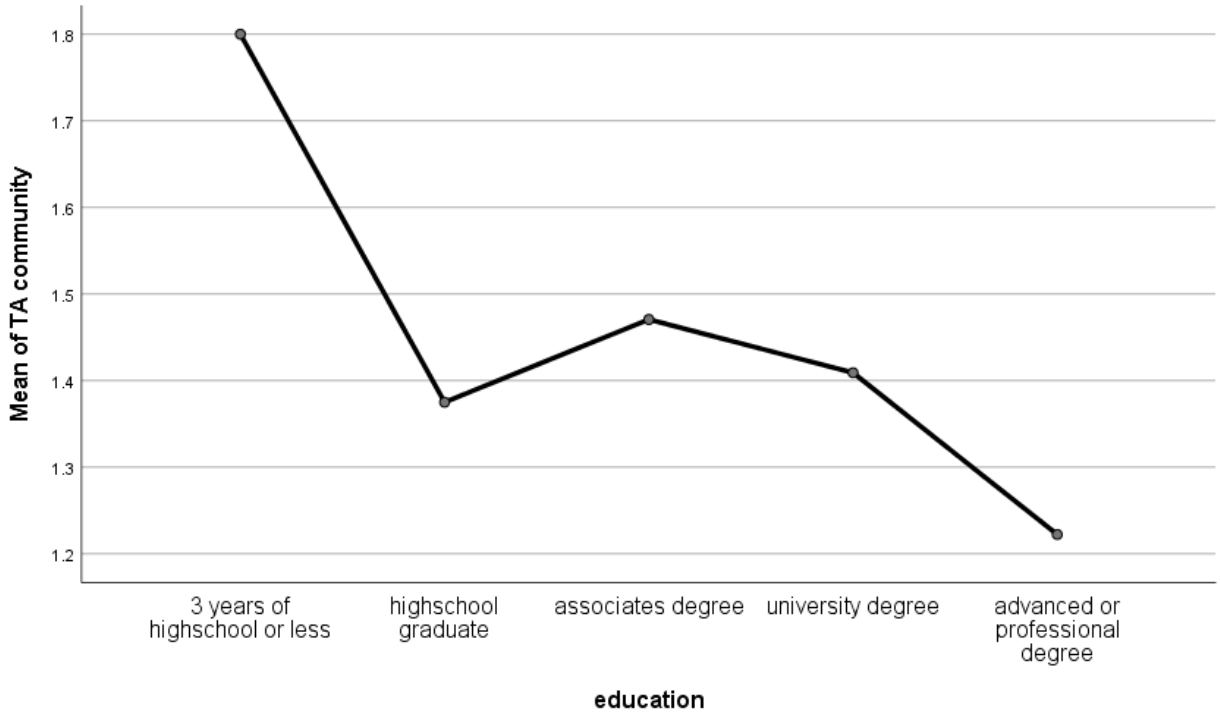
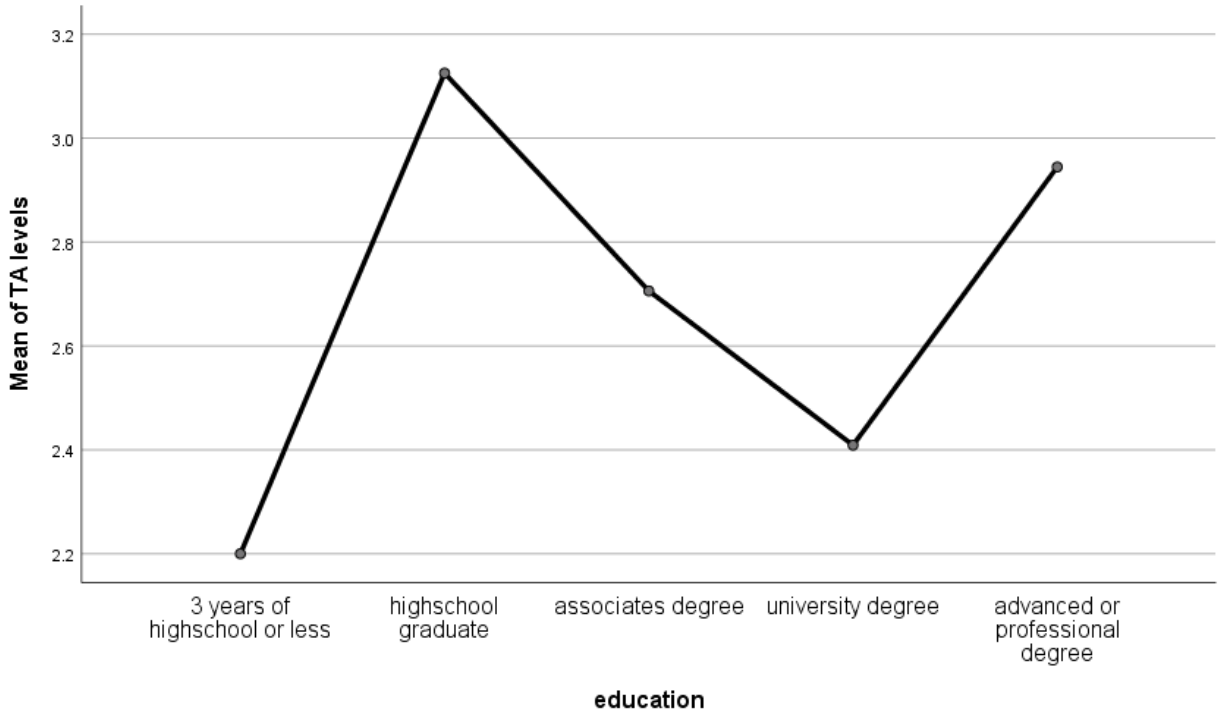


Figure 17



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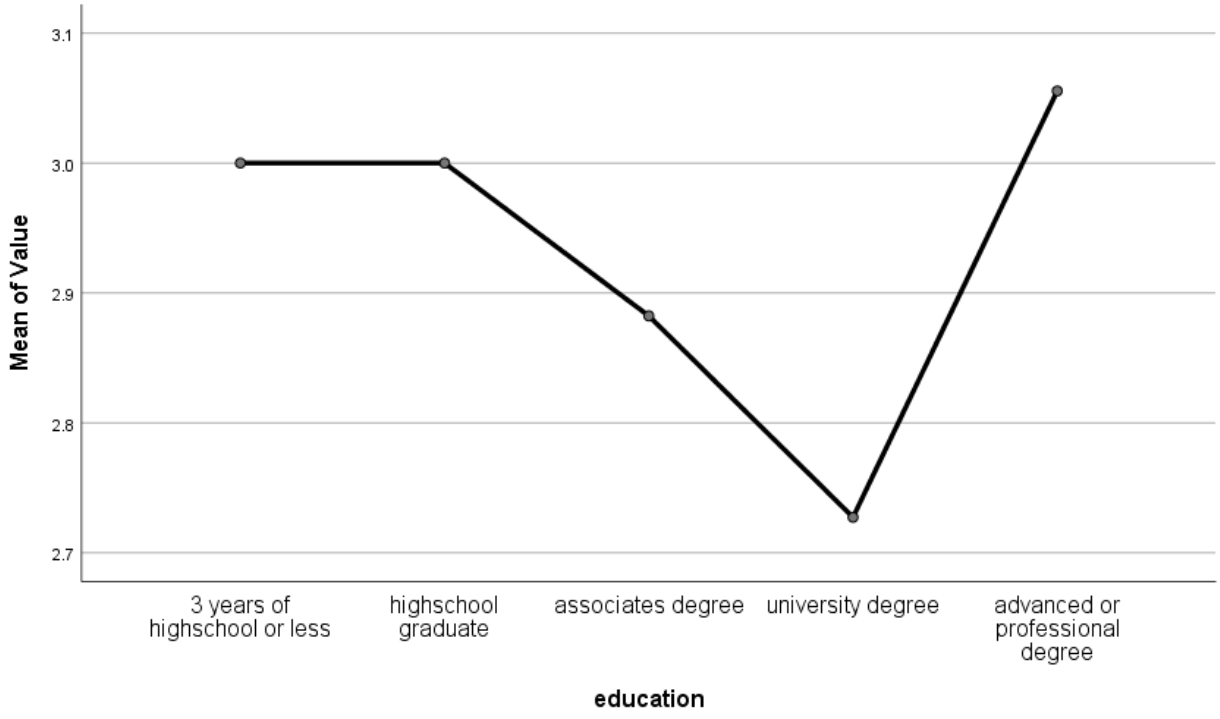

Figure 19. *Significands score*

	Sig.
TA Elements	0.836
Point Motivation	0.268
Helpful vote	0.148
TA community	0.195
TA levels	0.135
Value	0.836

Figure 20. *Awareness of TripAdvisor elements*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
TA Elements	Up to 5	46	2.09	0.839
	6-20 reviews	28	3.18	0.67
	21-50 reviews	18	3.67	0.97
	51+ reviews	8	4.38	0.518
	Total	100	2.86	1.11

Figure 21. *Point motivation*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Point motivation	Up to 5	46	2.33	0
	6-20 reviews	28	3.18	0
	21-50 reviews	18	3.39	0
	51+ reviews	8	4.13	0
	Total	100	2.9	0

Figure 23. *Helpful vote*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Helpful vote	Up to 5	46	2.22	0
	6-20 reviews	28	3.07	0
	21-50 reviews	18	3.56	0
	51+ reviews	8	4	0
	Total	100	2.84	0

Figure 24. *Sense of belonging to TripAdvisor community*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
TA Community	Up to 5	46	1.61	0.493
	6-20 reviews	28	1.29	0.46
	21-50 reviews	18	1.17	0.383
	51+ reviews	8	1.13	0.354
	Total	100	1.4	0.492

Figure 25. *Importance of level Advancement on TripAdvisor*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
TA Levels	Up to 5	46	2.02	0.954
	6-20 reviews	28	3.04	0.838
	21-50 reviews	18	3.06	0.998
	51+ reviews	8	4.13	0.835
	Total	100	2.66	1.121

Figure 26. *Gamification contribution to value of experience*

		N	Mean	Std.Deviation	F	Sig
Value	Up to 5 reviews	46	2.26	1.063	14.13	0
	6-20 reviews	28	3.11	0.786		
	21-50 reviews	18	3.5	0.924		
	50+ reviews	8	4.13	0.835		
	Total	100	2.87	1.125		

Figure 27. *Average value for gamification elements*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.Deviation
Point motivation	100	1	5	2.90	1.150
Value	100	1	5	2.87	1.125
TA Elements	100	1	5	2.86	1.110
Helpful vote	100	1	5	2.84	1.098
TA levels	100	1	5	2.66	1.121
TA community	100	1	5	1.40	.492

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March 20th, 2018.

Dear Survey Participant:

My name is Roko Nikolić and I am a senior student at RIT Croatia Dubrovnik, a global campus of Rochester Institute of Technology, based in Rochester, New York.

For my final research project in International Hospitality and Service Management, I am examining Gamification in trip planning applications and websites on the case of TripAdvisor.

Because you are a foreign tourist in Dubrovnik, I am inviting you to participate in this research study by completing the attached survey. It will require approximately 5 minutes to complete.

Your participation is completely voluntary. The information you provide on this survey will be kept completely anonymous and confidential. There is no risk to you. In order to ensure that all information will remain confidential, please do not include your name in your answers.

If you choose to participate, please answer all questions as honestly and accurately as possible.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational endeavors.

If you would like additional information about this survey or my research project, please contact me at rnikolic.dubrovnik@gmail.com or my mentor, Professor Besim Agušaj, at besim.agusaj@croatia.rit.edu.

Sincerely,

Roko Nikolić

1) Please state your country of origin:_____

2) Please circle the age group you belong to:

   18-30years old 31-45 years old 46-60years old 61+ years old

3) What level of education have you completed?

   ___ 3years of high school or less

   ___ High school graduate

   ___ Associates degree

   ___ University degree

   ___ Advanced or professional degree

4) How often do you go on holiday per year? (Weekend trips, travelling abroad etc.)

   - Less than once a year
   - Once a year
   - 2-4 times a year
   - 5+ times a year

5) How long have you been using TripAdvisor? _____

6) How many reviews have you written on the TripAdvisor site?

   - Up to 5 reviews
   - 6-20 reviews
   - 21-50 reviews
   - More than 50 reviews

7) How familiar are you with TripAdvisor elements such as collecting points, level advancing, badge collecting, etc.?

1	2	3	4	5
I'm not familiar	I'm somewhat familiar	I'm familiar	I'm very familiar	I'm fully familiar

8) On a scale of 1-5, to what extent does point collecting motivate you to write reviews?

1	2	3	4	5
It doesn't motivate me.	It somewhat motivates me.	It motivates me.	It highly motivates me	It is my primary motivation

9) Which of the following best describes the how receiving a "helpful vote" for your review motivates you to continue writing reviews?

1	2	3	4	5
It doesn't motivate me.	It somewhat motivates me.	It motivates me.	It highly motivates me	It is my primary motivation

10) I feel connected to the TripAdvisor community?

- Agree
- Disagree

11) How important is it to you improve your level on TripAdvisor?

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important	Primary motivation

12) To what extent do you feel that TripAdvisor elements such as point collecting, level advancement, competition, badge collecting, etc. are contributing to the value of your user experience of TripAdvisor?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Significantly	Extremely