Hotel Promotion through Social Media:
Hotel Anantara Vilamoura & Algarve Resort

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Abstract

The main objective of the present study is to understand the role of networks in the promotion of the Hotel Anantara Vilamoura & Algarve Resort. In response to the objective research, the following specific objectives were considered: i) to identify social networks used by the hotel; ii) understand the monitoring that the hotel gives to social networks; iii) identify the social networks most used by customers; iv) identify problems and challenges faced by the hotel in the management of its social networks; v) understand how the hotel uses the networks to be more competitive. A qualitative methodology was applied supported by semi-structured interviews with the Hotel Director, the Head of Social Networks, and the Guests, between August and October 2020. The information on the interviews was handled individually through content analysis. It was concluded that the network services are a direct channel between the Hotel and consumers, which facilitates brand exposure and interaction with customers. In this regard, it allows for greater loyalty and to attract new customers.
The results reveal that, when compared to other traditional means of communication, online social networks are a great tool that allows the hotel to publicize its services easily and quickly, in real-time, with great exposure and with reduced costs. The hotel is concerned to use social networks in the best way, with a focus on the current client and the target audience.

Keywords: Hotel Promotion; Social Networks; Social Media; Hotel Anantara Vilamoura & Algarve Resort.

Introduction

With the emergence of the Internet, there was a new reality in the face of marketing rules, since digital marketing is considered a key factor for those who want to prosper and, consequently, many traditional marketing strategies have become obsolete (Kaur, 2017). (Kaur (2017) assumes that the Internet allows its consumers an easy interaction between users and with their favorite brands, thus, there are several opportunities created for a new relationship between the interested parties. The use of social networks has brought several benefits and, with regard mainly to hotels, has significantly transformed the way hotels produce market and deliver products/services and communicate internally and externally with customers. In this sense, there is a need to implement detailed analyzes on the part of hotels to understand what is the most efficient and effective way to take advantage of all potential (Hashim & Fadhil, 2017).

In this way, this research aims to understand the role of social networks in the promotion of Hotel Anantara Vilamoura & Algarve Resort (AVAR). In this context, semi-structured interviews were applied between August and October 2020. The first part of the interview was applied to the director of AVAR, the second part of the interview to the person in charge of social networks, and, finally, the last part to the hotel guests, where had five participants. In total, seven interviews were applied, in person, via Zoom, Skype and WhatsApp, having been recorded and later transcribed, to analyze in detail the information obtained.

To complement the information extracted from the interviews and verify the veracity of the data obtained, AVAR's online presence and behavior were analyzed, through the online platforms Facebook, Instagram, Booking.com, and TripAdvisor.

The article is structured in four more parts: i) a theoretical framework with different themes; ii) the research methodology adopted; iii) a presentation and discussion of the results; iv) a conclusion with the limitations and future lines of investigation.

Theoretical Contextualization

Marketing Digital

Digital marketing is a new scientific area that has seen enormous growth (Magano & Cunha, 2020), consisting of the combination of traditional marketing with the Internet and new technologies (Kaur, 2017). American Marketing Association (2020) states that digital marketing is the use of digital or social channels to promote a brand or reach consumers and can be performed on social networks, search engines, the Internet, mobile devices, or through other channels.

For the success of companies, the relevance of using the appropriate digital marketing tools is particularly critical (Labanauskaitė, Fiore & Stašys, 2020). Chaffey and Smith (2013) present and clarify six advantages of digital marketing: i) speed (faster response for stakeholders); ii) personalization (possibility of reaching new markets through personalization, providing more interactivity and exposure of products and services); iii) quantification (increased ability to measure and collect data); iv) ubiquity (unlimited universal accessibility because there are no geographical and temporal limits); v) user involvement (more user participation); vi) network effect (need to pay attention to the interaction between users, mainly on social networks, since the network effect can help the construction, but also the destruction of a company). Torres (2018) also highlights the cost reduction.

Chaffey and Smith (2013) still highlight disadvantages: i) prejudice (users do not place total trust in technology and methods in the digital environment); ii) power on the consumer side (despite all efforts by companies/managers, the final word always lies with the user and the decision to purchase); iii) maintenance (costs associated with an environment that is constantly adapting, to meet global requirements); iv) globalization (existence of strong global competition). Gomes and Reis (2015) add the delay for the strategy to be conceived, that is, social networks often have the Fan Page format, where users must "follow" or "like" the page, an activity that can consume a lot of time of dedication to the marketing professional who manages the work, as it depends on the client's performance at this stage.

Marketing Digital in Hospitality

Younger generations, such as the millennial generation, have different needs than parents or grandparents, especially in the context of tourism, which drives the adoption of virtual reality in the hotel sector (Zeng, Cao, Lin & Xiao, 2020). What happened in the early 90s, when customers made hotel reservations through traditional means, such as telephone, fax, and travel agencies, changed in the mid-90s. Professionals in the sector and academic researchers began to defend the importance of booking travel products through online platforms, such as hotel booking websites, to improve the quality and revenue of services (Walle, 1996; Weber & Roehl, 1999). In this context, in the mid-late twentieth century, there was a strong consolidation of websites by hotels, as they perceived greater ease and convenience in reaching customers from all over the world. Over the years, the focus of hotel managers has changed: when initially a basic website for the hotel was merely necessary, later it is understood as a determinant to improve it, continuously updating the web technology (Law, 2019). This improvement includes providing personalized customer service and streamlining the booking process. Studies have shown that the presence and immersion provided by virtual reality can have a positive effect on the consumer's experience and pleasure (Gauquier, Brengman, Willems & Kerrebroeck, 2019). Hudson and Thal (2013) state that the relationship between consumers and brands has been significantly affected by digital marketing since virtual reality makes it easier for users to obtain visual information before making a purchase decision. The marketing of hotel establishments can be explored in the digital environment to create new types of services and improve current ones, but mainly to satisfy the needs of guests and seek differentiation in the market (Hudson & Thal, 2013).

Reputation Management

The theme of reputation and respective management, increasingly shows the importance for the success of organizations, being crucial to favor or harm companies (Amigó, Artiles, Gonzalo, Spina, Liu & Corujo, 2010). Reputation is essential due to its ability to influence the way people make decisions (Fombrun & Riel, 2003), being a concept that encompasses the ideas established in the target audience's mind about a company and that brings benefits when managed by effectively, especially in crises that profoundly influence management functions (Gözta, Koker & Yen, 2008). The concept of reputation is still widely discussed among the public relations community, and there is no consensus as to what it is and how it is formed (Gözta et al., 2008). According to Mendes (2013), the

most consensual definition is that of Fombrum and Riel (1997) who define reputation as "a collective representation of an organization's past actions and results, which describes the organization's ability to deliver results valuable to the various stakeholders. " There are three different types of reputation, with Weigelt and Camerer (cit. in Feldman, Bahamonde & Bellido, 2014) exposing: company, product, and corporate culture reputation. The company's reputation can be measured, which reflects the financial situation, but which also includes some notions of social responsibility. The product's reputation is associated with quality, price, service and other similar measures. Cultural reputation is linked to the work environment, that is, how the organization is viewed both internally and externally.

Reputation, when considered good or bad, can lead to success or failure. Fombrun and Riel (2003) claim that we are attracted to a positive reputation. A good reputation is the result of the organization's values, what it delivers to its consumers taking into account all the surroundings, its good actions, its performance, and its good procedures (Griffin, 2014).

However, there are reasons, such as the lack of incorrect information and inappropriate behavior, that induce an organization to lose its reputation, drastically reducing respectability and credibility. The reflection of this reduction can be felt in the financial and moral means that can result in financial losses. In this sense, communication policies constructed with a conscience in a planned way and the effective management of the institutional reputation will allow the anticipation of care and the quick and efficient response to any crisis to be faced (Gözta et al., 2008).

Online Reputation Management

Currently, competition is fierce in any sector of activity and it is up to each company to adopt the best strategy in terms of managing its reputation to survive and even differentiate itself in the market (Gözta et al., 2008). Online Reputation Management (ORM) consists of monitoring the media, detecting relevant content, analyzing what people say about an entity, and, if necessary, interacting with consumers, being an extension of Reputation Management to the digital world (Anderson, 2011). Currently, it is considered crucial for any company to be aware of its digital positioning and be willing to solve the problems that arise to strengthen its image and brand in the online environment. According to Anderson (2011), one of the most intriguing aspects of social media is its potential to mess with markets, establishing consumer buying patterns.

For the hotel industry, ORM in recent years has become one of the most decisive factors in the choice of accommodation, taking into account Online Reviews in the main virtual communities, such as Booking.com and TripAdvisor, since they are considered as one of the main motivators in the process of choosing a hotel. Online Reviews, being a reliable source of information in the eyes of the consumer (Lee, 2009; Phillips, Barnes, Zigan & Schegg, 2016; Sparks, Perkins & Buckley, 2013), can shape a company's reputation (Sparks et al., 2013) and should be seen as a valuable resource capable of fostering continuous development. If positive Online Reviews allow increasing reserves and market share (Rose & Blodgett, 2016), negative Online Reviews lead to damage to reputation and consequently to declines in revenue (Sparks et al., 2013). Whether positive or negative, Online Reviews are "an opportunity for the hotel to start a conversation and create a connection with the guest" (Phillips et al., 2016, p.4).

Research Methodology

For this study, a qualitative methodology was adopted, using semi-structured interviews, to understand in detail the role of social networks for the promotion of Hotel Anantara Vilamoura & Algarve Resort. To respond to the objective of the study, five specific objectives were formulated: O1) to identify the social networks used by the hotel; O2) understand the monitoring that the hotel gives to social networks; O3) identify the social networks most used by customers; O4) identify problems and challenges faced by the hotel in the management of its social networks; O5) understand how the hotel uses social media to be more competitive in the face of competition. To schedule the interview, the person responsible for AVAR's social networks and the Hotel Director was contacted in person, showing availability to collaborate in the investigation. The interviews were subsequently conducted via ZOOM. Guests were contacted through a private message on Facebook, after checking opinions on the AVAR Facebook page, to schedule an interview, online or in person. The contact through a private message on Facebook was due to the hotel's need to preserve the confidentiality and comfort of guests during their stay. Seventeen messages were sent, taking into account guests of Portuguese nationality, where the author introduced herself and made the purpose of the interview known. Five guests made themselves available to collaborate in the study. It was possible to interview in person, and the rest were conducted online, three via Skype and one via WhatsApp, all of which were recorded and transcribed. The respondents' age range varies between 30 and 66 years, with only one male respondent (Guest 2), and the rest female.

The interview guide was structured in 3 parts, with a total of 51 questions. The first part, consisting of 10 questions, concerns the interview conducted with the Director of AVAR, being allowed to perceive the importance of digital marketing as well as the usefulness of social networks. The second part of the interview, consisting of 34 questions, was addressed to the person responsible for AVAR's social networks, with questions related to the management of social networks, namely, the social networks most used by the hotel, how they apply them, what are the objectives that they intend to achieve and what is the inherent utility of using social networks. This part of the interview is divided into three different themes - Social Networks, Online Reviews Websites, and Influencers. Thus, it was possible to comprehensively understand how social networks are used by AVAR and whether all the tools are being used in their breadth. The third part of the interview, consisting of seven questions, was applied to guests, emphasizing the performance of AVAR's social networks at the time of decision-making. The questions in the interview guide were structured considering the answer to each of the specific objectives of the investigation. The interviews were applied between August and October 2020 and in the treatment of the data, the interviews were transcribed and a content analysis was carried out.

To complement the interview and verify the veracity of the data obtained, between January and March 2020, the presence and online behavior of the Hotel Anantara Vilamoura & Algarve Resort were analyzed. The selected online platforms were Facebook, Instagram, Booking.com, and TripAdvisor.

Presentation and Discussion of Results

O1 - Identify the social networks used by the hotel

It was verified that AVAR prefers Facebook and, essentially, Instagram, getting involved in all comments, including Online Reviews Websites, as the director of AVAR argues:

> "(…) To manage our reputation, we respond to all comments, whether negative or positive. In a unique and personalized way. You never cease to reply, especially when negative. We try to transform, whenever possible, this negative situation in our favor, that is, demonstrate our total interest and guarantee improvements in the next visit.

With particular regard to Online Reviews Websites, although the hotel responds on all platforms since it has the Review Pro program - a tool that AVAR uses to manage its online platforms, ensuring that any comments go unnoticed, she believes that TripAdvisor and Booking.com have the most credibility with the consumer. The study determines that the exposure offered is the main criterion for choosing AVAR to be present on social networks. We can find AVAR on Facebook, due to its great exhibition capacity and the interactivity provided by its natural conditions. Instagram is interesting for its ability to appeal to younger consumers, as well as the quality of content editing.

O2 - Understand the monitoring that the hotel gives to social networks

It was concluded that AVAR is very concerned with the good use of social networks. Social networks allow AVAR to reach a larger number of people, and the involvement of the Hotel in the responses is crucial. In this sense, AVAR takes into account good practices: it involves with the customer, providing immediate and personalized responses to all comments and evaluations; makes publications every day, some of them sponsored, giving hourly preference (from 6 pm, because the consumer is already more available to access social networks); encourages partnerships with influencers, believing that they are an asset not only for the promoting the hotel but also, for example, to enrich the portfolio of photographs; studies the statistics provided by social networks, both from the social networks themselves and from the social networks of influencers and public figures; partakes content shared by guests when they identify the Hotel, among others. To facilitate the management of all social networks, AVAR has the support of the Review Pro program. Regarding the results obtained, it can be seen that these are, in general, quite positive. With the increase in social media exposure, AVAR can:

> "Increase the visibility of the hotel establishment, trying to reach other markets and other age groups; increase reserves; improve the relationship with guests; not only promote but continue to promote the product." (director of AVAR)

In this way, social networks helped to enhance AVAR, and in the hotel sector, the exhibition is highly important, not only due to national competitors but also due to international competition, thus rising a need to create value for the company brand. Publications and shares on social networks can be a form of eWOM and can affect the attitudes and intentions of other consumers (Dellarocas, 2003). In short, it is possible to verify that social networks have a positive influence on the Hotel AVAR promotion since they are well worked. As the number of social network

users increases more and more, it is possible to assume that the level of exposure they present will tend to increase over time.

O3 - Identify the social networks most used by customers

The social networks used by customers are in line with those used by AVAR, especially Instagram, Facebook, TripAdvisor, and Booking.com. Instagram is used merely to view photographs, while the rest of the social networks, in addition to photographs, allow you to obtain feedback through comments and evaluations, as transcribed below:

> "(…) I use Facebook and Instagram to see photographs." (Guest3); "(…) The social networks I use the most are Insta and Facebook, however, I only used them to see photos, because the feedback I prefer Booking and TripAdvisor." (Guest 5); "In this case, I went to see TripAdvisor and Booking. But I usually see it on Facebook as well." (Guest 1)

O4 - Identify problems and challenges faced by the hotel in the management of its social networks

As for the challenges of the hotel in the management of social networks, the results show that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages:

> "(…) There are more advantages than disadvantages. There is a greater probability that the client will give feedback through social media than personally, both positive and negative". (director of AVAR); "Disadvantages: little control over what customers say and we are very exposed. Advantages: there are more advantages than disadvantages.
> It's a very modern application. It allows proximity between customers even if they do not visit the hotel, making them closer to their dreams. Reduced costs. When properly applied, we are allowed to reach a vast number of people that we would not otherwise be able to, and even in case of negative comments, we can always use them to our advantage. " (responsible for AVAR's social networks)

O5 - Understand how the hotel uses social media to be more competitive in face of competition

From the information obtained, it was concluded that direct competition does not use social networks to their full extent, that is, it is not yet a strategic focus for competition:

> "In general, the competition has not realized yet the potential of using social networks, so it is understood that AVAR is more developed on social networks than the competition, being hard to understand the competition." (responsible for AVAR's social networks)

> Following, AVAR has an advantage over the direct competition, since it realizes the advantages that a good use of social networks brings to AVAR's visibility. The hotel posts almost every day of the week, responding to all comments, to interact with its consumers, among other measures.

Comparison and analysis of responses acquired from interviews with AVAR's online presence and behavior

After a detailed analysis of AVAR's online behavior, it notices that responses from the AVAR director and the person in charge of AVAR's social networks are congruent and respond to the analyzed. AVAR's Director always responds to comments from all social networks, including the Online Reviews Websites. When negative comments, a concern to explain and justify what happened is noticeable. It is also noticeable, through a detailed analysis of AVAR's online presence and behavior, that the comments exposed on TripAdvisor are always answered by the AVAR director, as mentioned by her:

> "On TripAdvisor, she is the Hotel director, in this case, I, on the other online booking platforms or Online Reviews are the customer care teams. The public relations team takes care of comments on the Facebook and Instagram platforms. However, whenever it is directed straight to the direction, regardless of the platform, the director of the hotel always responds in a personalized way."

The person in charge of AVAR's social networks says that the social networks most used by AVAR are Instagram and Facebook, giving priority to the first. As justified by itself, this choice is due to:

> "(…) Customers are differentiated from the target audience. The prime clientele uses Instagram. Facebook gets more of who the customer is. (…) ".

Although AVAR's Facebook has a larger community (14 375 likes) than Instagram (12 300 followers), there is a greater engagement with the customer on Instagram, both in terms of likes and comments, these are always answered. AVAR makes instant publications every day, giving preference starting at 6 pm, being the same on Facebook and Instagram:

> "(…) It is an asset. The sharing of our guests also applies when they mention us. For us, it is a way to be more involved with the client and for others to obtain information which they consider more reliable than when published by AVAR itself." (responsible for AVAR's social networks).

Sponsored advertisements, attention to the target audience or customer, and the purpose of each publication are measures that AVAR has in mind when designing a marketing strategy.
Although the response of social networks says that it is rare to pay a commission to appear in the first search results, it appears in the first options when written "hotels in Vilamoura" in the search engine.

In the case of Influencers' use in AVAR, responsible for AVAR's social networks clarifies its advantages and what are the criteria in the selection process:

> "They are not seen merely as a strategy, but as partners. (…) Based on the number of followers; based on the content shared in the profile (lifestyle, travel, gastronomy, family); quality of followers; based on current customer's profile and the target audience (…)."

Conclusions, Limitations, and Future Research

The present study concluded that online social networks, in general, attract very positive results. With these, AVAR is allowed to take significant advantages of the online presence, since it allows the creation of a better relationship between the Hotel and the customers and, consequently, retaining them, increasing the hotel visibility and also attracting new customers. The results show that, when compared to other traditional means of communication, online social networks are a great tool that allows AVAR to publicize its services easily and quickly, in real-time, with great exposure and at reduced costs. AVAR is concerned with using social networks in the best possible way, with a focus on the current customer and the target audience. In the future, there is a need to create a digital marketing or social media management department, due to the evidence referenced with traditional marketing.

Like any work of research, this study also identified some limitations. At an early stage in the research for the literature review, it was revealed that the issue of social networks in the hotel industry is still emerging. Although the level of articles was not completely scarce, it was concluded that there was a great concentration around Facebook, eventually overshadowing studies related to other social networks. In the data collection phase, there wasn't easy scheduling the interviews, on the part of the Hotel. As for the guests, it focused on mistrust, which induced many people to see the message and not respond, conditioning their participation in the study.

As social networks are still an undeveloped area of study, it is possible to outline some options regarding next scientific studies, considering that this is still an area that has several aspects to explore: i) bet on more participants, to allow more comprehensive results; ii) involve international guests, thus expanding the sample and understanding whether national trends follow international trends; iii) apply the study to several hotels with similar characteristics.

Acknowledgement

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