CELSO ANDRÉ DE JESUS MARQUES

EXAMINING GOOD PRACTICES IN DIGITAL CONTENT MARKETING:

A STUDY ON PORTUGUESE HOTEL BLOGS

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Mestrado em Gestão de Marketing

Trabalho efetuado sob a orientação de:

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Dedicatória

À memória do meu avô António.

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DCM   Digital Content Marketing

CMI   Content Marketing Institute

CM   Content Marketing

DC   Digital Content

SEO   Search Engine Optimization

CRM   Customer Relationship Management

HTML   Hyper Text Markup Language

PDF   Portable Document Format

CMS   Content Management System

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Resumo

Este estudo examina o uso do marketing de conteúdo digital por parte de hotéis portugueses nos seus blogues. São analisadas boas práticas que a literatura aponta que devem ser utilizadas em blogues para que estes sejam bem-sucedidos na relação com o utilizador. Estas boas práticas sustentam-se no uso de aspetos específicos que beneficiam a gestão do blogue. O estudo oferece uma visão do nível da adoção dessas boas práticas/aspetos por parte de 22 hotéis analisados.

O estudo é motivado pela escassez de informação existente sobre hotelaria portuguesa e o uso que esta faz do marketing de conteúdo digital nos seus blogues. Foram encontrados estudos que evidenciam a importância do marketing de conteúdo digital e a sua estreita ligação aos blogues noutras áreas, mas verifica-se uma lacuna na investigação deste tópico aplicado à hotelaria. Desta forma, este estudo centra-se em analisar como o marketing de conteúdo digital é utilizado nos blogues de hotéis portugueses.

Os dados foram recolhidos através de um *website* gerido pelo Turismo de Portugal, no qual foi possível extrair-se uma lista de hotéis de 4 e 5 estrelas. Desta forma, foram identificados 198 *websites* de hotéis de 5 estrelas e 795 *websites* de hotéis de 4 estrelas, de forma a registar todos os hotéis que incorporavam blogues nos seus sites. Após esta fase preliminar, foi reunida uma amostra de 22 hotéis com blogues, nos quais se analisou seis dos seus mais recentes artigos/*posts*. Para o efeito, foi realizada uma análise de conteúdo dos mesmos, com uma aplicação quantitativa. Foram reunidas e analisadas 11 categorias principais e em alguns casos subcategorias, nomeadamente 1) "conteúdo educativo" (*webinars*, infográficos e *e-books*), 2) "credibilidade" (nome do autor), 3) "utilidade" (viagens/férias, dicas, lugares a visitar, relacionado ao negócio), 4) "relevância" (categorias), 5) "consistência", 6) "atual", 7) "cativante" (podcasts, vídeos, áudio, animações e imagens), 8) "comentários", 9) "dimensão do texto", 10) "botões de partilha" e 11) "artigos sugeridos".

A análise permitiu verificar que existe uma escassez de hotéis de 4 e 5 estrelas em Portugal com blogue no seu *website*, de acordo com os critérios usados no presente estudo. Além disso, algumas das categorias analisadas, como "conteúdo educacional" e suas subcategorias, nomeadamente *webinars*, infográficos e *e-books*, não estão a ser utilizados pelos blogues dos hotéis analisados. Ademais, na categoria analisada onde se

tenta perceber se o conteúdo é "cativante" (*engaging*), relativamente às suas subcategorias, nomeadamente *podcasts*, vídeos, áudio, animações e imagens, concluiu-se que esta última subcategoria (imagens) é a mais adotada pela grande maioria dos hotéis nos *posts* dos seus blogues. Verificou-se que dos 22 hotéis, 21 (95%) utilizam imagens nos seus blogues. O uso das outras subcategorias é quase residual.

Embora a literatura aponte como importante exibir o nome do autor do *post*/artigo no final do mesmo como forma de dar mais credibilidade, apenas 4 blogues (18%) incluem esta característica.

Relativamente à atenção dada ao grau de "utilidade" (*value*) dos *posts* para os utilizadores, verificou-se que apenas 2 dos blogues analisados (9%) fazem melhor uso desta característica de forma consistente. Cerca de 41% recorrem a esta boa prática mas não de forma consistente.

Com respeito à característica que indica que o blogue deve dar a possibilidade ao utilizador de escolher entre diferentes categorias (relevância), verificou-se que apenas 7 hotéis (32%) fazem uso desta opção.

Verificou-se também que é importante que os blogues façam uma partilha regular de *posts*/artigos. Nesta categoria foi verificada a sua consistência ao longo do tempo. Os resultados apontam que 7 blogues (32%) partilham *posts* de forma consistente.

Analisou-se se os blogues partilham *posts* que sejam atuais e que estejam ligados a eventos recentes. Verificou-se que 16 blogues (73%) partilharam *posts* que aplicam esta boa prática de marketing de conteúdo digital.

Relativamente à característica que se refere à possibilidade de os utilizadores deixarem comentários nos *posts*, constatou-se que apenas 2 blogues (9%) permitem que o utilizador deixe comentários, o que não é consistente com a ideia de interatividade esperada ao nível do marketing de conteúdos digitais aplicado aos blogues.

Com respeito à dimensão do texto dos *posts*, a literatura enfatiza a recomendação de que estes devem ter um mínimo de extensão de 500 palavras. Nesta característica, "dimensão do texto", verificou-se que apenas 2 blogues (9%) são consistentes em todos os *posts* analisados. Embora alguns blogues partilhem artigos que respeitam este número de palavras, estes não são consistentes em todos os *posts* analisados.

Analisou-se se os blogues dos hotéis incorporavam um botão (*share button*) diretamente nos *posts* que permitisse a que os utilizadores pudessem partilhar o *post* nas suas redes sociais. Aqui analisaram-se 3 redes sociais diferentes, nomeadamente Facebook, LinkedIn e Twitter, assim como a possibilidade de partilha via email. Constatou-se que 9 blogues (41%) permitem partilhar artigos diretamente no Facebook, seguido pelo Twitter, com 8 blogs (36%), LinkedIn com 6 blogs (27%) e e-mail com 5 blogs (23%).

Os resultados indicam também se os blogues fazem a sugestão de leitura de outros *posts* relacionado no próprio *post* que o utilizador leia. Desta forma, observou-se que 16 blogues (73%) aplicam esta boa prática.

Este estudo revelou que as boas práticas analisadas são importantes para que os hotéis possam otimizar os seus blogues a nível da estratégia de comunicação digital, por conseguinte, tornar a sua relação com os utilizadores mais próxima. Do que foi analisado, constata-se que nenhum blogue reúne todas as categorias e subcategorias examinadas. No entanto, existem pelo menos 2 hotéis que sobressaem em comparação com os demais, como aplicando o maior número de boas práticas de marketing de conteúdos digitais em blogues. De uma forma geral, a maioria dos blogues não segue as práticas recomendadas na literatura de forma consistente, não estando, dessa forma, a usufruir de todos os benefícios de uma estratégia de comunicação digital por via desta ferramenta.

Este estudo contribui para a literatura de marketing de conteúdo digital com aplicação em blogues de hotéis. Preenche uma lacuna existente ao nível do conhecimento, investigando de forma exaustiva o uso do marketing de conteúdo digital no uso de blogues que geridos por hotéis de 4 e 5 estrelas em Portugal. A metodologia usada pode ser usada no futuro no âmbito de outras tipologias de alojamento. Além disso, esta investigação enfatiza para a importância do uso de blogues de forma consistente e estruturada. Recomendações de marketing são oferecidas com o foco na gestão de marketing de hotéis com recurso a blogues.

Palavras-chave: marketing de conteúdo, marketing digital, inbound marketing, blogue de hotéis, boas práticas no uso de blogues

Abstract

The main objective of this study is to examine if companies such as hotels follow the best practices recommended in digital content marketing (DCM) literature in relation to their blogs. More specifically, it is intended to analyze if the content shared by Portuguese hotels on their blogs adhere to the elements that literature highlights as important for developing engagement with the audience. In so doing, 22 hotel blogs were compared by highlighting the ones that follow the best practices and the reverse situation.

This study is motivated by the scarcity of existing research on Portuguese hotels and their use of digital content marketing on their blogs.

A content analysis approach using 11 categories (characteristics identified in literature) revealed that the good practices analyzed are important so that hotels optimize their blogs and, therefore, improve their relationship with users. The findings show that no blog brings together all the good practices examined.

Of all the hotels studied, 2 hotel blogs stand out in comparison to the others by implementing the characteristics that literature points out as relevant in a good digital communication strategy via blogs. In general, the majority of blogs do not follow the practices recommended in literature in a consistent way, and therefore are not optimizing their blogs as a communication tool.

This study contributes significantly to the digital content marketing literature with application on hotel blogs. It fills an existing research gap, by examining the use of digital content marketing via blogs in a hospitality context, with a focus on 4 and 5 star hotels. As a result, this research offers marketing recommendations addressed to hotels, considering the use of DCM with regards to blogs.

Keywords: content marketing, digital marketing, inbound marketing, hotel blogs, blogs best practices

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 - Context

As in many other fields, marketing has evolved over time, becoming one of the most important areas for companies. Brands soon realized that marketing had the power to help them grow. This evolution is strictly connected with two major points: the first is related to the market's significant competition and the second to the progress and expansion of the internet (Kaur, 2017).

In the first case, the notion that marketing was a driving force that could help companies to thrive and assert themselves as leaders in their fields allowed it to prosper as a key domain. However, as more brands started to communicate, using the same channels and similar messages, it became difficult to obtain the general public's attention. Therefore, marketing became one of the most innovative areas in businesses, with professionals having to adapt to new challenges (Blythe, 2006). This evolution had undoubtedly influenced the way brands see marketing today.

Regarding the second point, the internet allowed that brands could use marketing through other formats, but also that it could reach more people. Although traditional marketing formats are still used, such as newspaper ads, TV ads, radio ads, etc., brands started also focusing on digital marketing. This new marketing branch is within reach of any company (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2017). Moreover, brands need to keep pace with the needs of the market but, more importantly, with the needs of the audience. If there is one major aspect about the relationship between customers and the internet, it is, unquestionably, that the latter changed consumer behavior (Pulizzi & Barret, 2009). This means that companies must be present where their customers are. Also, since mobile devices are now one of the most commonly used tools to access the internet (Chaffey & Smith, 2017), brands must be alert and monitor the marketplace.

Presently people use the internet for countless reasons and in entirely different situations. Customers may be in a shop and search online for reviews (or comparing prices) about a product they are holding in their hands (Kotler *et al.*, 2017). Another user may be checking their social media networks, or purchasing a product online. A prevalent action is searching for information online that, somehow, could potentially help the user in achieving something. Regardless of which action a user may be

performing, one of the most usual actions that are highlighted in literature is the search for information or, more specifically, the search for answers. Therefore, brands must be aware of what users are looking for and provide solutions for their needs (Pulizzi, 2014).

One way of delivering information is through blogs, which are normally located within the company's website. In this section, brands can share their knowledge with users. In the majority of cases, the information can be tangibilized in the form of written articles/posts, video or audio, amongst others (Chaffey & Smith, 2017). These formats of content can be categorized within content marketing. This area of marketing has gained ground in the last years and started to become incorporated in companies' strategic actions (Stokes, 2013). If literature points out that in an offline context a good location is crucial for the business, in the online world content became equally important (Blythe, 2006).

Content marketing has the objective to help consumers by adding value to their lives through important content. Thus, brands should use content as a driver to attract users to their websites. By providing helpful content, users become familiarized with the brand, a process that may lead to beneficial results, such as sales, *newsletters* subscriptions or sharing positive information related to the company in social media, for example (Pulizzi, 2014).

Companies can use blogs as part of their content marketing strategy (Colton & Poploski, 2019). However, the use of blogs must follow some good practices that are pointed out in the literature in order for the company to take full advantage of their use. The blog must be seen as a strategic component of communication, and marketing professionals that run a company blog must integrate both the information conveyed through the blog and good practices when managing a blog (Dennis, Minas, & Lockwood, 2016). These two components combined will increase the probability for the company website to be more easily discovered by users and to maintain the relation with users during more time, which ultimately will help to develop a relationship based on trust between the company and the user. Lastly, this long-lasting relation will increase the probability of the user buying from the company since the information regularly shared will help to develop a top-of-mind view of the brand (Hidayanto, Razaad, Shihab, & Hasibuan, 2014).

To the best of the author's knowledge, the studies that focus on blogs from the perspective of analyzing the application of good practices suggested in the literature are scarce. In particular, the application in the hotel context is non-existent. Studying the hospitality sector is important since this area has an enormous value to the economy, mostly to the Portuguese economy (Turismo de Portugal, 2020a). Therefore, it is relevant to have a study that gathers the best practices in the use of blogs, to help hotels take full advantage of their usage.

1.2 - Reasons for the choice of the theme

There are two main reasons that are at the root of the choice of this theme. The first reason has to do with the author's interest in digital marketing, more specifically, in digital content marketing. Moreover, the author is also interested in blogs, and how their use can approximate people to companies. Therefore, the research is focused essentially in the relation between companies' blogs and visitors.

The second reason is related to the objective of the author to understand how is the relation of Portuguese companies, more specifically hotels, and content marketing, with a focus on blogs. Moreover, the study is focused on hotels due to their importance to the Portuguese economy.

1.3 - Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to examine if companies, which in this case are hotels, follow the best practices recommended in digital content marketing (DCM) literature in relation to their blogs. More specifically, it is intended to analyze if content shared by Portuguese hotels on their blogs adhere to the elements that literature highlights as important for developing engagement with the audience. In doing so, we will compare hotel blogs by highlighting the ones that follow the best practices and the reverse situation. As a result, it is also intended to offer marketing recommendations addressed to hotels, considering the use of DCM with regards to blogs.

Following the research objectives, the main research question of this research is: To what extent are Portuguese hotels adhering to the best practices of DCM regarding their blogs?

1.4 - Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. In the first chapter, we introduce the theme, the reasons for its choice and objectives.

The second chapter corresponds to literature review. This section has the objective of demonstrating the evolution of content marketing, but also its contemporary importance. Also, we present the different definitions of content marketing introduced by various authors. Furthermore, we explain the differences of concepts related to digital marketing and their importance. Moreover, we analyze the different formats of content marketing individually.

The third chapter presents the methodology followed in the present study. This chapter discusses the theoretical foundations of the research, the research design, describes the population and the sample, the method of data collection and the data analysis.

The fourth chapter aims at discussing and analyzing the results. We describe them individually.

In the fifth chapter, we present the conclusions, recommendations and limitations of the study. This section also includes some suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2 – Literature review

This chapter seeks to provide an overview of the evolution of content marketing throughout the years until it becomes digital. We will also present several content marketing formats that can be used in blogs, to enhance the user experience.

2.1 - Content marketing – background

Although many companies worldwide are using content marketing, this is not a recent area of interest, as companies have been using it for many years. The most known example is the historic John Deere's magazine "The Furrow", created in 1895 and considered even today the biggest agricultural magazine. The idea behind this magazine was not to try to sell products commercially, but rather to share educational content with farmers about the agricultural world, and information related to new technologies and how they could manage their business better (Pulizzi, 2014). When John Deere decided to publish this kind of content, which had the aim to help farmers, instead of a catalogue with their products, they were doing content marketing, even if back then the term had not been coined yet.

Other examples, almost from the same time, helped to develop content marketing, such as the "Michelin Guide" or the "Jell-O" recipe book. The former was created in 1900 and had the objective to assist drivers in maintaining their cars and finding adequate lodging. In its first edition, about 35.000 copies were given for free (Pulizzi, 2014). As the name suggests, the latter was a recipe book distributed by the company Jell-O, a then-famous gelatine-dessert company, with the objective to teach housewives about gelatine-based desserts. These examples illustrate that companies have been using content marketing for a long time, and in different sectors.

However, officially, it was not until 1996 that the term "content marketing" was used for the first time. According to Świeczak (2016), it was during a roundtable discussion at the American Society for Newspaper Editors, which was about the topic of how to effectively marketing a newspaper with content, that John Oppedahl used the term for the first time.

Despite this first appearance, the adoption of the concept of content marketing was not immediate; i.e., although brands have been using it for decades, the idea behind using

content to promote a brand was not explored immediately. This rationale came as well with the internet that made possible for people and brands to share information in a different new way. We can assume that with the internet, content marketing enters in a second era (Gabriel, 2018).

In the year 2000, Seth Godin launched and shared for free his e-book "Unleashing the Ideavirus", considered a new format at the time (Zantal-Wiener, 2017). In 2008, Joe Pulizzi and New Barret wrote the book "Get Content Get Customers" (Pulizzi, 2014). Two years later in 2010, the Content Marketing Institute (CMI) was founded by Joe Pulizzi, who is considered one of the prominent personalities of content marketing (Maczuga *et al.*, 2014). Google updates, especially the Hummingbird in 2013, start to prioritize engaging content. According to Lin and Yazdanifard (2014) this update was a major upgrade in Google search results, as it takes better in consideration the intent behind any search made by users. Therefore, the type of content developed by brands should meet the searcher's intent in a more accurate manner, namely, content that users are looking for, and not deceiving content. This requirement is extremely important since the new update has the aim to present relevant content to users, i.e., quality content that satisfies the audience needs, and the user wants to engage with. In 2017, 89% of all brands in North America used content marketing (Pulizzi & Handley, 2017). Despite of its shy growth at the beginning of the internet era, content marketing continues to prosper in importance until today, as brands realized its relevance.

Although content has been used for more than a century by companies, the development of the internet made it possible for brands to distribute any type of content directly to their audience worldwide (Pulizzi, 2014). Moreover, companies today are able to share content with their public more efficiently than in the past. That is possible not only because of the available channels but as well due to the knowledge that brands have about their audiences through CRM systems, for instance. That is crucial to produce and share content the audience desires to engage with (Pulizzi & Barret, 2009).

Companies realized that content is a powerful way of creating a strong relationship with customers, encouraging them to be loyal to the brand. Therefore, any company that wants to be competitive should use content as part of its strategy. That is the main difference between companies from the early days of content and companies today: the notion that content marketing can be used as a strategic marketing approach (Human,

Hirschfelder, & Nel, 2018), and that it drives profit to the company (Pulizzi & Barret, 2009). In addition, content marketing has a significant impact on the so-called marketing mix's promotion dimension (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019).

2.2 - Definition of digital content marketing

First and foremost, it is important to highlight the fact that some authors use the terminology digital content marketing (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Taiminen & Ranaweera, 2018), while others prefer the expression content marketing (Kotler *et al.*, 2017; Maczuga *et al*., 2014; Odongo, 2016; Pulizzi, 2014). However, despite omitting the word "digital", it does not mean that these authors are not talking about content marketing applied to the digital world, as their works not only appear in the internet era, but focus on relating content marketing with digital marketing. Kotler *et al*. (2017: 121) state that content marketing "is being touted as the future of advertising in the digital economy". Pulizzi (2014: 8), on the other hand, declares that the "the center of gravity for content marketing is a brand website".

A third form of referring to this new type of marketing is digital content (Koiso-Kanttila, 2004; Rowley, 2008), which clarifies that this approach is applied to the digital world. Koiso-Kantilla (2004: 46) highlights that digital content is "conceptualized as bit-based objects distributed through electronic channels". For Rowley (2008), some formats of digital content are online-news, electronic journals or e-books.

Although content marketing can be used in off-line activities (in-person events), such as seminars, conferences, workshops, or roundtables (Wang, Malthouse, Calder, & Uzunoglu, 2017), in this dissertation, these three terms - content marketing (CM), digital content marketing (DCM) and digital content (DC) - will be used interchangeably and applied solely to the digital world. A group of the most cited definitions in literature was collected, which are shared in Table 2.1:

Table 2.1 - Content Marketing Definitions

Author	Definition
Koiso-Kantilla, (2002: 54)	"The key characteristics of the digital content identified are information recombination, accessibility, navigation interaction, speed, and essentially zero marginal cost."
Rowley, (2008: 522)	"Digital content marketing is the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customer requirements profitably in the context of digital content, or bit-based objects distributed through electronic channels."
Pulizzi and Barrett (2009: xvii)	"Content marketing is the art of understanding exactly what your customers need to know and delivering it to them in a relevant and compelling way."
Content Marketing Institute (2010)	"Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action."
Wuebben (2011: 4)	"Content marketing is the act of sharing tips, advice, and other value-added information as a means of converting prospects into customers and customers into loyal, lifelong, repeat buyers."
McPheat, (2011: 10)	"Content marketing is a way of publishing content on the Internet that empowers, engages, educates, and connects readers. […] content marketing also makes you as a business more visible and sellable."
Holliman and Rowley (2014: 23)	"B2B digital content marketing involves creating, distributing and sharing relevant, compelling and timely content to engage customers at the appropriate point in their buying consideration processes, such that it encourages them to convert to a business building outcome."
Pulizzi (2014: 5)	"Content marketing is the marketing and business process for creating and distributing valuable and compelling content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience - with the objective of driving profitable customer action."
Du Plessis (2015: 128)	"Content marketing is a strategic brand storytelling technique aimed at changing consumers' inactive behaviour through unobtrusive, engaging brand conversations in earned media."
Kotler *et al.* (2017: 121)	"Content marketing is a marketing approach that involves creating, curating, distributing, and amplifying content that is interesting, relevant, and useful to a clearly defined audience group in order to create conversations about the content."
Hollebeek and Macky (2019: 9)	"DCM denotes the creation and dissemination of relevant, valuable brand-related content to current or prospective customers on digital platforms to develop their favorable brand engagement, trust, and relationships (vs. directly persuading consumers to purchase)."

Source: Own development

According to Rowley (2008), the term digital content marketing was introduced for the first time by Koiso-Kantilla in her article from 2004 titled: "Digital Content Marketing: A Literature Synthesis". The objective of DCM is to deliver high-quality original

content (Kotler *et al*., 2017), "focused on creating a valuable experience" (Granata & Scozzese, 2019: 60) for the user , changing the type of content delivered by brands (Maczuga *et al*., 2014), such as blog posts, e-books, videos, infographics, webinars, (Pulizzi, 2014; Maczuga *et al*., 2014), podcasts (Mcpheat, 2011), website pages, case studies, digital magazines and press releases (Wuebben, 2011). However, what changes with the internet is, mainly, the way it can be delivered, as it can be done through websites, social media (Pulizzi, 2014), or email newsletters (Mcpheat, 2011). By doing so, it can reach more people, and any company can make use of it (Pulizzi, 2014), not being restricted only to major brands (Du Plessis, 2015).

DCM must follow specific rules so that customers want to read it, and prefer it over competitors' content. Some authors highlight in their definitions of content marketing the characteristics that the content must contemplate. Specifically, literature advocates that effective content must be educational (Mcpheat, 2011), compelling (Pulizzi & Barret, 2009; Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Pulizzi, 2014), valuable (Content Marketing Institute, 2020; Wuebben, 2011; Pulizzi, 2014; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019), relevant (Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Content Marketing Institute, 2020; Kotler *et al*., 2017; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019; Pulizzi & Barret, 2009), interesting (Kotler *et al*., 2017), consistent (Content Marketing Institute, 2020), timely (Holliman & Rowley, 2014), useful (Kotler *et al*., 2017) and engaging (Du Plessis, 2015; Mcpheat, 2011). These characteristics will help the company define the type of content it will produce, and "allow it to create added value for the consumer" (Granata & Scozzese, 2019: 65).

Educational content means that it must "impart knowledge on specific topics" (Lou, Xie, Feng, & Kim, 2019: 774); it could be simply to teach something complex in an easy way. The shared content must contain compelling information, meaning that if a customer reads it, the information becomes so important to them that they become new clients (Pulizzi & Barret, 2009). The content must be valuable, useful and relevant to the user, which means that it should help the customer solve a problem (Pulizzi & Barret, 2009) or complete a task (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). The content must be interesting, with quality information about a topic, instead of misleading the audience with an ad (Maczuga *et al*., 2014). Companies have to be consistent when publishing, which means delivering content on a regular basis (Pulizzi, 2014). Content should also be timely, meaning that it is key to address the customer needs in a timely manner

(Järvinen & Taiminen, 2016). Furthermore, it should be engaging, which is related to the quality of shared information and its clarity (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Although it is not present in the aforementioned authors' definitions, it is also important to consider another characteristic since it allows attesting the importance of the content of a blog, namely comments. Enabling comments on blog posts allows users to express their feedback (Blair & Level, 2008), and develop a conversation between the brand and the users (Ahuja & Medury, 2010). Moreover, although some authors use the expression "compelling" as a characteristic of DCM (Pulizzi & Barret, 2009; Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Pulizzi, 2014), other researchers suggest that the expression "credibility" is the best term to describe one of the best practices in producing digital content. Specifically, Cosenza, Solomon, and Kwon (2014: 75) state that "[...] credibility allows consumers to evaluate the believability of the information [...]". We follow the latter authors approach. Table 2.2 offers a broader understanding of each category.

Table 2.2 – Definitions of DCM characteristics

Characteristics of DCM	Description
Educational	The content must have a learning/teaching objective. It should help the audience in the process of learning something, i.e., it must "impart knowledge on specific topics" (Lou *et al*., 2019: 774). The learning intent may not be completely declared, since "blogs can also assist in the sharing of tacit knowledge" (Baxter & Connolly, 2013: 106). According to (Mcpheat, 2011), content that teaches how to perform any task better is considered educational, such as "how-to content". The author highlights that "how-to content comes in the form of lists, with steps or points that are labeled by number or bullet points. They can be sequential if the information teaches you a process that is linear, or it can be a list of points that do not have to be done in any particular order" (Mcpheat, 2011: 42). Also, some formats can be considered intrinsically educational, such as webinars (Pulizzi, 2014), infographics (Maczuga *et al*., 2014) and e-books (Rao, 2003).
Useful	The content should serve a useful purpose - helping the audience to do or achieving something. Pulizzi, (2014: 77) highlights that "[...] content should answer some unmet need of or question for your customer. It needs to be useful in some way to the customer [...]".
Credibility	The audience must acknowledge the veracity of the shared information in a way that encourages action. Credibility is an important aspect for determining if content is compelling (Barry & Gironda, 2017). Cosenza *et al*. (2014: 75) inform that "credibility allows consumers to evaluate the believability of the information based on their personal perspectives", and "[…] credibility influences the impact of the message." Therefore, blogs must exhibit credibility "[...] the usefulness of blogs is dependent upon how consumers perceive blog credibility and trust them" (Cosenza *et al*., 2014: 72). Credibility can be attested through the presence of the name of the author in the blog post. As presented by (Koenig & Schlaegel, 2014: 434), "credibility and interaction can particularly be supported by publicly displaying employee names and pictures, so that readers feel to rather interact with an individual than with an organization."

Table 2.2 – Definitions of DCM characteristics (cont.)

Characteristics of DCM	Description
Value	The shared content must be related to the core business of the brand. Users expect to find content that can help them. Therefore if users reach the blog and find unrelated content it may deceive them. If the blog belongs to a hotel, the shared content must be related to travelling, visiting places, etc. On the other hand, if the blog belongs to a food company, it should share, for instance, recipes. According to Ahuja and Medury, (2010: 103) "organizations should identify the appropriateness of content to the target population of onsite visitors and host content that is attractive to them." In order to share this type of content, the brand must understand the target audience "[...] providing valuable content requires an understanding of customer information needs at different points in time, and at different point in their buying/relationship process" (Holliman & Rowley, 2014: 287).
Relevance	Content must meet the consumers' needs, hence the "categorization", or the ability to have the blog divided per categories, or different themes but all regarding the business. Ahuja and Medury (2010: 92) state that "content categorization is used to enable organizations to post consumer-relevant content to induce greater consumer participation." Therefore, the blog itself should have categories and it should be possible to choose the most relevant among these. "Posts in blogs are tagged with keywords, allowing for content categorization and also for gaining access to the content through tagging as a theme-based classification system" (Ahuja & Medury, 2010: 93). Baxter, Connolly, and Stansfield (2010: 518) inform that "[...] information in a blog is stored chronologically by date often in themed categories." Iglesias-Pradas, Hernández-García, and Fernández-Cardador (2017: 221) highlight that blogs may have "tags for content classification."
Interesting	The information must be about a clearly defined topic, instead of misleading the audience with an ad, or content that tries explicitly to sell a product (Maczuga *et al*., 2014). Koenig and Schlaegel (2014: 433) express that "companies need to carefully consider which kind of messages they want to communicate on their corporate blog, as the use of marketing messages was found to negatively impact perceived ease of use." Järvinen and Taiminen (2016: 169) declare that "good content never focuses on products but instead focuses on helping customers to solve their problems and on offering advice on issues customers may feel unsure about."
Consistency	The content must be shared on a regular basis, "consistently and on time" (Pulizzi, 2014: 77). Ahuja and Medury (2010: 104) declare that "a regularity in posting leads to increased consumer contacts aids in strengthening brand recall and develops a brand relationship, thereby inducing participation and leading to consumer involvement, and an increased perception of value in the organization / product." If the brand has not a regular publication calendar it may not only lose readers, but also its contents may be perceived as outdated. "Most regular users visit blogs to read updated postings and to leave responses and therefore, the frequency of blog posting is likely to influence the users' perception of how well the blog author is performing expected tasks, and can be a good indicator of the corporate bloggers' taking responsibility in maintaining their relationships with blog visitors" (Cho & Huh, 2010: 36). Consistency in posting may create a positive brand attitude: "Having a regular touch point to interact with the customer results in learning related to the brand and generates a positive attitude by creating a brand association" (Ahuja & Medury, 2010: 96). For Koenig and Schlaegel (2014: 433), "blog management can be improved by publishing content on a blog frequently and regularly [...]."

Table 2.2 – Definitions of DCM characteristics (cont.)

Characteristics of DCM	Description
Timely	Content must be connected to present/modern happenings - it must be actual (Rowley, 2008). Therefore, content must be up to date, and that can be observed in the article publication date. Koenig and Schlaegel (2014: 433) refer that "company-related information on a blog is timely and up-to-date."
Engagement	In order to attract users, the blog must share engaging content, i.e., "content can be engaging because it provides users with an intrinsically enjoyable experience, enabling them to unwind and escape from the pressures of daily life" (Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel, 2009: 322). Multi-media features "can be considered to represent a corporation's efforts to make user interaction more enjoyable and entertaining" (Cho & Huh, 2010: 36). In these multi-media features, it can be included elements, such as "podcast, video, audio, and animation (Cho & Huh, 2010: 36), and "the use of images" (Koenig & Schlaegel, 2014: 433).
Comments	Comments are important since they allow the company to maintain a relationship with users. By allowing comments on its blog, the company may better understand users through what they write and use that information to make enhancements. Also, answering comments may strengthen the company connection with users. Blair and Level (2008: 161) express that "the use of comments is another common means of tracking success of a blog. In fact the comments feature is one of the selling points of blogs – readers have an opportunity to comment and express their opinions." Ahuja and Medury (2010: 93) refer that "the ability of a blog to induce consumer participation by making consumers comment on the posts hosted by the organization creates a dialogue and helps the organization achieve consumer engagement." Cox, Martinez, and Quinlan (2008: 10) point out that "allowing readers to respond to blog entries contribute to a sense of community. Open debate also increases a blog's credibility in a way analogous to the peer review process in academic publications." Dennis, Minas, and Lockwood (2016: 169) state that "with this feature [comments] disabled, the communication becomes unidirectional—from the corporation to its audience."

Source: Own development

Content marketing is focused on customers' needs and not on selling products (Content Marketing Institute, 2020). According to Hollebeek and Macky (2019), instead of directly persuading consumers to buy, like advertising, DCM adds value to their lives, doing so by creating a lasting relationship with the customer through trust. When a company creates and shares content, the objective is not to obtain profit directly from that content, but rather to attract customers and encourage them to be loyal to the brand (Pulizzi, 2012).

The adopted concept for content marketing in this dissertation is aligned with the definition purposed by Pulizzi (2014: 5):

> Content marketing is the marketing and business process for creating and distributing valuable and compelling content to attract, acquire, and engage a clearly defined and understood target audience - with the objective of driving profitable customer action.

This definition was chosen since it contains the notion that although content marketing has the objective of helping the consumer by providing valuable content firstly, it is also a marketing approach leading to profit. Moreover, it introduces the idea that brands must have a thorough understanding of their clients. Otherwise they cannot deliver the right content to the right audience. Lastly, this definition helps to understand that, above all, content marketing is a business strategy rather than a simplistic or superficial technique.

2.3 - The relationship between content marketing and related concepts

2.3.1 - Digital marketing and content marketing

Digitization has become natural in our lives. We are connected online almost every day, searching for information or products, working or studying online, amusing ourselves with social networks, listening to music or watching videos, among many others. This new way of using and interacting in the digital world changed the way customers and brands relate to each other, making marketers change their focus to online activities (Whatmough, 2018).

Some of the advantages for companies while using digital marketing are that it will enable brands to reach new markets (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). Also, digital marketing applications can be more easily measured than offline marketing (Järvinen, Tollinen, Karjaluoto, Jayawardhena, & Mero 2012). Moreover, it is easier for the consumer to find and compare information about products or services online (Goldfarb & Tucker, 2019), and specific instruments allow brands to track the consumer's path online. Consequently, digital marketing permits better segmentation and personalization (Goldfarb & Tucker, 2019). In addition, the costs of producing and sharing digital products are lower (Kannan & Li, 2017). According to Chaffey and Smith (2017) digital marketing allows to:

> Getting closer to customers and understanding them better, adding value to products, widening distribution channels and boosting sales through running digital marketing campaigns using digital media channels such as search marketing, online advertising

and affiliate marketing[1] (...) It also includes using the website to facilitate customer leads, sales and managing after-sales service (Chaffey & Smith, 2017: 13).

Digital marketing is an umbrella term, to which content marketing belongs, i.e., the latter is a form of doing digital marketing through content (Chaffey & Smith, 2017).

2.3.2 - Inbound marketing and content marketing

Today having a website to expose products and waiting for the customer to find them is not enough. Brands need to be more proactive to make their businesses more discoverable across the internet. One of the ways of accomplishing it is through inbound marketing.

According to Chaffey and Smith (2017), inbound marketing is a pull marketing technique that benefits from having good visibility on search engines, where customers use search terms to find what they are looking for, known as search engine optimization[2] (SEO). These brands pull customers to their websites, which are already searching for useful information, products or services (Holliman & Rowley, 2014), not only using SEO, but also through social media marketing.

Inbound marketing has a close relation to content. In other words, it is nearly impossible to talk about inbound marketing techniques without relating them to content (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Instead of using the traditional form of marketing that interrupts the audience with ads, inbound marketing is a more desirable technique that aims to help and educate the audience through relevant and engaging content, which will continuously come back for more content (Holliman & Rowley, 2014). Ultimately, inbound marketing means being found by the target audience, instead of interrupting them (Halligan & Shah, 2010).

2.3.3 - Copywriting and content marketing

Although copywriting and content marketing might leave the impression that they are the same, they are two distinct marketing approaches (Albrighton, 2010). According to Sugarman (2007: 25), copywriting is a process, which consists of "writing copy that

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[1] Affiliate marketing "it's a commission-based arrangement where the merchant only pays when they make the sale or get a lead" (Chaffey & Smith, 2017: 419).
[2] Search engine optimization (SEO) is "a structured approach used to increase the relative ranking position of a company or its products in search engine natural or organic results listings on search engine results pages for selected keyphrases" (Chaffey & Smith, 2017: 674).

motivates people to take an action". It is important to highlight in Sugarman's definition the fact that copywriting is applied to written messages. In contrast, as mentioned before, content marketing includes other distinct formats, such as video and podcasts. Some of the actions impelled by copywriting could be to buy something, download a free eBook, follow a company's social media profile, and subscribe to a newsletter, for example. On the other hand, as exemplified in this dissertation, content marketing has its focus on helping people, looking for the needs of the audience and adding value to their lives, as well as on creating trustworthy and long-lasting relationships, and not as another way of selling products or pushing people to buy (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019).

Even though copywriting and content marketing differ, they can be used together to create better content because they can complement each other. Copywriting uses different techniques to create better copy, such as "the right length of copy, the right structure, the right tone, the right choice of words" (Albrighton, 2010: 5). These techniques applied to content marketing can improve the content itself, such as a blog article, enhancing it with a more straightforward structure. The process of combining the two can increase the quality of the information, which is the ultimate objective.

2.3.4 - Storytelling and content marketing

Storytelling is not a new form of communication. It started being used much before writing. The earliest humans used stories to pass information that was crucial to surviving in a time with lots of dangers (Pulizzi, 2014). Nowadays, the way we tell stories changed, mainly due to new technologies such as the internet, mobile devices and social media.

In a world where companies offer the same kind of products, consumers seek the ones that appeal to emotions, providing unique experiences. Businesses that are too focused on just selling products must shift from this traditional method to new approaches. This is where storytelling finds its place. Companies that communicate through stories help their audiences to find a path in such a rushed world (Fog, Budtz, & Yakaboylu, 2005). According to Mossberg (2008: 196) "stories speak to our human needs and make our lives meaningful." Moreover, storytelling helps to create stronger bonds between the audience and the company helping to retain consumers, thus becoming loyal to the brand. Through storytelling brands differentiate themselves from competitors (Fog *et al.*, 2005; Holliman & Rowley, 2014; Rose & Pulizzi, 2011).

Stories have the power to create a better brand experience for consumers, which will sense positive emotions when are confronted with those stories (Liljander, Gummerus, & Riel, 2013). Storytelling becomes an important way of communication and, most importantly, a way of creating a loyal audience that feels connected with the company's stories. Pulizzi (2014: 27) states that storytelling "it's all about brands creating helpful, valuable, and compelling stories that position them as trusted experts in their fields". Not using storytelling means that a brand is losing an important way "to build rock-solid identification and loyalty in [...] customers" (Wuebben, 2011: 32).

Storytelling can be applied to content marketing to create more appealing subjects. Through the thousands of different types of content shared every day, consumers choose the ones they can connect with, making them feel as if they were part of the business story (Wuebben, 2011). Also, stories have the power to share knowledge and help the audience to remember the content better. This happens mainly because in stories "information is packaged in a meaningful context for us to better understand the depth and the relevance of the information being relayed" (Fog *et al.*, 2005: 144). Moreover, another great benefit of incorporating stories in content is that they can positively communicate information about products or goods without being understood as commercial (Liljander *et al.*, 2013). One of the objectives of content marketing, as stated before, is to help people by assisting them in easily solving problems. Storytelling has also that power, i.e. through narratives it is easier to teach complex problems (Fog *et al.*, 2005; Denning, 2006). By combining both, the brand can better clarify and educate the audience with high-quality content.

2.4 - SEO and its importance for content marketing

2.4.1 - Search engines

First it is important to explain what a search engine is and how it works, since search engine optimization (SEO) and search engines are closely related. According to Kent (2016: 8), a search engine is "a system that collects pages from the web, saves them in a massive database, indexes the information, and provides a mechanism for people to search through the data."

Search engines are software programs that use crawlers, also known as spiders, search bots, robots or bots, to crawl the entire web. These crawlers are also software programs

that "crawl around the web, cataloguing data so that it can be searched" (Ledford, 2008: 8). The information found by crawlers is then organised in databases. Examples of search engines are Google, Bing or ask.com, amongst others.

When users perform a search, they use the search box to enter any word or phrase, also known as a search term (Kent, 2016). Almost instantaneously, the search engine returns several results, usually divided by pages of results. The users only have to choose the one that better answers their question. Search engines provide access to countless information, such as textual or multimedia, that a user can look up by using a computer or a mobile phone (Jansen, Booth, & Spink, 2008).

2.4.2 - Search engine optimization (SEO)

Search engine optimization is an umbrella term that describes a number of different activities that a site owner, or someone else with that function, can implement, to augment the number of organic visitors to a website[3], coming through search engines (Grappone & Couzin, 2011). More specifically, SEO is defined as "the process of increasing the number of visitors to a website by achieving high rank in the search results returned by a search engine. The higher a website ranks in the results pages, the greater the chance is that users will visit the site" (Enge, Spencer, & Stricchiola, 2015: 944).

The objective of increasing the number of visitors is, mainly, because the probability of closing a sale is higher, hence raising the revenue (Ledford, 2008). A website ranking on the first page of results in a search engine such as Google receives the most clicks. That probability gets higher if the website ranks on the first results. In fact, according to a study carried out by Dean (2019), approximately 31,73% of clicks go to the pages that appear on the first position. The second position receives roughly 24,71% of clicks and the third position 18,66% of clicks. These three results combined receive approximately 75,10% of the total clicks on a ten results page. Therefore, there is a big competition not only to appear on the first results page (Lin & Yazdanifard, 2014), but to appear on the

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[3] Organic visitors get to a website coming from organic search results, which are not paid or sponsored. Search engines such as Google and Bing provide paid results and organic results on a search engine results page (SERP). Visitors clicking on organic results after performing a search are considered organic visitors (Enge et al., 2015; Grappone & Couzin, 2011).

first three results. This is where SEO can help websites achieve better rankings on search engines by optimizing some website page elements.

Although search engines have evolved notably in the last years, they still need help to understand and catalogue a website. According to Enge *et al.* (2015) some of the elements that should be optimized are page HTML[4] title tags, HTML meta descriptions, heading tags (H1, H2, H3, H4) and the text of the page itself. These elements should be optimized according to keywords previously researched, which must be relevant to the business. It is important also that the website has a responsive design[5], and it should load fast. However, one of the most important ranking factors is inbound links, also known as backlinks, which search engines see as votes from other websites (Ledford, 2008).

2.4.3 - Content marketing and search engine optimization

Content marketing and SEO, when used together, are powerful tools to help a company to get better rankings. By optimising the content with SEO techniques, a company can more easily be found by users, which is ultimately the objective of SEO. Moreover, through the shared content, a company gets more keywords indexed by the search engine, raising the probability of appearing on the first results page for any query related to those keywords (Kent, 2016). Furthermore, the more pages of content a website shares, the higher the probability of getting better rankings (Kent, 2016). Also, high-quality and engaging content increases the probability of having more organic traffic. In addition, users will come back to read more content and the likelihood of becoming customers augments. According to Wuebben (2011), good content helps a company to achieve long term success. This can be accomplished by creating a long-term audience that becomes loyal readers of the brand's content by following it. Still, most importantly, "those loyal readers may then be converted into loyal customers" (Pulizzi, 2014: 27). Also, content marketing "improves consumers' perceived brand loyalty and enhances their purchase intentions" (Lou *et al.*, 2019: 774). Moreover, high-quality content increases the probability of other websites to adding inbound links to those pages (Enge *et al.*, 2015), thus increasing rankings.

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[4] HTML (HyperText Markup Language) – "The main markup language for the creation of web pages, used to mark up web content and display it in a formatted manner. HTML defines how data is structured and informs the web browser how the page is to be displayed" (Enge et al., 2015: 936).
[5] Responsive design –" uses sophisticated HTML to automatically change the layout of a site's Web pages to suit the particular device on which it is being displayed" (Kent, 2016: 111).

Noteworthy, search engines still rely on text within HTML to understand a webpage, meaning that for some elements in a webpage they have difficulty understanding them. For instance, blog articles are easy to understand as they rely primarily on text. The search engine crawler easily reads and catalogues the page. However, it has some difficulty to read and catalogue the conveyed information regarding images, videos or audio. This challenge happens because in the case of images, although search engines detect that an image is being displayed, they use a significant part of their resources reading that image so they do not try to read all images they found throughout the web. Despite that, even when reading an image, the search engine cannot see it as a human does. According to Enge *et al.* (2015: 89), "search engines can recognize only some very basic types of information within images, such as the presence of a face". Additionally, text within images is not recognizable by search engines. The option is to add an alt[6] attribute within the HTML. This attribute consists of a word, or phrase, that describes the image, making it easy for the search engine to understand what the image is about (Grappone & Couzin, 2011).

Similarly to images, videos are not easy for a search engine to parse (Kent, 2016; Enge *et al.*, 2015). Nevertheless, videos are a good way of sharing content with the audience. However, to facilitate search engines in understanding them, a good practice in SEO is adding the transcript of the video in the webpage, or a caption file (Grappone & Couzin, 2011; Kent, 2016). Likewise, audio content, such as podcasts, is also not easy for search engines to understand. According to Enge *et al.* (2015: 279) "search engines cannot easily read words spoken in an audio file or video." Such as video, a good practice in audio content is also to add the transcript to the page. Despite all these optimizations having the objective to help search engines understand the different types of content, the purpose is also to help the audience find and understand them.

2.5 - The different types of digital content formats

In this chapter, different formats that are used in content marketing will be explored. It is important to understand the function and the difference between these tools and their benefits to companies.

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[6] Alt attributes – "HTML tags that provide text as an alternative to the graphics on a web page" (Ledford, 2008: 373). Also, "alt" stands for alternative text.

2.5.1 - E-books

The emergence of e-books was possible with the development of the internet and the progress of computer hardware and software (Rao, 2001). An e-book is "a book in electronic format" (Maczuga *et al.*, 2014: 39), compatible with electronic devices, such as computers or smartphones. According to Rao (2003), an e-book is:

> Text in digital form, or a book converted into digital form, or digital reading material, or a book in a computer file format, or an electronic file of words and images displayed on a desktop, note-book computer, or portable device, or formatted for display on dedicated e-book readers (Rao, 2003: 86-87).

E-books can contain text, but also "images, audio and video, [and] animations" (Maczuga *et al.*, 2014: 39). Some of the most usual formats are PDF[7] or EPUB[8], making it possible for any kind of books to be converted into e-books.

E-books are a practical way to share educational content and to position the company as a thought leader in its industry. They can be easily shared through the company website, making them a powerful source for generating leads[9] (Pulizzi & Barret, 2009), since to get this resource, which is commonly free, users must provide their contact information (Vinerean, 2017). According to D'Haen and Van Den Poel (2013: 545), leads "are prospects that will be contacted, after they have been qualified as the most likely to respond." The company can later try to monetize these leads (Pulizzi, 2014).

Although there is not a specific number of pages for a company e-book, Pulizzi and Barret (2009: 39) state that e-books "are typically 20 to 50 pages". In a later work, Pulizzi (2014: 169) declares that e-books are "generally 12 to 40 pages or more in length". Having these two arguments, we can assume that a company e-book could contain between 12 to 50 pages, albeit this is just a recommendation. The production of an e-book consumes company resources since it needs someone to write the content, make the design, and develop it, which will vary depending on the number of pages (Maczuga *et al.*, 2014). However, it is relatively easy to measure its impact using

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[7] PDF – "Adobe's Portable Document Format, a file format that renders the page exactly as intended regardless of the computer used" (Enge et al., 2015: 942).

[8] "An EPUB file is a digital ebook saved in the EPUB format, an open XML-based format for digital books and publications. It provides a standard digital publication format for publishers and consumers" (FileInfo, 2020).

[9] "Leads are prospects that will be contacted, after they have been qualified as the most likely to respond. (D'Haen & Van Den Poel, 2013: 545)"

metrics such as the number of downloads, the number of leads, or the number of social media shares (Maczuga *et al.*, 2014).

2.5.2 - Videos

Currently, video content is almost in all websites and platforms throughout the web, which was possible through the improvements in the internet speed (Appiah, 2006). It became a mainstream tool for companies to develop content, using it as another channel for sharing information.

Videos have the power to make the user experience on the web more enriching due to their appealing and entertaining nature (Wuebben, 2011). They also offer a stimulating and engaging experience to users compared to images or text (Stokes, 2013). In a study carried out by Alamäki, Pesonen, and Dirin (2019), the authors concluded that videos could influence the customer to take action, such as purchasing a product. Also, if the user feels connected with the video's content, it raises the probability of him moving forward on the customer journey. In the same research, the authors state that marketing videos can be useful to consumers, since videos can convey helpful information about the company services, such as prices, benefits or schedules. Moreover, videos can convey and trigger positive emotions in consumers. According to Stokes (2013: 344), "video content helps you [the company] connect with your audience, creating an experience and encouraging engagement".

Currently, brands can produce their own videos since the development of technological devices, such as video cameras or smartphones, allows companies to do it internally, instead of having to hire media companies (Stokes, 2013). Videos can be hosted on the company website, where the company has total control over it. Similarly, they can be placed in video hosting websites, such as Youtube or Vimeo, allowing the company to embed them on the company website easily. However, there are advantages in posting videos on the platforms mentioned above since they have already a large audience that the brand can use to its advantage. Moreover, it is easier for users to share videos on social networks through these platforms. Another important aspect is that videos may appear on a search engine results page as the answer to a user query, making it another possibility for the company to be found online.

2.5.3 - Infographics

Among the different formats in content marketing, there are infographics. The name is a short term for information graphic (Otten, Cheng, & Drewnowski, 2015; Yuvaraj, 2017) and is a visual representation of information (Yuvaraj, 2017).

The growth of social media influenced the use of visual formats such as infographics. Furthermore, the competition for audiences also increased its use (Howell, 2016). The success of infographics is explained because this presentation allows to structure information in an easy-to-understand scheme (Lazard & Atkinson, 2014). Additionally, the idea behind its use is to help the reader to understand the information better.

According to Otten *et al.* (2015: 1901), "infographics are an effective way to present complex data in a visual format that is compelling, provides rapidly available information, and is directly useful for decision-making purposes." Infographics help to explain complex information through illustrations, "some short written explanations and data visualization through charts or graphs" (Yuvaraj, 2017: 6). Ozdamli, Kocakoyun, Sahin, and Akdag (2016) state that information presented in visuals containing pictograms, such as infographics, it is easier to remember.

Currently, internet users have a plethora of information sources at their disposal and can filter only the ones they are interested in (Ozdamli *et al.*, 2016). Companies can benefit from using infographics, since this format allows the audience to consume information rapidly, without being time-consuming, and structured in a way that is easy to comprehend. Therefore, adopting infographics as a method to share content and engage the audience should be considered by companies (Lazard & Atkinson, 2014).

2.5.4 - Webinars

Webinars have been growing in popularity in the last years, mainly due to technology's progress and low production costs (Wuebben, 2011). The name is a combination of the words "web" and "seminar" (Carlson, 2009). According to Gegenfurtner and Ebner, (2019) webinars are defined as follows:

> Web-based seminars, in which participants and facilitators communicate live over the Internet across distant geographical locations using shared virtual platforms and interact ubiquitously and synchronously in real time via voice over IP technology and web camera equipment (Gegenfurtner & Ebner, 2019: 2).

Carlson (2009) explains that to assist a webinar, typically, participants have to register in advance to get a link, which allows them to participate in the session. Also, some webinars are paid and others are free. Moreover, webinars are generally a communication from the speaker to the attendant, although it is possible to ask questions by telephone, email or any other form of messaging. Webinars are an important method for educational purposes (Guanci, 2010), and usually, field experts use them to share knowledge with the attendants (Malik, 2013).

Webinars are also a great marketing tool for companies to generate leads, since the attendants have to leave their contacts, usually the email. Furthermore, it is possible for a brand to reach hundreds of people at once, without being restricted to a predetermined number of seats, such as in-person events (Wuebben, 2011). Additionally, webinars can be recorded and made available for later watching, and participants' questions and answers (Carlson, 2009).

2.5.5 - Podcasts

As with other formats inside the content marketing world, the emergence of podcasts was possible only due to the internet since this is its primary transmission medium. The name – podcast - derives from the words "iPod[10]" and "broadcast" (Evans, 2008). Although podcasts became most popular in the early 2000s, when Apple released the iPod (Wuebben, 2011), they could also be listened to using other music player devices (Mclaughlin, 2006). One of the key benefits of podcasts is that users can simply download the podcast to their equipment and listen to it anywhere and at any time (Evans, 2008; Wei & Ram, 2016).

According to Wuebben (2011: 202), "a podcast is a prerecorded audio program that is posted to a website and is made available for download so people can listen to it on personal computers or mobile devices." Although this definition describes what is a podcast, to present a broader explanation it is important to complement it with the definition from Waddingham, Zachary, and Ketchen, (2020: 2): "a podcast is a series of audio files available for download over the internet." This last definition helps to understand that a podcast can be both an isolated episode or a series of episodes. This is relevant, since consistency is an important factor in content marketing (Pulizzi, 2014).

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[10] The iPod is a portable digital media player device produced by Apple (Evans, 2008).

Wei and Ram (2016) state that podcasts are similar to radio broadcasts since they allow reaching a broad audience. Therefore, brands can use podcasts as a marketing tool to spread their message (Wuebben, 2011). In addition, companies can use podcasts to teach and share knowledge from within the organization, allowing them to connect with their audience (Wei & Ram, 2016), and also to "build trust and awareness" (Wuebben, 2011: 202). Evans (2008: 493) states that virtual learning materials, such as podcasts, can "increase learner engagement and receptivity."

Noteworthy is the fact that podcasts are an easy and inexpensive format, accessible to all companies. Moreover, brands can produce it inside the organization, without spending resources hiring an external company (Wuebben, 2011). Podcasts can also be incorporated into blogs, which will amplify user experience (Evans, 2008).

2.5.6 - Website pages

Websites are important relational channels between companies and users, therefore, they should be considered part of the brand's online communication strategy (García, Durán, & Jimenez, 2017). However, having a corporate website does not assure that it is being used correctly. Including it in the communication strategy may not be enough. The brand must also pay attention to the information that is being transmitted in its pages (García *et al.*, 2017). The content on each website page is important since it will help the user understand what the page is about. Hence, companies should present to users quality and unambiguous information, which helps the user understand its core business or its products (Rahimnia & Hassanzadeh, 2013). In addition, the information shared on the website pages should be clear, helping the user to rapidly understand the message (Hernández, Jiménez, & Martín, 2009). Moreover, information must be current, mainly regarding product specifications and prices (Eid & Trueman, 2004).

Hernández *et al.* (2009: 363) state that "the quality of the website affects the users' impression of the firm because it is the portal through which the transactions are conducted." Textual elements on a website also have a key role in stimulating users to perform the desired action (Jankowski, Hamari, & Wątróbski, 2019). Thus, well defined content will benefit the user and the company since the user will feel more engaged with the brand (Wuebben, 2011). According to a study carried out by Palmer (2002), there is a correlation between the quality of the information content and the success of the website, i.e., the better the content the more successful the website. Rahimnia and

Hassanzadeh (2013) declare that the quality of the information on a website helps to foster customers' trust in the brand. Furthermore, trust is an essential factor to increase the users' perception of security when visiting a website and, therefore, to complete a transaction.

Despite the importance the content of a website has for users, it is worth mentioning that content, such as text, helps search engines read and accurately index pages to later present them to users (Enge *et al.*, 2015). The probability of a page without text ranking higher on a search engine results page is lower than a page containing text (Kent, 2016). Although there is no ideal length of text that a website page should have, Enge *et al.* (2015) suggest that it should avoid thin content, consisting only of a phrase that does not describe the page. The content must be long and informative enough to allow both the user and the search engine to understand what the page is about.

2.5.7 - Case studies

The term "case study" has been widely used by researchers, as a method of research. However, in this chapter, it is important to clarify that when referring to case studies, we are indicating a different subject, although they may have some similarities. Therefore, we are designating case studies as a content marketing format, as presented by Wuebben (2011), Pulizzi (2014) and Maczuga *et al.* (2014). Content marketing started utilizing case studies to depict often success cases, demonstrating that using a companies' product or service helped that particular client and, therefore, it could help other consumers face the same challenges. Pulizzi (2014) defines case studies as follows:

> The case study is a document, typically one to two pages long, or video that combines the first-person authority of the testimonial with the narrative structure of a story. Based on real-life events, it leverages reader empathy with the featured client to build credibility and trust (Pulizzi, 2014: 170).

This definition raises the idea that this version of case studies is more commercial. Also, they are less in-depth than the case studies used in social research, although they can also use data to support their veracity (Wuebben, 2011). Maczuga *et al.* (2014: 30) declare that "case study is a format in which examples of effective business implementations of products or services are being described." Nonetheless, as a content marketing format, case studies have the ability to benefit the company since they are an

interesting tool to promote the business, showcasing services or products. In its essence, a case study identifies the problem or challenge, offers a solution and its implementation and shows the results (Pulizzi, 2014). According to Wuebben (2011: 107), a case study "demonstrates how a specific challenge or issue was first identified, which solution [...] [was] offered to resolve the issue, and how [...] [the] client benefited." Its main advantage is that it uses a client as a case study, which agrees to be part of the case study example (Maczuga *et al.*, 2014). This is important, since testimonials from clients may have a positive impact on other people (Chaffey & Smith, 2017). Case studies can be shared on the company website, but also through email or social networks, with the objective of convincing others to purchase a product or service.

2.5.8 - Digital magazines

Digital magazines, or e-magazines, have been growing in popularity in the last years among readers, mainly because it is easier to access them, and their interactive format (Wang, Chiu, Ho, & Lo, 2016). According to Pulizzi (2014: 181), "a digital magazine offers self-contained, visually compelling periodical content". Digital formats, such as digital magazines, can be read by users through technological devices, like mobile phones, tablets or computers, which allow storing them and be accessed at any time (Chen, Yen, & Peng, 2018). They can also be hosted on the company website, where users can download, and share them on social networks or by email (Pulizzi, 2014). Similarly to e-books, the company can use digital magazines as another source for generating leads since to access them users must leave their contact information, usually the email.

According to Silva (2011), digital magazines, due to their appealing and interactive nature, attract the reader's attention. Therefore, brands can benefit from this content format and share helpful information to readers without being restricted to any distribution barriers since the internet makes it easy to distribute. The brand can spread its word with more people, and amplify brand awareness. Also, depending on the type of business, brands can develop more than one magazine, directed to specific target niches, with differentiated information, not only for existing customers but also to attract new ones (Silva, 2011). This process is facilitated due to lower production costs

in publishing a digital magazine compared to a paper version (Wang *et al.*, 2016), since printing and distribution costs are very low or inexistent (Silva, 2011).

2.5.9 - Press releases

Press releases offer the company the possibility to get exposure through the media (Wuebben, 2011; Tsileponis, Stathopoulos, & Walker, 2020). Blythe (2006: 150) highlights that press releases' objective is "to establish a positive image for the company." According to Gilpin (2008: 9), a press release, or news release, "is typically written in the form of a news story and distributed to various media channels in the hope that the latter will republish the information to reach a wide audience." This medium acts as an advertising channel, benefiting the company, not only due to that fact but also because people tend to give more credibility to media news than information originated in the company, such as publicity (Choi & Park, 2011). Blythe (2006) declares that information shared by the reputable media has, typically, more relevance in public opinion. Gilpin (2008) states that press releases are a way for a company to build its identity. Also, press releases can be used as a form of influencing and shaping the interpretation of events. Moreover, press releases may impact the relationship between the readers and the company positively. Blythe (2006: 136) asserts that "although they [press releases] do not usually generate business directly, they do have a positive long-term effect in building brand awareness and loyalty."

A press release can as well be a cost-effective form of exposure since if it is well-written, the media can publish it with almost no changes (Blythe, 2006). However, it is important to note that the press release content should not be overly commercial, but rather to inform, despite talking about the company, such as an event or a new product. Noteworthy is that press releases produced in digital format are easier to spread through the media, which can share them on the same day (Tsileponis *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, the internet allows people everywhere to easily access them (Wuebben, 2011).

2.6 - Blogs and their importance to companies

Blogs appeared in the early days of the internet. It is assumed that the first blog was created around 1994, although without any certainty. In 1997 the term "weblog" started being used, which was later abbreviated to blog (Bair, 2016). The first blogs had a very simple format, as they permitted only to add text and links. The evolution of blogs is

notorious: today, it is possible to add "multimedia content, such as sound, video, animation and graphics" (Baxter & Connolly, 2013: 105).

The idea behind a blog's concept is not new, which is very similar to a paper diary. According to Bair (2016: 7), "a blog is a chronologically ordered series of website updates, written and organized much like a traditional diary". Despite Bair's definition, which gives us a general idea of a blog, it is important to introduce a more business-related description, more aligned with the content of this dissertation. Therefore, as highlighted by Jefferson and Tanton (2015: 52), "a […] blog is where you [the company] regularly share […] ideas in a form that is interesting and helpful to […] customers." The objective of a company blog is to generate business, thus "a valuable content blog is a place where you [the company] write about your subject for the benefit of the people you do business with" (Jefferson & Tanton, 2015: 52). This view goes along with the concepts proposed by Ahuja and Medury (2010: 93) of "corporate" or "organizational" blogs, referring to blogs that companies manage to communicate with their audiences.

In order to get traffic to the blog, the brand must focus on developing quality content that suits the needs of the audience. Therefore, the blog should be used as part of a strategy (Kotler *et al*., 2017), rather than a random tool. That means that the brand must define the blog's audience and the purpose of the blog, i.e. the objective of having a blog (educate people, becoming an expert in the field, etc.) (Cox *et al.*, 2008). Pulizzi and Barret (2009) declare that the company should align both blogging and content marketing strategies. Jefferson and Tanton (2015: 51) share the same point of view, stating that blogging is "at the heart of […] content marketing efforts."

Kelleher and Miller (2006) assert that blogs offer a conversational model, which may positively influence the relationship between the company and the user. Ahuja and Medury (2010) declare that the brand can engage in a conversation with users by enabling comments in blog posts, which may increase the user purchase decision and help reduce their indifference toward the company. It is the two-way nature of the blog that allows the company to engage in conversations with customers. "These conversations can support objectives and strategies such as, facilitating brand building, cultivating customer relationships, garnering feedback, supporting sales, demonstrating

expertise, and encouraging collaboration and knowledge sharing" (Colton & Poploski, 2019: 610).

A company may benefit from having a blog, as it permits to connect with existing customers, but more importantly, to acquire new ones (Cangiano, 2012). Cox, Martinez, and Quinlan (2008: 5) highlight the importance of a blog to a company, since "users rely on blogs when making purchase decisions because they consider the blogger to be a product or category expert." Ho, Chiu, Chen, and Papazafeiropoulou (2015: 347) affirm that "blogs can impact on consumers' evaluation of products and their decision-making process." Colton (2018: 94) state that "blog content can influence consumers' attitudes toward products and brands." Moreover, a blog is considered an owned media, consisting "of the channel assets that the brand owns and which are fully under its control" (Kotler *et al.*, 2017: 130). Therefore, the company has the power to decide the type of content it will share in its blog, whereas in social networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc., it is always constrained to the norms of these platforms (Jacobsen & Barnes, 2016). Despite the fact that these social networks are important to spread the content, "the focus should be on a platform you [the company] can control" (Pulizzi, 2014: 216).

A blog is an important channel that allows the brand to easily share content, almost in an inexpensive way (Jefferson & Tanton, 2015). Users can find blog articles through a search engine, but they can also be shared on social networks, or sent by email. In all cases, the objective is to reach more people and to drive traffic to the website. Also, blog articles offer another possibility for the brand to be found online; thus, it increases its chances to be noticed if it shares articles regularly. According to Philip (2017: 66), most leads are generated through search engines, "because search engines still are a predominant source for buyers during various stages of their buyer journey". Moreover, people look for information, such as blog articles, to move on their buying stage. Furthermore, if the article is SEO optimized, it raises also the probability of the brand or its products or services being discovered.

It is essential also to highlight some mistakes that could prevent the brand from obtaining all benefits from having a blog. According to Jefferson and Tanton (2015), a blog should be used to share useful and helpful content to the audience, rather than promotional messages about the brand. Uribe, Buzeta, and Velásquez (2016: 4405)

advocate that "when advertising intent is explicitly expressed on blog posts, readers are less likely to develop a relevant behavioral intention toward the advertised product." Also, a news page is not considered a blog, nor messages talking only about the company. Halligan and Shah (2010) state that the brand must focus on producing and sharing content about its industry, such as informative articles. Furthermore, the information shared on the blog must be veritable, since it helps to increase the users' perception of blog credibility. Cosenza, Solomon, and Kwon (2014) avouch that people look for information hoping that it helps with decision-making. Therefore, the user must feel that it can trust the provided information. Also, if the user trusts the information provided, it increases their chances of returning to the blog. In addition, credible information generates more positive attitudes toward the blog. Another important aspect is the consistency in sharing content. If the company has not a regular calendar of content, it may lose readers (Cangiano, 2012).

2.7 - Empiric studies

Blogs have seen exponential growth over the years. According to Statista (2012), the number of blogs worldwide in 2006 was roughly 36 million, and five years later, in 2011, there was more than 170 million. Currently, this number increased to 600 million (Finances Online, 2020). As awareness regarding blogs grew, brands realized that blogging could benefit them since people rely on the internet for information, in most cases, before buying. Therefore, brands started supplying users with information that is relevant to them. Lee, Hwang, and Lee (2006: 317) declare that "because the blog can be used to convey various types of information [...] it has become an effective communication tool over the internet."

Corporate blogs can be considered a great strategical step for companies, as a source to attract consumers but also to influence their buying behaviour. Online consumers consider blogs to be a source they can rely on for information and recommendation (Finances Online, 2020). As reported by a study carried out by the Content Marketing Institute and Marketing Proofs (2020), applied to marketing professionals from North America, 89% of the respondents use blog articles in their strategies. These articles are used mainly to build brand awareness and to nurture leads.

In another study, Semrush (2019) analyzed 450,000 tweets, hundreds of thousands of search queries, 700,000 blog posts, and surveyed 1,200 marketers across the globe. The results show that one of the most used sources by which people find information related to tourism is essentially through organic search. Therefore, blog articles offer another opportunity for the brand to be found online. Barnes, Pavao, and Fernandes (2020: 4) highlight that "blogs can help grow an email list and improve a website's SEO". Although other channels emerged in the last years, such as social networks, blogs still have an important role in companies' content strategy. Hidayanto, Razaad, Shihab and Hasibuan (2014: 256) argue that "corporate blogs are considered as the most effective media to maintain relationships with customers." A blog can become a competitive advantage since it helps to show the competence of the company in the society, mainly to potential clients (Hidayanto *et al.*, 2014).

According to a study performed by Barnes, Mazzola, and Killeen (2020) applied to the Fortune 500[11] companies in 2019, 54% of these companies (270) used blogs to grow thought leadership and engagement. This number increased to 77%, 387 companies, in 2020 (Barnes *et al.*, 2020).

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[11] "Fortune Magazine annually compiles a list of America's largest corporations, aptly named the "Fortune 500" (F500) given their size and wealth. Due to the hugely influential role that these companies play in the business world, studying their adoption and use of social media tools offers important insights into the future of commerce" (Barnes *et al.*, 2020: 1).

Chapter 3 – Methodology

The objective of this research is to understand if the studied companies, more specifically hotels, follow the best practices regarding DCM, i.e., if the content shared by these companies on their blogs respects the elements that some authors highlight as being important for developing engagement with the audience. An exploratory research was carried out since the literature review did not identify previous studies focusing on blogs on tourism with the approach used in this study. The exploratory research is usually adopted when researchers have little knowledge about the area they want to study (Given, 2008).

3.1 - Preliminary phase

Preliminary research was conducted to gather more information about the use of blogs by hotels. Therefore, it was performed an unstructured observation of companies websites to understand if they had a blog section. This unstructured observation was performed essentially in five-star hotels from the Algarve since the author wanted to focus on this specific category and region. Also, the probability of five-star hotels having resources (internal or monetary) to maintain a blog may be higher than in four or three-star hotels.

Therefore, in a first moment, an unstructured observation of company blogs was carried out. The unstructured observation was adopted initially to understand better how and which types of hotels were using blogs and decide which cases were important for the investigation. According to Given (2008: 908) unstructured observation "is particularly useful in the early stages of an observational study." Although this process results originally in analyzing a broad number of cases, it helps to narrow them to a small number of occurrences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This step was important since it helped the researcher to select the most appropriate cases for the investigation.

First, hotels in the region of Algarve were observed considered the research objective. The reason for this choice was due to the fact that the Algarve is mainly known for being a touristic region (Turismo do Algarve, 2014; INE, 2020). Activities related directly or indirectly to tourism have grown in the last decades and hotels represent a significant share of the companies of the Algarve. Therefore, the author wanted to learn more about the relation of hotels from this region with DCM.

To identify the hotels, a search online was conducted using the search engine Google. This search engine was chosen because it is considered the most used than other search engines (Lin & Yazdanifard, 2014). The same method of keywords was also used as suggested by Lee, Hwang, and Lee (2006). The difference was that, in our case, another Google platform (Google Ads) was utilized to attest the relevance of keywords. The exploratory data were collected in November of 2019. The process involved various steps, which are documented below.

Step 1 – To verify which words were suitable for the study, the online tool Google Ads was used. This program[12] presents the number of searches made by users for a particular word or sentence. It also shows some suggestions. This tool is particularly interesting, since it permits attesting the relevance of a particular keyword. The user must start by adding the keywords he/she wishes to verify and the platform displays the results. To start this research, keywords related to tourism were added, such as "five-star hotels Algarve". All words selected by the author were registered and are documented below in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 – Keywords used in search for five-star hotels

Keyword	Average monthly searches made by users
5 star Algarve	50
5 star hotels Algarve	590
5 star hotels Algarve all inclusive	40
Algarve 5 star family hotels	10
Algarve 5 star resorts	40
five star hotels Algarve	50
luxury hotels Algarve 5 star	10

Source: Own development

Step 2 – Next, a search online was conducted using the search engine Google in the incognito mode. The keywords previously collected were then searched until the tenth page of results and were registered.

Step 3 – After collecting the data, all companies were searched individually and the website explored, to verify if it had any blog section. All information was then

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[12] At the time of this research, the Google Ads software was free and accessible to anyone.

registered. In total, 57 five-star hotels of the Algarve were observed in this preliminary stage.

3.1.1 - Criteria for the selection of the blogs

To define which cases were eligible for the study, it was necessary to specify the criteria to use in this process. The criteria were defined as follows:

 - The website must need to have a section called "blog". If the section was called solely "news", then it was not eligible for the study. However, in some cases, in the URL, the term "blog" was shown, whereas the title of the page was named "news", or vice-versa. In these cases, they were eligible for the study, since it could be a website architecture mistake.

- The blog needed to be owned by a hotel with a presence in Algarve. If the hotel was part of an international chain, a requirement was that it had to have an individual blog. Thus, international blogs were excluded. Also, if a group of Portuguese hotels with a presence in Algarve shared the same blog among them, then that blog was eligible. These criteria were set to observe Portuguese blogs only.

- If the hotel was an individual unit and had a blog, it counted only as one blog. However, in some cases, hotels were part of a chain of hotels. In that case, it was observed that it could happen that only a general website existed and each hotel of the group had only a page on that website. In this case, even though there were several hotels, as they shared the same website and the blog as well, it counted as one blog only.

- If the analyzed blogs have no articles or no activity in the last 6 months, with at least an article per month, they were not considered eligible for the study.

3.1.2 - Results of the preliminary phase

According to the specified criteria, in this analysis, from the 57 hotels observed, 5 had blogs on their websites, but only 4 were considered eligible for this research. Therefore, it became apparent that the four cases fell short of the required sample for the study. For that reason, in order to increase the number of cases, another search was carried out, which was expanded to the whole country. This was considered a second phase of the research, where the final sample was selected.

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3.2 - Second phase

In this phase, the search was expanded to the Portuguese territory, including Madeira and Azores. In this process, it was used the website from Turismo de Portugal (2020b) (https://registos.turismodeportugal.pt/HomePage.aspx), in which is possible to access all hotels in Portugal (continental Portugal and islands). However, what is more interesting in this website is that it is possible to have a more granular observation, since it allows selecting hotels with the same attributes. For instance, it is possible to choose hotels inside the same typology and export them to an excel file.

At this stage, the search considered four and five-star hotels in Portugal (Madeira and Azores included) with blogs as the population under study. The choice of five and four-star hotels was due to the probability of these hotels having higher marketing budgets, therefore leading to more resources to maintain a blog.

All hotels were searched individually online, using the search engine Google, and their websites were analyzed. To select the hotels that were eligible for the study, the criteria presented in section 3.1.2 were applied.

The necessary adaptation was made to the criteria used in the preliminary stage. Only four and five-star hotels were examined with presence in the Portuguese territory, regardless if they belong to a Portuguese or international company or group.

3.2.1 - Definition of the study population and sample

Two excel files were collected from the aforementioned website, one regarding five-star hotels and the other related to four-star hotels. In the first case, a total of 209 hotels were gathered. From these, only 198 websites were analyzed – eleven hotels were left out due to errors such a) the website address was wrong or not possible to find, b) the hotel was not correctly categorized or c) it was duplicated. From the remaining 198 websites, 16 blogs were identified, and only 8 were considered eligible for the study, according to the specified criteria.

Regarding the four-star hotels, a population of 840 hotels was identified. From these, 45 hotels were left out for the same reasons described in the five-star hotel process. In the remaining 795 hotels with a website, 24 blogs were identified, and 14 were considered eligible for the study, according to the specified criteria.

Therefore, a sample of 22 (8 five-star and 14 four-star) website hotels with a blog was used as the sample for this study.

3.2.2 - Data analysis approach

As mentioned in the previous section, a total of 22 hotel blogs was the sample to be analyzed. For data analysis, content analysis following a quantitative approach was performed. According to Kim and Kuljis (2010), this data analysis method has been implemented not only in the context of traditional communication but also in web-based applications. Moreover, Neuendorf (2002) states that content analysis may be employed in quantitative approaches. Krippendorff (2004: 18) declares that "content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use."

3.2.3 - Content analysis of blogs

The procedure introduced by Neuendorf (2002), which is composed of nine steps, was used in this dissertation (Figure 3.1). This process was also followed in the empirical study conducted by Kim and Kuljis (2010). The latter authors used this procedure to analyze blogs, and therefore we consider it suitable for the research objective of this dissertation.

Figure 3.1 – The process of content analysis research

1 - **Theory and rationale**: What content will be examined, and why?

↓

2 - **Conceptualizations**: What variables will be used in the study?

↓

3 - **Operationalizations**: Define categories and units of measurement

↓

4 - **Coding scheme**: Create a code book with the categories and measurement

↓

5 - **Sampling**: Define sample

↓

6 - **Training and pilot reliability**: Training of coders/revise the code book as needed

↓

7 - **Coding**: Code the data

↓

8 - **Final reliability**: Calculate a reliability figure for each variable

↓

9 - **Analyzing/Reporting**: Analyze and interpret data/ report findings

Source: Adapted from Neuendorf, (2002) and Kim and Kuljis, (2010)

The **first step** aimed to understand the characteristics of digital content marketing, according to literature review, and if hotels used blogs. Content analysis was considered adequate to address the main research objective related to the rationale of those specific characteristics, such as the ones identified in the literature review (Table 2.2). These are best practices and, therefore, can be used to examine the strategy of DCM used by companies focused on blogs.

Regarding the **second step**, the variables to be analyzed, based on the literature review, were the eight "characteristics of DCM", presented in Table 3.2., namely: educational, credibility, value, relevance, consistency, timely, engagement and comments.

Table 3.2 – Definitions of DCM characteristics

Characteristics of DCM	Description
Educational	The content must have a learning/teaching objective. It should help the audience in the process of learning something, i.e., it must "impart knowledge on specific topics" (Lou *et al.*, 2019: 774). The learning intent may not be completely declared, since "blogs can also assist in the sharing of tacit knowledge" (Baxter & Connolly, 2013: 106). According to (Mcpheat, 2011), content that teaches how to perform any task better is considered educational, such as "how-to content". The author highlights that "how-to content comes in the form of lists, with steps or points that are labeled by number or bullet points. They can be sequential if the information teaches you a process that is linear, or it can be a list of points that do not have to be done in any particular order (Mcpheat, 2011: 42)." Also, some formats can be considered intrinsically educational, such as webinars (Pulizzi, 2014), infographics (Maczuga *et al.*, 2014) and e-books (Rao, 2003).
Credibility	The audience must acknowledge the veracity of the shared information in a way that encourages action. Credibility is an important aspect for determining if content is compelling (Barry & Gironda, 2017). Cosenza *et al.* (2014: 75) inform that "credibility allows consumers to evaluate the believability of the information based on their personal perspectives", and "[…] credibility influences the impact of the message." Therefore, blogs must exhibit credibility "[...] the usefulness of blogs is dependent upon how consumers perceive blog credibility and trust them" (Cosenza *et al.*, 2014: 72). Credibility can be attested through the presence of the name of the author in the blog post. As presented by (Koenig & Schlaegel, 2014: 434), "credibility and interaction can particularly be supported by publicly displaying employee names and pictures, so that readers feel to rather interact with an individual than with an organization."
Value	The shared content must be related to the core business of the brand. Users expect to find content that can help them. Therefore if users reach the blog and find unrelated content it may deceive them. If the blog belongs to a hotel, the shared content must be related to travelling, visiting places, etc. On the other hand, if the blog belongs to a food company, it should share, for instance, recipes. According to Ahuja and Medury, (2010: 103) "organizations should identify the appropriateness of content to the target population of onsite visitors and host content that is attractive to them." In order to share this type of content, the brand must understand the target audience "[...] providing valuable content requires an understanding of customer information needs at different points in time, and at different point in their buying/relationship process" (Holliman & Rowley, 2014: 287).
Relevance	Content must meet the consumers' needs, hence the "categorization", or the ability to have the blog divided per categories, or different themes but all regarding the business. Ahuja and Medury (2010: 92) state that "content categorization is used to enable organizations to post consumer-relevant content to induce greater consumer participation." Therefore, the blog itself should have categories and it should be possible to choose the most relevant among these. "Posts in blogs are tagged with keywords, allowing for content categorization and also for gaining access to the content through tagging as a theme-based classification system" (Ahuja & Medury, 2010: 93). Baxter, Connolly and Stansfield (2010: 518) inform that "[...] information in a blog is stored chronologically by date often in themed categories." Iglesias-Pradas, Hernández-García, and Fernández-Cardador (2017: 221) highlight that blogs may have "tags for content classification."

Table 3.2 – Definitions of DCM characteristics (cont.)

Characteristics of DCM	Description
Consistency	The content must be shared on a regular basis, "consistently and on time" (Pulizzi, 2014: 77). Ahuja and Medury (2010: 104) declare that "a regularity in posting leads to increased consumer contacts aids in strengthening brand recall and develops a brand relationship, thereby inducing participation and leading to consumer involvement, and an increased perception of value in the organization / product." If the brand has not a regular publication calendar it may not only lose readers, but also its contents may be perceived as outdated. "Most regular users visit blogs to read updated postings and to leave responses and therefore, the frequency of blog posting is likely to influence the users' perception of how well the blog author is performing expected tasks, and can be a good indicator of the corporate bloggers' taking responsibility in maintaining their relationships with blog visitors" (Cho & Huh, 2010: 36). Consistency in posting may create a positive brand attitude: "Having a regular touch point to interact with the customer results in learning related to the brand and generates a positive attitude by creating a brand association" (Ahuja & Medury, 2010: 96). For Koenig and Schlaegel (2014: 433), "blog management can be improved by publishing content on a blog frequently and regularly [...]."
Timely	Content must be connected to present/modern happenings - it must be actual (Rowley, 2008). Therefore, content must be up to date, and that can be observed in the article publication date. Koenig and Schlaegel (2014: 433) refer that "company-related information on a blog is timely and up-to-date."
Engagement	In order to attract users, the blog must share engaging content, i.e., "content can be engaging because it provides users with an intrinsically enjoyable experience, enabling them to unwind and escape from the pressures of daily life" (Calder, Malthouse, & Schaedel, 2009: 322). Multi-media features "can be considered to represent a corporation's efforts to make user interaction more enjoyable and entertaining" (Cho & Huh, 2010: 36). In these multi-media features, it can be included elements, such as "podcast, video, audio, and animation (Cho & Huh, 2010: 36), and "the use of images" (Koenig & Schlaegel, 2014: 433).
Comments	Comments are important since they allow the company to maintain a relationship with users. By allowing comments on its blog, the company may better understand users through what they write and use that to make enhancements. Also, answering comments may strengthen the company connection with users. Blair and Level (2008: 161) express that "the use of comments is another common means of tracking success of a blog. In fact the comments feature is one of the selling points of blogs – readers have an opportunity to comment and express their opinions." Ahuja and Medury (2010: 93) refer that "the ability of a blog to induce consumer participation by making consumers comment on the posts hosted by the organization creates a dialogue and helps the organization achieve consumer engagement." Cox, Martinez, and Quinlan (2008: 10) point out that "allowing readers to respond to blog entries contribute to a sense of community. Open debate also increases a blog's credibility in a way analogous to the peer review process in academic publications." Dennis, Minas, and Lockwood (2016: 169) state that "with this feature [comments] disabled, the communication becomes unidirectional—from the corporation to its audience."

Source: Own development

In **step three** – defining categories and units of measurement – we needed to verify if the blogs had the characteristics mentioned above. Therefore, these were operationalized into categories and, in some cases, sub-categories. It is important to

highlight that two characteristics identified in the literature section were left out of the research, namely "useful" and "interesting". The reason is that, when operationalized into categories and related measurements, these were not mutually exclusive. The first characteristic seems to have some similarities with "educational content". The aim of "educational content" is to teach something, i.e., useful content that helps solve a problem/question. Both aim to try to help through teaching. Therefore, we decided to analyze only one concept. The category "interesting" was equally left out since its definition resembles other characteristics under study, such as the "valuable" category, not being completely exclusive. Also, we had initially named "compelling" to a category. However, after analyzing it, and according to the approach used by Cosenza *et. al.* (2014), we confirmed that the label "credibility" was most adequate.

Noteworthy is that three new categories were included in the table, based on the preliminary observation of blogs. The first has to do with the dimension (lenght) of the texts. We decided to add this new category "text dimension", according to the recommendations of Jefferson and Tanton (2015), which suggest that blog articles should have a minimum of 500 words. The second new category that was added aimed to understand if any social media buttons allow the reader to share the content on his personal social media account. This aspect may attract new readers to the blog, and therefore engage with the brand. The third category that was added had the objective to examine if the blog posts suggested other posts at the end of the article (or in any other part of the page). This aspect is relevant to measure, since suggesting a new post for the reader may enhance the probabilities of maintaining the user engaged with the brand. To summarize, the eleven categories that were observed were: educational, credibility, value, relevance, consistency, timely, engagement, comments, text dimension, social media buttons and suggested articles. These categories were registered as being present or absent in blogs. In order to have a more granular analysis, in some cases were added sub-categories, which are depicted in Table 3.3. The categories and sub-categories were decided based on literature review, on the preliminary stage of observation of blogs and discussed with the supervision team of this dissertation.

In **step four** – to create a coding scheme – it was developed a presence-absence matrix, or a reliability data matrix (Krippendorff, 2004: 224). This consists of a binary matrix, in which one (1) represents presences and zero (0) the absences. The matrix is composed

of rows and columns, in which the rows represent the object under study, and the columns the sample. In this study, the rows represent all observed DCM characteristics and the columns represent the sample of hotels with blogs, in which the "H" stands for "hotel" and the number next to it the order in the sample (Appendix 1). In Table 3.3, we present the presence-absence matrix.

Table 3.3 - Presence–absence matrix for each blogs of the hotels (H1-H22)

Main categories	Sub-categories	Hotels																					
		H1	H2	H3	H4	H5	H6	H7	H8	H9	H10	H11	H12	H13	H14	H15	H16	H17	H18	H19	H20	H21	H22
Educational content	Webinars																						
	Infographics																						
	E-books																						
Credibility	Name of the author																						
Value	Travel /Holidays																						
	Tips																						
	Places to visit																						
	Related to business																						
Relevance	Categories																						
Consistency																							
Timely																							
Engagement	Podcasts																						
	Videos																						
	Audio																						
	Animations																						
	Images																						
Comments																							
Text dimension (>=500 words)																							
Share buttons	Facebook																						
	LinkedIn																						
	Twitter																						
	Email																						
Suggested posts/articles																							
Total																							

1 = presence; 0 = absence; H = hotel

Source: Own development

In **step five** – sampling - consists of 22 hotels with blogs on their websites, which results from the previous search of four and five-star hotels, in which 1049 hotels in the Portuguese territory were preliminary observed.

In **step six** – training of coders – based on the previous steps, the researcher was responsible for the process of coding the content of blogs. The code matrix was discussed with the supervision team.

In **step seven** – coding – the total sample of 22 blogs was inspected, based on the code matrix defined in step 4. It is important to highlight that six posts/articles were analyzed in each blog, starting from the most recent. We considered that this number of posts was adequate for verifying each company's pattern in relation to their strategy in the use of blogs. A new table for each blog was also created, since it was necessary to verify each post individually. Therefore, each hotel had its own table, which is presented in Table 3.4. After filling the table, the total was summed and transferred to the main table (Table 3.3).

Table 3.4 - Presence–absence matrix for each post by hotel/blog

Main categories	Sub-categories	Hotel 1					
		A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6
Educational content	Webinars						
	Infographics						
	E-books						
Credibility	Name of the author						
Value	Travel/Holidays						
	Tips						
	Places to visit						
	Related to business						
Relevance	Categories						
Consistency							
Timely							
Engagement	Podcasts						
	Videos						
	Audio						
	Animations						
	Images						
Comments							
Text dimension (>=500 words)							
Share buttons	Facebook						
	LinkedIn						
	Twitter						
	Email						
Suggested posts/articles							
Total							

1 = presence; 0 = absence; H = hotel; A = (blog) article/post

Source: Own development

Step number **eight** is related to assess final reliability. To enhance content analysis reliability, the code matrix and all the process of coding was discussed with the supervision team. This process intended to maximize mutual exclusivity of the recorded categories/sub-categories, as proposed by Weber (1990). In case a specific record unit was more complex to code, this was resolved with the two other researchers, until no unresolved case existed (Rydzik, Agapito, & Lenton, 2021). The final results are presented in Table 4.1, in the next chapter, in which we can examine all observations extracted from the individual tables from each blog. The numbers inside the parenthesis are the sum of all observed blog articles in each category. The percentages are the weight of that sum also in each category. Therefore, the blogs that have higher totals mean that the companies that run these blogs seem to have not only a better understanding of digital content marketing but are more evolved regarding the implementation of best practices of digital marketing based on blogs.

Step nine is about data analysis, which is discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4 – Results and Discussion

This chapter depicts and discusses data collected, which are shown in Table 4.1, regarding the content of blogs managed by hotels. The results for each category and sub-category identified in the chapter dedicated to the methodology related to best practices of DCM will be analyzed and discussed against the research objective. Examples of best practices (elements that are advocated in research as contributing to more efficient communication and engaging audiences) compared to examples that do not follow best practices in the use of content marketing in blogs by hotels are also highlighted.

4.1 - Analysis and discussion of results

Table 4.1 shows that none of the blogs had the maximum score possible considered all observed categories. Also, the blogs from hotel seven (H7) and seventeen (H17) are the ones with the highest scores, 13 and 12, respectively, in terms of more content elements/characteristics/good practices that have been used (please see row "Number of elements with at least 1 presence in the blog" in table 4.1). This means that these two blogs adhere to more features that are related to the best practices in communicating through blogs. In contrast, we can observe that blogs from hotel five (H5) and twenty-one (H21) have the lowest score in the number of features used, both totalling 4. The same contrast can be observed if we look at the "average of elements used per post" in the same Table.

Table 4.1 – Final table containing the sum of all presences and absences for all blogs

Main categories	Sub-categories	Hotels																					
		H1	H2	H3	H4	H5	H6	H7	H8	H9	H10	H11	H12	H13	H14	H15	H16	H17	H18	H19	H20	H21	H22
Educational Content	Webinars	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Info-graphics	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	E-books	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Credibility	Name of the author	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17% (1)	0	0	0	0	17% (1)	0	0	0	67% (4)	0	0	0	0	100% (6)
Value	Travel/ holidays	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50% (3)	0	0	0	0	17% (1)	0	0	17% (1)	0	0	0	17% (1)
	Tips	100% (6)	17% (1)	17% (1)	0	33% (2)	0	0	0	0	50% (3)	83% (5)	33% (2)	0	67% (4)	83% (5)	100% (6)	100% (6)	50% (3)	17% (1)	67% (4)	0	33% (2)
	Places to visit	0	17% (1)	17% (1)	0	33% (2)	0	17% (1)	0	17% (1)	17% (1)	67% (4)	0	0	33% (2)	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	33% (2)	67% (4)	50% (3)	0	0
	Related to business	100% (6)	50% (3)	50% (3)	17% (1)	100% (6)	100% (6)	17% (1)	17% (1)	0	83% (5)	67% (4)	83% (5)	0	100% (6)	67% (4)	100% (6)	100% (6)	67% (4)	100% (6)	83% (5)	67% (4)	83% (5)
Relevance	Categories	100% (6)	100% (6)	0	100% (6)	0	0	0	0	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	0	0	0	100% (6)	0	0	67% (4)	0	0	0	0
Consistency		100% (6)	100% (6)	0	67% (4)	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	0	83% (5)	0	0	17% (1)	100% (6)	0	83% (5)	0	83% (5)	67% (4)	0	0
Timely		100% (6)	100% (6)	33% (2)	50% (3)	0	83% (5)	50% (3)	67% (4)	100% (6)	0	17% (1)	100% (6)	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	0	100% (6)	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	33% (2)	0
Engagement	Podcasts	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Videos	0	33% (2)	0	0	0	0	17% (1)	0	0	0	0	0	17% (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	33% (2)	0
	Audio	0	0	0	0	0	0	17% (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Animations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Images	100% (6)	100% (6)	50% (3)	100% (6)	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	67% (4)	100% (6)	100% (6)	67% (4)	100% (6)

Table 4.1 – Final table containing the sum of all presences and absences for all blogs (cont.)

Main categories	Sub-categories	Hotels																					
		H1	H2	H3	H4	H5	H6	H7	H8	H9	H10	H11	H12	H13	H14	H15	H16	H17	H18	H19	H20	H21	H22
Comments		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100% (6)	0	0	83% (5)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Text dimension (>=500 words)		17% (1)	17% (1)	33% (2)	0	50% (3)	33% (2)	33% (2)	17% (1)	0	33% (2)	0	0	17% (1)	33% (2)	50% (3)	100% (6)	100% (6)	50% (3)	0	83% (5)	0	33% (2)
Share buttons	Facebook	0	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	0	0	100% (6)	0	0	0	0	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	67% (4)	0	0	0	100% (6)
	LinkedIn	0	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	0	0	0	0	0
	Twitter	0	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	0	0	100% (6)	0	0	0	0	0	0	100% (6)	67% (4)	0	0	0	100% (6)
	Email	0	0	100% (6)	0	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	0	0	100% (6)	0	0	0	0	0	0	100% (6)	0	0	0	0	0
Suggested posts/articles		100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	83% (5)	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	17% (1)	0	100% (6)	0	67% (4)	0	83% (5)	0	100% (6)
Number of elements with at least 1 presence in the blog		**8**	**10**	**11**	**9**	**4**	**10**	**13**	**6**	**5**	**11**	**9**	**5**	**6**	**9**	**8**	**8**	**12**	**10**	**6**	**8**	**4**	**9**
Average of elements used per post		**7**	**6**	**7**	**7**	**2**	**9**	**9**	**3**	**4**	**8**	**7**	**4**	**4**	**5**	**7**	**8**	**12**	**6**	**5**	**6**	**2**	**7**

Note: the values inside parentheses represent the total of presences for each characteristic. The percentages represent the weight of the total number of presences in each category, considering the total of 6 posts analyzed by hotel.
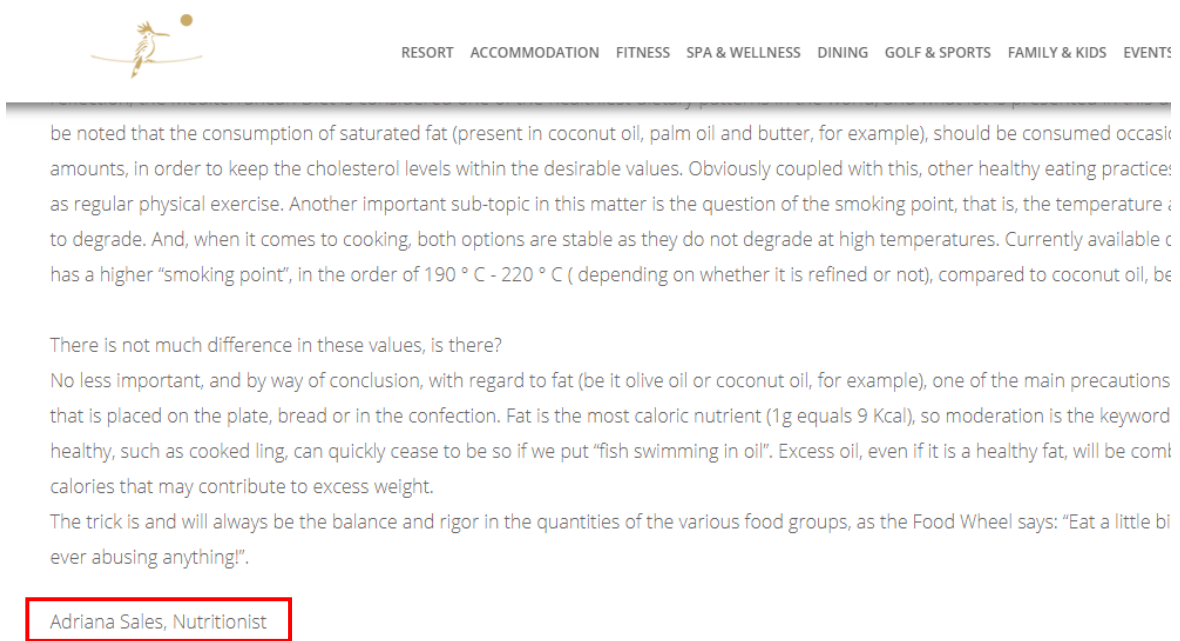
Source: Own development

4.2 - Educational Content

In the category related to educational content, we can observe that none of the hotels in this sample share blog posts that are considered educational, according to the methodology used. In order to try to understand if this feature was similar when looking at international hotel blogs, we analyzed the seven international hotel blogs that were identified during the preliminary phase of the investigation but were not included in the final sample. As a way of comparison, after observing these international hotel blogs, we found that these blogs also did not use educational formats.

Therefore, we can conclude that not using educational formats is not exclusive to Portuguese hotels. Some possible reasons for this result could be the business area of hospitality, not being considered as much educational/pedagogical in terms of practical activities, such as repair or mechanical works or areas that teach how to use a specific software program or how to use equipment, cosmetics, or develop healthy recipes. Also, blog managers may not have a clear understanding of the type of educational content they can share, applied to hospitality. This may as well be due to an absence of a defined strategy or existing resources, such as internal full-time human resources with the know-how for developing this type of content; or available budget to outsource this task (Järvinen *et al.*, 2012).

4.3 - Credibility

As for the credibility aspect, we have identified that an essential attribute was that blog posts should mention their author's name. As highlighted by Koenig and Schlaegel "credibility [...] can particularly be supported by publicly displaying employee names [...], so that readers feel to rather interact with an individual than with an organization" (2014: 434). We have also already mentioned that presenting the author's name helps to increase trust in the brand/company (Cosenza *et al.*, 2014). However, we can observe that only a very small number of the blogs display the posts' authors (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 – Blog post with the name of the author

be noted that the consumption of saturated fat (present in coconut oil, palm oil and butter, for example), should be consumed occasio
amounts, in order to keep the cholesterol levels within the desirable values. Obviously coupled with this, other healthy eating practices
as regular physical exercise. Another important sub-topic in this matter is the question of the smoking point, that is, the temperature a
to degrade. And, when it comes to cooking, both options are stable as they do not degrade at high temperatures. Currently available c
has a higher "smoking point", in the order of 190 ° C - 220 ° C (depending on whether it is refined or not), compared to coconut oil, be

There is not much difference in these values, is there?
No less important, and by way of conclusion, with regard to fat (be it olive oil or coconut oil, for example), one of the main precautions
that is placed on the plate, bread or in the confection. Fat is the most caloric nutrient (1g equals 9 Kcal), so moderation is the keyword
healthy, such as cooked ling, can quickly cease to be so if we put "fish swimming in oil". Excess oil, even if it is a healthy fat, will be com
calories that may contribute to excess weight.
The trick is and will always be the balance and rigor in the quantities of the various food groups, as the Food Wheel says: "Eat a little bi
ever abusing anything!".

Adriana Sales, Nutritionist

Source: Pine Cliffs Resort blog

(https://www.pinecliffs.com/en/blog/coconut-oil-vs-olive-oil/)

Only 4 blogs, which represent 18% of the total blogs, incorporate this feature, despite not all articles from these blogs include the author's name. For example, H22 is managed by an individual who the hotel publicly states as the author of the posts in the blog's header. Therefore, we have considered that all posts of this blog were signed, despite the fact that they do not include his name at the end of all posts (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2 – Statement from the blog of H22

Source: Four Seasons Fairways blog

(https://www.fourseasonsfairways.com/pt/blog/)

The other three blogs incorporating the author's name of the posts are not consistent. For instance, H8 and H13 mention this aspect only once, and H17 includes the author

four times out of the six posts analyzed by blog in our sample. Displaying the author's name is not a priority for the blog managers, either by lack of knowledge of its importance, either by deliberately omitting it. Therefore, we conclude that displaying the name could be arbitrary, rather than doing it with a specific communication strategy in place.

4.4 - Value

Having an online presence is important. However, it is essential to provide information to guests according to their expectations of search (Leite & Azevedo, 2017). The objective of the category "value" is to understand if companies/brands are sharing content that their audiences may be interested in. However, to do so, companies must know their target audience very well. Therefore, four sub-categories were created to help to perform this task, namely "travel/holidays", "tips", "places to visit" and "related to business".

4.4.1 - Travel/holidays

In this sub-category the objective was to analyze if blog posts were related to travel and holidays in general, such as best destinations, why to choose a specific place to travel on holidays, where to stay, why to spend holidays in a determined hotel, etc. We found that only 4 blogs (H10, H15, H18 and H22) have this type of content, representing 18% (Figure 4.3). However, none of them are consistent in all six posts.

Figure 4.3 – Example of a blog post related to travel/holidays

Source: Four Seasons Vilamoura blog
(https://www.fourseasons-vilamoura.com/en/blog/family-bonding-holidays-vilamoura/)

4.4.2 - Tips

In the second sub-category, the intention was to verify if blogs provided tips for their users (Figure 4.4), such as travel tips when travelling to a particular place. These can be

aspects related to recommended local food for the traveller, best local restaurants, souvenirs or gifts to buy, among others.

We observed that 15 blogs (68% of the sample) (H1, H2, H3, H5, H10, H11, H12, H14, H15, H16, H17, H18, H19, H20 and H22) shared posts following the recommendation of including tips for the user as a form of enhancing value-added content. However, only 3 blogs (H1, H16 and H17) are consistent, i.e., they share tips in all the six posts analyzed.

Figure 4.4 – Example of a blog post with tips for gifts

Source: Amendoeira Golf Resort blog

(https://amendoeiraresort.com/en/blog/top-5-christmas-gifts-for-golfers.html)

4.4.3 - Places to visit

The third sub-category had the aim to understand if the shared blog posts were related to places to visit, such as monuments, museums, best beaches, cities, etc.

From the total sample, only 13 blogs (H2, H3, H5, H7, H9, H10, H11, H14, H16, H17, H18, H19 and H20) share posts that fall in this sub-category, which represent 59% of the total blogs.

4.4.4 - Related to business

The fourth and last sub-category related to value content had the objective of ascertaining if the shared blog posts were related to the core business of the brand. The idea was to understand if the blogs focused on sharing content related to tourism and hospitality or scattering their focus to other areas. In Figure 4.5, we can observe a post that is not associated with the company's business.

The majority, 21 blogs (95%), shared at least one post related to the core business. From these, only 8 blogs (36%) adhere consistently to this characteristic in all the 6 posts analyzed (H1, H5, H6, H13, H15, H16, H17 and H19).

Figure 4.5 – Example of a blog post that is not related to the core business

Source: Miracorgo Hotel blog

(https://www.hotelmiracorgo.com/curiosidade-10-o-sol-e-a-lua/)

As an overview of the category "value", regarding the aspect of content being valuable, we can observe that hotels that make better use of this best practice are H16 and H17 (Table 4.2). In the table, it is possible to observe that these two hotels are the ones with more blog articles adhering to the recommendations within this category. This represents a small parcel of the sample, 9%, that is more focused on sharing valuable content, i.e., content attractive to visitors (Ahuja & Medury, 2010). Also, these two hotel blogs seem to have a better understanding of their target audience and what type of content to share compared to the majority. Holliman and Rowley (2014) state that a significant aspect of sharing valuable content is to have a thorough understanding of the target audience and the stage of the buying process customers are.

Another group of hotel blogs can be observed, around 41% of the sample, corresponding to 9 hotels, which also display value content, although not in a consistent fashion. The number of presences considering all sub-categories of "value content" on these blogs ranges from 10 to 13. Content related to the core business is the most representative, as can be seen in Table 4.2. However, it is noteworthy that about 50% of hotel blogs (11) have scarce activity regarding to the best practice of focusing on

valuable content for the target audience. In this group of hotel blogs, the number of presences ranges from 1 to 8.

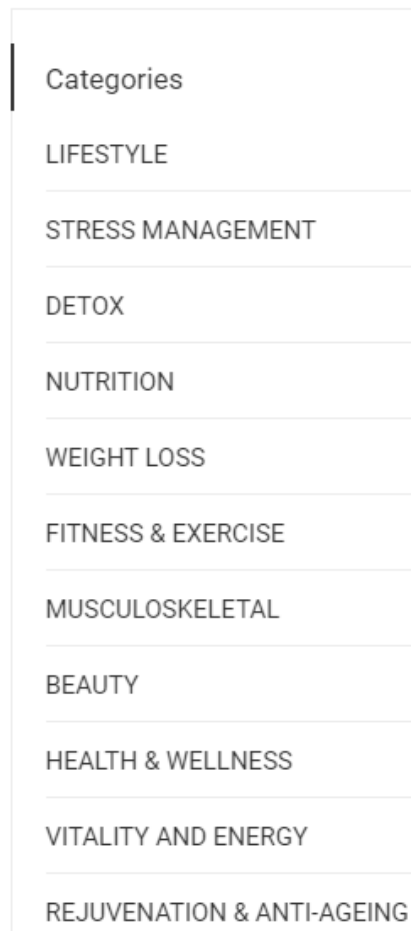**Table 4.2 – Final table containing the sum of all presences and absences for the "value" feature for all blogs**

Main categories	Sub-categories	Hotels																					
		H1	H2	H3	H4	H5	H6	H7	H8	H9	H10	H11	H12	H13	H14	H15	H16	H17	H18	H19	H20	H21	H22
Value	Travel/Holidays	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	50% (3)	0	0	0	0	33% (2)	0	0	17% (1)	0	0	0	17% (1)
	Tips	100% (6)	17% (1)	17% (1)	0	33% (2)	0	0	0	0	50% (3)	83% (5)	33% (2)	0	67% (4)	83% (5)	100% (6)	100% (6)	50% (3)	17% (1)	67% (4)	0	33% (2)
	Places to visit	0	17% (1)	17% (1)	0	33% (2)	0	17% (1)	0	17% (1)	17% (1)	67% (4)	0	0	33% (2)	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	33% (2)	67% (4)	50% (3)	0	0
	Related to business	100% (6)	50% (3)	50% (3)	17% (1)	100% (6)	100% (6)	17% (1)	17% (1)	0	83% (5)	67% (4)	83% (5)	100% (6)	67% (4)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	67% (4)	100% (6)	83% (5)	67% (4)	83% (5)
Sum of total presences		**12**	**5**	**5**	**1**	**10**	**6**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**12**	**13**	**7**	**6**	**10**	**13**	**18**	**18**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**4**	**8**

Source: Own development

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4.5 - Relevance

Regarding this aspect, we have verified in the literature review that a system of categories (topics within blogs) would allow presenting to users more relevant content. This system aims to provide the visitors with the opportunity to rapidly choose the content that better suits their needs through a menu (e.g. lifestyle, stress management, detox). This method allows users to select blog posts related only to a specific category (Figure 4.6). Therefore, this is an accurate system for leading the user to the most relevant posts to his/her needs. According to Ahuja and Medury (2010: 92), "content categorization is done to enable organizations to post consumer-relevant content to induce greater consumer participation."

Figure 4.6 – Example of a system of categories

Categories

LIFESTYLE

STRESS MANAGEMENT

DETOX

NUTRITION

WEIGHT LOSS

FITNESS & EXERCISE

MUSCULOSKELETAL

BEAUTY

HEALTH & WELLNESS

VITALITY AND ENERGY

REJUVENATION & ANTI-AGEING

Source: Longevity Wellness Worldwide blog
(https://longevitywellnessworldwide.com/longevity-blog/)

Only 7 hotels (32%) (H1, H2, H4, H10, H11, H15 and H18) have this feature enabled. This aspect concludes that most blogs (68%) do not simplify the search for the users, leading to frustration, abandoning the blog, and possibly not coming back. This fact can also hinder users from becoming habitual users, leading to a loss of potential traffic.

4.6 - Consistency

Concerning consistent content, the aim was to understand if blogs were sharing content regularly. Ahuja and Medury (2010: 104) declare that "a regularity in posting leads to increased consumer contacts, aids in strengthening brand recall and develops a brand relationship [...]." Therefore, it is important to maintain a regular posting, since it may have implications in the relation between the user and the company. In addition, blogs are chronologically ordered (Bair, 2016), which means that the last posts are the most recent. Also, blog posts usually display the date (Figure 4.7) in which they have been added to the blog, helping to identify if the blogs are adding posts regularly.

Figure 4.7 – Example of blog post with the date
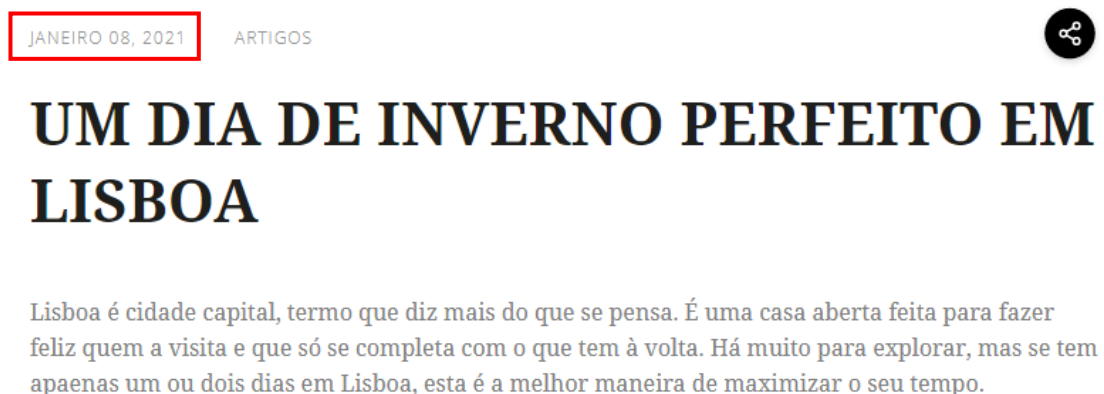
Source: Olissippo Hotels blog
(https://www.olissippohotels.com/pt/Corporativo/Noticias.aspx?lang=pt&idnews=99)

There is no ideal number of posts for a blog. That will depend on the strategy of the company. However, Pulizzi (2014: 77) advises that "whatever you commit to in your content marketing, you must consistently deliver." This means that if companies/brands are committed to sharing an article per month, per week or per day, they must be consistent in that strategy.

Regarding this attribute, we can verify that 13 blogs (59%) (H1, H2, H4, H6, H7, H8, H9, H11, H14, H15, H17, H19 and H20) have some consistency in posting. In fact, not

all blogs are completely consistent since there gaps between posts. This means that in these cases, some posts were found to be consistent and following a coherent time line, but other posts had a different time interval in between. Therefore, from the 13 blogs, 7 have a clear strategy regarding a schedule of posts (H1, H2, H6, H7, H8, H9 and H15), and 6 blogs attempt some consistency but not for all posts. These results allow some conclusions. The first is that only 7 blogs (32%) seem to have a coherent plan or a strategy for the blog regarding time planning. Six blogs attempt a specific strategy, but gaps between posts may lead us to conclude that it could also be arbitrary. This result could also be related to other issues such as limitation of human resources, high staff turnover (e.g., short-term contracts or internships), limited number of specialized employees in the marketing department (Royle & Laing, 2014), or no available budget, to outsource a digital agency or a copywriter. The fact that tourism in Portugal is a seasonal phenomenon can also help to explain and understand this scenario (Daniel, 2010).

For the remaining 9 blogs, we have verified two situations. On the one hand, there is no consistency in posting, meaning that blog posts are shared with a considerable interval between them. On the other hand, blog posts do not display the date. Therefore, it is not possible to attest consistency. However, whatever the case may be, these 9 blogs (41%) do not incorporate this user-friendly feature nor develop a consistent relationship with the client. These blogs do not seem to have a defined strategy for this feature. According to Royle and Laing (2014), a major issue found among marketers is the ability to implement an integrated digital marketing strategy that is consistent over time.

4.7 - Timely content

Regarding content being timely, the objective was to understand if it was related to present events. Therefore, we have used the following criterion in order to categorize the content. If the blog posts were related to contemporary aspects, then, they were considered timely. Examples of such aspects are related to information about Covid-19, the environment, or places users could visit to see a particular exhibition on display on the date of the post (Figure 4.8), amongst others.

Figure 4.8 – Example of a timely blog post

COLOMBO FESTIVAL 2020 NO PORTO SANTO

Wednesday, 23 September 2020 | Events

The Colombo 2020 Festival will take place between the 23rd and 27th of September 2020. There are 4 days with a lot of entertainment at Porto Santo island.

Source: Vila Baleira Hotels & Resorts blog

(https://www.vilabaleira.com/festival-colombo-2020-no-porto-santo/)

We observed that, in general, 16 blogs (73%) (H1, H2, H3, H4, H6, H7, H8, H9, H11, H12, H14, H15, H17, H19, H20 and H21) shared timely content. However, it is important to mention that not all posts were considered timely within some blogs. A total of 6 blogs (27%) do not have any timely content, considering the criterion used. Therefore, we can conclude that most blogs share timely content and seem to be alert to the latest trends, and share them with users.

4.8 - Engagement

Concerning the category "engaging content" we divided it into sub-categories, related to multimedia (Table 4.3). Cho and Huh (2010: 36) state that multimedia features "can be considered to represent a corporation's efforts to make user interaction more enjoyable and entertaining." Therefore, we have identified in the literature review the following sub-categories: podcasts, videos, audio, animations and images. These elements have aim to make the blog posts more engaging and enjoyable (Calder *et al.*, 2009).

Globally, regarding the aspect of content being "engaging", we can observe that hotels that make better use of this best practice are H2 and H7 (Table 4.3) (total of 8 presences each, considering all sub-categories), and H13 (total of 7 presences). Although, for this category, totals are not high (mostly, these blogs focus on the use of images), it is interesting to notice that H13, which does not have a high total in presences considering all categories (please see previous table 4.1, which shows the overall analysis), seems to be aware of the importance of the process of using multimedia content for engaging their audience. This suggests that some blogs can be stronger in adhering to some good practices and less attentive to other aspects, leaving space for improvement. This aspect

is revealed particularly through the analysis conducted in this dissertation by examining categories and sub-categories separately.

4.8.1 - Podcasts

In our sample we have found that the use of podcasts was absent (Table 4.3). Podcasts are a simple way of reaching a broad audience (Wei & Ram, 2016), and a marketing tool for companies to spread their messages (Wuebben, 2011). The process of utilizing this communication format may bring benefits to the brand. Therefore, the hotels under analysis are not taking the advantages of this tool.

The reason why hotels are not using this format may be due to unfamiliarity with this tool or the way to applying it to a hotel. As in any other field, it is necessary a strategy for producing a podcast. One possible explanation may be the fact these hotels not knowing how to define a strategy for developing a podcast. On the other hand, it could happen that despite already knowing this format, this might not be a priority for these hotels and, thus, they opt for using other channels.

Furthermore, not using podcasts may be due to other aspects, for instance, not having the budget to hire a specialized professional to produce a podcast or a professional within the marketing team with knowledge to do it (Royle & Laing, 2014).

4.8.2 - Videos

We have found that blogs that shared videos are a minority (4: 18%) in our sample (H2, H7, H13 and H21), (Figure 4.9). The vast majority are not using this communication format (Table 4.3). This result is important since exposing users to videos about a specific product may increase their purchase intentions (Alamäki *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, hotels should invest in this format as it may bring loyalty/financial benefits to the company.

Figure 4.9 – Example of blog post with video embedded
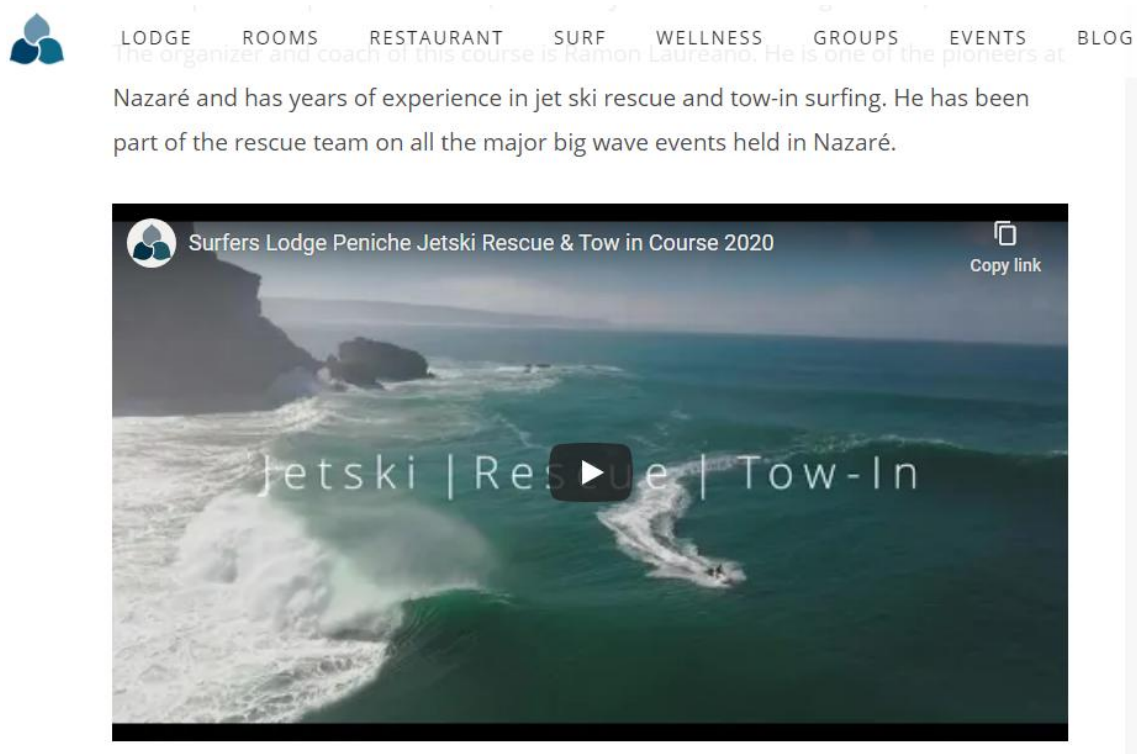
Source: Surfers Lodge Peniche blog

(https://surferslodgepeniche.com/towincourse/)

Some of the reasons why these hotels are not using this format could be related to financial aspects. In order to produce videos, some technological devices are needed, such as a video camera and, in some cases, a microphone. Also, as there must be someone with technical skills to produce the videos, these hotels may not have specialized employees in this area, or budget to hire an outside company (Royle & Laing, 2014). Also, marketing departments may be too small and could be dedicated to other areas, considered more important (Leite & Azevedo, 2017). However, a way to bridge this gap could be by sharing videos from platforms such as YouTube. This could be an inexpensive method to share this engaging format.

4.8.3 - Audio

We have observed that only one hotel (H7) has a blog post with audio, representing 5%, of the total sample (Table 4.3). Regarding this feature, we have analyzed if the blogs had any audio, such as music, or any kind of audio itinerary, such as a guide, for instance. It seems that the majority of hotels/blogs do not focus on providing users with audio. This could be related to brands preferring to use other formats in their blogs,

because they do not have any audio to provide or do not consider this a suitable/relevant format.

4.8.4 - Animations

It can be observed that none of the blogs used animations (Table 4.3). This format can vary in terms of length; or be produced in different forms, with diverse stories. Two different reflections can help to sustain why hotels do not use this format in their blogs.

The first one is related to monetary reasons, since to utilize animations, the hotel must have a designer in-house, outsource an agency or a design freelancer. Therefore, hotels might prefer to choose less expensive formats.

The second reflection is that animations may not be the most appropriate format for presenting in a hotel blog. We also analyzed the seven international hotel blogs that were identified during the preliminary phase of the research to understand if these blogs included this format. However, these international blogs also do not present this format. This may lead us to assume that this result may not be exclusive to Portuguese hotels but to hotel blogs in general.

4.8.5 - Images

In general, we have observed that 21 hotels (95%) are using images in their blog posts. Only one hotel (H5) was found not to be using images. However, only 18 blogs (82%) utilize images in all the six posts analyzed by each blog (Table 4.3).

Images are the most used format in the analyzed sample. Images are easy to get through free stock photos online and mobile phones allow taking pictures of good quality without needing any professional edition. Therefore, almost any individual with basic digital knowledge may handle images. Images are a less expensive format than the aforementioned ones, a fact that may explain why so many hotels use them. Noteworthy is that some blogs are not optimizing their use, considering so many ways of getting free images. This leads to the assumption that there could be a lack of knowledge regarding best practices in content marketing (Järvinen *et al.*, 2012).

Table 4.3 – Final table containing the sum of all presences and absences for the "engagement" feature, for all blogs

Main categories	Sub-categories	Hotels																					
		H1	H2	H3	H4	H5	H6	H7	H8	H9	H10	H11	H12	H13	H14	H15	H16	H17	H18	H19	H20	H21	H22
Engagement	Podcasts	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Videos	0	33% (2)	0	0	0	0	17% (1)	0	0	0	0	0	17% (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	33% (2)	0
	Audio	0	0	0	0	0	0	17% (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Animations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Images	100% (6)	100% (6)	50% (3)	100% (6)	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	100% (6)	67% (4)	100% (6)	100% (6)	67% (4)	100% (6)
Sum of total presences		6	8	3	6	0	6	8	6	6	6	6	6	7	6	6	6	6	4	6	6	6	6

Source: Own development

4.9 - Comments

We analyzed if the companies/blogs allowed users to include their comments (Figure 4.10) on their posts, since allowing this feature on the blog enables users to express their opinions (Blair & Level, 2008). Indeed comments help develop a dialogue between the brand and the users and increase consumer engagement (Ahuja & Medury, 2010).

Figure 4.10 – Example of blog post in which it is possible to leave a comment

LEAVE A REPLY

YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS WILL NOT BE PUBLISHED. REQUIRED FIELDS ARE MARKED *

YOUR COMMENT *

NAME *   EMAIL *   WEBSITE

PLEASE ENTER AN ANSWER IN DIGITS:

four + 7 =

POST COMMENT

Source: Pestana CR7 Lifestyle blog

(https://pestanacr7lifestyle.com/cr7-tips/best-island-destination-of-the-world/)

We have observed that only 2 blogs (9%) (H11 and H14) allow comments on their posts. Consequently, the vast majority, 20 blogs, do not have this feature visible. According to Dennis *et al*., (2016: 169) when comments are disabled "the communication becomes unidirectional - from the corporation to its audience". Therefore, users cannot engage in a conversation with the brand.

In one of the two blogs that allow comments, we have verified that, in one specific post, actually it is not possible to submit a comment (this module was disabled for that particular post). A reflection can be made on this result. The first one is that allowing comments on blog posts could be arbitrary. This means that the responsible person for managing these blogs may not be aware that this feature is important, so they exclude it. However, according to Dennis *et al.* (2016), the adopted norm by blogs is to enable

feedback. The second inference is that the blog's structure in terms of development may not allow adding this feature.

Noteworthy that from the specific blog posts that allowed comments, we have found only one comment from a user, which had no answer from the blog manager. This result shows that even when this feature is available, users might not feel encouraged or interested enough in the content provided to leave a comment. So, this feature alone is not enough to engage audiences. This result also suggests that answering to users may not be a priority, which can leave comments without answer from the company. One reflection is that in the cases of the companies (hotels) analyzed, the marketing department may be too small (in some cases, the department itself may not exist) or there is no dedicated individual to answer or to verify the blog posts after they have been added. These assumptions are in accordance with the conclusions from Järvinen *et al.* (2012), which inform that major barriers to technology are the lack of resources such as workforce. Also, in a study carried out by Leite and Azevedo (2017: 97) applied to the hotels from the city of Porto, the authors found that "few hotels have employees dedicated exclusively to digital marketing functions."

We also observed the blogs from the seven international hotel blogs that were identified during the initial research (preliminary phase), and we found that four allow adding comments. We decided to examine these blogs only as a way of comparison. We consider that Portuguese blog managers may be more conservative regarding the use of this category. As we mentioned before, this may be due to no one assigned exclusively for answering the comments. Therefore, managers may be cautious about the fact that negative comments could be left without an answer.

4.10 - Text dimension

This category was added in accordance with Jefferson and Tanton, (2015) who highlight that blog posts should have at least 500 words. Therefore, we analyzed all blog posts to understand the number of words used in each one.

We found that 16 blogs (73%) (H1, H2, H3, H5, H6, H7, H8, H10, H13, H14, H15, H16, H17, H18, H20 and H22) have at least one post with a minimum of 500 words. We believe, however, that this happens by chance, since only 2 blogs (9%) (H16 and H17) are coherent regarding this feature, designing all analyzed posts with the

recommended number of words. On the other hand, 6 blogs (27%) (H4, H9, H11, H12, H19 and H21) do not have any posts adhering to the proposed number of words.

With this analysis, we conclude that most of blogs do not take into account the number of words a post should have. This may be due to unfamiliarity with this practice.
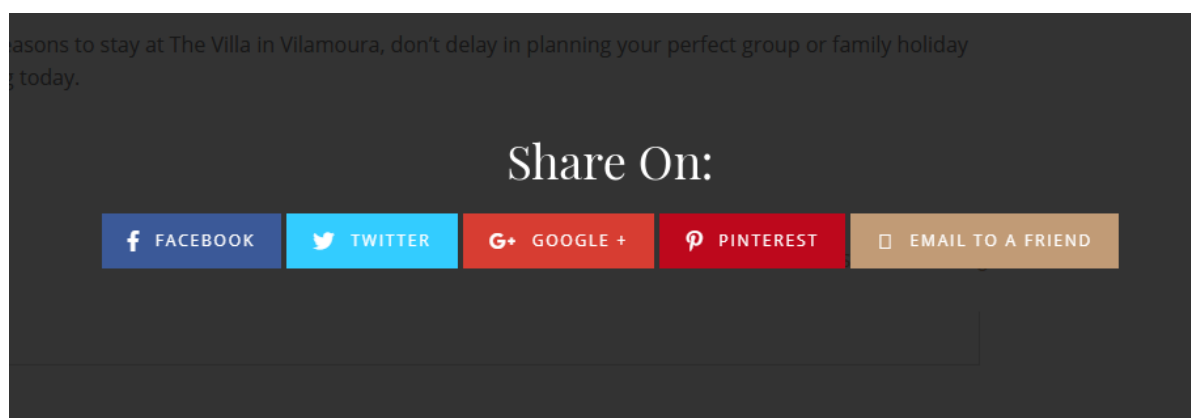
4.11 - Share buttons

We divided the category "share buttons" into specific sub-categories, namely Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and email (Table 4.4). The objective is to ascertain if the analyzed blogs allow the visitor to share the post on his personal social network, or send it by email. The rationale behind this is that sharing the post with users contacts may help create engagement and drive traffic to the blog.

4.11.1 - Facebook

Regarding this attribute, we can observe that 9 blogs (41%) (H3, H4, H6, H7, H10, H16, H17, H18 and H22) have a direct button for sharing their posts on Facebook (Figure 4.11). On the other hand, 13 blogs (59%) do not have this feature (Table 4.4). Despite all of the analyzed hotels have a Facebook account and a button to access it directly from the website, not all of them allow sharing the posts. This could be a limitation of the blog, due to development issues, rather than a blog's manager choice. Also the programmers and the website owners may not be aware that this feature is important, hence its exclusion.

Figure 4.11 – Example of blog post that is possible to share

Source: Four Seasons Vilamoura blog

(https://www.fourseasons-vilamoura.com/en/blog/eating-algarve-mediterranean-diet/)

4.11.2 - LinkedIn

Concerning the LinkedIn sub-category, only 6 blogs (27%) (H3, H4, H6, H7, H16 and H17) allow users sharing the company's posts in this social network directly from the blog by using the dedicated button (Table 4.4). On the contrary, a strong majority (16 blogs) does not allow this feature, representing 73% of the sample. We have also analyzed how many hotels have a LinkedIn account, and only five (23%) were found to have a profile in this platform and a direct button to access it directly from the website.

4.11.3 - Twitter

We identified that 12 hotels have an account on this social network and a direct button to access it from the website. However, we found that only 8 blogs (36%) (H3, H4, H6, H7, H10, H17, H18 and H22) allow sharing posts on Twitter (64% do not allow this feature) directly from the blog (Table 4.4). Therefore, these hotels seem to give more importance to having an account than allowing users to share posts on Twitter.

4.11.4 - Email

We analyzed if blogs offered the possibility to share the article directly by mail through a dedicated button (Table 4.4). In fact, users may have liked the post and decided to share it with their email contacts or to store it for using later.

We found that 5 blogs (23%) (H3, H6, H7, H10 and H17) allowed sharing posts through email (77% of the blogs do not allow this feature). Literature points out that this aspect could be related to unfamiliarity and lack of expertise from blog managers with this detail (Järvinen *et al.*, 2012). Also, the blog itself may not allow enabling this feature due to development issues since this is not controllable by the blog manager.

As an overall overview, Facebook is the most chosen social network to share blog posts directly from the hotel blogs, with 9 blogs (41%) incorporating this feature, followed by Twitter, with 8 blogs (36%), LinkedIn with 6 blogs (27%) and email with 5 blogs (23%) (Table 4.4). Also, it can be observed that 4 blog hotels reach the maximum score possible regarding the total of presences considering all sub-categories of "share buttons", namely H3, H6, H7 and H17. These blogs (especially H7 and H17) are among those in Table 4.1 that showed higher scores with regard to the total presences of the implementation of best practices of DMC. The same conclusion can be drawn to the

hotel blogs that in Table 4.1 have the lowest scores regarding the total of presences considering all categories analyzed. Accordingly, it can be observed that H1, H2, H5, H8, H9, H11, H12, H13, H14, H15, H19, H20 and H21 (Table 4.1) do not include any button for allowing interaction with social media directly from their blogs (Table 4.4).

In general, it seems more important for blog managers to provide a button directing the user to a social network where the brand has a profile than allowing the user to share the blog post in his/her account. We believe that many companies do not allow users to share posts due to development issues and limitations within the blog and some "digital illiteracy" by blog managers, who are not aware of the importance of the aspects related to DCM. The inconsistencies found seem to support these ideas. Also, our assumptions are aligned with the conclusions drawn by Järvinen *et al.* (2012), who have identified that lack of expertise is a major issue in digital marketing. Moreover, these authors highlight the lack of control of the messages in social media platforms as a barrier: "the lack of control of marketing messages and their distribution is considered a major risk when using social media tools as part of the digital marketing mix (Järvinen *et al.*, 2012: 108). Royle and Laing, (2014) also found gaps in digital marketing skills in managers regarding social media tools.

Table 4.4 – Final table containing the sum of all presences and absences for the "share buttons" feature, for all blogs

Main categories	Sub-categories	Hotels																					
		H1	H2	H3	H4	H5	H6	H7	H8	H9	H10	H11	H12	H13	H14	H15	H16	H17	H18	H19	H20	H21	H22
Share buttons	Facebook	0	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	0	0	100% (6)	0	0	0	0	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	67% (4)	0	0	0	100% (6)
	LinkedIn	0	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	0	0	0	0	0
	Twitter	0	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	0	0	100% (6)	0	0	0	0	0	0	100% (6)	67% (4)	0	0	0	100% (6)
	Email	0	0	100% (6)	0	0	100% (6)	100% (6)	0	0	100% (6)	0	0	0	0	0	0	100% (6)	0	0	0	0	0
Sum of total presences		0	0	24	18	0	24	24	0	0	18	0	0	0	0	0	12	24	8	0	0	0	12

Source: Own development

4.12 – Suggested articles

By suggesting other articles (Figure 4.12) at the end of the post (or in any other part of the page), the brand enhances the probability of presenting additional answers/information to the user and keeping him/her engaging with the company/brand during more time.

Figure 4.12 – Suggested articles at the end of the blog post

RELATED ARTICLES

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Source: Convento do Espinheiro blog

(https://www.conventodoespinheiro.com/2020/07/experiencias_a_pensar_em_si/)

We found that 16 blogs (73%) (H1, H2, H3, H4, H6, H7, H9, H10, H11, H12, H13, H14, H16, H18, H20 and H22) suggest related articles with the published post, and 6 blogs (27%) do not. Among the 6 blogs (H5, H8, H15, H17, H19 and H21) that do not have this characteristic are the ones that have the lowest scores in Table 4.1, regarding the sum of presences when considering all categories analyzed.

Despite the majority having this feature implemented, some blogs still need to implement this best practice of DCM. Literature points out that, in some cases, it may be due to limitations on the blog itself rather than a choice of the blog's managers. However, this does not mean that blog's managers are aware of the importance of this feature (Järvinen *et al*., 2012).

Chapter 5 - Conclusion

In this chapter we are going to present the main conclusions of this dissertation, marketing recommendations, study limitations and suggestions for future research.

We have identified in the literature review a dearth of empirical studies focusing on the use of corporate blogs by companies, especially in a hospitality context. Also, some of these studies are not conducted in a Portuguese context but mainly on the North American market.

5.1 - Conclusions

Our main objective was to understand if the studied hotels were following DCM's best practices, i.e., if the content shared by these companies on their blogs respected the elements that literature highlight as being important for developing engagement with the audience. The elements observed were: Educational (Webinars, Infographics and E-books), Credibility (Name of the author) Value (Travel / holidays, Tips, Places to visit and Related to business) Relevance, Consistency, Timely, Engagement (Podcasts, Videos, Audio, Animations and Images), Comments, Text dimension, Share buttons (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and Email) and Suggested articles.

First, it is important to note that we have noticed a lack of Portuguese hotels (4 and 5 stars) with blogs, considering the definition used in this study: "a valuable content blog is a place where you [the company] write about your subject for the benefit of the people you do business with" (Jefferson & Tanton, 2015: 52). In some cases, we found that some hotels had a news-related section instead of a blog section. Also, in some blogs, we found a mix of news and blog articles. In other cases, we observed that the website had a blog, but it was "abandoned" since there were no posts. This first observation shows that although literature highlights the important role of blogs in a DCM strategy (Cox *et al.*, 2008; Baxter *et al.*, 2010; Colton, 2018), the hospitality sector in Portugal is not optimizing this communication resource.

We have observed that the category "educational content", in general and its sub-categories in particular are not being used by any of the blogs analyzed. Järvinen *et al.* (2012) point out that some of these situations in companies may be due to not having a

defined strategy and lack of resources such as the internal capacity to produce it or budget to hire an external company.

Additionally, some other sub-categories are not being used. For instance, in the engaging content related category, blogs seem to give more relevance to images since the majority of the blogs analyzed use this format. Despite video and audio are being also used, it is almost residual. None of the blogs has adopted the other sub-categories, namely podcasts and animations. Whereas images are an easy format to access and edit, the other formats require that the hotel hire a professional with digital marketing communication skills, provide training to an existing employee or outsource an external company. Also, these formats require that the hotel invests in specific technical equipment. As Royle and Laing (2014) advocate, digital marketing is evolving very fast. Therefore, marketing professionals may experience difficulty in following all these best practices on DCM.

We have also noted that blogs seem to be reluctant to display the post author's name. Only a minority has adopted this feature. Literature suggests that blog managers may not be aware of this aspect, and some blogs may incorporate this feature without a specific digital communication strategy in place (Royle & Laing, 2014).

In general, the blogs analyzed do not allow users to leave a comment in their posts. This means that users and companies/hotels cannot engage in a (digital) public conversation. One possible explanation can be that there is no professional dedicated to answering comments (Leite & Azevedo, 2017). Therefore, the blog's managers prefer to disable comments. Furthermore, blog managers may be cautious with the possibility of negative comments might be left without an answer. Additionally, another reason could be that these professionals do not acknowledge the importance of this DCM feature, due to their lack of expertise in the digital marketing area (Royle & Laing, 2014).

Noteworthy that only 9 blogs (41%) seem to have a module (button) allowing users to share the blog posts on social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Twitter). From a digital marketing communication perspective, this aspect is concerning because these companies are not taking full advantage of communication and brand exposure.

These results suggest that many managers in hotels responsible for managing their blogs may not be aware of some of the best practices of DCM. This idea is also supported by

the fact that, although authors such as Jefferson and Tanton (2015) recommend that blog posts should have a minimum of 500 words, most blogs analyzed are not consistent in their strategy regarding the length of posts. The same conclusion can be presented for the use of the author's names in blog posts, which is posed in literature as a relevant feature of blogs (Koenig & Schlaegel, 2014).

Some reasons justifying that many blogs do not adhere to the best practices of DCM may be related to the fact that marketing departments of these hotels, may be smaller in comparison to big international chains (Leite & Azevedo, 2017). Therefore, they may have no capacity to implement an integrated digital marketing strategy. In fact, the strategy used by most of the blog posts analyzed is not consistent. For example, we found several temporal gaps within blog posts. Also, the lack of employee expertise could be a major obstacle, as pointed out by Järvinen et *al,*. (2012: 108) "as technology develops quickly, it is evident that many employees will have difficulty keeping pace with it", or a single employee/manager might be responsible for a diversity of tasks apart from DCM. In general, the majority of the hotel blogs analyzed seem not to have a defined strategy for a result that meets the findings of Royle and Laing (2014) and Järvinen *et al.* (2012). The notable lack of consistency, timely content and educational content also sustain our assumptions.

Furthermore, it is also important to point out that, in some cases, hotels in Portugal may not have access to enough marketing budgets allowing them to hire specialized staff, or outsource external companies dedicated to DCM only. This might be one of the reasons why there is a lack of engaging related content, such as animations, videos and educational content. Our assumptions are also supported by the work of Järvinen *et al*. (2012), which point out that the lack of resources is a major barrier in digital marketing. Nevertheless, it should be noted that in other cases, there could be limitations within the blog itself, such as website programming. Also, the lack of share buttons within some blogs could be due to that rather than an arbitrary implementation of DCM actions.

Some of the hotels under study may also use other channels to communicate, such as social media and other websites such as Booking.com, Expedia.com, Tripadvisor.com, etc. This means that their attention could be directed more to these platforms rather than to the blog. However, these platforms do not necessarily bring traffic to the website nor help in developing a relationship with the user.

Some of the tools presented in this research may not have been adopted by these hotel blogs, since managers may not know which ones are indicated for their strategy. According to Järvinen *et al*. (2012: 108) "as the emergence of new digital tools accelerates, it is no wonder that B2B [business to business] firms need time to comprehend which tools are apt for their industries and how they might best be utilized for marketing purposes." Despite this statement is applied to the sector B2B, we can conclude that it could also justify why some hotels, typically with a communication business to consumer (B2C), have not adopted some of these tools.

Considering the above, regarding the research question "To which extent are Portuguese hotels adhering to the best practices of DCM regarding their blogs?", we conclude that a few hotel blogs – considering the overall analysis: H7 and H17 – seem to be aware and adhere to many good practices of DCM in a more consistent fashion. In general, the hotel blogs in our sample do not follow these recommendations consistently. In some cases, the features under analysis were almost absent – considering the overall analysis: H5 and H21. The exception is the presence of images. Of the sample, 95% of blogs incorporate this feature, which is considered a key format for engaging audiences (Koenig & Schlaegel, 2014).

5.2 - Marketing recommendations

As in any other marketing areas, DCM needs a defined strategy. This strategy should be elaborated within the company marketing communication plan, contemplating all actions that should be performed in an integrated manner, including allocated resources and budget (Diamond, 2019). Also, an operational plan must be drawn regarding DCM considering the blog posts to be published. The plan should be robust enough in order to avoid gaps and realistic regarding available resources. There should be space left for improvements, and it must be flexible since it could need some changes during the time of its application.

Defining a strategy may be difficult, therefore, if the company can afford to outsource a digital agency, it can delegate tasks with respect to digital marketing. On the other hand, if the brand cannot afford to outsource a specialized external company, for example hiring a digital agency, we suggest the preparation of a plan with fewer tasks with respect to adhering to good practices of DCM, as long as it is consistent, executable and realistic. Hotels can provide training to their existing employees and also learn from

trainers who recently completed graduated courses in marketing, digital marketing and communication design. These interns, who have updated knowledge and practical skills, can help hotels drawing their operational plans and enhancing the digital strategy of these companies with relation to blogs and their connection to other social media platforms. This follows the recommendation from Järvinen *et al.,* (2012: 114), who state that: "companies should invest in acquiring human resources with the capability to utilize digital marketing tools; that might be through training or recruiting or, indeed, may involve outsourcing to expert agencies."

Regarding managers training digital communication skills, Royle and Laing (2014: 67) stress that some of those skills are "website construction; maximizing the potential of social media […]; Search Engine Optimization (SEO); mobile applications; customer conversion and knowledge of digital analytics for evaluating the effectiveness of digital approaches […]." Some e-learning platforms, such as Udemy.com, LinkedIn Learning, Coursera.org, Swonkie, etc., offer the possibility to undertake many courses regarding digital marketing at relatively accessible prices. Hotels should allocate some time in the workload of employees responsible for DCM tasks for allowing them to complete these short courses. Literature poses that investment in a good DCM strategy can result in favorable image, brand awareness, loyalty and positive word of mouth (Diamond, 2019).

The absence of some categories and sub-categories analyzed may be due to limitations in terms of development/programming. Therefore, we suggest that blog managers analyze if there are limitations within the company blogs and proceed with the necessary adjustments. Also, hotels that decide to create new blogs should have all features planned to consider all necessary operational and technical aspects.

It is imperative to understand the profile of guests staying in the hotels, including how these guests search online. In this process, internal customer relationship management (CRM) systems and platforms such as Google Analytics help to understand not only the target audience but also their behavior. Data gathered in these platforms and from questionnaires, for example, can help to develop a better digital communication strategy and, thus, improve content development for blogs.

5.3 - Limitations and suggestions for future research

The findings of this dissertation help to understand to which extent Portuguese hotels are adhering to the best practices of DCM regarding to their blogs. As a result, the study offers these companies recommendations that support the process of rethinking their strategies regarding the use of blogs as a form of marketing communication. Considering the exploratory nature of our study, some limitations should be highlighted.

While the lack of studies focused on blogs in hotels conducted both in Portugal and other countries revealed a research gap that was addressed, this aspect difficulted the comparison of findings with previous studies.

For selecting the sample, a list from the website of Turismo de Portugal was used. It is important to note that changes in the hospitality sector happen very fast, so some of the hotels on that list may not have been updated at the time of the study. Thus, other possible hotel blogs that met the criteria presented in the methodology may not have been included in the sample. Also, our sample was limited to the number of hotel blogs that met the criteria presented in the methodology.

Analyzing websites and their blogs is a time-consuming task and the online environment changes rapidly. Therefore, during the study, some hotel blogs may have changed their internet address, content or even have been deleted, an aspect that limits the replication of the study.

As a complement to this study, we suggest future studies to conduct interviews with blog managers and users. In this study, blog posts were analyzed through criteria found in literature regarding good practices of DMC.

We consider it relevant to analyze posts also from a blog manager's point of view and collect information about the back-office of the content management systems[13] (CMS). This process would allow understanding if some DCM's characteristics are used in an arbitrary manner, if there are technical limitations in the blogs themselves, and/or if managers are unaware of specific good practices of DCM.

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[13] Content management system (CMS) – "a publishing platform intended to make the task of publishing and maintaining a website easier" (Enge et *al.*, 2015: 933).

Our study was focused only on the blogs of Portuguese hotels. In the future, it would be interesting to compare Portuguese blogs to international blogs.

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APPENDIX 1 – LIST OF THE HOTEL-BLOGS ANALYZED

Code	Hotel/Blog	URL
H1	Longevity Health & Wellness Hotel	https://longevitywellnessworldwide.com/longevity-blog/
H2	Vidamar Resort Hotel Algarve	https://www.vidamarresorts.com/blog/
H3	Vale da Lapa Village Resort	https://detailshotels.com/en/blog/
H4	M'Ar de Ar Aqueduto Historic Design Hotel & SPA	https://mardearhotels.com/blog
H5	Vale d'Oliveiras Quinta Resort & Spa	https://www.valedoliveirasresort.com/blogpage
H6	Convento do Espinheiro, Historic Hotel & Spa	https://www.conventodoespinheiro.com/blog/
H7	Hotel Olissippo Lapa Palace	https://www.olissippohotels.com/pt/Corporativo/Noticias.aspx
H8	Pine Cliffs Hotel, a Luxury Collection Resort, Algarve	https://www.pinecliffs.com/pt/blog/
H9	Hotel Apartamentos Alvor Jardim	https://www.aguahotels.pt/en/news/
H10	Four Seasons Vilamoura	https://www.fourseasons-vilamoura.com/en/blog/
H11	Pestana CR7 Funchal	https://pestanacr7lifestyle.com/
H12	Apartamentos Turísticos Vila Baleira	https://www.vilabaleira.com/noticias/
H13	Surfers Lodge	https://surferslodgepeniche.com/blog/
H14	Apartamentos Turísticos Tróia Marina	https://www.troiaresort.pt/blog/
H15	Amendoeira Golf Resort	https://amendoeiraresort.com/en/blog/
H16	Apartamentos Turísticos Belmar	https://www.belmarresort.com/en/blog/
H17	Lux Fátima Park	https://fatimapark.luxhotels.pt/blog/en/
H18	Dom Pedro Vilamoura	https://www.dompedro.com/pt/blog/
H19	Hotel da Montanha	https://www.hoteldamontanha.com/en/blog/
H20	3HB Clube Humbria	https://3hb.com/en/blog/
H21	Hotel Miracorgo	https://www.hotelmiracorgo.com/o-nosso-blog/
H22	Four Seasons Fairways	https://www.fourseasonsfairways.com/en/blog/