

Chapter 35

Social Media as a Marketing Strategy in Hospitality: Case Study of the Braga City



Elisabete Paulo Morais  and Bruno Rodrigues

Abstract Social media is a powerful tool for creating a closer relationship with customers and potential customers, allowing hotels to communicate directly with them, answer questions, receive feedback and provide real-time customer support. They are a highly effective digital marketing channel for hotels, as they allow them to promote their services, present their differentials and attractions and show their facilities. This investigation seeks to understand how social networks, as a digital marketing strategy, in hotels in the city of Braga, are important and how they contribute to the dissemination and promotion of hotels. The tourist developments in the municipality of Braga were selected by the National Tourism Register, in the typology hotels and in the categories from 2 to 5 stars, which resulted in a selection of 28 hotels to contribute to the present study. In this first phase of the study, a survey was carried out on the hotels' websites as well as social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter and the social media YouTube. In a first phase, an exhaustive survey of the digital presence of hotels was carried out. After that, a qualitative methodology was adopted, applying a descriptive analysis and semi-structured interviews to managers, owners and those responsible for marketing the hotels, in order to analyze the digital presence and understand how the management of the social media in which they are present is done.

35.1 Introduction

The tourism sector faces a technological revolution. The number of tourists who books trips, stays and other tourist products and services online has increased and, even when they do not buy online, they use the Internet to search for information

E. P. Morais (✉)

UNIAG (Applied Management Research Unit), Instituto Politécnico de Bragança, Campus de Santa Apolónia, Bragança 5300-253, Portugal
e-mail: beta@ipb.pt

B. Rodrigues

Instituto Politécnico de Bragança, Campus de Santa Apolónia, Bragança 5300-253, Portugal

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about destinations. Social media allow sharing this information through texts, images and videos to promote the tourist destination, tourist developments and other services [1].

The advancement of technology has changed the way tourists research and seek information about the hotel industry, and social networks are increasingly an essential tool that influence consumer behavior [2].

The use of social networks has significantly transformed the hospitality industry and the way hotels communicate with customers. Social networks are becoming one of the most important marketing tools for hotel strategies [3].

Social networks are present in people's lives, both personally and professionally, and as they are a tool for promoting and selling products and/or services, it is important to understand how hotels benefit from social networks in their strategy of digital marketing, since this theme arose from the need to understand the importance that social networks have in the promotion and dissemination of hotels. The general objective of this study is to understand the role of social networks as a digital marketing strategy in hotels in the city of Braga.

35.2 Literature Review

35.2.1 *Digital Marketing*

In recent decades, digital platforms have significantly revolutionized marketing, offering new ways to reach, inform, engage, sell and provide services to consumers [4].

Digital marketing, described as the marketing of products and services using digital channels, is defined with a broader concept, as the process of using digital technologies to acquire and maintain customers, create preferences, promote brands and increase sales [5].

According to [6], marketing is constantly changing, the result of evolution. For the author, «digital marketing» is an expression that came along with the Internet and is increasingly popular in the last decade. As a definition, digital marketing is «the application of traditional marketing concepts to the digital media currently available».

According to the American Marketing Association (AMA), digital marketing is the use of digital or social channels to promote a brand or reach consumers. This type of marketing can be performed on the Internet, social networks, search engines, mobile devices and other channels. It requires new ways of marketing to consumers and understanding the impact of their behavior [7].

According to the literature, the importance of digital marketing has been increasing, as a result of globalization and increased use of the Internet [8–10].

35.2.2 Digital Marketing Strategies and Tools

Digital marketing has more and more value in any company's marketing strategy. Marketing strategies consist of decisions and actions taken by companies, which are oriented toward creating value for consumers, creating a differential and sustainable advantage over the competition [11].

According to [12], it is essential to define a digital strategy for any business or organization. This strategy will guide the way a company acts to achieve its goals. The development of the Internet and new technologies allowed the emergence of a variety of tools, enabling companies to know, analyze, promote and sell products or services, considering the defined objectives. We have as examples of digital marketing tools the website, search engine optimization (SEO), customer relationship management (CRM), social networks, mobile applications (APPS) and e-mail marketing, among others.

35.2.3 Social Media

In [13] studied the importance of social networks in the attractiveness of the destination and found that the adoption of adequate strategies in social networks can attract more tourists.

The impact of social networks on tourism is not limited to the attractiveness of the destination, but goes far beyond covering the tourism and hospitality industry as a whole, in particular the hotel industry. Online reviews posted on social media allow customers to share their opinion and experiences online [14].

According to [15] the impact of social networks on the hotel industry is quite beneficial, bringing positive consequences of great importance to this sector. Firstly, social networks are a way of giving visibility. Second, there is the economic aspect. For these authors, the use of social networks does not imply any cost (except if it is a professional account and if there is a manager to carry out this task).

From a management point of view, these can give important information about the factors of customer satisfaction as well as dissatisfaction, and this information can help to correct the negative factors, thus improving the overall service of the hotel [13, 16], and also contribute to strategic planning [17].

The electronic word-of-mouth (e-WoM) also influences new customers and has an effect on the hotel occupancy rate [18]. Positive reviews are considered more effective in deciding booking intentions compared with negative reviews [17]. According to [19] the management of social networks has been considered a crucial aspect of the relationship between hotel services and consumers. In this sense, the authors mention that the importance of this aspect lies in making use of social networks, as well as considering the opinion of customers regarding the services received, in order to preserve or improve the reputation of the hotel.

35.3 Characterization of the Braga City

Located in the heart of Minho, ancient and religious by tradition, the city of Braga promotes itself through its two thousand years of history, which allows its visitors to travel through time within modernity. The city has one of the oldest Sacro-Montes in all of Europe and the standard-bearer of the Minho region, Bom Jesus, recently declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is in Braga that you can find the oldest Cathedral in Portugal and the Mother House of the Benedictine monks, the Monastery of Tibães, the Sanctuaries of Sameiro and Santa Marta da Falperra, among others [20].

The city stands out for being innovative, happy and a model at an economic, cultural and touristic level, offering its inhabitants an excellent quality of life. Located in the Cávado valley, in the northwest region of mainland Portugal, is the municipality of Braga. The municipality covers an area of approximately 184 km² in which 40 extend its 37 parishes. In administrative terms, Braga is the district capital, the youngest city in Portugal, the third largest city in the country after Lisbon and Porto and one of the youngest in Europe [20].

35.4 Methodology

A search was carried out through the National Tourism Register (<https://registos.turismodeportugal.pt/>) of tourist developments in municipality of Braga in the typology hotels and in the categories from 1 to 5 stars, which resulted in a total of 28 hotels for the present study.

An analysis was carried out, for each of the hotels, of their online presence, that is, in which social networks are present and the number of followers. Subsequently, an exploratory study was carried out where the most used social network, Facebook, was analyzed for the type of interaction/publication most used by hotels (videos; images/illustrations; photographs; campaigns (promotions/offers); shares and events).

Subsequently, interviews were conducted with hotel managers, to understand how social networks were managed and to assess the importance of social networks as a marketing strategy.

Seven interviews were carried out, representing ten hotels, since some hotels belonged to the same hotel group.

35.5 Results

35.5.1 *The Digital Presence of Hotels*

In a first phase was an analysis of the online presence (website) of the hotels in the city of Braga.

From this analysis it was found that a hotel has its own website and group, fourteen hotels have a group website, nine have their own website and four do not have website. All four- and five-star hotels have a website, one three-star hotel doesn't have website and three two-star hotels don't have a website.

It was verified by the analysis of the websites of the hotels that some were not responsive and there were some links to social networks that did not work.

It was found that the social network most used by hotels is Facebook and the least used is Twitter. About half of the hotels have a presence on YouTube and LinkedIn. Hotels with more stars have a greater digital presence. Five hotels are present on all analyzed social networks (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter and YouTube), and of these five hotels, four are four-star hotels and one is three-star. There are two two-star hotels and two three-star hotels without any digital presence and two hotels whose only digital presence is the social network Facebook.

An analysis was carried out on the contents of the social network Facebook published between January and December 2022, since it was the social network where hotels are most present. The result of the analysis is given in Table 35.1.

The hotels of the BomJesusBraga Group (Hotel do Templo, Hotel do Elevador, Hotel do Parque and Hotel do Lago) share the same Facebook page, hence they contain the same information. The same happens with the Hotel Ibis Braga and Hotel Ibis Budget Braga Centro.

It can be seen from the collected data that events are still not widely used and photographs are the most published content. With regard to sharing, these also do not happen very often.

There is a hotel that despite having a Facebook page (Terrace House) did not publish any content during the period under review.

35.5.2 *Interviews*

Seven interviews were carried out (five in writing, one by telephone and one by video conference) representing eleven hotels, since some interviewees represented more than one hotel.

Each respondent is coded by: Respondent A; Interviewee B, Interviewee C, Interviewee D...

In order to facilitate the analysis and achieve a better use of the interviews, the questions and answers were separated by subject. This organization was done

Table 35.1 Social network Facebook contents

Hotel	Video	Image	Photo	Campaign	Share	Event	#
Melia Braga Hotel & Spa	9	32	115	49	4	6	Yes
Hotel Vila Galé Collection Braga	7	26	168	22	92	0	Yes
Burgus Tribute & Design Hotel	3	11	27	2	4	0	Yes
Villa Garden Braga	2	23	44	8	0	0	Yes
Hotel Moon & Sun Braga	30	36	89	6	1	0	Yes
Hotel do Templo	7	13	174	10	1	0	Yes
Hotel do Elevador	7	13	174	10	1	0	Yes
Hotel do Parque	7	13	174	10	1	0	Yes
Hotel Mercure Braga Centro	54	40	63	7	2	0	Yes
Hotel Bracara Augusta	7	12	55	0	4	0	Yes
Grande Hotel	0	0	0	0	0	0	Yes
Hotel do Lago	7	13	174	10	1	0	Yes
Hotel Senhora-a-Branca	0	5	6	1	14	0	Yes
Motel Horly Hotel	0	0	0	0	0	0	Yes
Hotel D. Sofia	6	1	4	0	11	0	Yes
Urban Hotel Estação	3	3	0	2	10	0	Yes
B&b Hotel Braga	0	3	15	0	0	0	Yes
Flag Hotel Braga	1	8	8	9	9	0	Yes
Basic Braga by Axis	1	2	36	0	6	0	Yes
Motel Bracancun Hotel	0	1	0	0	0	0	Yes
Hotel São Nicolau	0	0	0	0	0	0	Yes
Hotel Residencial Dora	0	0	0	0	0	0	Yes
Truthrooms Hotel	0	0	0	0	0	0	Yes
Hotel Dom Vilas	25	68	66	0	63	0	Yes
Terrace House	0	0	0	0	0	0	Yes
Hotel Ibis Braga	39	130	22	3	2	1	Yes
Hotel Ibis Budget Braga Centro	39	130	22	3	2	1	Yes
Hotel João XXI	0	0	0	0	0	0	Yes

through the creation of subjects where the given answers can be inserted, which are represented in Table 35.2.

Of the seven answers, it appears that five of the hotels interviewed do not have or intend to have a marketing department, nor do they have a defined strategy, and that only two of the hotels have a marketing department.

The most used social networks are Facebook and Instagram, some for just being present, others for advertising, and most to reach new customers and be close to customers. Only Interviewee F intends to be present on the new social network TikTok, the rest do not want to be present on any other social network.

Table 35.2 Subjects analyzed in the interviews and answers

Subjects	Answers
Existence of a marketing department and a digital marketing strategy	<p>“No, everything we do is on a personal level, that is, both my brother and I sometimes go on Facebook. (...) Everything we receive from requests for information or messages there yes, that is, as we receive notifications we respond in good time or quickly whether it is for information on rates or because we are recruiting people, even more for that than information on prices and rates and availability, but yes, that is, we do not have a department is an issue that we deal with personally or familiarly, it is not foreseen.” (Interviewee A)</p> <p>“Yes, we now have a group-wide marketing department, it is an internal service that does marketing for the entire hotel group.” (Interviewee B)</p> <p>“At the moment no, nor is it in the short/medium term plans to set up a Digital Marketing department, since we have an external professional who gives us answers and streamlines all the work.” (Interviewee G)</p> <p>Interviewees C, D and E only answered no, and interviewee F only answered yes</p>
Used social networks and prediction of presence in new social networks	<p>“The hotel is only present on Facebook, in our case since it is a small hotel with more family management, so to speak it is really a matter of making ourselves known and being present because effectively the feedback or reservations we have in relation to that page are merely insignificant. “Regarding the hotel, no, (...) we are on Facebook, but we don’t need to move to other platforms.” (Interviewee A)</p> <p>“We are present on Facebook and Instagram because they are the most viewed social networks with the greatest impact on our clientele and future clientele.” “I judge that it is not foreseen at the moment.” (Interviewee B)</p> <p>“Just realize that the Hotel exists.” “No” (Interviewee C)</p> <p>“Advertising and exposure. Disclosure advantages.” “No” (Interviewee D)</p> <p>“We are more prominently present on social networks. The advantage is mainly the ability to reach potential customers and retain those who already know our hotels. With that, it is the easiest way to make us known as a hotel chain, to show what you can find in a stay, our activities, sub-brands and all the offers available at the moment.” “No” (Interviewee E)</p> <p>“Interacting with customers and prospects. Try a larger number of people.” “We want to gain more prominence on TikTok, the most popular social network at the moment” (Interviewee F)</p> <p>“Being closer to our target public, while adding knowledge and making our facilities known so that in the long term we can transform this public into an end customer. Facebook allows us to reach pre-existing customers while Instagram has allowed us to reach a younger audience.” “Not yet (...) but we are aware of these changes” (Interviewee G)</p>

(continued)

Table 35.2 (continued)

Subjects	Answers
Social media management	<p>“We have no management, we only respond to requests for information on Messenger.” (Interviewee A)</p> <p>“It’s a bit of both things, our marketing department does the general publications, we as a unit, when there’s an event in the city we send information to create content. For example, if a customer publishes something on their own page and identifies the hotel, we take advantage of it and make a repost. The department has autonomy in terms of content, there is a relationship of autonomy and trust.” (Interviewee B)</p> <p>“The management of social networks is done by a professional within the marketing team. The hotel contents are sent to the department which then uses them depending on the strategy at the time.” (Interviewee E)</p> <p>“Management Shared by several professionals and has monitoring and authorization of the contents to be published by the hotel administration.” (Interviewee F)</p> <p>“Yes. Since the end of 2020, our networks have had Social Media Management by a dedicated professional who manages the community and creates personalized content, without requiring authorization from the hotel’s management.” (Interviewee G)</p>
Most relevant social network	<p>“Facebook, but only to respond to requests for information.” (Interviewee A)</p> <p>“Facebook is the most relevant for publicity, we have more views on Facebook and there is more interaction, the customer who sends us a message trying to make a reservation.” (Interviewee B)</p> <p>“Not relevant to our company.” (Interviewee C)</p> <p>“Facebook” (Interviewee D) and (Interviewee F)</p> <p>“Instagram” (Interviewee E)</p> <p>“The most relevant social network for disclosure is Instagram, Sales and target audience loyalty has been Facebook so far” (Interviewee G)</p>
Strengths and weaknesses compared with the competition	<p>“A strong point is that we can photograph a breakfast and publish it immediately in an amateur way, but without having to communicate with a department, in relation to the negative points, lack of time and ideas, for example, we could publish every day or weekly.” (Interviewee A)</p> <p>“Yes, I definitely think there is room for improvement, for example more content posted on social media.” (Interviewee B)</p> <p>“We do not manage our social networks.” (Interviewee C)</p> <p>“Strong point loyal customers. Weak point little presence.” (Interviewee D)</p> <p>“Our strong point compared to the competition is our very active presence on social networks (mainly Instagram and Facebook).” (Interviewee E)</p> <p>“Not applicable.” (Interviewee F)</p> <p>“We do not compare our management to the competition.” (Interviewee G)</p>

Respondents A, C and D have no social media management and respondents B, E, F and G have social media managed by marketing professionals passing through the hotel administration.

Most respondents admit the lack of content on their social networks, others admit that they are not managed or compared with the competition, and only one claims to have a very active presence, mainly on Facebook and Instagram, which sets them apart from the competition.

35.6 Conclusions

Social media is an important tool for hotels to reach their customers and promote their brand. Therefore, it is critical that hotels dedicate time and resources to managing their social media accounts effectively.

In this study, it was possible to identify that most two- and three-star hotels do not have a digital marketing department or a short- and medium-term strategic plan. These situations arise mainly from lack of resources, lack of knowledge to do so or the lack of appreciation of digital marketing.

From the analysis carried out on the hotels in the city of Braga, it was found that of the twenty-eight hotels, only four do not have any presence on social networks. Of these four, two of them don't even have a website, that is, they don't have any digital presence.

Although the literature demonstrates that having a strong digital presence enhances the success of any business, some failures were identified with the analysis of the digital presence of hotels and it was verified through the interviews that there are still hotels without a digital marketing strategy and that, on the one hand, they do not give importance, either due to lack of resources, or due to lack of knowledge to do so.

During the analysis of the interviewees' answers, it was verified that most of the answers had in common the lack of a marketing department and a digital marketing plan, and it is not foreseen in the short/medium term to constitute the marketing department since they do not have human resources and money to invest in the elaboration of a digital marketing strategy.

For future investigations it will be interesting to investigate, for example, what are the obstacles in the implementation of the digital marketing strategy in the hotel industry; characterization of human resources and tools used in digital marketing in hospitality and evaluation and control systems for the digital marketing strategy in hotels. It will also be interesting to replicate the same study in other cities and make comparisons.

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