Digital Communication and Inbound Marketing: strategies applied to the tourism sector in Portugal

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ABSTRACT

The explosion of product options and digital channels, couple with the emergence of an increasingly demanding and well-informed consumer, has revealed implications for the purchasing process and marketing. Increasingly, the consumer takes control of the process and actively seeks out the information he considers useful (Court et al., 2009). This new paradigm is called inbound marketing. In this context, brands feel the importance of integrating the consumer's voice in a bilateral communication valued by inbound marketing strategies. However, the topic is still recent and academically little explored. Hence, the objective is the study of the application of inbound marketing strategies, supported by the starting question: What are the key points in the implementation of inbound marketing strategies by Tour Operator S (It was chosen for this designation, to protect the identity operator concerned)? To this end, we sought to explore and cross-check the "content marketing" and "social media marketing" (strategies applied by the company) in the translation of success indicators for inbound marketing. We opted for a qualitative methodology, using the content analysis of interviews and documentary research. This study highlights the importance of incorporating content marketing in companies' inbound marketing strategies. Since the goal of

inbound marketing is to attract consumers, it's essential to awaken the interest in looking for Operator S and building positive attitudes. To reinforce this, Operator S offers a valuable storytelling to the consumer, combined with an emotional component. The process involves investing in continuous conversations that encourage engagement[1], possible through participatory and collaborative means, which is the case with social networks. The accessibility of the tools of this medium allows the sharing of non-invasive content, leaving the power, in the consumer, to decide in what circumstances he looks for the brand.

Keywords: digital communication; inbound marketing; content marketing; social media marketing; viral marketing

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, brands' communication strategies have undergone evident changes, in order to respond effectively to new customer needs. The relevance of the Internet-based economy (Kotler, 2013) motivated brands to invest their attention on the final consumer, who is in a growing way participating in the production of media content and brands, from which they consume information, entertainment, products and services. (Terra, 2009, p. 13).

This environment presents new challenges to companies, but also new opportunities to obtain and maintain contact with their audience, learning about their needs and opinions, as well as interacting with them in a direct and personalized way (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008). In this way, brands understand the importance of integrating the voice of this audience in a two-way communication, valued by inbound marketing strategies; these strategies, of digital marketing, serve to design the customer's path towards the company, instead of the company going out to find him (Zilincan, 2015).

The purpose of this study is, therefore, to gain knowledge about the application of inbound marketing strategies, focusing on a Tour Operator developing its

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[1] The term engagement is defined as the interaction between the customer and the brand, which takes place on social media.

activity in Portugal, hereafter referred to as S Operator (anonymity was chosen to protect the operator's identity).

The literature shows us that tourism is a very relevant sector of economic activity, occupying a significant weight globally (Pimentel, 2020). In particular, leisure tourism segmented to the sun and beach market, stands out as an important driver of tourism consolidation as an economic and social activity (Lohmann et al., 2021), its growth being associated with the degree of consumer satisfaction, who will invest more the more unique and memorable experiences they live (idem). Note, incidentally, in this regard, that the travel and leisure tourism sector underwent considerable expansion in the second decade of the XXI century, consolidating itself in a mass tourism supported by operators, travel agencies, hotels and entertainment (Trigo, 2020).

Operator S, which will be the subject of this research, has been operating in the Portuguese market for about 30 years, providing tour packages to travel agencies. At the distribution chain level, it acts as a wholesaler, since it is responsible for "packaging" flight, hotel and experience, and selling to travel agencies (retailer). In turn, the retailer makes the product available according to the needs of the final consumer. Through the results of the study, we aim to know how to develop inbound marketing strategies, that is, to understand their characteristics. We also aim to gain insights into key issues to be considered in the implementation of strategies, and thus be able to provide relevant data for the success of marketing in the context of the company under study, and of others operating in the same sector.

MARKETING IN A DIGITAL CONTEXT

In the Internet Era, we live a hybrid model of information circulation, and it increasingly stimulates the participation of network actors with collaborative behaviors, which give rise to the collective (Jenkins et al., 2009), which assumes Pierre Lévy's notion of collective intelligence. According to Lévy (2003, p. 28),

collective intelligence is "[...] an intelligence distributed everywhere, incessantly valued, coordinated in real time, which results in an effective mobilization of competencies. It aims at the recognition of knowledge in humanity. Each individual can offer knowledge and no one is considered void in this context. The strength of collective intelligence, referred to by Anderson (2006), lies in the new shapers of preferences and their power of recommendation, capable of influencing the behavior of other individuals with regard to new experiences. It ranges from expert professionals to opinion leaders, celebrities, or digital influencers.

Chaffey & Smith (2013) understand traditional media as media push[2], in that the marketing message is delivered to the customer and stakeholders. Assiriyage et al. (2018) refer to traditional advertising, advertisements, press advertising, direct email and outdoor as the methods of outbound marketing. This is a form of marketing that relies on mass media tools to push (push) the products and message to the audience. Dionísio et al. (2009) also mention the existence of outbound (push) media in the online context, in which they identify product placement[3], online advertising and permission email[4]. Lambin (2000) characterizes the push strategy as the means to push the efforts of communication and promotion in relation to intermediaries, that is, to encourage them, voluntarily, to refer the brand to the final consumer to, consequently, promote the sale. To this end, incentives and more favorable sales conditions are provided, including positive margins on sales, advertising at the point of sale, merchandising offers, and prizes.

With technological advances in communication, the public has the ability to move forward or ignore much of the traditional advertising formats. The saturation of advertising in the market, along with the critical power of the

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[2] Media distribution model in which content is delivered to users with little interaction from them.
[3] Product Placement is a strategy based on the natural introduction of brands, and their products, in entertainment content.
[4] Email marketing, following the concept of permission marketing, consists of obtaining permission from the user to voluntarily receive newsletters.

consumer in relation to the content, reveal themselves in limitations to the effectiveness of outbound marketing media. In view of the growing role of the Internet in consumers' lives, the appeal of inbound is increasing in value (Assiriyage et al., 2018). Inbound marketing opposes outbound marketing in that it is focused on developing media activities that allow customers to find the message they are looking for (Świeczak, 2014b). In other words, it allows the consumer to take control of the process and actively search for the information they find useful (Court et al. 2009).

As a form of pull marketing strategy, inbound marketing fosters the relationship between organizations and the potential consumer (Assiriyage et al., 2018). The pull strategy focuses its communication and promotion efforts directly on the consumer and end user. It seeks to create, in the final consumer, positive attitudes towards the product or brand, to thus arouse in him the will to ask for, and even demand, a certain brand from the distributor (Lambin, 2000). The online pull media, which give the user the role of initiating communication, include websites, search engines blogs, applications, podcasts and virtual worlds, as mentioned by Dionísio et al. (2009). Opreana, A., & Vinerean, S. (2015) also incorporate in the concept of inbound marketing, the mechanisms of email marketing, viral marketing, content marketing and social media marketing.

CONTENT MARKETING

Content marketing is a marketing approach that involves the creation, organization, distribution, and amplification of interesting, relevant, and useful content to a clearly defined audience group in order to create conversations about content. (Kotler et al., 2017, p. 155). According to Pulizzi (2014), a content marketing strategy can leverage all channels involved in the story (print, online, personal, mobile, social); be applied at all stages of the buying process, from attention-getting strategies to retention and loyalty strategies; and include multiple buying groups.

The key points of content marketing include content sharing, purchase process referrals, as well as potential business return, Holliman & Rowley (2014) specify. Świeczak (2014a) adds that an important aspect is to define the target audience, who will receive the message content. Reinforcing this idea, in the view of Adolpho (2014) the content should be consumer-oriented. The product should only be seen as the means of connecting the consumer with what he or she lives as an experience, that is, as the means of making the lifestyle he or she aspires to tangible. Pulizzi (2012) adds that what makes content go from "good" to "great", is the targeting aimed at niche consumers. Anderson (2006) argues that increasingly the mass market is turning into niches, largely due to the Internet.

Pulizzi (2014) supports that instead of pitching products or services, brands should deliver information that makes consumers smarter, or even, more entertained. The essence is to create emotional connection by sharing valuable information, with the goal of receiving customer retribution with purchase and loyalty. Content marketing enables real engagement with the target audience and the creation of an authentic and honest relationship based on trust and partnership. It has such a strong potential that even though it ultimately has a commercial meaning, it makes consumers themselves actively seek out the message (Świeczak, 2014a).

To strengthen the involvement of the parties during the narrative, brands have been betting on storytelling techniques (Du Plessis, 2015c). For whatever the goal of online communication, search engine optimization[5](to be found), lead generation[6](conversion) or leveraging social media tools, effectiveness is linked to the ability to tell compelling stories (Pulizzi, 2012). "When we talk about digital and Internet marketing, we are talking about people, their stories and their

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[5] Optimization for search engines. It is a set of optimization techniques for websites, blogs and web pages. These optimizations aim to achieve good organic rankings generating traffic and authority to a website or blog.

[6] Lead is a potential consumer that represents a business opportunity, as it has already shown interest in the company, in some way.

desires. We are talking about relationships and needs to be met" (Torres, 2009, p. 62). For Barker and Gower (2010), an organization encounters, every day, a diversity of audiences with significantly different communication needs. To respond to this heterogeneity, the same authors advocate the adoption of the storytelling technique. They justify that all human beings are storytellers, i.e., that this is a communication method that cuts across cultures and, as receivers, everyone is able to rationally evaluate the content of stories. Tugend (2015) reinforces that besides being a sales tool, storytelling can be used for customers to better understand the work of companies, to connect employees and management in a common bond, and to give voice to those who otherwise have no means to express themselves.

One of the indicators of success of content marketing is the viralization of messages (Kee, & Yazdanifard, 2015): "Viral marketing is a powerful traffic generator for any website that has content that appeals to the audience" (Adolpho, 2014, p. 423). For Berger and Milkman (2014) there are several reasons why people enjoy sharing content. One is sharing useful information, because people like to share content that conveys knowledge and enhances the value of their personal image. The other reason is the impact of the emotional aspects shared. It is part of the social act to discuss emotional aspects with others, and the proof is that these kinds of experiences generate more word of mouth than the average. Berger (2014) adds that one of the reasons is related to functionality and efficiency: "We tend to prefer websites that are easy to use, medicines that are more effective, and scientific theories that are true" (Berger, 2014, p. 14). The author further distinguishes that the two critical factors for viral effect are word of mouth coupled with social influence. Word of mouth is considered more effective than traditional advertising as it is more persuasive and naturally focused to an interested audience. The objectivity and frankness of the message is a medium that conveys credibility and consequently has greater social influence.

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Social media refers to communication and publishing platforms that are underpinned by the interpersonal interaction of individuals (Neti, 2011). It is possible to describe social media as a group of applications that are Internet-based and that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content (UGC). This category covers social networks, blogs, collaborative content sites, and other communication models that involve relationship, collaboration, multimedia, and entertainment (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

In this context, Alvin Toffler (1980) predicted the disappearance of the line that demarcated producers from consumers, which would result in the junction of the two, characterized by the term "prosumer". Cova et al. (2007) define prosumers as consumers who identify themselves as members of a particular group and who collectively use a consumer culture that includes the individual and collective construction of practices, identities, meanings, and also differentiating texts, images, and objects. According to Tapscott and Williams (2007), prosumers are developers, that is, they are community members and entrepreneurs. They have the ability to self-organize to produce their own products. Even more literate ones form their own online prosumer communities, where they share product information, exchange product tips, collaborate on custom projects, and engage in commerce (idem, 2007).

Platforms such as social networking sites, social medias and self-media, allow others, other than experts, to publish content to a potentially global audience (Amaral, 2012). Collaborative projects allow the joint and simultaneous creation of content by many users and are, in this sense, the most democratic manifestation of UGC[10]. For users, the main idea underlying collaborative projects is that the joint effort of many actors leads to a better result than any actor could achieve individually (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Compared to marketing in traditional media, Neti (2011) identifies significant advantages for companies that use social media as a marketing strategy: i) in addition to being a timely medium to present goods and services, it provides a

greater possibility of listening to consumer feedback; ii) it facilitates segmentation and identification of groups of influencers who have communication power over the brand; iii) and the costs are competitive relative to the results.

In the case of tourism marketing, the use of social media is aligned with the purposes of marketing, by aiming to create links of connection and affection, using mechanisms, in digital context, that meet the expectations of users, providing them experiences and moments that they will keep in memory (Bispo et al., 2020; Silva & Barreto, 2018). It is created, in this context, an environment that enhances the satisfaction of needs and the creation of desires (Castro & Gândara, 2019). It can be said that the evolution of the Internet and digital platforms embodies a greater connection between consumers and businesses, opening doors for the enrichment of the tourist experience of users (Perinotto et al., 2020).

METHODOLOGY

This research aims to study the application of inbound marketing strategies, supported by the following starting question: What are the key points in the implementation of inbound marketing strategies by Tour Operator S? To this end, we sought to explore and cross-reference the themes of "content marketing" and "social media marketing" (strategies applied by the company) in the translation of success indicators for inbound marketing. We opted for a qualitative methodology, using content analysis of interviews and documentary research. This methodology is justified by the need to gather in-depth knowledge of the participants' perspectives. It was intended to dynamically analyze experiences, behaviors, values, and knowledge involving the theme and the organization under study, emphasizing a wide range of interpretations of an evolving nature, as well as to seek insights and substantial knowledge about the implementation and effects of inbound marketing in the specific company.

For data collection, conducted in the year 2019, semi-directive interviews were used through personal and direct discussion with the participants. These interviews are usually conducted according to an elaborate form and are preferably conducted with people selected according to a plan (Marconi & Lakatos, 2007). This type of interview was chosen to ensure that all areas of interest of the study were addressed by the participants in as natural a manner as possible.

For the interview, experts were selected from the marketing area of the S Operator. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and had an average duration of 60 minutes. Data were collected from the marketing and communication director and the account manager of the S Operator. The interview questions were constructed in a way to allow an open and flexible speech from the participants, not limited to yes or no answers. They were therefore developed according to guiding topics. The guiding topics were divided into three groups: i) the consumer and his buying process, i.e., to understand how the brand gets in touch with the final consumer and vice-versa; ii) online communication of the S Operator to understand the objectives, strategies, and actions of the brand; iii) online marketing strategies, i.e., the different means and strategies that the company uses in its digital marketing efforts.

In addition, in order to find useful information for the study, documentary research was carried out, using more diverse and dispersed sources, without analytical treatment, such as: reports, internal documents and electronic information sources of the S Operator (Fonseca, 2002). The sources analyzed in the context of this study are data concerning the online communication of the S Operator, specifically in the social networks Facebook and Instagram (main means of digital communication of the brand with the final consumer). These are closely related to the dimensions and objectives of this research and proved to be very useful to support and complement the content analysis of the interviews. As addressed by Guba and Lincoln (1981), documentary

research highlights as an advantage the fact that it constitutes a consistent and rich source, in which the researcher can draw evidence to support his assertions, serving to validate or complement information obtained by other data collection techniques.

Content analysis of the interviews

To elaborate an evaluation of the semi-structured interviews, which did not take as reference the values and representations of the author, the method of categorical analysis was used. It works by operations of dismembering elements of a set by differentiation and then by analogical regrouping. Among the different possibilities of categorization, the investigation of themes, or thematic analysis was chosen, since it is an approach that best meets the qualitative data collected (Bardin, 1977).

We followed the model proposed by Bardin (1977), which consists of three phases: 1. pre-analysis; 2. exploration of the material; 3. treatment of the results obtained and interpretation.

Based on the study objective and the different areas considered important in the discussion for the analysis of the inbound marketing strategies of the S Operator, groups were defined. The progressive grouping of the information into groups led to the emergence of four categories created and named in accordance with the data. After presentation and discussion of the initial categories, six subcategories emerged. Table 1 illustrates this process and serves as a guide for the analysis.

Categories	Subcategories or indicators
a. S Operator online community	**a.1.** level of knowledge of the S Operator in the market, **a.2.** consumer purchasing characteristics
b. *Inbound Marketing*	**b.1.** Marketing and communication strategy
c. Content marketing	**c.1.** *storytelling* strategy, **c.2.** influencer marketing

d. Social networks	**d.1.** relational involvement between the organization and the consumer

Table 1: Categorization of the interviews

Source: Elaborated by the author

For the codification of the interviews, it was performed the nomination of categories according to the thematic set of the interviewees' answers, resulting namely in online community of the S Operator, inbound marketing, content marketing and social networks. Each of these was divided into subcategories that prove significant in the process and are considered, individually, as a basis for the analysis of results. For this process, excerpts from the interview responses relevant to the coding, analysis and interpretation of the results are presented. The excerpts with the abbreviation DM refer to the marketing director, female, with 5 years in the position, and the abbreviation GC refers to the account manager, also female, with 2 years of experience in the position.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Category Analysis a. S Operator online community

For the category "S Operator online community", two subcategories or indicators of content analysis of the interviews were assigned. These are the "Level of brand awareness in the market" and the "Consumer purchasing characteristics".

Level of brand awareness in the market

According to the opinion of the interviewees, the consumer's knowledge of the brand in relation to the S Operator's business area indicates, in general, a superficial knowledge, although improvements in this respect are already evident, compared to last year.

"The end customer doesn't know how to make the distinction of what is a travel agency and an operator." - DM.

"More and more the consumer knows what S Operator is as a tour operator. I remember starting a year ago and I would say 70% of people thought the S Operator was a travel agency." - GC.

Most consumers perceive the brand as a travel agency and even reveal the ability to mention the brand in a number of travel agencies. In other words, the brand is recognized as being well known among travel agents.

"The S Operator brand is one of the strongest, when a person says - refer a travel agency - the S Operator is referred to." - DM.

"The S Operator, at the end-customer level, competes as a travel agency, compared to the other agencies." - DM.

Still, even if the notoriety is not the right one for the institution, it is seen by the S Operator in a positive way and even as an opportunity for sales.

"What we notice is that when the travel agent is in front of the customer, if the customer has already heard of Operator S, the more easily the sale falls to our side." - DM.

"It's important, when a consumer goes to a travel agency, that they know us to specifically ask for our package. In the midst of so many offers, it's important for them to go there and say 'I want this package [...] ." - GC.

Consumer purchasing characteristics

The S Operator characterizes its target audience as over 30 years old, educated and with their own income. Since the company is intended to sell tropical destinations, i.e. destinations associated with a greater economic value of sale, it is important to take into account the social class and their

purchasing power. At the behavioral level, the target audience looks for comfort and safety benefits in the packages, to make their trip worry- free, as the brand's slogan states: "More than travel, vacation". Finally, the public is also characterized according to their lifestyle and interests. These are people who show interest in traveling to beach destinations and are even actively associated with the digital pages of travel agencies.

"Our audience is kind of premium. Usually over 30, college graduates or with some kind of education, because our destinations are very tropical and it's for a consumer with some buying power." - GC.

"Most people seek us out because they don't want to worry, or they already want all-inclusive, or they are looking for multi-destination circuits." - GC.

"The S Operator can deliver the service from start to finish, from the point of departure from the airport to getting home. People don't have to worry about anything." - DM.

"When we define our personas we take into consideration ages (from 30 - 45 and 45 - 60); then it also depends on the type of package and destination, but we consider interests like: travel, destination, other agencies." - GC.

"In relation to purchase characteristics, we attach importance to the consumer's online activity during the entire purchase process. At the moment of purchase decision, they use the Internet to gather information about products, including, getting in direct contact with the brand to gather concrete and personalized service information. During the purchase, and even post-purchase, the public manifests an active behavior, through sharing experiences, such as photos on social networks, and sharing honest opinions about the buying experience with the community, such as reviews. "Today the buying journey starts on the Internet [...]"- DM.

"They want the "pap" all done, it's much easier for them to text and ask for things than to go looking for it. Often it even happens, 'I want to go here, I need options.' They don't mention the season, the numbers of people, nothing, they just say 'I want this'." - GC.

"Usually the consumer comes into our social networks to ask for product information and to share their own opinions and experiences. On this part we even have a good experience with reviews. We have four out of five stars on Facebook and we notice that there is an effort by the consumer to give good feedback when deserved."- GC.

Category Analysis b. Inbound marketing

For the category "Inbound Marketing", the subcategory "Marketing and Communication Strategy" is considered for the content analysis of the interviews.

Marketing and communication strategy

According to the interviewees, Operator S's type of online communication follows the B2C (Business to Consumer) model, just like travel agencies. Although its business model is B2B (Business to Business), i.e. it only conducts commercial transactions from a business consumer perspective, its digital communication is aimed at the final consumer. Communication relies on digital media and pull strategies are applied to the final consumer. The main goal is to directly attract the final customer, leaving the decision power to him and taking power away from the middleman. Even if the consumer cannot make a direct purchase with the S Operator, he actively approaches this operator to ask questions and request information.

We denote the consumer's use of social media as a source of information (Świeczak, 2014b) to which the consumer actively requests help in conducting simulations of travel budgets and information about destinations.

"When I joined, they were already talking to the end customer. What changed was the form. Before, communication was done in masses: billboards, communication in cabs. Now, what we talk about is in a more segmented way. We also do above the line, but it is not the main thing; we talk much more about digital. Before, we used to let the customer drift more, since he saw our brand and had to go to the travel agency. Nowadays, we pull the customer to us and we are the ones who refer them to the agency, to try to get the sale to stay with the S Operator." - DM.

"On the other hand, we take power away from the travel agent and communicate directly with the final consumer through social networks, influencers, which makes that at the moment of decision they are more likely to choose us." - DM.

"At the online level, more and more we attract the customer to the site in the sense that we are the one to make that referral or to make known the other products, the brand." - DM.

For the communication process, it is important for the S Operator, content marketing supported by the storytelling strategy and its own diffusion, or using influencers in the digital community, in which a bilateral exchange of information with the consumer is promoted. "[...] the goal is to tell different stories with our platforms and social networks in order to create differentiating content and support the storytelling of these ambassadors" - DM. "What we want is to generate engagement on social media: people coming to talk to us and asking things and in addition we use the network to find out information that helps us in decision making, such as doing polls asking about a destination." - DM

Category Analysis c. Content marketing

For the "Content Marketing" category, the following core indicators were assigned: "Storytelling strategy" and "Influencer marketing". When storytelling

strategy is framed in content marketing, the goal is to communicate stories in an appealing and relevant way. Influencer marketing supports this strategy, in which influencers tell their own stories. As a result of these real stories, a greater connection is developed between the storytellers and the listeners, who identify with the experiences told.

Storytelling Strategy

The interviewees believe that storytelling stories are a means of captivating the customer and differentiating themselves in the market. They value the storytelling of real testimonials that appeal to emotion, with arguments that evoke emotion in the receiver, provoking emotional responses such as joy and enthusiasm. As proof of this, for those who have already had an experience with the S Operator, the brand takes care to provide a more personalized service, in order to continue its faithful story with that consumer. One form of service personalization provided by the brand, in times of repurchase, is the exchange of private messages on social media directly with the consumer. Standard messages are not used, but rather, messages that meet past experiences and needs. "We want to captivate the customer much more and at the communication level it involves investing in telling different stories than our competition." - DM "Providing a very real, concrete and raw story." - DM. "The way you communicate is with an emotional part." - DM. "In addition, we give more attention, a more personalized service, to those who have already had an experience with Operator S. First, because they have already invested in us and if they have come back, it is because they have a positive image; and then, because the type of approach is already easier because they know our conditions. In these situations, the type of messages exchanged are deeper and have greater attention. I take care on Facebook and Instagram to see the messages already exchanged with the client, and to understand the preferences he revealed, the destinations of interest, the number of people for whom the budget was requested, and his wishes."- GC.

The big challenges and key points of storytelling identified by respondents in the travel market, encompass speed of communication in the face of change, flexibility of content and media. "The big challenge of content marketing is flexibility of communication. Flexibility of content and media."- DM.

Influencer Marketing

The answers given by the interviewees show that Operator S has know-how in influencer marketing. In the travel sector in Portugal, it was a pioneer in campaigns with influencers and the effect of this is present today. The continuous return from the campaigns carried out is notorious, in visitors to the website and in visibility for the brand. "When we talk about digital influencers, something that sets us apart, we talk about five years ago, when we took an influencer to Cape Verde and to this day that article brings traffic to our website." - DM. "At the digital level, without a doubt it is through influencers that consumers get to know the brand. When an influencer travels with us, the visits to the site immediately have a spike on that particular package. We even have some that have done work with us a few years ago and even today that medium is one of the top ten that brings traffic to the site." - GC.

The work done with influencers is intrinsically linked to content marketing and gains its importance with the sharing in the community, through online platforms. A partnership is created between the S Operator and the influencers, with the objective of promoting the packages of the travel destinations. The most common partnerships are user-experience partnerships, in which influencers are invited to test flights, hotels and the destinations themselves (including restaurants, attractions, stores). The goal is to support continuous storytelling using various profiles, to create different points of contact with the consumer. "The goal is to tell different stories with our platforms and social networks, in order to create differentiating content and support the storytelling of these ambassadors. Ambassadors in the sense that they tell good stories and real experiences. We are not interested in having one exclusive

face, but more than one that will tell good stories over time." - DM. The partnerships are worked in the sense of community building with a view to the long term.

The selection of influencer profiles depends on the type of destination, the goals, the number of followers, and the media strategy. Among the profiles, there is a distinction of objectives between public and non-public figures. The former in terms of notoriety, and the latter in terms of reinforcing values associated with truthfulness and transparency.

"First, the selection is made according to the destination and the type of experience. If we want to promote a hotel with many water activities, we will contact a profile with a more adventurous lifestyle. Within the type of profiles we have, for example, the following: couple, family, adventure... GC." In which profiles are thought of that follow certain requirements at the level of interests and life cycle. "With celebrities we work on notoriety and with influencers on storytelling. The main advantage is engagement. An influencer reveals more honesty and tells true stories. People believe that opinion leader and what he or she is telling." - DM. Another strategy is the media strategy in which the channels and content formats that best meet the objectives are considered. "Let's imagine that we need more video level content, let's choose someone with good Youtube production" - GC. That is, there is a prior study at the level of content planning, in which weaknesses and new media and content opportunities are identified, as is the case of YouTube, and partnerships are developed to meet these objectives. "What differentiates us here, in the marketing department, is the influencers, because, unlike the competition, we don't bet only on celebrities, because we believe that the non-celebrities tell stories that are much more raw and closer to the consumer.

Analysis of category d. Social networks

The subcategory "Relational involvement between brand and consumer" is associated with the category "Social Networks", in order to analyze the involvement and relational closeness between the brand and the customer on social networks.

Relational involvement between brand and consumer

The basis of the S Operator's online communication with the final consumer starts from the social networks. They are considered the starting point for the remaining means and communication strategies, such as content marketing, the website and campaigns with influencers. As an added value, it has a strong community, with about 100,000 followers on social networks. The goal in social networks is to generate engagement with the consumer, encouraging them to initiate contact with the brand, to ask questions and request information, as well as foster relationships of opinion and experience sharing. In addition to engagement, this exchange of information supports the decision making of certain departments of the brand.

"Social media, I would say was the main thing, is our starting point. We have a loyal community. It's over 100,000 and now it's stable and loyal. Which allows us, when the travel agent can't reach it on his own, to provide the support. When we work the digital influencers, it is for social media, it is to feed with content. In other words, the starting point is the social networks and everything goes from there. The influencers are for there, to create content for the social networks. Social networks are the basis for generating traffic to the site. What we want is to generate engagement on the social networks: people coming to talk to us and asking us things, and we also use the network to find out information that helps us in our decision making, such as doing polls asking about a destination." - DM.

"Usually, the consumer comes into our social networks to ask for product information and to share their own opinions and experiences. On this part, we

even have a good experience with reviews. We have four out of five stars on Facebook and we notice that there is an effort on the part of the consumer to give good feedback when deserved." - GC.

The strategies practiced by the S Operator in the social networks are characterized as pull and have proven to be the most effective form of online communication. The leverage in the sales process is the result of the combination of the independent strategies of the travel agencies with the strategies of the S Operator.

"Travel agencies are passive in product pull. Today, their strategy is still very pushy, and we have concrete cases. With Terceira Island we ran a campaign where we focused at first on the sales force, through communication supports and actions, and the sales didn't come. Only when the S Operator addressed the final customer directly, through the promotion of the package using influencers, communication of publications on social networks, and replying to private messages, did sales start to generate. We work more with pull strategies. That is why it is important to work with the final consumer." - DM.

"It's important, when a consumer goes to a travel agency, that they know us to specifically ask for our package. In the midst of so many offers, it's important for them to go there and say, 'I want this package, I've already talked to them on Facebook and this is what I want'." - GC

Documentary research content analysis

Like the interview analysis model, the document analysis was based on Bardin's (1977) model. The organization of the data into groups led to the definition of a category structure by indicators. This was followed by individual exploration of the indicators, with transcription of relevant content and inference of knowledge. The document analysis aimed to deepen the understanding of category c. Content marketing and subcategory c.1. Storytelling strategy represented in Table 1. From the content analysis of the documentary research,

the following content marketing indicators are distinguished, in addition to the indicators identified in the interviews: attention grabbing storytelling and retention storytelling.

A clear indicator of the analysis is the development of strategies in content marketing, to capture the attention of the final consumer who has not had experience with the brand. These are contents specifically linked to the dissemination of the product, with objectives outlined in the short term and present imperative language characteristics: "There are certain words that we already know have greater impact, such as: last places, all included." - states the brand account.

The message is created in the context of product benefits, associated with call to action. The call to action corresponds to a link to the website, where the consumer can perform a budget simulation. After performing the simulation, the consumer is unable to make the purchase since the S Operator only sells to travel agencies, Business to Business (B2B)[7]. The purchasing process assumes that the consumer uses the simulation to present to a travel agency. However, since the communication is Business to Consumer (B2C)[8] and there are no references at the content level to how to make the purchase, the new user reveals doubts regarding the purchase. In most situations, this results in direct contact between the consumer and the S Operator, via private messages on social networks or online chat on the website (for the final consumer, the brand does not provide further means of contact), to clarify their questions. In this way, the brand can have the autonomy to attract the potential customer and refer to the travel agent.

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[7] Business model also called company to company in which the end customer is another company and not an individual.

[8] Business model also called business to consumer in which the end customer is directly the consumer.

Another form of attraction content is online gift contests held in partnership with digital influencers. In this sense, the attraction is not directly for sale, but is aimed at visibility and attracting new followers.

Regarding the retention storytelling indicator, video, image, story and personalized private message formats are distinguished. The content created in this context has a long-term function. The format is characterized as consumer-friendly, and emotional in nature, as it acts in a closer and more engaging way. In other words, contents are developed that add value to the product and service of the S Operator. They encompass a set of information about travel, namely, what to do, points of interest, what to eat, traveler tips, among others, which are framed as a source of credible and valuable information for the consumer.

While the video, image and stories formats follow an interaction strategy, focused on metrics such as the number of likes, comments, and shares, the private messages follow a conversion strategy, essentially focused on conversion into leads, through the collection of contacts and information during the clarification of questions and requests for quotes. In both strategies, the major goal is retention, not the attraction of new followers, but the creation of relationships of trust with those who are close to the brand, in which there is confidence to share information, with the brand's mission to be a relevant opinion leader in the market of.

It can be seen, therefore, that in storytelling strategies indicators are identified at the level of objectives: attraction (short term) and retention (long term) of the consumer. The identification of these indicators is important for the choice of inbound marketing tools that best fit the message to be transmitted. While the attention attraction storytelling is focused on product benefits and special campaigns, with actions such as online hobbies, the retention storytelling focuses on the product's added value, providing valuable content to the consumer, reinforced by trust relationships. Both indicators play an important

role in the inbound marketing of the S Operator, because only their combination - attracting the consumer to the brand and establishing continuous interactions - is capable of positioning it as close as possible to the mission of being an opinion leader in the travel industry.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The relationship between content marketing and the S Operator's communication strategy

Content marketing "involves the creation, organization, distribution, and amplification of interesting, relevant, and useful content to a clearly defined audience group in order to create conversations about content" (Kotler et al., 2017, p. 155). In addition to static website content, the S Operator also makes use of videos, consumer-generated content (Chaffey & Smith, 2013) as well as by digital influencers, and content considered consumer-friendly, such as stories (Opreana & Vinerean, 2015) and private messages exchanged on social media and in the website's live chat[14].

Operator S preserves the information provided by users on the networks. Polls and customer reviews (Bazaarvoice and The CMO Club, 2011) assume an important role in decision making. To strengthen the emotional involvement (Pulizzi, 2014) of the parties during storytelling, increasingly the brand relies on storytelling techniques (Du Plessis, 2015c). An important aspect of storytelling techniques is the definition of the target audience (Świeczak, 2014a). The Account Manager mentions the S Operator consumer as: "Our audience is kind of premium. Usually over 30, graduates or with education because our destinations are very tropical and it's for a consumer with some purchasing power." It is important to note that segmentation is carried out with particular consideration for the consumer's dimension of consumption preferences: "we consider interests like: travel, destination, other agencies." - GC. There is zeal in targeting content to the consumer, with the product being positioned as the

means to make the consumer's lifestyle and preferences tangible (Świeczak, 2014a).

The content marketing approach, practiced by the S Operator, has participation in attention-grabbing storytelling and retention storytelling (Pulizzi, 2014). For attention grabbing, the goal is to attract potential customers in the short term, being frequent the use of imperative words in product promotion posts, such as "last places" and "all-inclusive". There are also efforts in terms of replying to private messages and holding contests in partnership with influencers.

There is the application of content marketing in retention strategies aimed at those who have already had the first moment of contact with the brand, according to the brand's account. One way is through private messages on social networks. In this medium "the type of messages exchanged is deeper and has greater attention"- GC. There is a personalization of the message according to interests, wishes and personal information. In addition, storytelling is developed in video, image, and story formats that disseminate valuable travel-related content. The goal is to create lasting relationships of trust that associate the brand with a relevant vacation opinion leader. In addition, there is programming to develop retargeting campaigns on Facebook specific to this target audience. Lundqvist et al. (2013) note that a good story can engage consumers to become brand ambassadors, spreading the word through positive word of mouth and recommending the brand to others. This type of strategy has been promoted by the S Operator for about five years, through campaigns with influencers and, to date, the return is evident in the higher number of visitors to the website, increased brand visibility and closer engagement with the consumer. Influencer groups are characterized by living the travel experiences provided by the brand and sharing their influential stories with their community (Adolpho, 2014). This influential power of ambassadors is not limited to public figures. It also significantly encompasses anonymous

people, as they are better able to convey honesty and truthfulness in their stories.

The relationship between social media marketing and the S Operator's communication strategy

A social network is a website or service that allows sharing between connected users. It allows collaborative content creation, social interaction and information sharing in various formats (Miller, 2011). According to the marketing director of the S Operator, the basis of the brand's online communication with the end consumer comes from the social networks Facebook and Instagram. As an added value, it has a strong community, with about 100,000 followers on social networks. The goal of the brand on social networks is to generate engagement with the consumer, encouraging them to initiate and maintain close contact with the brand, to ask questions and request information. That is, to encourage social research (Adolpho, 2014). It is denoted the use of social networks by the consumer as a source of information (Świeczak, 2014b) to which the consumer actively requests help in performing simulations of travel budgets and information about destinations. Moreover, as a goal, the brand reveals to favor opinion and experience sharing relationships with the brand. The reviews and comments of consumers favor social research, since, being generated by the endorsement of contacts in the network, it conveys greater confidence to those who read (Adolpho, 2014).

Compared to marketing in traditional media, significant advantages are presented in using social media as a marketing strategy. The company identifies the ability to listen to consumer feedback, the competitive costs (Neti, 2011), and the ability to measure results as the key pluses.

The relationship of content marketing in Operator S's social media

Chaffey & Smith (2013) identify the Internet as a communication tool divided into three media categories. They include paid media[9], owned media[10] and earned media[11]. The S Operator's content marketing strategies are developed essentially in owned media and earned media. The owned media corresponds to the website and the social networks Facebook and Instagram, the latter being the hub of all the actions prepared for the final consumer. In earned media, we highlight the participation of the final consumer and the campaigns developed with influencers in the social networks. The advantage of social networks for the S Operator is that they are a participative medium that facilitates collaboration by Internet users (Carrera, 2012). The S Operator's consumer is empowered with the ability to participate in online surveys aimed at product improvement, the creation and posting of personal brand-related content, and the making of comments and reviews derived from the consumption experience. Together with the influencers, these elements, external to the company, are characterized as preference shapers, with recommendation power about the S Operator brand, capable of influencing the behavior of other individuals to new experiences (Anderson, 2006).

Identify indicators of success in the practice of content marketing in social networks that attract the consumer and reinforce inbound marketing in the S Operator

Since 2014, the S Operator has changed its approach with the customer, that is, from push strategies to pull strategies, in which it actively seeks to attract the customer. "Before we used to let the customer drift more, he saw our brand and had to go to the travel agency. Nowadays we pull the customer to us and we are the ones who refer them to the agency, to try to get the sale to stay in the brand-DM." Nowadays, the S Operator provides the consumer with content

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[9] They are materials or content that are present in spaces independent of the brand through payments.
[10] These are the channels that belong to the brand, such as website, blog and landing pages.
[11] They are channels, media or platforms that are not part of the business or company, but that are part of the organic exposure of the brand.

and means to take control and decide when to look for the company (Court et, al. 2009). To this idea, Świeczak (2014b) conceptualizes inbound marketing. The most important goal of inbound marketing, for the S Operator, is to generate engagement on social media, that is, to promote ongoing conversations in which consumers feel confidence in the brand as a source of information and a means of interaction and of sharing their own opinions and experiences. The reinforcement of these ongoing conversations results in more sales at the moment of decision "if they have already heard of the S Operator, the sale will fall through more easily" - DM.

To nurture this relationship, the brand offers content that demonstrates the benefits of the product for the consumer (Świeczak, 2014b; Opreana & Vinerean, 2015) combined with an emotional (Pulizzi, 2014) and friendly (Opreana & Vinerean, 2015) component, developed over the long term. Moreover, in order to maintain close relationships, the development of campaigns with influencers is recurrent. Travel experiences are provided for them to create their own content about their real stories. The aim is, at the user level, to create positive attitudes towards the brand (Lambin, 2000), which gives it greater credibility and notoriety. One visible result of these campaigns was in the Mauritius destination, where an isolated action was developed with an influencer and the hotel where she stayed. The hotel occupied the sixth place of sales in the destination and since the action took place until the year this data was collected, it occupied the third place in the sales ranking.

To tell differentiating stories, storytelling techniques are involved (Du Plessis, 2015c) through less conventional methods, but more effective in accessibility, such as: private messages, videos, contests, content originated by consumers and influencers and stories in social networks. The S Operator intends, therefore, to tell different stories with its platforms and social networks in order to create differentiating content and support the storytelling of ambassadors.

CONCLUSION

The interest in this research focuses on understanding the role of inbound marketing in the communication strategy. The focus is to assimilate the contribution of social media content in consumer attraction, applied to the case of tourism. The results of this study indicate that content is the key element of brand communication with the end consumer. The main formats are video, consumer- and digital influencer-generated content, private messaging content, live website chat, and social media stories. There is differentiated content between potential and current customers, with a more personalized approach to retaining current customers. The contents are consumer-oriented, in which the purchase is promoted as the means to achieve one's lifestyle and satisfy one's needs. Through stories, the aim is to add superior symbolic value to goods and services, so that the consumer creates positive associations with the brand. In this way, the brand seeks to position itself as an opinion leader in the area of travel, presenting itself as a relevant source of information for the consumer. There is also a focus on emotional involvement and transparency through storytelling techniques, with emphasis on partnerships with digital influencers.

Attracting the consumer involves awakening in them the interest to search for the brand and building positive attitudes towards it. For this, it is essential to offer a valuable storytelling for the consumer, combined with an emotional component, as is the case with the use of partnerships with digital influencers. The process involves investing in continuous conversations that promote engagement, possible through participatory and collaborative means, which is the case of social networks. The accessibility of the tools allows for non-intrusive content sharing, leaving the power in the consumer to decide under what circumstances to search for the brand. Some of these user-friendly tools identified in the brand's social networks are as follows: private messaging, videos, online hobbies, content originated by consumers and influencers, and social media stories. In addition, the challenges identified encompass speed of communication, flexibility of content and media.

Inbound marketing in B2B businesses takes power away from the intermediaries, giving the consumer an active role in the decision of the existing brands at the points of sale. This process requires, on the part of brands, as is the case of the S Operator, a great deal of market monitoring, both with market studies and with community listening tools. Community management is a complex job that involves constant monitoring both online and offline. Listening to the customer is important throughout the buying process, to understand the reasons for buying and not buying. Understanding at the moment of purchase why the consumer bought package x and not y is valuable information for your business. In this way, the expression community cannot only be focused on the final consumer but be broadly extended to the intermediaries. These will be the last face of the brand and with strong power in the final decision, as they have influence in the purchase process/closure, especially in high value products or services. Having regular campaigns with influencers and campaigns focused on the final customer brings as a challenge intermediaries distrustful and with a perception of devaluation of the work, because they are called to give an opinion about an area on which they have no expertise. The challenge for operators is to integrate this community into one, where no party feels excluded.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study's limitation is the impossibility of predicting the long-term results of inbound marketing practice at Company S. Another important limitation concerns the scope of the problem. The analysis could have encompassed other research domains and study dimensions, in addition to those deepened by the study. The choice sought to meet the company's domains, but the possibility of analyzing other domains within inbound marketing is admitted.

Regarding the main difficulty of the research, data collection is identified, since the topic was little explored by the company in question and it was not possible

to gather and cross-reference data from other departments related to marketing results, such as the sales department.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

During the study, it was notorious the recurrent contact of the consumer with Operator S, in order to request services that were not its responsibility, but rather that of a travel agent. This regular occurrence arose because the S Operator communicates as a travel agent, communicating directly with the final consumer and not only with its B2B business area. In addition, the consumer himself revealed a lack of knowledge regarding the sales process of the brand.

The question arises from this: For what reason(s) does Operator S not carry out a clear communication in the media itself, in which it explicitly advertises that it is a wholesaler and does not sell directly to the final consumer? This question was raised at the time of the interviews, but there was no response.

We identified, however, that although the communication was not clear, it had results as an inbound marketing strategy. The process resulted in consumers coming into direct contact with the S Operator, with their purchasing questions and experiences. They were attracted by that non-explicit brand message. It remains to be seen whether the results would be the same if the message were direct and mentioned that the sales area is not intended for the end consumer. Thus, new avenues of investigation could contribute to the study of the effectiveness of equivocal messages in attracting the consumer.

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