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Integrated Marketing Communications in Contexts of Eco Tours in Porto (Portugal): Challenges (Post) Covid-19

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Abstract

In the face of an increasingly competitive and global market, where communication channels are massified and where information sharing between consumers occurs in such a fast and uncontrolled way, brands need to reinvent their communication plans, with the aim of focus on the emotional side of the consumer. Thus, in this context, the integrated communication mix emerges as a competitive strategy to meet the needs of consumers. Therefore, the main objective of this chapter is to understand the role of the Integrated Marketing Communications in the context of an organization linked to ecological tours. This chapter presents contributions to the area of marketing and communication (integrated), tourism (ecological) and a response to the pandemic and post-pandemic scenario (i.e., covid-19), at the level of response strategies in the context of a pandemic in 2020 (through digital communication channels). A qualitative methodology was adopted, using semi-structured interviews with organizational managers in the context of ecological tours in Portugal (i.e., Ekoeasy case study). Ecotourism as a concept is neither easy to define, nor to implement. Ecotourism is a complex concept as it involves specialised niche markets that can share a lot of characteristics, preferences and motivations or vary for the same reasons. Future studies should allow to complement the present investigation, through empirical study and quantitative nature (i.e., questionnaires to tourist consumers in the North of Portugal).

Keywords: post covid-19, ecotourism, marketing, communication
1. Introduction

The area of communication has become increasingly important over the years in our lives, in society, in companies and organizations, although it has not always been so. The role of communication is totally different given the pressure and strong competition that organizations face, and it plays a unique role in the success of an organization, a brand, a service or product. Prior to the dissemination of intended messages, communication has the function of designing, producing and disseminating them to achieve the intended targets. The choice of communication channels is also a fundamental task for the success of message transmission. Kotler, Roberto and Lee (2002) consider that in order to develop strategic communication, it is essential to consider two main steps: the creation of messages and the selection of communication channels that best suit the specific case. A qualitative methodology was adopted, using semi-structured interviews with organizational managers in the context of ecological tours in Portugal (i.e., Ekoeasy case study). Ecotourism as a concept is neither easy to define, nor to implement. Ecotourism is a complex concept as it involves specialized niche markets that can share a lot of characteristics, preferences and motivations or vary for the same reasons. The segment of ecotourism was first approached in 1965 by Hetzer in a perspective of a more ecological tourism (pre-concept of ecotourism), making observations about sustainable and responsible tourism, conferring four key factors to minimize environmental impact (concern with the environment and deterioration due to tourism), the respect for the culture of the host population, maximization of benefits for the local population and the rise in the tourist’s satisfaction degree. This chapter presents contributions to the area of marketing and communication (integrated), tourism (ecological) and a response to the pandemic and post-pandemic scenario (i.e. covid-19), at the level of response strategies in the context of a pandemic in 2020 (through digital communication channels). Future studies should allow to complement the present investigation, through empirical study and quantitative nature (i.e., questionnaires to tourist consumers in the North of Portugal).

2. Marketing and Communication

Over the years, the area of communication has become increasingly important in our lives, in society, in companies and organizations, although it has not always been so. Lendrevie et al. (2015) recognize that, today, the role that communication occupies is totally different given the pressure and the strong competition that organizations face, and assumes a unique role in the success of an organization, a brand, a service or product. When we talk about communication, we think about knowing the human reality (of the organization and its surroundings), in which it requires the knowledge of different types of knowledge, skills, as well as the awareness of values and beliefs. According to the authors, communication differs from other marketing variables and it is through communication strategies that the organization transmits the desired messages to the market and, on the other hand, receives the messages that the market addresses to the organization. As an instrument of marketing operation, “the communication strategy is born from the marketing strategy”, being essential that it respects the strategic options, namely, the defined target segments and the intended positioning (Lendrevie et al., 2015). Communication alone is the process in which individuals share meanings. The objectives of developing a good communication strategy are to capture the attention of the target audience and persuade them to adopt the desired behavior (Kotler, Roberto & Lee, 2002). Before the dissemination of the intended messages, communication has the function of conceiving, producing and disseminating them to achieve the intended targets. The choice of communication channels is also a fundamental task for the success of the message transmission (Lendrevie et al., 2015). Kotler, Roberto and Lee (2002) consider
that in order to develop strategic communication it is essential to take into account two main steps: the creation of messages and the selection of communication channels that best suit the specific case.

At the stage of creating the message strategy, it is defined what is to be communicated and why it will be communicated. The establishment of the objectives of the message, the selection of an effective execution and the communication strategies require the creation of a document - a creative brief, which will guide the development of the message and the choice of the media (Kotler, Roberto & Lee, 2002). According to Kotler and Armstrong (2001), messages generally do not immediately lead to awareness, but the AIDA model - attention, interest, desire and action - suggests the desirable qualities of a good message and, therefore, should guide the development of the message. The marketing specialist to inform and persuade must shape the message, so that it attracts attention and is convincing (Kotler & Roberto, 1992). It is extremely important in the elaboration of the strategy and execution of the message, to take into account the four elements of the communication that act as calls for the adoption of the desired behavior. Regarding the message formats, they also depend on the selected media (newspapers, magazines, radio, television, films), if they did not have the power to reinforce or weaken a message. In the case of radio, television and films (visual and auditory media), these are appropriate for a more emotional appeal.

Andreasen (1995) explains that the selection of channels, through which the message will be delivered, is a difficult decision to make, since the channels vary greatly in their ability to be effective and efficient in achieving the objectives of the communication program. Therefore, methods must be chosen carefully. Consumer research is central to finding out where the target audience spends time and where to get information, to understand which channel they pay the most attention to and trust, and to find out which channels are most popular or credible (Weinreich, 2011). When selecting channels to carry out promotional strategies, the decisions to be made include choosing the types of communication channels, selecting the specific media vehicles and determining the timing of the campaign (Kotler, Roberto & Lee, 2002). The authors highlight those that they consider to be the main channels of communication and, even, the corresponding specific media vehicles. Over time, communication variables have evolved significantly. The Internet, as a new means of communication, brought with it new tools, and the advent of “Web 2.0” allowed the emergence of other ways of communicating, within the scope of digital communication, public relations and relational marketing (Lendrevie et al., 2015). In this context, the channels that are also used in marketing include: social media (blogs, online videos) and websites (online games, search engine marketing) (Weinreich, 2011). According to Lendrevie et al. (2015), the communication mix consists of eight variables: the sales force, advertising, direct marketing, public relations, sponsorship and patronage, promotion, merchandising and digital communication. These tools serve different communication purposes and have peculiar characteristics in terms of form and means of application.

Communication strategy planning decisions also depend on the selection of specific media vehicles that best serve the intended message, including, for example, the choice of television programs, radio programs, and specific magazines, newspaper sections, billboard exhibition sites, websites and even places to hold special events (Kotler, Roberto & Lee, 2002). The marketer will have to carry out several comparative analyzes regarding the costs, size and profiles of the audiences reached by the medium, the compatibility of the medium of communication, the messages and positioning of the appropriate communication channel. The advantages and limitations of each communication tool must be taken into account, depending on the nature and format of the key messages defined in the creative brief.
2.1 Digital Communication

Social networks are considered a powerful tool for consumer involvement and have come, in a way, through instant messaging tools, to facilitate interaction between individuals, especially when it requires greater emotional involvement (Machado & Sousa, 2018). Initially, social networks were driven by young people, currently it is transversal to all age groups and geographies. Within this context, the consumer started to adopt a more active role in the communication of brands, which allow them to share information and encourage consumers with great ease and speed. According to Malheiro et al. (2019), digital marketing has constantly evolved due to its intensive study and the exponential increase in its use. This term can be used specifically to describe the marketing of products and services using digital channels, or in a more complex way to encourage the use of digital technologies, in order to acquire more customers and build a profile of preferences, promote the brand, retain former customers and increase sales (Kannan, 2016); although it has many similarities to traditional marketing. The idea of taking marketing to the digital world when it emerged, was not concerned with creating new techniques that would adapt to virtual reality (Pentina, Koh & Le, 2012), there was simply the application of techniques already known and used in traditional marketing (Carrera, 2009) but the readjustments were happening according to the needs of users. The rise of the Internet has introduced profound changes in society. With this new means of communication, it is revealed in a symbolic environment of interfaces, multiple images and sounds that make virtuality a reality. In this way, the information that is made available through the internet, represents the main element for the social organization of humanity (Castells, 1999). With the Internet, geographical distance has lost its power of separation as people from different and remote parts of the planet can communicate instantly, and it becomes more valuable tools for the dissemination and exchange of information, due to its capacity to establish fast communications, regardless of the geographic location of their users (Borges, 2001, Marujo, 2008). With the emergence of a new technological paradigm, based on the communication and information technologies that began to emerge in the 1960s, the world is undergoing a structural transformation process according to (Castells and Cardoso, 2005), adapting itself according to its needs, values and interests of its users. In this way, people start to integrate communication technologies in their lives, “linking virtual reality with real virtuality” (Sousa & Soares, 2019). Studies carried out in different societies prove that, more often than not, Internet users are more sociable (Malheiro et al., 2020), have more friends and contacts and are socially and politically more active than non-users (Castells & Cardoso, 2005). That is, the more they use the Internet, the more they engage in face-to-face interactions, in all areas of their lives. Weinreich (2011) states that social media sites (i.e. “Web 2.0”), unlike the traditional website, are dynamic and allow the user to add new content. According to the author, traditional sites have the limitation of, offering information in one sense (from the creator of the site to the user), while social media sites offer the opportunity for users to interact with the content of the site, which allows establish greater involvement with people. The existence of social networks only became possible, because the connection to the Internet is easier, namely through mobile devices, and because technological devices are more widespread (Pereira, Pereira & Pinto, 2011). Approximately 90 percent of our interactions with the media are now facilitated by screens: screens of smartphones, tablets, portable computers and television (Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan, 2017). Global Internet traffic increased 30-fold between 2000 and 2004, linking four people out of 10 worldwide. In 2019, according to a forecast by Cisco, we will see another ten-fold growth in global internet traffic, driving more than 11 billion connected mobile devices. In this sense, content marketing is based on the development of educational content, which aims to attract or retain consumers (Sousa & Soares, 2019). The creation of this content aims to attract customers to the company's social networks, thus enabling an increase in consumer interaction (Holliman
The fundamental objective of this type of marketing is to expose the brand, promote customer engagement and sales growth by increasing the customer portfolio. Therefore, managers who develop this type of content should not present a message that is too complex, however it should be a visual message and be well structured, so that customers are able to identify the brand. According to Smith and Chaffey (2013), some of the most common formats that this type of digital content uses are images, animations, e-books, blog texts and publications in social media (Malheiro, Sousa & Ferreira, 2019). Social networks can consist of their own identity and functionality, such as Facebook (placing the organization's pages on community networks), Youtube (communicating through images through videos), Instagram (sharing images) or Twitter (real-time information sharing) (Lendrevie et al., 2015). Advertising appeals are generally divided into emotional and rational (Solomon, 2004). Laskey et. al (1989) argue that there must be different strategies for different categories of advertising. First, the authors divide the concept of the message into informational (rational appeal) and transformative (emotional appeal), as Puto and Wells (1984) had done previously. Within the informational message there is the comparative category, the single value proposal, the preventive category and the hyperbole category. In the context of the transformative message, we are faced with the image of the user, the image of the brand, occasional use and the generic.

2.2 Communicating Ecotourism

As Ross and Wall (1999) stated, it is a difficult concept to define and to implement. Accordingly, Wight (2001) confirms that it is a complicated concept because it involves specialized niche markets that can share many characteristics, preferences and motivations, or vary for these same reasons. Fennell (1998) and Cheia (2013) reporting to Hetzer (1965) claim that the ecotourism segment as a concept was first addressed in 1965, being considered by Fennell (1998) as the father of the concept of a more ecological tourism (pre-concept of ecotourism), making considerations about sustainable and responsible tourism, attributing four key factors, namely minimizing the environmental impact, respect for the culture of the host population, maximizing the benefits of the local population and maximizing the degree of tourist satisfaction. Sustainable tourism refers to ecotourism according to existing concerns, regarding the environment and the wear and tear due to tourism. According to Miller (1978), referring to the planning and management of national parks in South America, he mentions the importance of creating eco trails that are established in these areas. According to Diamantis and Ladkin (1999), Blamey (2001), Higham (2007), Cheia (2013), ecotourism was defined for the first time in formal terms in 1987 by Hector Ceballos-Lascurain. But, according to the interview of the magazine Eco club (2006) to Héctor Ceballos Lascurain himself, he says that the definition was created in 1983.

Due to its relevance, citing the architect Ceballos-Lascurain, ecotourism is that tourism that involves traveling to relatively intact natural areas with the specific object of studying, admiring and appreciating the landscape and its plants and wild animals, as well as any existing cultural aspects (past and present) found in these areas (Ecoclub, 2006). According to the author, it is essential that tourists who practice ecotourism can come into contact with Nature. In 1993 the same author updated the definition that was adopted by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature in 1996. This update highlights the importance of promoting conservation, pointing out that the negative impact will be of low magnitude. However, the big and significant difference is to provide socio-economic benefits to local populations. Through this definition, it is understood that ecotourism belongs to nature tourism as well as sustainable tourism. According to Ceballos-Lascurain, this type of tourism will be linked to all types of tourism. In turn, Scheyvens (1999) reinforces the importance of
ecotourism through cultural and environmental involvement combined with benefits for the local population. This type of tourism is considered by Ross and Wall (1999) as much more than tourism in nature should be seen as a means of conserving resources and local development through tourism in a synergistic way. The authors reinforce that the objectives of tourism development must complement those of maintaining biodiversity and protecting natural areas. The authors Dumitrescu et al. (2013) reinforce the importance of ecotourism in relation to the hotel, since the hotel units must be careful not to neglect the environment and take protective measures. As tourism is one of the largest industries and has the greatest impact on people and the environment, its unbalanced development will result in the degradation of habitats and landscapes, deplete resources and generate waste and pollution. On the other hand, if we adopt responsible tourism policies, we will help to create awareness and support for the conservation of local culture, thus also creating economic opportunities for countries and communities. Similarly, Scheyvens (1999) considers the involvement of the local population in controlling and sharing the benefits of ecotourism initiatives in the area of residence to be relevant. According to Spinola (2006), ecotourism contributes to local development and conservation of the natural heritage. The importance of the local population being an active agent, resource manager, who is able to make decisions and who controls activities that affect their own life is defended by Spinola (2006), although he considers this participatory planning model to be more difficult to be implemented and should always be analyzed in the long term to enable the creation of the business mass and the creation / application of environmental legislation.

Buckley and Mossaz (2018) confirm the importance of tourism companies to finance the creation of private reserves, community conservation and protection of public areas, increase of local employment as well as the combination of two types of marketing: the main marketing that promotes proximity with the wild nature excelling in luxury and comfort and the conservation marketing that promotes the sale of articles to finance the conservation. Tourists are looking for new experiences and exciting challenges, and tourist destinations operators need to be able to allow a unique experience tailored to the interests of this type of tourists. In addition, Wight (2001) considers that the ecotourism market is a dynamic market, changing and adapting to the preferences and motivations of tourists, as well as supporting companies that promote experiences that support local environmental and social value.

3. (Pós) Pandemic Case Study in Portugal: Ekoeasy

EKOEASY is a tourist entertainment agency in the city of Porto. EkoEasy is ready to offer the best tours and rental services for electric scooters, which can be rented through the physical store, online store or in tourist units (Hotel, hostel, local accommodation). According to the Regional Tourism Authority of Porto and North of Portugal (TPNP), in 2019, the Porto and North region received the largest number of tourists ever. In the municipality of Porto alone, there was an increase of 10% in overnight stays compared to the previous year, corresponding to 6.5% of the national total. In order to respond to the growth in the number of guests who will visit the city of Porto, it is imperative to create alternative transport offers that provide a more pleasant and more environmentally friendly experience, facilitating the movement between places and monuments to visit.

Ekoeasy's mission is to provide a differentiated service from the others, betting on a sustainable, attractive and vocational project for all those who are interested in enjoying our services. The company recognizes that a quality service is a key factor for the success of any entity and is based on this factor that will be based on the customization of all E-scooters. Vision - We intend to be a reference in the area of tourist entertainment, with differentiating services and products in the tourist market and tourist experiences, guaranteeing the creation
of added value, appreciation of the territory and sustainability in business. Values - More than a good mission or a good vision, this project has a base of values on which it cannot oscillate. These values will be the basis of this entire project and the way you will be able to get close to all of our customers. Ekoeasy believes that an excellent and close relationship with all our customers is the right way to make the project sustainable and attractive to everyone.

The motorcycles have a range of approximately 60 km and reach a maximum speed of 35 km/hour, at the time of rental the motorcycle is delivered with the maximum range and one or two protective helmets. Electric bikes can be ordered through three different channels: physical store, online store and tourist units. In the first two cases the bike will be “picked up” at the store located in the center of Porto, in the third case the bikes will be transported and delivered to the tourist unit that requested them. When renting the motorbike, the customer is asked for a deposit, proof of identity and driving license, the rentals can last for a full day or half a day. At the customer's request, charging or changing the battery for a fully charged one can be requested, with the customer having to go to the store. Tourist tours have been carefully designed with the aim of providing small groups of customers with an unforgettable and enriching experience. The tours are available for groups between 3 and 6 people and can choose one of the predefined tours or request (subject to availability) a personalized route. In predefined tours, there is what is called “Thematic Tours” and they are composed by: Artistic Tour, Historical Tour, Nature Tour, Cultural Tour, Gastronomic Tour.

4. Final Considerations

The importance of the integrated communication strategy in contexts of ecological tourism and socially responsible transport. Being a relatively new company in the tourist entertainment market, Ekoeasy felt the need to become relevant and known in the minds of its consumers and in its market. Since then, it has put all its efforts into what it considered the most important factor, the implementation of a communication strategy to meet its objectives. Ekoeasy's integrated communication mix instruments. Through digital communication and advertising tools, Ekoeasy promotes its services and promotes its image. Always giving priority to the development of digital channels, and of all channels, it shows a higher rate of attracting new customers in the market. Improvements in Ekoeasy's promotion strategy (negative effect COVID-19). With the interview, it was found that Ekoeasy was able to adapt more successfully to the most difficult moments that the tourist activity is going through at this moment, combining efforts with digital technology, thus promoting an application for smartphones that will make consumers seek to visit and discover the city of Porto again without the risk of possible contagion of the pandemic COVID-19. Ekoeasy's communication strategy in digital contexts and consumer relationship marketing of ecological tours. When reviewing its communication strategy in digital media, Ekoeasy immediately realized the power of social networks was gaining over time, the accessibility and the easy way that anyone today debates and communicates through social networks it is simply magnificent, faced with this situation, the company decided to reformulate and recreate its promotional content on social networks, thus leading to an increase in its reserves, thus reaching its objectives more quickly.

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