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Advances in Design and Digital Communication

Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Design and Digital Communication, Digicom 2020, November 5–7, 2020, Barcelos, Portugal
Preface

Digicom - 4th International Conference on Digital Design and Communication is organized by the Design School of the Polytechnic Institute of Cavado and Ave and by ID+, Research Institute for Design Media and Culture with the cooperation of CECS-UM. Digital is increasingly ubiquitous and prevalent in our networked and global society. This conference aims to be a space for reflection and analysis on the constant challenges of digital communication for society, institutions and brands. This event brings together annually the work of researchers, academics and designers from around the world. Although Digicom is focused on the area of communication design, the objective is the promotion of an open, broad and plural discussion, aggregating different areas of knowledge, namely arts, technology, communication sciences, education sciences, branding, etc. The conference thus seeks to stimulate interdisciplinary relationships that contribute to a solid development of scientific activity.

The event took place between November 5 and 7, 2020, and, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was exceptionally held online.

The Digicom received three keynote speakers:

**Rachael Feinman** is Product Designer raised in California. She studied graphic design and began her career working for digital agencies in Los Angeles and New York. She has been embedded into teams for various clients including Hulu and Airbnb before making her full-time transition in-house. Now, she finds herself designing the merchant experience within Google Maps London and is part of the Women@Google team. She loves the challenges that come with her role and always strives to put users’ needs first.

**Fernando Moreira da Silva**, Full Professor and Researcher in Design; President of CIAUD-Research Center for Architecture, Urbanism and Design; Coordinator of the PhD degree in Design at FA_ULisboa; Coordinator of the FCT panel for PhD grants in Design, Architecture and Urbanism, and CnPq International Evaluator, Brazil; Regular participation in national and international universities; Member of Scientific Commissions of several international scientific journals; Coordination
and participation in several research projects; Regular publications in peer-reviewed scientific journals, several book chapters and three books.

**Daniel Raposo**, Designer, Researcher and Professor of Communication Design at ESART—Escola Superior de Artes Aplicadas do Instituto Politécnico de Castelo Branco.

He is particularly dedicated to themes such as design of brand visual identity, branding, design management, brand typography, editorial design and design theory. He has a PhD in design from FA-ULisbon, a master’s degree in design, materials and product management from UA, a degree in communication design and graphic techniques, graphic design and advertising from ESTGP. His papers, chapters and books on design include “Communicating Visually: The Graphic Design of the Brand” (English editions by Cambridge Scholars Publishing in 2018 and 2019 and Spanish edition by Experimenta Libros, 2020), “Perspective on Design: Research, Education and Practice” (Springer), “Investigaçã e Ensino em Design e Música” (IPCB Editions, 2017), “The rebellion of the lyrics” (ePub, 2013), “A rebelião dos Signos. A alma da letra” (in Portugal by Dinalivro, 2010 and in Argentina with La Crujía, 2008) and “Design de Identidade e Imagem Corporativa” (IPCB Editions, 2008).

In addition to the guest speakers, we also had the opportunity to attend a set of approximately 80 communications, strictly selected by Digicom’s Scientific Committee, from different researchers and international designers. The three days event resulted in extensive debate sessions, where the participants’ personal and professional perspectives encouraged the discussion, showing the importance of this kind of event.

The current book gathers the 56 best papers selected out of 124 submissions, upon a rigorous double-blind peer-review process.

The promotion of a panoramic vision of digital design and communication is a trademark that Digicom has been affirming and that it intends to continue to build and consolidate in its upcoming editions.

After many months of preparation for this fourth edition of Digicom, we could not forget to register and transmit a special thanks to all those who believed in this event and, in different ways, have contributed to its success!

Thank you very much to all participants, book contributors and people who have collaborated to the success of this edition, and to all the readers of this book, we hope you enjoy it and see you next year!

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>University/Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Susana Barreto</td>
<td>Universidade do Porto, Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa Ruão</td>
<td>Universidade do Minho, Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiago Assis</td>
<td>Universidade do Porto, Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiago Navarro Marques</td>
<td>Universidade de Évora, Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanda Sousa</td>
<td>Politécnico de Lisboa, Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vera Barradas Martins</td>
<td>Politécnico Portalegre, Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vítor Quelhas</td>
<td>Escola Superior de Media Artes e Design IPP, Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of Social Design Projects Based on Krippendorff’s Four</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pillars of HCD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa Pozatti, Natália Debeluck Plentz, and Caio Marcelo Miolo de Oliveira</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Communication on Higher Education Institutions:</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges and Tools for Research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arlindo Santos, Luisa Lopes, and Marcus Brasil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health, Pleasure, Physical Appearance: Which Motivates Food Involvement Mostly?</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana Teresa Tavares, Rita Espanha, and Sandra Miranda</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet and Social Networks: Reflecting on Contributions to Employability and Social Inclusion</td>
<td>398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>João Pinto and Teresa Cardoso</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Protagonism of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous Tales in Comics</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamires Maria Lima Gonçalves Santos, Larissa Vieira de Oliveira Ribeiro, Edivan Silva Menezes dos Santos, and Danilo Itabira Nunes Santos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Do I Feel When… A Card-Based Communication Game to Stimulate Empathy Among Family Members with Anorexia Nervosa</td>
<td>418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viviane Peçabes, Pedro Cardoso, Liliana Castro, Bruno Giesteira, Livia Lopes, and Clara Junqueira</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Impact of Visual Communication in COVID-19’s Prevention and Risk Mitigation</td>
<td>433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inês Saraiva and Cristina Ferreira</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological Change in London’s Commercial Printing Trades, 1980–1992</td>
<td>443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex Heslop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design as a Driver for Behavioural Change: Oceans and Plastics, Approaches for a Shift Towards Sustainability</td>
<td>456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dília Nunes and Joana Lessa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graphic Design and Branding</td>
<td>473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete Poetry and Advertising Symbiotic Relationship in Post II World War</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiago Santos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernardo Meza Guzman and Catarina Lelis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Digital Communication on Higher Education Institutions: Challenges and Tools for Research

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Abstract. Changes in the Higher Education (HE) paradigm in Portugal, have made the sector competitive where different Higher Education Institutions (HEI) adapt marketing strategies to foster their education offer and differentiation factors in order to attract and maintain a higher number of students. With the increasing reduction in birth rates in Portugal, the investment on internationalization becomes a need in order to maintain the number of students. At the same time, the rapid proliferation of communication technologies affected the recruitment of new students and the communication strategies of HEI. The Instituto Politécnico de Bragança (IPB), being aware of this reality and recognizing the importance of digital communication tools, established in its strategic plan 2018–2022 objectives related to its internal and external communication in the digital context. For that purpose, various tools of research were conceptualized and implemented on an earlier phase of a digital communication plan. The originality and contribution of this work is to open this research methodology to the public sphere looking for critical analysis and construction.

Keywords: Higher Education · Digital communication · Research

1 Introduction

Digital communication plays a fundamental and specialized role in connecting people, when offering products and services essential to society and meeting extremely important processes. Communication is an effort between two or more elements, based on signs, codes and languages, in order to provide a shared commonality [1]. This idea of commonality provides the notions of dialogue and sharing so essential for a virtually
connected world. Sodré [2] says that today we live in a virtual bios, that is, an existence lived through networked media. The idea of virtual bios makes up a series of changes in everyday life, which brings new powers to exist. What interests us substantially is how these new ways of living in contemporary societies alter the ways of interacting socially, and promote new challenges to life in society. For Lévy: “The collective intellect builds and reconstructs its identity through the virtual world that expresses it.” [3]. By taking this statement to the fields of telematic communication networks, we can see that they are becoming, today, an unequivocal locus of events. Digital communication, building innovative knowledge and practices, is an important vehicle for the development of communicational assets. The digital requires an understanding of the syntax, semantics and culture of communication processes, to understand and act on/with them. In this sense, digital communication in cyberspace refers to “(...) an intelligence distributed throughout, incessantly valued, coordinated in real-time, which results in the effective mobilization of competences” [4].

This work intends to present an overview of contemporary marketing applied to HE, connected to the scientific field of services marketing. Moreover, it highlights the main challenges of digital within the HE field, suggesting some methodologies and tools applicable to digital communication in HE, using the case study of an HEI, the IPB. Finally, it provides a discussion of the relevance of such instruments in the success of communication and digital marketing in the context of an HEI.

2 Marketing Higher Education

In their seminal work, Kotler and Fox [5] argued that the philosophy and management of marketing activities are as imperative for HEI as for any company to survive in a market with increasing competitiveness. As such, it is necessary to be aware of trends, market research, needs and desires of students to attract and retain them. Thus, a marketing strategy in HE must fully comply with the following fundamentals:

- The emphasis on customers, meeting their needs and creating value.
- The importance of shared knowledge.
- The cross-functional coordination of marketing activities in the various functions of the organization;
- Respond to market activities by taking appropriate action to implement the defined strategies.

Still, the research and practice of marketing has advanced over the past four decades. Many marketing practices are no longer as simplistic. Today, there is a much more consumer-orientated approach in marketing. Giving greater choices, delivering true value, and winning the hearts and minds of consumers is the key to long-term market advantage [6]. This is especially true in the domain of services marketing fully

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1 The word “bios”, etymologically derived from the Greek (βίος), refers to the “means of existence” of a person or society.
applicable in the education context [7, 8], and the marketing of education needs to consider the broader framework provided by a view of services marketing [9].

Education as a process of “obtaining skills” configures a service. Filling a HE programme is a multi-year process, in which the student, together with the teaching and non-teaching staff, acquires, in the physical space of the university or polytechnic, a training that guarantees scientific and social skills, within the different objectives set out when registering with the service provider [7].

Lovelock and Wirtz [6] address the services marketing complexity through the “7 P Model”, which consists of the execution and management of seven factors. The marketing of education is not just about product, place, price and promotion (or customer solution, convenience, customer cost and communication) but also about people, process and physical evidence [9].

Product, as the core service of an HEI, is its education offer and learning process where the experience and its satisfaction is dependent on the student, as a co-creator and, as such, his/her involvement and educational effort will influence his/her perception of value [7].

Price in public HEI has a maximum and is not subject to fluctuating demand and in the decision to attend HE, secondary costs are also decisive (e.g. the costs of accommodation, food, transport, among others) and are the second main inhibitor to further studies [10].

Distribution refers to the place and time when the service is made available to the customer. Vieira [10] states in his report that 34% of secondary school students point to geographical location as an inhibitor in the continuation of studies, mentioning the difficulty in balancing studies with a job that allows to relieve the family’s investment. Recently, Winter and Thomson-Whiteside [11] examined the role of location in building a distinct HEI identity, linking this to the field of place marketing.

It, also, becomes crucial for an HEI to communicate efficiently with several actors, taking into account the most relevant factors for each one. Vieira [10] indicates that the main facilitating factor in continuing for HE are social influences, namely the influence of family members.

HE is a service provided by people for people and the client’s participation is fundamental. The quality of the interaction between students and teaching and non-teaching staff influences the perception of quality, which is why it is necessary for school staff to have not only the technical skills, but also interpersonal skills to create empathy and respect. Fellow customers also play a decisive role. The student’s relationship with other students, the ability to adapt and the relationships generated during the period of attendance determine not only satisfaction but also advocacy at the specific HEI [7].

In education, the service production process implies a standardization of the service, as classes are directed to an entire class but also individualization, as the learning process is individual. However, although HEI have limited control over their teaching processes, there are processes that can be improved and individualized using electronic systems that allow queuing reduction, treatment of bureaucracy and facilitate the learning process, ordering of documents online, purchasing meal vouchers, scheduling visits to service hours and using online platforms for educational content. The inclusion of platforms that allow the co-production of the service to convey utility to the customer increases the customer’s perception of quality [6].
Finally, and of extreme importance, is physical evidence encompasses all the tangible elements that involve the production of the service. The quality of the facilities, as well as the support tools, determine the quality and involvement of the student (the classroom, but also complementary spaces such as the canteen, library, bar and social spaces).

Besides services marketing, it is also relevant to acknowledge that retaining students is becoming increasingly important for HEI, and, such, ideas from relationship marketing should be of great interest to university, where the creation of value should be regarded as an ongoing process over the lifetime of the relationship [12]. The learning experience is hedonic, co-created, emergent, uncertain, unstructured and holistic [7]. Concern for the student experience is significant and increasing, and is widespread in the media [13] with consequences for the student’s maintenance and future of each HEI.

The success of any marketing strategy is intimately linked to understanding the target audience and identifying their needs. Successful HEIs are capable of forging fruitful and collaborative relationships with different stakeholders, including business, industry, as well as with research institutions in order to improve their academic branding [14]. Table 1 shows the 16 HE publics suggested by Kotler and Fox [5]. It is essential that a communication plan includes all audiences.

A marketing orientation can help universities compete in the global arena but only if the right principles are well applied [7, 15]. Some even argue that the marketization of HE still seems to pose more challenges than it brings advantages to universities, at least in the less developed world [16]. Coexist inevitable linkages between the marketing and the marketization of HE, with the marketing being driven by the need to increase student numbers and reputation, and the marketization being driven by the introduction of fees as students decide where to spend their time and money for a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to obtain a degree level qualification [15].

HE has witnessed a paradigm shift in recent years, and the debates around marketing of HE are timely and significant, and discussions around many issues including institutional marketing, branding, corporate communication, identity, image, perceived quality, the student voice and reputation take place at the most HEI across Europe and globally [9, 13, 16]. More knowledge in this contemporary field is yet to know and a world of opportunities co-exist in the digital field.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Publics of an HEI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - Potential Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - Alumni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - Enrolled Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - General Community</td>
</tr>
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<td>5 - Mass Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - Local Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 - Foundations</td>
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<td>8 - Government Agencies</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kotler and Fox [5]
3 The Digital Challenges

Nowadays, we have the opportunity to reach our audiences using digital marketing strategies [17] with more appropriate tools and tactics. This is only possible if communicators are aware of communication strategies to engage customers and improve their experience [18].

Previously, HEI and other organizations promoted their services and products in different media only depending on the budget. Today, with the democratization of production and distribution platforms, that are many and increasing, we can see, face to face, supply and demand [19], and the globalized world offers the opportunity to have a digital platform as a common communication tool.

Some challenges are, now, briefly presented and discussed.

3.1 International Students

The annual growth in the number of domestic students has slowed [14], and for this fact, strategies must consider market diversification, and recruit international students [20]. Digital marketing is a fundamental tool for international education [21], and the advances in technology can provide significant opportunities for HEI to leverage themselves through the Internet and web technologies [14].

3.2 Digital Natives

Young people are people who adopt early, and are not afraid to experiment [22]. A strategy initially focused on young people is more likely to succeed as they are an essential group to achieve the so-called “share of mind”, and so brands to convince traditional groups need primarily to convince young people. This generation was exposed from an early age to ICT and they are an integral part of their decision-making process, and for this reason HEI must adapt to these preferences and take advantage of the opportunities present in these trends [23].

3.3 Families as Influencers

Social and family influences, as parents, are the main motivators for students to proceed to an HEI [10, 24] and according to Kotler [22], women, who by nature are analytical and information collectors, do more research and talk about brands. These groups take into account the functional, emotional benefits, as well as the price of a product or service.

3.4 Digital Influencers

According to Kotler [22] connectivity is perhaps the most important element of change in history, and consumers have become very dependent on the opinion of others, This is supported by the proliferation of pages dedicated to evaluations of services and
products, and in many cases the evaluations of other customers are more relevant than
the opinion itself or marketing communications. The power of word-of-mouth and
e-word-of-mouth is increasing in the final purchase decision. The digital influencers,
identified by Kotler [22], are “collectors”, “critics”, “talkers” and “creators”, and when
they feel involved with a brand they become “evangelists”, sharing stories about the
brand and disseminating positive content on online platforms.

3.5 Social Media

Social media platforms have become an important support for HEI to manage their
relationships [25] because this sector depends on improving and managing connections
with current and future students, as well as with alumni [26]. These platforms are a very
interactive and dynamic media that offers many opportunities. Users seem to value it
even more through direct involvement and see this from a sense of belonging through
that they also generate content [18]. A report, carried out in 2016, pointed out that half
of the HEI candidates use digital tools to compare HEI, and 80% consider conversa-
tions held on social networks with HEI students at the time of decision [27].

3.6 Omnichannel

The user’s journey is the sum of all physical and digital interactions [28]. Each stage of
the journey represents a possible interaction with the institution and must be highly
valued in an integrated communication strategy. In the digital age the path traced by the
user is not always straightforward and there are many possible combinations of points
of interaction in a physical and digital environment, and the omnichannel strategy aims
to integrate several channels to create a perfect and consistent customer experience and
consider each channel, not as a closed space but being integrated and unified with
others [22].

4 Methods and Results on a HEI

The study of Ferreira et al. [29], presented in this paper, introduces methods and
analysis used on the IPB digital communication value proposition, aiming a sustained
instrument for further strategic development. This work followed the 8P approach of
Conrado Adolpho [30], where he suggests these as phases for a digital strategy to be
implemented, allowing organizations to get better target insights and create relevant
offers. It lists identifiable variables for a precise approach on the HE market, with
potential target audiences, in addition to the current and previous audiences of that HEI.
Mixed methods combine quantitative data with qualitative interpretations of the con-
tents in a survey applied to 404 IPB students. Furthermore, this study provides com-
parisons between IPB and other HEI strategies. Initially, the research and diagnosis
assembled, proposed a competition analysis, using a comparison guide, in order to
identify the strategies implemented by the main HEI in Portugal. A benchmarking
strategy was also carried out, including international and reputed HEI. Then it indicates
who are the primary potential target of the IPB, including Portuguese, Brazilian,
PALOP and other international students. For this analysis several personae were created. It discusses the influence of these audiences by the perceptions of current students and alumni. This relationship is due to the importance of WOM and E-WOM, in the context of cyberspace, in the decisions made by people looking for this service experience through the internet.

In the digital communication strategies proposed are included:

- Considering that the IPB is the Portuguese HEI with the largest number of international students, accounting for 26% of the total student body [31], the IPB website must consider a set of strategies, such as production of content oriented to be consumed on different devices, in different locations and from different types of users. It is central to reach the optimization of the website together with other systems of external and internal communication.

- The production of quality content, as well as the customization of such content for each customer profile. Stresses the family influence, with a major role in the choice of HEI, and particularly that of mothers, that being women, are more analytical. The contents, published in the different official channels of the institution, must have detail, and an appropriate depth level to satisfy this information need.

- Systematization and unification of interactions originated on different contact points of potential target audiences to the IPB landing page.

- Articulated and permanent actions with social networks, in order to generate high interaction with different audiences. A survey ranging a sample of 404 IPB students (of a universe of 7500) concluded that only 3.6% of the students do not use social networks. The rest mostly use Facebook, Instagram and Youtube, with a daily frequency of more than an hour a day, confirming others previous studies [32]. LinkedIn is proposed to be incremented in order to intensify the touch points with alumni and transform them into brand ambassadors. This platform connects academic and professional arenas and adds value to the IPB brand. Also, hashtags development and sponsored share is also advised.

- “Content is king” is an often cited quote in the world of online marketing, and content creation, and distribution for different users is especially relevant, when integrated by a digital institutional curator.

- Finally, digital offers real time access to data, being important to use tools like Google Alerts, Google Trends, Google Analytics and others to analyse hashtags and keywords. The work suggests ways of monitoring actions through analytical tools, for better understanding of the actions of dissemination and personalization of the content that can provide accurate data for updating and improvement.

5 Conclusions and Further Development

The consolidation of virtual environments in cyberspace and virtual bios in contemporary societies can no longer be ignored by organizations when thinking about their market strategies. In the field of HEI, this becomes intense and important, considering the research tools on the internet and the means by which consumers make their decisions, when choosing their future professional qualification. In the context of HEI,
recognizing new trends in the dissemination and construction of brand image, as well as their positioning, becomes a need and a challenge. Also, the need to pay attention to teachers and administrative workers and to the local community of an HEI, as entities of dissemination, reception and added value to a brand in HE.

In this paper we seek to provide state of the art review of the main concepts applied to HEI marketing, with a special focus on services marketing. A series of HEI challenges is discussed, as they want to reach targets and stakeholders to increase competitiveness in the face of extreme competition and the multiplicity of options. As an applied object, we look at the methods and results found in a research report applied to IPB digital communication, in Portugal.

Competitiveness among HEI is a topic that will gain relevance in Portugal in the coming years due to the continuous decrease in the number of students in basic and secondary education as a result of the birth rates reduction. The application of a communication strategy reaching potential students is an essential activity in the survival of an HEI, with special emphasis on institutions located in interior areas where the exodus of the population to the coast requires attraction campaigns outside its area of influence and also of international students. In this way, digital is especially important in attracting young students, who have strong mastery of the digital communication tools. This avenue will increase the probability of success of any strategy in this field.

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