

BLOGS AS A NEW TOOL OF THE COMMUNICATION MIX

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RESUMO

Este estudo enquadra-se na área de marketing, especificamente na área de comunicação. O tema prende-se concretamente com a comunicação nos *blogs* e o seu principal objetivo consiste em estudar os *blogs* enquanto nova ferramenta do *mix* de comunicação. Neste estudo, são abordados conceitos como comunicação, redes sociais e publicidade em *blogs*. Adicionalmente, é feito um enquadramento do estado da Internet no mundo e em Portugal, da evolução e impacto crescente dos *blogs* e da relação entre as marcas e os *blogs*.

Esta investigação tem como principais objetivos perceber de que forma é que os *blogs* são introduzidos no *mix* de comunicação das empresas, o que envolve toda a dinâmica da comunicação em *blogs* e também as perceções dos três grupos de intervenientes (consumidores, marcas e *bloggers*) quanto aos *blogs* enquanto nova ferramenta de comunicação.

Com a realização deste projeto, foi possível concluir que a quase totalidade dos consumidores estudados visita *blogs* e que uma das principais motivações para tal é a obtenção de informação sobre produtos e/ou marcas. Adicionalmente, concluiu-se que, tanto para os *bloggers* como para as marcas estudadas, a comunicação em *blogs* é uma prática recorrente e, especificamente para as marcas, é uma aposta que se tem mostrado bastante vantajosa. Por fim, foi possível concluir que, na maioria das marcas estudadas, os *blogs* não constam como uma variável independente no *mix* da comunicação mas estão, por outro lado, incluídos em relações públicas e/ou em publicidade.

Palavras-chave: Marketing, *Blogs*, Comunicação, Publicidade

JEL Classification System: M31 (Marketing) e C12 (Hypothesis Testing)

ABSTRACT

This study is framed within the marketing field, specifically in the communication field. As the title indicates, “blogs as a new tool of the communication mix”, the project is related specifically to communication in blogs and its main objective is to study blogs as a new tool of the communication mix. In this study, several concepts are discussed, such as communication, social networks and blog advertising. Additionally, a framework is made about the status of the Internet in the world and in Portugal, the evolution and growing impact of blogs and the relationship between brands and blogs.

This research has as main objectives to understand how blogs are presented in the communication mix of companies, what the whole dynamics of communication in blogs includes and also the perceptions of the three groups of stakeholders (consumers, brands and bloggers) regarding blogs as a new communication tool.

With the realization of this project, it was possible to conclude that almost all the consumers studied visit blogs and one of the main reasons for it is to obtain information on products and/or brands. In addition, it was concluded that, for both bloggers and brands studied, communication in blogs is a widespread practice and, specifically to the brands, it is a strategy that has proved to be quite advantageous. Finally, it was concluded that, for most of the brands studied, blogs are not presented as an independent variable in the communication mix but are, on the other hand, included in public relations and/or in advertising.

Keywords: Marketing, Blogs, Communication, Advertising

JEL Classification System: M31 (Marketing) e C12 (Hypothesis Testing)

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
1. INTRODUCTION	3
1.1. FRAMEWORK AND RATIONALE OF THE INVESTIGATION.....	3
1.2 OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH PROBLEM	5
1.3 THESIS STRUCTURE	5
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	7
2.1. MARKETING.....	7
2.2. THE COMMUNICATION MIX	7
2.3. COMMUNICATION	9
2.3.1 The new communications tools.....	9
2.4. THE INTERNET.....	11
2.4.1. Social media	11
2.4.2. Online consumer reviews	13
2.5. THE NEW CONSUMER.....	14
2.6. BLOGS.....	17
2.6.1. Blogs – a new source of information.....	17
2.6.2. Blogs – a new type of media	19
2.6.3. Blog advertising.....	21
3. THE INTERNET AND BLOGS	21
3.1. THE STATUS OF THE INTERNET IN THE WORLD AND IN PORTUGAL.....	21
3.2. THE EVOLUTION AND GROWING IMPACT OF BLOGS.....	22
3.3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRANDS AND BLOGS	22
4. ANALYSIS MODEL AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES.....	23
4.1. ANALYSIS MODEL.....	23
4.2. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES	24
5. METHODOLOGY.....	25
6. RESULTS ANALYSIS.....	27
6.1. RESULTS ANALYSIS – BLOGGERS.....	27
6.1.1. Socio-demographic characterization of the sample.....	27

6.1.2. Blogs’ antiquity and bloggers’ perceptions about being influencers	28
6.1.3. Bloggers experience with blog advertising	29
6.1.4. Bloggers’ perceptions about blog advertising	31
6.2. RESULTS ANALYSIS – BRANDS	32
6.2.1. Brands’ characterization by activity sector	32
6.2.2. Brands’ experience with communication in blogs	33
6.3. RESULTS ANALYSIS – CONSUMERS	37
6.3.1. Socio-demographic characterization of the sample.....	37
6.3.2. Consumers’ experience as blog readers.....	38
6.3.3. Research hypotheses.....	42
7. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS AND MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	46
7.1. MAIN CONCLUSIONS	46
7.2. MAIN THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE RESEARCH	48
7.3. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND CONTRIBUTES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	50
8. REFERENCES.....	52
9. ANNEXES.....	57

TABLE OF FIGURES

Table 1 – Bloggers’ sample distribution by age group	27
Table 2 – Bloggers’ sample distribution by academic qualifications	28
Table 3 – Bloggers’ sample distribution by occupation	28
Table 4 - Bloggers' sample distribution by blog antiquity.....	28
Table 5 - Bloggers' sample distribution by perceptions about being influencers	29
Table 6 - Bloggers' sample distribution by frequency of blog advertising	29
Table 7 - Bloggers' sample distribution by percentage of advertising content	30
Table 8 - Bloggers' sample distribution by most advertised brands	31
Table 9 - Bloggers' sample distribution by perception of blogs as efficient means of communication.....	32
Table 10 - Brands' sample distribution by activity sector.....	33
Table 11 - Brands' sample distribution by first time using blogs	33
Table 12 - Brands' sample distribution by frequency of resorting to communication in blogs	34
Table 13 - Brands' sample distribution on impact that communication in blogs has in revenue	34

Table 14 - Brands' sample distribution by criteria for choosing a blog to communicate	35
Source Own Table 15 - Brands' sample distribution by frequency with which communication in blogs includes other platforms.....	36
Table 16 – Consumers’ sample distribution by age group	37
Table 17 - Consumers' distribution by academic qualifications	38
Table 18 - Consumers' sample distribution by occupation	38
Table 19 - Consumers' sample distribution by frequency of blog visits.....	39
Table 20 - Consumers' sample distribution by motivations for visiting blogs	39
Table 21 - Consumers' sample distribution by most visited type of blogs	40
Table 22 - Consumers' sample distribution by perceptions of bloggers as opinion leaders	40
Table 23 - Consumers' sample distribution by frequency of use of blog information in purchase decision	41
Table 24 - Consumers' sample distribution by perceptions regarding blogs as a mean of advertising.....	42
Table 25 - Summary results of hypotheses testing	45

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research project addresses communication in blogs. Specifically, blogs are studied as a new tool of the communication mix. The reasons for choosing the topic relate to the interest of the researcher by communication on these platforms and the fact that it is a current topic, for which there is still little scientific basis.

The skepticism of consumers regarding traditional advertising is a reality in recent times. Brands have to adapt to this situation and seek alternatives. Blogs seem to be an increasingly viable alternative. It is important for both academics and professionals to get more information regarding the existing communication alternatives to address the lack of receptivity of consumers to traditional advertising and that is what this study aims to provide, specifically at the level of communication in blogs.

The main objectives of this project are to understand how blogs are introduced into the communication mix of companies, what the whole dynamics of communication in blogs involves and also the perceptions of the three groups of stakeholders (consumers, brands and bloggers) concerning blogs as a new communication tool. It is considered that the realization of this project and, consequently, its results, will lead to relevant discoveries not only at a theoretical level but also at a practical level.

This research project started with the literature review process and with the interview to Paulo Bastos, professor at ISCTE-IUL and TVI journalist, which enabled the creation of the foundations for its construction. Specifically, the interview permitted the collection of highly relevant information regarding the application of communication in blogs in practice. In addition, a framework was carried out, using statistics, regarding the Internet status in the world and in Portugal, the evolution and growing impact of blogs and the relationship between brands and bloggers. After the concepts and theories established by other authors regarding the subject under study have been collected, we proceeded to the design of the strategy for data collection. Specifically, three different questionnaires were prepared and applied to the different groups of stakeholders. Subsequently, data from the collection carried out was analyzed, thus allowing the establishment of the project's findings.

The results show that almost all the consumers studied visit blogs and one of the main reasons that leads them to do it is to obtain information on products and/or brands. In addition, it was

concluded that, for both bloggers and brands studied, communication in blogs is a widespread practice and, specifically to the brands, a resource that has shown to be quite advantageous. Finally, it was concluded that, for most of the brands studied, blogs are not included as an independent variable in the respective communication mix but are, on the other hand, included in public relations and /or advertising.

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains an overview of the present investigation, presenting the framework and rationale behind it, its main objectives and, in the end, a brief description of the structure of the thesis will be presented.

1.1. FRAMEWORK AND RATIONALE OF THE INVESTIGATION

The National Media Museum (2011) disclosed a paper, “new media: a brief history of the Internet”, where it states that the Internet emerged during the 1950’s in the United States of America (USA). The paper specifies that, at that time, the cold war was creating high tensions between North America and the Soviet Union and, in order to improve American military technology, the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) was created in 1958. Additionally, it points out that one of the major achievements of this agency was the creation of a distributed network that allowed two different computers, located in different places, to connect with each other. Finally, it states that the objective of this creation was to enable the USA Air Force to maintain control over its fleet if a nuclear attack existed. This was the first step to the creation of the Internet as we know it nowadays.

In the course of the emerging of the Internet, the World Wide Web (commonly known as just Web) has been created. Choudhury (2014), in his article “World Wide Web and its journey from Web 1.0 to Web 4.0” defined it as “a system of interlinked hypertext documents accessed via the Internet”. According to the author, Web 1.0 was Web’s first implementation, which lasted from 1989 to 2005, and it offered a very limited interaction since the consumer was able to interact with other consumers but not with the Website. On the other hand, the second generation of the Web, Web 2.0, is described by Choudhury as being more interactive from a consumer perspective and lasted from 2004 to 2016. With regard to Web 3.0 (starting in 2016), the author defends that it stands on the following premises: Websites or Webpages do not exist and data is shared instead of owned.

The Internet, along with all its evolution, has carried many opportunities that affected marketing and it is considered a new channel of communication (Tălpău, 2014). According to Castells (2005), nowadays we live in a networked society, which one of its main characteristics is the transformation of the communication area, including the media. Specifically, the author states that the communication system is increasingly digitized and gradually more interactive, which allows a much greater integration of all communication sources.

Nowadays, the weight of traditional marketing on companies' marketing budgets is decreasing and being reimbursed with online marketing (Tălpău, 2014). Along with this, "the dialogue between brands and their customers is expected to replace the traditional marketing monologue" (Maurya, 2011). According to Rodrigues *et al.* (2010), due to an increasing new range of technological products and services, consumers are changing their habits in terms of searching and buying. Specifically, the authors state that in Web 2.0, a rising community produces and uploads content on the Internet. Films and music, but also opinions and complaints, are, for them, examples of the referred contents that invade the Internet through social networks, blogs and sites like Youtube. The authors also point out that, in this context, users discuss, among several other issues, buying and consumption experiences and brands and share opinions, recommendations and critics. These new trends have affected, in their opinion, the way brands interact with their publics since brands were used to have a unidirectional communication with clients, in a context where consumers only listened and brands were in total control of the advertising and information but, nowadays, consumers have also the power to influence brands' images and reputation.

According to Teixeira (2010), consumers are trusting less in companies and brands and more in other consumers. The author specifies that we have witnessed a need, from consumers, to increase contact with brands that has, consequently, led to a decreasing efficacy of communication in traditional means and a diminishing credibility of its messages. Augusto (2013) states that consumers are becoming more and more informed and demanding, searching for a more open and active relationship with companies and brands. The author then defends the importance of recommendations in this context since, for him, recommendations have the power to capture the attention of consumers and orient their perceptions and expectations towards a specific product with power to harm or help brands' sales and reputation. As a result of this, according to Rodrigues *et al.* (2010), brands need to follow and monitor what is said about them in the Web and develop new strategies to better adapt to this new era.

Maurya (2011), in the article "the evolution of blogs as a credible marketing communication tool", starts by stating that, since the Internet is an information storehouse, consumers evaluate their alternatives online before they take a decision. Specifically, the author states that the next generation of customers, the "Millennials", do not read traditional newspapers and, instead, they like technology and constitute part of a new online generation that obtains information from online resources such as blogs. Maurya finishes the article by stating that this new

generation shows a strong resistance to marketing messages and, especially, to advertising and that “it is now an acknowledged fact that blogs are here to stay and will have an impact on customer behavior”.

1.2 OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH PROBLEM

This master thesis is framed within the Marketing field and, more specifically, it addresses communication in blogs. This study aims to investigate if blogs are an independent variable in the communication mix of brands nowadays and also the perception of blogs as a new marketing communication tool for the three stakeholder groups: bloggers, consumers and brands.

Specifically, with regard to bloggers, it was intended to understand, among other things, if they consider their blogs as efficient means of communication for brands, if they consider themselves as “influencers” and, therefore, able to influence the buying decision of their readers and, finally, if they consider that blogs, given their importance nowadays, should be an independent variable in the communication mix of brands.

In what concerns to consumers, the objective was to understand, among other things, if they use blogs and if that usage is dependent on their demographic characterization, if they recognize blogs as means of advertising and communication, if they use blogs when searching for information prior to a purchase and, finally, if they consider bloggers as “opinion leaders” and, consequently, trust in their recommendations.

Finally, regarding brands, it was intended to understand, among other things, if they had already used blogs as a communication tool and how often they use it nowadays and if blogs are, in fact, an independent variable in their marketing communication. In case this was not proved, the objective was to understand in which variables of the communication mix blogs are included.

Based on a detailed literature review, complemented by an empirical study, this research aims to contribute both for the theoretical and practical field.

1.3 THESIS STRUCTURE

This study is composed by seven chapters, for which a brief summary is presented next:

Chapter 1 – Introduction – It presents an introduction about the topic in study, the objectives of the investigation and the research problem.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review – It contains a bibliographic review of several scientific articles, books and other theoretical contributions related to the topic under study. It does the scientific framework of the theme, addressing issues such as the new communication tools, the communication mix and blog advertising.

Chapter 3 – The Internet and Blogs – It is a framework of the status of the internet in the world and in Portugal, it analyzes the evolution and the growing impact of blogs and the relationship between brands and blogs. It presents a set of data that supports the growing importance of these platforms in the context of Marketing and contributes not only to frame this research project but also to justify it.

Chapter 4 – Analysis Model and Research Hypotheses – It presents the analysis model and the research hypotheses, resulting from the literature review and the framework made to the subject in study.

Chapter 5 – Methodology – It describes the methodology adopted in the various stages of research and presents the tools used for collecting the data for posterior results analysis.

Chapter 6 – Results Analysis – It presents the main results of the investigation for each of the three samples in study (bloggers, brands and consumers). For the bloggers' sample, a descriptive analysis of the responses is presented, including a socio-demographic characterization of the sample. For the brands' sample, a descriptive analysis is also presented, including a characterization of the brands by activity sector. Finally, for the consumers' sample, a descriptive analysis is presented, including a socio-demographic characterization of the sample and, lastly, the testing of the research hypotheses in study is also presented.

Chapter 7 – Discussion of the Results and Main Conclusions and Recommendations – The final chapter sets out the main conclusions of the data analysis presented in chapter 6, as well as the contribution of this research to the theoretical and practical field. It also presents the limitations encountered in the realization of the research project, leaving suggestions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.MARKETING

According to Helfer & Orsoni (1996), the term and implicit practices of Marketing emerged in Europe, on the branches of US companies, in the 1950's. Marketing was defined by Rodrigues *et al.* (2010) as the group of methods and means that an organization has to promote, in the publics that it wants to target, the behaviors favorable to the realization of its own objectives.

Marketing is commonly included in companies' strategic plans. Varadarajan (2009), stated that "marketing strategy refers to an organization's integrated pattern of decisions that specify its crucial choices concerning products, markets, marketing activities and marketing resources in the creation, communication and/or delivery of products that offer value to customers in exchanges with the organization and thereby enables the organization to achieve specific objectives". Additionally, the author described strategic marketing decisions as a company's decisions in the field of marketing that can have major consequences in its long-term performance. For Day *et al.* (1990), the main focus of companies that invest in marketing strategies is to build and to maintain a sustainable competitive advantage. Several authors have already discussed the main purposes of marketing strategy. Srivastava *et al.* (1998) indicated the creation of market-based relational assets and market-based intellectual assets for the company. On the other hand, Bagozzi (1975) pointed that a purpose of marketing strategy is to enable a company to establish and maintain mutually exchange relationships with customers. Finally, for example, Carpenter *et al.* (1997) specified the modification of customers' and consumers' behaviors in ways that are conducive to their acquisition, possession and consumption of specific product offerings of a company.

2.2.THE COMMUNICATION MIX

The communication mix refers to the variables of communication that are possible to combine in order to achieve, more effectively and efficiently, the intended goals of a company/brand (Rodrigues *et al.*, 2010).

Keller (2001), stated, in the article "Mastering the marketing communications mix: micro and macro perspectives on integrated marketing communication programs", that communication options are regularly grouped into broad communication types: media advertising (TV, radio, newspaper, magazines); direct response and interactive advertising (mail, telephone, broadcast media, print media, computer-related); place advertising (bulletins, billboards, posters, cinema, transit); point-of-purchase advertising (shelf talkers, aisle markers, shopping cart ads, in-store

radio or TV); trade promotions (samples, coupons, premiums, refunds/rebates, contests/sweepstakes, bonus packs, price-offs); event marketing sponsorship (sports, arts, entertainment, fairs and festivals, cause-related); publicity and public relations and, finally, personal selling. Subsequently, the author states that, as a result of the communications environment' development in the recent years, a modern marketing communication program is, usually, constituted by a set of different communication options. According to this author, Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) programs are used by marketers to support their brands and, specifically, these types of programs require that multiple types of communication options are employed and that the individual types of communication are articulated. Keller points out that the main goal of an IMC program is to develop the most effective and efficient communication plan possible but this goal is dependent on six factors: coverage (proportion of the audience that is reached), contribution (capacity to generate the desired response from consumers), commonality (degree to which common associations are strengthened across communication options), complementarity (degree to which dissimilar associations and linkages are highlighted across communication options), robustness (degree to which a communication option "works" for different groups of consumers) and cost of the communication option itself.

Purcarea *et al.* (2015) also studied the communication mix and, specifically IMC programs. The authors started by pointing that the components of the communication mix are the channels through which a message is transmitted and, in an IMC program, there are more channels which deliver the same message. Then, they introduced that the new online environment has led to an online IMC, which relies on the integration and coordination of a diversity of multiple sources of information as well as interpretations of the previously given feedback. The authors defend that, nowadays, the organization is no longer the only one which sends a message, consumers' feedbacks may be read by other consumers and managers at a wider scale. They also stated that an online IMC, in order to be successful, must focus on the integration of the online and offline communications in order to attract consumers or lead them to a Website where they can collect additional information, on the usage of the online communication tools to deliver efficient messages and, finally, on the integration of all communication channels into a strategic plan according to the marketing goals. Finally, these authors specified that the online IMC is constituted by online advertising, online sales promotions, direct marketing (which keeps the same name as used in the offline), online sales forces, online public relations, electronic Word Of Mouth (WOM) and online press releases

2.3. COMMUNICATION

Nowadays, a marketplace is a crowded environment of companies that offer almost the same services and, in order to distinguish their services from the ones offered by competition, companies must invest in marketing communications (Purcarea *et al.*, 2015).

Keller (2001) described marketing communications as the resources that companies use to inform, influence, incite, and remind consumers - directly or indirectly – of the brands they have. The author also specified that marketing communications represent the voice of a brand, have the ability to associate a brand with a specific person, place, experience, or thing and can contribute to higher brand purchases and sustained consumer loyalty. For Keller, marketing communication effectiveness is influenced by the variation of consumers' characteristics (demographic, behavioral, etc.), characteristics of the communication option itself (nature, message content about the brand, creative execution, etc.), situational factors and consumer response (outcome associated with exposure to the communication). For Lovelock and Wirtz (2007), marketing communications have the ability to inform prospective consumers about the service options, its availability, specific features, functions and benefits.

2.3.1 The new communications tools

Keller (2001), in the article “Mastering the marketing communications mix: micro and macro perspectives on integrated marketing communication programs”, starts by stating that, in recent years, we have experienced a rise in the number and variety of communication options available for marketers to reach consumers. Specifically, the author defends that the marketing communication environment has been affected by two crucial factors: the fragmentation of traditional advertising media and the emergence of new, non-traditional media, promotion, and other communication alternatives. With regard to media fragmentation, he defends that the importance of independent stations has grown, which contributed to the diminished share of the traditional “big three” television stations. In turn, the author points the emergence of new media includes, for example, sports and other event sponsorship, in-store advertising, product placement in television and movies and interactive electronic media (such as Websites and banner ads).

The Internet and Web 2.0 introduced new opportunities for brands to reach out and influence consumers in new, exciting and more effective ways (Marken, 2007). Research concerning consumers' perceptions of advertising on the Internet and the Web was conducted by several authors, which, globally, showed that Web advertising has a significant positive influence on

consumers (Bush *et al.*, 1998). Specifically, in Ducoffe's (1996) study, consumers rated Web advertising as valuable, instructive, not particularly annoying, and a benefit to organizations using it. In turn, Maddox and Mehta (1997) concluded that consumers perceive Web advertising as more customer-oriented, responsive, instructive, high tech and sophisticated. Finally, Briggs and Hollis (1997) discovered that banner advertising increases brand awareness, reminds consumers of a brand's existence, motivates brand associations, can affect attitudes toward the brand and increase the probability of consumption.

One of the first studies concerning "Advertiser Perceptions of the Internet as a Marketing Communications Tool", dates back to 1998 and it was performed by Alan Bush, Victoria Bush and Sharon Harris. At that time, Acceptance and usage of the Internet was already perceived as phenomenal, data indicated that hosts on the Internet were doubling every 12 to 15 months and companies were increasingly dedicating budgets to Internet advertising, which was indicative of the potential of this new medium. Many advertisers were starting to acknowledge the importance of a Website and organizations were adopting this new medium in the marketing communications mix. Regarding, specifically, the results of the study, the authors discovered that the majority of the companies that constituted the sample have incorporated the internet into their marketing strategy and perceived it has as an important marketing tool. Additionally, companies perceived an even greater Internet presence in the future.

In the article "The New Communications Tools... Listening, Helping", Marken (2007) starts by stating that when deciding which online communication tools to use, companies can quantify performance and results on the volume of media clips/hits, investigate the reach/influence of specialized user groups/communities and investigate how many readers a blog has per month. Then, the author specifies the social networking locations where companies can communicate, which are: rating/review sites, video/content sharing sites, blogs, specialty groups and social networks. Rating/review sites provide information/assistance/guidance to its readers. Video/content sharing sites are constituted by segments that are posted for viewing/sharing. Blogs are platforms that allow people to express their identity and show their status and can also provide unique information, insights and assistance. Specialty groups are constituted by individuals or organizations that join together since they share a common interest and want to share/learn with people that have similar interests. Finally, social networks can be profile-driven (for example, for jaguar enthusiasts) or purpose-driven (for example, for video post-production groups) but the main aspect is that they

are also all about sharing common interests and being part of a community. Later in the study, the author points out that Social networks such as MySpace, Youtube, Plaxo, Facebook and LinkedIn are excellent ways to reach powerful decision makers since people from all around the world are members of these sites where they are able to exchange information, ideas, problems and solutions on specific topics (business, personal or professional). The author concludes the topic by stating that, nowadays, with the new range of online platforms available to consumers, tracking and handling social media coverage of a brand itself or its products' is crucial but a significant challenge for companies. Additionally, he concludes that, in the new communications environment, derived from the evolution of the Internet and from Web 2.0, we have to understand and embrace the following ideas: nowadays the local market was substituted by a global market and an information community; brands must have open and continual conversation with their customers and each consumer has unique wants and needs

2.4.THE INTERNET

“From the late 1990’s onward, (...) the spread of e-mail use and the appearance of freely available Web browsers made the Internet a more and more convenient and accepted technology for communication and newsgathering” (Oggolder, 2015). According to the author, in the second half of the 1990’s, the Internet came to be part of a boom with gigantic consequences for economic matters, in 2000 it was mainly acknowledged as a technological instrument to improve both economic prosperity and the comfort of daily life and these days business, politics, culture and communication are all integrated in the virtual space. The digital space is increasingly becoming part of the real world as Newman *et al.* (2012) stated, “the Internet is becoming an essential aspect of everyday life and work for an increasing proportion of users”.

2.4.1. Social media

According to Bruns (2005), the Internet has become essential in media and communication. The seemingly limitless success of Facebook and Twitter has been a vital part of this process (Bredl *et al.*, 2011). For Oggolder (2015), nowadays, with the era of social networks, the Internet is connected with the term and the concept of “social” and “going social” is equal to share. For this author, the purpose of Facebook, for example, is not shopping but sharing, which is translated into generating private data and freely available content, commonly named as user-generated content.

“With the advances of the Internet technologies, social media communication channel has become a new kind of medium that connects business to business, business to consumer and consumer to consumer” (Isa *et al.*, 2015). These authors extensively studied the social media topic in the article “determinants and Impact of Online Social Interaction on Online Buying Behaviour”. Firstly, they introduce that, unlike what happens in the e-commerce, where the interactions between companies and consumers are predominantly established through the retailer’s Website, in social media (e.g., Facebook) the interactions are predominantly based on virtual activities between consumers and consumers. Then, they specify that social media communication includes several types of online communication such as WOM, forums (e.g., e-mail, chat rooms, discussion boards and blogs) and social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and Twitter) and that each one of these social networking sites are used by hundreds of millions of people and, more important than that, by businesses. The authors defend that social media communication gives to firms the opportunity to connect and interact with trading partners and consumers at a higher reach, to develop market opportunities, market penetration and market development through observation and participation of consumers. Additionally, they refer that, by using social media communication, firms can also improve brand awareness, brand consciousness and brand community among consumers. One of the most important benefits of social media interaction referred by them is the possibility for consumers to interact among themselves online. Along with this, the extension of the consumers’ possibilities for collecting impartial product information from other consumers was also pointed. The authors consider that, nowadays, many consumers wait for the opinions of primary consumers before taking a buying decision in order to diminish the risk of purchasing unnecessary new products and that consumers are much more likely to rely on recommendations from people that they know and trust and also from people with similar experience and tastes. Specifically regarding the nature of social interactions, Isa *et al.* state the following: “online social interactions can be divided into opinion-based social interaction and behavior-based social interaction”. Then, they proceed to clarify the concepts as follows. Opinion-based social interaction, commonly acknowledged as online reviews, concerns any positive or negative online consumer opinion related to a product or a seller. On the other hand, behavior-based social interaction is related with the fact that consumers make buying decisions based on the purchase actions of others. With regard specifically to blogs, the authors defend that they play a crucial role in the transmission of information amongst consumers and, because of that, improved online social interactions amongst bloggers leads to the transmission of ideas, knowledge, experience, best practices, fashion and trends on the Web.

Isa *et al.* (2015), in the previously referred article, also discussed e-commerce and stated that social media and Web 2.0 have provided a significant improvement to it. Specifically, the authors stated that “e-Commerce retailers are now able to capture consumer’s behavior, which gives them insights into their shopping needs, creativity and experiences”. According to them, the decision making process in e-Commerce can be divided into 5 stages, which will be described next, but it is important to note that all the process is based on the social interaction, among the consumers, about the product. Firstly, the consumer decides whether to go or not to go on an e-Commerce Website. Secondly, the consumer searches information that will help him in deciding to buy or not the product. Thirdly, the consumer decides on rating a review or not, based on the evaluation of the information. Fourthly, the consumer chooses in which e-Commerce Website to buy the product. The fifth, and final stage, is related with the consumer’s evaluation after the purchase and, at this stage, the consumer decides to write or not a review of the product.

2.4.2. Online consumer reviews

The Internet boosted the appearance of a new form of Web communication (electronic WOM), which facilitates the diffusion of information between service providers and consumers and also between consumers themselves (Park & Nicolau, 2015). Consumers are increasingly relying on product information provided on the Internet by other consumers before making a purchase in order to minimize purchase risks (Dellarocas, 2006; Hu *et al.*, 2011). Consumers are more responsive to this type of WOM than to product information disclosed by firms (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Trusov *et al.*, 2009) since such WOM is acknowledged as extremely credible and trustworthy (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004; Mayzlin, 2006; Smith *et al.*, 2005). In contrast, product information disclosed by firms is perceived as less credible (Bickart & Schindler, 2001) because of firms’ self-interest in disclosing such product information (Mourali *et al.*, 2005).

Online reviews are a type of electronic WOM (eWOM) that has gain more popularity and influence especially with regard to products that people have difficulty in assessing its quality before consumption (Woodside & King, 2001). Marketers are becoming more conscious of the opportunities and risks related with online consumer reviews and are strictly observing what consumers post online about the firm and its products because of the significant reach of this type of reviews (Hu *et al.*, 2011; Kozinets *et al.*, 2010). Previous studies have shown that the features of online reviews (e.g., star ratings, review richness and valence of reviews)

(Sparks & Browning, 2011) and of review providers (e.g., identity disclosure and level of expertise) (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009) have positive effects on revenue and on supporting buying decisions. From a company's performance perspective, previous studies indicate that the volume of eWOM is positively correlated with product sales (Duan *et al.*, 2008).

2.5. THE NEW CONSUMER

Kasriel-Alexandre wrote an article, in 2016, where he presents the "Top 10 Global Consumer Trends for 2016". To introduce the theme, he states that, with regard to consumption, the year 2016 is characterized by an interesting mix of "established and new trends with countertrends". Subsequently, he presents what he considers to be the trends that will prevail around the world in 2016: agnostic shoppers; buying time; challenging ageing; changemakers; gender blurring; greener food; mental wellbeing; over-connected consumers; shopping for control and spending singles. The ten trends presented will be described in detail below.

The agnostic shoppers are the personification of the today's contradictory shopper, which is hyper-informed, savvy-shopping, less bothered about labels and recognized products and that has numerous opportunities to compare prices at his disposal. These type of consumers constitute a serious challenge for brands who aspire to bond with them or stimulate their loyalty because they switch between shops and products in their pursuit for value and innovation.

With regard to the trend of buying time, Kasriel-Alexandre states that saving time will be very important for consumers in 2016 since, nowadays, consumers are more predisposed to outsource aspects of their lives and several recognize time as the key luxury. The possibility to save time is still a crucial reason for consumers' preference for local and online shopping. These days a large number of consumers uses timesaving devices at home such as, for example, robot vacuum cleaners and combined food preparation and cooking devices, despite its high price. Additionally, the idea of sleep as something for sale is becoming increasingly common because of consumers' hectic lifestyles and today's greater understanding that sleep improves lives, health and weight loss. Along with this, products such as "Night Milk", which contains more sleep hormone (melatonin), from the German company Milchkristalle are increasingly ordinary.

The trend of challenging ageing is directly connected with the increased number of individuals that are living a hectic, more satisfying and long "third age" (starting from 55-65 years-old). These "third age" consumers work more, are more active, care about preserving good physical

health and about mental wellbeing and are capable of leading fuller lives as consumers as well. Nowadays, mature consumers constitute a massive market and they persist as a crucial and rising consumer segment, which creates several opportunities for manufacturers and retailers. Marketing strategies for this consumer segment include, for example, lower prices established for retirees in tourism hubs, cinemas, clubs and even supermarkets. These type of consumers are also usually interested in products that prolong independence such as robots and small drones for the home.

Changemakers are characterized by Kasriel-Alexandre as people that try to change things for the better. This will is becoming a crucial priority for people in 2016 and it embodies itself in the individual consumers' desire to improve lives and preserve the earth's natural resources. Currently, consumers, more specifically younger consumers (also known as the Millennials), increasingly embrace social causes, have high expectations regarding corporate environmental matters and want brands they purchase to act responsibly. The actions of these changemakers are being facilitated by social media since, for example, Facebook enables users to visit non-profit pages, add its campaigns to their own timelines and promote the causes that are more important for them.

Gender blurring is associated with gender fluidity in what concerns to consumption. This gender fluidity is visible in tech devices, androgynous fashion (the blending of feminine and masculine clothes) and in the classification and way of display of some toys to attenuate gender lines. Increasingly, brands are creating gender-neutral labels. For example, in the last Halloween, Disney labelled all Halloween costumes as being "for kids" and did not divided it according to gender, an approach that has also been applied to backpacks and lunchboxes.

The greener food trend is related with the expectation that, in 2016, an increased number of people will be eating greener. Along with this, more people will try to avoid food waste, unhealthy food, overeating and increase the consumption of more natural, local and seasonal food. Consumers are increasingly caring about the transparency of the entire production process and aspire to feel good about their consumption choices. This trend is already affecting even the fast-food operators that are now answering to customers' demands for healthier options.

The mental wellbeing trend, in turn, refers to the interest of consumers to foment the wellness of their inner selves. This interest translates into the buying of books (e.g., coloring books for

adults and self-help books), apps downloads (e.g., meditation apps) and holiday options. Major firms like Google and Apple have intensely adopted the mindfulness trend due to its claimed benefits of stress reduction and increased mental clarity. This growing interest in mental wellbeing is partially related with an increased rejection of consumption as simply the acquirement of additional products.

Over-connected consumers is a trend that mainly drifts from the fact that, these days, near to half of the world's population has Internet access. Nowadays, smartphones follow consumers literally everywhere and, consequently, consumers have the possibility to always be connected to the Internet, which, in turn, allows them to make several things, from visiting social media to online payments.

With regard to shopping for control, this trend is correlated with the increased wish from consumers to buy control. This wish, in turn, is potentiated by a series of disquieting world events, personal security concerns and financial stress that lead to a sense of fear in consumers. These days, insecurity, driven by factors such as global terrorism and instability, is influencing several purchasing decisions and the consumer behavior in general. Products such as Webcams that enable parents to observe their children from the office are some of the products suitable for these type of consumers.

The last trend, spending singles, is connected with a type of consumer that, generally saying, has less commitments and more to spend: the premium singles. These consumers are often characterized as great spenders with more disposable income and child-free, that enjoy spending money on products and experiences for themselves and also that spend generously for important kids in their lives (e.g., nieces and nephews). Cruiser companies and hotel chains have already acknowledged this segment of consumers and, consequently, have developed special offers for these younger, single travelers (e.g., the abolition of single supplements charging).

The consumer trends for 2016 were also studied by the Ericsson ConsumerLab, which presented, in 2015, the "10 hot consumer trends 2016". Firstly, there is "the lifestyle network effect", which is connected with the intense online use that leads, consequently, to social effects such as crowd intelligence and sharing economy. Secondly, the "streaming natives" are presented as the teenagers that nowadays watch more YouTube video content than other age clusters. Thirdly, "artificial intelligence ends the screen age" is related with the fact that

artificial intelligence will allow the interaction with objects without a smartphone screen being necessary. Fourthly, “virtual gets real” is connected with consumers’ demand for virtual technology in their everyday activities (e.g., sports and 3D food printing). Fifthly, the “sensing homes” trend is related with the expectation that bricks employed in home constructions could include sensors that alert for mold, leaks and electricity problems. Sixthly, “smart commuters” refers to the commuters that want to spend their time in meaningful ways and do not want to feel like passive objects in transit. Seventhly, “emergency chat” is associated with the possibility of social networks starting to be the favorite method to contact emergency services. Eighthly, “internables” refers to the usage of internal sensors that are installed inside our bodies to measure wellbeing. Ninthly, the trend “everything gets hacked” is related with the fact that the majority of smartphone users considers that hacking and viruses will stay as a reality in 2016. Finally, tenthly, the Ericsson ConsumerLab presents the “netizen journalists”, which is related with the fact that, these days, consumers are sharing more information than ever, trusting that it intensifies their power in society.

2.6. BLOGS

Johnson and Kaye (2004) defined blogs as diary-style Websites that usually offer opinions and news, where readers are able to leave comments and share recommendation links and/or trackbacks. For Nardi *et al.* (2004), blogs are “frequently updated Web pages with a series of archived posts, typically in reverse-chronological order”. According to Morimoto and Trimble (2012), blogs are an example of user-generated media that allows both marketers and consumers to communicate their ideas on products and/or brands by using trackback, links and comment utilities. Blogs enable individuals with similar interests to join to exchange ideas and information and to learn from other community members (Rothaermel & Sugiyama, 2001).

2.6.1. Blogs – a new source of information

Blogs, as sources of information, have already been studied by some authors. Morimoto and Trimble wrote an article, in 2012, entitled “Consumers’ use of blogs as product information sources: from need-for-cognition perspective” where they start by stating that blogs as product information sources can be classified into two types: corporate and consumer-generated blogs. Corporate blogs are owned and maintained by marketers in order to deliver content to their customers. On the other hand, consumer-generated blogs are managed by consumers and are a place where they share their opinions and experiences about brands, products and services. Nowadays, the amount of blogs and other online communities that address product reviews

and that are available to consumers during their online search is extremely high. Specifically, under this study, the authors observed how consumers see corporate and consumer-generated blogs as product/brand information sources. The findings proved the strong effect of vulnerability to WOM influence on the usage of blogs and buying intentions. Consequently, marketers will benefit significantly if they include blogs in their marketing communication programs, thus providing consumers a forum to interact with other consumers to enable and encourage positive WOM. Additionally, the study showed that consumers have stronger buying intent of products mentioned in consumer-generated blogs, when compared to corporate blogs. Thereafter, marketers can use consumer endorsement by bloggers as a potential effective way of communicating products/services. According to the authors, the increase of blog use by consumers will be a reality in the future and blogs, as an advertising medium, represent an unlimited potential as effective resources for both consumers and advertisers.

Cosenza *et al.* (2015) also studied blogs as an information source and stated that information is imperative for decision making and blogs offer a plethora. “Google it”, a phrase which is widely used by all of us, exhibits the importance of online search for consumer decision making. According to a study by Lecinski (2011), 70% of buying decisions start with online search and particularly with the search for recommendations and product reviews. Specifically, according to the “2013 Digital Influence Report” from Technorati Media, blogs are in third place in what regards to the most likely online platforms to encourage a buying decision. Zafiroopoulos (2012) stated that blogs offer access to freely accessible information, which produces a significant influence on consumer decision making.

In the article entitled “Credibility in the blogosphere: A study of measurement and influence of wine blogs as an information source”, Cosenza *et al.* (2015) start by stating that if a consumer does not have sufficient information to make a decision, he needs an external information search. Nowadays, the increase of Web tools and social media apps enables individuals to easily share information about everything. According to the authors, blogs are “classified as social media and user-generated content, cover a variety of topics and represent a virtual warehouse of searchable information”. Specifically, blogs contain posts with created content and the interaction with readers occurs through comments. Although more dynamic and interactive than usual Websites, a blog is still technically a Website. Additionally, it is a media source, categorized as social media, because it is an information carrier. A blog is like face-to-face WOM because of the interpersonal-type of communication provided. It differs from a

conventional Website by the changing comments from the author, from a forum since the controller of the conversation is the author, from review sites because of the interactive accessibility with the author and from other media sources because of the predictable personal voice.

2.6.2. Blogs – a new type of media

According to Kozinets *et al.* (2010), social media is growing quickly. Along with this, in a 2009 article, *The Economist* stated that modern consumers use social media in order to get assistance in the decision making process since they trust on recommendations from friends (*The Economist*, 2009). In addition, also an article from *The New York Times* reported that a specific firm has risen its sales from \$100,000 to \$4 million because of a blog endorsement (Jaret, 2006).

Blogs have been characterized as a form of consumer-generated media (CGM) and CGM's are seen as a communication mean that consumers perceive as more reliable than other advertising/marketing media (Hart & Blackshaw, 2005). From all the online media available to marketers nowadays, blogs are “the newest and potentially the most attractive” (Mutum & Wang, 2011).

In the article “The New Face of Beauty”, Renfrow (2009) starts by advocating that marketers in the beauty industry have replaced the traditional print, television and radio ads for blogs, online communities, widgets, ratings and reviews, videos and Websites, a decision that has been very successful. Specifically, these marketers are the proof that “viral communication, even online, is what sells beauty products”. WOM has constructed brand names such as Estée Lauder and this proves that the customers themselves are most likely the best marketers for beauty and personal care products. Estée Lauder, such as several other beauty retailers, has many Facebook pages for its brands. If a company wants to obtain and retain customers, it must engage them through in-store demonstrations and tips on how to apply the products or through a long-form show on television that shows the before-and-after results of a product and, nowadays, this interaction is increasingly happening online, in social communities and blogs. The author finishes the article stating that “it is the tech-savvy generation that is now coming to the age of purchasing power”. Consequently, to reach this target, marketers have to launch campaigns on numerous digital platforms and also have to amuse and engage with the customer.

According to Blood (2002) and Herring *et al.* (2005), blog content can either be produced by a single writer or be created from a diversity of sources. In both cases blogs work as a mass communication medium since the content provided is distributed to a large audience (Hoffman & Novak, 1996).

Bickart *et al.* (2012) also discussed blogs as a new type of media in their article “How to Persuade 100,000 Friends? Understanding Blogs as One-to-One Mass Media”. The authors start by defending that “blogs are, by definition, a form of broadcast media in which a blogger shares his or her views with a large audience”. Then, they state that bloggers can use two key communication strategies in order to make their messages more effective and persuasive: illusion of relationship and ambiguity in commercial interests. Illusion of relationship allows bloggers to move readers’ perceptions of the blog away from a mass audience and toward a one-to-one-audience, consequently generating a sensation of familiarity and personalized relationship between bloggers and their readers. In turn, ambiguity in commercial interests enables bloggers to deemphasize the existence of commercial interests by occulting the bloggers’ commercial motivations behind the communication. The implementation of the first strategy leads to an increased level of trust and improved quality of the blogger-reader relationship. The implementation of the second strategy leads to a sensation of kindness and care and intensifies readers’ trust towards the blogger.

Colliander and Dahlén (2011) specifically studied and compared the effects of brand advertising in social and “traditional” digital media within their article “Following the Fashionable Friend: The Power of Social Media – Weighing Publicity Effectiveness Of Blogs versus Online Magazines”. The authors started by stating that “blogs have become highly fashionable among writers, readers, and marketers” and that “influential bloggers who reach millions of readers are becoming online stars themselves”. Nowadays, as a complement to the traditional advertising in the daily and business press, companies are increasingly embracing blogging and other forms of social media engagement. Blogs and magazines are in competition since they appeal to the same audiences and advertisers. By placing the same brand advertising in seven popular blogs and seven popular online magazines and, then, by analyzing the correspondent consumer reactions, the authors concluded that blogs can be defined as “fashionable friends”, have higher advertising effectiveness and generate improved brand attitudes and higher purchase intentions.

2.6.3. Blog advertising

Blog marketing was defined by Corcoran *et al.* (2006) as “the use of weblogs to promote a brand, company, product or service, event or some other initiative”. According to Wright (2005), blogs have been pointed as a communication and marketing tool to connect with Internet users and customers all over the world and marketers have assumed blog advertising as a new mean for brands to obtain awareness, visibility and attention. According to Deighton and Kornfeld (2007), blogs are part of a “digital interactive transformation in marketing”.

Yang (2011) conducted a study in order to understand the effects of social influence on consumer’s use of blog advertising. The author was able to conclude that the stronger the social influence, the higher the probability that consumers will use blog advertising. The author specified that “consumers are more likely to read blog advertising sent from someone who has a strong social tie (either through common interests or kinship)”. Additionally, the results showed that Internet and blogging experience positively influence the consumer’s use of blog advertising, meaning that the more experience the consumer has in those fields, the more likely it is for him to use blog advertising. Finally, Yang stated that “the more credible and favorable consumers perceive blog advertising to be, the more likely they will use the technology”.

Regarding the advantages of blog marketing, Corcoran *et al.* (2006) pointed the following: viral potential, quantifiable results, adding human faces, credibility and interactivity into marketing. “Blogs have the potential to change the competitive landscape and companies who understand the impact of such new technologies are likely to dominate the industry and the future marketplace” (Mutum & Wang, 2011).

3. THE INTERNET AND BLOGS

3.1. THE STATUS OF THE INTERNET IN THE WORLD AND IN PORTUGAL

According to Miniwatts Marketing Group (2016), the total world population on June 30, 2016 is around 7.3 billion people, of which around 3.6 billion are Internet users. This data implies that, at this date, almost a half (49.2%) of the total world population uses the Internet. Specifically, other statistics from this platform show that in the regions of Europe, Latin America, Middle East, North America and Australia more than 50% of the total population uses the Internet, reaching proportions of internet usage of 73.9%, 61.5%, 53.7%, 89% and 73.3% respectively. From the data available in this platform, it is also worth noting the exponential growth of the Internet users from 2000 to 2016, which reached around 900%.

Specifically regarding the Internet usage in Portugal, INE (*Instituto Nacional de Estatística*) conducted a survey on the use of information and communication technologies by families and published the results in November 2015. The results of this 2015 edition showed that 70% of the Portuguese families have Internet access at home. Specifically, in 2015, 7 out of 10 people, aged between 16 and 74 years-old, were connected to the Internet. The usage of computers and the Internet is more frequent for people up to 44 years-old, for men and for those who completed high school or a higher degree. Additionally, in 2015, 70% of the Internet users in Portugal participated in social networks and two thirds accessed to it through their phones or smartphones. Finally, it is worth noting that, in the last 5 years, the Internet usage in Portugal increased around 18 percentage points for the population aged between 16 and 74 years-old.

3.2. THE EVOLUTION AND GROWING IMPACT OF BLOGS

“Blogs emerged in the late 1990’s as a technology that allows internet users to share information” (Yang, 2011). The blogging phenomenon started in the USA and, at that time, individuals required sufficiently solid programming abilities to build and maintain a blog but, with the evolution of time and subsequent availability of inexpensive and free software to support the practice, blogging expanded quickly (Kobayashi, 2011). Technorati Media reported, in March 2005, that there were, at that time, 7.8 million blogs and 937 million links in the blogosphere (Sifry, 2005). Additionally, it reported that the blogosphere was currently doubling its size every 5 months, with a number of new blogs created everyday of around 30.000 – 40.000. According to the most recent Digital Influence Report from Technorati Media, which was disclosed in 2013, brands are using digital media to share their message and, specifically, around 30% of the brands surveyed stated that they have a presence on blogs. Additionally, the report indicates that 65% of brands participate in influencer-based marketing, which comprises blogs and that many consumers are currently relying on blogs before making a purchase. Specifically, blogs proved to be the third-most influential digital source with regard to consumers’ purchasing decision and the fifth-most trustworthy source for information on the internet. Finally, the results of the report also indicate blogs as one of the most influential mediums, presenting high popularity, influence and sense of trust among consumers.

3.3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRANDS AND BLOGS

“In traditional media, the flow of information is unidirectional, but blogs have established a new paradigm of interactivity that some businesses have made profitable use of” (Chiang & Hsieh, 2011). According to Haygood & Imfeld, (2006), with the significant growth and

increased usage of blogs, marketers and advertisers started to give more attention to the blogosphere and, specially, to the opportunities that it offers for their businesses. Specifically, these authors stated that blogs offer an exclusive opportunity for brands to target audiences who are interested in a particular topic and who are probably actively involved in that topic. Additionally, they pointed that advertising on blogs offers the opportunity to match product with high potential buyers and, consequently, to achieve a high degree of content and message cooperation and that some blogs have a broad advertising structure, offering a variety of placement choices, innovative opportunities and a set of demographic and visitor usage statistics.

The ability of blogs to influence what will or will not be a fashion trend, turned them into viable advertising alternatives for brands (Silveira, 2016). The 2013 Digital Influence Report, from Technorati Media, reported that 64% of influencers obtain revenue from blogging. The majority of bloggers reported the revenue was a result of relationships with brands, specifically of banner advertising (61%), text ads (51%), affiliate programs (41%), brand-sponsored content (24%) and brand-sponsored product reviews (19%). Most bloggers (70%) indicated to receive around 10 opportunities per week to work with brands and the main factors that lead to relationships between brands and blogs are: the blogger's affinity to the brand (68%), the access that the blogger has to an audience the brand desires to reach (61%), the campaign type (61%) and the category of the product being presented (60%).

4. ANALYSIS MODEL AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

4.1. ANALYSIS MODEL

As it was previously referred in the literature review, we have witnessed an increase in the number and variety of options available for brands to communicate. Specifically, the Internet presented new, exciting and effective opportunities for companies to reach and influence consumers and, consequently, it has become essential in media and communication. Nowadays, companies can communicate in social networks such as blogs. This study will focus, specifically, on blogs as a new tool of the communication mix of companies.

Nowadays, several consumers wait for the opinions of other consumers before making a buying decision and strongly rely on recommendations both from people they know and from people with similar experiences and tastes. Specifically, blogs are social networks that play a crucial role in the transmission of information amongst consumers. Blogs are an example of user-generated media that allow marketers and consumers to communicate their ideas on products

and/or brands. Nowadays, the amount of blogs that address product reviews is extremely high. It has been proved that marketers benefit significantly if they include blogs in their marketing communication programs. It was also possible to conclude that the increase of blog use by consumers will be a reality in the future and that blogs, as an advertising medium, have an unlimited potential not only for marketers but also to consumers.

Blogs are, currently, one of the most powerful platforms to encourage a buying decision. They are characterized as a form of CGM, which consumers see as more reliable than other advertising media. Marketers are complementing and, in some cases substituting, traditional advertising for blogging and other forms of social media engagement. They perceive blog advertising as a new mean for brands to obtain awareness, visibility and attention.

This study aims to investigate if blogs are an independent variable in the communication mix of brands nowadays and also the perception of blogs as a new marketing communication tool for the three stakeholder groups: bloggers, consumers and brands. Specifically, with regard to bloggers, it was intended to understand, among other things, if they consider their blogs as efficient means of communication for brands, if they consider themselves as “influencers” and, therefore, able to influence the buying decision of their readers and, finally, if they consider that blogs, given their importance nowadays, should be an independent variable in the communication mix of brands. In what concerns to consumers, the objective was to understand, among other things, if they use blogs and if that usage is dependent on their demographic characterization, if they recognize blogs as means of advertising and communication, if they use blogs when searching for information prior to a purchase and, finally, if they consider bloggers as “opinion leaders” and, consequently, trust in their recommendations. Finally, regarding brands, it was intended to understand, among other things, if they had already used blogs as a communication tool and often they use it nowadays and if blogs are, in fact, an independent variable in their marketing communication. In case this was not proved, the objective was to understand in which variables of the communication mix blogs are included.

4.2.RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis testing is a method of statistical inference. According to Maroco (2007), the statistical inference process is only valid when the samples studied are representative of the theoretical population in study. Since all the samples in this study (bloggers, brands and consumers) are non-random and, therefore, may or may not be representative of the population in study, statistical inference may not be valid. However, it is statistical acceptable to perform

statistical inference on non-random samples only if the number of elements of the sample is considerably high, when compared to the total theoretical population, and if the results are not generalized for the population. Therefore, hypothesis testing is only suitable to be performed for the consumers' sample and the formulated hypotheses are the following:

H1 – The probability of a consumer being a blog reader is dependent on his socio-demographic characterization.

H2 – The frequency with which a consumer visits blogs is directly related with the type of blogs that he visits.

H3 – The frequency with which a consumer uses information obtained in blogs before making a purchase decision is related to the fact that he recognizes bloggers as opinion leaders.

H4 – The recognition by a consumer that blogs are a mean of advertising is related with the fact that he detects the presence of advertising in the blogs he visits

5. METHODOLOGY

The initial phase of the literature review and the analysis of the sector framed the whole research process, in particular because it provided the basis for the research lines. Thereafter, based on this, it was decided to proceed to a quantitative methodology for collecting the information, which resulted in the application of three different questionnaires to the three groups of stakeholders in analysis in this study (consumers, bloggers and brands).

The choice for the questionnaire is justified by the intention to collect information on a large number of individuals, as well as by the need to process the data collected through a quantitative analysis. The questionnaire is a standardized instrument for collecting information. It presents an order and form of rigid questions and, therefore, can be applied to all individuals in the same way and with the same sequence.

For the three groups of stakeholders studied in this research, the sampling method used was the convenience sampling, given the impossibility to constitute a representative sample of the population. Regarding the group of brands and bloggers, all the individuals were contacted by the researcher (via e-mail and telephone) based on a previous research, which resulted in the collection of several contacts of brands and bloggers. Regarding the group of consumers, the questionnaire was released through Facebook in order to reach as many people as possible.

According to Quivy and Champenhoudt (1995), the observation phase is constituted by three activities. In first place, there is the design of the observation instrument, in second place there is the test of the observation instrument and, finally, in third place there is the data collection.

Based on what was previously stated, in an initial phase the three questionnaires were constructed, with the elaboration of a set of questions able to cover all the selected indicators, formulated with a maximum of clarity and precision. The questions formulated are in general closed, in order to facilitate the statistical analysis and avoid difficulties of interpretation, by using essentially alternative answers or Likert Type Scales.

In a second phase, the pre-tests of the questionnaires were conducted from a restricted set of respondents, who included university professors and students of Marketing and Statistics. The objective of this phase was not only to evaluate the clarity and accuracy of the selected questions but also its relevance to the present and study. At the end, after the necessary adjustments were carried out, the final versions of the questionnaires (Annexes 1, 2 and 3) were settled, in order to reach the objectives previously defined.

Finally, in the third stage, the data collection was conducted, with the application of the questionnaires to the respondents included in the respective sample. The questionnaires were constructed using the forms of Google Docs (<https://docs.google.com/>) and the data collection took place between September 23rd and October 3rd, 2016.

After the conclusion of the observation phase, the processing and analysis of the collected data was conducted. Firstly, an individual analysis of the questionnaires was performed in order to identify and exclude questionnaires with problems, reserving the statistical treatment only for investigations considered valid. Then, the answers were codified and inserted into a database, which, with the use of the statistical analysis software IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0, allowed to perform a descriptive analysis of the answers and to test the research hypotheses. The results and conclusions that have been reached will be presented in the following chapters.

Finally, it is relevant to clarify that this investigation project addresses communication in general and, consequently, all of its tools and not only advertising. However, the term communication was only widely used in the brands' questionnaire. In the bloggers' and consumers' questionnaires, the term widely used was advertising because it was assumed that these groups of individuals might not be familiarized with the term communication, which, consequently, could skew the results. The terms are then used as equivalent only in this context.

6. RESULTS ANALYSIS

In this section, the results analysis for the three samples of this study (bloggers, brands and consumers) are presented.

6.1. RESULTS ANALYSIS – BLOGGERS

Once the bloggers' sample is a convenience sample and the number of individuals that constitute the sample is not that high (22), the most appropriate results analysis to be performed is a descriptive analysis, which will be presented after the Socio-demographic characterization of the sample.

6.1.1. Socio-demographic characterization of the sample

The Bloggers' sample is constituted by 22 individuals, with a higher prevalence of female individuals (81.8%). With regard to the age distribution (Table 1), half of the individuals are aged between 35 and 44 years old (50%). The next age group with higher incidence lies between 25 and 34 years old (36.4%) and these two groups together represent over 80% of the sample.

AGE GROUP	N	%
16-24 years old	3	13.6%
25-34 years old	8	36.4%
35-44 years old	11	50%

Source: Own

Table 1 – Bloggers' sample distribution by age group

In what concerns to academic qualifications (table 2), more than half of the respondents have qualifications at the undergraduate level (54.5%) and around 41% have a higher level of education, specifically postgraduate studies (18.2%), master's degree (18.2%) and doctoral degree (4.5%). The remaining 4.5% have qualifications at high school level.

ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS	N	%
High school	1	4.5%
Graduation	12	54.5%
Postgraduate studies	4	18.2%
Master's degree	4	18.2%
Doctoral Degree	1	4.5%

Source: Own

Table 2 – Bloggers' sample distribution by academic qualifications

With regard to the current occupation (table 3), the majority of the respondents works for others (36.4%) or are self-employed (31.8%). The remaining are entrepreneurs (18.2%) and students (13.6%).

OCCUPATION	N	%
Student	3	13.6%
Self-employed	7	31.8%
Works for others	8	36.4%
Entrepreneur	4	18.2%

Source: Own

Table 3 – Bloggers' sample distribution by occupation

6.1.2. Blogs' antiquity and bloggers' perceptions about being influencers

In one of the first questions of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to indicate how long they have their blogs. With the analysis of the responses, it was possible to conclude that the majority of the bloggers that constitute the sample have their blogs for quite some time (Table 4), specifically in between 6 to 8 years (31.8%).

BLOG ANTIQUITY	N	%
1 < 2 Years	4	18.2%
2 < 4 Years	4	18.2%
4 < 6 Years	3	13.6%
6 < 8 Years	7	31.8%
8 < 10 Years	2	9.1%
>10 Years	2	9.1%

Source: Own

Table 4 - Bloggers' sample distribution by blog antiquity

In order to understand the bloggers’ perceptions regarding their ability to influence the buying decision of their readers, the respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement with the following sentence: “I consider myself an influencer and, consequently, able to influence the buying decision of the readers of my blog”. With the results analysis (Table 5), it was possible to conclude that the majority of the respondents (54.6%) agreed (36.4%) or totally agreed with the sentence (18.2%) and, therefore, consider themselves as able to influence the buying decision of their readers. A significant number of respondents (36.4%) showed to be neutral about the statement, indicating that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

BLOGGERS PERCEPTIONS ABOUT BEING INFLUENCERS	N	%
Totally disagree	2	9.1%
Neither agree nor disagree	8	36.4%
Agree	8	36.4%
Totally agree	4	18.2%

Source: Own

Table 5 - Bloggers' sample distribution by perceptions about being influencers

6.1.3. Bloggers experience with blog advertising

In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to indicate if they have already have advertising in their blogs and all answered positively. Then, they were asked to indicate how often they have advertising on their blogs (table 6), wherein the majority indicated to have it very frequently (33.3%). This results show that, at least in this sample of blogs, blog advertising is very common.

FREQUENCY OF BLOG ADVERTISING	N	%
Very sporadically	3	14.3%
Sporadically	3	14.3%
Moderate	4	19%
Frequently	4	19%
Very Frequently	7	33.3%

Source: Own

Table 6 - Bloggers' sample distribution by frequency of blog advertising

The respondents were also asked to point out the percentage of advertising content that their blogs have. The results analysis (table 7) indicates that the majority of the bloggers (27.3%) have in between 30% to 40% of advertising content in their blogs, which is still a considerable percentage. The results analysis also pointed that 22.7% of the respondents have in between 20% to 30% of advertising content and 18.2% have in between 0% and 10%. It is, then, possible to conclude that, although blog advertising is common among these bloggers (as it was proved previously), the advertising content in general does not exceed 50% of the total of blog content.

PERCENTAGE OF ADVERTISING CONTENT	N	%
0%<10%	4	18.2%
10%<20%	3	13.6%
20%<30%	5	22.7%
30%<40%	6	27.3%
50%<60%	3	13.6%
70%<80%	1	4.5%

Source: Own

Table 7 - Bloggers' sample distribution by percentage of advertising content

In order to understand which types of brands are most advertised in these blogs, there was a question in the questionnaire that asked respondents to indicate exactly that. The results analysis (table 8) indicate that the most advertised are brands of clothing, shoes and accessories (77.3%), cosmetics (68.2%) and restaurants (59.1%).

MOST ADVERTISED BRANDS	N	%
Cosmetics	15	68.2%
Hotels	10	45.5%
Clothing, shoes and accessories	17	77.3%
Cars	6	27.3%
Jewelry	7	31.8%
Watches	10	45.5%
Technology	8	36.4%
Restaurants	13	59.1%
Decoration	8	36.4%
Others	7	31.8%

Source: Own

Table 8 - Bloggers' sample distribution by most advertised brands

With the objective to realize if, in general, the editorial content that results from a partnership with a brand is proposed by the brand, the respondents were asked about it. With the results analysis, it was possible to conclude that, with regard to the majority of these bloggers (40.9%), the situation is balanced, sometimes the editorial content is proposed by the brand and other times is proposed by the blogger (or his agency). With regard to the remaining respondents, 31.8% indicated that, in general, the editorial content is proposed by them and 27.3% indicated that it is proposed by the brand.

In order to realize if bloggers advertise all kinds of brands in their blogs or, otherwise, if they select only the ones whom they identify themselves, we asked the respondents about it. According to the results analysis, an overwhelming majority of the bloggers (90.9%) indicated that they only advertise brands whom they identify themselves. Only 9.1% of the respondents indicated that advertise even brands whom they do not identify themselves. The researcher considers that these results are expected to impact positively the credibility of the recommendations of these bloggers (which will be analyzed further, in the consumers' results analysis) and, consequently, their ability as influencers.

6.1.4. Bloggers' perceptions about blog advertising

In one of the last questions of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following sentence: "my blog is an efficient mean of communication for brands". The results (table 9) show that all bloggers agreed (45.5%) or

totally agreed (54.5%) with the sentence. Consequently, we can assume that these bloggers are totally aware that their blogs are a very powerful platform for brands to communicate their products.

BLOGGERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR BLOGS AS EFFICIENT MEANS OF COMMUNICATION		
	N	%
Agree	10	45.5%
Totally Agree	12	54.5%

Source: Own

Table 9 - Bloggers' sample distribution by perception of blogs as efficient means of communication

In the last question of the questionnaire, the respondents were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with a sentence, the following: “given the relevance that communication in blogs has nowadays, blogs must be presented as an independent variable in the communication mix of brands, being, therefore, at the same level as direct marketing and the remaining variables”. According to the results analysis, the majority of the bloggers (63.6%) totally agree that blogs must be presented as an independent variable in the communication mix of brands, given their relevance nowadays. From the remaining respondents, 27.3% of the respondents indicated to agree with the sentence and 9.1% indicated to neither agree nor disagree with the sentence.

6.2. RESULTS ANALYSIS – BRANDS

The socio-demographic characterization only makes sense to be performed for the bloggers’ and consumers’ samples since, despite the fact that the questionnaires of the brands have been answered by individual employees of the brands, each response represents a brand and not an individual. Hereupon, for the brands’ sample, it will be presented a characterization by activity sector.

6.2.1. Brands’ characterization by activity sector

In the first question of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to indicate the activity sector of the brands they represent. The results analysis (table 10) shows that the sample is mainly constituted by communication agencies (77.8%). The remaining brands of the sample (22.2%) are inserted in the technology and games sector. The fact that the sample is mainly constituted by communication agencies enriches the data since these companies make communication plans for many companies.

BRANDS' ACTIVITY SECTOR	N	%
Communication agencies	7	77.8%
Technology and games	2	22.2%

Source: Own

Table 10 - Brands' sample distribution by activity sector

6.2.2. Brands' experience with communication in blogs

The second question of the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate if they had already used communication in blogs as a marketing tool and all the respondents (100%) asked positively.

Then, respondents had to indicate how long they used communication in blogs as a marketing tool for the first time. The results analysis (table 11) shows that the majority of the companies (44.4%) used it for the first time for more than 5 years. It is, then, possible to conclude that, at least for the majority of these companies, the use of blogs as a communication tool it is not just a phenomenon of the last couple of years.

FIRST TIME USING COMMUNICATION IN BLOGS	N	%
< 1 Year	2	22.2%
1 < 2 Years	1	11.1%
2 < 3 Years	1	11.1%
4 < 5 Years	1	11.1%
> 5 Years	4	44.4%

Source: Own

Table 11 - Brands' sample distribution by first time using blogs

In order to realize how often these brands resort to communication in blogs, we asked the respondents to indicate exactly that in the questionnaire. The results (table 12) show that more than 50% of these brands resort to communication in blogs several times per month (66.7%). It is, then, possible to conclude that for more than half of these brands communication in blogs is a very frequently used resource.

FREQUENCY OF RESORTING TO COMMUNICATION IN BLOGS	N	%
Several times per month	6	66.7%
Every 3 months	1	11.1%
Every 6 months	1	11.1%
Other	1	11.1%

Source: Own

Table 12 - Brands' sample distribution by frequency of resorting to communication in blogs

With the objective to realize if, for these brands, the use of communication in blogs has proved to be advantageous, there was a question about it in the questionnaire. More than half of the respondents (66.7%) indicated that it has proved to be advantageous, 22.2% indicated that it has neither proved to be advantageous nor disadvantageous and 11.1% indicated that it has proved to be very advantageous.

Next, respondents were asked to indicate the degree of impact that communication in blogs has in revenue. The results (table 13) show that the majority of the respondents (44.4%) considers that communication in blogs has a high impact in revenue.

IMPACT IN REVENUE OF COMMUNICATION IN BLOGS	N	%
Low impact	2	22.2%
Moderate impact	2	22.2%
High impact	4	44.4%
Very High impact	1	11.1%

Source: Own

Table 13 - Brands' sample distribution on impact that communication in blogs has in revenue

Additionally, respondents were asked concerning the impact that communication in blogs has in the immediate feedback received from consumers. The majority of the respondents (44.4%) indicated that communication in blogs has a high impact in the immediate feedback received from consumers. From the remaining respondents, 33.3% indicated that it has a moderate impact and the remaining 22.2% are divided equally between the respondents that indicated a low impact and a very high impact. With these results it is possible to conclude that, at least for the majority of these brands, blogs are platforms that allow them to increase potentially the immediate feedback received from consumers, regarding the brand and its products.

In order to understand the criteria for brands to choose the blogs in which to communicate, we asked the respondents to point, among a set of possibilities, the factors that they take in consideration when choosing a blog to communicate. The results (table 14) show that the factors that weight more for these brands are the profile of the blog's readers (77.8%), the type of product to be communicated (77.8%), the number of daily views of the blog (66.7%) and the diversity of communication options available, associated to the blog, namely Instagram and Facebook for example (55.6%).

CRITERIA FOR CHOOSING A BLOG TO COMMUNICATE	N	%
Profile of the blog's readers	7	77.8%
Number of daily views of the blog	6	66.7%
Diversity of communication options available, associated to the blog (Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, etc.)	5	55.6%
Experience of the blogger in partnerships with brands	2	22.2%
Type of the product being communicated	7	77.8%
Other	3	33.3%

Source: Own

Table 14 - Brands' sample distribution by criteria for choosing a blog to communicate

Respondents were also asked concerning what their packages of communication in blogs usually include. The results analysis indicates that, mostly, these packages include posts written by the blogger, in partnership with the brand (77.8%) and posts written entirely by the blogger, with a review of a product (77.8%). The option "banner ads" registered 22.2% of responses and the option "other" registered 11.1%.

With the objective to understand the frequency with which communication in blogs includes communication in other platforms, associated with the blog, such as Instagram and Facebook, respondents were asked about it. The results (table 15) show that, for more than half of these brands (55.6%), communication in blogs always includes communication in other platforms associated with it, such as Instagram and Facebook. Nowadays the majority of bloggers have Facebook and Instagram accounts, associated to the blog, that are followed by many people so it may be very profitable for brands to also include them in the package of communication in blogs. These results are aligned with previously presented results that indicated that the diversity of communication options available, associated to the blog, is one of the factors that weighs more for brands when choosing a blog in which to communicate.

FREQUENCY WITH WHICH COMMUNICATION IN BLOGS INCLUDES OTHER PLATFORMS	N	%
Never	1	11.1%
Sometimes	1	11.1%
Several times	2	22.2%
Always	5	55.6%

Source Own

Table 15 - Brands' sample distribution by frequency with which communication in blogs includes other platforms

In order to understand if positioning is the only reason why brands resort to communication in blogs or if it is just one of the reasons, the respondents were asked exactly about it. The results indicate that for more than half of these brands (77.8%) it is not the only reason but it is certainly one of the reasons for that. From the remaining respondents, only 11.1% indicated that positioning is the only reason for resorting to communication in blogs and also 11.1% indicated that it is not one of the reasons for resorting to this type of communication.

One of the most important questions of the questionnaire was intended to realize if blogs are presented as an independent variable in the communication mix of these brands. The results show that, for an overwhelming majority of these brands (77.8%), blogs are not presented as an independent variable in the communication mix. Hereupon, these respondents were asked to indicate the variable of the communication mix in which blogs are included and 57.1% indicated public relations and the remaining 42.9% indicated advertising. These results show that, despite the relevance that communication in blogs has for these brands, that is still not enough for blogs to be presented as an independent variable in their communication mix. Additionally, these also may indicate that communication in blogs can include several types of communication such as, specifically, advertising and public relations and, therefore, it is more appropriate to not present it as an independent variable. On the other hand, the respondents that indicated that blogs are an independent variable in their communication mix were asked to indicate, then, if communication in blogs is positioned at the same level as communication in other platforms such as Youtube and Facebook and 50% indicated that communication in blogs has less relevance, 25% said that it is positioned at the same level and also 25% said that communication in blogs has more relevance. These respondents were also asked to indicate if the reason why blogs are presented as an independent variable is because they are efficient means of communication and all the respondents answered positively.

In the last question of the questionnaire, respondents had to indicate their level of agreement with the following sentence: “I see bloggers as influencers, which means as individuals that have the power to affect the buying decision of others due to their (real or apparent) authority, knowledge, position or relation”. More than half of the respondents (55.6%) indicated to agree with the sentence, 33.3% said that they neither agree nor disagree and 11.1% indicated that they totally agree.

6.3. RESULTS ANALYSIS – CONSUMERS

6.3.1. Socio-demographic characterization of the sample

The consumers’ sample is constituted by 200 individuals, with the majority being female (76%). Regarding the age distribution (table 16), more than half of the respondents are aged between 16 and 24 years old (52.5%). The next age groups with higher incidence are between 25 and 34 years old (24%) and between 35 and 44 years old (12.5%). These three age groups together represent 89% of the sample.

AGE GROUP	N	%
16-24 years old	105	52.5%
25-34 years old	48	24%
35-44 years old	25	12.5%
45-54 years old	17	8.5%
55-64 years old	2	1%
65 years old or more	3	1.5%

Source: Own

Table 16 – Consumers’ sample distribution by age group

With respect to the residence district, the majority of the respondents are resident in Lisbon (53%) and *Setúbal* (31.5%).

Regarding academic qualifications (table 17), the higher incidences are verified at the level of graduation (37.5%), master’s degree (25%) and high school (23.5%). The remaining respondents have qualifications at the level of postgraduate studies (13%) and basic education (1%).

ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS	N	%
Basic education	2	1%
High School	47	23.5%
Graduation	75	37.5%
Postgraduate studies	26	13%
Master's degree	50	25%

Source: Own

Table 17 - Consumers' distribution by academic qualifications

In what concerns to the current occupation (table 18), more than half of the respondents work for others (60.5%). The next occupations with higher incidence are student (26%), unemployed (6%) and self-employed (4.5%).

OCCUPATION	N	%
Student	52	26%
Unemployed	12	6%
Domestic	2	1%
Self-employed	9	4.5%
Works for others	121	60.5%
Entrepreneur	2	1%
Retired	2	1%

Source: Own

Table 18 - Consumers' sample distribution by occupation

6.3.2. Consumers' experience as blog readers

One of the first questions of the questionnaire asked individuals to indicate if they had already visited a blog. The results showed that almost all respondents had already visited a blog (95.5%) and only a minority hadn't (4.5%). The respondents that answered positively were redirected to a set of questions, whose results will be analyzed next.

In order to realize the frequency in which these consumers visit blogs, they were asked to indicate it. However, as it is possible to see in table 19, the distribution of the sample regarding this question presents a wide dispersion, making it impossible to draw clear conclusions.

FREQUENCY OF BLOG VISITS	N	%
Very sporadically	38	19.9%
Sporadically	46	24.1%
Moderate	41	21.5%
Frequently	44	23%
Very frequently	22	11.5%

Source: Own

Table 19 - Consumers' sample distribution by frequency of blog visits

With the aim to realize the motivations that drive these consumers to visit blogs, the questionnaire included a question about it. The results (table 20) show that the motives that most drive these individuals to visit blogs are the interest for the editorial content (67.2%), the intent to obtain information about brands and/or products (39.7%), the intent to obtain information about current issues (39.2%) and pure pleasure (36%).

MOTIVATIONS FOR VISITING BLOGS	N	%
Interest for the editorial content	127	67.2%
Identification with the blogger	50	26.5%
Obtaining information about current issues	74	39.2%
Obtaining information about brands and/or products	75	39.7%
Obtaining information about fashion trends	52	27.5%
Pure pleasure	68	36%

Source: Own

Table 20 - Consumers' sample distribution by motivations for visiting blogs

Consumers were also questioned regarding the type of blogs that they visit. Results (table 21) show that the most visited type of blogs are lifestyle (54%), followed by fashion and beauty (43.9%), entertainment (42.3%) and cuisine (41.8%).

MOST VISITED TYPE OF BLOGS	N	%
Lifestyle	102	54%
Politics, economics and business	37	19.6%
Innovation and Technology	44	23.3%
Entertainment	80	42.3%
Fashion and beauty	83	43.5%
Personality	33	17.5%
Cuisine	79	41.8%
Family	37	19.6%
Sports	43	22.8%
Other	7	3.7%

Source: Own

Table 21 - Consumers' sample distribution by most visited type of blogs

In order to understand if consumers see bloggers as opinion leaders and, consequently, trust in their recommendations, they were asked to indicate their level of agreement to a sentence that exposed exactly that. However, as it is possible to observe in table 22, the distribution of the sample regarding this matter presents a wide dispersion and, consequently, it is not possible to take clear conclusions. The majority of the responses is distributed similarly between the options “don’t agree”, “neither agree nor disagree” and “agree”.

PERCEPTIONS OF BLOGGERS AS OPINION LEADERS	N	%
Totally disagree	17	9%
Disagree	49	25.9%
Neither agree nor disagree	57	30.2%
Agree	58	30.7%
Totally agree	8	4.2%

Source: Own

Table 22 - Consumers' sample distribution by perceptions of bloggers as opinion leaders

In the sequence of the previously presented matter, consumers were also asked to indicate the frequency in which they take into account information obtained in blogs before making a purchase. The results of this question (table 23) are also inconclusive because of the wide dispersion of responses. The majority of the responses is situated similarly between the options “few times”, “moderate” and “several times”.

FREQUENCY OF USE OF BLOG INFORMATION IN PURCHASE DECISION	N	%
Never	26	13.8%
Few times	53	28.2%
Moderate	56	29.8%
Several times	47	25%
Always	6	3.2%

Source: Own

Table 23 - Consumers' sample distribution by frequency of use of blog information in purchase decision

In order to understand if consumers have already identified the presence, even if indirect, of advertising in the blogs they have already visited, they were questioned about it. The results showed that almost all the respondents (94.7%) have already noticed the presence, even if indirect, of advertising in the blogs they have already visited. In the sequence of this question, the respondents that answered positively were questioned if, when faced with a situation where it is advertised by the blogger a brand that doesn't identify with his lifestyle (indicating that it may be just a commercial trade), the credibility of the blogger decreases for them. The majority of the respondents (43.2%) indicated that the credibility of the blogger decreases for them, 37.2% indicated that it doesn't decrease and 19.7% indicated that they were never faced with a situation like this. These results show that almost all these consumers are aware that blog advertising is a reality nowadays and the majority is skeptical regarding what a blogger advertises. Specifically, if a blogger advertises a brand that has nothing to do with his lifestyle, the credibility of that blogger decreases for these consumers.

In the last question of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked about their level of agreement with the following sentence: "blogs are an efficient mean of advertising". The results (table 24), show that the majority of the individuals are in accordance with the sentence (72.5%) and, therefore, consider blogs as an efficient mean of advertising. Specifically, 36% of the respondents indicated to "agree" (36%) or totally agree (36.5%) with the sentence. The majority of consumers are, therefore, aware of the potential of blogs as a mean of communication for brands.

PERCEPTIONS REGARDING BLOGS AS A MEAN OF ADVERTISING	N	%
Totally disagree	3	1.5%
Disagree	9	4.5%
Neither agree nor disagree	43	21.5%
Agree	72	36%
Totally agree	73	36.5%

Source: Own

Table 24 - Consumers' sample distribution by perceptions regarding blogs as a mean of advertising

6.3.3. Research hypotheses

In this section, the results regarding the validation of the research hypotheses, previously formulated, will be presented. It is important to note that, as it was previously referred, the sample is a convenience and not a random sample. Therefore, it is not intended to generalize the hypotheses tests performed to the population. Its relevance in this context is only related with the quantification of the magnitude of the effects encountered.

6.3.3.1. The probability of a consumer being a blog reader is dependent on his socio-demographic characterization (H1)

In order to test H1 and, consequently, evaluate if the probability of a consumer being a blog reader varies according to his socio-demographic characterization, the researcher resorted to Logistic Regression. It was not possible to use Multiple Linear Regression because the dependent variable in study is categorical and, therefore, one of the assumptions of the linear models that defines that residuals must be normally distributed is not assured. Hereupon, the most appropriate way to test this hypothesis was by using a Logit Function.

The Logit Function defined to study H1 is the natural Log of the odds that the categorical variable in study (consumers as blog readers), that represents Y (the dependent variable), equals the category of “yes”, coded with the number 1 (the category “no” was coded with 0). The function is represented in the following way:

$$\ln \left(\frac{P}{1-P} \right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4$$

In the function, P is defined as the probability that Y=1, and the independent variables (X's) represent the variables of socio-demographic characterization, namely X₁ represents the age-

group, X_2 represents the residence district, X_3 represents academic qualifications and X_4 represents current occupation.

As it is possible to observe in the output extracted from IBM SPSS 22.0 in Annex 4 all the p-values are higher than the significance level defined (0.05) in the Omnibus Tests of Models Coefficients and, therefore, the model designed is not statistically significant. Additionally, the Cox & Snell's R^2 value indicates that only 17.4% of the probability of a consumer being a blog reader is explained by the logistic model defined. Finally, the last table presented by IBM SPSS 22.0 ("Variables in the equation") indicated that none of the variables defined as independent in the model (X_1 , X_2 , X_3 and X_4) are statistically significant and, therefore, these variables do not explain the dependent variable (Y). It was possible to conclude this because the p-values presented in the table for each of the independent variables are all higher than the significance level defined (0.05).

Based on the results obtained from IBM SPSS 22.0, which were analyzed above, we reject H_1 and, therefore, conclude that the probability of a consumer being a blog reader is not dependent on his socio-demographic characterization.

6.3.3.2. The frequency with which a consumer visits blogs is directly related with the type of blogs that he visits (H_2)

In order to test H_2 and, consequently, understand if the frequency with which a consumer visits blogs is directly related with the type of blogs that he visits, a non-parametric test, specifically the Chi-square Test to the independence of two categorical variables, was conducted. It is important to note that parametric tests were not suitable for testing this hypothesis since the sample is not normally distributed. The test hypotheses for the Chi-square test to the independence of two categorical variables are define as follows:

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} H_0: \text{There is no relation between the frequency with which a consumer visits blogs} \\ \quad \text{and the type of blogs that he visits} \\ H_1: \text{There is relation between the frequency with which a consumer visits blogs and} \\ \quad \text{the type of blogs that he visits} \end{array} \right.$$

The output obtained from IBM SPSS 22.0 regarding the realization of the test (Annex 5) indicates a p-value for Pearson Chi-Square higher than the significance level defined (0.05) and, therefore, we do not reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and conclude that there is no relation between the frequency with which a consumer visits blogs and the type of blogs that he visits.

6.3.3.3. The frequency with which a consumer uses information obtained in blogs before making a purchase decision is related to the fact that he recognizes bloggers as opinion leaders (H3)

To test H3 and, therefore, realize if the frequency with which a consumer uses information obtained in blogs before making a purchase decision is related to the fact that he recognizes bloggers as opinion leaders, a non-parametric test, specifically the Chi-square Test to the independence of two categorical variables, was conducted. As it occurred with H2, parametric tests were also not suitable for testing this hypothesis since the sample is not normally distributed. The test hypotheses for the Chi-square test to the independence of two categorical variables are define as follows:

$$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} H_0: \text{There is no relation between the frequency with which a consumer uses information} \\ \text{obtained in blogs before making a purchase decision and the fact that he recognizes} \\ \text{bloggers as opinion leaders} \\ H_1: \text{There is relation between the frequency with which a consumer uses information} \\ \text{obtained in blogs before making a purchase decision and the fact that he recognizes} \\ \text{bloggers as opinion leaders} \end{array} \right.$$

The output obtained from IBM SPSS 22.0 regarding the realization of the test (Annex 6) indicates a p-value for Pearson Chi-Square lower than the significance level defined (0.05). Consequently, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and conclude that there is relation between the frequency with which a consumer uses information obtained in blogs before making a purchase decision and the fact that he recognizes bloggers as opinion leaders.

6.3.3.4. The recognition by a consumer that blogs are a mean of advertising is related with the fact that he detects the presence of advertising in the blogs he visits (H4)

To test H4 and, consequently, understand if there is a relation between the recognition by a consumer that blogs are a mean of advertising and the fact that he detects the presence of advertising in the blogs he visits, a non-parametric test was performed, specifically an Independent-Samples Median Test. As it occurred with H2 and H3, parametric tests were also not suitable for testing this hypothesis since the sample is not normally distributed. The test hypotheses for the Independent-Samples Median Test are define as follows:

- H₀: The median of the level of agreement with the sentence "blogs are a mean of advertising" is the same for a consumer that has already noticed the presence of advertising in the blogs he visits and for one that hasn't.
- H₁: The median of the level of agreement with the sentence "blogs are a mean of advertising" is not the same for a consumer that has already noticed the presence of advertising in the blogs he visits and for one that hasn't.

The output obtained from IBM SPSS 22.0 regarding the realization of the test (Annex 7) indicates a p-value for the Independent-Samples Median Test lower than the significance level defined (0.05). Consequently, we reject the null hypothesis (H₀) and conclude that the median of the level of agreement with the sentence “blogs are a mean of advertising” is different for a consumer that has already noticed the presence of advertising in the blogs he visits and for one that hasn’t.

Another output obtained from IBM SPSS 22.0 (Annex 8), indicates that the consumers that have indicated that they have already noticed the presence of advertising in the blogs they visit showed a median level of agreement of 4 (“agree”) with the sentence “blogs are a mean of advertising”. On the other hand, the consumers that have indicated that they have never noticed the presence of advertising in the blogs they visit showed a median level of agreement of 3 (“neither agree nor disagree”) with the sentence.

6.3.3.5. Summary results of hypotheses testing

Table 25, presented below, summarizes the results obtained from the testing of the hypotheses under study.

HYPOTHESIS	RESULT
H1	Rejected
H2	Rejected
H3	Validated
H4	Validated

Source: Own

Table 25 - Summary results of hypotheses testing

7. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS AND MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the main findings of this research as well as its empirical and theoretical contributions. Finally, it presents the limitations faced during the investigations and suggestions for future investigations.

7.1. MAIN CONCLUSIONS

This investigation aimed to investigate if blogs are an independent variable in the communication mix of brands nowadays and also the perception of blogs as a new marketing communication tool for the three stakeholder groups: bloggers, consumers and brands. Specifically, with regard to bloggers, it was intended to understand, among other things, if they consider their blogs as efficient means of communication for brands, if they consider themselves as “influencers” and, therefore, able to influence the buying decision of their readers and, finally, if they consider that blogs, given their importance nowadays, should be an independent variable in the communication mix of brands. In what concerns to consumers, the objective was to understand, among other things, if they use blogs and if that usage is dependent on their demographic characterization, if they recognize blogs as means of advertising and communication, if they use blogs when searching for information prior to a purchase and, finally, if they consider bloggers as “opinion leaders” and, consequently, trust in their recommendations. Finally, regarding brands, it was intended to understand, among other things, if they had already used blogs as a communication tool and often they use it nowadays and if blogs are, in fact, an independent variable in their marketing communication. In case this was not proved, the objective was to understand in which variables of the communication mix blogs are included.

The initial phase of the investigation, specifically the literature review, provided important insights about the theme that framed the all investigation. Marken (2007) pointed that the Internet and Web 2.0 introduced new opportunities for brands to reach out and influence consumers in new, exciting and more effective ways. Isa *et al.* (2015) defended that blogs are social networks that play a crucial role in the transmission of information amongst consumers. According to Morimoto and Trimble (2012), blogs are an example of user-generated media that allow both marketers and consumers to communicate their ideas on products and/or brands. These two authors have also pointed that, nowadays, the amount of blogs that address product reviews and that are available to consumers during their online search is extremely high and

that marketers will benefit significantly if they include blogs in their marketing communication programs. In fact, Colliander and Dahlén (2011) discovered that, nowadays, companies are increasingly embracing blogging and other forms of social media engagement as a complement to the traditional advertising in the daily and business press. According to Wright (2005), marketers have assumed blog advertising as a new mean for brands to obtain awareness, visibility and attention. Regarding the advantages of blog marketing, Corcoran *et al.* (2006) pointed the following: viral potential, quantifiable results, adding human faces, credibility and interactivity into marketing.

Regarding the results obtained from the bloggers' analysis, it is worth nothing that more than half of the bloggers studied consider themselves as influencers and, consequently, able to influence the buying decision of their readers. All the bloggers had already had advertising in their blogs, the majority indicated that, nowadays, have it very frequently and that the percentage of advertising content in their blogs is around 30% to 40%. The most advertised type of brands in the blogs studied are brands of clothing, shoes and accessories, cosmetics and restaurants. Concerning the relationship with brands when it comes to blog advertising, the majority indicated that sometimes the editorial content is proposed by the blogger himself and sometimes it is proposed by the brand. All the bloggers studied consider that their blogs are efficient means of communication for brands and the majority thinks that, given the importance that blogs have nowadays, they should be placed as an independent variable in the communication mix of brands.

In what concerns to the results obtained from the brands' analysis, it is important to state that all the brands studied had already used communication in blogs as a marketing communication tool and the majority had used it for the first time for more than 5 years. More than half of these brands resort to communication in blogs very frequently, specifically several times per month and pointed that this has proved to be advantageous. With regard to the impact in revenue and in the immediate feedback received from consumers, the majority of the brands indicated that it has a high impact on both. When deciding which blogs to use to communicate, the factors that these brands take more in consideration are the following: profile of the blog's readers, type of product to be communicated, number of the daily views of the blog and diversity of communication options available, associated with the blog (e.g., Facebook and Instagram). The packages of communication in blogs of these brands usually include posts written by the blogger, in partnership with the brand and posts written entirely by the blogger, with a review

of the product. Positioning is one of the reasons that leads these brands to resort to this type of communication. Finally, it is important to note that, for an overwhelming majority of the brands studied, blogs are not presented as an independent variable in their communication mix and are, in turn, included in Public Relations and/or in Advertising.

With regard to the results obtained from the consumers' analysis, it is relevant to point that an overwhelming majority of the respondents had already visited blogs and the main motivations that led them to do it were the interest for the editorial content, the intent to obtain information about brands and/or products, the intent to obtain information about current issues and pure pleasure. The type of blogs that these consumers most visit are lifestyle, fashion and beauty, entertainment and cuisine. Additionally, it is important to note that almost all the respondents had already identified the presence, even if indirect, of advertising in the blogs they visit and that the majority recognizes blogs as efficient means of advertising. Specifically from the hypothesis testing, it was possible to conclude that the probability of a consumer being a blog reader is not dependent on his socio-demographic characterization and that there is no relation between the frequency with which a consumer visits blogs and the type of blogs that he visits. In turn, it was also possible to realize that there is relation between the frequency with which a consumer uses information obtained in blogs before making a purchase decision and the fact that he recognizes bloggers as opinion leaders. Finally, results enabled to conclude that a consumer that has already noticed the presence of advertising in the blogs he visits recognizes blogs as a mean of advertising whereas a consumer that hasn't noticed has no opinion about it.

To conclude, it is relevant to point that the research considers that the objectives initial defined for this project of investigation were achieved. The results of the investigation are an important insight for the theme in study and, specifically, to understand the dynamics involved in blogs as a communication tool, from the perspective of the three groups of stakeholders and if blogs are in fact an independent variable in the communication mix of some brands.

7.2. MAIN THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Communication in blogs is a recent topic, which is still taking its first steps both empirically and theoretically. Behind the fact that it is a recent area, it is in constant and rapid evolution, which requires both managers and academics to follow up the news and to be continuously learning. Currently, it seems that managers have adopted a "learn by doing" attitude and, consequently, it seems that practical is in a more advanced stage than theory. Despite the fact

that the theory has already looked into this subject in the recent years, this is a relatively unexplored field at a scientific level, with the information being widely dispersed and frequently difficult to search and access. Hereupon, based on the few theoretical basis, it was necessary to structure the literature review in form of a pyramid and, consequently, presenting first solid theoretical basis on marketing, followed by communication, Internet and the new type of consumer and only after that presenting the theoretical bases specifically on blogs and blog communication. This theoretical framework certainly provides a research basis and an interesting starting point for future researches.

This study addressed the dynamics involved in blogs as a communication tool, from the perspective of the three groups of stakeholders (bloggers, brands and consumers) and the positioning of blogs in the communication mix of brands. It contributes to the enrichment of the scientific bases of this topic but, in the future, it makes sense to embark on more specific approaches in order to deepen some conclusions drawn in this study.

From a management perspective, the managers of today must realize that consumers are increasingly distrusting traditional advertising and that they have nowadays new options to substitute it and reach consumers in more effective ways. Blogs are one of these options. Results of this research project show that the consumers studied are visiting blogs in mass and one of the main motivations that led them to do it is the intent to obtain information about brands and/or products. Additionally, all the brands studied indicated to had already used communication in blogs as a marketing tool, that it had a high impact on revenue and on the immediate feedback received from the consumers and that the decision to resort to this communication option was advantageous.

From an academic perspective, it is beneficial to start including blogs as communication tool that can be incorporated in the communication mix of brands. This would be appropriate because it is recent topic that it is gaining importance in the practical field, with several companies resorting to this type of communication. The teaching of marketing communication must be adjusted to what Deighton and Kornfeld (2007) called “digital interactive transformation in marketing”. Specifically, the results of this research show that the majority of the brands studied do not include blogs as an independent variable in their communication mix and, in turn, include it in public relations and/or in advertising. Hereupon, that is how academics can also introduce it to the academic population.

7.3. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND CONTRIBUTES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The realization of this project was subject to limitations of different kinds, which will be listed next, along with some suggestions for future research.

Since this is a proposed academic project, subject of course to constraints of time and resources, it was necessary to assume some commitments that enabled its realization within the time limits and without compromising its validity in this context.

Communication in blogs is still a relatively recent practice but that is developing rapidly. This theme is, consequently, a relatively new subject of study in the academic context and there was some difficulties in accessing relevant information on the subject, particularly with regard to current scientific articles published in journals of reference.

The fact that the questionnaires used to collect the data have been developed from scratch and not according to a pre-tested and validated model is also a limitation of this research project.

A considerable limitation of this study is the fact that the samples obtained are non-random samples, specifically convenience samples. Consequently, the samples cannot be considered as representatives, which invalidates any generalization of the results to the respective populations. Besides that, it is important to note that the samples show a distribution very different from the respective populations in some attributes that can be important and, therefore, extra care in the in results reading is required. The findings are, then, valid only for the samples studied but may, however, be seen as exploratory clues for future research.

After the construction of the questionnaires, to minimize errors, a pre-test was conducted, which led to the realization of several corrections. Still, after the application of the questionnaires and, in some cases, during the results analysis some situations were detected that will be important to take into consideration in future research:

- It is possible that the concept of “advertising”, assumed here in a broad sense, may not have been clear to all respondents, which may have biased some answers.
- The consumers’ questionnaire was constructed in order to test the hypotheses under study but a later conclusion indicated that not all questions taken from the outset as necessary to proceed with its validation have been actually appropriate in reality.

Despite that, these questions were useful for a broader characterization of the dynamics of blogs as a communication tool.

Finally, with regard specifically to suggestions for future research, with the realization of this research project, the researcher realized that it would be interesting to make a case study with a company that uses blogs as a communication tool and understand the whole dynamics involved in it, including how it is handled and what it includes. Additionally, it would also be interesting to discuss if brands actually know how to deal with this phenomenon or not since it is a relatively recent phenomenon that it is poorly studied from a scientific perspective. Within the last suggestion presented, it would be appropriate to address and study situations in which the resort to communication in blogs didn't prove to be advantageous such as occurred with Samsung and the advertising campaign with the blogger Filipa Xavier (known as "Pêpa").

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9. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 - BLOGGERS FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Master Thesis Questionnaire - Blogs as new tool of the communication mix

Hello, Welcome (a)!

I am a student of ISCTE Management Master and I am currently conducting my master thesis that focuses on communication in blogs, more specifically in blogs as a new tool of the communication mix.

With this questionnaire I ask your help to get it done.

To help me, just answer a few questions (which should not take longer than 10 minutes). All responses are anonymous and will only be used in this study.

In this questionnaire there are no right or wrong answers. To answer, select the option that best matches your positioning.

If you have any questions, would like to obtain more information regarding the questionnaire or the study, or even if you want to be informed of the results of it, just send an email to cslrz@iscte-iul.pt.

Thank you!

***Obrigatório**

1. Age: *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- <15 years old
- 16-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55-64 years old
- 65 years old or more

2. Gender: *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Male
- Female

3. Academic qualifications: *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Basic education
- High School
- Graduation
- Postgraduate studies
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree

4. Occupation: *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Student
- Unemployed
- Domestic
- Self-employed
- Works for others
- Entrepreneur
- Retired

5. How many years have you started your blog? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- < 1 year
- 1 < 2 years
- 2 < 4 years
- 4 < 6 years
- 6 < 8 years
- 8 < 10 years
- > 10 years

6. Indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: "I consider myself as an 'influencer', that is, I am able to influence the purchasing decisions of the readers of my blog." *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Totally disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Totally agree

7. Indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: "on my blog, I am communicating to people who like to dream and, above all, to buy." *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Totally disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Totally agree

8. Have you ever had advertising on your blog? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Yes.
- No.

9. If you have answered yes to question 8, please indicate how often do you have advertising on your blog:

Marcar apenas uma oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very sporadically	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very frequently

10. If you have answered yes to question 8, indicate the percentage of advertising content that your blog has:

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- 0% < 10%
- 10% < 20%
- 20% < 30%
- 30% < 40%
- 50% < 60%
- 60% < 70%
- 70% < 80%
- 80% < 90%
- 90% < 100%

11. If you have answered yes to question 8, indicate the type of brands that you advertise on your blog:

Marcar tudo o que for aplicável.

- Cosmetics
- Hotels
- Clothing, shoes and accessories
- Cars
- Jewelry
- Watches
- Technology
- Restaurants
- Decoration
- Other

12. If you have answered yes to question 8, indicate if the editorial content as a result of a partnership with a brand is generally proposed by the brand.

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Yes, usually the editorial content is proposed by the brand.
- No, usually the editorial content is proposed by me (or my agency)
- The situation is balanced. Sometimes the editorial content is proposed by me (or my agency) and sometimes it is proposed by the brand.

13. If you have answered yes to question 8, please indicate if you advertise on your blog only brands with which you identify.

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Yes, I only advertise on my blog brands with which I identify myself.
- No, I do not only advertise on my blog brands with which I identify myself.

14. It is common for you to get proposals and invitations for satellite business (e.g. collaborations and advertising campaigns) through the blog? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Yes.
- No.

15. Indicate your level of agreement with the statement: "my blog is an effective mean of communication for brands." *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree

16. Indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: "given the importance that communication in blogs currently has, they should be included as an independent variable in the communication mix of companies and, therefore, be at the same level of advertising, direct marketing and other variables". *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Totally disagree Totally agree



ANNEX 2 - BRANDS FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Master Thesis Questionnaire - Blogs as new tool of the communication mix

Hello, Welcome (a)!

I am a student of ISCTE Management Master and I am currently conducting my master thesis that focuses on communication in blogs, more specifically in blogs as a new tool of the communication mix.

With this questionnaire I ask your help to get it done.

To help me, just answer a few questions (which should not take longer than 10 minutes). All responses are anonymous and will only be used in this study.

In this questionnaire there are no right or wrong answers. To answer, select the option that best matches your positioning.

If you have any questions, would like to obtain more information regarding the questionnaire or the study, or even if you want to be informed of the results of it, just send an email to cslrz@iscte-iul.pt.

Thank you!

***Obrigatório**

1. What is the area of activity of your company? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Technology and games
- Communication
- Cosmetics
- Decoration
- Tourism
- Other

2. Have you ever resorted to communication on blogs as a marketing tool? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Yes.
- No.

3. If you have answered yes to question 2, please indicate how long have you resorted for the first time to the communication on blogs as a marketing tool.

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- < 1 year
- 1 < 2 years
- 2 < 3 years
- 3 < 4 years
- 4 < 5 years
- > 5 years

4. If you have answered yes to question 2, please indicate how often do you resort to communication in blogs nowadays.

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Several times per month.
- Once per month.
- Every three months.
- Every six months.
- Once per year.
- Other

5. If you have answered yes to question 2, please indicate to what extent the resort to communication in blogs has proved to be advantageous.

Marcar apenas uma oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very disadvantageous	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very advantageous

6. If you have answered yes to question 2, please indicate, based on your experience, the degree of impact that the influence of bloggers has on sales.

Marcar apenas uma oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very low impact	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very high impact

7. If you have answered yes to question 2, please indicate, based on your experience, the degree of impact that communication on blogs has in the immediate feedback received by the brands from consumers.

Marcar apenas uma oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very low impact	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very high impact

8. If you have answered yes to question 2, please indicate if, in the majority of the times that you resorted to communicating in blogs, the initiative came from your company and not from the blogger (or his agency).

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Yes, in the majority of the times the initiative came from the company.
- No, in the majority of the times the initiative came from the blogger (or his agency).
- The situation is relatively balanced. Sometimes the initiative comes from the company and sometimes it comes from the blogger (or his agency).

9. If you have answered yes to question 2, please indicate the factors that are taken into account when selecting a blog as a means of communication.

Marcar tudo o que for aplicável.

- Profile of the blog's readers.
- Number of daily views of the blog
- Diversity of communication options available, associated with the blog (Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, etc.).
- Blogger's experience in partnerships with brands.
- Type of product being communicated.
- Other

10. If you have answered yes to question 2, please indicate what communication in blogs usually includes.

Marcar tudo o que for aplicável.

- Banner Ads.
- Posts written in partnership with the brand.
- Posts written entirely by the blogger, with a review of the product.
- Other

11. If you have answered yes to question 2, please indicate the frequency with which the investment package in a blog also includes communication in platforms like Instagram and Facebook.

Marcar apenas uma oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never includes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Always includes.

12. If you have answered yes to question 2, please indicate if the only reason or one of the reasons why your company uses communication in blogs is the brand's positioning.

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Yes, the only reason is the brand's positioning.
- Yes, one of the reasons is the brand's positioning.
- No, the brand's positioning is not one of the reasons why we resort to communication in blogs.

13. If you have answered yes to question 2, please indicate if, in the communication mix of your company, blogs are established as an independent variable, and is, therefore, at the level of advertising, Public Relations, Direct Marketing, etc.

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Yes, blogs are established as an independent variable.
- No, blogs are not established as an independent variable.

14. If you have answered negatively to question 13, please indicate in which of the following communication mix variables are blogs included in the communication mix of your company:

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Advertising
- Public Relations
- Patronage
- Promotions
- Merchandising
- Sales Force
- Direct Marketing

15. If you have answered yes to question 13, please indicate if, as an independent variable in the communication mix of your company, blogs are positioned at the same level as other platforms, specifically Youtube and Facebook.

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Yes, it is positioned at the same level.
- No, communication in blogs has less relevance.
- No, communication in blogs has more relevance.

16. If you have answered yes to question 13, please indicate if blogs are established as an independent variable in the communication mix because they are an efficient mean of communication.

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Yes, that is the main reason.
- No, that is not the main reason.

17. If you have answered negatively to question 16, please indicate the main reason why blogs are established as an independent variable in the communication mix of your company.
-

18. Please indicate your degree of agreement with the following statement: "I consider bloggers as 'influencers', ie individuals who have the power to affect the purchasing decisions of others due to their (real or apparent) authority, knowledge, position or relationship" *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Totally disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Totally agree

ANNEX 3 - CONSUMERS FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Master Thesis Questionnaire - Blogs as new tool of the communication mix

Hello, Welcome (a)!

I am a student of ISCTE Management Master and I am currently conducting my master thesis that focuses on communication in blogs, more specifically in blogs as a new tool of the communication mix.

With this questionnaire I ask your help to get it done.

To help me, just answer a few questions (which should not take longer than 10 minutes). All responses are anonymous and will only be used in this study.

In this questionnaire there are no right or wrong answers. To answer, select the option that best matches your positioning.

If you have any questions, would like to obtain more information regarding the questionnaire or the study, or even if you want to be informed of the results of it, just send an email to cslrz@iscte-iul.pt.

Thank you!

***Obrigatório**

1. Age: *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Up to 15 years old
- 16-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55-64 years old
- 65 years old or more

2. Gender: *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Male
- Female

3. District of residence: *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Viana do Castelo
- Braga
- Vila Real
- Bragança
- Porto
- Aveiro
- Viseu
- Guarda
- Coimbra
- Castelo Branco
- Leiria
- Lisbon
- Santarém
- Portalegre
- Setúbal
- Évora
- Beja
- Faro
- Other

4. Academic qualifications: *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Basic education
- High school
- Graduation
- Postgraduate studies
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree

5. Occupation: *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Student
- Unemployed
- Domestic
- Self-employed
- Works for others
- Entrepreneur
- Retired

6. Have you ever visited a blog? *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Yes.
 No.

7. In case you have answered yes to question 6, please indicate how often do you visit blogs:

Marcar apenas uma oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very sporadically	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very frequently

8. If you have answered yes to question 6, please state the reasons that make you visit blogs:

Marcar tudo o que for aplicável.

- Interest for the editorial content
 Identification with the blogger
 Obtaining information about current issues
 Obtaining information about brands and/or products
 Obtaining information about fashion trends
 Pure pleasure
 Other

9. If you have answered yes to question 6, indicate the type of blogs that visit:

Marcar tudo o que for aplicável.

- Lifestyle
 Politics, economics and business
 Innovation and Technology
 Entertainment
 Fashion and beauty
 Personality
 Cuisine
 Family
 Sports
 Other

10. If you have answered yes to question 6, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: "I see the bloggers I follow as celebrities."

Marcar apenas uma oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Totally disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Totally agree

11. If you have answered yes to question 6, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: "I see the bloggers I follow as very close people."

Marcar apenas uma oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Totally disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Totally agree

12. If you have answered yes to question 6, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: "I consider bloggers as 'opinion leaders' and therefore trust in their recommendations".

Marcar apenas uma oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Totally disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Totally agree

13. If you have answered yes to question 6, please indicate how often do you take into account information gathered on blogs before making a purchase.

Marcar apenas uma oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Never	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Always

14. If you have answered yes to question 6, indicate if, in the blogs you visit, you have already realized the presence, even if indirect, of advertising.

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Yes, I have already realized the presence, even if indirect, of advertising on the blogs I follow.
- No, I never realized the presence of advertising on the blogs I follow.

15. If you have answered yes to question 14, indicate whether, when faced with a situation where it is advertised by the blogger a brand that does not fit his lifestyle, indicating that it may be just a commercial exchange, the credibility of the blogger decreases for you.

Marcar apenas uma oval.

- Yes, when faced with such a situation, the credibility of the blogger decreases to me.
- No, when faced with such a situation, the credibility of the blogger does not decrease to me.
- I never encountered such a situation.

16. Indicate your level of agreement with the following statement: "Blogs are means of advertising." *

Marcar apenas uma oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Totally disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Totally agree

ANNEX 4 – OUTPUT FROM LOGIT FUNCTION (H1)

Logistic Regression

Case Processing Summary

Unweighted Cases ^a		N	Percent
Selected Cases	Included in Analysis	200	100,0
	Missing Cases	0	,0
	Total	200	100,0
Unselected Cases		0	,0
Total		200	100,0

a. If weight is in effect, see classification table for the total number of cases.

Dependent Variable Encoding

Original Value	Internal Value
Não	0
Sim	1

Categorical Variables Codings

	Frequency	Parameter coding														
		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	
3. Distrito onde vive atualmente:	Beja	1	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
	Braga	1	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
	Bragança	1	,000	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
	Castelo Branco	3	,000	,000	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
	Coimbra	3	,000	,000	,000	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
	Évora	2	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
	Faro	2	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
	Leiria	4	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
	Lisboa	106	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
	Outro	2	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
	Porto	2	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000
	Santarém	3	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	1,000	,000	,000
	Setúbal	63	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	1,000	,000
	Vila Real	4	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	1,000
	Viseu	3	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
	5. Ocupação:	Desempregado(a)	12	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
Doméstico(a)		2	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
Empresário(a)		2	,000	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
Estudante		52	,000	,000	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
Reformado(a)		2	,000	,000	,000	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
Trabalhador(a) independente		9	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
Trabalhador(a) por conta de outrem		121	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
1. Idade:	15-24 anos	105	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
	25-34 anos	48	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
	35-44 anos	25	,000	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
	45-54 anos	17	,000	,000	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
	55-64 anos	2	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
	65 anos ou mais	3	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
4. Habilitações literárias:	Básico	2	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
	Licenciatura	75	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
	Mestrado	50	,000	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
	Pós-graduação	26	,000	,000	,000	,000	1,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	
	Secundário	47	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	

Block 0: Beginning Block

Classification Table^{a,b}

Observed			Predicted		
			6. Já visitou algum blog?		Percentage Correct
			Não	Sim	
Step 0	6. Já visitou algum blog?	Não	0	10	,0
		Sim	0	190	100,0
Overall Percentage					95,0

a. Constant is included in the model.

b. The cut value is ,500

Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 0 Constant	2,944	,324	82,362	1	,000	19,000

BLOGS AS A NEW TOOL OF THE COMMUNICATION MIX

Variables not in the Equation

		Score	df	Sig.
Step 0	Variables			
	@1.Idade	42,642	5	,000
	@1.Idade(1)	1,293	1	,256
	@1.Idade(2)	3,324	1	,068
	@1.Idade(3)	1,504	1	,220
	@1.Idade(4)	,030	1	,861
	@1.Idade(5)	38,384	1	,000
	@2.Sexo	,092	1	,761
	@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te	13,750	14	,469
	@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(1)	,053	1	,818
	@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(2)	,053	1	,818
	@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(3)	,053	1	,818
	@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(4)	,160	1	,689
	@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(5)	,160	1	,689
	@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(6)	,106	1	,744
	@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(7)	8,612	1	,003
	@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(8)	,215	1	,643
	@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(9)	,207	1	,649
	@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(10)	,106	1	,744
	@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(11)	,106	1	,744
	@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(12)	,160	1	,689
	@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(13)	,645	1	,422
	@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(14)	3,437	1	,064
	@4.Habilitaçõesliterárias	4,648	4	,325
	@4.Habilitaçõesliterárias (1)	,106	1	,744
	@4.Habilitaçõesliterárias (2)	,702	1	,402
	@4.Habilitaçõesliterárias (3)	1,263	1	,261
	@4.Habilitaçõesliterárias (4)	2,690	1	,101
	@5.Ocupação	1,720	6	,944
	@5.Ocupação(1)	,672	1	,412
	@5.Ocupação(2)	,106	1	,744
	@5.Ocupação(3)	,106	1	,744
	@5.Ocupação(4)	,088	1	,767
	@5.Ocupação(5)	,106	1	,744
	@5.Ocupação(6)	,741	1	,389
	Overall Statistics	61,027	30	,001

Block 1: Method = Enter

Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficients

		Chi-square	df	Sig.
Step 1	Step	38,167	30	,145
	Block	38,167	30	,145
	Model	38,167	30	,145

Model Summary

Step	-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1	41,239 ^a	,174	,530

a. Estimation terminated at iteration number 20 because maximum iterations has been reached. Final solution cannot be found.

Hosmer and Lemeshow Test

Step	Chi-square	df	Sig.
1	1,964	8	,982

Contingency Table for Hosmer and Lemeshow Test

		6. Já visitou algum blog? = Não		6. Já visitou algum blog? = Sim		Total
		Observed	Expected	Observed	Expected	
Step 1	1	6	6,616	14	13,384	20
	2	2	2,423	19	18,577	21
	3	2	,838	21	22,162	23
	4	0	,123	20	19,877	20
	5	0	,000	20	20,000	20
	6	0	,000	21	21,000	21
	7	0	,000	20	20,000	20
	8	0	,000	18	18,000	18
	9	0	,000	6	6,000	6
	10	0	,000	31	31,000	31

Classification Table^a

Observed			Predicted		Percentage Correct
			6. Já visitou algum blog?		
			Não	Sim	
Step 1	6. Já visitou algum blog?	Não	4	6	40,0
		Sim	0	190	100,0
Overall Percentage					97,0

a. The cutvalue is ,500

BLOGS AS A NEW TOOL OF THE COMMUNICATION MIX

Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a						
@1.Idade			,072	5	1,000	
@1.Idade(1)	-2,720	22296,086	,000	1	1,000	,066
@1.Idade(2)	15,096	22893,020	,000	1	,999	3599979,973
@1.Idade(3)	14,211	23685,178	,000	1	1,000	1485027,647
@1.Idade(4)	-2,211	22296,086	,000	1	1,000	,110
@1.Idade(5)	-58,458	36407,032	,000	1	,999	,000
@2.Sexo	1,071	1,281	,699	1	,403	2,918
@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te			4,853	14	,988	
@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(1)	2,550	45554,733	,000	1	1,000	12,803
@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(2)	-801	46312,477	,000	1	1,000	,449
@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(3)	16,507	46057,979	,000	1	1,000	14751663,88
@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(4)	17,856	30367,702	,000	1	1,000	56860485,83
@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(5)	16,483	31322,936	,000	1	1,000	14407966,33
@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(6)	18,634	34615,600	,000	1	1,000	123725060,3
@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(7)	-4,088	22491,391	,000	1	1,000	,017
@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(8)	18,343	29319,243	,000	1	1,000	92522348,85
@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(9)	-,445	22491,390	,000	1	1,000	,641
@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(10)	18,059	36036,165	,000	1	1,000	69667302,99
@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(11)	-1,274	36082,569	,000	1	1,000	,280
@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(12)	18,181	30155,810	,000	1	1,000	78672379,73
@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(13)	17,628	22939,430	,000	1	,999	45273581,70
@3. Distritoondeviveatualmen te(14)	-4,504	22491,391	,000	1	1,000	,011
@4.Habilitaçõessliterárias			2,444	4	,655	
@4.Habilitaçõessliterárias (1)	17,305	27139,843	,000	1	,999	32772106,39
@4.Habilitaçõessliterárias (2)	-1,187	1,796	,436	1	,509	,305
@4.Habilitaçõessliterárias (3)	,783	2,006	,152	1	,696	2,187
@4.Habilitaçõessliterárias (4)	-1,394	2,029	,472	1	,492	,248
@5.Ocupação			,204	6	1,000	
@5.Ocupação(1)	19,626	10784,571	,000	1	,999	333662569,4
@5.Ocupação(2)	2,069	27997,978	,000	1	1,000	7,920
@5.Ocupação(3)	-,115	26444,959	,000	1	1,000	,891
@5.Ocupação(4)	,413	,916	,204	1	,652	1,512
@5.Ocupação(5)	17,071	24973,752	,000	1	,999	25933040,91
@5.Ocupação(6)	15,810	10307,083	,000	1	,999	7347725,515
Constant	4,765	31669,845	,000	1	1,000	117,373

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: @1.Idade, @2.Sexo, @3.Distritoondeviveatualmente, @4.Habilitaçõessliterárias, @5.Ocupação.

ANNEX 5 – OUTPUT FROM CHI-SQUARE TEST (H2)**Crosstabs****Case Processing Summary**

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
7. No caso de ter respondido afirmativamente à questão 6, indique o grau de frequência com que visita blogs: * 9. No caso de ter respondido afirmativamente à questão 6, indique o tipo de blogs que visita:	188	94,0%	12	6,0%	200	100,0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	432,884 ^a	408	,190
Likelihood Ratio	397,492	408	,636
Linear-by-Linear Association	3,011	1	,083
N of Valid Cases	188		

a. 515 cells (100,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,12.

ANNEX 6 – OUTPUT FROM CHI-SQUARE TEST (H3)

Crosstabs

Case Processing Summary

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
13. No caso de ter respondido afirmativamente à questão 6, indique com que frequência tem em conta informação recolhida em blogs antes de realizar uma compra. * 12. No caso de ter respondido afirmativamente à questão 6, indique o seu grau de concordância com a seguinte afirmação: "considero os bloggers como 'opinion leaders' e, consequentemente, confio nas suas recomendações".	188	94,0%	12	6,0%	200	100,0%

13. No caso de ter respondido afirmativamente à questão 6, indique com que frequência tem em conta informação recolhida em blogs antes de realizar uma compra. * 12. No caso de ter respondido afirmativamente à questão 6, indique o seu grau de concordância com a seguinte afirmação: "considero os bloggers como 'opinion leaders' e, consequentemente, confio nas suas recomendações".

Crosstabulation

Count

		12. No caso de ter respondido afirmativamente à questão 6, indique o seu grau de concordância com a seguinte afirmação: "considero os bloggers como 'opinion leaders' e, consequentemente, confio nas suas recomendações".					Total
		Totally disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Totally agree	
13. No caso de ter respondido afirmativamente à questão 6, indique com que frequência tem em conta informação recolhida em blogs antes de realizar uma compra.	Never	5	10	7	4	0	26
	Few times	7	22	20	4	0	53
	Moderate	5	14	21	14	2	56
	Several times	0	3	8	32	4	47
	Always	0	0	1	3	2	6
Total		17	49	57	57	8	188

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	80,596 ^a	16	,000
Likelihood Ratio	82,857	16	,000
Linear-by-Linear Association	53,194	1	,000
N of Valid Cases	188		

a. 12 cells (48,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,26.

ANNEX 7 – OUTPUT FROM INDEPENDENT-SAMPLES MEDIAN TEST (H4)

Nonparametric Tests

Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.	Decision
1	The medians of 16. Indique o seu grau de concordância com a seguinte afirmação: "Os blogs são um meio de publicidade". are the same across categories of 14. No caso de ter respondido afirmativamente à questão 6, indique se, nos blogs que visita, já se apercebeu da presença, mesmo que indireta, de publicidade..	Independent-Samples Median Test	,027	Reject the null hypothesis.

Asymptotic significances are displayed. The significance level is ,05.

ANNEX 8 – OUTPUT FROM PERCENTILES (H4)

Case Processing Summary

	14. No caso de ter respondido afirmativamente à questão 6, indique se, nos blogs que visita, já se apercebeu da presença, mesmo que indireta, de publicidade.	Cases					
		Valid		Missing		Total	
		N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
16. Indique o seu grau de concordância com a seguinte afirmação: "Os blogs são um meio de publicidade".	Sim, já me apercebi da presença de publicidade, mesmo que indireta, nos blogs que sigo.	179	100,0%	0	0,0%	179	100,0%
	Não, nunca me apercebi da presença de publicidade, mesmo que indireta, nos blogs que sigo.	10	100,0%	0	0,0%	10	100,0%

Percentiles

	14. No caso de ter respondido afirmativamente à questão 6, indique se, nos blogs que visita, já se apercebeu da presença, mesmo que indireta, de publicidade.	Percentiles							
		5	10	25	50	75	90	95	
Weighted Average (Definition 1)	16. Indique o seu grau de concordância com a seguinte afirmação: "Os blogs são um meio de publicidade".	Sim, já me apercebi da presença de publicidade, mesmo que indireta, nos blogs que sigo.	2,00	3,00	3,00	4,00	5,00	5,00	5,00
		Não, nunca me apercebi da presença de publicidade, mesmo que indireta, nos blogs que sigo.	1,00	1,10	2,75	3,00	4,00	4,00	.
Tukey's Hinges	16. Indique o seu grau de concordância com a seguinte afirmação: "Os blogs são um meio de publicidade".	Sim, já me apercebi da presença de publicidade, mesmo que indireta, nos blogs que sigo.			3,50	4,00	5,00		
		Não, nunca me apercebi da presença de publicidade, mesmo que indireta, nos blogs que sigo.			3,00	3,00	4,00		