UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

EXPLORING HOW THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IN

PLACE BY TLC MARKETING HAVE CHANGED IN TIMES OF

UNCERTAINTY FOR THE PARTNERS & CONTENT DEPARTMENT

-

THE IMPACT OF A CRISIS ON COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Internship report presented to Universidade Católica
Portuguesa to obtain a Master's Degree in Communication
Sciences- Communication, Marketing and Advertising

By

Joana Moutinho de Gouveia Correia de Lacerda

Faculty of Human Sciences

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Under the supervision of Professor Jessica Roberts

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Resumo – O impacto de uma crise na estratégia de comunicação

O presente relatório de estágio é o resultado de um estágio curricular que teve lugar na agência TLC Marketing. Com o objectivo de ligar os tempos difíceis da pandemia em Portugal com as estratégias de comunicação *business-to-business*. Este relatório pretende identificar estratégias de marketing e comunicação que possam contribuir para minimizar e inverter os efeitos negativos de uma pandemia de coronavírus.

O desenho da investigação fenomenológica aspira analisar duas campanhas muito semelhantes que foram lançadas em anos diferentes (2020 e 2021), uma campanha alcançou resultados impressionantes, a outra não. Planeia classificar quais as estratégias que tornaram a primeira campanha tão bem sucedida. Na sequência da elaboração da investigação de Creswell, escolho por utilizar o método qualitativo: entrevistas abertas e semi-estruturadas, assim como a observação dos participantes, durante o período de estágio.

A presente investigação baseia-se em três capítulos principais: o mercado do *B2B*, o contexto da comunicação, e o contexto da Covid-19. De acordo com as minhas conclusões, fui capaz de identificar as estratégias de comunicação que foram bem sucedidas num contexto *B2B*. Em tempos de crise pandémica, quando as empresas não sabem realmente com o que contar, é fundamental investir nas abordagens de comunicação e empatia de uma empresa. Deve ser dado, um maior ênfase às possibilidades digitais, ainda mais agora, que todos os tipos de empresas que têm a oportunidade se estão a tornar conhecedoras do digital. No entanto, através de tempos difíceis como este, vários parceiros fecharam e houve muitas lutas a ultrapassar.

No fundo, ambiciono a contribuir para um melhor conhecimento da comunicação entre empresas e espero que novos estudos possam reforçar esta área de investigação, promovendo uma discussão académica profundamente ligada ao mundo do marketing.

Palavras-chave: *Business-to-Business*, Comunicação, Estratégias, Covid-19, Digital

Abstract - The impact of a crisis on communication strategy

The current internship report is a result of a curricular internship in the TLC Marketing agency—aiming to connect the challenging times of the pandemic crisis in Portugal with business-to-business communication strategies. This report intends to identify marketing and communication strategies that can minimize and reverse the adverse effects of a coronavirus pandemic.

The phenomenological research design aspires to analyze two similar campaigns launched in different years (2020 and 2021). One campaign achieved impressive results, and the other one didn't. It plans to classify which strategies made the first campaign so successful. Following Creswell's research design, I choose to use the qualitative method: open-ended and semi-structured interviews and participant observation during the internship period.

The present research is based on three main chapters: the B2B market, the communication context, and the Covid-19 background. According to my conclusions, I was able to identify the communication strategies that were successful in a B2B setting. However, several partners closed because of challenging times like this, and there were many struggles to overcome. In times of a pandemic crisis, when firms don't know what to count on, it's fundamental to invest in a company's communication and empathy approaches. A greater emphasis should be given to digital possibilities, even more so now, that all types of businesses that have the opportunity are becoming digital savvy.

Furthermore, I aspire to contribute to a better knowledge of business-to-business communication and hope that new studies can strengthen this research area, promoting an academic discussion deeply connected to the marketing world.

Key words: Business-to-Business, Communication, Strategies, Covid-19, Digital

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Introduction

The current report on the impact of a crisis on communication strategy, applied to a B2B business, is the completion of a curricular internship in TLC Marketing agency. The company is composed of three parts: 1) The Business Development department team that sells a campaign to a client with the promise of having x, y, and z rewards that meet the customer's needs; 2) The Partners and Content department that creates the partnerships network and later adds the right partners to the campaign; and 3) The Customer Service department that handles the consumers who experience/enjoy the rewards. I worked in the Partners and Content department. Therefore I decided for the purposes of this research to focus more on this department.

Throughout this internship period, it was evident that the pandemic crisis determined and influenced the company's campaigns and strategies. In the Partner and Contents Department, all the communication strategies were designed to respond to the context of the crisis. In this sense and trying to give a contemporary edge to the research, I decided to look at the pandemic crisis and the communication strategies implemented during this time.

In essence, I aimed to understand which communication strategies are best suited for a period of crisis. In this sense, and trying to ensure the feasibility of the study, my research object is business-to-business communication strategies. Therefore, my research question will be: what impact will the pandemic have in changing the communication strategy?

A thriving marketing relationship calls for a business to communicate with its clients in a manner that generates value for all sides. For this reason, the strategic function of communication has emerged as an area of primary concern for management for companies in all sectors. (Hjelmeland & Panteleeva, 2021). According to Swani et al. (2020), business-to-business (B2B) marketers have implemented and tested a broad selection of marketing communication instruments to address the challenges of far-reaching development goals and increasing pressure to achieve execution objectives (Lilien, 2016). This change is due to an acknowledgment that a personal sales approach is significant (Hutt & Speh, 2021) but not enough, even when based on an elevated ability to respond to customer needs to be more cooperative (Wiersema, 2013). Consequently, B2B marketers have shown a commitment to go beyond mere one-way marketing

communications to innovatively implement several types of traditional and non-traditional marketing media to better interact with clients (Grewal, Bart, et al., 2016; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Salo, 2017). According to Brown et al. (2007), new strategies need to be established for brands to interact with business buyers efficiently. I hope to identify the new strategies that the Partners and Content department established to communicate with the partners efficiently in a pandemic context.

I will dedicate the first chapter of this report to contextualizing the reality of the business-to-business market since this profoundly affects the performance of this type of agency at a national level. Portugal is currently going through one of the most challenging times in its history, during which many businesses had to shut down. According to Statistics Portugal and Banco de Portugal (2021), 62% of companies recorded a reduction in business volume in the first half of February 2020. Since the profit was not the same as before, companies weren't as open for business as before. Therefore, using the "Business to business-consumer Market Dimensions Continuum" from Brown, Bellenger, and Johnston (2007), it will be essential to identify the differences between a business-to-business market and a business to consumer market, and from that to determine the branding approach that is most viable to be successful in brand-building efforts in a business-to-business (B2B) setting.

I will begin by highlighting some of the forms of the B2B Marketing (sub-chapter 1.1), and then, using several authors, I explore the existing literature in this area. Throughout the sub-chapter dedicated to the business-to-business market, I try to identify the characteristic variables of that market and understand the aspects and strategies that define it.

In the context of a widespread pandemic crisis, communication strategies are inevitably affected. However, and given its nature, several approaches can easily be adapted to the current situation and still provide positive results, acting as a source of assistance for B2B companies.

I will dedicate two sub-chapters to specific aspects of the communication context, such as communication strategy and negotiation, seeking to enrich this report with details that I consider fundamental for a thorough study. The growing importance of the digital, and the consequent ability to reach the entire country, was translated into potential growth and profitability for small

to large businesses, with a target audience that was too limited until now. In this challenging new reality, marketing and communication must rethink strategies to meet these new challenges. It is on the possible response approaches that I will focus on by presenting the conclusions of authors such as Hoover (2010), Putnam and Roloff, Pandey (2021), He and Harris (2020).

Portugal is not a very digital country, as it still opts for several traditional approaches/tools. Still, throughout these two years, Portugal experienced a tremendous evolution with the digital world and communication. The businesses that wanted to keep running had to adjust their business model to an online platform to communicate with clients. Yoga, Pilates, and gym classes were taught through Zoom or Teams; client and team member meetings were held through Teams or Google Hangouts; small boutique clothing stores now had an Instagram page and a TikTok account. Numerous researchers have emphasized that integrating digital is one of the most valuable methods to managing the pandemic crisis (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Hwang, Nageswaran & Cho, 2020; Habes et al., 2020).

He and Harris (2020) stated that platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Zoom, Teams, and Google Hangouts were used more by individuals than any other apps throughout the lockdown period. For this reason, implementing a digital marketing and communication strategy to interact with clients is extremely important for firms. However, to create an essential digital marketing and communication strategy, it is first necessary to understand the digital marketing and communication area and how B2B companies develop a brand and promote their products and services purposefully.

At the end of these two chapters (1.2; 2.3), I present a selection of business-to-business and marketing and communication approaches that seem fundamental to responding to a post-pandemic crisis. I will try to reflect a wide range of opinions that will contribute to an in-depth knowledge of the study already existing in this area and outline action trends for the future. I then move on to explain the conditions of the country during the pandemic. This chapter will focus on the pandemic crisis, and more specifically on its influence on marketing and the B2B market variables, and the most affected businesses sectors. It will show how corporations have adjusted and shift their marketing philosophies to mirror the consumer's needs and wants. Within the scope of the pandemic crisis and the sub-chapter, the influence of marketing (3.1) on CSR

and marketing methodology will be explained. According to He & Harris (2020), several firms proactively implemented various CSR activities that helped fight against this virus. However, it is essential to address in this sub-chapter that after enforced lockdowns and travel limitations, there was a drastic shift in perceptions of value between several buyers and partners (He & Harris, 2020).

The last topic to be addressed in this chapter is coronavirus's influence on the B2B market variables (3.3), describing how the coronavirus crisis has created disastrous revolutionary challenges for B2B agencies. The pandemic crisis will also be compared to a financial-based problem to show its impact on all levels. It is on the possible response approaches that I will focus on by presenting the conclusions of authors such as Cortez and Johnston (2020).

As He and Harris (2020) stated, agencies had to re-assess their missions, visions, and goals to explain alterations in the markets, customers, competitors, and others. The descriptive narrative chapter describes the TLC Marketing agency's mission, vision, values, products, and organizational chart. It will also tell my role as an intern, describing the activities done and implemented throughout the internship.

The last chapter applies a Phenomenological Research Design to present and analyze two campaigns dedicated to attracting new clients and helping them achieve their goals by giving consumers what they need in a pandemic setting. The campaigns are RESTART Portugal (launched in 2020) and RISE Portugal (established in 2021). They both have the same target audience. It will analyze why one campaign succeeded and the other one did not. I will then describe the results of a qualitative study that consisted of interviewing 10 TLC Marketing employees. My research will be conducted based on Creswell's (2014) research design. In this sense, I will now present the research objectives that will serve as the guidelines of my report. Which are the following:

1.   Understand the impact of the pandemic in all the variables.

2.   Identify which communication strategies work and which don't work during the pandemic crisis.

3.   Understand the role of the digital as a strategy.

4.   Identify which campaigns were successful and why.

5.   Analyze the most affected sectors in the light of the current crisis.

6.   Reflect on the future of business-to-business communications.

In this report, I have decided to use the qualitative method since this approach meets my ambition of gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. Taking advantage of the internship at TLC Marketing, it will be possible for me, as a participant-observer, to explore and understand the functioning of the Partners and Content department and all the strategies designed.

In the end, I propose to reflect on the future of marketing agencies. Aware that the digital era has profoundly changed the way businesses operate, I will try to analyze the steps that have been taken by agencies and the challenges they face. Moving away from an alarmist position, I intend to explore alternative paths so that this sector can better adapt to current demands and consolidate its place in the market by reformulating its business model.

My ambition is to contribute to the academic knowledge in a little-explored area of research, the pandemic crisis applied to business-to-business communication strategies. Even though there was an increase in research about the business implications of the pandemic, the truth is that there is still very little available literature. In this sense, I hope to have opened the way for Future studies that will complement and strengthen the academic contribution in this marketing area.

Chapter 1- The B2B Market

B2B is generally seen as a position where corporations have a mutual agreement, they both benefit from, or one corporation makes negotiation with another. The requirement for business relationships is a connection of trust between both parties (Schoop & List, 2001). This connection of trust relies upon the particular form of communication and agreements and regulations. According to Vargo and Lusch (2011), service-dominant reasoning is a hypothetical system clarifying worth formation through trade. This logic widens the point of view of trade and

value formation. It suggests that all communal and monetary factors involved in exchange (e.g., firms, clients, and so forth) are service-providing, value-formation businesses. Accordingly, B2B is viewed as everything that is exchanged. Understanding the background and meaning of B2B marketing is essential as it is one of the main concepts and will provide the foundation for this research. Symbiotic relationships between businesses have existed since companies were established, suggesting that B2B marketing has prevailed for a while. While the study of B2B marketing can be traced back to the '90s, it created considerable additions to the B2B marketing approach over the past three eras (Hadjikhani & LaPlaca, 2013).

Research on B2B marketing was muted to a great extent, and the knowledge of it was based on unspoken, specified, and empirical studies established on the conduct of a businessperson (Hadjikhani & LaPlaca, 2013); The growth of B2B marketing approaches has been understood in several ways. Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995) distinguish the phases of market growth as pre-industrial, industrial, and post-industrial phases and link the advancement of B2B to these phases of market growth. Throughout the post-industrial or post-model turn phases, investigators gradually used behavior approaches to ground the B2B marketing method. According to Hadjikhani and LaPlaca (2013), the B2B marketing method did not have much hypothetical advancement in the pre-industrial phase. In the industrial stage, which mainly consisted of marketing evolution, the economic approach was significantly influenced. At the same time, the post-industrial phase shifted to the impact of the conduct approach. The researchers Brown, Bellenger, and Johnston (2007) presented the "*B2B-Consumer Market Dimensions Continuum*" as an instrument to identify significant distinctions between the two marketplaces, the business to business and the consumer to business. The continuum is utilized to indicate the branding methodology that is most feasible to be effective in a B2B company's brand-building attempts, which will be explained in the following chapters.

1.1 B2B Marketing

According to Hall (2017), B2B marketing can also be described as business marketing, and it's the method of the entities or corporations promoting products or services to corporations or businesses. The corporations in this scenario are seen as the client instead of a single client or purchaser. There are apparent discrepancies between B2B marketing and marketing to narrow

businesses and standard or sizable businesses. This discrepancy is transactional marketing for limited companies and affiliation or enterprise marketing for regular or sizable firms. The primary characteristics of transactional marketing are product-oriented, wide target-group (narrow industry), more straightforward purchasing procedure, lower quantity, higher quality, an individual investor in purchasing approach, emotive purchasing choices, and boosting and producing profit (Hall, 2017). The characteristics of enterprise marketing are loyal affiliations, narrower concentrated groups, and more complex procedures, higher quantity and offers, several investors in purchasing approach, reactions endowed + logical purchasing choices and boosting & producing leads, growing the pipeline and profit (Hall, 2017).

The last decade has been marked by numerous trends in B2B marketing, including establishing a new marketing mix and creating a B2B Scheme and tactics, which consist of the following cycle: evolve through digital and matter, boost and develop within the network, be more customer-oriented, and elevate marketing performance (Hall, 2017). Hall (2017) considers these trends and adds critical subjects to help B2B marketers develop innovative marketing strategies and boost their performance. The key issues are the following: first is to become customer-oriented. By altering companies' conduct, business interactions, and working together, B2B marketers must better understand managerial impacts. In addition to increased involvement and contact with companies and investors through more focused marketing, which has turned into trendy themes in B2B as their central core is to empower diverse relations and influencers (Hall, 2017).

Second, due to the surge in digital and substance marketing, there has been a change in marketing communications to emphasize substance. As a result, substance structures have branched out and mostly became more valuable. There has been a shift from interruptive marketing to inbound marketing. Interruptive marketing uses publicity, campaigns, public relations, and transactions with a product or service; if overused, it can be viewed as something harmful rather than helpful in attracting more clients (Hall, 2017). In contrast, inbound marketing is a more approachable response from clients to marketing communications, and it is marketing that appeals and attracts clients, preferably more than marketing impelling communications. A decade ago, marketers could not trace clients' purchasing attitudes or media use through several marketing channels; additionally, clients did not consume such a range of marketing channels in an acquisition. Digital and connected tools have transformed everything: currently, companies

can trace clients' media use and ride in a more related way. Digital appliances let businesses understand how consumers connect through digital tools such as the telephone, social, online journals, what content they employ, and how they interact with such matter (Hall, 2017).

Third, is the journey from particular paths to advertise to multi-channel marketing. Firms and marketers were limited to believing in specific concrete ways to promote openly or implicitly (Hall, 2017). With the boost of digital tools and appliances, businesses must incorporate digital and substantial allocation vehicles and include them in their strategies to sustain and hasten their development (Hall, 2017).

Fourth, enhanced tension to maximize marketing performance. With the recent digital products such as marketing automation, CRM, etc., marketers can and must boost sales and optimize marketing execution. With the shifting environment of purchasing choices, the strategies marketers utilize to develop prospects have strengthened. Recent tools and digital applications have expanded the capacity to trace clients' behavior through interaction (Hall, 2017).

According to Wiersema (2013), B2B firms are progressing to adjust themselves to their changing market situation. Almost half (46%) of the organizations had left on a significant change drive, regularly alluded to as paths, or were getting ready to do so. Their level of progress changed, along with the degree of businesses-broad purchase-in. The most frequent changes were from an item to a market center, from being business-focused to becoming client-esteem driven, toward more impactful assistance or outcome-focused, or from direct clients to end clients. Marketing has a focal role in these broad business paths—frequently as the assigned driver of the undertaking. B2B marketing's position is getting more tactical. In 48% of companies, managers discussed the need to depict marketing's developing situation and its liability inside the company (Wiersema, 2013).

According to Brown, Bellenger, and Johnston (2007), the main factors that characterize the B2B market and its impact are Marketing & Communication Variables, Product Variables, Psychological Variables, and Contextual Conditions. These will be explored in the following section.

1.1.2 *Marketing & Communication variables*

According to Schultz and Schultz (1998), Integrated Marketing Communication is a deliberate commercial method utilized to plot, advance, implement, and assess accordingly. It gradually determines convincing brand communication plans with consumers, customers, prospects, and another aim at significant outsider and insider viewers. Gilliland and Johnston (1997) argue that "the inherent differences between B2B marketing and consumer marketing results in significant differences in how marketing communication tools are processed and acted on by their targets". Even though both consumer and B2B marketers depend on various instruments to advertise their brands, the subject conveyed and the channels utilized are likely to vary. Therefore, the communication plan and devices tend to differ according to the technical and operational aspects of output and the composition of the decision-making entity.

According to Brown, Bellenger, and Johnston (2007), "Personal selling is the most important communication tool for the B2B marketer" (based on Jackson, Keith, and Burdick 1987; Malaval's 2001 research). When Marketers target a consumer, they utilize a variety of communication instruments; the same thing is applied to B2B marketers. The most commonly operated devices are likely to incorporate the vendor's department, displays, trade magazines, trades resources, advertising methods, public relations, and attempt to influence. However, according to Traynor and Traynor (1989), providers discovered it was most relevant to advertise their brands through the salesforce. It was pursued by publicity in trade magazines, trade shows, practical sessions, selling promotion resources, direct mail advertising, packaging, and newspapers/ television/ radio marketing. Individual trading is the most valuable communication instrument for the B2B marketer (Jackson, Keith, and Burdick 1987; Malaval 2001). It incorporates more than a company's vendors department. For instance, O'Hara (1993) claims that displays distinguish from in-person trading and are generally utilized to complement more individual trading programs. Parasuraman (1981) discovered that shows lined up after online trading shaped manufacturing buyers' purchasing choices.

According to Jerman and Završnik (2012), well-structured communication marketing goals will positively impact efficacy. This assumption is evident from the intentions of the methodology created by Fisher, Maltz & Jaworski (1997). It is based on the synchronized conduct of people

and parties within an association to attain the acknowledged goals. The tactic is founded on teamwork and collaboration between the parties. Successful marketing communications is the outcome of a well-managed process between the purposes of a corporation and its selected approach to marketing communication (Kliatchko 2009; Reid 2003). This indicates that the advancement of marketing communication goals and organization with a solid commercial plan can lead to a steady and feasible marketing communication plan. A marketing communication plan should be in alignment with the corporation's vision, plan, and mission (Fill, 1999) and in alignment with the selected marketplace plan (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998). Previous research shows the constructive influence of the mission of a corporation on its financial achievement. There must be coherence with all interacting communications for compelling marketing communications to develop faith and consistency in potential customers' views. Overseeing the point of view conveys and acquires communications on a system of planned coherence (Kitchen & Schultz, 2003).

In short, B2B marketers are expected to highlight distinct means and involve diverse matters in their message compared to consumer marketers. Brands need a unique communication method because of the various settings. In B2B contexts, brand features need to communicate more engagingly and individually than conventional consumer methods (Brown, Bellenger & Johnston, 2007). Additionally, they should be understood as containing a practical aspect, including a more sympathetically vital part. For example, BASF's "We don't make a lot of the products you buy" campaigns embody this method as it conveys contrasting character and chemical contributions. Their print advertisements express the robustness, flexibility, and revolving durability of its plastics, including enhanced developments, improved quality, and cheaper costs as the setting of action-focused reasons. Therefore, brands should be suitably strong in their performance and problem-solving abilities and effortless when it comes to their character and several delicate features (Brown, Bellenger & Johnston, 2007).

1.1.3 Product variables

Secondly, product variables are the apparent value of an acquisition that is expected to differ depending on the setting. For that reason, the position of brands is expected to vary depending on the ground (Brown, Bellenger & Johnston, 2007). Aaker and Keller (1998), Brown (1998), and

Brown and Dacin (1997) claim that there is a continuum of a business' public branding support by stages. On one side of the spectrum is what may be described as "umbrella branding," company branding, or a "branded house" approach. A company branding approach refers to "a systematically planned and implemented process of creating and maintaining a favorable reputation of an organization and its constituent elements, by sending signals to stakeholders using the corporate brand" (Van Riel and Van Bruggen, 2002). The other side of the spectrum is what may be described as the "product brand" or a "house-of-brands" approach. A "product-brand" approach implies utilizing a brand term distinct from the establishment's representation on a single proposal or related proposals (Blomback, 2005).

According to Chernatony and McDonald (1998), "In any purchase, organizational buyers' main concern is with the supplier's corporate identity, as opposed to any specific product." There is a notable distinction between a professional marketplace and a customer marketplace. Professional marketplaces are inclined to depend on an "umbrella branding" strategy. De Chernatony & McDonald (1998) claim that in any acquisition, managerial purchasers' main concern is with the seller's business character, contrary to any particular good. According to Gordon, Cantone, and Benedetto (1993), this claim has significant implications.

To start with, the firm designation and its status, not specific goods labels, are the key differentiator. Then, from the perspective of commercial setting, brand faithfulness is equivalent to corporation faithfulness. According to previous research, a corporation's status is at the core of a business branding plan (Mudambi et al., 1997). Therefore, a purchaser's assessment of a business product will involve understanding the operational advantages of development and an evaluation of the employees in the corporation regarding their abilities, manners, performance, manners of interaction, and resilience (Michell et al. 2001).

Davies et al. (2006) and Foote et al. (2001) explained the choice of whether a corporation identifies and incorporates a rival's expertise as the 'acid test,' taking into consideration that implementing that will possibly put the corporation's services business in inconsistency with its product businesses. Galbraith (2002) described this challenge by contrasting product-focused and customer-focused companies. I.e., product-focused companies aim to attract as many consumers

as feasible for their products. At the same time, customer-focused businesses seek to attract as many products as possible for their consumers and incorporate them. The researcher also reckoned that this might demand if the suggestion of competitive products supports the client's concerns. Kowalkowski (2005) considered this stance the most extreme type of consumer focus and is not pertinent for firms with potent manufacturing and product growth abilities. Mathieu (2001) also found resources on other corporations' products as the ultimate form of administrative intensity'. For example, how dedicated a business is to be developing a services business. Only those corporations with a cultural passion, where services form the corporation's mission, are liable to achieve this shift (Raddats & Easingwood, 2010).

In short, McQuiston (2004) argues that for mechanical items, branding is a multifaceted concept that incorporates how the client sees the actual item and auxiliary elements, like the logistics, client service, brand image, and business rules that go with the item. Past the tangible object, purchasers seek brands to convey value beyond actual execution. An additional vital component to a brand's prosperity is a producer's capacity to supply items and backing facilities, frequently through mediators, dependably and effectively. Brands must be related to organizations and the relationship that organizations have with a client. Along these lines, brands should mean more than the guarantee of the perceptible item. They should transmit every supporting amenity intrinsic in an organization's item market proposing to (Brown, Bellenger & Johnston, 2007). For instance, well established for its networking and business items, CISCO Systems has expanded advertising spending in backing its firewall and network-focused devices as assisting (Brown, Bellenger & Johnston, 2007).

1.1.4 Psychological variables
Thirdly, psychological variables are related to the fact that customers openly pursue information or watch the actions of reference group participants and opinion leaders. In mutual settings, reference groups and opinion leaders might deliver information intended to decrease the risk of item acquisition and sway actions; this has been determined by the consumer marketing literature (Brown, Bellenger & Johnston, 2007). A considerable number of studies indicate the following, "Individual risk minimization or avoidance is a key motivating factor in the industrial buying process" (Puto, Patton and King, 1985; Qualls and Puto, 1989). A significant contrast between

business and buyer marketplaces is the form and degree of tension a consumer feels when acquiring. The position of brands as risk reductant is expected to vary depending on the environment. There is a degree of social risk in managerial purchasing linked to the apparent threat of a product not fulfilling the requirements of the consent of other parties of the decision-making team (Henthorne & LaTour, 1992).

Nevertheless, it is expected that the social risk is of less importance to the managerial consumer than to the end consumer. Correspondingly, even though the economic risk is comparative, it is expected that financial and performance risks are more influential aspects in managerial purchasing. In B2B settings, the brand selection might diminish social risk, but branded products tend to decrease apparent economic and performance risks for managerial consumers than final buyers. The self-expressive nature of purchaser items and the individual purchase choice interaction in shopper settings regularly lead to impetuous purchasing. Managerial purchasers are probably not going to make imprudent buys. The business market setting more likely demands conversation among people inside the forthcoming association and individual contact between the purchasing firm and the selling firm (Minett, 2002). Both the specialized idea of the item and the gathering buy choice cycle proposes some degree of analytical dialogue.

Hawkins, Best, and Coney (2004) differentiate between five forms of perceived risk: social risk, financial risk, time risk, effort risk, and physical risk. Financial, time, and effort risks are mostly seen as economic risks associated with misuse or ineffectiveness. Social risk is the risk that an acquisition may not receive public approval by partners. Performance risk relates to risk due to a chance of output failure (Henthorne & LaTour, 1992). Assael (1987) states that the impact of performance risk is highest when a purchaser is handling a technically intricate or unknown output. Midgley (1983) acknowledges discrepancies in the degree of exploration seen on output form. He classifies products as practical, luxurious, and significant. Even though most products might have some degree of economic risk, performance risk tends to be more valuable with functional outcomes. Therefore, performance risk tends to be more prevalent in B2B situations than in consumer cases. In addition to what was previously said, managerial purchasers are expected to focus on buying aspects that incorporate value, quality, execution, and administrations. Banter is required since such measures will generally be regarded differently by

various individuals from the purchasing place. Additionally, the risk implied in a hierarchical buy will probably urge purchasers to consult casual, individual wellsprings of data (De Chernatony & McDonald, 1998), incorporating contacts with an agent or other personal connections. Finally, given the impulse to frame long haul and more community connections in business settings, managerial purchasers are confronted with the test of persuading themselves and different groups about any proposed relationship (Minett, 2002).

In short, a few critical differences are apparent because of the single item- market, drivers, and purchase choice cycles of each context. In this way, the positions of brands will probably differ in every unique situation. Although shoppers might be inclined to buy brands advocated by celebrities, such an approach will likely be inadequate in a commercial context due to the intricacy of most modern acquisitions and the position of other individuals in the purchasing community. In a commercial context, purchasers are more likely to be impacted by meaning and professional recommendations or the genuine presentation of antecedent companies. However, administrative purchasers principally grapple with monetary and execution hazards; so, advertisers need to effectively utilize brands to bring down the social dangers of purchasing too. Brands should include and clarify the parts of financial and execution standards.

Moreover, instead of rash decisions, brands should have in mind a good dialog, which means that some brands must represent the most reasonable alternative. Finally, B2B advertisers must attract opinion leaders and reference groups. Brands ought to be situated to attract explicit reference groups as top-tier cases for acquisitions in suitable examples. Additionally, inside specialists might necessitate being co-selected by brand advertisers to help as winners during purchase considerations (Brown, Bellenger & Johnston, 2007).

1.1.5 *Contextual conditions*

Fourthly, contextual conditions or the perception of the acquisition position is a significant factor in managerial purchasing research. Johnston and Lewin (1994) suggest that the risk associated with administrative buying circumstances fluctuates from low to high concentrations. According to Heide & Weiss (1995), "In an organizational behavior setting, buyers with more experience are likely to choose a known brand as a result of organizational memory. " Acquisition condition

considerations can be classified as those associated with the business, product, and entities within the company. The newness of the acquisition, the intricacy of the buying position, and, particularly, the significance of the buying position are strong elements of a purchase base's decision-making process (Johnston & Bonoma 1981). Investigators have considered two spaces of intricacy in modern purchasing: the intricacy of the buy circumstance and the intricacy of the item. McQuiston (1989) characterizes the intricacy of the buy as "how much information the organization must gather to make an accurate evaluation of the product." In a business setting, will more mechanically progress items than in a shopper set. The purchaser is generally worried about usefulness, especially by merchant claims. Hence, items will generally follow straight patterns in business settings on account of mechanical progression (Brown, Bellenger & Johnston, 2007).

The curiosity of the buy circumstance alludes to the absence of involvement of people in association with comparable buy circumstances (McQuiston 1989). The interest of an item/administration buy is required to influence the level of a purchaser's apparent risk. In a shopper conduct setting, Heilman, Bowman, and Wright's (2000) hypothesis of dynamic brand decision guarantees that the probability of picking an underdog brand will be low when a customer enters another classification. While the likelihood of choosing a longshot brand will increase with the buying experience, as perceived chances for less-known choices decline. Purchasers are relied upon to be bound to pick a lesser-known brand with expertise in classification. In a hierarchical conduct setting, Heide and Weiss (1995) recommend that purchasers with more experience are probably going to pick a referred-to brand because of managerial memory. This evident conflict confirms the need for further research of brand impact in administrative purchasing settings. Item explicit components related to the buy circumstance, like apparent "risk, time pressing factor, and kind of procurement, may impact offering firms' endeavors to develop brand value" (Sheth, 1973). It's expected that these elements affect a purchasing association's penchant to be influenced by an item's or administration's image value or, maybe more appropriately, by the selling association's status.

Technical intricacy and an incentive for the product are probably going to correspond with the level of apparent risk. Accordingly, a high value, in fact perplexing, the essential to-the-creation

measure will have a raised degree of related risk (Mitchell, 1995). McQuiston (1989) defines the importance of buying as the effect of a purchase on managerial benefit and efficiency. The significance of an item, as demonstrated by how much an item's particulars meet a purchaser's apparent necessities, is required to influence the impression of the item/administration brand (Kim et al. 1998). Valla (1982) recommends that three-item classes can be utilized to help clarify varieties in the level of hazard apparent in a purchasing circumstance: worn-out items, results of significance in the creation cycle, and vital items. As a result of the importance of most buys, modern purchasers are relied upon to differ from end customers as far as their overall degree of contribution and the recurrence of deliberately significant deals. It's expected that the high degree of association in explicit item classes is a factor directly identified with an association's or purchaser's image affectability. The subtleties of every setting recommend one-of-a-kind promoting tactics and, hence, single branding tactics. Modern products might expect purchasers to be taught substantial, measurable advantages. Consumer goods might necessitate that a buyer fosters mental affiliations and descriptions (Minett 2002).

1.2 B2B trends post-covid

It is important to briefly mention recent research on the upcoming trends in the B2B Market after the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Jong et al. (2021) have recognized a future examination plan to counsel experimental study of B2B services strategies. Against the backdrop of expanding digital conversion, they contend that five critical administrations showcasing patterns are facilitators that will help business advertisers plan techniques that are practical moving forward. In making their recommended research headings, they have been particularly mindful of the extensive background of the Coronavirus pandemic that has plagued each part of the business (McKinsey, 2020). Recognize empowering agents that assist business advertisers in exploiting advancements in digital conversion and harmonize with the dire need to reconfigure plans of action, in addition to reconsidering business methodologies to ensure both momentary endurance, long-haul flexibility, and development openings. Taking everything into account, they offer various logical considerations helpful for exploiting future studies of the fundamental patterns they distinguish in this article. Then again, how service marketing strategies can help organizations and advertisers effectively turn in light of the Coronavirus pandemic and the next to normal (Jong et al. 2021).

First and foremost, to get by in the post-Coronavirus setting, it has been brought up that business advertisers need to be in an operational position in reskilling their channel partner networks. For example, as numerous re-dealers have been required to shift to online selling, new marketing skills must be assessed to choose the best growth ability. Likewise, it is significant that business advertisers cautiously think about how to inspire their channel affiliates to educationally interact in the post-pandemic time. Through gamification, combined experiences, and perception of information, affiliates can be provided with the expertise and abilities expected to work viably in the plan of action improvement mode (Jong et al. 2021).

Furthermore, quantifiable decreases in pollution, the requirement for more transparent trade, and tackling environmental change have made sustainability a tactical need. UN sustainable improvement objectives will be included notably as business guidelines and channel affiliates will consecutively feel compelled by their end-buyers to incorporate them as part of their value contribution. In terms of stimulation, it is necessary that channel affiliates are both cultured and driven to reflect about tactical services. For example, the end-of-life phase systems, product-emission policies, packaging and shipping regulations, green-selling abilities, and value schemes that underline green maintenance. The authors speculate that enthusiastically appealing with B2B stimulation services will be vital to attaining this revitalized attention (Jong et al., 2021).

Thirdly, due to the shift of new tactics, the researchers anticipate an increase of strategic execution measurements, integrated into new tactical control panels that assist practical, workable, and customized decision-making—at the same time not losing track of upcoming strategic imperatives. These new evaluation devices incorporate systems of measurement that place referrals in social channels to take the narrower impact of social networks. Another case is the utilization of "Random Forest metrics," which help estimate which and how sustainability measurement systems attract to which channel affiliates, separate representatives. To the extent of what privacy and security sites operate most successfully in combination with these objectives (Jong et al., 2021).

To the extent of public demand for virtual games during the Covid-19 pandemic, which has made virtual gaming as a commercial marketing boundary. For example, fashion departments (Balenciaga, in this case) have changed to a virtual game to reveal its newest sets to fashion sellers. Lately, IT manufacturers (e.g., IBM), have implemented a "Blockchain-based patent" for confidentiality and data security protection in virtual games and is now studying the use of virtual gaming to improve interpersonal skills. The researchers expect that an emphasis on the crucial B2B services marketing trends deliberated in this study will add to the investigation of new limits. In the end, cooperative belongings between the progress of combined experiences and gamification. As B2B marketers are searching for strategic techniques to emerge from the existing dilemma and persist while supporting digital development change (Jong et al. 2021).

Chapter 2- Communication Context

Communication is a combination of three unique determinants, to be specific, the choice of data, choice of the expression of this data, and a particular arrangement or misconception of this expression and its data. Together they would constitute communication. Just together - and that implies just when their selectivity can be made compatible (Luhmann, 1992).

According to Klein (1996), there are a few observationally established communication rules that, taken together, can form a communication strategy. These are as follows:

1. Message repetition is identified with message maintenance.

2. The utilization of various media is more powerful than the utilization of only one.

3. Face-to-face communication is a favored form.

4. The line progression is the best hierarchically endorsed communication channel.

5. Direct management is the standard and best wellspring of authoritatively endorsed data.

6. Opinion leaders are capable transformers of the mentalities and beliefs of an audience.

7. Individual pertinent data is preferred kept than conceptual, unknown, or general data.

First, message repetition is identified with message maintenance and the power of using more than one media. Based on previous studies, the information is evident on the relevant opinions that repetition of the message through more than one channel boosts individuals' retention (Bachrach & Aiken, 1977; Daft & Lengel, 1984; Dansereau & Markham, 1987). However, through a composed medium, researchers usually have seen executives providing their message once or even twice and leave it to that. Then when workers criticize about not receiving the data, they are told that they have send it, and that they should have paid more attention to it. Consequently, the reality is that if the message was neither received nor comprehended, the fault is on the supposed receiver for not comprehending it and not on the sender Klein (1996).

Second, face-to-face communication is a favored form. This medium has higher influence than any other individual channel (D'Aprix, 1982; Jablin, 1979; 1982). The positive influence of a face-to-face communication might be due to its fast results and the interaction that comes from within based on the feedback given (Gioia and Sims, 1986). The two-way conversation incentivizes participation in the process. It also explains uncertainties and enhances the likelihood that the sender and the receiver are bonding properly. It is the best form that opinion can be utilized to fix flaws instantly in the communication process (O'Connor, 1990). One of the main benefits of face-to-face medium is the capability of the individual to notice non-verbal signals as the communication progresses. This includes fullness to the understanding of the message and conveys the emotional facets, that could have been disguised (Gioia and Simms, 1986).

Researchers argue that the use of face-to-face medium as a communication strategy, in a group setting, can be a strong resource in the service of a profitable change. It gives the correspondent the chance to exploit on the different perceptions and understandings that are likely to develop from a difficult message in regards of supplying clarifications and interpretations significant to fluctuations of comprehension (Weick, 1987).

Third, line authority is a powerful correspondences channel. In this period of worker entitlement and choices by agreement, the relevancy of the authority chain of command is regularly neglected. However, few associations don't depend on proper authority as a final resolution-making emplacement and the wellspring of the essential responsibility that implants carefully

handled order and restraint frameworks. Such designs pervade hierarchical existence and are seen as reasonable by most authoritative members. Reports from those in power convey practical and emblematic influence (Klein et al., 1974; Snyder & Morris, 1984; Young & Post, 1993).

Line management, since it conveys more managerial power than workforce roles, likewise has more noteworthy correspondences sway. The researchers realized that the believability of a message is directly connected to the importance of the wellspring of that message, and superior nobility ordinarily concurs to the line progression (Kiesler & Mirson, 1975). The authority meddles with the new standard collaborative or agreement-established measures (Troy, 1989). The writer's knowledge proposes that it improves the dispersion of impact through the progression when each consecutively lesser degree is completely well-versed and created a communications partner (Daft & Huber, 1986; Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Fourth, the manager is a vital communicator. The ladder order of power is connected through management at each step. Individuals hope to hear significant, formally authorized data from their current director or chief. Managers are required to be correctly up-to-date and to be authentic sources of data. Management takes on a much more significant trait, shifting down through the positions of the non-administration degree. The leading performer and the essential organization agent are the direct manager (Jablin, 1979). Hence, the position of management as the last ranked correspondences connected to the non-managerial workers is a fundamental one. Lastly, since managers are usually in regular contact with their supervisees, they can appeal to the standards of repetition and face-to-face interchanges. By retaining the central degree management fully aware of the reasoning and development of the hierarchical shift, almost certainly, lower degrees are also very much aware (Higginson & Waxler, 1989; Smeltzer & Fann, 1989).

Fifth, the utilization of the adviser's view. The people who have educational power have a high influence on other's viewpoints and behaviors. This guideline comes from many writing on political procedures and the development of shared views and is the usual appeal in political movements. In the writer's opinion, it is entirely movable to firms (Cialdini et al., 1981). A few times, the researchers have seen the judgment-developing force of familiar advisers, particularly those working in association matters, however not piece of the association ladder.

Lastly, individually significant data is better held in a sequence of research intended to comprehend the significance and effect of successful correspondence to production line representatives. The writers found that the primary substance is related to employment norms of assessment, employment assumptions, strengthening of enactment, and specialized employment-associated data (Klein, 1992). As such, data that straightforwardly influences one's position field is taken care of and held (Pincus, 1986). Shockingly, data regarding the organization, place, or different employees immediately would, in general, be neglected or was not disclosed at the beginning.

2.1 Communication Strategy

Hoover (2010) says that the most significant and frequently undervalued aspect that shifts a company from strategy growth to execution is strategic communications. Gary et al.'s (2008) research demonstrated that businesses often break down at implementation since they go directly to underlying redesign and disregard the most impressive drivers of viability choice privileges and data stream. The relevance of a Strategic Communication Plan makes clear that an organization should have a fundamental tactic in any case and, preferably, integrate strategic communications in the administration progress course, not refer to it as a reconsideration. In a perplexing domain, pioneers can't just make a strategy, integrate it down the hierarchy of leadership, and suppose that it should consequently work out as expected. Communications overwhelm individuals daily; a deliberately conveyed one will reverberate better with workers. According to an administrative viewpoint, strategic communication can fill this need and simplify the execution of drivers or central organizational shift attempts. At its center, critical correspondence should convey a specific explicit message that mirrors an organization's tactic nonetheless cooperates with a particular vision. Pioneers necessitate setting aside an effort to guarantee the center message mirrors that vision and, if not, follow measures to solve any administrative dysfunctions. Several will consider the idea of strategic communication fresh (Hoover, 2010). The mechanisms of a Strategy Communication Plan typically have around four elements, depending on how an organization sets them. Jointly, they deliver a path to get from strategy growth to execution. Nonetheless, not suitably outlining and conveying an organization's center message for the segmented public will generate average alterations attempts and generally weaken organization value (Hoover, 2010).

Firstly, a rationale statement creates a concise outline for the ideal shift. It fills in as an outline to the more expansive Strategic Communication Plan. For instance, an association needs to start an organized management advancement plan. The organization should enunciate why the existing procedure is inadequate. Assessments (e.g., SWOT, gap) can reveal managerial shortages, for example, that the current strategy needs stability when, preferably, it would give intersected, gradual, and successive advancement mockups based on analytical supports like functional tasks and the proper instruction. The reasoning must highlight this purpose of almost their pressure and recapitulate the Strategic Communication Plan objectives and ideals that will push the association to strategy execution (Hoover, 2010).

Secondly, the situational analysis section should focus on figuring out where the association is currently and which direction it needs to go. The Strategic Communication Plan should recognize problems, difficulties, and obstacles to convey throughout. The organization needs to identify the current culture or how to manage things at this point (Hoover, 2010). For example, an organization officially promotes maturing the upcoming front-runners. As opposed to empowering management rehearses, like demonstrating the path, stimulating a shared vision, demanding procedures, allowing to perform, and empowering the heart, the association reliably advocates into prominent management occupations individuals with a severe administration method. This sort of authoritative doublespeak leaves workers discouraged, smothered, and searching somewhere else for innovative markets. A corporation that reliably conveys merged messages, purposefully or not, might get 40 hours of work hours per week from the staff, but not their passion or spirit (Hoover, 2010).

Confronting the truth of how things are resolved instead of how they are supposed to be solved can be helpful for managers to decide whether an office's vision fills in as a manual or only as a collection of sayings. Various analytical instruments (SWOT, gap, G2G) exist so that it can assist managers in sorting out why an authoritative framework creates the outcomes it does and, in many cases, will lead them to the proper vision declaration (Hoover, 2010).

2.2 *Negotiation*

To understand the challenges of establishing a B2B partnership, it is necessary to briefly review the principles of negotiation. According to Putnam and Roloff (1992), "negotiation is a special form of communication that centers on perceived incompatibilities and focuses on reaching mutually acceptable agreements." A negotiation can be described as one or more partners in a position of some sort of relation, each having some personal objects that may be somewhat contradictory. In some way of the negotiation process, choices are examined, where one is commonly approved as the satisfactory result of the process. According to Weigand et al., (2003), "A business negotiation is a negotiation conducted by business partners."

Negotiation can be distributive or integrative (Walton & McKersie, 1965). The goal of distributive negotiation is to attain an effective agreement. The purpose of integrative negotiation is to establish a resolution that fulfills both partners (Weigand et al., 2003). Furthermore, looking into negotiation models can be used for different intentions. A significant feature is whether they are used as descriptive or prescriptive models (Gulliver 1979; Kersten & Cray 1996). Descriptive models aim to thoroughly illustrate the current situation, while prescriptive models are standardized in the perception that they impose what partners ought to operate to attain the needed outcome. According to Kersten and Cray (1996), any negotiation approach should be founded on a descriptive model that examines and describes the cognitive perceptions and behaviors of the individuals without interpreting impractical beliefs about their logic. After this cognitive degree has been illustrated, is it valuable to give predictive and prescriptive support at the influential degree. Negotiation uphold must enable for distinctive descriptive interpretations to be created. After, predictions and prescriptions can be formulated, founded on an examination of the requirements of the partner, the particular of their position, and decision-making circumstances (Weigand, et al., 2003). Gulliver's (1979) concept of negotiation is about two forms, collectively explaining the negotiation procedure. The cyclical form explains how communication, cognition, and learning intervene. Knowledge is traded with the partners; the acquiring partner understands this knowledge and includes it in his/her inventory of information. Therefore, individuals identify their expectations and desires and those of their partners, and their mutual position and possible results. The developmental form is about a sequence of

coinciding stages explaining the growth of the beginning of a negotiation to the end of an approved result (Gulliver, 1979).

A communication perspective on negotiation can be examined from distinct views. In economics, the central emphasis has been the decision procedure. In that view, a negotiation uphold scheme is a particular type of decision sustain scheme. In the author's judgment so far, a view that has been ignored too much in the negotiation uphold scheme is the communication viewpoint. There are three key features of communications viewpoints on negotiation, which are the following: "microelements, dynamics, and systems of meaning" (Putnam & Roloff, 1992). Firstly, communication procedures are mainly microelements that occur in a particular situation. For example, messages are associated with prior and following messages in a specific target position. Secondly, the dynamics of communication ought to be researched. For instance, how deals are framed and altered. Thirdly, systems of value from personal, relational, circumstantial, and educational viewpoints ought to be revealed to suitably handle the negotiation procedure (Weigand, et al., 2003).

2.3 Communication trends post-covid

It is essential to examine the digital marketing strategies to recognize the go-to communication strategy that has been implemented and successful during these past two years of crisis, keeping in mind that communication plays a significant role. According to Pandey, (2021) digital Marketing, as a part of Integrated Marketing Communication has received more interest and use during the pandemic. The majority of clients have relocated to the online world and are devoting more time to the internet. The client is at the core of all marketing doings. The digital marketing strategies implemented by corporations for bonding with clients have also shifted in this crisis.

To begin with, the Covid-19 pandemic influenced all the business features regardless of volume and type of possession. Most corporations have been struggling to continue to exist and develop during the epidemic disaster. Well-known corporations like Pizza Hut, Gold's Gym, JCrew retail chain, and Hertz car rental company, filed for insolvency during the coronavirus pandemic. However, it is notable that the corporations with a solid digital platform like Zoom, Amazon, Uber Eats, and Slack gained several new clients and had a strong development curve. At the same time, most businesses struggled for profits and maintaining clients. A great example of a

company that was able to increase its sales in rural markets was Mahindra Tractors due to their digital marketing strategy, which will later be explained.

Several researchers (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Hwang, Nageswaran & Cho, 2020; Habes et al., 2020) have highlighted that incorporating digital is one of the most practical approaches to handling this crisis. The clients were spending more time on digital networks like Facebook, Instagram, Zoom, and WhatsApp throughout the pandemic quarantine period (He & Harris, 2020). Thus, the utilization of digital marketing to interact with clients turned out to be significant for corporations. The utilization of digital marketing communications has gradually risen in the B2B market as well in the last era (Pandey, Nayal & Rathore, 2020). Nevertheless, comprehending the field of digital marketing and how different corporations, both B2B and B2C, are utilizing it tactically to develop a brand and promote its product and services would be indispensable for creating its individual digital marketing tactic.

Corporations utilized digital marketing centered on data to interact with the target clients as other instantaneous means have been diminished or were not helpful because of the pandemic. The utilization of augmented reality, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence (A.I.) is another means that is being used to target clients. The utilization of networks like WhatsApp, Zoom, and Google Meet increased multifold during the pandemic (He & Harris, 2020; Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020). So, digital marketing is being significantly utilized by corporations to target clients counting with high-level goods like real estate, automobiles, and servers. The computerized digital advertisements are given to clients founded on search words and surfing history. Methods like text mining and image analytics assist digital marketers in boosting their exactness in interacting with the target clients during the crisis (Pandey, 2021).

Several corporations devoted social network campaigns to corporate social responsibility to induce consciousness to individuals about social distancing and wearing masks to encourage attitudinal alteration (Habes et al., 2020). A great example of this was the very well-known Nike brand, which promoted playing outdoors with ads like "Move more move better" has freshly replaced the ad tagline and highlighted playing inside, instead of gambling outdoor. The advertisement by Nike turned out to be an immediate smash on social networks. The brands required creativity to be used more agile ways to create a timely impact during the pandemic (Balis, 2020).

A company that had an outstanding marketing plan during the pandemic was Mahindra Tractors. This business was able to empty its stock post-pandemic by utilizing digital marketing in rural and smaller towns. There was significant relocation from urban regions to rural areas during the crisis. The majority had sufficient buying capacity as they had devoted substantial time to be professionally active in urban regions. Part of the community wanted to return for a period of time and tackle agriculture in a more structured way, Mahindra Tractors pursued this community utilizing digital marketing. Most of the communities in rural regions in India access the internet on their mobile. The Kharif crop (cultivated plants that are nurtured and collected in India) supported by a digital campaign targeted at rural masses resulted in the increase of sales of Mahindra Tractors to the point of 69% YOY basis in August 2020 (Jaiswal, 2020).

Mahindra Tractors utilized paid media involving search and display ads to interact with the target clients. This added to the owned media where it promoted its social media handles. They were able to capture media attention with its social network campaigns, leading to earned media benefit as well. In addition, Mahindra Tractors invested in providing marketing deals for discounts and funding alternatives to potential clients. The campaigns with marketing deals encouraged the target clients who were considering purchasing tractors. Swaraj Tractors (part of the Mahindra and Mahindra group) has also designed a Facebook community page for growers as an addition to their global digital strategy. This aided in creating an emotional bond with the grower society spite of enhancing sales of tractors (Pandey, 2021).

Pandey (2021) conducted a qualitative study that incorporated a total of fourteen semi-structured interviews. The interviewees were from the marketing field and had on average eleven years of professional experience in the business. The primary research question was the following: "How their organization was managing the digital marketing strategy during the Covid-19 pandemic situation".

She discovered that it is more focused on the management position/way and the responsiveness of the corporation to adjust to the new normal that is creating a change in the corporation. The research evaluated the digital marketing efforts done by five corporations during the pandemic. With the interviews, the fundamental notion was to comprehend the digital actions done by these corporations to deal with Covid-19, concerning interacting with the workers, clients, and medium affiliates. The conversations with the interviews focused on four specific research

questions, where four main topics arose in the evaluation, being those the following: Perceived Safety, Creative Persuasive Communication, Paid Media, and Adaptability.

First, regarding Perceived Safety, it's notable that the digital communication during Covid-19 from the corporations incorporated a wellbeing note in it. This was made to get the clients informed of the pandemic-associated protection policies and demonstrate that the corporation was sympathetic to these concerns for clients as well as for the workers and other shareholders. This facilitated corporations to gain the client's confidence. safety was the top worry for clients when buying online or going to retail shops. The corporation's digital communication plan should include this aspect (Pandey, 2021).

Second, Creative Persuasive Communication, the essence of digital marketing, must be resourcefully created by the corporations. It must utilize the discipline of influential communication in the matter. The matter of the campaign must be accurate and should have emotional appeal. The innovative case obtained more remarkable earned media through likes, shares, and comments. For instance, Uber Eats started a creative banner ad as "Your go-to restaurant in the comfort of your home." The banner ad had shifting images of regional gastronomy based on the whereabouts of the client. This ad earned a great deal of views, likes, shares, and mentions on social networks. Several current Uber contributors interacted with the ad (Pandey, 2021).

Third, Paid Media, most of the interviewees sensed that overseeing the advertising budget among diverse promotion outlets is a hassle. The search advertisement has the benefit of accurately attaining more excellent click-through rates (CTR) but prevents above-average financing in this network due to its relatively higher expense. Although, all the interviewees established that the paid media provided them the finest and quicker outcomes. The campaigns began with the paid media, backed by the owned and shared media of the corporations and the associate ad organization (Pandey, 2021).

Fourth, Adaptability, the evaluation of the case study, and semi-structured interviews with marketing managers reliably emphasized that the adaptability of corporations was fundamental to arise as a front-runner from this Covid-19 crisis. The corporations, which were rapidly adjusting to digital means, built-in systems, and developments immediately as the crisis began,

have begun presenting optimistic economic outcomes from the third quarter of the year 2020 (Pandey, 2021).

Epidemiologists have projected that the pandemic will last for a couple of years (Scudellari, 2020). Companies should not merely exist with it for a limited period but set up how to better deal with related situations if they happen again in the future. The evaluation revealed that in the digital marketing strategy during the crisis, paid media was the most successful in achieving necessary commitment regarding CTR (click-through rate) as compared to earned, owned, and shared media. This was correct for all the five corporations that were included in the research. All corporations must also have consciousness, training, and incorporation of business continuity plans (BCP). The BCP is all-around practical contingency planning to guarantee that corporations are flexible if there is a primary disaster in the business. It was discovered that corporations with BCP had a more significant opportunity for continuity and developments in disaster as equated to companies that did not implement BCP (Savage, 2002).

In short, the discoveries from the primary information employing semi-structured interviews from managers employed in the business emphasized the significance of safety-related communication, creative persuasive communication, paid media, adaptability, and backing from higher executives as significant characteristics in handling crisis by corporations (Pandey, 2021).

Chapter 3- Covid-19 Background

The Coronavirus crisis emerged from the transmission of an infectious disease caused by Covid-2019. The rapid contagion that started in China triggered an outbreak severely affecting countries worldwide and causing tremendous death, suffering, and disruption of everyday life. Deadly disease and pandemics have been challenging human existence throughout history, and these were once separated by many decades, now they are becoming much more frequent. Since 2003, the world has experienced several pandemic outbreaks (Morens et al., 2020). In 2003, a viral respiratory disease called severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) appeared (World Health Organization, 2003; McBride, et al., 2021), in 2009, the A/H1N1pdm influenza virus appeared (Nelson et al., 2009), in 2014, the chikungunya virus (Morrison, 2014), in 2015, the Zika pandemic (Lucey & Gostin, 2016) and from 2014 to 2015, an extension of the Ebola virus (Beeching, Fenech & Houlihan, 2014). According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the

current financial crisis resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic is equal to or worse than the subprime economic crisis from 2008-2009 (IMF, 2020). Firms' cash flows have been negatively affected as the economy declined sharply, and many markets disappeared with trade and supply chains severely disrupted. The International Monetary Fund indicated that, in 2020, the global growth was projected at -4.9%, with a more negative impact on economic activity than anticipated. In 2021, global growth is projected to be 5.4%, thus, leaving 2021 GDP 6.5% lower than the pre-covid-2019 projections of January 2020 (World Economic Outlook, 2020). The nature of the Coronavirus crisis has brought a highly uncertain outlook and has raised vulnerabilities that represent disastrous effects for most B2B firms.

The impact of Coronavirus has been one of the most significant environmental changes in marketing history, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and consumer ethics. He and Harris (2020) explored the influence Coronavirus had on CSR and marketing philosophy. Many companies proactively employed various CSR activities that helped in fighting the virus. For instance, Vodafone provided free access to unlimited mobile data for many customers, and some U.K. manufacturing companies produced and donated personal protective equipment, ventilators, hand sanitizer, and others. The Coronavirus pandemic has offered great opportunities for firms to actively engage with various CSR strategies that establish more lasting and meaningful bonds between the brand and the customer (He & Harris, 2020). It is to point out that, due the pandemic, several adjustments took place in consumer behavior associated to products, channels, and incentives. These adjustments turned out to be more related to consumers' views of the crisis than to its practical consequences (Vázquez-Martínez et al., 2021).

3.1 Influence on Marketing

Firms have adapted and changed their marketing philosophies to reflect the consumer's needs and wants. After imposed travel restrictions and lockdowns, communication means shared agreements and radically changed perceptions of value between many suppliers and buyers (He & Harris, 2020). Face-to-face exchanges and interactions were slowly eroded by e-commerce and online interactions, fast-food delivers became supermarket delivers and shoppers, and restaurants adopted take-out markets (He & Harris, 2020). Media companies and advertising also had to develop responses and campaigns in a matter of days, while before, they would take

months and years. The competitive environment in the market also shifted radically. Some sectors were closed entirely, some competitors became collaborators, and some industries were forced to move exclusively online (He & Harris, 2020). Organizations had to re-evaluate their missions, visions, and objectives to account for the changes in markets, customers, competitors, and others (He & Harris, 2020). It seemed likely to incorporate long-term survival, strategic agility, a possibly centered societal marketing orientation, and meaningful social responsibility for the goals and objectives of firms. During the pandemic, agencies and governments adopted market-driven strategies to control, manage and educate essential public behavior, demand-supply, and services, while companies exponentially moved to online communications. Globalization was also drastically affected (Crawford & Chen, 2015). Global supply changes stopped, worldwide initiatives fluctuated to a standstill, and international campaigns faltered (He & Harris, 2020).

To effectively develop a crisis management strategy for business-to-business marketing, four overarching imperatives should be adapted by executives. The first one is "understand fast": In a crisis, executives are forced to think quickly, analyze fast and keep an overview (Pedersen, Ritter & Benedetto, 2020). The uncertain outlook prevents detailed planning, but executives should understand and re-evaluate the situation: What is the impact of the crisis in the business model (Ritter & Pedersen, 2020), what can learn from the former problem (Kottika et al., 2020), how is the organizational preparedness (Hughes et al., 2020), and what risks are they facing (Pedersen, Ritter & Benedetto, 2020). The second imperative is "think allocentric": thinking too independently destroys opportunities during and after a crisis. Therefore, businesses should actively engage in helping society. Collaboration with competitors can lead to performance-enhancing business models and mutually beneficial and interdependent social goals. Understanding and utilizing the differences in network relationships can also help executives overcome a lack of resources and achieve worthwhile economic goals (Pederson, Ritter & Benedetto, 2020). The third imperative is "change proactively": firms must adapt to the new normal to succeed in a crisis. Firms can design innovative solutions, shape markets, use middle managers as change agents, and more (Pedersen, Ritter & Benedetto, 2020). According to Hartmann & Lussier (2020), "Change must be seen as an interconnected process encompassing various elements." The fourth and final imperative is "sell intelligently": Executives can drive positive results or minimize adverse impacts by introducing sales enablement (the process of

supporting the sales associated with the data, matter, and instruments that help salespeople sell more successfully), instead of adjusting budgets downwards and cutting prices (Habel et al., 2020). Sales focus can be moved to new services, new ways of selling, specific clients, and adjusting the sales force (Sharma, Rangarajan & Paesbrugghe, 2020).

3.2 Vulnerable sectors

Reviewing the most affected sectors is necessary to understand the pandemic's influence on B2B Market variables over the past two years. Statistics Portugal (2020) reported that the most significant negative impact on the growth of turnover resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic was the Accommodation and Restaurant sector. The current level of turnover associated with the new containment measures harmed 82% of the enterprises, with a very negative impact of 59%. The variations in orders/customers hurt 84% of the enterprises, negatively affecting 55%. It also states that 23% of enterprises decrease competition for the Accommodation and Restaurants sector, whereas 14% of enterprises mentioned an increase in competition in the Information and Communication sector.

The Accommodation and Restaurant sector is the segment with the highest percentage of businesses, with more than 90% expressing a moderate or high degree of concern regarding the predicted scenarios for pandemic containment. This sector was also the one with the highest percentage of business benefiting from the Government support measures. 50% benefited from the suspension of contributory obligations and tax payment, 56% benefited from great incentives to normalize economic activity, and 58% benefited from support for expansion or resumption of a simplified layoff. Given the current situation, until the end of 2021, the Accommodation and Restaurants sector has the highest percentage (35%) of businesses expecting to reduce jobs. In contrast, the Information and Communication sector has the highest rate (21%) of businesses wishing to increase employment (Statistic Portugal, 2020).

Total responding enterprises

Legend: ■ Very positive impact ■ Positive impact ■ No impact ■ Negative impact ■ Very negative impact

	Positive	No impact	Negative	Very negative
New containment measures announced	5%	38%	38%	18%
Variations in orders / customers	5%	35%	39%	21%
Changes in the supply chain	2%	57%	31%	10%
Variations in persons employed by the enterprise	2%	66%	24%	7%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Economic activity

Legend: ■ Very positive impact ■ Positive impact ■ No impact ■ Negative impact ■ Very negative impact

New containment measures announced

Manufacturing and energy	4%	49%	37%	10%
Construction and real estate	4%	47%	38%	10%
Distributive trade	5%	32%	43%	20%
Transportation and storage	6%	33%	33%	27%
Accommodation and food services	6% 8%	24%	59%	
Information and communication	3%	42%	41%	13%
Other services	7%	35%	38%	19%

Variations in orders / customers

Manufacturing and energy	5%	40%	38%	16%
Construction and real estate	4%	48%	34%	13%
Distributive trade	5%	32%	44%	19%
Transportation and storage	5%	28%	38%	29%
Accommodation and food services	4% 11%	29%	55%	
Information and communication	3%	38%	39%	19%
Other services	4%	36%	36%	24%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Source: Statistics Portugal and Bank of Portugal, COVID-IREE

Graph 1- This figure illustrates the "impact of changes resulting from Covid-19 pandemic on the evolution of enterprises turnover, as a % of the total number of enterprises." Showing that "Accommodation and food services" had the had highest adverse effect (Statistics Portugal, 2020).

Statistics Portugal, on March 9, 2021, reported that from March to December 2020, the billing prices of the Accommodation activities and Arts, entertainment, sports, and recreation activities exemplified less than part of the billing value in the same 2019 frame. In 21 out of the 25 NUTS 3 sub-regions (Administrative, Statistical, and Autonomous Regions), the Accommodation activities were considered the sector with the most remarkable homologous contraction in the billing price. In comparison to, in 13 sub-regions, the Information and Communication sector achieved the highest effective execution; In Portugal, the sector with the highest effective performance was Manufacture of basic pharmaceutical products and pharmaceutical preparations (Statistics Portugal, 2021a).

Source: Statistics Portugal

Graph 2- This figure illustrates the "invoicing value, by activity branch, Portugal, March to December 2020 YOY (year-on-year) growth rate". Showing that Accommodation was one of the most affected sectors (Statistics Portugal, 2021a).

Statistics Portugal, on June 2, 2021, reported an outline of the 12 months of the Covid-19 pandemic (March 2020 to February 2021). The contrast of numerical outcomes for the initial year of the Covid-19 (March 2020 to February 2021) with the previous 12 months (March 2019

to February 2020) revealed: Tourism and associated activities underwent a vastly adverse burden. Principally the shortening in demand for the particular services by non-residents resulted in a damaging harmony between products and services, regardless of the decrease in the commerce shortfall (Statistics Portugal, 2021b).

Statistics Portugal, on June 4, 2021, reported that the tourist activity increased in April. However, it still is a long way from the levels seen in the 2019 frame. The tourist accommodation branch listed 460 thousand guests and 946.8 thousand overnight stays in April 2021, equivalent to YOY rates of change of 762.6% and 510.8%, correspondingly (-59.6% and -67.1% in March). In contrast to April 2019, the number of customers decreased by 80.3% and overnight stays dropped by 84.2%. In April 2021, by sort of accommodation, the result regarding overnight stays (in YOY) was the following:

 • Hotels and similar: +678.8% (i.e., 73.4% of total overnight stays).

 • Local accommodation establishments: +219.7% (19.7% of the total).

 • Rural/lodging tourism: +785.0% (6.9% of the total).
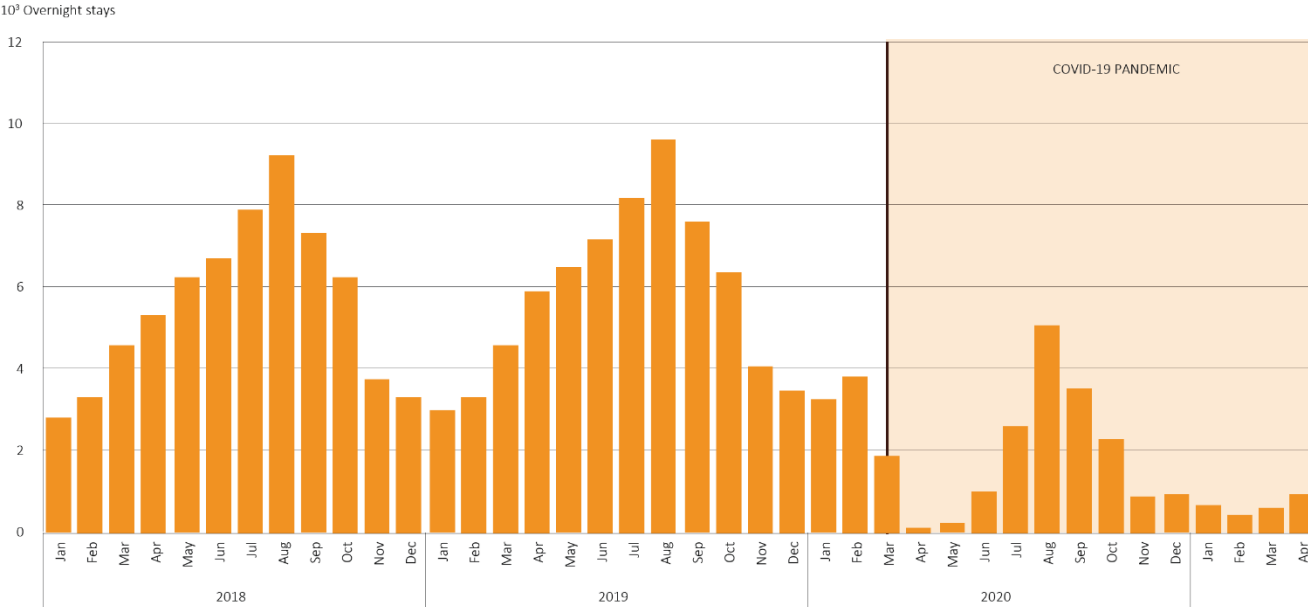
Graph 3- This graph illustrates the "overnight stays in tourist accommodation establishments, per month." Showing the abrupt decrease that happened in 2020 (Statistics Portugal, 2021c).

Statistics Portugal, on September 3, 2021, reported that the domestic market increased in July, exceeding the outcomes of the 2019 frame. In July 2021, the tourist accommodation branch listed 1.6 million customers and 4.5 million overnight stays. These outcomes indicate:

• A YOY rise compared to July 2020, which listed 1.0 million customers and 2.6 million overnight stays.

• Decreases of 42.5% in customers and 45% in overnight stays compared to July 2019.

• The domestic market (59%) added with 2.7 million overnight stays and the non-domestic market with 1.9 million. Plus, contrast to July 2019, there was a 6.4% increase in overnight stays of residents and a 67.6% reduction in overnight stays of non-residents.
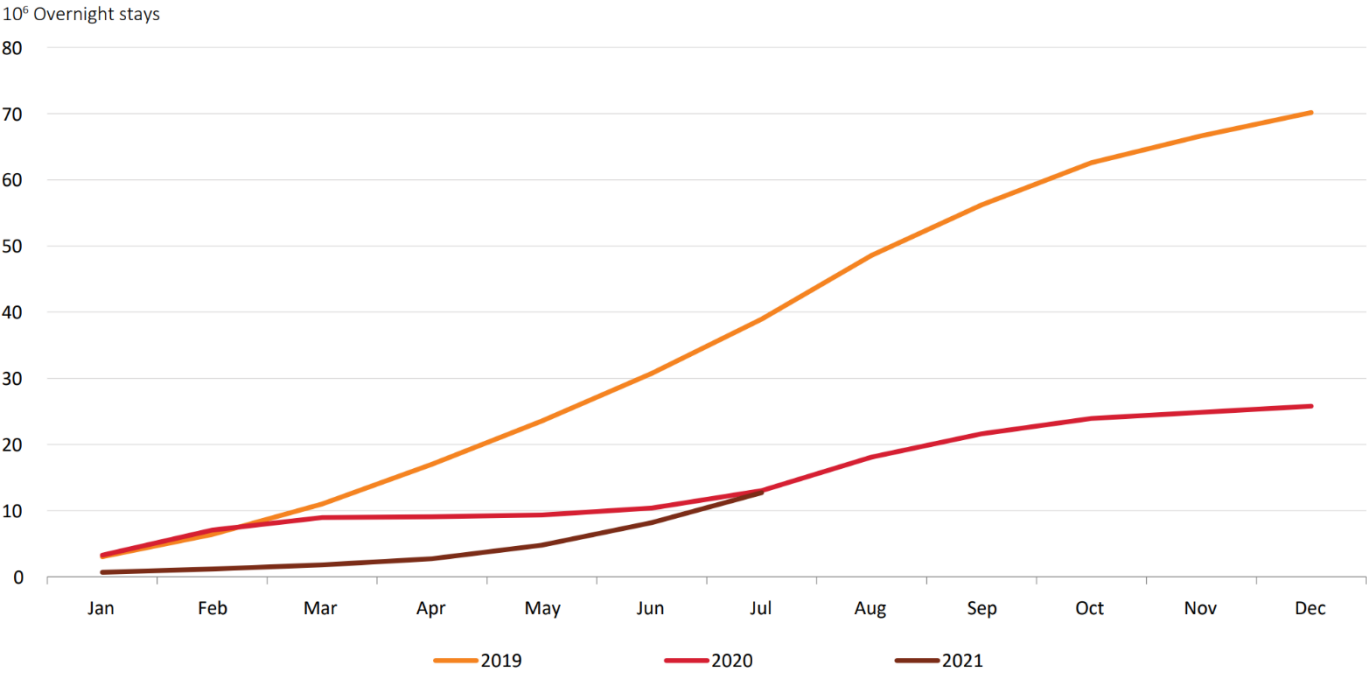
Source: Statistics Portugal

Graph 4- This graph illustrates the "overnight stays in tourist accommodation establishments, per month, cumulative sum." It Compares the overnight stays within three years (Statistics Portugal, 2021d).
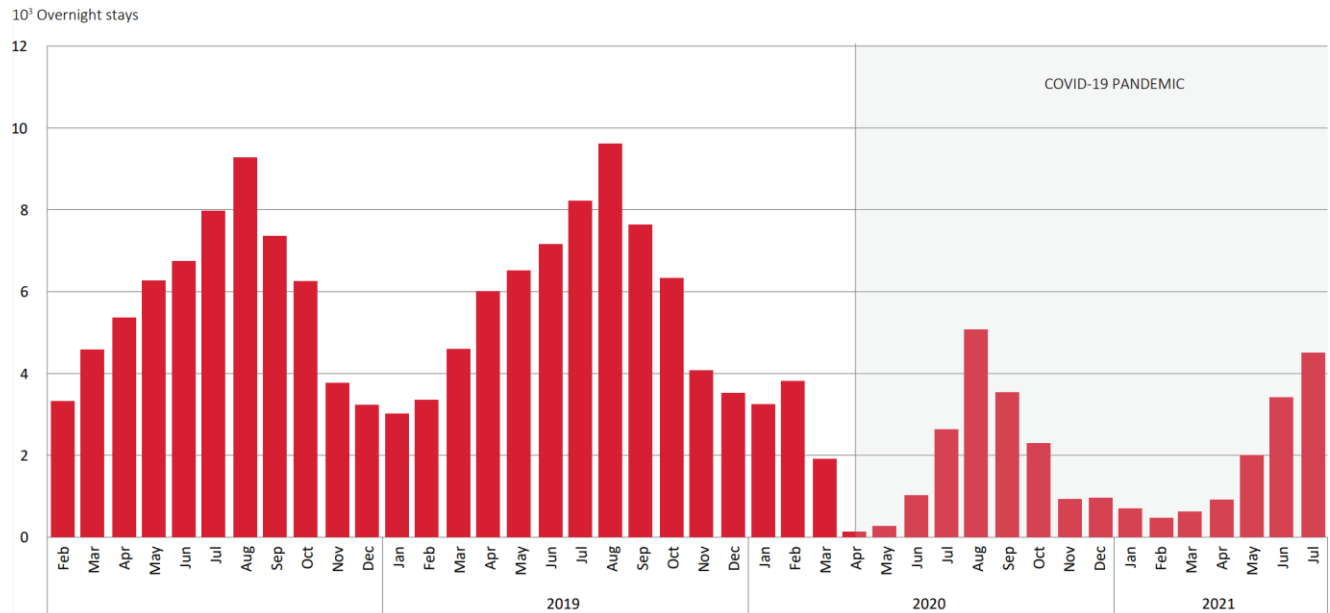
10³ Overnight stays

Graph 5- This graph illustrates the "overnight stays in tourist accommodation establishments, per month." Showing the growth in April, May, June, and July 2021 compared to 2020 (Statistics Portugal, 2021d).

3.3 Influence on B2B Market variables

The pandemic has affected people's lives, attitudes, opinions, and beliefs, so astute marketers and firms had to adapt their strategies and policies to reflect consumers' needs. The study developed by Cortez & Johnston (2020) established a grounded theory method using theories-in-use (TIU) to explore the Coronavirus crisis effect in the B2B inter-organizational and intra-organizational interactions from a psycho-sociological perspective. The sampling included 31 participants from medium and large-sized firms, a range of industry sectors, multiple functional areas, and different geographic regions (Europe, the U.S., and Latin America). The method comprised four open-ended questions: 1) How has the Coronavirus affected the business?; 2) What are the differences between the crisis generated by health/biological hazard and the traditional economic crisis (e.g., the economic crisis of 2008-2009)?; 3) What are the main

changes for the team?; 4) How has the Coronavirus changed relationships within the business network and with customers/suppliers? (Cortez & Johnston, 2020)

The Coronavirus crisis has introduced disastrous groundbreaking challenges for B2B firms. Unlike a financial-based problem, the Coronavirus crisis is based on socio-biological factors, which inflicts an uncertainty shock and equally affects human beings independently of their functions and hierarchies (Cortez & Johnston, 2020). The fear and concern regarding the possible death and losing jobs generates an introspection at an individual level, which makes a financial crisis based on health hazards far more aggressive and dangerous than a financial-based crisis. These scenarios include the prolongation or worsening of the governments' measures (e.g., lockdown), resulting in a rapid collapse in consumer demand, leading to an almost immediate loss of markets and negatively affecting firms' liquidity and financial situation (Cortez & Johnston, 2020).

Regarding the differences between the two crises, both the financial-based and Coronavirus crises are abrupt. Still, the Coronavirus crisis is unique due to its unprecedented global scope and biological hazard. The Coronavirus is transmitted from person-to-person, implying that the propagation rate is solely based on the individuals' behavior. Since it affects human beings as individuals and not corporations, it also directly affects human capital. In a financial-based crisis, there is some degree of predictability (Cortez & Johnston, 2020). In a Coronavirus crisis, the span is unknown and uncertain, which complicates the forecast for demand and resources required for firms to operate. Compared to financial-based concerns, the Coronavirus crisis had much higher government involvement. Governments had a role in opening or closing businesses, controlling quarantines, influencing people's transit in industrial sites and cities, and providing support measures for the liquidity situation (Cortez & Johnston, 2020).

The pandemic has changed the way businesses work: 46% realize that the reorganization of work teams is very likely, 31% consider working remotely, and almost 60% contemplate reducing the number of business trips permanently. The Information and communication sector has the highest proportion of enterprises willing to change the way they work: 65% of enterprises are considering the intense use of remote work, and 58% of enterprises are considering imposing more flexible working hours (Statistics Portugal, 2020). In contrast, in the Accommodation and restaurant sector, 71% of enterprises are not considering the intense use of remote work due to

the nature of the business. However, 58% of enterprises in this sector are considering the possibility of permanently reorganizing their work teams (Statistics Portugal, 2020). The Coronavirus crisis also had repercussions regarding psychological wellbeing and productivity. The restriction of basic out-of-work tasks negatively affected the social life and increased psychological tension. In contrast, the online communication imposed proved to be, on average, less effective and more time-consuming, thus, resulting in extended working hours (Cortez & Johnston, 2020).

The Coronavirus crisis impacted businesses drastically by decreasing, on average, 25% to 40% of sales. This crisis has shown that society and most B2B firms were not prepared to deal with a problem of this nature and magnitude. Some firms were forced to shut down plants, implement more complex split-shifts to manage essential operations, and focus on facilities' hygiene (Cortez & Johnston, 2020). Due to the limited scope for action, this impact can keep growing in the short term, but on the bright side, in a long time, the economic effect is expected to be lower than the economic impact from a financial-based crisis. Unlike a financial-based problem, a Coronavirus crisis has less space for business maneuvers. Therefore, the increase in relevance of buyer-seller relationships is more necessary. Given the imposed quarantines and closed borders, some enterprises were forced to change their relationships with main customers/suppliers (Cortez & Johnston, 2020). In the Accommodation and Restaurants sector, 57% of enterprises reported having already reduced or intending to reduce the stocks of products needed. This sector was also the one with more enterprises (43%) to have already redirected or planning to redirect, the target markets they operate in, and to have the highest percentage of business (36%) to have already changed or indenting to change, the range of products sold (Statistics Portugal, 2020).

Chapter 4- Descriptive Narrative

4.1 The company

> *"Experiences make life more rewarding."*
> - TLC Marketing

TLC Marketing aims to deliver a brands' story, positioning, and promise in campaigns with a fair number of rewards and experiences through the team's work and a network of national and international partners. TLC is a multinational marketing agency founded in 1954 and is currently present in 14 countries: Portugal, in Lisbon; UK & Ireland, in London (headquarters); Italy, in Milan; France, in Paris; Spain, in Madrid; South Africa, in Johannesburg; Asia, in Singapore; Australia, in Sydney; Germany, in Frankfurt; Brazil, in São Paulo; USA, in New York; the Middle East, in Dubai; Nordics, Benelux, in Amsterdam (**figure 7**). The office in Parque das Nações, Lisbon, is the leading global agency in promotional campaigns and brand activation, developing innovative and exclusive actions to increase sales and boost customer acquisition and loyalty (Alves, 2020).
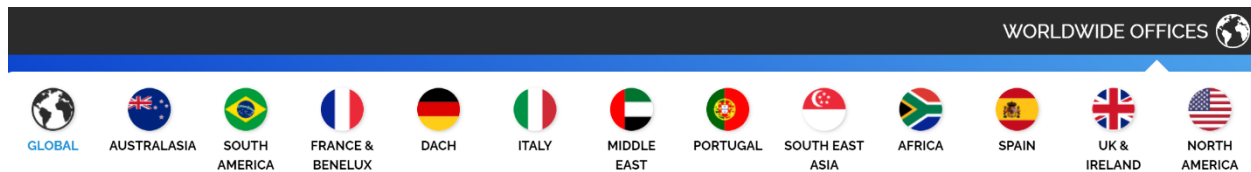
Source: TLC Marketing

Fig. 1- This figure illustrates TLC Marketing's global market.

Each project/campaign is unique and always created in line with the client/brand objectives. TLC Marketing has a team of experienced marketers in the field. The team analyzes consumer behavior to develop campaigns based on the most valued offers by the public. TLC Marketing Worldwide is a promotional agency that works across many different sectors: industry, telecoms, retail, automotive, electronics, entertainment, banking, insurance, FMCG, gaming, health, sports, pharmaceuticals, and media and technology. In the current circumstances, where individuals are surrounded by information, capturing customers' attention is one of the main challenges a corporation faces.

Storytelling is a fundamental mechanism to maintain contact with their audience. Many advertisers use storytelling as a communication technique to gain and keep customers' attention (Vasconcelos, 2019). TLC Marketing claims that it provides brands with Story doing, intending to help them achieve their specific goals through its story creation approach. In other words, if a brand communicates that it advocates the importance of family time, TLC provides it with partnerships that include a variety of family activities. In practice, TLC Marketing sells campaigns to brands that aim to develop their relationship with consumers. In these campaigns, when a consumer buys a product, in return, they are granted a reward. To deliver these brand activation campaigns, TLC Marketing has a network of partnerships and offers. This national and international network of partnerships ranges from travel, hotel stays, beauty treatments, Zen experiences, sports, entertainment, cinema, retail, services, health and wellness, eco-friendly activities, family activities, and restaurants.

The company has been operating for over 50 years. Thus far, TLC Marketing has had more than 5,000 campaigns in its portfolio for hundreds of brands, impacting more than 800 million consumers globally since the turn of the millennium, based on the analysis of Catarina Alves's (2020) internship report. TLC's B2B Marketing occurs when they contact another company (like Nestle or Unilever, etc.) to sell a campaign in the clients' sector. Then the team handles all its operationalization, from proposals to the choice of offers and their partners and all the creative process until it goes live for the final consumer. In the campaigns run by this company, the final consumer can use a promotional code that is found on all products, which can be exchanged for rewards. However, despite acting in a B2B setting, it provides constant support to the consumer through the existing customer support line placed on the coupons/vignettes/vouchers and the respective campaign site (depending on the type of campaign being sold), available on working weekdays from 9 am-1 pm and 2 pm-6 pm.

Regarding the pandemic context, TLC created and adopted for the first time an 'At Home' rewards campaign to provide consumers with at-home services such as free fitness sessions, music, movies, cooking classes for the whole family, and language courses for all ages. This agency is a global leader in campaigns with promotions, incentives, and brand loyalty, with more than sixteen markets, 100,000 partners, more than 700 campaigns worldwide in 2018, more than 400 professionals, and 20 awards between 2017 and 2018 (Alves, 2020).

Fig. 2- Some of the TLC Marketing clients.

4.1.2 *Mission, Vision & Values*

TLC Marketing has a business model that focuses on turning the consumer's shopping experience into an unforgettable moment with the help of rewards. There are two critical points to developing a campaign: the first point is that brands must add value to the product, rather than running a mere campaign, and the second point is that this same added value should extend to everyone who buys the product or service.

With that said, TLC's mission is to help brands influence consumer choice at the point of sale, i.e., at the moment of decision. So, TLC aims to deliver a unique promotional campaign due to existing partnerships, consumer behavior knowledge, and previous experience.

The vision (medium and long term) is to be a better nationally recognized agency of reference. To make the purchase a unique moment, through the following mechanics: acquisition of new customers, retention of customers, increase the frequency of purchase, highlighting the competition at the point of increase in the average receipt / average purchase, increased brand penetration, increased frequency of visitors to the end of the sale and lastly, increased profit.

Finally, the company's values are innovation, creativity, appreciation, trust, credibility, commitment, demand, and concern for the customer. In short, whatever moment you meet any worker of the company, whether in the meeting room, at the point of sale, or by telephone

contact, the goal is, and will always be, that the whole experience is truly rewarding for everyone involved (Alves, 2020).

4.1.3 Product

"*Promotional Marketing is any marketing initiative, the purpose of which is to create a call to action, that has a direct and positive impact on the behavior of a targeted audience by offering a demonstrable, though not necessarily tangible, benefit.*" – Roddy Mullin

Most of the campaigns created by the agency are point-of-sale campaigns. The following figures demonstrate the campaigns that are part of the loyalty program, which were the ones that I worked with during my internship:
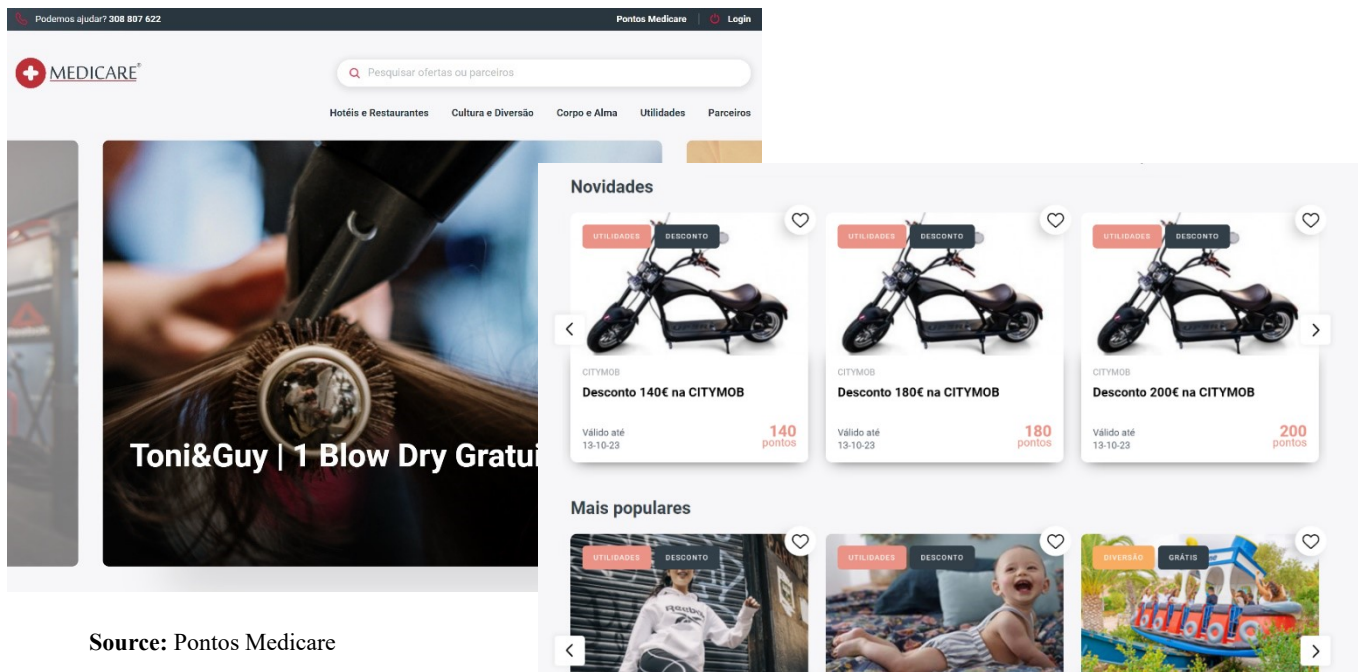
Source: Pontos Medicare

Fig. 3- This figure illustrates the landing page for the Medicare campaign with TLC Marketing.

The Medicare campaign is a 100% digital loyalty program. Medicare is a 100% Portuguese-owned company that democratized access to private health care for millions of families.

Everything that the Medicare client invests in is his health plan in return for experience. For example, for every € spent, the customer accumulates 1 point that can use in rewards. Rewards options range from hotel stays, massages, restaurants, sports, and more.
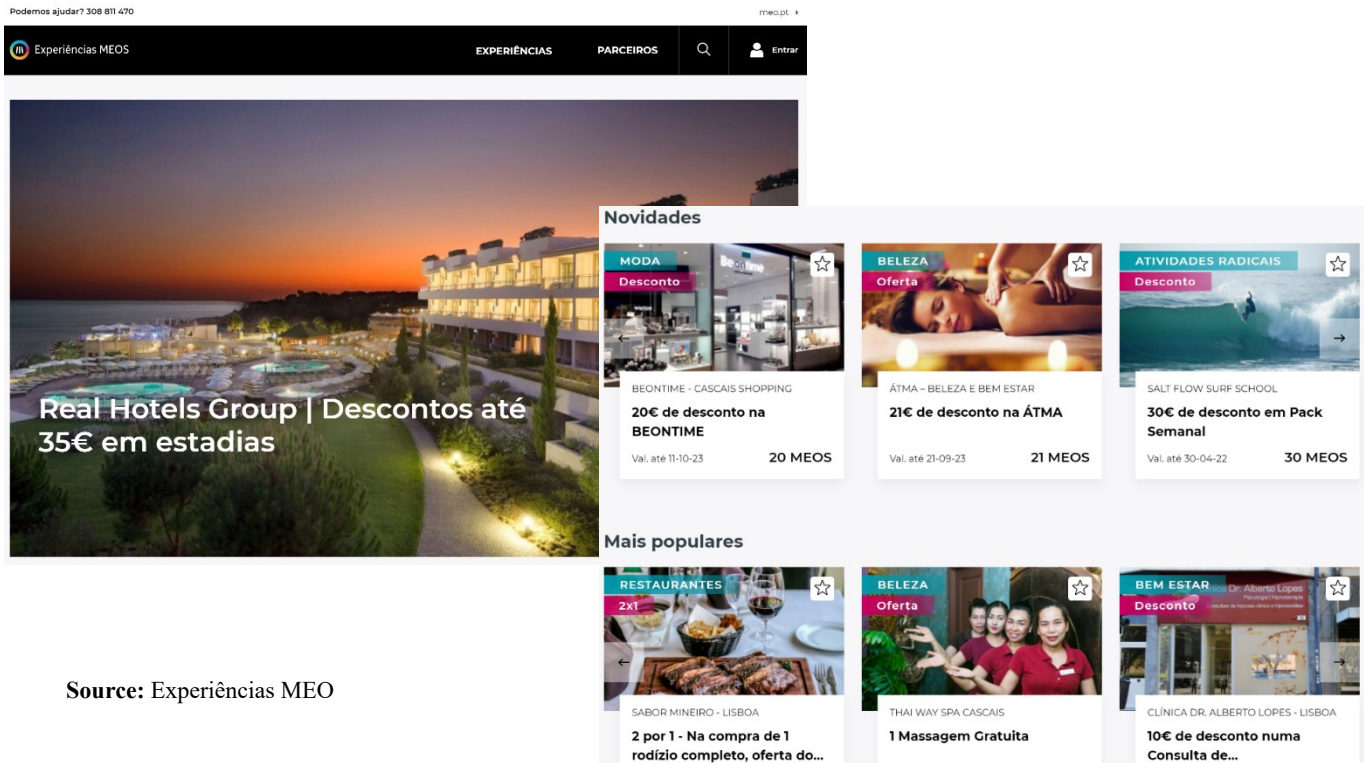
Source: Experiências MEO

Fig. 4- This figure illustrates the landing page for the MEO campaign with TLC Marketing.

MEO is a leading global telecommunications operator in Portugal in all segments in which it operates. The company offers products and services in the telecommunications and multimedia areas, targeting the consumer and business segments. The MEO campaign is a 100% digital loyalty program. Everything that the MEO client invests in is his monthly fee in return for experiences. For example, for every € spent, the customer accumulates 1 point that can use in rewards. Rewards options range from hotel stays, massages, restaurants, sports, and more.

4.1.4 Organizational chart
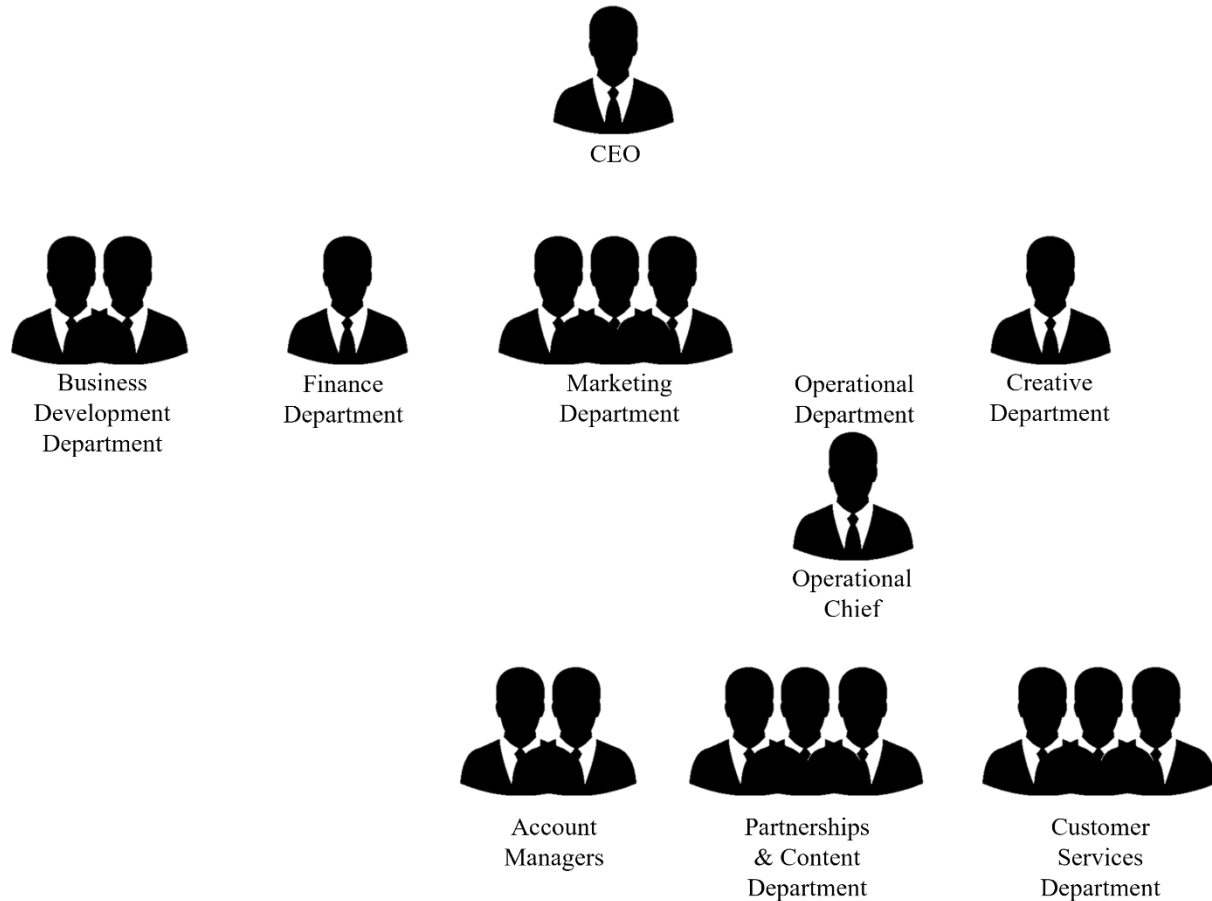
Fig. 5- This figure illustrates the organizational chart of the TLC Marketing team.

4.2 Framing the trainee's role in the organization

TLC Marketing had a gap in the Partners & Content department. This department was composed of two employees, the Partners & Content Manager and the Partners & Content Specialist. Therefore, my integration in this Partners & Content group as the Partners and Content assistant was necessary. The team needed someone to help with the existing campaigns' technical and administrative side and create internal and external communication. As mentioned before, my recruitment as a trainee in the partners & content group came in response to an overwhelmed team and the need for someone to take over the communication side. Since the first day, there was a daily follow-up by my supervisor and colleague that helped me understand the various

mechanics, challenges, and goals that we wanted to be achieved. My primary responsibilities were the following: Content and data management for the development of TLC Marketing partner networks; Research of potential new partners contacts; Elaboration of presentations for meetings; Organization and systematization of partnership protocols; Elaboration of communication materials for the partner networks and respective dynamization; Creation of marketing and communication contents for the partner networks and teams (Newsletters, e-shots, team support materials, etc.); And support the operational department. I reported to Telma Monteiro, the Operational Manager, and David Mónica, the Partner & Content Manager, and worked with the Medicare and MEO campaign.

4.2.1 Description of the activities in the internship

My internship at TLC Marketing started on November 23 and ended on May 23, 2021 and enabled me to practice the knowledge acquired during the master's degree and apply it to a real work context. The first few months of the internship were more focused on technical and administrative tasks, for instance, managing content and tracking data with Microsoft Dynamics NAV. This is where new partnerships or renewals are implemented. This process consisted of several steps: creating the partner's profile card, adding the proposed offers to the correct category, and adding them to the current loyalty programs. The goal here was the addition of three new partners per week (on average), increasing and broadening supply by +16% within six months, including implementing well-known brands such as Reebok, Tidal, and Lingo Kids to enhance the rewards page.
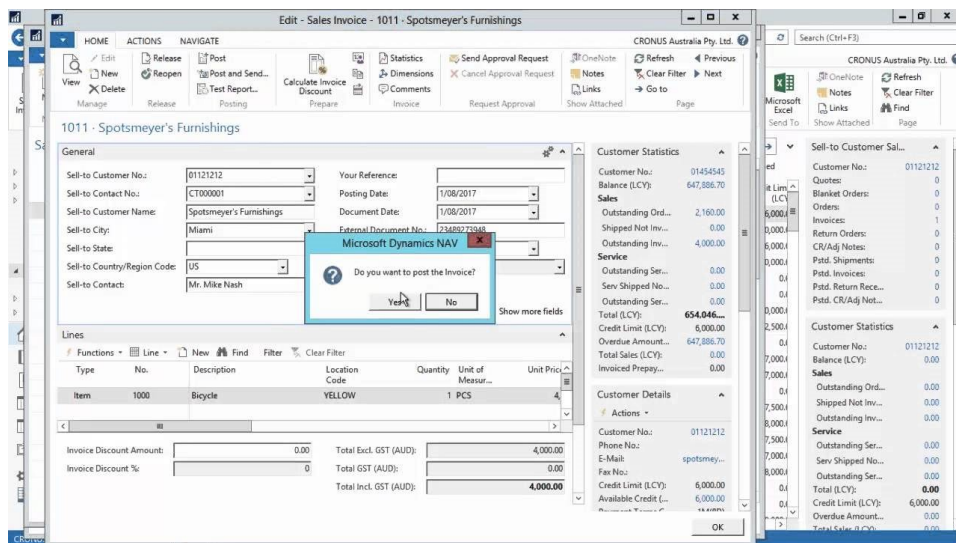
Fig. 6- This figure illustrates an example of how the Microsoft Dynamics NAV looks like.

After successfully implementing the partner or offer to Microsoft Dynamics Nav, the next step was activating, managing, and customizing them in the loyalty programs: in MEO's (Telecom service) and Medicare's (Health plans provider) back office. This enabled me to focus on more strategic and creative tasks to ensure that the partners and offers were displayed most appealingly and excel the clients' requirements (see example in **Figure 9 & 10**).

In addition to the strategic and creative tasks, I created and implemented internal and external communications (such as Newsletters, E-shots, and Product Sheets). The internal communication was to help the Business Development team to have innovative ideas to sell to their customers (for example, new partners that we just added and would be relevant for Father's Day). The goal here was to bring awareness about the latest additions pertinent to other departments. At the same time, the external communication was about the new platform that the Operations Team would launch—explaining the benefits that the prospective and existing partners would get from it.

Fig. 7- This figure illustrates the Newsletter created to introduce the REWARDS platform.

Chapter 5- Methodology

5.1 Qualitative Method

To understand the impact that Covid-19 had on TLC Marketing's communication strategy, this study will use a qualitative method. Qualitative research is a means for investigating and comprehending the meaning of persons or groups assigned to a human or social issue. The research process incorporates methods and questions, information normally gathered in the respondent's environment, data analysis inductively developing from specific to broad topics, and the investigator interpretations the meaning of the information collected. Those who participate in this kind of investigation support a form of research that follows an inductive approach, the relevancy of reading the difficulty of a position, and a focus on personal meaning (Creswell, 2007).

I seek to understand how the end consumers look at the agency's rewards, how the clients evaluate a campaign and the impact of the current pandemic crisis in how the departments plan and adjust their strategies. I propose conducting semi-structured interviews since I intend to provide the interviewees' space to expose their ideas and share experiences that contribute to a better understanding of my object of analysis. I aim to create a neutral environment and shift away from the directive interview where there is no room to understand realities that escape a previously constructed script. The purpose of exploratory interviews is not to verify hypotheses or collect or analyze specific data but rather to open lines of thought, broaden and clarify the horizons of reading, and become aware of the dimensions and aspects of a given problem (Quivy and Campenhoudt, 1998).

First, a phenomenological research design was applied to examine what was successful on past and current campaigns and strategies and what was not successful, which will later be explained in more detail. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted with ten individuals who work at TLC Marketing, allowing the interviewee to share their experiences. The interview followed a semi-structured design that incorporated structured and open-ended questions. All interviews were conducted through Zoom and Teams and were recorded and then transcribed. This sample included: four employees from the Partners and Content (P & C) department, one Account Manager; one Operational Manager; two employees from the Customer Service department, and

two employees from the Marketing department. The independent factors are the employees, the dependent factor is the campaigns and strategies, and the external factors are the Covid-19, restrictions, and Stakeholders (partners, clients, and end-consumers). The following table will better illustrate this information:

Departments	Interviewee	Interview Date	Role
Partners & Content Department	**Participant #1** David Mónica	23/04/21	Partners & Content Manager (four years and a half)- I Manage the partnerships network. This means, creating strategic partnerships with products that are interesting for the end consumer, that are well known nationally and internationally. In addition to helping the business development department, when it comes to creating proposals that include partnerships.
	Participant #2 Daniela Madureira	23/04/21	Partners & Content Specialist (five months)- I was responsible for increasing the partnerships networks, by getting new partners, and maintaining the ones we already had.
	Participant #3 Tiago Dias	20/09/21	Partner & Content Specialist (six months) – I was responsible for the partnerships network and content. I look for new partnership opportunities for our clients, for our programs, and for our networks and develop quality offers for these potential partners. In addition to renewing and maintaining the partnerships that already exist.
	Participant #4 Inês Matias	21/09/21	Partners & content specialist (one month and half)- I oversee partner audits and manage the partners that already exist in our networks. Trying to 1) always maintaining a relationship

			with them and getting new offers and 2) ask if they want to integrate in the campaigns we have in place.
Account Manager	**Participant #5** Paula Silva	20/04/21	Account Manager (10 years)- I do all the work of managing and launching the promotional campaigns that we do at TLC Marketing. So, I do account management, client management and project management. From the moment the campaign is launched, I manage it internally and externally with the client, so that the campaign is successful, and the client is happy.
Operational Manager	**Participant #6** Telma Monteiro	4/10/21	Operations Manager (10 years)- I am responsible for the accounts, partnerships, and customer support teams. Daily, I must make sure that all the team members perform well, that there are no gaps in the campaigns and the customers are satisfied. I change and create new procedures to make all implementations and management more efficient. I am also a board member, meaning that I must go through the details of all the company related information together with the CEO and the CFO to make decisions about the future strategies.
Customer Services Department	**Participant #7** Luís Silva	23/09/21	Customer Service Manager (10 months)- I work with reports, management, costs, values etc. Right now, my work is very much related to booking stays, sending physical awards, contacting customers, managing complaints, managing customer requests and brand customer. Brand customer = the LG customer, I have the person customer who has applied for

			rewards and then I have the brand customer, who wants to understand the current situation.
	Participant #8 Daniela Moreira	8/10/21	Customer Service Specialist (four months)- I ended up managing more less 6-7 campaigns, all for overnight stays at hotels, code sending and rewards. I also make phone calls and there is also a physical reward send here, and invoicing. The campaigns that I work with are: Millenium (Ativo Bank), Millenium BCP, Sumol, Compal, Gazela, LG, High Definition, Mastercard, BPI.
Marketing Department	**Participant #9** Catarina Alves	22/09/21	Marketing Assistant (two years)- I do the entire communication of the agency, including taking care of the newsletters, website, and social media (IG and LinkedIn). I also support other departments in their communication, such as the Partners & Content department, in partnerships. We make proactive proposals to clients and approaches to get our clients to listen to us. Therefore, our marketing is very commercial, very aggressive in that sense it's a very supportive tactic to the business development team. I also schedule meetings, close proposals, and campaigns.
	Participant #10 Maria Madalena Nobre	29/09/21	Strategic Marketing Executive (eight months)- My work is to prepare the brands, with whom the sale teams will meet. This includes creating presentations of all the campaigns that we have already done, I put together the best ones so that I can present them as mockups. I do the research and contacts for us to approach them and make the initial contact, so that later we can close a

			campaign.

Table 1- This table illustrates the different departments that were interviewed, including the interviewee's name, date of the interview, and their job role description.

The interviewees were selected based on purposive sampling, selecting cases that were knowledgeable regarding the purpose of this research. The following criteria were taken into consideration:

1) Partner and Content (P & C) department: Since the business model of TLC Marketing is providing experiences as rewards, a higher number of employees of this department had to be interviewed to understand better the logic that goes behind choosing the right partners/ experiences for a campaign. In addition to understanding what strategies were necessary to implement during a crisis and which ones were successful in gaining and retaining new partners and which ones weren't.

2) Account Manager: It was necessary to have the perspective of an Account Manager, as they are the ones that inform the P & C of the changes that need to happen during the campaign. It's one of the departments that work closely with the P & C department, and it is through them, we have a better awareness of what the client wants.

3) Operational Manager: It was necessary to have the perspective of the Organizational Manager, as she is seen as the bridge that links all the different departments together, and no matter the current circumstances, she can make the departments work efficiently as a team. It was necessary to comprehend the shift from working from the office to home to understand its impact on the departments (specifically P & C) and the available resources.

4) Customer Service department: It was necessary to interview at least two employees from the Customer Service department to identify which campaigns had more complaints and why. To better comprehend the consumers' wants, it is the end consumer who experiences the service provided by TLC Marketing.

Second, the Marketing Assistant controls the brand image and communication, which plays a crucial role in how the stakeholders perceive the brand. 5) Marketing department: It was necessary to interview at least two employees from the distinct types of Marketing existent at TLC because first, the Strategic Marketing Executive is the person that has the first contact with

a prospective client. So, it was insightful to understand what had to change in that communication to be more appealing to clients and recognize the innovative strategies that had to be implemented to stand out.

Even though it's a small sample, I chose to interview these ten employees as they have a tremendous collective awareness and specifically the Partners and Content, the Customer Services department, and the Account Manager as their functions and strategies depend on each other their external independent stakeholders.

5.2 *Strategies of inquiry*

Strategies of inquiry are forms of qualitative designs or models that give specific guidance for processes in a research design (Creswell, 2011).

5.2.1 *The phenomenological research design*

Phenomenological research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher recognizes the core of human experiences about a phenomenon as illustrated by individuals (Creswell, 2011). Comprehending the lived experiences shows phenomenology as philosophy and as a technique. The process requires analyzing a small number of topics through thorough and extended interactions to create patterns and associations of meaning (Moustakas, 1994). In this procedure, the researcher supports or decides individuals in the study (Nieswiadomy, 1993).

The purpose of the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is to study specifically the interviewee's perception of the subject being studied. Therefore, the resolution is phenomenological because it is interested in the interviewee's personal view of a matter or event against an effort to create an impartial declaration of the matter or the happening itself. It's a dynamic process that attempts to get near the interviewee's world (Murray & Chamberlain, 1999). This interpretative phenomenological study will examine two campaigns launched in different years but had the same purpose. It will analyze what led one to succeed and what led the other one to fail. This also includes all the communication channels that they were advertised on. This study will mainly focus on employees' opinions.

The first campaign is called RESTART Portugal, and it was launched on June 4th, 2020, with a mission of allowing brands to boost their sales and recreate meaningful relationships with their consumers. This campaign was promoted on their website with the following message: The role

of marketing agencies in the economic recovery- In a year where the hierarchy of consumer needs has been temporarily, or permanently, changed and many industries have come to a dramatic halt, it's time to understand TLC's role in the economy's recovery. To address this need, TLC Marketing has launched this campaign, an action plan that brings together the needs and expectations of brands, consumers, and other economic factors in a cycle of reinvestment and optimism (TLC Marketing, 2020).

The plan comes in response to a study conducted by TLC, which addressed the expectations and desires for the end of the period of government-imposed isolation and found that people miss simple pleasures such as connecting with nature, the sea, an outdoors lifestyle, and many other activities connected to Portuguese life. Through this plan, TLC Marketing realizes this promise and gives its clients the possibility to implement offers that meet the desires of the Portuguese: eco-stays, family activities, fun activities, activities in nature, or offers related to the physical and mental well-being of consumers, among others. TLC claims to help brands give signs of optimism and contribute to the return to normal life of the Portuguese (TLC Marketing, 2020).

This delivery is made possible by our unparalleled network of thousands of partners nationwide, with all kinds of businesses including hotels, adventure partners, theme and amusement parks, family fun activities, beauty salons and spas, among others. Partners that currently work with maximum safety and comfort and with the Clean & Safe seal. It is also an opportunity for brands to contribute to the important national recovery, stimulating and promoting the important tourist entertainment sector, whose business has been severely affected (TLC Marketing, 2020).

It is important to analyze how the current situation in Portugal was, regarding the pandemic, in the months before June 4, 2020. According to the Observador newspaper (2020), these are the main moments, of the three months that have changed the lives of Portuguese people. First the month of March 2020, from the first cases to the state of emergency. On March 18, the president of the Republic declared a state of emergency for 15 days. Then in April, the renewal of the state of emergency. April 10, the president of the Republic announced that he would renew the state of emergency until May 1. April 16, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa (the president of the Republic) proposes to parliament the second extension of the state of emergency, to last until May 2. The parliament approves the decree. April 30, the Government approves in the Council of Ministers a transition plan from a state of emergency to a calamity situation. Third the month of May, the

return to a new normal. May 2, the third period of the state of emergency, which began on April 18, ends. May 15, the Government meets in the Council of Ministers and makes a positive assessment of the first two weeks of deconfinement. May 21, parliament approves Government proposals on the deconfinement process. May 29, the Government approves, in council of ministers, the third phase of the deconfinement plan.

It is also necessary to analyze which channels were used to promote this campaign. In the figure below are the photo and video that were posted on Instagram and an advertising video that was posted on YouTube.
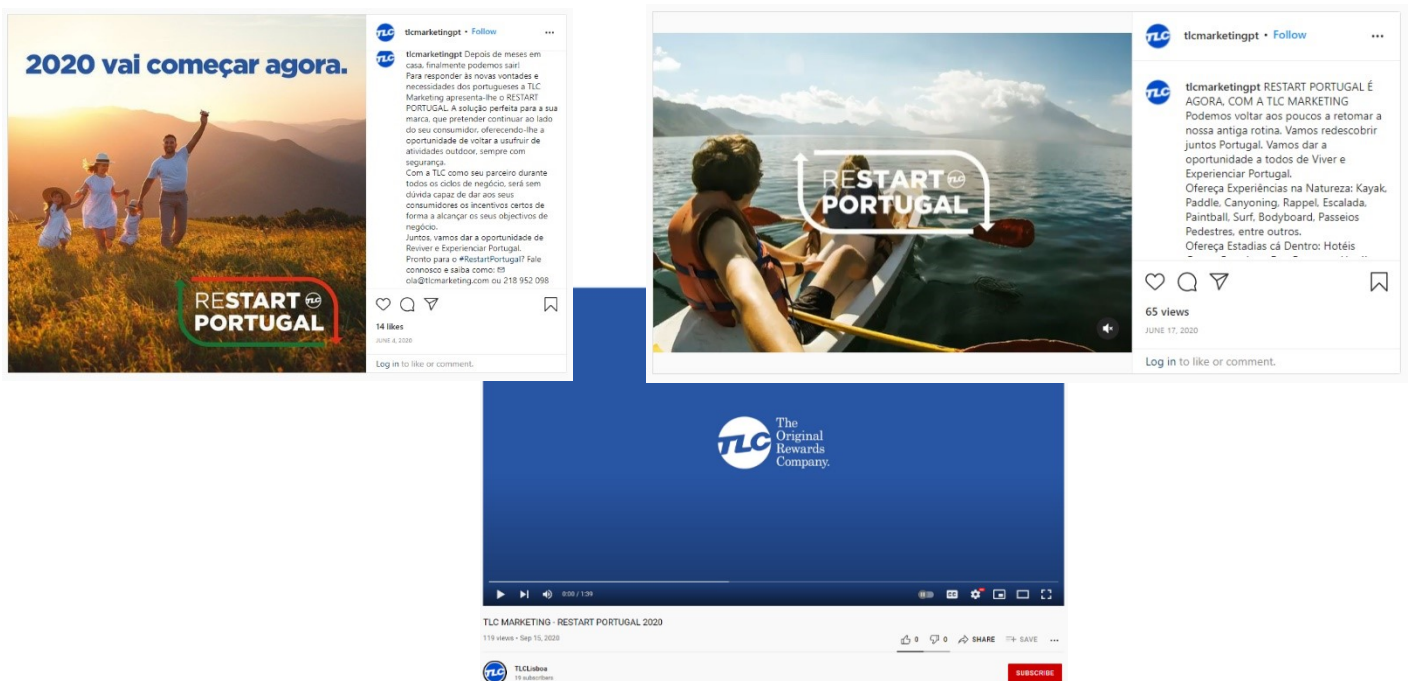
Source: TLC Marketing Instagram and YouTube

Fig. 8- This figure shows the channels used to promote the RESTART Portugal campaign. All the three channels showed low engagement.

The image on the left was published on June 4th (day of the launch), with the following caption: "After months at home, we can finally go out! To meet the new desires and needs of the Portuguese, TLC Marketing presents you the RESTART Portugal. The perfect solution for your brand if you want to stay close to your customers by offering them the opportunity to enjoy outdoor activities again and again. With TLC as your partner during all business cycles, you will

undoubtedly be able to give your customers the right incentives to achieve your business goals. Together, we will give you the opportunity to Relive and Experience Portugal." The image on the right was published on June 17th, with the following caption: "RESTART Portugal is now, with TLC Marketing. We can slowly get back to our old routine. Let's rediscover Portugal together. Let's give everyone the opportunity to live and Experience Portugal. Offer Nature Experiences: Kayak, Paddle, Canyoning, Rappel, Climbing, Paintball, Surf, Bodyboard, Walks, among others. Offer Stays in Portugal: Green Hotels, Premium Hotels, Eco-Resorts and Hotels with the Clean & Safe seal. What are you waiting for? Join TLC Marketing and make a RESTART in your strategy, for Portugal, for the Portuguese!" The YouTube advertising was only published on September 15th.

Overall, the social media strategy didn't generate a lot of engagement, but it still ended up generating a couple of relevant leads, according to the Marketing department. As stated by the TLC's employees these were the results of the campaign:

"*The campaign RESTART Portugal happened after the lockdown last year (2020) when people were very keen to go out, so we were essentially inviting people to visit the rural hotels, so they could go on more isolated, safer getaways. Last year's strategy, was essentially about contacting all clients and say ok we are going through a pandemic, but your company doesn't need to suffer, you can still offer your customers safe experiences for people to enjoy being away from home, due to the timing and structure of the campaign, it was very successful, we ended up creating two great campaigns with this message.*" – Paula Silva, Account Manager.

"*RESTART Portugal, it was when we started to deconfine. At that time, we built this message that it was really to restart Portugal and with our help our clients could provide these new experiences and return these activities to their clients that until then the consumers couldn't do. And I think it was a very well-constructed campaign, we even sold some campaigns with this message to Turismo de Portugal, and the BPI bank, who were looking for campaigns that were designed and conceived around this strategy, so I think it was one of the campaigns that had the best results.*" – Ana Catarina Alves, Marketing Assistant.

The second campaign to be analyzed is called RISE Portugal. It was launched on January 27, 2021, with a mission of attracting new clients and helping them achieve their goals by giving consumers what they need. This campaign is promoted on the website with the following message: How can brands positively influence the market? Through TLC Marketing's "Rise Portugal" plan. The country is coming out of a particularly complicated year. Brands have been suspended for too long and staying suspended is not a solution. TLC must develop strategies that are appropriate to the current reality and that allow brands to be in the front line, guaranteeing their commercial results and preparing for the future (TLC Marketing, 2021).

Brands are the visible face of consumption; the one consumers relate to in their daily lives. They have, therefore, a fundamental role of serving as a beacon in the darkness, a light of hope, and of accompanying their consumers on the path to follow. If they have the right strategies, they boost not only sales but also the business of all stakeholders in the value chain: employees, retailers, and other economic players. At TLC Marketing, they want to be the facilitators of this process and deliver value to brands (protecting their bottom line and strengthening connections), to businesses in general (the networks) and to consumers (who are rewarded). With the real notion of the current needs, not only of brands, but also of their consumers, TLC created RISE Portugal, a plan that aims to meet the consumers' expectations and the brands' needs (TLC Marketing, 2021).

TLC stated that it would help brands show signs of optimism and contribute to the recovery of the Portuguese economy. Through this plan, TLC Marketing claimed that it made this promise come true and gave its clients the possibility to implement sales activation actions with offers that meet the current wishes of the Portuguese people. This was made possible by its network of thousands of partners with relevant offers for any occasion (TLC Marketing, 2021).

It is important to analyze how the current situation in Portugal was, regarding the pandemic, the months before and after January 27, 2021. According to Público (2021), the parliament voted on January 13th on the President of the Republic's proposal to extend the state of emergency until January 30. On February 19 the ban on driving between the 278 municipalities on the mainland during the weekend has been in effect successive times since the New Year period. It has been extended as of January 15 with the new general confinement. In addition to this restriction on movement between municipalities, there is still in effect mandatory confinement, where the main rule is to stay indoors; a ban on sales or deliveries to the wicket in any non-food establishment; the prohibition to sell or deliver any beverage to the wicket, even in establishments authorized for take-away; and a ban on staying in public leisure areas (which may, however, be frequented). The state of emergency was extended until 11:59 pm on March 1, and the same rules of confinement were applied.

Several channels were used to promote this campaign. In the figure below is a photo was posted both on Instagram and LinkedIn.

Fig. 9- This figure shows the channels used to promote the RISE Portugal campaign. Both channels showed low engagement.

The image on the left was published on January 27th (day of the launch), with the following caption: "Consumers are more attentive than ever to the actions of brands, and therefore, TLC Marketing launches RISE Portugal - A plan that integrates sales activations, for confinement and post-confinement, designed for each brand, with Exclusive Partner Networks of National coverage and high value, that you can offer to all your consumers! Sports Activities, Online Fitness Classes, Streaming Movies, Series & Music, E-learning Courses, Among many others! Join RISE Portugal with TLC and discover your Brand Strategy to Re-Energize Portugal!" The image on the right was published in January as well, with the following caption: "The pandemic has left us all in suspense but giving up is not the solution. We need to put in place the right strategies that allow brands to position themselves as drivers of consumption and optimism. Consumers are more attentive than ever to the actions of brands, and therefore, TLC Marketing launches RISE PORTUGAL - A plan that integrates sales activations, for confinement and post-confinement, designed for each brand, with Exclusive Partner Networks of National coverage and high value that you can offer to all your consumers! In our Partner Networks, your brand can find everything your consumers value, indoors or outdoors, alone or with family: Sports Activities, Online Fitness Classes, Streaming Movies, Series & Music, E-learning Courses,

Among many others! Join RISE PORTUGAL with TLC and discover your Brand Strategy to Re-Energize Portugal!"

Overall, the social media strategy didn't generate a lot of engagement, nor leads, according to the Marketing department. As stated by the TLC's employees these were the results of the campaign:

"*The campaign RISE Portugal happened when we were about to go into lockdown again (2021) when people already knew what to expect and were tired and hopeless. This year's strategy had a similar approach to the RESTART Portugal strategy that happened last year. A couple mistakes were made, with the lack a time they didn't end up doing a thorough market research, it was launched at a wrong time, and it wasn't taken into consideration the current conditions of the country. At last, since it didn't consider the previous aspects, it wasn't able to fulfill the consumers expectations and the brand needs. The results weren't great.*" – Paula Silva, Account Manager.

"We tried to do this year another strategy like the RESTART Portugal, called RISE Portugal (launched in January 2021) and it didn't go so well. I believe this happened because of timing. Last year it was just coming out of an almost 3 months lockdown, so people could wait to go back to do activities out of the house. So, we managed to create a message that was broad to all sectors and optimistic. This year everyone was already knew what to expect and were about to go into lockdown again. So, the campaign itself didn't end up having impressive results." – Ana Catarina Alves, Marketing Assistant.

In short, after analyzing both campaigns, it's important to identify the three main factors that made the first campaign (RESTART) successful and those are: timing, customization and understanding marketing needs. The first campaign was launched after three overwhelming months of lockdown from a virus that started off by infecting a few people to killing more than 800 every day. So, what the RESTART campaign was providing at that time was exactly what the consumers expected, and brands needed: safe and fun out of the home activities. While the second campaign looked like it didn't have much thought put into it and it was simply a copy of the first campaign, which made it less successful because first it wasn't created based on consumers' expectations or what clients were looking for in that the moment, and it didn't take into consideration the current Covid restrictions that were being implemented at the time. Their selling point wasn't aggressive, and the communication was too broad. This is an appropriate strategy because it helped us understand that in the current conditions that we live in, the main aspects that made a campaign work and the main aspects that made the other campaign not work. This will better prepare the marketing agency for future similar situations.

This strategy helped shape the type of questions asked in the interview because it showed the importance of being aware on the impact that the pandemic is having and will have on the

country, on the different departments, on the business model and on the stakeholders, as it's all characteristics that affect a campaign. Therefore, the interviews started by asking questions related to the pandemic affectability and then it shifted to questions of how they were able to overcome it and what was successfully implemented. This research design led to the creation of a coding process that used the interviewees responses to identify the main themes that helped a marketing agency survive during challenging times.

5.3 The researcher's role

My role was as interviewer, since I was doing structured and open-ended questions, it allowed the interviewee to provide their own opinions and from those, new questions were drawn. The selected interviewees work for TLC Marketing, where I did a 6-months internship as the Partners and Content assistant. (See **Table 1**) Participant #1 was my manager and supervisor, first we would have morning meetings every day to define our to do lists, then additional meetings would occur throughout the day, so we were constantly in contact. Participant #2 was my partner, we would work as a team, she would have the first contact with the partners to close the deal and then I would insert the offers and partner that she closed in the current campaigns. We were also constantly in contact and in meetings. Participant #3 was a new addition to the team, so I ended up training him and preparing him to be successful with the tasks he would have to take on. Our contact was frequent. With participant #4, I didn't have any contact prior to the interview. With participant #5, I had at least four meetings per week to make sure that the current campaigns were in order, so our contact was frequent. Participant #6 was my supervisor, so she would be a part of every morning meeting and the group meetings that were at least three times per week. We were constantly in contact. With participant #7, we had at least two meetings per week to do an overview of the week, so our contact was periodical. With participant #8, we didn't have contact prior to the interview. With participant #9, we would only contact each other when help was needed, thus we would only meet twice a month. With participant #10, we didn't have any contact prior to the interview.

Potential biases in this study may result from my preconceived ideas regarding the topic of research. The research attempts to emphasize the impact that the pandemic had on the communication strategy implemented by TLC Marketing but disregards that 1) I was a member of the Partners and Content department; 2) the fact that some departments didn't need to change

their communication strategy to achieve results; 3) some interviewees only started to work at TLC during the pandemic, so they couldn't provide a perspective of what the 'before' was. The following steps were taken to manage these biases: 1) To keep my own opinion of influencing the interview, I would ask neutral and objective questions with follow ups of the answers they would provide. Like that I was able to be a participant in the interview without influencing them with my opinion. I would approach the interview like I was new to the topic. 2) Even if no new strategies were implemented, the approach was to understand if the language or any other aspect shifted to a more empathic attitude (e.g., the way they would write an e-mail now). 3) Instead of understanding what strategies were done before the pandemic and which strategies were implemented during the pandemic. The approach was to understand how it evolved from the pandemic to 'post-pandemic'.

To ensure fairness and transparency in this research and interview the subsequent ethic codes were followed: All the reported research, data and results were written with honesty and integrity. All the interviews were conducted with objectivity to avoid bias. Anything reported in confidence, is kept in confidentiality. Anything related with legality, including awareness of laws and regulations that control my work, were complied with. Finally, to ensure human subjects protection it was asked beforehand if the interviewees allowed their full name to appear on the research, and if I was allowed to record the interview. Later, when the transcribed interview was sent to the interviewee, it was asked if any information provided had to be kept in confidentiality (Leffler, 2017).

5.4 Data collection procedures

The goal behind qualitative research is to intentionally choose respondents that will best assist the researcher to recognize the problem and answer the research question. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) four aspects were recognized: the location, the respondents, the events, and the process (Creswell, 2011). The interviews conducted in this research took place via Zooms and Teams because of the current situation. The selected respondents followed a purposeful sampling selecting criteria and are the following: four employees from the Partners and Content department, one Account Manager and one Operational Manager, two employees from the Customer Service department and two employees from the Marketing department (see **Table 1**). The respondents were interviewed talking in their home or office. A friendly approach

was used to break the ice and make the interviewees feel more comfortable, so the dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee was smooth. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The type of interview was a remote one-on-one interview. The advantages of this type of interview are that they are easy to schedule because there is no need to go to a physical place to meet; helpful when respondents cannot be immediately observed; give the researcher power over the line of inquiry; and respondents can give historical information. Limitations of this type are that it gives indirect data filtered through the opinions of the respondents; poor internet connection might affect the quality of the interview; the researcher's presence might bias answers; limited interview time; gives information in a selected location rather than the natural field location (Creswell, 2011).

5.5 *Data recording procedures*

I conducted semi-structured interviews, recorded the interviews, and transcribed the interviews. The interviews followed a protocol created by Creswell (2011) This protocol includes the following components:

- A heading (date, location, interviewer, interviewee).
- Guideline for the respondent to follow so that regular procedures are used from one interview to another.
- The questions: Start with an ice-breaker question at the beginning, followed by 4-5 sub questions, followed by some concluding statement or question, such as, what else would you like to add about this 'topic'?
- Probes for the 4-5 questions, to follow up and ask respondents to clarify their ideas in more detail or to explain what they have said.
- Interval between the questions to record answers.
- A final thank you statement to recognize the time the respondent spent on the interview.

A sample of questions that were asked in the interview (the questions were later adapted to the different interviewees):

1- Tell me about your role at TLC Marketing.

2- What aspects of your work have changed due to the pandemic?

3- In what way would you say the pandemic has affected your work with the partners?

4- Describe your relationship with the partners before the pandemic and now. How did it change during the pandemic?

5- Looking at the pandemic with another perspective, do you feel like in a way it opened doors? If so, wich ones?

6- Focusing more into the communication with the partner, what strategies/ tactics have you implemented this year?

7- Can you give me an example of a strategy/tactic that has resulted in retaining a partner?

8- Why did you choose that strategy?

9- What type of technique do you use, when you see there is the possibility of not retaining/attracting a certain partner?

10- Can you give me an example of a time where you weren't able to close the deal with a partner?

11- According to the Instituto Nacional de Estatística, the sectors that were highly affected by the pandemic were the accommodations and food services. Having in mind that TLC has several partnership networks. In your opinion, which ones were the most affected by the pandemic?

Follow up question: Can you tell me more about what you mean by [this topic]?

12- Closing question: Is there anything else you think I should know about impact of the pandemic?

5.6 *Data analysis and interpretation*

Data analysis requires gathering open-ended data, based on asking broad and specific inquiries and creating an analysis from the information provided by respondents (Creswell, 2011).

Phenomenological research uses the analysis of substantial statements, the creation of meaning elements, and the progress of what Moustakas (1994) calls an essence explanation. In this approach, I collected qualitative data, and analyzed it according to themes.
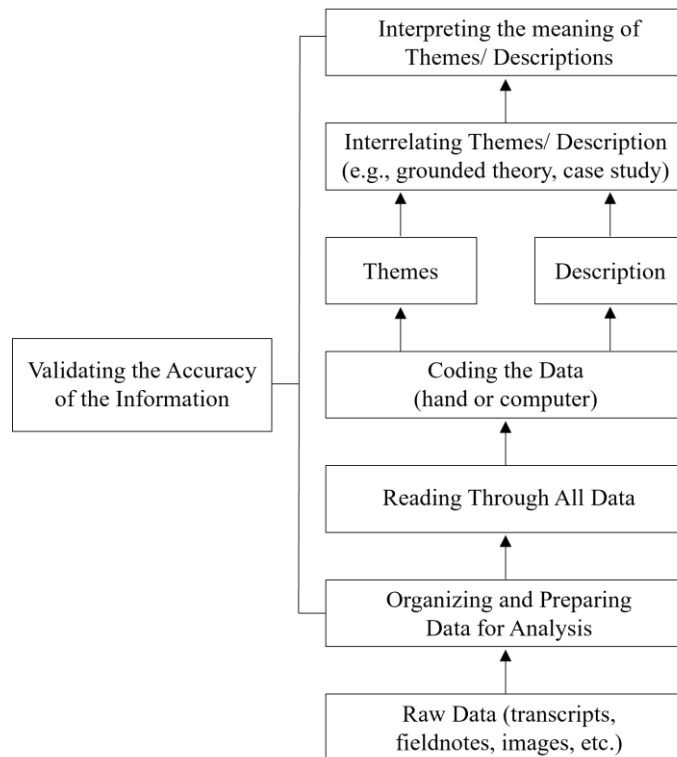
Source: Creswell 2011

Fig. 10- This figure illustrates a layered approach developed from bottom to top (Creswell, 2011). This was the approach followed to analyze the interviews and distribute it by themes. The following steps were considered:

Step 1- Arrange and prepare the data for further analysis, this included transcribing interviews, and organizing all the information into a structured table.

Step 2- Go through all data. First get an overall sense of the particulars and consider its overall meaning. Then take the following questions into consideration: "What is the impression of the overall depth, credibility, and use of the information"? "What general ideas are participants saying"? "What is the tone of the ideas"? (Creswell, 2011).

Step 3- Start a thorough analysis with a coding process. Coding is the process of arranging the material into sections of text before bringing meaning to information (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). The following segmentation list by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) was considered for the coding process:

- Viewpoints held by participants

- Strategy codes

- Subjects' modes of thinking about people and items

Step 4- The coding process was used to produce a narrative description of the context or individuals as well as categories or topics for analysis. Description entails a thorough rendering of information about individuals, events, or locations in a context. Researchers can produce codes for this explanation. Topics are analyzed for each specific case and formed into an overall description (as in phenomenology) (Creswell, 2011).

Step 5- Progress how the description and the topics will be presented in qualitative narration. The approach that was used was the narrative transition to express the outcomes of the analysis. This will be an in-depth discussion of assorted topics (including subthemes, concrete examples, several viewpoints from respondents, and quotations). It will also include the use of illustrations, figures, or tables as aides to the discussions (Creswell, 2011).

Step 6- The final step in data analysis included making an explanation or meaning of the information. Having in mind the following question: "what were the lessons learned?", which depicts the essence of this concept (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These lessons are my personal interpretation, drafted in the comprehension that the interview brought to the research from her or his own work culture, history, and experiences (Creswell, 2011).

I divided the coding into five main themes: Creative adaptability, Empathy, Communication, Intended Strategy and Affectability. The sub-themes were divided by the different departments that were interviewed. The **table 2** (Annex A) describes the outcome of the analysis in the previously mentioned themes. The following section includes a summarized description of the themes:

5.6.1 Creative adaptability

"*Today, Ecommerce is already a common place, it is no longer scary. I am no longer afraid to put my credit card, PayPal on the Internet to make a purchase. In the same way that I'm not afraid to promote my brand on the Internet because I already know what the Internet is.*"

– Participant #3

First, it is necessary to define what I mean by creative adaptability. The standard definition of creativity is the capacity to produce results that are both new, unique, effective, adaptive, and suitable (Runco & Jaeger, 2012). However, new, and effective are comparative ideas. While creative concepts, outcomes, or products are frequently assessed as new and effective by professionals in each area (Kaufman & Baer, 2012; Orkibi, 2021). In this case, creative adaptability is the innovative ideas, techniques that individuals, departments, businesses implemented in a brief period to adjust to this new reality. The abovementioned quote shows the that the scary unknown has now become commonplace, and this happens because of evolution.

From my analysis, it is evident that Portugal evolved tremendously these past few years. I created the creative adaptability theme to help us understand the role of the digital as a strategy. The role of digital as a strategy means that something that was previously seen as impossible to attain, was now achievable in a brief period, that in any other circumstances would not have been possible. For example, a small yoga studio in Lisbon that subscribed to online platforms such as Zoom or Teams and learned how to work with them, was able to provide online classes in Porto, Algarve, and Coimbra, while before, this was not even a possibility. We have all witnessed how businesses evolved and according to the interviewees from the Partners and Content department, the pandemic forced businesses to evolve, react and adapt rapidly. These past two years were seen as a brutal learning curve for some businesses. The percentage of businesses that were able to adapt can range from big to small brands that had the willingness and the resources to do so. This meant for some brands to create a new possibility of having a virtual chain. Three aspects were considered for this type of business to evolve: their willingness and resources, seeing the digital as something worth investing in, and understanding the advantages of being part of this world.

Higher importance was given to better understanding the country's current conditions, the market needs, and consumer needs, as we are living at a time when everything is new, and no one knows what's coming next, the bright side is that it also provides the opportunity to test innovative ideas and strategies. According to the account manager, looking from the perspective of the general market brought many positive things to companies because they had to adjust quickly to the new reality. This meant moving all employees home, managing the processes, finding ways to manage these processes remotely. This has brought an evolutionary standpoint to the companies because they had to adjust to this way of working and the market and market needs.

Initially when remote work started to be mandatory, it was necessary to have several meetings throughout the day to better understand the company's dynamic in an online setting, and how everything was going to play out. According to the operational manager, the struggles felt to readapt to remote work were the following: the managing multiple teams at a distance, each with its own way and challenges, wasn't easy; the increase of countless meetings to ensure the fulfillment of all objectives without neglecting communication and distance between colleagues, was a challenge; the daily interactions by phone or video call were more exhausting; and work processes had to change to fill in details that were not functional in this new reality. On the other hand, they also pointed out that this opened doors for technology to become normal and typical in communication. It showed that remote work is not that complex, and that it can bring many benefits to employees in their work-life balance.

New rules had to be implemented in a scenario like the one we were going through. Most things that were learned before had to be forgotten, as it didn't made sense anymore to apply it to the current conditions. An open-minded approach was the go-to in this situation. A good example was the customer service department, which also struggled to train people remotely, especially when in a group. At a company level, the number of meetings with the different departments increased and the way they would organize their daily tasks and team dynamic changed. At an end-consumer level, there was a noticeable increase in the technological consumables (computers, tablets, cell phones). Regarding the current circumstance, their approaches with the end consumer had to change, so they implemented the following: disregard what was agreed

between the end consumer and TLC in the signed contract and create new negotiations and find new partners.

Since communication is affected by the current conditions of the country and market cycles, it was necessary to do a readjustment of how everything was going to be communicated. As seen in the Marketing department, all the plans for the rest of the year had to change and be adjusted. Communication had to be adjusted to better approach sensitive topics and the language and selling point had to be more aggressive. The communication and marketing strategy had to be more tactical for TLC to remain in the mind of clients as a source of assistance, this need of creating effective strategies intensified even more.

My goal is to understand the role of the digital as a strategy through how the different departments delt with the adjustment to the new reality, what creative adaptability meant for each of them, what struggles they had to overcome and in general what positive aspects came from it. Regarding the overall depth, the Partners and Content department had more to point out as they were representing all the diverse types of networks that they work with, which lead to a more detailed observation of how the current market adapted. Regarding the credibility and the use of information, all the answers are based on the experiences that the participants had throughout the pandemic, including when it started back in March 2020 until now, October 2021. They have based their answers on how their work environment and dynamic adapted and evolved along these 20 months.

5.6.2 *Empathy*

"*In a certain way, people reveal a little more of what their lives are, and that leads them to be more comfortable. There's a chance to create more empathy with clients because they feel more comfortable talking to us, we have more time and availability.*" – Participant #5

First it is necessary to define what I mean by empathy. Several researchers believe empathy means the ability to share an individual's emotion, an emotional process, t. Take on an individual's viewpoint, a cognitive process, a. And feeling sympathetic and wanting to help, a motivational process (Hall & Schwartz, 2019; & Depow, et al., 2021). In this case, I observed a shift in the way communication was conveyed. Adopting an empathic approach brought individuals closer. As seen in the abovementioned quote, since the pandemic was something,

everyone was going through, people better understood each other. Human connection is what kept us going.

From my analysis, this pandemic situation brought out the need to understand who's on the other side, what's going on, what the story is, and gain empathy from that. TLC's empathy approach, according to the Partners and Content department (after noticing that a lot of partners were closing) was to rapidly contact them to show that the company was there for them, which created a stronger connection. This example showed how important it is to act when situations get rough. Remote work was seen as positive as it created a better relationship between the two parties, and it made contact between them easier and simpler.

In general, remote work is seen as a positive. The fact that individuals didn't have to commute to their offices enabled them to use that free time to do things they enjoyed. It is also seen as a positive turning point in the relationship with clients, according to the account manager, remote work has been very positive because clients when they present themselves, present in a more natural and relaxed way. It might happen because they are in their home environment, and don't feel so pressured to look a certain way. For this reason, they tend to have different types of conversations that they wouldn't have in a normal work setting. This leads people to reveal more of what their personal lives are, making them more comfortable. So, there is a chance to create more empathy because they feel comfortable, and the employees have more time and availability.

Throughout the pandemic there was a change in people's reaction, they have become more hopeless and positive. A good example was in Customer Services department, they noticed that around May to June 2021, consumers became more patient, seemed happier, more understanding with one another and the world itself. People started to book more stays, buy more products, and participate in more contests. There was more acceptance and realization that this department was doing everything they could for consumers to be okay, satisfied with the campaign and able to enjoy it.

My aim is to understand that behind a company or a brand that is a human, that we are all going through the same, what empathy meant for each of the departments and the significance that there is on having an empathetic approach. Regarding the overall depth, the Partners and Content department, the Account Manager and Customer Service department had more to point out as

they are the ones who deal with stakeholders. Regarding the credibility and the use of information, all the answers are based on the experiences that the participants had throughout the pandemic, including when it started back in March 2020 until now, October 2021. They have based their answers on their relationship with the stakeholders along these 20 months.

5.6.3 *Communication*

"*LinkedIn ends up becoming a communication accessory with other professionals in the area and even with people in my company. LinkedIn and the digital have become a foundation that I value today.*" – Participant #3

First it is necessary to define what I mean by Communication. Communication is fundamental because employees today should be media savvy and practice great judgment when composing e-mails and publishing messages on the Internet. To succeed, they must safeguard the reputation of their workers and protect their online image (Guerrero, 2021). In this case, everything goes down to how communication is perceived, it can make a real difference in the opinion of clients/consumers. In the quote above mentioned, it shows how important it is to leverage the existing communication tools to achieve better results.

Companies in the current days must adopt a more client-focused communication, it's the only way to be successful in a pandemic setting. A notable example was the shift of the communication from a commercial approach to a human-oriented approach from the Partners & Content department. The approach is that it had to be a win-win for both sides, that is what a partnership is all about. In addition to that, a communication process is also followed. First there is a list of potential partners that are contacted by phone, to explain what the department does, what the partnership is about and then the message is reinforced with an e-mail. After them having all the information on their side and having some time to analyze, investigate and raise questions. Then it's time to follow-up the contact to know if there are any questions that the department can clarify and if they are interested in signing the digital protocol.

To leverage the now available communication resources can really help with problem solving. This to say that problems that sometimes can take up to one hour to solve, with the existing technology can be solved 10 times faster. According to the Account Manager that are several positive aspects in a video call. First it allows them to have more frequent meetings, without the

need of time management. Second, it's possible to solve any problem that might occurred in a 15-minute meeting. Third, more points of contact the quicker is the response. Fourth, client that reach out through Teams, end up having a quicker answer to their questions. In general, the goal is for clients to be satisfied with the ongoing campaigns. The impact is that it allows to talk more directly with clients than before.

Individuals are adhering more to phone calls, which is great because people enjoy talking, specially about themselves. According to the Customer Service department, its curious to see that before consumers used to reach out via e-mail, and now they started calling more. Since consumers already now TLC's number from campaigns they started to answer more. So, the department realized that outbound contacts for people is crucial because they always answer. In this situation it was felt that the human connection evolved.

To create a greater impact, written message should be personalized depending on who it's being address to as well as to the current conditions. In this case, a more sensitive communication should be adopted, to provide more compassion. According to the Marketing department, their goal was to be cautious and sensitive about what they would communicate (including offers). Then there was the challenge to show the clients that they could be an asset and some help for them to achieve their goals. The e-mail language became more sensitive as their started to include "I hope you are well/safe".

My aim is to understand that importance of a proper communication, how customizing a message can help to make a difference, and the importance of having a human-oriented, sensitive, and cautious approach. Regarding the overall depth, each of the departments have their own technique that they implement to make their communication more effective. Regarding the credibility and the use of information, all the answers are based on the experiences that the participants had throughout the pandemic, including when it started back in March 2020 until now, October 2021. They have based their answers on the shift of their communication throughout these 20 months.

5.6.4 *Intended Strategy*

"Never in one year has TLC managed to close so many important partnerships, such as, Portuguese super brands, leading brands in their fields, international partnerships, and major players in the market as this year". -Participant #1

"So, it ends up being a free marketing service and that's very interesting for companies. We work with big brands and the projection in the market is that they are able to package thousands of consumers for free."- Participant #4

First it is necessary to define what I mean by intended strategy. Intended strategy is the concept, conclusion, and measures that allow a company to achieve success (Dess et al., 2019); a strategy that is purposely planned for (Peng, 2021). This topic is very important to help me identify the communication strategies that worked during the pandemic crisis. As seen in the quotes above, this year allowed TLC to close deals that previously were harder to get. This is because brands realized that any assistance, they could get was welcome.

There were several approaches and strategies implemented during this crisis. According to the P & C department they resorted to these approaches and strategies in a standard deal-closing setting and in a difficult deal-closing setting. There are four approaches and four strategies. First is the positive approach; this approach deals with the advantages and the security of being in a network that has major brands (known worldwide), and the increased visibility for their business. Second is the no-cost approach; this approach explicitly explains that the partner doesn't need to make any communication investment or any type of investment and that the communication range for them is much greater. Third is the customized approach (implemented during the pandemic); this approach is about showing that they're on the side of the partners and are here for them, it's a discourse for each type of partner and adapted to the reality of the partnership and the needs of the client. The fourth is the empathy approach (implemented during the pandemic); this approach is all about conveying trust, whether its face to face or online, and finding out what that point that connects the employee to the partner is. The goal here is to establish a relationship, as it facilitates the job. The first strategy is the follow up, this step completely changes the relationship they have with the partners, as it leads them to maintain a healthy relationship with them, even in terms of retention. The second strategy is the media, this strategy is about showing that the partners would gain another communication channel and that the use of

LinkedIn has become a foundation and communication tool for reaching out to certain prospects. When there is some resistance on the other side, LinkedIn is the way to go as it provides a more direct way to contact the person in charge and has already returned some answers and potential partners. The third strategy is the copy-cat (implemented during the pandemic), if you have a big partner of the same type, it will be used as an example "this 'partner' is also here, and things are going well for them." This is always a very efficient argument because the Portuguese businessmen like to imitate one another. The final strategy is the conformity strategy (implemented during the pandemic), and it's about not having much impact but to add an extra percentage to the value of an already existing discount offer. For instance, if they do 15% off, TLC does 16% off on their platform. It doesn't have a significant difference in their operations, and it results in winning the partner.

Most companies activate a task force in extreme situations, this happens normally when they need to rethink the dynamic of the team, the market needs, and the new strategies that are going to be implemented. According to the Account Manager and at a campaign level, in extreme situations there is this task force that is activated to understand which path is the correct to take. This normally includes the CEO, Marketing department and the Partners and Content department and it's necessary to do market research, and to understand the current conditions of the country. So, the strategy here was for consumers to realize that they were being offered Netflix streaming, for example. So, this department would talk to the client database and give them the perspective of what they could create for them and are able to give to the end consumer. This to encourage them in terms of the needs and goals that they have for their brand, and that's how they managed to get new clients.

Each department implemented their survival strategy, meaning the type of strategy that allows them to have the best outcome. In the Customer Service department, a three-step strategy was implemented. But first, it is important to point out that with the easing of the restrictions two things happened: first, the volume of customers that get in touch has increased; second, there is more openness to negotiate because people would go out more. In this case, the timing and the current conditions made all the difference. The three-step strategy was about the following: first to use the pandemic as an excuse for some situations; second, they had to be more patient with the end consumers; and third, to forget about what was defined pre-pandemic, including

deadlines, terms, and contract. So, it was necessary to approach new rules. For example, customers have x amount of time to do something, so we extended the time. The code systems were the ones that worked the best, it appealed more to consumers because the codes were from well-known companies like Amazon. As it is something that people can do at home, they ended up participating a lot and the campaigns also had a lot of value because of that. They started to notice an evolution on the end consumer's reaction, on more recent campaigns, for example the Millennium campaign that was launched when all restrictions were lifted. The consumers already had the option to choose dates for the next year (2022), as they know everything will be much better and to be able to take better advantage of what the offer is (a stay at a hotel). At the end of the day, this always tries to give the best advice and tell people, look, choose these dates, these hotels because it's the best option for you. And they believe that is what made people give positive testimonials about the campaigns. This was due to timing and people's understanding.

Since most people's time was spent at home because of restrictions and limitations, companies aimed to provide more activities to do in a closed space. According to the Marketing department, one of their strongest communications was the at-home rewards, which was the activities that you could do at home, like karaoke, DIY (do it yourself) workshops, online fitness classes, as well as apps. The strategy focused on providing offers of this type and partners that were willing to adjust to a more at home setting. It's been mentioned in previous literature that people would spend more time on social networks and streaming platforms (He & Harris, 2020). In the current market streaming was a golden offer. This meant that any campaign that included a streaming offer, made the campaign way more appealing. As was said by the Marketing department, the campaigns that included any streaming offer (e.g., HBO) were also more successful, because it's something that you would naturally already use when you were at home.

My goal is to understand the go-to strategies, which campaigns were the most successful and why, what the different departments implemented, and the importance of the strategies that worked during the pandemic crisis. Regarding the overall depth, within the Partners & Content department, the Account Manager and the Customer Service department are dependent on one another and are all influenced by independent, external stakeholders. For the P & C to successfully know what partners to look and invest, besides of doing market research, the input of the Account Manager and Customer services is fundamental. This is because the Account

Manager monitors the client's campaign over time. So, they are aware of what the client wants. Customer service understands the perspective of the end consumer and analyzes if the end consumer is happy with the matched partner. Regarding the credibility and the use of information, all the answers are based on the experiences that the participants had during the pandemic, including when it started back in March 2020 until October 2021. They have based their answers on the implemented strategies and results of the campaigns that were promoted during these 20 months.

5.6.5 *Affectability (vulnerable sectors)*

"The prospect partners even replied saying that this it all looked very nice and all, but that right now they didn't see any advantage in doing a partnership. Due to uncertainties people were being more cautious, so being sympathetic was fundamental to maintain the relationship. Then, when things started to get better, we had people turning to us saying that they would be up for it and asking about next steps. Sometimes it's all about timing, and empathy." - Participant #2

First it is necessary to understand how one of the most vulnerable sectors is hotels. On November 3, 2021, it was reported that "for the first time since the start of the pandemic, the number of overnight stays spent by non-residents exceed those spent by residents" (Statistics Portugal, 2021e). As seen in the quote above, this year affected several business and potential partners because of uncertainties they weren't so open to begin a partnership. This theme has the aim to analyze the most affected sectors in the light of the current crisis.

Data showed that initially the most affected sectors were restaurants and hotels. This topic created some controversy between colleagues from the same department, according to the Partners and Content department, because some argue that the restaurant sector was the most affected because they have a different cost of sales than a hotel, that is, they have the food, and management is much more difficult. But then there was the issue of delivery, that they couldn't adapt to. The department tried to build a take-away network, because they were too dependent on platforms like Uber and Glovo, and they didn't want to be hostage to that platform and create something of their own. While the hotels sector said that from May to November 2020, everything that was nature and more remote had an increase (e.g., rural tourism, the small houses), there are testimonials from partners revealing that it worked very well for them. Others claimed that they saw a drop in hotels more than in restaurants. In their opinion, restaurants adapted and started to offer discounts for take-away and delivery. Others argued that the tour

operators, the activities, namely tuk-tuks, paddling activities, kayaks, etc., were the sector that suffered the most. The state support was not enough, the activities were completely forgotten, and many operators closed. There weren't that many restaurants or hotels that closed. So, I do believe that we noticed more resistance in making partnerships with these types of operators because these partners are traditionally more difficult. The people in this area were very impacted, so much so that there are many partners that had to close or suspend operations to understand, outline new strategies to grow and open again.

Others claim that the hotels and outdoor actives were the sectors that suffered the most. According to Customer Service, it's hotels because there was a rule that prohibited movement and had more restrictions and if you couldn't go anywhere, you just ended up staying in your house. For instance, for LG we were booking 40 customers for the same hotel, but then we realized that during that time and because of restrictions, we were only able to book 20 for that hotel. We had to pay attention if, for example, five people chose the same day, we had to check if the hotel really was able to receive that number of guests in the same day. It's up to the hotel to tell us the capacity to receive x number of people and the capacity of that space. Rural hotels and bungalows were more frequented than any other type of hotel. Unfortunately, the activities (outdoor areas) suffered a lot, and is evident from the lack of partnerships that exist. The team is currently trying to create more partnerships within this sector. However, when it comes to food, people always need to eat, so restaurants had that safety net.

My aim is to analyze and understand what the most affected sectors were, why, and what external factors influenced that. Regarding the overall depth, each department provided the insight that was more accurate according to the current conditions, the strategies they have implemented and the overall outcome. Regarding the credibility and the use of information, all the answers are based on the experiences that the participants had throughout the pandemic, including when it started back in March until October 2021. They have based their answers on the current conditions and news throughout these 20 months.

5.6.6 Failed strategies and campaigns

Failed strategies and campaigns are important to analyze to bring a more insightful understanding on what doesn't work. Three main aspects were identified: 1. Current conditions; 2. Association with clients; 3. Oversell.

1. Current conditions

The first example was with Sport Zone, one of the leading brands in the sports sector. Sport Zone communicated with the Partner and Content department that in operational terms, their digitalization was far behind schedule, and they could not embark on this digital process of creating a partnership with us. Since the stores were closed at the time, they couldn't provide physical vouchers for consumers to use. Due to the situation, this partnership didn't end going through.

The second example was Aqualand, a very well-known outdoor waterpark. They were interested in entering the McDonald's campaign in 2020. They were one of the top partners, and the Partners & Content department were able to get an incredible offer from them: a buy one, get one free offer. It was the best offer that were able to get from them and because of the pandemic they weren't allowed to open the waterpark during summertime, so, the deal was cancelled.

The third example was the LG campaign; this brand is known for making electronics, chemicals, and telecommunications products. This campaign was launched mid-pandemic and because of that the Customer Service department ended up having more complaints than delighted customers. This happened because the available hotels on the site did not want to partner with TLC anymore due to financial issues. So, the campaign had to be redesigned and sent back to the client. The complaints were due to the high number of customers who had already booked flights and overnight stays, and the department had to respond to this whole situation. This led to the campaign being postponed four times. On the client side, there was also a lot of discontent because initially they chose hotels that the Partners & Content department were not able to get anymore. People expected to get one thing but ended up getting another. This caused delays because the team was always changing, both the customer and the entire TLC team, which ended up hurting the campaign.

2. Associated to current clients

In this example, participant #3 (form P & C) was trying to reach to a potential partner called Plateform. Plateform was created by Rui Sanches and is a chain of restaurants that started with the Vitamins restaurant, and then developed into 107 concepts, including the Avillez restaurants. It's a fast fine dining concept. The owner, Sanches, was already added on LinkedIn, along with everyone else that works with this brand. They were contacted several times but so far, have not answered. It may be assumed that they prefer to be a neutral entity and not be associated to current campaigns, in this case Medicare or MEO.

3. Oversell

In this example, a campaign was launched with Gazela wine, which is a white wine that is sold at the supermarket in the price range of 2-5€. This was a campaign launched before the pandemic and designed based on campaigns that happened before the crisis, to deliver new experiences. The campaign is an offer for the consumer to buy a bottle of wine and send in the receipt to receive a reward. The strategy was to provide several activities for the brand-client (Gazela wine) to have x opportunities, and for the client-client (consumers) to pay x to have an income gap. Since this ended up happening at a time that everything was closed, the main experience being offered was streaming. The results of the campaign were the following: about 4905 participants when no more than 800 were estimated. Another mistake is that Gazela wine only costs around 2€ and 2 months of free Netflix were being offered. That was a big reward for a small expense. Two major mistakes were done is this campaign and it ended up being oversold.

5.7 Validating findings

To validate findings, a few approaches were implemented: triangulating data, member checking and peer examination. Data triangulation consisted of the information gathered from various sources. Member checking consisted of the informant examining the inquiry method (Creswell, 2011).

5.8 The qualitative write-up

My interpretation from the creative adaptability theme was the following: first, any business with the willingness, resources, and mentality that the digital is worth investing in, can evolve, react, and adapt to any situation. Showing that they are using the digital provides leverage. Second, communication must be more sensitive but the selling point more aggressive because

communication strengthens a brand's reputation and builds credibility. Third, it is not a lie when they say that after a storm comes the calm, and that is what happened when people adjusted to remote work: at first it was a struggle, but now it's seen as very beneficial for employees in their work-life balance.

My interpretation from the empathy theme was the following: first, in business-to-business negotiation, you must deal with the person on the other side. This means that the need to understand who's on the other side, what's going on, and what the story is has intensified in pandemic times. Second, it's now proven that people would choose remote work over in the office work, some even prefer the hybrid system. People not only feel more comfortable as they are able to be more open about their personal life and don't stick to just talking about business matters. In return, it strengthens the relationship between the two parties. Third, since everyone is going through the same thing, and understands the current situation, more acceptance and understanding can be observed.

My interpretation from the communication theme was the following: first, companies have been using a commercial-oriented approach, which is something that looks overly aggressive during a pandemic crisis. There was a need to shift communication into a more human-oriented approach. Second, online platforms opened new possibilities, allowing companies to solve problems faster. It became easier to hold meetings with several people at the same time and due to the sharing the screen technology, it's easier to discuss and identify existing problems and solve it in a matter of minutes. Third, it is extremely important to change the business language in written e-mails and messages. For example, include an "I hope you are well/safe during these times" and add an individualized touch to it. It will not only show that you care but that you make the effort, and that is never a bad view for a client/partner to have about a business. So, communication had to become more cautious and sensitive.

My interpretation from the intended strategy theme was the following: first, essential approaches and strategies had to be implemented during this crisis, and they were as follows: the positive, the no-cost, the customized and the empathy approach and the follow-up, the media, the copy-cat, and the conformity strategy. This helped me identify the communication strategies that were effective in retaining partners. Second, depending on the country's current context, it was important to do a market and consumer analysis, to identify the golden offer. The golden offer

means the one specific offer that elevates the entire campaign, in this case, the streaming offer. It was so successful because people spent most of their time during lockdown at home. Third, when it comes to dealing with people, more specifically customers, the three-step strategy adopted by the Customer Services helps: 1. Use the pandemic as an excuse; 2. Be more patient with consumers; 3. Forget what was defined pre-pandemic.

Finally, my interpretation from the affectability theme was the following: first, hotels were one of the most affected sectors because of the restrictions and the rules that prohibited movement, when a negative test was required to enter facilities, it made people want to travel less. Second, activities were one of the most affected sectors because the state support was insufficient, and they were completely forgotten. People would just try to avoid being around other people at all costs, so group activities ended up not being an option anymore. Third, restaurants were one of the most affected sectors because they are closed spaces and were mandatorily closed for a long time. People got too comfortable with the idea of take-away, which encouraged them to go to a physical restaurant less often.

In short, the collected and analyzed information matched the phenomenological research design inputs. That helped me identify which campaigns were successful and why they were successful. It has also brought a better understanding of the customized approach used in the Partners and Content department and showed that the current conditions and timing truly affect a campaign's success.

Conclusion

The main objective of the present study was to understand the impact of the pandemic on the communication strategies in a B2B setting. Over the course of several months, I have dived into the world of a marketing agency, the challenges they faced, and the pandemic crisis that surrounded it. I tried to understand the reality as best I could.

My research demonstrated that the crisis had an impact on the five main themes (creative adaptability, empathy, communication, intended strategy and affectability) that are all linked to the effectiveness of the communication strategy. The literature Brown, Bellenger and Johnston (2007) and their "Business to business-consumer Market Dimensions Continuum" helped me define the B2B variables. Pandey (2021) helped me understand the direction that communication was shifting to post-covid. And Jong et al. (2021) that also helped me understand the direction that the B2B developments were changing to post-covid. The pandemic crisis caused this B2B marketing agency to resort more frequently to these strategies, such as the positive, the no-cost approach, the follow-up, and the media strategy, as potential partners were not really looking to close a partnership. When the pandemic was reaching its peak, it became harder to close partnerships so new approaches and strategies were implemented. Those approaches were the customized, and empathy approach as it became crucial to have a more personalized and caring/sensitive approach. The strategies were the copy-cat strategy as it became significant to show the results of being a TLC partner; and the conformity strategy as it was important to add a low margin that wouldn't harm the partners business as it was a time that they were struggling. The agency was successful in attracting new partners and maintaining existing partners because all the communication of these approaches and strategies shifted to a more sympathetic and human-oriented approach (including the way that e-mails and messages were written) and the partners ended up feeling heard and saw them as a source of help. In other areas, such as attracting more partners within the activities, hospitality and restauration sector, the agency was not able to respond effectively because these were the top three most affected areas by the pandemic, and most of them were struggling with financial problems, so the existent partners wanted to cancel their partnership and the potential ones weren't willing to do a partnership. With this, my aim is to contribute to the academic knowledge in a little-explored area of research, the pandemic crisis applied to business-to-business communication strategies.

To establish a bridge within my area of expertise - communication and marketing, and the difficult crisis period that we are going through, I have decided to explore the communication strategies that were implemented during the pandemic period. In essence, I sought to understand what role marketing can play in dealing with a tremendous crisis like this one. Two years ago, Portugal started to experience a virus that has never experienced before. This affected the entire world and lead to economic despair and social unrest. It was a very intense experience; it was unfortunate having so many businesses closing and that still happens until today's date. At TLC Marketing, almost every day they would receive a contact from a partner that closed doors, it's a sad reality of the country. However, at the same time it was very interesting to see how rapidly Portugal developed with this digital obligation that happen, it forced brands to digitalize.

To understand the impact of the pandemic in all variables, we must go through the B2B-consumer Market Dimensions continuum used by Brown, Bellenger and Johnston (2007). This continuum defines the main factors of the B2B market as follows: Marketing & Communication Variables, Product Variables, Psychological Variables, and Contextual Conditions.

The Marketing & Communication variables determine brand communication plans gradually with consumers, customers, prospects and another aim at significant outsider and insider viewers. The communication plan and devices tend to differ according to the technical and operational aspects of output and the composition of the decision-making entity (Gilliland & Johnston, 1997). In this research the following themes within the marketing and communication variables are empathy and communication. It is seen that the pandemic affected tremendously business-to-business negotiation, it added the need to have a more empathic strategy and human-oriented communication when approaching to potential partners. It opened the possibility for B2B business to use other technical tools such as Zoom, Teams, and Slack improving partners/customers-employees relationship and problem-solving skills. The social network LinkedIn also started to become used more frequently than before to reach more directly to a higher position individual in a potential partner company. The business language in written e-mails, messages had to became more thought through and delicate. According to Pandey (2021), most clients have relocated to the online world and are devoting more time to the internet. The

client is at the core of all marketing doings. The digital marketing strategies implemented by corporations for bonding with clients have also shifted in this crisis.

In Product variables its said that purchasers seek brands to convey value beyond actual execution. An additional vital component to a brand's prosperity is a producer's capacity to supply items and backing facilities, frequently through mediators, dependably and effectively. Brands must be related to organizations and the relationship that organizations have with a client (Brown, Bellenger & Johnston, 2007). In this research the following business model that was affected by the pandemic within the product variables is the partners and content network. Since this business model includes different types of business, it was seriously affected by the pandemic, as a lot of its partnerships closed down, creating the need of finding new potential partners that would adjust to the current situations, market needs and customers' expectations.

Psychological variables are related to the fact that customers openly pursue information or watch the actions of reference group participants and/or opinion leaders. In a commercial context, purchasers are more likely to be impacted by meaning and professional recommendations or the genuine presentation of antecedent companies (Brown, Bellenger & Johnston, 2007). In Contextual Conditions, the newness of the acquisition, the complex nature of the acquisition circumstances, and the significance of the acquisition circumstances are potent factors of a purchasing facility's decision-making process (Johnston and Bonoma 1981). Buyers with more knowledge tend to select a well-known brand as a consequence of managerial memory (Brown, Bellenger & Johnston, 2007). This variable helps us understand the logic that goes behind a client/partner's mind. In this research, the following approach within the psychological variables is the positive approach implemented by the Partners and Content department. This approach talks about the advantages and the security of being in a network that has major brands (known worldwide), and the increased visibility for their business. The pandemic affected positively here, as it made the super Portuguese brands rethink their approach and close a partnership deal with TLC Marketing that in any other circumstances, it would have taken longer to happen. It is observed with potential partners that have experience in the field that when is mentioned they will be associated with national super brands, a change in reaction to wanting to be a partner of TLC Marketing.

To identify which communication strategies work and which don't during the pandemic crisis, we must briefly review the B2B and communication trends post-covid literature. Jong et al., (2021) claims that it is significant that business advertisers cautiously think about how to inspire their channel affiliates to educationally interact in the post-pandemic time. Through combined experiences and perception of information, it can be provided with the expertise and abilities expected to work viably in the plan of action improvement mode. In this research, the following theme within the communication strategies is intended strategy. In extreme situations there is this task force that is activated to understand which path is the correct to take (includes the CEO, Marketing department and the Partners and Content department). Depending on the country's current context, it was important to do a market and consumer analysis, to identify the golden offer. The main purpose of a golden offer is to enrich the entire campaign, in this case it was the streaming offer. By having these initiatives TLC was able to build a proper communication plan. As it was said in previous research by Savage (2002), corporations with a Business Communication Plan had a more significant opportunity for continuity and developments in disaster as equated to companies that did not implement any.

The researchers anticipate an increase of strategic execution measurements and a shift of new tactics because of the coronavirus crisis. The tactics will be integrated in a new strategic control panels that assist effectively, feasibly, and customize decision-making. At the same time not losing track of upcoming strategic imperatives (Jong et al. 2021). In this research, I identified the communication strategies that work in retaining partners. The approaches and strategies are the following, the positive, the no-cost, the customized and the empathy approach and the follow-up, the media, the copy-cat, and the conformity strategy.

Pandey (2021) research talked about a brand that achieved impressive results, it was called the Mahindra Tractors. They invested in providing marketing deals for discounts and funding alternatives to potential clients. The campaigns with marketing deals encouraged the target clients who were considering purchasing tractors. The Partners and Content department use a similar concept for one of their communication strategies, the conformity strategy. It's about adding an extra percentage to the value of an already existing discount offer. For instance, if they do 15% off, TLC does 16% off on their platform. Since it doesn't make a significant difference in the partner's operations, they accept it, and it resulted in winning the partner.

In Pandey's (2021) research, Perceived Safety was identified as an important theme. In this theme it's noticeable that the digital communication throughout Covid-19 from the corporations incorporated a wellbeing note in it. This was made to get the clients informed of the pandemic-associated protection policies and demonstrate that the corporation was sympathetic to these concerns for clients as well as for the workers and other shareholders. The corporation's digital communication plan should include this aspect. In this research the communication theme showed that this was an aspect that all departments at TLC considered in their communications. The business language in written e-mails, and messages changed. The employees started to include a "I hope you are well/safe during these times" and a personal touch to show compassion.

The second theme drawn was Creative Persuasive Communication, that explained that the digital marketing essence must be resourcefully created by the corporations. It must utilize the discipline of influential communication in the matter. The matter of the campaign must be accurate and should have an emotional appeal (Pandey, 2021). In this research the creative adaptability theme showed that the communication is affected by the current conditions of the country and market cycles. For this reason, it was necessary to do a readjustment of how everything was going to be communicated. The communication had to be adjusted to better approach sensitive topics and the language and the selling point had to be more aggressive. The communication and marketing strategy had to be more strategic for TLC to remain the mind of clients as a source of help.

The identified communications strategies that didn't work, were the following, first, external factors such as current conditions and timing. In operational terms, if a brand had their digitalization far behind schedule, they could not embark on the TLC digital process of creating a partnership. This because at the time there wasn't the possibility of having a physical voucher for consumers to use. Regarding timing, if a partnership was going to be closed for a certain period, it didn't made sense to pursue the partnership deal. On the partners side, partners that were struggling with financial issues wanted to cancel their partnership. Second, to be associated with current clients, certain partners if they had a terrible experience with the client before or are well known, are more reluctant to enter the partnership network or the client campaign. Third, to oversell, this can happen because a campaign was launched before a crisis and designed based on

previous experience that didn't consider a pandemic crisis, so it might lead them to provide a big reward for a small product.

Through phenomenological research design we were able to identify which campaigns were successful and why. Four main factors have been established, timing, customization, country's current conditions and market needs. Timing is about the aptitude to evaluate the broader environment of things that are required for the campaign to prevail. Customization is about consumer's behavior and understanding and delivering value through it leads to consumer satisfaction and loyalty. It's important to be updated with the country's current conditions because if an important update/news is missed, then the company is losing out on knowledge that could be significant for their campaign. Understanding Market needs can meaningfully help build a marketing and communication strategy because it helps deliver information and essential ideas to the company. It also offers greater insight on competition and clients.

To understand the role of the digital as a strategy, we must briefly review the B2B and communication trends post-covid literature. Pandey, (2021) claimed that the corporation to adjust to the new normal is more focused on the management position and the responsiveness than creating a change inside of the corporation. To get by in the post-Coronavirus setting, it has been brought up that business advertisers need to be in an operational position in reskilling their channel partner networks. For example, as numerous re-dealers have been required to make the shift to online selling, it is essential that newly marketing skills are assessed to choose the best growth ability (Brown, Bellenger & Johnston, 2007). In this research, the following theme within the digital role is creative adaptability. Business to evolve, react, and adapt to the current situation had to have the willingness, resources, and a mentality that the digital will provide value.

The fourth theme drawn by Pandey (2021) was adaptability, the evaluation of the case study and semi-structured interviews with marketing managers, reliably emphasized that the adaptability of corporations was fundamental to arise as a front-runner from this Covid-19 crisis. The corporations, which were rapid to adjust to digital means, built-in system, and developments immediately as the crisis began, have begun presenting optimistic economic outcomes from the third quarter of the year 2020. As showed in the creative adaptability theme, these past two years

were seen as a brutal learning curve for some businesses. This percentage of businesses that were able to adapt can range from big to small brands that had the possibilities to. This even meant for some brands to create a new possibility of having a virtual chain.

To analyze the most affected sectors in the light of the current crisis, it is necessary to review the vulnerable sectors literature. According to Statistics Portugal (2020) back in November 2020, the accommodation and restaurant sector was the segment with the highest percentage of businesses, with more than 90% expressing a moderate or high degree of concern regarding the predicted scenarios for pandemic containment. In this research, the following theme within the vulnerable sectors is affectability. It's now seen that the accommodation sector on November 3, 2021, was already showing positive results, it reported that they already had a higher number of non-residents staying overnight than with residents (Statistics Portugal, 2021e). In this research I identified the three most affected sectors, the hotels/accommodations, the activities, and the restaurants. These were the most affected sectors because of restrictions and the rules that prohibit movement, the state support not being enough, and lockdown. The topmost affected one would be the activities since they were completely forgotten and the less affected one was the restaurants as they could still depend on take away and home delivery.

The reflection about the future of business-to-business communications will only be based on the experience with the TLC Marketing agency. TLC Marketing is very traditional with their marketing communication and tools. The agency used to only use Instagram and YouTube as their marketing communication and only until recently (January 2021) a LinkedIn page was created for the Portuguese agency. Every time that is necessary to create a new social network page, it is necessary to go through paperwork first, and make sure that its complying with the guidelines. The only type of media they invest in is owned media, through the existing social networks and their website. At a results level, it doesn't generate a lot of engagement nor leads. For now, this is a marketing strategy that works for their objectives and purpose but if the digital world and businesses keep evolving the way they are evolving, and the company wants to reach a new level of growth, investing in a paid media strategy will definitely be necessary.

Finally, the following research question: what impact will the pandemic have in changing the communication strategy? Will be answered. This impact is seen through the established themes

mentioned in the analysis, the creative adaptability, the empathy, the communication, the intended strategy, and the affectability.

First, the creative adaptability theme was established to show that the pandemic created this need to solve a problem, the problem of being able to keep a business running in the online world. The TLC Marketing achieved this and saw some of its stakeholders achieving it as well by motivating creative efforts and digitalization. Since the communication strengthens a brand's reputation and builds credibility, it had to shift to a more purposeful and strategic selling point. Second, the empathy and communication theme were established to show that the pandemic positively changed TLC's Marketing approach to a more client-focused orientation, implementing an empathic strategy and human-oriented communication and improving problem solving skills. This improved client- employee, partner-employee, and end consumer-employee relationship. Third, the intended strategy theme was established to show the communication approaches and strategies that were necessary to implement to retain new partners, which it varies from case to case. This includes the (1) positive, (2) the no-cost, (3) the customized and the (4) empathy approach; The (1) follow-up, (2) the media, (3) the copy-cat, and the (4) conformity strategy; The golden offer; and the three-step strategy. Lastly, the affectability theme was established to show the most affected sectors by the pandemic. This was extremely important to know because it's what defined which type of partners would be inserted in the next campaigns. In essence, this information is crucial to better choose which communication strategy to use when approaching new potential partners. Despite of the digital evolution, the pandemic affected the partners negatively.

Limitations and future directions

During the development of this research, some limitations started to arise. As previously mentioned, qualitative research was conducted, meaning only one side of the story was heard. There is not sufficient data that proves that all the communication strategies implemented by the partners and content department were actually successful because only the employees' perspectives were heard and not the partners. The research had to be limited this way because of the agency guidelines. Another limitation is the first round of interviews date. The first round was conducted in April 2021 and the second round in September-October 2021, in the meantime

all the restrictions were lifted and even the company itself suffered drastic changes. This could have an influence on the employee's opinion.

A lot of recent research has emphasized the importance of incorporating a digital marketing strategy (Donthu & Gustafsson, 2020; Hwang, Nageswaran & Cho, 2020; Habes et al., 2020; Pandey, Nayal & Rathore, 2020). Therefore, future research should focus on the digital marketing strategy of the TLC Marketing agency because digital marketing can help them discover the latest trends and learn how to better optimize them. So, knowing that this media will be a reliable source of information for the business development department and partners and content department.

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Annex A

This table illustrates the main themes that were drawn from the coding process. Those main themes are Creative adaptability, Empathy, Communication, Intended Strategy and Affectability.

☐ Partners & Content department ☐ Account Manager ☐ Operational Manager

☐ Customer Service department ☐ Marketing department

Identified Themes:	Creative adaptability (The digital)	Participant #1- The true challenge was to rapidly react and adapt the networks that were used to having their own space to available resources at home (e.g., Restaurants started to use takeaway; Gyms started to provide online classes).
		Participant #1- It forced brands to go digital, they must look at this as an opportunity. With digitalization there is no longer a gap, because the small brands, with some resources (e.g., Teams), can reach customers across the country and function almost like a chain.
		Participant #2- There are other businesses who are willing to understand what they must do next, as in they find a difficulty, and want to understand how to overcome it. They are beginning to understand that the digital is worth to invest in. If there is one business that adapted was the restaurants. You are at home, and you can order food from anywhere.
		Participant #3- The digital improved some aspects because society had to evolve in a rapid way and today everyone uses Zooms and Teams. I believe that on the partners' side, it opened their horizon to what is the digital is, and the advantages of being part of the digital world. Suddenly you had to focus more on a digital strategy. Our needs today converge with this need that was created on the side of partners and potential partners. And I believe that nowadays it is easier for us to reach an understanding.

		Participant #3- For now, Covid-19 is seen as a terrible thing, but the forced adaptation that it compelled people to make, made the digital a less scary thing for more traditional and classic businesses, it made it a commonplace. These past two years have been a brutal learning curve that allowed some businesses to adapt.
		Participant #5- The pandemic in the general market, I think it brought very positive things to companies because companies had to quickly adapt to what really was the new reality. This meant, moving all employees home, managing the processes, finding ways to manage these processes remotely. And I think that this brought an evolutionary perspective to the companies itself, because they had to adapt to this way of working. In this sense, I agree that there was an evolutionary perspective here and, deep down, we are even building a little bit of our future. At a company level, there was no other option for companies but to evolve and adapt. We learned how to work in other circumstances, and we had to adapt to the market and the market needs, although we had no clue about the future, TLC Marketing had several strategies throughout this period.
		Participant #6- Adapting to remote work was a challenge. Managing multiple teams at a distance, each in its own way and with its own challenges, the countless meetings and ensuring the fulfillment of all objectives without neglecting communication and distance between colleagues, was tough. The pandemic brought distancing to people who were together daily and with their own dynamics, the sudden break in communication had consequences because it was necessary to readapt. It was more exhausting to deal with everything by phone or video calls. The daily interactions were more exhausting, and we had to change work processes to fill in

details that were not functional in this new reality.

Participant #6- It opened many doors, a new world I would say. It opened doors for technology to become normal and typical in communication. It showed that remote work is not that complex and that it can bring many benefits to employees in their work-life balance, which is necessary these days. Especially with employers with backward mentalities as there are still so many in Portugal. It showed that working by objectives works and that when employees are happier, companies only stand to gain from this.

Participant #7- It was difficult to give a proper training remotely, it was almost impossible, in my case, to train three people at the same time, it was a challenge. At the company level I also felt that the whole operation changed instead of having the so-called meeting, we ended up having several a day, several with the different departments and that was the biggest change I felt.

Participant #7- There were some doors that I think were opened in a different way, for example, regarding my work, I felt an increase in technological consumables (computers, tablets, cell phones). Which makes a lot of sense because we have clients in that area, and the pandemic crisis encouraged that. Then I think it opened a very important door, it changed our work organization, it changed the way we organize our day. We ended up having more diverse types of meetings marked on our calendar than before. In general, we had to forget what was agreed between consumers and TLC for a while because there was no point on following a contract when you are now in completely different circumstance. We had to do new negotiations, find new hotels and new partners.

Participant #9- We had to adapt all our communication

		because there were more sensitive topics, we had to approach certain things differently. Communication strategies had to be much more strategic for us to remain in the minds of our customers as a source of help. At that time, we weren't selling much either, so the need to create marketing and communication strategies and to be able to reach them intensified even more. In this sense, we changed all the plans we had for the rest of the year and had to adapt to a much more recurrent type of language. Something more aggressive.
	Empathy	**Participant #1-** A lot of the partners closed; The best way for TLC was to rapidly contact them to show that we were here for them; which created a stronger connection. The remote work was seen as positive as it created a better relationship between the two parties, and it made the contact between them easier and more simplified.
		Participant #2- In this pandemic phase, I really enjoy communicating, but I felt that I needed to create more empathy with people. And if you can't relate to what's going on with them, that's the biggest hindrance in this kind of work. And this pandemic situation brought out the need to understand who's on the other side, what's going on, what the story is, and gain a little empathy from that.
		Participant #5- In my opinion remote work has been very positive because I feel that the clients first when they present themselves in meetings, they present themselves in a much more natural and relaxed way. This because they are in their home environment. So, they tend to have other conversations that they wouldn't have in a normal work environment. We also don't waste much time going to the office, so we end up having more time for them.
		Participant #7- I have noticed that with time (around April,

		May, June, etc.) people were more patient because the pandemic was something that affected everyone. Now, I notice that they have more patience and people seem happier. They already book more things, they already buy more things, they already participate in more things and the patience is a little bit more than maybe 10 months ago when I started.
		Participant #8- I think people have started to help each other more, to be more understanding with one another and with the world itself. An example I can give you is that people before probably saw marketing as a negative thing, something that we would sell and promote and now I don't see that anymore. There's more understanding, there's more okay, they're doing everything they really can for us to be okay, to be satisfied with the campaigns and be able to enjoy it.
	Communication	**Participant #1-** Our work ends up being a very commercial work and until the pandemic, we were very commercial in the way we raised funds, trying to always have the best offer. The communication had to shift to a more human discourse and now it started to be more human oriented and not commercial oriented. The approach is that it had to be a win-win for everyone. The difference between selling products and partnerships is this, while selling products there is a company where one company sells to the other. A partnership must be a win-win for both parties.
		Participant #4- What I try to do is, first we have our list of potential partners, then I contact them by phone, to explain a little bit what it is that we do, what the partnership is about, and then you reinforce that message by sending an e-mail. After they have all the information from their side and after you give them a period to analyze, investigate and raise questions. Then it's time to follow up the contact to know if

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		there are any questions that we can help them with if they are interested in signing the digital protocol or not.
		Participant #5- Even though video calls appear to distance people. I think that in the end, they allow us not only to have more frequent meetings, without the need for people to do a lot of time management because you can quickly have a 15-minute meeting and solve any problem that might have occurred.
		Participant #5- More points of contact, more quickly I can talk; there are clients that come to talk to me through Teams and end up having a quicker answer to their questions. So, my goal is for the clients to be satisfied with the ongoing campaigns. The impact has been quite positive in that sense because it also allows me to talk more directly with clients in comparison to before.
		Participant #8- I think that's what changed, maybe in the past it was very much via e-mail and now people started to adhere more to calls. For example, when we call, our number is like a commercial one, and people always thought it was sales, but now, since they already know our number from the campaigns, they started to answer more. So, we realized that outbound contacts for people is crucial because they always answer. In my opinion that is what changed, and I think it's a wonderful thing. What evolved was the connection with the customers.
		Participant #9- Our goal was to be very cautious and sensitive about what we would communicate, including our offers. Then there was this challenge of making our clients know that we could be a help in this tough time. Since they were not achieving their goals, we could be an asset for them.
		Participant #10- Previously, we used to include in the email messages the "I hope you are well/safe", to create more

		empathy. Now, it is no longer necessary, we just go straighter to the point. This is how our approaches work.
	Intended Strategy	**Participant #1-** Regarding partners retention, my speech whenever I had to talk to the ones that were thinking about leaving our network, was to explain them the advantages, the security that is being in a network that has major brands. Where the range of communication for them is much greater, and they don't even have to make any communication investment or investment itself for that matter. Our networks are something more selective. When it's well explained ends up convincing the partner to stay. Once again in a humanized way and by showing that we are on their side. We cannot level the discourse, that is, we must have a discourse for each type of partner; adapt to the different networks. Once again, the humanization of our way of working ends up being more favorable to this amplitude of partnerships.
		Participant #2- I just use the strategy of no-cost approach. Most businesses don't mind it, in the end they know it will bring them more visibility.
		Participant #2- I've always worked with people, and if there is one thing that you must build on whether it's face to face or online, you must always convey trust. You must understand the point that connects you to that person.
		Participant #2- There were rare the times when the empathy approach didn't work. When you can establish a relationship, it all becomes so much easier, even if they tell you no, it's never a no-go. It varies from person to person and depends on whether it's worth insisting or not.
		Participant #2- Follow-ups (the secret strategy) changes a lot the relationship you have with partners. Even if the partnership is already established, the follow-up is always good, and you

		maintain a healthy relationship with them. Even in terms of wanting to retain them as partners.
		Participant #3- The approach is that TLC works with famous brands, and this is what we try to transmit to our partners. An opportunity to be there as well, to be associated to well-known brands, and to be in another communication channel.
		Participant #3- A tool that I think has become mainstream nowadays and that I use a lot in my favor is LinkedIn. From a business perspective, I've been using it a lot since I've been at TLC to reach out to partners. So, when I see that they have some resistance on the other side I go straight to LinkedIn, it has already returned some answers and some potential partners.
		Participant #3- I always try to use an argument that fits the reality of the partner. I try to adapt myself to the reality of the partnership and the needs of the client, it also depends a lot on what the client wants.
		Participant #3- I use the 'copycat' strategy a lot, it works well. If I have a big partner of the same type, I'll use as an example, "they are also here, and things are going well for them". I always use an argument because here the Portuguese businessmen like to imitate each other a lot. We always try to adapt to the initial obstacles they put in our way and to what we know is our final goal, which is to have a good offer and another place to partner with.
		Participant #4- I normally go for a strategy that is not going to impact much and at the same time adds a little extra thing to the value of that offer. For example, if they do 15% off, we do 16% off on our platform. It's something that doesn't make a significant difference in their operations, and it results in us winning the partner.

		Participant #5- There is a task force that is activated in these situations, to understand which path we take. This normally includes the CEO, Marketing department and the Partners and Content department. It's necessary to do market research, and to understand what the path is we take regarding the current conditions of the country. So, the strategy here was for customers to realize that we had these offers to give (e.g., Netflix streaming). Therefore, we would talk to our client database and give them the perspective of what we have for them and are able to give to the consumers. This to encourage them in terms of the needs and goals that they have from their brand, and that's how we would get new clients. We managed not to go under, especially because of that reaction and that marketing strategy of the company.
		Participant #7- With the easing of the restrictions, the volume of customers that get in touch has increased now, the deconfining is helping. We have sold several big campaigns. There is more openness to negotiate because people would go out more. We had campaigns this summer that included drinks in a terrace, a year ago there were no terraces opened, so it wasn't even a possibility and this year we've had a couple that opened. So, I relate the deconfinement to the increase of work and clients interested on creating campaigns. In general, I believe it's all about timing.
		Participant #7- Now we had to do 3 things, first use the pandemic as an excuse for some situations that made us change several aspects. There was a significant increase of complaints for us to solve, which showed that some customers did not understand the "pandemic". Second, we had to be more patience, and third to forget about what was defined pre-pandemic (deadlines, terms, contract) and approach new rules.

		For example, customers have x amount of time to do something, so we extended the time.
		Participant #8- Regarding the codes, I think it also appealed a lot to consumers because the codes were from well-known companies like Amazon. As it is something that people can do at home, they ended up participating a lot and I think the campaigns also had a lot of redemption because of that.
		Participant #8- Consumers already know in principle that things are going to be better and that they are not going to have restrictions when entering the hotels for next year 2022. For example, now in this Millennium campaign, practically everyone chooses dates for next year. We are always trying to give the best advice and tell people, look, choose these dates, these hotels because this, this, and that. And I think that's what made people give positive testimonials about our campaigns.
		Participant #8- Millennium campaign I think it is going great, also because it was launched at a time when all the restrictions were lifted, which makes it easier because people are really hoping. Especially we are hoping that later this year and next year things will be much better. Then they are choosing dates for the next year, to be able to take better advantage of what the offer is, which is one night. So, people already know better the way they must enjoy it to have an enjoyable time. This is all due to timing and People's understanding of the current situation.
		Participant #9- At the time, our strongest communication was the at home rewards, which was practically the activities that we could do at home, like karaoke, workshops, online fitness classes as well, as apps. Our strategy went a lot through this network, and these offers.
		Participant #10- In the pandemic times the campaigns that

		included the HBO streaming offer were the most successful one. This because you were at home, and everything that included streaming had the best offers.
	Affectability (Vulnerable sectors)	**Participant #1**- From May 2020 to November 2020, the rural tourism, the small houses, everything that was nature and was more hidden had an increase, we have testimonials from partners revealing that it worked very well for them. The restaurants didn't work so well, because they have a different cost of sales than a hotel, that is, they have the food, and the management is much more difficult. But then there was the issue of delivery, that they couldn't adapt to. We tried to build a take-away network, because they were too dependent on platforms like Uber and Glovo, and they couldn't stop being hostages of that platform and create something of their own. It was clearly the most affected sector.
		Participant #2- Effectively we saw a drop in hotels more than we saw in restaurants. As I told you earlier, restaurants adapted, we had several restaurants that started to do discounts for take-aways, for delivery, and they adapted a lot. In our model, the hotels suffered more. There were also no more outdoor activities that the hotels used to promote.
		Participant #3- The tour operators, the activities, was the sector that suffered the most. The state support was not enough, nor was it anything like what it was for the hotel business, that is, the activities were completely forgotten, and we had many operators that closed. I didn't have that many restaurants or hotels that closed. So, I do believe that we noticed more resistance in making partnerships with this type of operators because these partners are traditionally more difficult. Activities, well, mainly tuk-tuks, paddling activities, kayaks, all that stuff, forget it, most of them closed.

		Participant #4- What I can say from the contacts I have been making more recently, I feel for example that the activity sectors (e.g., rugby, tuk-tuks) has suffered the most. The people in that area were very impacted, so much so that there are many partners that had to close or suspend operations to understand, outline new strategies to grow and open again.
		Participant #4- I would say the activities and hotels.
		Participant #7- The accommodations because there is a rule that prohibits movement. If you can't move around, you just end up staying in your house. You will always need eat, so I don't think the restaurants suffered that much. Hotels with bungalows and the rural ones were the most frequented ones than any other type of hotel. The outdoor areas, the activities also suffered a lot, right now, we are trying to get more partnerships within this sector because we don't have any.
		Participant #8- I think hotels was the most affected one because there was a lot of restrictions. For instance, for LG we were booking 40 customers for the same hotel, but then we would realize that during this time and because of restrictions, we were only able to book 20 for that hotel. We had to pay attention if for example 5 people chose the same day, we had to check if the hotel really had the conditions to receive that number of people in that same day. It's up to the hotel to tell us the capacity to receive x number of people and the capacity of that space.
		Participant #9- I think it was the restaurants because they are closed spaces and people are sitting inside for hours. It was also one of the sectors that took the longest to open. And the group activities.
		Participant #10- The accommodations must have been the network that was more affected, and the restaurant because we

		could no longer practice the offers that were promised.

Annex B

Transcript of the interview with David Mónica (participant #1), Partners & Content Manager.

1- Tell me about your role at TLC Marketing

Partners & Content Manager (4 years and half)- I Manage the partnership network. Create strategic partnerships with products that are interesting for the end consumer that are well known nationally and internationally. In addition to helping the business development department, when it comes to create proposals that include partnerships.

2- What aspects of your work have changed due to the pandemic?

First it was remote work, not only for us but for many partners. This meant closing physical spaces, remember that 95% of our partners before the pandemic had their own space. Consumers would go to the restaurant, a bookstore, a gym and all that space was constrained, and we had to manage the partnerships and the networks with this situation that basically happened overnight. And the big challenge in pandemic was to restructure all the partnerships that we could in the case of restaurants with take-away, in the case of gyms for online. But there were other activities like accommodations that were completely impossible, it was practically on standby, just like other theme parks. Everything related to children that was practically face-to-face no longer existed. And that was the big challenge, was to quickly react and manage to adapt our networks that were very focused on the use of the partner's own space for use at home.

3- In what way would you say the pandemic has affected your work with the partners?

It was a very intense experience, every day we practically receive a contact from a partner that closed doors, other times we find out in other ways, through audits. There were many partners closing, it's a sad reality of the country. However, the partners that stayed, created a closer connection because one of the measures we took was to quickly get in touch with the partners, show them that we were there for them. Redefine the partnership because many of the services that we had in protocol with them no longer exist or had to be conditioned.

Trying to communicate more and more with the partners, this was also an effort that was made together with the Marketing department and the company that wants to communicate more and more with the partners to give them awareness and consequently bring more people to use their services in order to build loyalty. More than ever, we had to be united and on the one hand it was an advantage. Telecommuting brought us closer to many partners because we didn't have to meet them in person to talk, the country due to this confinement issue, was closer in this aspect. I had many partners from Porto that I tried to call and they were in their offices giving classes and we couldn't, this way, made the processes a little bit more agile, the video calls, the online meetings came to speed up the process and I can tell you that I was able to have contact with some brands for partnership and some partners that I couldn't have before the pandemic.

4- Describe your relationship with the partners before the pandemic and now. How did it change during the pandemic?

The big changes were, I managed to get closer and closer to the big brands. I think we all came down to earth a bit, including the big brands, and they realized that it was necessary to listen to all parties, and many times there were rejections in the first approaches, in the first contacts, and I never managed to get to talk to them. And during this month of March 2020, I was able to contact brands with whom I had never spoken, including them in campaigns. We all realized the need to create more partnerships and within those big brands where the people in charge were very busy. This time many of them were at home and I was able to get in touch with them, which was positive. Never in a year had TLC been able to close so many important partnerships, with Portuguese superbrands, with leading brands in their areas, with international partnerships, with major players in the market as this year. We closed partnerships with Galp, Grupo Pestana, Prio, SportTV, Wook, HBO, several major brands, for half of 2020 and 2021. In this aspect I consider it quite positive.

Then there was something very interesting, this digital obligation that there was, Portugal was not a very digital country, it forced the brands to digitalize themselves. So many small people, since the yoga teacher that had his own small studio but now started to give classes on Teams and Zoom and opened this possibility. Nowadays it's very interesting, because we can have a teacher that until March 2020 had a small studio in Oeiras and that basically had

his students there, nowadays with the online classes he can be giving classes to a student in Braga. We must face this situation as opportunities. With digitalization there's no longer a gap, because the small ones, with some resources, can have the light spread throughout the country and function almost like a big chain of gyms. And this was an advantage, and the big brands themselves standardized their processes, simplified their processes. There were brands in Portugal with lousy digital processes and this year forced them, they as they have some investment capacity, forced them to change.

5- Looking at the pandemic with another perspective, do you feel like in a way it opened doors? If so, wich ones?

One of the opportunities was that some foreign brands, rocked by the pandemic, rocked by the economic crisis, which resulted from the pandemic, started to look at other markets. So, they are also entering our market because once again the level of digital knowledge has increased, studies proved that Portugal had a very low digital knowledge in terms of usability and today it is as simple as realizing that our grandparents use WhatsApp to make video calls. If you were talking in December 2018 or 2019, saying look grandma let's make a video call everyone is doing it nowadays. And this created advantages and also brought some foreign brands to enter our country, basically the only barrier is just the language but nowadays it is also easily overcome.

6- Focusing more into the communication with the partner, what strategies/ tactics have you implemented this year?

Our work ends up being a very commercial work and until the pandemic, we were very commercial in the way we raised money, trying to always have the best offer. With the pandemic, what changed was that we had to completely change our speech, which for me, honestly, is an advantage. We had to side with the partners, understand their needs, try to help them, many times be the partners' shoulder to cry on, because we realized that we couldn't, and we can't demand from people who literally saw their business collapse from one day to the next and had no financial capacity. And this I think made us much more human and our communication started by a humanization. I know there is a big brand in the market that uses this term, but I think the truth is this, that I appealed from the beginning to the team was that we had to humanize more the speech towards the partners. Not to stop

being demanding, but to realize that we can't make this offer, we may have to reduce it to give the partner room to win. Because this has to be a win-win for everyone. The difference between selling products and partnerships is this, while selling products, there is a company where one company sells to the other. Not a partnership, a partnership must be a win-win for both parties. A partnership only works if both parties are win-win if it's not a good partnership.

7- Can you give me an example of a strategy/tactic that has resulted in retaining a partner?

The strategy we used in terms of partner retention. There were many partners that out of desperation didn't end up closing the deal, the last thing they wanted to hear about was partnerships. It was not something that immediately brought them cash on hand. At this point, they need cash on hand. And in terms of retention, my speech whenever I had to talk to partners who were thinking about leaving our network, to explain to them the advantages, the security that is being in a network where the major brands are. Where the range of communication for them is much greater, they don't have to make a communication investment (e.g. flyer). They will have to invest in communication in terms of Google Ads, Facebook Ads. The truth is that there is a flood of brands doing this communication that many times is considered as more noise than the communication of the brand itself. Our networks are something more selective. I always give this example, if a person, a massage partner is giving a flyer in which he is giving an offer of massage to a person that is distributing flyers in the street or if this massage is gained through the acquisition of a ppr, in one of the main Portuguese banks in which do you think the consumer will gain confidence. And normally the partners realize the advantage of belonging to our networks and working with the main brands in the market. Another trick, is that there is no investment, usually well explained ends up convincing the partner to stay. Once again in a humanized way and by showing that we are on their side.

8- Why did you choose that strategy?

It varies from network to network. Our network of hotels and restaurants has been badly affected. The discourse will have to be completely different. The hotel business was not totally black, but the restaurant business was. It was by far our most affected network, as well

as the beauty network, which was also very affected, because it is a network made up of very independent partners, small partners (e.g. hairdressers, beauticians) and they were very affected. Of course, this discourse and everything I talked about before must be adjusted and this is part of our job, I can be responsible for a 5-star hotel or a neighborhood hairdresser. We cannot level the discourse, that is, we must have a discourse for each type of partner. Once again, the humanization of our way of working ends up being more favorable to this range of partnerships. Because at the end of the day we are all people and we all have our difficulties, whether we are the 5-star hotel or the neighborhood hairdresser.

9- What type of technique do you use, when you see there is the possibility of not retaining/attracting a certain partner? // Can you give me an example of a time where you weren't able to close the deal with a partner?

Sportzone was very keen to work with us and we associated Sportzone as one of the leading brands in their sector of sports, retail, and sporting goods. Sportzone itself communicated with me that in operational terms, all digitalization was far behind schedule, and they could not embark on this digital process of creating a partnership with us. Since the stores were closed at the time, there couldn't be a physical voucher here for people to use. It was frustrating because both parties wanted to work and there was an impediment because of the current situation. Another one was Aqualand, last year they really wanted to get into our MC Donald's campaign and would consider one of our top partners. We got an incredible offer with them where one person bought the ticket and the other person that went with them didn't pay, it was the best offer that we could get with them and due to the pandemic, they simply couldn't open the park during the summertime and the deal ended up getting canceled.

10- According to the Instituto Nacional de Estatística, the sectors that were highly affected by the pandemic were the accomadations and food services. Having in mind that TLC has several partnership networks. In your opinion, which ones were the most affected by the pandemic?

Between the two, clearly the restaurant business, for two reasons. First the network of hotels in Portugal, the hotel industry in Portugal is better structured, they have better structured services (local accommodation not included). There are many hotel chains with large structures and despite everything they have been very affected, because they no longer have

guests. In the deconfinement openings, what happened was from May 2020 to November, the hotels especially, the rural tourism, the small houses. Everything that was nature and more remote had the growth and we have testimonials from partners to reveal, that it worked very well. The restaurants didn't work so well, because they have a different cost of sales than a hotel, that is, they have the food, and the management is much more difficult. There is a very large range between restaurants, they have a very large structure. But then there are those family restaurants that are dependent and many times these family restaurants, as they have a large volume of clients are unemployed and we all know these types of restaurants and they have suffered a lot. They couldn't adapt, even though there are platforms like booking, tripadvisor, fork, there are some platforms that allow reservations. But then there was the issue of delivery, they couldn't adjust to it. We tried to build a take-away network, because they were too dependent on platforms like uber and glovo, and they couldn't stop being hostages of that platform and create something of their own. The advantage I see for this type of restaurants, some of them even won, as you had 1 or 3 cases that worked very well, because they were in residential areas and practically during the week, they had no customers because their customers were working elsewhere and then they managed to have customers during the week as people were working from home. So, they increased the level of customers. But it was clearly for me, one of the most affected sectors.

11- Closing question: Is there anything else you think I should know about impact of the pandemic?

Within the difficulties of this year, of the pandemic, we grew in many aspects. Maybe we didn't grow in the volume of partners or new partners. The things we worked on was a new space that opened in the market, it could be a new restaurant or a new hotel, we contacted them, and at this point we stagnated. However, we reinforced offers, we started to have partners with online and in-person offers. We reinforced certain aspects of our network, we recycled some partners with whom we had been working for some time and we included them again in our campaigns, because they realized the advantages of working with TLC and being part of our networks. We established partnerships with major brands in the market, which was also quite positive. So, if I do a comparison excluding the health part and the economy part. If I talk specifically about the partnerships, I think the balance is positive.

Annex C

Transcript of the interview with Tiago Dias (participant #3), Partners & Content Specialist.

1- **Tell me about your role at TLC Marketing.**

Partner & Content Specialist (about 6 months) - my job is to be responsible for partnerships and content. In terms of duties, I initially look for new partnership opportunities for our clients, for our programs, for our networks and develop quality offers for these potential partners. I also have the objective of renewing and maintaining the partnerships that already exist and keeping up to date with what the market asks for, that is, what the customers ask for because you know different customers, different needs and what the consumer himself is looking for in terms of rewards and offers. So, it's a job of, let's say, prospecting, but also of a lot of business-to-business relations.

2- **What aspects of your work have changed due to the pandemic?**

The work at home has changed something, although I have always been in the hybrid system, I have never been fully remotely. It may have brought me less stress because I end the days when I am at home, I can do other things (like receive orders, do some errands etc.), we can leave on time (not always), but we have another margin. The fact that I can also give an extra mile to my company doesn't hurt when I'm at home, and maybe if I'm at the office, it hurts a little to stay more than 6 p.m. Nothing has changed in my core as a professional, I'm the same as I was. But it has brought some advantages, and some disadvantages, right? nobody wants to be closed. As far as the professional connection is concerned, it was advantageous in some ways.

3- **In what way would you say that the pandemic affected your work with the partners?**

It affected more the life of the partners than it affected our connection with the partners. We professionals in this area, it didn't affect much, it improved some things because society had to evolve in a really rapid way and nowadays everyone uses Zooms and Teams. It save us a lot of time in what was the classic commercial school, because we don't stop having a commercial activity, it made this process more agile. I believe that on

the partners' side, it opened their horizon to what is the digital part, there the compensations of being in the digital world. We always look at being a TLC partner from a perspective that is not so much lead generation, but more that I am going to leverage myself with the help of a great brand, and this is what we try to transmit to our partners. It's an opportunity to be there, to spread the word, another communication channel, and I think they have married things. Suddenly you had to focus more on a digital strategy, what are our needs today converge with this need that was created on the side of partners and potential partners. And I believe that nowadays it is easier for us to reach an understanding. That part of my job that was to maintain and renew the partnerships became more complicated because the pandemic unfortunately closed many PMES, we have many small operators that closed doors, but what I see as bad for some, is an opportunity for others to emerge. It's a cycle, you end up renewing yourself, economic and social cycles, so I'm not too worried. But I do notice that there were many doors closed in these two years, but I also feel that there is more willingness today to open those same doors.

4- **Since the lifting of restrictions (from March until September 2021), do you think that partners are more open to the idea of partnership?**

Some, those that were able to adapt and those that were already born into this more digital reality. The businesses that opened in 2018, 2019 and had a very abrupt learning curve, that is, they had to learn right away and adapt right away. Not like EDPS, Galps, which have had a long time and have been through a lot and adapt with some difficulty or less to these situations. We're talking about businesses that were born in 2018, 2019 grew up in a reality that changed everything very quickly and they had to adapt. These types of partners, yes, they are more active, they want to communicate more. They know that there are other ways to reach their targets, it's not necessarily having the store open or a kiosk in the mall. And this mindset helps us, Portugal is a classic market, we are still not very American in the way we think, so the question of loyalty scares people, the question of rewards, offer systems, programs, being a partner and not getting anything in return automatically still scares people. It's part of our job to justify something that exists in

front of these types of programs and to make partners see what kind of opportunity you can create with some on point campaigns.

5- **Looking at the pandemic with another perspective, do you feel like in a way it opened doors? If so, wich ones?**

Yes, I always see in moments of crisis, moments of opportunity, that is, when they are not things that really cloud reason, I see that they are moments of opportunity. Companies had to rethink the model of having their collaborators, their employees, the home office is proof of this, facilitating Teams is proof of this, we no longer imply much with the image issue, I must be in suit and tie, I have to be all dressed up, no. You can see in the street that people themselves don't have so much need to produce themselves, that is, image still counts a lot (it's still everything in our industry), we know, you have to look good to show up. But for all intents and purposes, there are other inputs, there are other things that have been created. Covid today is no longer a pandemic, in the more western world, fortunately, it is already a more endemic situation as is the flu, other diseases that exist and that we have already irradiated (we are working on that). I will also tell you that we can't be too sure that things won't change. For now, Covid is a terrible thing, but the forced adaptation that it forced people to have, made digital a less scary thing for more traditional, more classic businesses, made it commonplace. Ecommerce today is already a common word, it is no longer scary, I am no longer afraid to put my credit card, PayPal or whatever on the Internet to make a purchase. In the same way that I am not afraid that my brand is on the Internet because I already know what the Internet is, and these 2 years have been that it was a brutal learning curve that allowed some businesses to adapt. But at the same time, it doesn't give me much security because I know that these issues of public health and society can change at any time. We haven't solved it yet and until we solve it globally there is still a danger, don't forget we didn't have flu last year, we might have flu this year. There are many things that are still going to influence here, whether we go back to being 100% confined. So, I believe, that until we have removed Covid from the top of mind we still won't be able to make that 100% leap. But we can already see an evolution in the market, there is no doubt on that.

6- **Focusing more into the communication with the partner, what strategies/ tactics have you implemented this year?**

This varies a lot, it depends a lot on the person you are contacting, there are people who prefer e-mail, there are people who prefer calls, there are cases that have happened to me recently that prefer physical meetings, that is, it limits us a little bit. A tool that I think has become mainstream nowadays and that I use a lot in my favor, I've also been using it for more than 10 years, is LinkedIn. But from a business perspective, I've been using it a lot since I've been at TLC to reach out to partners. I use my personal profile to reach people that I can't otherwise. Many times, we want to reach the director of a franchise and they don't respond to the email, they don't answer their cell phone. Many times, we hit the crossbar, as I often say it is, we get to a desk that is more difficult to get through, doesn't want to give us to the agenda of the person who is taking care of. So, we always have to keep these issues in mind, so when I see that they have some resistance on the other side I go straight to LinkedIn, it has already returned me some answers and some potential partners. LinkedIn replaces Facebook a lot in this dynamic. We are very much at home these days, at work and at home, LinkedIn ends up becoming a communication accessory with other professionals in the area and even with people in my company. LinkedIn/digital has become a foundation that I need in my work setting.

7- **Can you give me an example of a strategy/tactic that has resulted in retaining a partner? Why did you choose that strategy?**

It will be the selling of the dream, but that's a bit conceptual, what I mean. It will be more or less, we as agents, understanding what the real need of that partner is. Imagine that it is a client that has no FB, no website, nothing like that. Maybe he has something to grab, he will appear here associated to Medicare in an online platform, thousands of people will see it. I always try to use an argument that fits the reality of the partner. For example, in the case of Kidzania, they've been closed for two years, now it's an opportunity to bring in leads that they need, one or two more will always be better than none, and I try to adapt myself to the reality of the partnership and the needs of the client, it also depends a lot on what the client wants. With the hotels it has been more difficult, we notice that the hotels are working very well, fortunately, and it has been more complicated to have good

rates and I have noticed a difficulty with the restaurants that I think have not evolved yet. But it makes sense that they are not evolving as much as a clothing brand or a spa, because eating is very much about going to the place, experimenting. So, they themselves are still very much locked into that reality. Recent events have helped these businesses to be more present online, but they still have some resistance, especially on the question of the offer, on having an offer, on having a discount. These are the two sectors that are traditionally the most difficult for us, the restaurants, and the hotels.

8- **What type of technique do you use, when you see there is the possibility of not retaining/attracting a certain partner?**

It depends if it's a big restaurant group, or with many hotels or a hotel group, I the strategy of the copycat a lot, it works a lot. If I have a big partner of the same type, I'll use as an example, "they are also here and things are going well for them", I always use an argument because here the Portuguese, the Portuguese businessmen like to imitate each other a lot. When they are smaller partners, I try to go case by case, but for example, if I have that classic, then if I give them a 2 for 1, I'll be losing a huge margin on the main course. We always try to use those arguments, which I think David has already explained to you, I know that the margins you have are better elsewhere, i.e., you can get more from the wines or the desserts. Maybe you are not giving as much as you think you are giving; you are giving a good offer, but it will not weigh you down. We always try to adapt to the initial obstacles they put in our way and to what we know is our final goal, which is to have a good offer and another place to partner with.

9- **Can you give me an example of a time where you weren't able to close the deal with a partner?**

I'm in a situation, that I haven't gotten the Plateform partner yet, it's a chain of restaurants that started with vitamins, they developed so today they are 107 concepts among them the Avillez restaurants that is they have a concept that is very fast fine dining. Vitamins is a fast-food concept but in a healthy way. There are 107 restaurant brands and I have tried everything. But I know that previously people from this company, people before me have also tried. And I've already talked to the colleague, I've already added the owner, which is

Rui Sanches, I've already added everyone, but I don't get an answer, they see my messages, they see my e-mails, but they don't answer, they ignore it. I insist and I will insist until I get a no, I am one of those people who insists until they get a no. The truth is that I have had many difficulties, and this is because we are talking about a network that is consulted in the market and probably doesn't see any interest in being associated to Medicare or MEO, it prefers to be a neutral entity, to leave things open, it doesn't want to commit to anyone and goes a bit this way. Then I see that the Portuguese businessman, when he becomes a director, also pulls over a little bit, doesn't he, we know the model. And when he pulls over, he doesn't have time for anything, if it's not something requested by the director above, he won't do it. And I see a lot in the Portuguese business world that there is a lack of giving the extra mile. I think that our generations have already changed this a little bit because we had a lot of people that unfortunately had to go abroad to learn with other models, other ways of working and so we don't have that very Portuguese mentality of "I'll get back to you tomorrow, I'll get back to you later" and you never do. We have some entrepreneurs with some resistance, it's not that our product is the best in the world, but the simple fact that you acknowledge to something and then you don't give continuity to that process neither in the form of negative response, nor in the form of positive feedback is always bad, it's not very professional and I find this more at the top than at the bottom, which was a behavior I expected to find in small restaurants, I find in larger groups, so it's like this: society has changed, some things have changed, but we still have bad habits at the entrepreneurial level, here in Portugal.

10- **According to the Instituto Nacional de Estatística, the sectors that were highly affected by the pandemic were the accommodations and food services. Having in mind that TLC has several partnership networks. In your opinion, which ones were the most affected by the pandemic?**

Neither of those two, it was the tour operators, the activities. None of those two, the restaurants are complaining, it's one thing to recognize that we have restaurants that closed, but if you go to the business spectrum in all industries, they closed businesses. Since factories, in the case of Dielmar closed the factories, it was a contact that was behind and in the meantime it went bankrupt. Like the small groups also went bankrupt

because it is not transversal to the hotel business. The hotels have suffered a little bit, but most hotels have gone into layoff, and they can't complain too much either. Sending their employees home to be paid less than half some and the restaurants that didn't do the same thing, they had uber eats and Glovo on their side and continued to sell maybe more meals than they were selling. Many of them grew okay, many hotels grew at this time and many restaurants grew. Tour operators, activity sectors, it's not the same anymore, it's a completely different scenario, now I see some recovery, some recovery. The state support was not enough, nor was it anything like what it was for the hotel business, that is, the activities were completely forgotten, and we had many operators that closed, I didn't have that many restaurants that closed and hotels that closed and so I believe that yes. We noticed more resistance in making partnerships with this type of operators because these partners are traditionally more difficult, Some because they do not want to give up the margin that is already multiplied by 4, which is the restaurants as you know, and the hotels because they have the issues of after this pandemic a giant overbooking, everyone wants to save, everyone wants to leave, at least 8 million already have a certificate. So, the market opened and opened very strongly. We can't travel as freely as we used to, we are consuming more internally, so restaurants and hotels can't complain too much compared to other sectors. Activities, well, mainly tuktuks, paddling activities, kayks, all that stuff, forget it, most of them closed. I know this because I did the Tourism of Portugal, it was my first campaign here in Portugal at TLC Marketing. And that's what I noticed, we initially had 400 or so partners and ended up with 280, so 120 partners closed their doors or are no longer able to do so, were waiting to see how things would turn out, so yes, for me this was the sector that suffered the most.

Annex D

Transcript of the interview with Daniela Moreira (participant #8), Customer Service Specialist.

1- **Tell me about your role at TLC Marketing.**

Customer Service Specialist (about 4 months)- I didn't have much training, because they really didn't have many people at the time when I started, so it was all very quick, a very quick adaptation. But then, at this moment, as I was gaining a lot of trust here from the

employees at TLC and I have showed that I could really do a lot of things and that I am a quick learner. I ended up with 6-7 campaigns all for overnight stays at hotels as well as sending codes, and rewards. For example, customers make a supermarket or store purchase and that's basically what I do, I also make calls and there is also a physical reward send here, sometimes we also have physical rewards sent to our customers' address. So, I end up doing a little bit of everything, as far as what is needed and including invoicing. The campaigns that I work with are: Millenium (Ativo Bank), Millenium BCP, Sumol, Compal, Gazela, LG, High Definition, Mastercard, BPI.

2- **What aspects of your work have changed due to the pandemic?**

What I really noticed, for example in the campaigns for stays, people were very understanding. I noticed it because we had to postpone reservations several times and then they were very understanding because I think people don't want to enjoy something and be restricted and doing tests all the time in hotels and everything else. Regarding the codes I think it appealed a lot because the codes were from Amazon. And that is something that people can do at home, they ended up participating a lot and I think the campaigns also had a lot of redemption because of that. People ended up being able to enjoy it at home and in times of pandemic more than we expected.

3- **Looking at the pandemic with another perspective, do you feel like in a way it opened doors?**

As I said before, I think people have started to help each other more and to be more understanding both with people and with the world itself. An example I can give you is that people before probably saw marketing as a dreadful thing, something that we would probably sell and cheat and now I don't see that so much. There's more understanding, there's more okay, they're doing everything they really can for us to be okay and to be satisfied with the campaigns and to be satisfied with the things we've been doing. And we really have had a lot of positive testimonials from people, which we end up using in our social media to then prove to the rest of the people that we are trying to do a decent job and trying to get all the people to enjoy the experiences. For example, now in this Millenium campaign, which is mine until next year and practically all people choose

dates for next year. They already know in principle that things are going to be better and that they are not going to have restrictions when entering the hotels. And we were always trying to give the best advice and tell people, look, choose these dates, these hotels because of this, this, and that. And I think that's what made people give positive testimonials about our campaigns.

4- Describe how your communication was before the pandemic and now. How did it change during the pandemic?

Regarding communications, we do a lot of email and phone calls, we had more phone calls, a high volume of calls because I think people, they feel more connected and more at ease talking to us and feeling that we really were able to help in a way that they were able to enjoy things. By email it's always a very dry "communications", so by phone we were able to have more closeness. And I think that's what changed, maybe in the past it was very much via e-mail and people started to adhere more to calls. Even for example, when we call, our number is like a commercial one, and people always thought it was sales. However, since they already know our number from the campaigns, they started to answer more and we realized that outbound contacts for people, they always answer and I think that this changed, I think it was a good thing. What evolved was the connection with the customers.

5- Can you give me an example of a campaign that was a great success?

Only on calls, because even on the complaints we have, we always call the client to ask what is going on, to ask what the best solution for him is, so that we can reach a consensus, a middle ground so that our company and the client are satisfied. That it is within our parameters in terms of stays. In general, this is it, not so much communication strategies, but what meets and helps each party better, both us and the client.

6- From the campaigns you are handling now, which one would you say is going the best?

I think Millenium's is the one that is going better, it's the most recent one we have, we haven't had any complaints yet. The stays have been booked normally and almost always

for the first option that the customer applies for, both hotel and dates until next year, until March 31st. So, the clients have been very good, the process is also very fast, they then provide the options of hotels and dates; we talk to the hotel and then once we have the ok, we talk to the client and send them the reservation. I think it is going great, also because it was launched at a time when all the restrictions were lifted, which makes it easier because people are really hoping, especially we are hoping that later this year and next year things will be much better and then they are really choosing dates for the year, to be able to take better advantage of what the offer is, which is one night. So, people already know better the way they must enjoy it to have an enjoyable time.

7- **Can you give me an example of a campaign that wasn't so great?**

The LG example because it was thousands of customers, also with flights, stays and it was a challenge; in this campaign unfortunately, we have more complaints than happy people because it was done in the middle of the pandemic, it was launched in the middle of the pandemic. It was postponed about four times. The hotels that we had on the site, many of them didn't want to partner with TLC anymore, because of all these financial issues, etc. And so, we had to redesign everything, send everything back to the client because, for example, they initially chose hotels, which we then couldn't get anymore and there was a lot of discontent. Because people expected one thing and it happened another way and we also had a lot of delays because the team was always changing, both the customer and the whole TLC team, so it went through many hands and each person worked in their own way and got each customer unhappy. So, every customer for example that called I talked to this colleague and this colleague, and they all gave me this answer. This is really a mistake, we are in a marketing campaign here, I am not getting anything, and they were very unhappy, and we are now still with LG which was launched last year, they have managed to get some customers and it has been very difficult, but we are managing and hopefully it will end well.

8- **According to the Instituto Nacional de Estatística, the sectors that were highly affected by the pandemic were the accommodations and food services. Having in mind that TLC has several partnership networks. In your opinion, which ones were the most affected by the pandemic?**

I think hotels, especially with the campaigns with MEO and Medicare, which is about points, and they also have partnerships with gyms and beauty salons. I think it was really in general the most affected, because we for example had a very big restriction in hotels. For instance, imagine LG, while we were booking 40 clients to the same hotel, we would realize okay now we are in pandemic time, they even have restrictions and so we ended up only booking 20 to that hotel. We had to pay attention if for example 5 people chose the same day, we had to pay attention if the hotel really had conditions to receive so many people in the same day. It was really complicated, because some understood, others didn't. For example, we don't feel this now, but for the October 5th, 2021, holiday, everyone chose that day to go away for a night. The hotels, even if things were better now and there aren't many restrictions, they always want to leave some rooms available for any eventuality that may occur. And so, we must manage how many clients we can book for that hotel, for that day. So, we must pay a lot of attention, because the hotel must tell us its capacity to receive x number of people and the capacity of the space.