

Chapter 129

Digital marketing and social networks as an innovation opportunity for micro and small companies: a study carried out with retailers in the city of Lavras – MG

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ABSTRACT

When the environment becomes increasingly competitive, companies seek different forms of

marketing to win and retain customers in an attempt to expand their sales. Therefore, the present work had as its main objective to evaluate the effectiveness of social networks as a marketing strategy for capturing, customer loyalty and expanding sales of micro and small companies (MSEs) in the city of Lavras-MG. Quantitative, descriptive-exploratory research was carried out, through the application of structured questionnaires applied to a sample of 92 MPEs located in the municipality. The results showed that the MSEs analyzed the use of digital social networks as a marketing tool, which has contributed to increased customer acquisition, and customer loyalty and, consequently, to increase sales rate.

Keywords: Digital Marketing, Social media, Digital social media, MEPS.

1 INTRODUCTION

Contemporary organizations face a highly competitive market and need to innovate to adapt to this new economic model (VIEIRA, NASCIMENTO, and CALVO, 2016). The digital revolution in society and marketing creates a tremendous challenge for contemporary companies (LEEFLANG et al., 2014).

Given this scenario, managers have invested in online media and social networks to create brand fans, which tend to cause positive effects such as loyalty and word-of-mouth marketing (LEEFLANG et al., 2014; DE VRIES, GENSLER, and LEEFLANG, 2012; DHOLAKIA and DURHAM, 2010).

According to Fader and Winer (2012), the 1990s is the decade of electronic commerce and the first part of the 21st century has become the era of social commerce. The internet is currently one of the most important markets for goods and services transactions (LEEFLANG et al., 2014).

Facebook is the social networking software that has the largest number of users in the world, surpassing one billion active users per month (JULIANI et al., 2012; LEEFLANG et al., 2014). Two years after its creation, Facebook already had more than 50 million users around the world (FISCH, 2010).

According to Leeflang (2014), in the USA, Brazil, Europe, and India, more than 70% of the population is a member of at least one social network. In India, each person is a member of 3.9 social networks on average. In Brazil, this number is above 3, and in the USA and Europe around 2 (VAN BELLEGHEM, EENHUIZEN and VERIS, 2011).

Williamson (2011) found that more than 50% of social media users follow brands on social media. In this sense, companies are investing more and more in social media, and around 4.3 billion dollars are spent on marketing in these channels around the world (LEEFLANG et al., 2014; WILLIAMSON, 2011).

Bad evaluations and criticisms related to marketed products have increasingly negative effects on e-commerce or online commerce classification means (Godes & Silva, 2012; Moe & Schweidel, 2012; Moe & Trusov, 2011). According to these same authors, this occurs because evaluation systems are becoming more mature, are being improved, and, therefore, have gained credibility with consumers. There are 32 billion searches on Google each month and 50 million Tweets per day related to the subject (LEEFLANG et al., 2014).

These same authors claim that more than 90% of all consumers read online reviews before buying products and that 67% of all consumers of consumer goods do so based on the content of reviews and information generated by other users/ consumers. Consumers, on average, consult this information at least four times before purchasing a given product (LEEFLANG et al., 2014; GODES and SILVA, 2012; KEE, 2008).

According to Van Doorn et al. (2010), the content of social networks creates well-informed customers, who are sometimes more influenced by other customers than by the advertising itself. The consequence of this is that companies need to invest in other types of marketing and the involvement with their final customer is important (VAN DOORN et al. (2010). It is in this interim that digital marketing gains strength and appears as an opportunistic alternative and innovative way to gain market share in the 21st century.

In this sense, the present work sought to evaluate the effectiveness of social networks as a marketing strategy for capturing, customer loyalty and expanding sales of micro and small companies (MSEs) in the retail trade in the city of Lavras-MG.

Carrying out this study was important because, according to the Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service (SEBRAE, 2013), many MSEs do not use marketing tools because they consider their cost to be high, based on their available resources. However, according to Kotler; Kartajaya, and Setiawan (2010, p.9) "social media are low cost, [...] they will be the future of marketing communications".

Kotler, in an interview with Exame magazine (2014), confessed that if he were in the early stages of his career, he would dedicate himself to studying social media. Therefore, the relevance of this field of research in the marketing of modern companies is observed.

Furthermore, this field of study is incipient, since most of the previous literature has been limited to mainly discussing the conceptual impact of the digital revolution, and the articles that quantify it are still scarce (LEEFLANG et al., 2014).

This article advanced the specific studies of the theme by carrying out quantitative, descriptive-exploratory research, through the application of structured questionnaires applied to a sample of 92 MPEs located in the municipality of Lavras-MG. The software was used to run the descriptive statistics, analyze the responses, and, mainly, their implications related to the object of study.

In addition to this introduction, this paper is structured in four other sections. The second section presents the theoretical framework that supported the study. The third section explains the methodological procedures used in carrying out this research. Then, in the fourth section, the analyzes and discussions of the results found are presented. In the fifth and last sections, the final considerations of the study are presented. The bibliographic references used in the construction of the text are brought in full at the end of the text.

2 THEORETICAL REFERENCE

This theoretical framework was divided into four sections, where the theories that underlie this work are organized.

Conceptualizing marketing

Whatever the size or segment of the company, marketing actions become important because it is through these actions that your customers or potential consumers can get to know your product portfolio. Customers and consumers have needs, desires, and interests that, consequently, lead them to the buying process (KOTLER and KELLER, 2006).

According to these same authors, marketing is human actions that lead to the knowledge of the needs and desires of the customer, profitably satisfying them. It is the marketing actions that generate demands in the companies, they are the ones that facilitate the exchange process. Thus, Kotler (1999, p. 54) states that "marketing is the art of discovering opportunities, developing them, and profiting from them".

For Hiam (1999) marketing strategies are responsible for attracting customers, it is what awakens their attention, thus facilitating the buying process. Marketing strategies need to be well planned so that the company's objective is achieved.

Marketing actions are extremely broad and used in various ways by companies and professionals, but when it involves the core activity of companies that work with sales, marketing is how the company first provides information about its product, promotes it to the market and the sale will come later, as a consequence (CASTELLS, 2003).

Marketing effectiveness, according to Kotler and Keller (2012), can be achieved through several factors, one of which is the marketing mix, a compound created by Jerome McCarthy in 1960. In the conception of Cavazza et. al (2015), this compound is what leads companies to increase their sales and customer loyalty.

Also known as the 4 (four) Ps of marketing, the marketing mix is summarized, according to Gabriel (2010), as the Product (the one that will satisfy the customer's need or desire), the Price (a factor that will establish the conditions for purchase and sale), in the Place (where the product will be available for exchange), and in the Promotion (how the company will communicate its product to the market).

Several authors define marketing and the conceptual variations proposed in their approaches are small, what has changed even over the years are the tools and ways of doing marketing (TORRES, 2009). When talking about new marketing tools, digital marketing can certainly be included among them.

Digital Marketing: social media and social networks

Technology and the internet are constantly evolving, interfering with the social and business environment. Castells (2003) compares the Internet to what electricity was during the Industrial Age. It is understood that for companies the internet is as important as electricity which contributed a lot to the growth of organizations during the Industrial Age.

Currently, companies use the internet in various ways in their various functional areas. People are also increasingly connected, according to the Brazilian Media Survey (PBM, 2015) released by the Social Communication Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic, where it was found that 48% of Brazilians use the internet on computers and devices mobile phones, remaining most of the time connected. SEBRAE (2013) mentions that digital marketing came to adapt to this reality.

For Oliveira (2010) digital marketing has the same conceptual basis and the same objectives as conventional marketing, however, unlike the conventional version, it has tools that are aimed at the digital environment.

According to Adolpho (2011), digital marketing allows a greater number of consumers to know the company, trust it, buy and talk about it to other people.

This transition from marketing to the virtual environment was already perceived by Kotler (1999) when he considered that organizations would have the internet as a great ally. For Kotler; Kartajaya and Setiawan (2010) information technology was being introduced in the market, originating a new trend, called the "new technological wave".

For Cintra (2010) when talking about digital marketing, we also talk about social media. Torres (2009) explains that social media are websites on the internet that allow the sharing of content between users.

Telles (2015) points out that social networks are part of the category of social media, which allows people with common interests to gather and interact with each other, sharing different content. There is, as an example of social networks, also known as relationship networks, Facebook®, LinkedIn®, Instagram®,

and Whatsapp®, among many others, where it is possible to create a profile, communicate with other users and share content. These are networks that do not have geographic barriers.

In this sense, Costa (2013) states that social networks will be the way of doing marketing/advertising of the future, as it has a greater reach, and more visibility by different people and in different places of the world, its cost is considered low if compared to those of conventional marketing, and because it facilitates the approximation between companies and customers.

Kotler in an interview with Exame magazine (2014), and line with Barichell and Oliveira (2010), points out that social media as marketing strategies are gaining more and more space in the contemporary business environment. However, conventional media should not be excluded from the event, both must be used together (KOTLER, 2014).

Social Networks and micro and small companies: planning and use strategies

Marketing on social networks brings many advantages, especially for MSEs that are starting their commercial activities. In addition to having relatively low communication costs, digital marketing also brings the company closer to the final customer/consumer, facilitating interaction between the parties, which contributes to attracting customers and building relationships with them (KENDZERSKI, 2009; SEBRAE, 2013).

For Kotler (2014), it is not enough just to have an account on social networks, social media as marketing tools require strategic planning to be used effectively. It is important to develop a good strategic plan so that the advantages that the virtual environment provides are well used and, at the same time, to avoid unnecessary exposure (SEBRAE, 2013).

According to this same source, the sharing of positive opinions about a given company or a given product, among users of social networks, improves institutional visibility, attracts the attention of consumers, increases customer acquisition, and, often, the rate of sales.

Porto (2014) also points out that social networks, especially Facebook®, as one of the social networks most used by consumers and companies, as reported in the introduction to this article, also allow for dialogue between company and consumer and, through posting of relevant content, makes it possible to retain the attention of consumers.

According to SEBRAE (2013), one of the most efficient strategies to be used by MSEs is to carry out a survey to assess whether the company's potential customers are using social networks and, if so, adapting their profiles and posts. to this target audience.

It is important to be sensitive in order not to make the networks an entirely commercial space. As they are communication channels and relationship spaces, social networks require interaction between the company and the user, and the sale itself will occur naturally. Therefore, constant monitoring/updating of social networks is essential (SEBRAE, 2013).

Some social networks allow the company to monitor performance on the pages themselves, where it is possible to analyze whether the posted content is capturing and arousing the interest of users and whether the intended commercial objectives are being achieved (PORTO, 2014).

For Ramalho (2010) updating social networks with content that adds value and draws the attention of users is important so that company profiles do not become monotonous, to awaken the attention of potential consumers through the news.

It is worth exploring visual resources such as photos and even creating surveys related to the company and its products. It is also interesting to pay attention to commemorative dates that will make the customer feel valued (PORTO, 2014).

Post-planning is very relevant, it is necessary to create value for potential customers to fix the company in their minds. Information such as the location of the physical store and direct communication channels must always be updated to allow consumers to reach the purchase with a certain ease of access (PORTO, 2014).

Another interesting marketing strategy for MSEs, remembered by Adolpho (2011), is the fact of creating promotions where one of the rules requires that participants also disclose or tag their friends or followers. This strategy allows the mass dissemination of MSEs without additional costs.

Social networking is an innovative source of competitive advantage accessible to companies of any size. However, they offer some risks to the visibility of organizations, since companies may also be exposed to criticism or negative inferences related to their products or their provision of services (SEBRAE, 2013).

In the virtual environment, information spreads quickly, so SEBRAE (2013) reports that it is necessary to maintain an appropriate corporate posture, where it is preponderant to ensure ethics, usefulness, and the appropriate degree of formality, to prevent comments from being misinterpreted and the institutional image is compromised.

Therefore, companies that, in a planned way, insert themselves in the digital environment and strategically use social networks, will be able to influence the desire and need and also strengthen their relationship with customers/consumers, facilitating their loyalty and the effectiveness of the purchase (TUTEN and SOLOMON, 2014).

Micro and small companies in retail trade: definitions and characteristics

MSEs are of great relevance to the national economy because they account for approximately 27% of the Brazilian GDP and represent the reality of the vast majority of national companies (SEBRAE, 2013). When referring to the subject, Viol and Rodrigues (2005) point out the benefits brought by MSEs, such as the generation of jobs, and helping in the socioeconomic development of the population.

Due to the evident importance of MSEs, government agencies have sought to encourage the development of this type of organization. MSEs, according to SEBRAE (2013), can be classified according

to the number of employees; specifically, the trade and services sector follows the following classification: up to nine employees for micro companies, and between 10 and 49 employees for small companies.

Gonçalves and Koprowski (1995) define some characteristics that are noticeable in MSEs, such as the use of family labor; low working capital; Managers have close relationships with employees, customers, and suppliers. Viol and Rodrigues (2005) add that MSEs are largely responsible for job creation, and have variable income, and high birth and death rates in the Brazilian scenario.

About the MSEs' mortality process, SEBRAE (2014) infers that the fact is directly related to the lack of planning that has been observed since their emergence. Among the main causes of mortality is the lack of analysis of the market where the MSEs will be inserted, the wrong measurement of the working capital needed to cover costs and generate the intended profit, and, usually, the lack of evaluation, or inadequate evaluation, consumption behavior of its target audience (SEBRAE, 2014).

In this sense, it is observed that entrepreneurs and managers do not pay attention to basic planning, which ranges from financial management to marketing practices. Still, according to information provided by the same source, marketing actions such as advertising for the dissemination of MSEs and their products have the lowest investment, justified by the low availability of working capital in the hands of micro and small entrepreneurs.

Another very peculiar feature of MSEs is their field of action, where it is observed that most of them conduct their activities in the commercial sector (SEBRAE, 2013).

The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics - IBGE (2013) considers that commercial activities have three segments: vehicle and automotive trade; wholesale and retail. However, according to the results of the Annual Survey of Commerce (2013) carried out by the IBGE, the vast majority of companies operate in the retail segment, around 80% of the market. In this sense, this large portion of the market becomes important for job creation, with the retail commercial segment having the highest employability rates in Brazil in recent years (IBGE, 2013).

Retail trade, according to Brito (2014) and Las Casas and Garcia (2007), is made up of companies that buy goods from other companies in the wholesale sector, distributors, or intermediaries in the production process, whose sales are destined to final customers. Brito (2014) also points out that for a company to be characterized as a retailer, about 50% of its sales must be carried out in retail, that is, operations directly aimed at the final customer, the last link in the chain.

3 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

In this section, the methodological procedures used in conducting this study will be presented.

This research is characterized as quantitative. According to Gil (1999), the numbers become relevant for the quantification of data, and in this same perspective, Malhotra (2001) states that the data obtained are quantified through calculations and statistical procedures. And this study aims to quantify the data

obtained from the questionnaires applied to MSEs in the city of Lavras-MG and transform them into relevant information.

Concerning meeting the objectives, it was classified as an exploratory-descriptive study. Exploratory due to the theme, “digital marketing in MSEs”, still not showing so much popularity among market studies. According to Gil (2008), when research deals with a theme that is in the initial stage of the study, it can be characterized as exploratory. It is descriptive because it will also describe the characteristics of the MSEs that make up the sample (GIL, 1999).

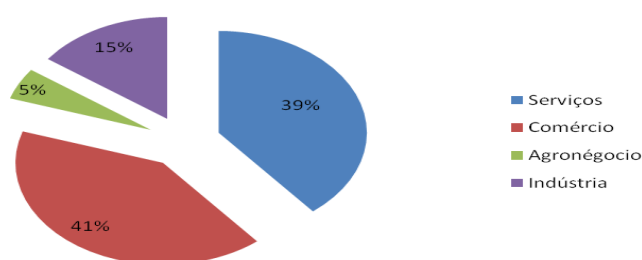
About the research object, this work is focused on understanding the digital marketing strategies aimed at serving social network users used by MSEs in the retail trade in the city of Lavras-MG in the search for customers, retaining them, and expanding sales. The data collected for analysis were obtained through the application of a survey with a sample of this population.

Gil (1999; 2008), states that the survey can be defined as a study where information is sought from a particular group or specific population that one is interested in investigating. It also infers that not all are investigated, which differs from the census survey, in which only part of this group is selected through statistical calculations, thus obtaining a sample that will represent it. Fonseca (2002) points out that the searches for information and data in survey studies happen through the application of questionnaires directly to the group of interest.

The population under analysis was composed of MPEs from Lavras - MG. To access the list of companies that could respond to the questionnaires, the SEBRAE Business Intelligence Unit in the municipality was consulted. In this body, it was discovered that the market of the city under study is composed of 6,911 companies and that 2,229 of them are MSEs in the retail trade sector, our research object.

The choice of the city of Lavras is justified by the fact that the city is considered a regional commercial center. According to data from SEBRAE (2013), 41% of the companies in this municipality operate in the commerce sector, as can be seen in the graph below:

Graph 1 – Composition of the market in Lavras – MG



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Subtitle: services
Business
Agribusiness
Industry

We chose to use probabilistic sampling in this study, which, according to Malhotra (2001), gives elements the same chance of being chosen, guaranteeing all elements the same chances of participation, and avoiding any type of tendency in the selection.

The results found are generalizable to the entire population, indicating representativeness. Below are the formula and data used to obtain the sample of the study population:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \cdot P \cdot Q \cdot N}{(N - 1) \cdot e^2 + P \cdot Q \cdot Z^2}$$

$$n = Z^2 (P \cdot Q / e^2)$$

Table 1: Breakdown of the formula and respective values considered

Number of standard deviations	z	1,96
maximum error	e	10,00%
Population Size	N	2229
Percentage of phenomenon occurrence (P+Q=1)	P	0,5
Additional percentage (1-P=Q)	Q	0,5
n= Sample Size	n	92,11

Source: Prepared by the authors.

According to the result of the calculation, data collection, to be reliable and ensure the aforementioned representativeness, should be carried out with 92 MSEs.

Data collection took place through the application of a structured questionnaire to MSEs in Lavras-MG. This type of questionnaire consists of closed questions, which are useful for quantifying data, since they are standardized (MALHOTRA 2001).

In this study, the perceptions of micro and small entrepreneurs were brought, up since the accounting data of the MSEs were not analyzed, due to difficulties in accessing the documents that contained the information. To reduce the chances of failure in understanding the questionnaire, a pre-test was applied to 10% of the population sample.

Data collection was carried out through visits to MSEs selected by sampling, in September 2016. The vast majority of respondents were the MSE owners themselves, who in the vast majority of cases were also the managers of the establishment. The questionnaires were left at the companies and, later, the respondents were contacted to schedule their return, and answered.

The responses obtained were coded and tabulated directly in Excel, ensuring data security and facilitating analysis through the use of descriptive statistics techniques, commonly used in studies of this nature.

The next section presents the results and analyses generated by the research, where the effectiveness of social networks as a marketing strategy was evaluated in terms of attracting customers, retaining customers, and increasing the sales rate.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First, we sought to describe the characteristics of MSEs in the city of Lavras-MG. Soon after, a description of the marketing tools adopted by these companies and the strategies used in their profiles on social networks was carried out. Finally, the perception of entrepreneurs about customer acquisition, loyalty, and increased sales after starting to use digital social networks as a marketing tool is presented.

General characteristics of companies

The sample used in this work consisted of 92 MSEs from the city of Lavras-MG, of which the vast majority belong to the clothing branch (51.1%), the footwear branch (14.1%), and the accessory branch (17.4 %). It is noted that a large part of the city's trade revolves around the fashion industry.

Table 2 - Field of activity of the company

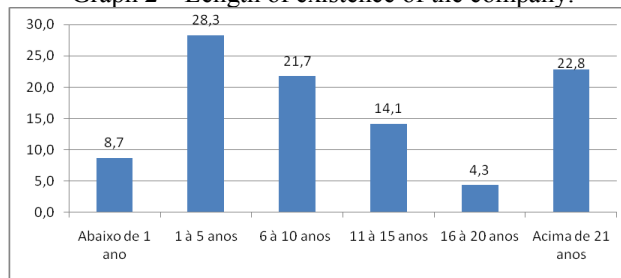
Answer option	Occurrence percentage (*)
clothing	51,1
shoemaker	14,1
Accessories	17,4
Construction Materials	4,3
pharmacies	5,4
optics	5,4
decoration furniture	3,3
electronics	1,1
Bookstores and Stationery Stores	5,4
cosmetics	5,4
Others	7,6

Source: Prepared by the authors.

(*) The sum of the percentages does not reach 100%, considering that the possibility was opened for the respondent to indicate more than one option.

As for the time that companies have been in the market, it was observed that 8.7% of them have been active for less than 1 year, 28.3% have existed for a period between 1 and 5 years, 21.7% between 6 and 10 years, 14.1% from 11 to 15 years, 4.3% from 16 to 20 years and, finally, 22.8% of the SMEs that make up this sample have been in the market for over 21 years. This allows us to infer that most of the MPEs in Lavras are consolidated in the market, which suggests a relationship with good management practices and meeting the needs, desires, and interests of customers.

Graph 2 – Length of existence of the company.



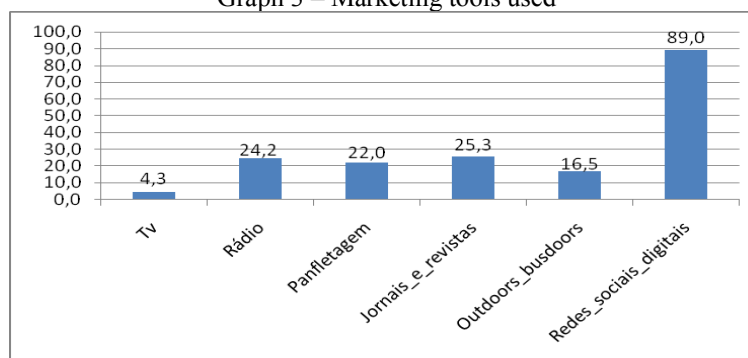
Source: Prepared by the authors.

Subtitle: below 1 year
 1 to 5 years
 6 to 10 years
 11 to 15 years
 16 to 20 years
 Over 21 years old

Marketing tools used by companies

As presented in the theoretical framework of this article, marketing practices are of great relevance to knowing the needs and desires of customers and satisfying them profitably, from the company's point of view. The segment of marketing on social networks has been one of the fastest growing in the world, which could be confirmed in the retail trade of Lavras, where of the 92 MSEs consulted, 89% use social networks as a marketing strategy. Among these companies, 50.6% also use other channels such as TV, radio, flyers, newspapers and magazines, and billboards, among others, as shown in Graph 3:

Graph 3 – Marketing tools used



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Subtitle: TV
 Radio
 leafleting
 Newspapers and magazines
 outdoor bus doors
 digital social networks

It is noted that the MPEs from Lavrense act according to the guidelines of Kotler (2014) and Barichell and Oliveira (2010), who state that digital social networks and conventional media must be worked together.

Among the 11% of companies that do not use social networks as a marketing strategy, approximately half of them say they do not because they do not consider social networks a source of

competitive advantage or a way to attract customers and increase sales effectively. On the other hand, the other 50% are interested in using this channel shortly, which again highlights the growing trend for the digital marketing segment, also observed in MSEs in the city of Lavras-MG.

Digital social networks used by companies

As for the digital social networks used as a marketing strategy by MSEs in the city of Lavras-MG, it was found that 93.8% use Facebook®, 80.2% Whatsapp®, 58% Instagram®, 4.3% Snap Chat® and 3.7% responded using other networks (see Table 3).

Table 3 – Digital social networks used.

Answer option	Occurrence percentage (*)
Facebook	93,8
Whatsapp	80,2
Instagram	58,0
Snap Chat	4,3
Other social networks	3,7
Linkedin	0
Twitter	0

Source: Prepared by the authors.

(*) The sum of the percentages does not reach 100%, considering that the possibility was opened for the respondent to indicate more than one option.

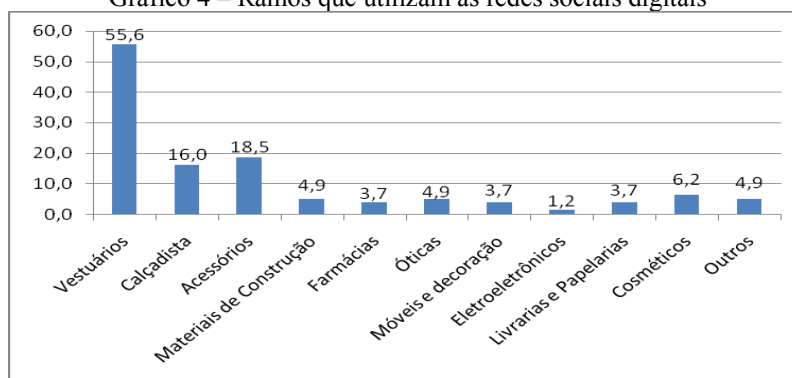
Facebook ratifies its preference among respondents and confirms its first position as the social network with the largest number of active users in the world (PORTO, 2014; JULIANI et al., 2012).

The branches that most use social networks as a marketing strategy are, respectively, clothing (56.6%); footwear (16%); and accessories (18.5%). These are sectors related to the fashion industry.

However, it is necessary to emphasize that the result is not directly related to the segments themselves, but rather to the frequency of MSEs responding to the questionnaires, which are mostly represented by the aforementioned branches, generating this bias in the results of the survey. work.

In Graph 4, it can be seen that other sectors, with different target audiences, also use digital social networks as strategic marketing tools.

Gráfico 4 – Ramos que utilizam as redes sociais digitais

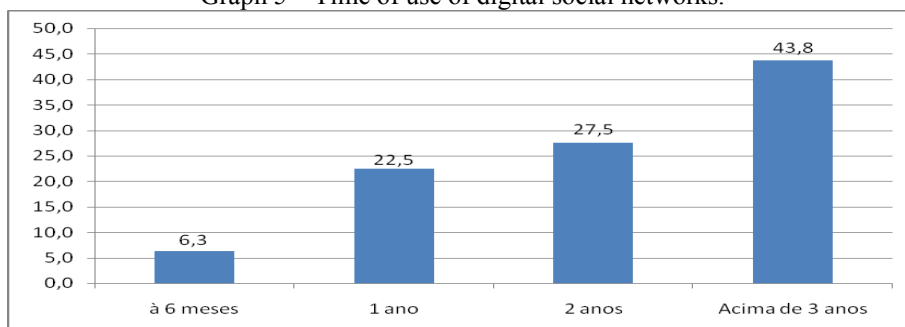


Source: Prepared by the authors.

Subtitle: clothing
shoemaker
Accessories
construction materials
pharmacies
Opticians
Furniture and decoration
Appliance
Bookstores and stationery stores
cosmetics
Others

It was observed that the vast majority of MSEs already use digital social networks for more than three years, which can be seen in the analysis of graph 5, a fact that demonstrates that the sample of this research already has a certain experience that allows them to make inferences regarding their perception of the results achieved through the use of social networks and digital marketing.,

Graph 5 – Time of use of digital social networks.



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Subtitle: Less than 6 months
1 year
2 years
Over 3 years

Questioned about the initial reasons that led them to use social networks as a marketing strategy, it was found that 76.5% created the profile because they had a large number of customers using social networks, 59.3% because they thought that such a tool brings greater visibility for the company, 49.4% due to the proximity between customer and company that digital social networks make possible, 39.5% due to the low cost, 24.7% due to the possibility of growth of MSEs, 19.8% to adapt to the virtual environment, 7.4% because their competitors were using it, 1.2% for other unspecified reasons (see table 4):

Table 4 - Initial reasons for adopting social networks as a marketing strategy

Answer option	Occurrence percentage (*)
A large number of customers use social networks	76,5
Greater visibility	59,3
Approximation between customers and companies	49,4
Low cost	39,5
Opportunity for micro and small business growth	24,7
Adapt to the digital environment	19,8
Competitors were using	7,4
Other reasons	1,2

Source: Prepared by the authors.

(*) The sum of the percentages does not reach 100%, considering that the possibility was opened for the respondent to indicate more than one option.

As people are increasingly connected (BARICHELL and OLIVEIRA, 2010), the large number of customers who use social networks in their daily lives was considered the most important factor reported by MSEs who answered the questionnaires. Among the objectives of digital marketing are, mainly, increasing the company's visibility, also mentioned by Costa (2013) and SEBRAE (2013), and getting closer to customers, mentioned by (ADOLPHO, 2011; KENDZERSKI, 2009; SEBRAE, 2013).

The relatively low cost of using this type of marketing, compared to conventional models, cited by Kotler, Kartajaya, and Setiawan (2010) and SEBRAE, (2013) in this work, appears in fourth place, but with considerable representation.

Regarding the elaboration of strategies before acting on social networks, it was identified that 88.8% of MSEs seek to plan their strategies, which is strongly recommended by (Kotler, 2014; Ramalho, 2010; SEBRAE, 2013; Tuten and Solomon, 2014).

However, 11.2% of respondents stated that they are not in the habit of developing action strategies on social networks, which increases the organization's risks of failure and decreases its chances of taking advantage of the competitive advantages provided by well-planned digital marketing, as highlighted (ADOLPHO, 2011; KENDZERSKI, 2009; SEBRAE, 2013).

According to the data collected in the MPEs of Lavras, regarding the strategies adopted on social networks to attract customers, retain them and expand the sales rate, micro, and small entrepreneurs seek strategies such as: posting product photos offered (95%); publications of invitations to product launches (45%); sweepstakes and promotions (40%); surveys related to the company (7.5%); among others (2.5%), as can be seen in the table below:

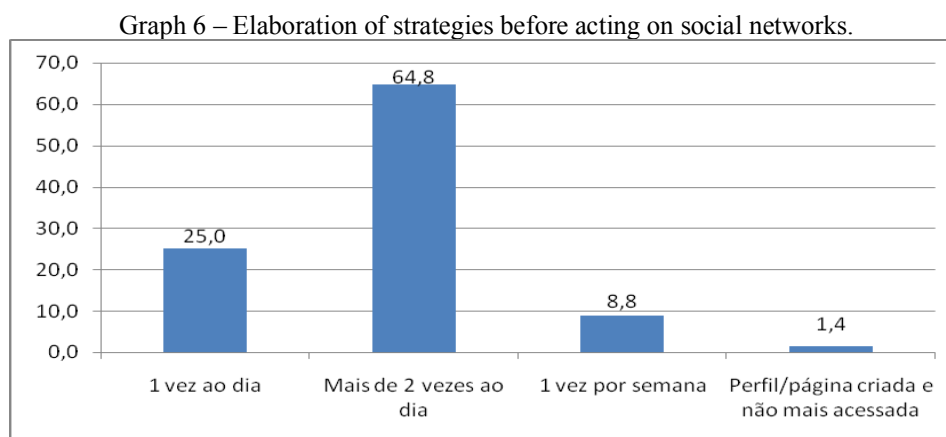
Table 5 - Strategies adopted by MSEs

Answer option	Occurrence percentage (*)
Photo posts of the products offered	95
Product launch invitation publications	45
sweepstakes and promotions	40
Company related polls	7,5
Others	2,5

Source: Prepared by the authors.

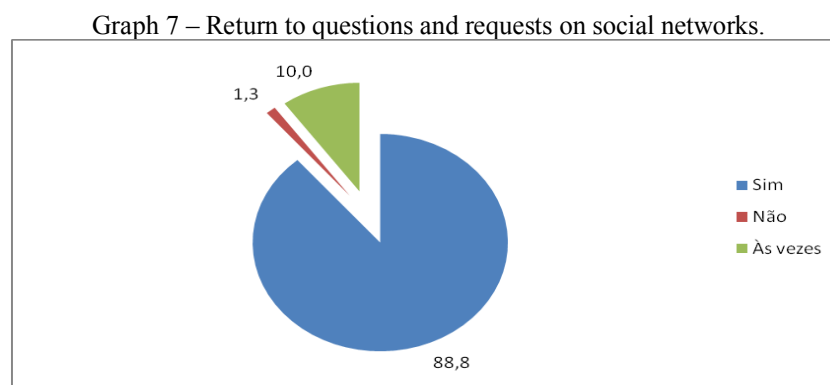
(*) The sum of the percentages does not reach 100%, considering that the possibility was opened for the respondent to indicate more than one option.

About the frequency with which the page or profile of the digital social networks is accessed/updated, it was observed that 64.8% of the respondents connect to the digital social networks more than twice a day, 25% connect once a day, 8.8% once a week and only 1.4% created the profile and no longer accessed the network. This fact can compromise the achievement of favorable results through the use of the tool (PORTO, 2014; RAMALHO, 2010; SEBRAE, 2013).



Source: Prepared by the authors.

When questioning micro and small businessmen about the feedback given to customers and consumer requests, 88.8% say yes, that they give due to feedback to customers, while 10% said that sometimes they do and 1.3% said that they just don't respond.



Source: Prepared by the authors.

Subtitle: Yes
No
Sometimes

Visibility, attracting customers, and increasing sales through the use of digital social networks

According to the results of this survey, 97.5% of the respondents realized that their customers had easy access to the information disclosed by the company and to the products sold by it after starting to use marketing strategies aimed at social networks, while only 2.5% did not notice any difference.

When verifying the increase in the number of customers through the use of social networks, 93.8% of respondents said they had noticed the positive result sometime after starting to use social digital media, while 6.2% said they did not notice any change.

For the virtual environment, there are no borders, which could be observed with this research, where 98.7% of micro and small entrepreneurs consulted stated that the effects of digital marketing aimed at attracting customers transcended the limits of the municipal territory and extended throughout the micro-region of the city of Lavras. Only 1.3% of the sample did not observe positive changes in this regard.

Another point raised in the questionnaire concerns customer and consumer loyalty after starting to use marketing strategies on social networks. It was observed that 86.3% of micro and small entrepreneurs noticed that the level of loyalty and the closeness of the relationship with their customers improved after implementing the use of digital marketing on social networks and only 13.8% of respondents said no have noticed significant improvements related to this issue.

Finally, the results of this study suggested that the proper management of digital marketing tools, combined with the use of social networks as a direct communication channel with the customer, stimulates the buying process and facilitates operations. When questioning micro and small entrepreneurs about the use of social networks and their relationship with the increase in sales, it was found that the vast majority, 92.5% of them, noticed a significant increase in sales after using social networks as a marketing strategy, while only 7.5% of respondents said they did not observe significant differences.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

After carrying out this work, it was observed that the use of digital marketing strategies in social networks is a manifest trend, which is also growing among MSEs in the city of Lavras-MG. It was also observed that it is not a recent movement, on the contrary, it has existed for some time and the improvements resulting from the use of these strategies are already starting to be observed by the majority of micro and small entrepreneurs from Lavras. Most MSEs that still do not use these tools are already planning to start their digital social media activities shortly.

The research met what it proposed, since, given the answers to the questionnaires and analysis of the results, it was verified that the use of digital marketing strategies in social networks proved to be a very effective tool. The overwhelming majority of respondents noted improvements in increasing the company's visibility; attracting new customers; proximity in the relationship with customers, contributing to their loyalty; and, consequently, the increase of the sales index. According to the micro and small entrepreneurs who participated in the survey, improvements were observed not only within the city of Lavras but in its surroundings as well.

As a limitation of this work, we point out the fact that the clothing, footwear, and accessories branches, linked to the fashion industry, appeared in a disproportionate frequency when compared to the other branches that made up the sample. However, this can be explained by the fact that these sectors of

retail trade are the ones with the highest number of MSEs in the city of Lavras. This study also showed that other branches of activity have also used digital social media as a marketing strategy and that the responses of entrepreneurs in these other segments did not differ from representatives of the clothing, footwear, and accessories sectors.

Another limitation of this research is its narrow focus on analysis. How the questionnaires were answered by micro and small entrepreneurs; retail trade; from the city of Lavras; the generalizability of the results is low. It cannot be said that the behavior of the data would be the same if the research were replicated with larger companies; or from other cities/regions; or sectors other than those analyzed in this work; or at another time; etc.

Finally, as a suggestion for future studies, it is emphasized that it would be important to develop a larger survey, more representative in terms of the number of respondents; the different cities and regions; with entrepreneurs from different fields; including accounting analyses to more accurately assess the significance of the results presented; etc. The suggestion is precisely to try to overcome the deficiencies and fill in the gaps that this research was unable to cover, which were mentioned in the previous paragraph.

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