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The Impact of Covid-19 on Event Management: How companies can use Social Media to face the Pandemic. A Social Media Marketing Plan for RConcept

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Acknowledgments

This thesis marks the end of an extremely challenging yet happy student journey. A journey that ends with a Master's in Marketing, which allowed me to learn with remarkable teachers and gave me valuable tools to pursue my career as a Marketing professional.

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Hélia Gonçalves Pereira who inspired me for the subject of this Master Thesis and for all her mentorship, support, and availability.

The warmest thank you goes to my parents and brother for having given me the best opportunities throughout my academic journey, for never lacking support, for their unconditional love, and for always being the ones who most believe in me. To my boyfriend Miguel for being constantly by my side, every step of the way, for all the daily motivation, patience, and inspirational talks.

Furthermore, I am thankful to all my friends for having accompanied me on this journey, for their friendship and love during the last months of this intense process. To Teresa Seixas for all her availability and valuable inputs.

To RConcept, especially to Rita Abecassis who said yes to my project without any doubts, giving me, whenever I needed, information for the construction of this Master Thesis.

Last but not least, a special thanks to Nestlé, for having given me the opportunity to participate in an internship during this academic process, for all the support and flexibility to pursue this professional experience without deprioritizing my studies.

I finish my academic journey feeling completed with all I have learned, the friendships I have built, and the person I have become.

Abstract

This thesis is an in-company project carried out in collaboration with RConcept, an event company that has been affected by Covid-19 and has not taken full advantage of social media's power to connect with customers. The present study was carried out at a very particular time when connection is more important than ever to strengthen the company's image in response to Covid-19 and when, due to this same pandemic, the use of digital tools increased.

Nowadays, companies need to adapt and create strategies, using online platforms to overcome the obstacles caused by the crisis and to shorten the distance between brands and customers. In this matter, it is crucial to understand the immediate effect of the pandemic in consumer behavior, as well as to have a strong knowledge of the industry and competitors, to listen to customers' needs, expectations, and preferences to address the right content, and to talk with them in order to establish meaningful relationships and influence users' behavior.

After identifying the problem and defining the objectives, it was done a literature review and some analyses were made whose conclusions allowed the design of a Social Media Marketing Plan for RConcept. Following this, the company will use social media as an active communication channel to have direct and timely contact with the end consumer, in order to get people engaged, promote the business, generate awareness and create stronger relationships with customers. All this being done to complement physical events that are happening at a very slow pace.

Keywords: Social Media; Events; Event Management; Covid-19; Consumer Behavior

Resumo

Esta tese é um projeto-empresa realizado em colaboração com a RConcept, uma empresa de eventos que foi afetada pelo Covid-19 e não soube tirar proveito do poder das redes sociais para conectar-se com os consumidores. O estudo foi levado a cabo numa altura particular, em que a conexão é mais importante que nunca para fortalecer a imagem da empresa em resposta ao Covid-19 e num momento em que, devido à pandemia, o uso das ferramentas digitais aumentou.

Atualmente, as empresas precisam de adaptar-se e criar estratégia, utilizando as plataformas online para superar os obstáculos causados pela crise e encurtar a distância entre marcas e clientes. Assim, é crucial entender o efeito imediato da pandemia no comportamento do consumidor, ter um forte conhecimento da indústria e dos concorrentes, ouvir as necessidades, expectativas e preferências dos consumidores para abordar o conteúdo certo e conversar com eles, de modo a estabelecer relacionamentos significativos e influenciar o comportamento dos usuários.

Após a identificação do problema e a definição dos objetivos, foi realizada uma revisão da literatura e algumas análises, cujas conclusões permitiram elaborar um Plano de Redes Sociais para a RConcept. Desta maneira, a empresa utilizará as redes sociais como um canal de comunicação ativo para ter um contacto direto e oportuno com o consumidor final, de forma a interagir com as pessoas, promover o negócio, gerar consciência e fortalecer o relacionamento com os clientes. Tendo tudo isto sendo feito para complementar os eventos presenciais que estão a acontecer a um ritmo muito lento.

Palavras-Chave: Social Media; Eventos; Gestão de Eventos; Covid-19; Comportamento do Consumidor

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1. Introduction

The Covid-19 felt worldwide, stopped our world, and forced human beings to adapt. The economic, social, political, and cultural impacts were profound and tended to be long-lasting (He & Harris, 2020). Many industries were immediately affected and damaged, but the events sector has been one of those who suffered the most and will probably be one of the last sectors to recover 100% of the profitability they had before the pandemic (Silva, 2020).

Consumer behavior also changed with the crisis. Due to the lockdown consumers were confined to stay at their homes, and subsequently, the use of social media platforms and the acceptance of digital tools increased (Choudhary, 2020). If online technologies were already playing an important role in the consumers' lives, with the pandemic they would soon become indispensable. From then on consumers would use them to work, study, socialize or shop, making it inconceivable to live in a world without the internet. This has led many companies to change the way they promote and approach potential customers, using the internet and resorting to their online platforms to strengthen their image in response to the Covid-19 (Madray, 2020).

In the events sector, the serious concerns about the spread of the virus combined with the uncertainties about the future of the industry led many professionals to feel the need to adapt to this new reality (Tavares, 2020). Event companies felt the need to implement strategies to overcome the crisis, using technology and social media effectively as an ally to overcome the obstacles caused by Covid-19. Consumer's willingness to adopt digital is reflected in attitudes towards online events, which began to be a widely used tool to connect and involve a large number of participants, and which guarantee consumer safety (Choudhary, 2020; Kitley-Spencer, 2020).

RConcept, a small Portuguese event agency and the object of this study, is one of those companies that was greatly affected by Covid-19. Therefore, and taking into consideration the importance of digital communications channels, it is urgent to implement a Social Media Marketing Plan as a long-term solution for the company. This social media marketing approach will allow the company to get people engaged online, keep the consumers informed about their events and services, generate awareness, and gain recognition. Focusing on these communication objectives, the company will have more online exposure, later becoming better known among the target audience at a time when the events season will be back at full force.

1.1. Problem Definition

The events industry, represented by more than 26 million professionals worldwide, has faced tough times since March 2020 (Tavares, 2020). Due to Covid-19 security measures to prevent the spread of the virus, event managers had to cancel or postpone thousands of events with record declines in revenue. Also, because of the spread of the virus, many people began to be afraid and started to avoid crowded and closed places in order to protect their health (Zenker & Kock, 2020). The impact of this crisis is not only felt by the events industry but also by workers and businesses. Thus, many companies, especially the most vulnerable ones, have struggled and made a great effort to deal with the situation.

Models and strategies, which seemed perfect until the pandemic, were forgotten or rethought to adapt to the “new reality” (Teixeira, 2021). If, on the one hand, the Covid-19 crisis posed major challenges for business organizations, on the other, it also required innovative ideas, provided an opportunity for companies to identify new business models, to adapt creatively, to be agile, and to quickly develop capabilities that will allow them to succeed (Seetharaman, 2020).

Regarding the specific case of RConcept, it is possible to state that it was forced to give up holding many events, losing its profitability without great expectations and many uncertainties. It took a while to get back to normality. However, over the months, with the help of the vaccination plan, at a different pace than the one it had before, the sector slowly started rising again and RConcept started to hold some events, complying with all safety and hygiene measures. Additionally, the current times have noted the rise of social media, and the company has not taken full advantage of this tool. Nowadays, the use of social media needs to be seen as a tactic in response to Covid-19 because the more companies are in contact with their followers, the less likely they are to be forgotten, especially at a time when demand for events, due to all constraints, is much lower than supply (Wallain, 2020).

1.2. Objectives of the Study

Once the research problem was acknowledged, it is possible to state that the objective of this project is to establish an efficient Social Media Marketing Plan for RConcept, as a strategy for the company to create and maintain a good relationship with customers, strengthening its online presence, and standing out in a pandemic context, becoming more prepared for the post-

pandemic era. In this way, RConcept will: 1) Respond to changing marketing with innovation and digital transformation; 2) Use social media as an active communication channel and; 3) Create stronger relationships with customers online.

1.3. Thesis Structure

To achieve what is being proposed, this project will be divided into five main chapters: literature review, methodology, contextualization, implementation, and conclusions (see Figure 1). In the first part, a literature review will be developed from which the thesis will grow, to understand what other authors wrote about the different topics under study: 1) From Event to Event Management; 2) Social Media, and 3) Crisis and Disaster Management. In the second phase, the research methodology begins, including the methods used to select and collect the right data, which will be essential for the development of the third phase, the contextualization. In this part, the data obtained previously will be presented and analyzed, for that the chapter will be divided into internal analysis, benchmark analysis, target analysis, and SWOT analysis. All the knowledge gained will be used to build and implement an effective Social Media Marketing Plan for RConcept, which will correspond to the fourth phase of this Master Thesis, which will also include a budget and a calendar for the respective actions. Lastly, the main conclusions are included in chapter five.

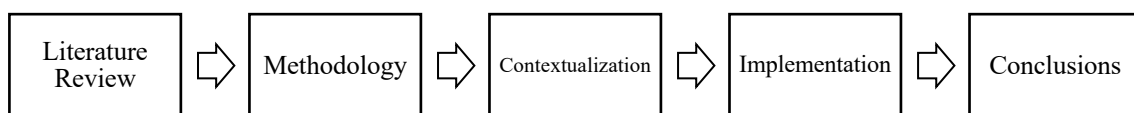


Figure 1 - Master Thesis Structure (Own elaboration)

1.4. Importance of the Study

A pandemic of this dimension seemed too unlikely to happen. Many companies did not resist, others felt the need to reevaluate their vision, mission, goals and look for alternatives to survive (He & Harris, 2020). In the events industry, the business practically stopped, and digitalization was a spontaneous response, shaping from then on even more the future of the industry (Fell, 2020; Oliveira, 2020).

Therefore, this project, which is based on a real situation, will bring value and good tips not only to RConcept but also to other companies in the industry by helping them to understand

the benefits of using social media effectively to promote and communicate, to explore new revenue avenues, and to complement the traditional events that are happening at a very slow speed.

2. Literature Review

2.1. From Event to Event Management

The technological advancements, as well as social and experiential shifts, have changed the way people spend their leisure time, resulting in an increase in the number and types of events globally (Mair & Whitford, 2013; Robertson et al., 2015). There has been a huge interest and participation in events, as it plays a significant role in society as *“the desire to celebrate particular dates and occasions is an essential part of human nature”* (Wrathall & Gee, 2011, p. 11). Due to a fast-changing business environment and an increasingly demanding consumer, the events industry has evolved and changed through time, raising both challenges and opportunities to the planners (Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2018; Lockstone-Binney et al., 2013).

According to Getz (2008), an event is a temporary occurrence, in a certain location, with a time to begin and end. Each event is unique because of the interactions between the program, the participants, and the management. *“An event is an occurrence with an audience”* (Wood & Masterman, 2008, p. 3), when an audience exists it is because the message is being shared, so all events communicate something. An event is an opportunity for leisure, social, or cultural experience outside the routine and it can represent a context where behavioral change is encouraged (Mair, 2014). Moreover, events are important around the world, contributing not only to defining our personal lives, but also to bring economic and social benefits to communities (Mair & Whitford, 2013; Park & Park, 2017). Their communicative power and social capacity to arouse people’s interest are seen as essential drivers for different sectors (Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2018). Event management is the practice devoted to the design, production, and management of events (Getz, 2008). The strategic preparation, as well as the coordination of all the activities necessary for the execution of an event, requires professional handling to guarantee quality and risk management for the event (Thomas et al., 2008).

In a modern event management model, experience is a core phenomenon of the process (Robertson et al., 2015). People seek rewarding experiences, providing the right level of surprise, novelty, challenge, and excitement (Wood & Masterman, 2008). Thus, event managers must provide experiences that were effectively designed to enhance the impact on the audience (Ziakas & Boukas, 2014). Indeed, understanding consumers’ motivations and needs can be useful to develop an event suitable to the target, ensuring the best and most positive experience, fostering a high level of involvement (Whelan & Wohlfeil, 2006; Ziakas & Boukas,

2014). Nevertheless, different consumers will always react and perceive the experience differently (Wood & Masterman, 2008).

2.2. Social Media

The rise and popularity of social media platforms have drastically changed the marketing environment (Chu & Kim, 2011). According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media is a group of Internet-based applications that was built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of content between all users. Therefore, considering that there are two different actors, it is possible to define two distinct types of social media content: the firm-created content, which is controlled by the company, and the user-generated content, in which companies have no control and can influence the companies or not (Bruhn et al., 2012).

Social media can take a variety of forms that need to be distinguished in terms of social presence/media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure, as shown in Table 1. The first classification can be made based on the degree of social presence and the degree of media richness they possess. Social presence is defined as the acoustic, visual, and physical contact existent between two communication partners. Media richness, means the amount of information that allows being transmitted in a certain interval of time, thus differing in its effectiveness to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty. The second classification can be made based on the type of self-presentation and the degree of self-disclosure it requires. Self-presentation states the desire people have to control the impression others have of them to get rewards and to create an image that is consistent with one's identity. Self-disclosure is the conscious or unconscious revelation of personal information consistent with the image one would like to give, that is vital to building close relationships (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Table 1 - Classification of social media by social presence/media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)

Self-presentation/ self-disclosure	Social Presence/Media Richness		
	Low	Medium	High
High	Blogs	Social Networking Sites (e.g. Facebook)	Virtual Social Worlds
Low	Collaborative Projects	Content Communities	Virtual Games Worlds

2.2.1. The Power of Social Media for Business-to-Consumer

Social media is a new revolutionary trend. In 2018, social networking sites saw explosive growth with a total of 3.03 billion active users estimated globally (Dolega et al., 2021). Given such exponential growth, companies can powerfully make use of these applications as a marketing tool to reach consumers, namely to find out where they are spending the majority of their online time (Campbell et al., 2014; Sun & Zhang, 2020). Social media allows firms to have direct and timely contact with the end consumer, at a relatively low cost and more efficiently than traditional marketing tools. This makes social media not only relevant for big companies, but also for small and medium companies (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Therefore, companies must dedicate a fair amount of time and resources to maintaining their social media presence, keeping their content updated, and developing meaningful relationships with customers (Barker et al., 2013; Hoffman & Fodor, 2010).

Users want more than to connect online. They want to create, collaborate, and give their opinions, sharing thoughts, likes and dislikes. In the online environment, the efforts of companies are centered on designing social media programs to increase awareness, engagement and generate word-of-mouth, encouraging users to participate (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010). To build engagement online, marketers should define what type of content to include and what works best to reach the target audience (Swania et al., 2021). Knowledge of how consumers interact online is necessary to build strong relationships (Campbell et al., 2014) and to help companies to detect individual preferences and opinions to efficiently implement appropriate changes and customized communications according to the feedback they have received (Hill & Moran, 2011; Leeflang, 2011).

2.2.2. The Role of Social Media on Event Management

Technological evolution is transforming the way events are both experienced and managed (Jaimangal-Jones et al., 2018). Nowadays, social media has become a crucial part of the integrated marketing communication of the event (Lockstone-Binney et al., 2013). Therefore, event managers should consider online platforms like social networking sites, to increase awareness and engage with consumers, establishing a relationship with them through user-generated content and social interaction (Hudson & Hudson, 2013; Leung et al., 2013). Communicating through diverse media also offers different types of experiences and adds value to customers (Getz, 2008).

Social media tools are positively affecting the events industry, contributing to the exchange of information (Sigala et al., 2012). From the perspective of a consumer of events, social media allows them to become aware of the event, to find out what is being offered, to follow others' recommendations and reviews, as well as to interact with other users, event companies, and planners (Robertson et al., 2015). From an events manager's perspective, social media efforts are very beneficial to expand company recognition, to generate awareness and profitability, to reach a large-scale audience, to spread the message faster, and to gain real-time consumer insights (Hudson & Hudson, 2013). Furthermore, managers see digital communications as an opportunity to understand target customers and to answer to their needs, expectations, and preferences based on the analysis of customers' behavior on all channels, including social networking sites (Leung et al., 2013; Socialbakers, 2021).

2.2.3. Social Media Marketing Plan

The development of a marketing plan, which brings together all the knowledge gathered about a company and the market, is recommended for any company that wants to reach goals in this area, creating appropriate strategies to achieve success (Kotler & Keller, 2012). Hence, developing a winning social media plan with achievable and measurable goals is mandatory for anyone that wants to stand out in the technological era (Safko & Brake, 2009). Bearing this idea in mind, several authors have suggested different approaches.

2.2.3.1. Social Media Planning Cycle

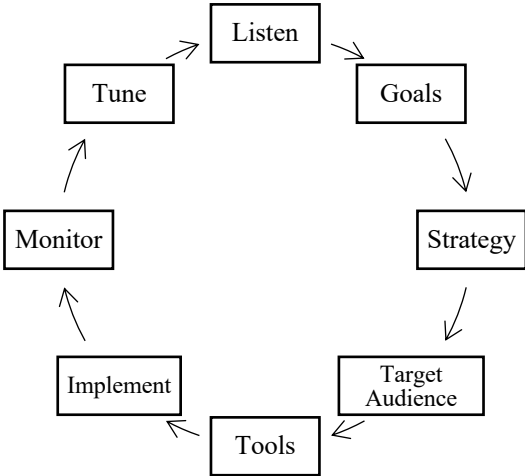


Figure 2 - Social Media Planning Cycle (Barker et al., 2013)

According to Barker et al. (2013), to improve the chances of an organization to succeed in executing a social media effort is to create a well-researched and carefully thought-out plan. Therefore, Barker et al. (2013) created the Social Media Planning Cycle (see Figure 2), an ongoing and cyclical plan to incorporate social media marketing effectively by monitoring the progress of social media elements over time. The cycle contains the following eight steps:

Listening

The first step focuses on listening, ability essential to the entire plan. It is therefore critical that organizations listen and observe what people are saying about them, what good and bad comments have been made, and where the conversations are taking place (Barker et al., 2013), in fact, *“your brand is whatever your customers say it is. And in the groundswell where they communicate with each other, they decide”* (Li & Bernoff, 2011, p. 78). Listening allows to evaluate the organization, to see the company’s social media presence, the posting schedule, the type of content shared and helps to identify topics that the audience discusses and loves (Barker et al., 2013).

Besides, it’s important to observe competitors, what people are saying about them, and on what platforms. Once this analysis is made, it’s also important to identify what competitors are doing on social media and what seems to be working. Keeping updated through listening can provide powerful learnings. It’s also helpful to look at the tone of the conversations, how people interact with each other, and whether this varies by platform. This knowledge will facilitate online integration and participation. Further, it will be useful in setting goals and strategies to achieve them (Barker et al., 2013), *“once you begin to listen and act on that information, your company will never be the same”* (Li & Bernoff, 2011, p. 96).

Setting Goals

Once the company understands their audience’s behavior and needs it’s time to move on, for it is important to perform a SWOT analysis first and, based on this analysis set social media goals (Griffin, 2014). At this point, companies must think about what goals can help to fulfill the mission and vision of the company. The objectives must be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) (Macleod, 2013). Li and Bernoff (2011) have created a framework to be followed by the business when they have a social media presence. Depending on the company, one or more of the forthcoming objectives can be followed:

1. **Listening:** To better understand customers, it is important to listen to the opinions, questions and needs expressed online. Use this research as an opportunity to deliver personalized content, improve customers' experience and build strong relationships;
2. **Talking:** Communicate and engage online. If there is more engagement there is more exposure, so participation and dialogue are vital to increase awareness and trust for those who participate but also for those who read (Meylan, 2017);
3. **Energizing:** Energizing enthusiastic customers to create buzz around the company and get the audience to spread the message, increasing word-of-mouth and by consequence sales;
4. **Supporting:** Provide online tools to customers so that they can help and support the company, in solving questions about products/services;
5. **Embracing:** Incorporate customers into the company, leverage the collective knowledge of the audience and use their help to improve products or services.

Defining Strategies

Here it is time to figure out how to accomplish social media goals. To identify the strategies that best suit the organization in reaching the outlined goals, there are some rules to follow (Li & Bernoff, 2011):

- 1- Create a plan that enables small steps, so it can grow over time or be changed if necessary. Also, set time intervals to check the progress of the strategy;
- 2- Give the role to someone important within the organization, choose somebody with the authority or skills to transform the relationship with customers on social media. Besides, a social media expertise or an agency can be hire;
- 3- Think about the consequences of this social media marketing plan.

Despite these rules, social media is conversational so companies need to contribute to the conversations not just promote their products and services. Following this, it is also important to define the brand personality and tone of voice that should be consistent with the company (Barker et al., 2013). Brand personality refers to the human characteristics embodied by a brand, it is how the brand acts in front of the customers (Sullivan, 2019). Aaker's (1997) theoretical framework helps to organize how brands act, determining the five dimensions of brand personality: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. The tone of voice is shaped by the brand personality and it is how you communicate in your brand's interactions (Sullivan, 2019).

Identifying the Audience

Defining the target audience will reveal better strategies that can be adapted to where and how audiences interact online (Barker et al., 2013). To identify the target audience, Li and Bernoff (2011) developed a Social Technographics Ladder to group people according to their web profile. There are six segments in this ladder, and it's important to note that some people belong to more than one segment. They are mentioned from the most to the least active:

- 1- Creators: online active consumers who have their website, upload videos, make podcasts, publish a blog, reviews, etc., at least once per month;
- 2- Conversationalists: a group that is frequently updating their status, posting photos, and promoting the content of others in social networks, at least once a week;
- 3- Critics: are those who comment on the content available online, post rates, and write reviews at blogs, online forums, or where they want to offer their expertise;
- 4- Collectors: consumers who normally collect, categorize, and aggregate information, and may also participate in online polls or subscribe to newsletters;
- 5- Joiners: users who have profiles on social network sites such as Facebook, and who occasionally participate;
- 6- Spectators: are most of the participants. People who consume content done by others (watch videos, read blogs, etc.) but don't produce content by themselves;
- 7- Inactives: who stay offline or don't use social technologies.

In this phase, aspects such as the target audience's preferences and interests have to be also considered, thus the company's target must be people who share interests and values with the company (Barker et al., 2013).

Selecting Tools

This step in the circle allows the company to select the appropriate technology to be used for the successful implementation of the outlined plan and to reach as many customers as possible. The social media channels chosen should be where the target audience is, there must be applied the organization's social media efforts. In this process, previously defined objectives must also be taken into account, since each platform gives different results and outputs for brands (Li & Bernoff, 2011).

Implementing

Once the company realizes what it wants to accomplish, who wants to reach, and what are the best tools to do it, it's time to implement all the tactics above. Many companies do not follow anyone of these steps, they just create social media accounts and start posting. Their efforts are not strategically focused and in many of these cases, there is a great risk of a communication crisis with the public (Griffin, 2014).

The biggest brands on social media publish consistently, so it's important to consider how a content calendar can make the process much easier (Barnhart, 2021). Organizing and managing a content calendar is a process of constant learning and adjusting, which will give a lot of insights into what works for the company to operate online. Before the development of the calendar, it is important to remember the outputs obtained in the Listening phase (what content has the company posted in the past that worked well, the most common hashtags and keywords in the industry, the most used platforms to engage, what competitors did, etc.) to think in highly relevant content for the audience. Once the company has an idea of what are their upcoming posts and where they are going to post, it's time to create the content calendar. Understanding the best times to post and setting the day and time will save employees time and energy and will ensure that the company is always active (Aboulhosn, 2020). The big picture of the company's month in a calendar will allow making decisions without repeating the same content and to schedule posts without having to constantly post in real-time (Barnhart, 2021).

Monitoring

At this stage, it is time to track, measure, and evaluate what has been implemented, to see what is going well and what needs to be changed. To carry out this monitoring can be considered quantitative approaches based on metrics or analytics that involve numbers, and qualitative approaches that measure feelings towards comments and interactions (Turner, 2012). Regarding quantitative measurement, it's important to note what kind of social media it is being evaluated, because they have specific rules of utilization as well as specific analytics (Weinberg & Pehlivan, 2011). That is why Hoffman and Fodor (2010) have defined different KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) for each type of social media. However, only social networking KPIs will be shown in this literature review, as shown in Table 2, since only they are relevant for the RConcept's Social Media Marketing Plan. Regarding qualitative measurement, Broekemier et al. (2015) stated that users' comments can be tracked in terms of valence as being positive, negative, or neutral.

Table 2 – Relevant metrics for social networks (Hoffman & Fodor, 2010)

Social Media	Brand Awareness	Brand Engagement	Word-of-Mouth
Social Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of fans ▪ Number of apps installed ▪ Number of impressions and bookmarks ▪ Number of reviews/ratings and valence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Number of comments ▪ Number of active users ▪ Number of likes on friends' feeds ▪ Number of user-generated items ▪ Usage metrics of applications ▪ Impressions-to-interactions ratio ▪ Rate of activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Frequency of appearances in timeline of friends ▪ Number of posts on wall ▪ Number of reposts/shares ▪ Number of responses to friend referral invites

Tuning

Customers' tastes and needs, as well as technology, are constantly changing. That is way, adaptation is imperative since social media may work in unanticipated ways. The measurement of results can lead to changes in goals or strategies, at this stage, the continuous adjustment and improvement of the Social Media Planning Cycle occur to maximize its success (Barker et al., 2013).

2.3. Crisis and Disaster Management

Crisis and disasters are notable phenomena in our world, known to be unusual, unexpected, chaotic, and complex (Ritchie, 2004; Scott & Laws, 2006). They are distinguished because a crisis occurs due to an internal inefficiency to act (Faulkner, 2001), it is a *“disruption that physically affects a system as a whole and threatens its basic assumptions, its subjective sense of self”* (Zenker & Kock, 2020, p. 1) and a disaster refers *“to situations where an enterprise [...] is confronted with a sudden unpredictable catastrophic change over which it has little control”* (Scott & Laws, 2006, p. 151). The response and recovery can vary based on their nature and impact (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019).

2.3.1. The Covid-19 Pandemic and its Impact on Consumer Behavior

Over time, consumers develop their consumption habits, about what, when, and where to consume. However, four main factors disrupt these habits in general. The first factor is changes in the social context, such as marriage. The second factor is technology, as technology advances, it breaks old habits (e.g. the way we shop). The third one is the rules and regulations

(e.g. public policies related to smoking reduce tobacco consumption). The fourth factor is natural disasters, such as earthquakes and global pandemics (Sheth, 2020).

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 a global pandemic and so, many countries have locked down their economy to prevent the spread of the virus, closing several non-essential businesses: restaurants, hotels, etc. (Hamilton, 2020). Humankind is undoubtedly living the most impactful event of the 21st century. This most recent world pandemic is considered a natural, socio-political, and human-made disaster and it is also seen as an economic crisis (Zenker & Kock, 2020).

Although it is believed that most things will get back to normal, the world has changed, and immediate effects have emerged regarding consumer behavior. One of them was improvisation. With the restrictions consumers learned to improvise and their existing habits were left behind and new ones have emerged, such as weddings via zoom. Another immediate effect regarding consumer behavior was the daily adoption of digital technology, such as telework (Sheth, 2020). Also, with consumers restricted in their homes, the use of social networks has increased (Choudhary, 2020), in such a way that *“the largest nations in population are no longer China [...] they are Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp* (Sheth, 2020, p. 281). Thus, the impact of digital technology and social networks on behavior is huge and omnipresent in the consumer’s daily life. As a result of the rapid and universal adoption of online technologies to replace face-to-face interactions, dramatic changes in the consumer’s habits are to be expected (He & Harris, 2020).

2.3.2. Covid-19 Crisis in the Event Sector

With the lockdown, the quarantines, and the imposed distance measures, the impact of Covid-19 was immediately felt, forcing many companies to change the way they had been operating (He & Harris, 2020; Zenker & Kock, 2020). Measures of social distance introduced globally to minimize contagion have affected the event management industry on an unprecedented scale. As a result, the cancellation of events and, consequently, the lack of revenue, have harmed the finances of many organizations (Weissgerber et al., 2020).

But it is not just the global measures that are shaping the future of events. As already stated, the Covid-19 pandemic is a traumatic event that has caused many behavioral changes that are likely to have implications for the industry. First, the threat of disease has taken root in people's minds, making them more cautious and prudent when looking for events. Safety and hygiene

became a key concern and Covid-19 procedures including social distancing, masks, disinfectants, and contactless technology, have become so ordinary that are now considered a standard practice (Kitley-Spencer, 2020). Second, since new technologies have become indispensable to our lives, many event planners felt the need to respond to a changing market with innovation and digital transformation, resorting to the online to operate, generating awareness, driving traffic, and promoting upcoming virtual events (Fell, 2020). Many companies have adopted social networking platforms to continue to communicate and virtual solutions to still carry out the events, deployed these tactics in response to Covid-19 providing consumers the opportunity to enjoy events in the comfort of their homes (Choudhary, 2020). While Covid-19 has proved to be a significant challenge, it has also provided an opportunity to stop, reflect and reinvent what will be the new normal (Fell, 2020). Hybrid events, incorporating both live and virtual elements, were and continue to be a widely used tool during the pandemic, reaching larger and global audiences (Tavares, 2020).

3. Methodology

In order to reach what is being proposed for this project, research techniques will be used to develop the Contextualization. The Contextualization chapter will correspond to the first step of the Social Media Planning Cycle called Listening, according to Barker et al. (2013). Therefore, Listening will allow designing an implementation strategy for the Social Media Marketing Plan. Selecting and collecting the right data is crucial to ensure that a successful research analysis is conducted. In general, two types of data will be used to maximize the quality of the results: primary and desk research. Overall, primary data is collected for a specific purpose, whereas desk research is a review of previous research findings, to get a deep and broad understanding of the field.

3.1. Data Collection

The data collection for this Master Thesis consists, firstly, of conducting desk research, looking for information about events, about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, how the scenarios for the future of events and consumer behavior are being modified, about the rise of social media, the role of social media on business, and particular in event management. It was also vital to move on to primary data collection, which has been collected through both qualitative and quantitative methods, via some interviews and an online questionnaire. Thus, the collection of information will be essential for the development of the Listening phase which in turn will be divided into three distinct parts: internal, benchmark, and target analysis.

Internal Analysis

To understand not only RConcept's history, mission, values, corporate environment, and structure, but also its offline and online communication instruments and performance, an internal analysis of the company was developed. Data was collected through the available information on the website as well as through the observation of its social media pages. However, and since this was not enough to develop a meaningful analysis, a casual interview was conducted with Rita Abecassis, RConcept's Managing Partner, on the 3rd of May 2021 to complete the information needed about RConcept (see Annex A.1).

Benchmark Analysis

After the internal analysis, it was imperative to analyze good practices that have been developed to face the pandemic in the event market, as well as good practices implemented in social media. Therefore, two companies have been chosen for this purpose. First, Desafio Global, a very prestigious event company in Portugal and Europe, responsible for being the pioneers in creating a solution for holding digital events in Portugal, and second, Mafalda Aires Events, a company which has a wide portfolio of events and a strong online presence. Data was collected through the available online information (company's websites, news...), through the observation of the social media pages of each company and, to provide greater accuracy to this analysis, an in-depth interview took place with Pedro Rodrigues, Chief Executive of Desafio Global, on the 14th June 2021 (see Annex C.1) and on the 10th June 2021, with Mafalda Aires, founder of Mafalda Aires Events (Annex D.1).

Target Analysis

In order to define the target group of RConcept, data about the behavior of the Portuguese users on social media was firstly gathered, as well as social media trends, through study reports from research companies (e.g., Marktest). Nonetheless, and since this info was not enough to clearly identify the target, a consumer research analysis was applied via an online questionnaire available from 30th April to 15th June with a total of 326 respondents (see Annex G.1). That was useful to gain important information about the Portuguese opinions and behaviors regarding events during Covid-19, the use of social media by companies, as well as their interest level in interacting with event agencies on social media. The questionnaire was shared online and so that an in-depth data analysis could be done, and all respondents answered the same questions. The results will be analyzed, and conclusions will be discussed.

To conclude the contextualization, and to summarize all the gathered information, a SWOT and a Dynamic SWOT analysis will be constructed. The info collected on the internal analysis will be used to define RConcept's strengths and weaknesses, while the info collected on the benchmarking and target analyses will determine the opportunities and threats RConcept is facing. The Dynamic SWOT will be a complement and will be used to generate strategic alternatives based on the SWOT obtained results.

4. Contextualization

As already stated, this chapter will correspond to the first step of the Social Media Planning Cycle called Listening, according to Barker et al. (2013). Listening is an ability essential to the entire social media plan, not only to observe and learn more about the company under study, but also about the market, the competitors, and the target audience. The knowledge gathered in this part will facilitate online integration and participation and will be useful in setting goals and defining strategies for the Social Media Marketing Plan of RConcept.

4.1. Rconcept's Internal Analysis

RConcept, a Portuguese event agency, was established in October 2010, when the founder Rita Abecassis, after a few years of professional experience in the area, decided to start her own company. Initially, the agency started by organizing children's events and birthday parties but quickly adapted to the market flow, adjusting supply to the demand, and started to organize social and corporate events, which are the current core business of the company (see Table 3). A few years later, there was also high demand for weddings, making Rita decide on creating a brand specific to the wedding organization. Therefore, the company was divided into RConcept Events and RConcept Weddings.

Table 3 - Types of RConcept's events (own elaboration)

Corporate events	Meetings, conferences, seminars, conventions, fairs, lunches, dinners, brunches, coffee breaks, cocktails, inaugurations, launches, private parties, and team building.
Social events	Lunches, dinners, birthday parties, and other types of parties.
Children's events	Theaters, plastic and dramatic expression workshops, team building, training for teachers, parents, and students.

Regarding the development of an event, RConcept not only helps in all the stages of planning but it also provides a specialized service in human resources, meaning that RConcept's portfolio of clients can count on a team of qualified promoters with excellent training to support all types of events. The company's office is at Belém and they have a permanent team of

promoters in Lisbon and Porto. Through a payment for travel allowances, they also move the team for national events and roadshows.

Currently, Rita Abecassis is the only manager, being responsible for the entire company, her main functions include organizing weddings and taking part in some events. There are four other employees, two of them responsible for the events and for the promoters, and the other two entirely responsible for the weddings, being one of them a freelancer. This is a small, family-run business. The area of accounting and payments of the company's employees is done by an outsourcing company and all the company's work is reported to Rita.

4.1.1. Corporate Strategy: Mission and Values

RConcept's primary mission is to create a strong relationship with its customers. In fact, it is not by chance that the R in RConcept stands for Rita and for Relationship, acting in the event market with high quality and commitment to make the customer completely satisfied and fulfilled with any service provided. As far as weddings are concerned, its mission is to be the right hand of the engaged throughout the entire time of the wedding organization. Its activity is based on four values, that characterize and inspire the daily life of the company. They are:

- 1) Transparency – fully transparent relationships, honesty in all aspects of the business, both with customers and inside of the company among employees;
- 2) Excellence – everyday improvement, offering high-quality services, adding premium value to their business;
- 3) Teamwork – joint collaboration, listening, and respecting everyone's opinions to meet the needs of their customers and to help the company win;
- 4) Passion – dedication and enthusiasm about what they do.

4.1.2. Brand and Communication

At the moment, RConcept's biggest challenge is to reposition itself and think about new ways of operating, being able to remain active in a market impacted by the Covid-19. According to the brand vision, the company intends to move towards a more digital market, using, for this, social media marketing tools to foster greater digital involvement with consumers, becoming in the future a reference in the offline and online Portuguese event market. Below you can find the brand's positioning, as well as its communication mix.

4.1.2.1. Brand Positioning

The brand positions itself as a delicate company in the area of events and weddings, seeking to establish strong, honest, and respectful relationships to provide a gold service to its customers and employees. A small and familiar company with a very agile spirit, ready to notoriously and competently solve any unforeseen situation that may arise.

4.1.2.2. Communication-Mix

In order to achieve the brand vision, RConcept already uses some communication tools, from offline to online instruments. Regarding the offline channels, it is possible to state that word-of-mouth is the main tool to promote itself since a satisfied customer will most certainly call another one and so on. Therefore, creating good experiences and making customers happy is the first step in order to generate conversation between people, and making them share their feedback about the company and the services they tried, retaining and reaching eventually new clients. In fact, and according to Rita Abecassis, the company knows that word-of-mouth is a little limiting, but it is what works best for them.

Despite the importance of word-of-mouth, the truth is that online communication channels are also very important. Online, RConcept is present on social media to get closer to customers and since the main focus of this study is related to the social media practices of RConcept, a detailed analysis was performed, which can be found in the next paragraphs. The company also has a corporate website which has all types of info about the company, such as who they are, what they do, what their portfolio of events is like, who some of their customers are, and the companies' contacts.

4.1.2.3. RConcept on Social Media

According to the different types of social media defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), the company is currently present on two social networking sites, Facebook, and Instagram. However, the low number of followers and the low frequency in which they updated content, show that it has no social media strategy. In fact, Rita Abecassis recognizes that it is important for RConcept to be on social media, but she does not know what to do and how to behave in this online channel, confessing that this is one of the company's biggest weaknesses mainly regarding event's pages. Since in terms of social media, the company's performance is much

better when it comes to weddings and not events. Therefore, the following analysis will focus on the digital presence of RConcept Event's page between April 2019 to April 2021.

RConcept Event's Facebook Page

RConcept is present on Facebook (see Figure 3) since January of 2011, and it has 2.142 followers with an average number of 6 likes per post (based on the last 15 posts prior to May 2021). They only use organic posts, and the last post was in August 2019, so they are inactive for a long time, without updating any type of content, which makes this social media page not very dynamic. When studying the RConcept's Facebook statistics it is shown that many of the followers are women (81,6%), most of them aged between 25-34 years (see Annex B.1). Further, the largest number of followers is from Portugal, more specifically from Lisbon (see Annex B.2). Regarding the posted content, those that have the greatest reach are the ones that have hashtags and mentions in the copies (descriptions), whereas those that have more likes are edited/transformed images and professional photos with high quality. Regarding comments, they don't have many, and the few they have are unanswered.

But knowing that Facebook is the most used social network in Portugal (Marktest, 2020) the company still needs to work to increase the number of followers, content updates, and page reach, which is the number of individual accounts that have seen any content of the profile at least once. The actual RConcept's event page reach decreased 8,83% in the last 28 days (prior to May 2021), with an estimated 22 views (see Annex B.3) which is very low compared to the RConcept's wedding page with an estimated 419 views and a reach increase of 2,0 mil% (see Annex B.4). Therefore, it was possible to conclude that the company is not dynamic and does not update frequently on this platform.

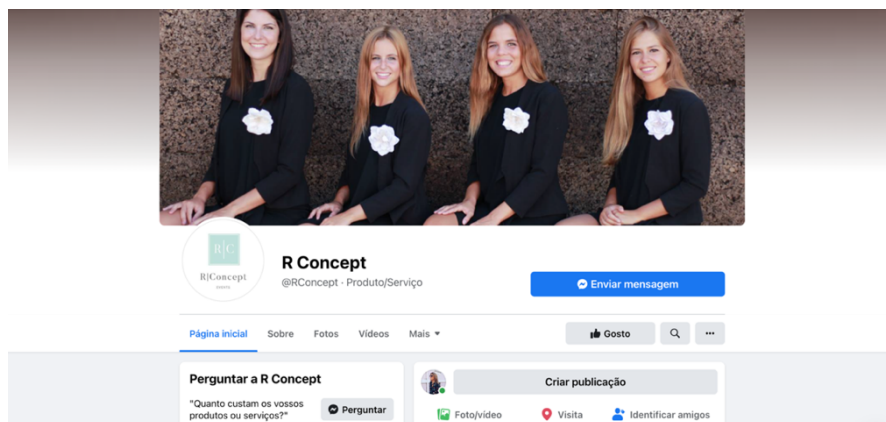


Figure 3 – Facebook Oficial Page

RConcept Event's Instagram Page

RConcept is present on Instagram (see Figure 4) since October of 2016. It has 647 followers, 334 published photos, and it is identified in 11 publications. The last post was in January 2021, and the average number of likes per post is 42 (based on the last 15 posts prior to May 2021). The main themes of the photos are related to previous events, the team of promoters on different occasions, announcements of new projects, partnerships, and interactions with the audience during holidays or a festive period (e.g., wishing a good Easter). According to Rita Abecassis, they had already advertised on Instagram, through paid ads to have more views and, consequently, more likes and comments, but the result was mediocre. Concerning the Instagram statistics, the reach of the page increased 52,4% in the last 28 days (prior to May 2021), with estimated 96 views (see Annex B.3). In terms of audience, the majority are women aged between 25 and 44 years old (see Annex B.1). Analyzing the posted content, those that have the greatest reach are publications that have influencers (like the post with the nutritionist Mariana Abecassis) and the founder's, Rita Abecassis. In terms of likes and comments, the favorites are those that also have Rita, posts that announce new projects, and those that have contents related to Covid-19. Regarding comments, there are few and they have no response, revealing the same attitude as on Facebook.

Despite the Instagram page being more updated and having more interactions than the Facebook page, the average Instagram business account posts are once per day (Newberry, 2021) so it is far from successful, and it has many aspects to improve. After all, and according to the Instagram stats in 2021, 81% of people use Instagram to research products and services, and 2 in 3 people say that social networks help foster interactions with brands (Newberry, 2021), hence the company is not taking full advantage of the platform to engage and to create relationships with customers.

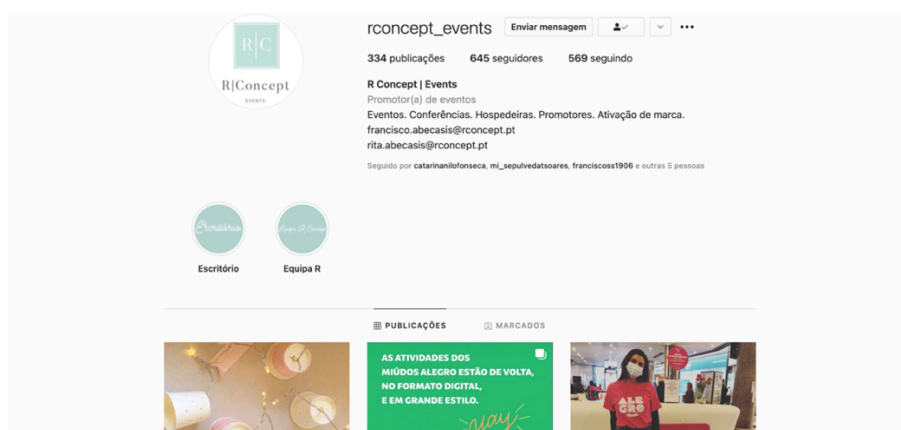


Figure 4 – Instagram Oficial Page

4.2. Benchmark Analysis

4.2.1. Covid-19 Crisis Management Case

This section includes a successful case during the Covid-19 crisis in the event industry, to gain insights on what has been done. The information was collected from an interview with Pedro Rodrigues, managing director of Desafio Global (see Annex C.1).

Desafio Global: Tactics to negate the effects of Covid-19 on business

Established in 2001, Desafio Global is a company specialized in corporate events and it is responsible for the management of events for many brands in Portugal. Over the last twenty years, the company has received 128 awards, being considered the “Best European Event Agency” by Best Event Awards (source: Desafio Global website, accessed 21st May 2021). With the Covid-19 the company felt the need to adapt and reinvent itself. So Desafio Global embraced the challenge and took all the know-how it had about events to the online, creating Go Live. According to Pedro Rodrigues, Go Live is a digital platform that ensures all the potential of a virtual event, reproducing the emblematic characteristics of a face-to-face event, enhancing creativity, authenticity, and involvement. The feedback has been very positive, and many well-known companies are using its services.

Regarding online communication, the company doesn't have an outlined strategy, they post when they think it's appropriate to be on the “top of mind” and not to be forgotten. In terms of social networks, the company is present on Instagram and LinkedIn. On Instagram they have 2.215 followers, and the content is more informal, they usually share the making-of of some events (video that records the entire performance of an event from backstage until the end of the event), professional photos, and carousel posts. Regarding copies, normally all the parties involved in the event are tagged, and hashtags such as #eventdesign, #corporateevents, and #brandactivation are often used. On LinkedIn the content is more institutional (e.g., opinion articles), and Desafio Global frequently interacts with other companies by liking, commenting, and sharing posts made by other organizations.

Although the company has never been “aggressive” in terms of communication, they have a strong presence, and they are a reference in the market because of their reputation built over time. At Desafio Global, the key is to deliver the best event possible, to meet the client's expectations to boost customer loyalty.

4.2.2. Social Media Best Practices in the Event Industry

The following section includes good social media practices in the event industry. The information was collected from an interview with Mafalda Aires, founder of the brand Mafalda Aires Interior Design Event Planner (see Annex D.1).

Mafalda Aires Event Planner: How to build a better social media presence

Mafalda Aires has a degree in Interior Design and has always enjoyed the decoration and organization of events. Therefore, she created her brand in 2018, and then she had the opportunity to do the Baby Shower of Inês Herédia, a Portuguese singer and actress with many followers on social networks. That event turned out to be a boost to reach a bigger audience and increase social followers. Since then, the brand has been growing and, even though Covid-19 stopped events for a while, the brand has reinvented itself with the Home Party Kits, which were a success, due to its active and strong presence on social networks. For the brand, relationships are the essence of the business, and social networks play a very important role as they allow the brand to create relationships with followers in a split second. According to Mafalda Aires, getting personal with followers can help to establish a connection and, contents such as a picture of the faces behind the company or a photo of the office, are good steps to show the human side of the company and get closer to users.

The most used social network platforms and considered the strongest for the brand are Instagram and then Facebook, with at least one content shared per week in one of them. On Instagram, they have 5.938 followers, and the content shared is more selective, they only publish the best photos of an event. Further, they choose to share more Instagram stories than posts because they believe people are more interested in seeing the stories than the news feed. Also, they often use Instagram stories to ask the target questions and even to share customers' feedback, which helps to increase brand trust. On Facebook, in contrast to Instagram, they prefer to publish photo albums of different events. Considering their online communication, a key strategy for them is to dedicate time to responding to all the comments and messages they receive. They also use Question Stickers on Instagram that allow people to ask questions for them to answer as a way to start conversations and clarify any doubt.

4.3. Target Analysis

4.3.1. Portuguese Social Media Behavior

Internet usage in Portugal continues to grow over the years and, in 2019, penetration exceeded $\frac{3}{4}$ of Portuguese people aged between 16 and 74 years old, and despite having a lower internet penetration rate (76%), Portugal has been approaching the European Union average (88%). According to a Pre- and Post-Covid-19 forecast that is reflected from 2020, the values in Portugal stand at 76% in 2019 and forecasts estimate an increase in 2020 to 81% and in 2025 to 93% (see Annex E.1). In annex E.2, it is possible to find the penetration rate of internet use in Portugal by region.

Regarding internet activities, what attracts most users to the online world are e-mails, search, and social media (ACEPI & IDC, 2020). Based on a study done by the Marktest Group (2020), on average, Portuguese people are spending (per day) 96 minutes on social media. The number is even higher among the younger generations aged between 15 and 24, with an average of 135 minutes, approaching twice the time of users over 45 years old (75 minutes). Middle-class users also stand out, spending nearly an hour more on social media than lower-class individuals. Although, 97,7% admit they visit social media at least once a day, weekends seem to be the period when the Portuguese spend more time on these platforms (Marktest, 2020).

Facebook remains the dominant social network in Portugal, being the most visited (49,4% of respondents mentioning it), the one with more profiles created (92,2%), and, despite the highest spontaneous notoriety (99,6%), it has lost out over years to Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok, mainly among the young generations. Instagram has been standing out. It is the second most visited (22,8%) among the active users (73,3%), being the most used by people between 15 and 24 years old, with 87,4% of spontaneous notoriety, followed by Twitter with 60,1% and WhatsApp with 30,7% of the references. WhatsApp is also the third most visited (15,5%) among the active users (80,3%). TikTok goes directly to the fifth position in terms of spontaneous notoriety in Portugal (26,8%). In terms of social media behaviors, it is possible to conclude that sending messages (82,8%), reading the news (67%) making comments (66,5%), and linking posts (60,6%) are the most common activities among Portuguese social media users. Regarding equipment, the smartphone is the most used to access social media (Marktest, 2020).

4.3.1.1. Social Media Trends

According to a Socialbakers’ report (2021), the audience size on Instagram is 40% larger than on Facebook. Also looking at Q1 2021 results, the Instagram audience grew 10,3% compared to Q1 2020, while Facebook’s audience remained quite the same. Engagement is stronger on Instagram, which had 22.7 times more interactions than on Facebook, even though 53,7% of all brand posts were on Facebook (see Annex. F.1 – Chart 1).

Overall, when it comes to brand profiles, images represent around 71,2% of all Facebook content and 65,5% of all Instagram content. Considering the other formats of posts on Facebook, video is the second most common (16,6%), followed by links and status updates. On Instagram, the carousel is the second most common (18,6%) (see Annex. F.1 – Chart 2). In terms of interaction, Facebook Live is the most engaging format with 42 median post interactions, followed by images and regular videos. On Instagram, the carousel (which can contain both images and videos) is the most engaging format with 182 median post interactions (see Annex. F.1 – Chart 3) (Socialbakers, 2021).

Considering the worldwide brand accounts on Instagram, posts with 1-2 hashtags often perform better than posts with 3-4 or no hashtags, so social media managers should avoid unnecessary hashtags (see Annex. F.1 – Chart 4). Also, short (less than 150 characters) or very long (between 1500 to 2000 characters) Instagram copies (descriptions) are the best performers, so whenever it is necessary, useful, or interesting, there is no need to be afraid of sharing long and detailed copies (see Annex. F.1 – Chart 5) (Socialbakers, 2021). The best times, as well as the overall best days to post on social media, vary in terms of engagement and platforms (see Table 4). Overall, weekends, late-night, and early morning showed a more consistent engagement, becoming an opportunity for brands (Arens, 2021).

Table 4: Best Times to Post on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn (Arens, 2021)

Facebook	Best Time to Post	Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday 2 p.m. – 6 p.m.
	Best Day to Post	Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday
Instagram	Best Time to Post	Tuesday 4 p.m. –7 p.m., Monday through Friday 4 p.m.
	Best Day to Post	Tuesday
LinkedIn	Best Time to Post	Tuesday and Thursday 2-5 p.m., Wednesday 2-7 p.m.
	Best Day to Post	Tuesday and Wednesday

Regarding paid social media, marketers are spending more on Facebook and Instagram advertising. The trend will continue to increase as the world reopened after the pandemic lockdown and companies are more than ever willing to spend money to reach consumers. Further, 57% of the advertising revenue is generated from the Facebook News Feed, followed by Instagram Feed and Instagram Stories (Socialbakers, 2021).

However, understanding social media behaviors and trends are critical but not enough. It is also necessary to analyze and consider how people acted regarding events during Covid-19, what are the target perceptions about the use of social media by companies, and what is their level of interest in interacting with event agencies on social media. For this purpose, it was conducted an online survey (see Annex G.1), which results are shown on the next pages.

4.3.2. Portuguese Opinions and Behaviors about Events during Covid-19

Before Covid-19, the demand for live experiences, such as events, was growing. Nonetheless, the pandemic directly impacted the industry that in some cases has responded to a changing market with digitalization. Since the company will focus its social media communication on the events market to create an effective engagement, it is essential to know the target audience opinions regarding physical and digital events and understand the changes in consumer behavior.

It is possible to conclude that since the beginning of the pandemic most of the people didn't attend any physical event (Annex H.1 – Chart 1), many of them admitted to being worried about going to an event because of the Covid-19 (Annex H.1 – Chart 3), and their biggest concerns were crowds/people that didn't respect the distance measures, fear of getting Covid-19, and concern that the spaces were not disinfected (Annex H.1 – Chart 4). Unlike what happened with physical events, most people have digitally attended an event since the lockdown (Annex H.1 – Chart 2). People feel that this alternative makes them feel safer (30,1%), considering that it will be the future (20,9%) and that they like the idea of attending an event while being in the comfort of their houses (20,2%). However, for 70,9% the online event doesn't replace face-to-face interactions and, as the pandemic slows down, people are eager to get together more than ever (Annex H.1 – Chart 6).

Notwithstanding, as already stated, people ended up using much more online technologies by being restricted to their houses (Annex H.1 – Chart 5), contributing to the rise of social media. And, although in the long run, the effects of the virus will successively disappear, digital adoption is here to stay, even after the pandemic is over.

4.3.3. Perceptions about the use of Social Media by Companies

Understanding the target's perceptions about the use of social media by companies is also important. After all, this is the only way to know what the target wants to see and then to analyze it, making changes based on it.

According to the consumers' research applied, 97,8% of the target think companies should be on social media (Annex H.1 – Chart 7). The reasons are very diverse, but the main ones are: 1) to communicate and engage with customers; 2) to post information about their products and services, and; 3) to create awareness (Annex H.1 – Chart 8). Regarding contents, 59,9% prefer companies to publish videos, 52,6% images (any visual object that is modified or altered by a computer) and 51,5% choose photos (anything taken by a camera) (Annex H.1 – Chart 9). Besides this, 70,2% admitted that they have already unfollowed a company because it posted too much (Annex H.1 – Chart 11), considering that companies must be active on social media, sharing only 1 post per day (49,6%) (Annex H.1 – Chart 10).

4.3.4. Interest Level in Interacting with Event Agencies on Social Media

To complete this analysis, it is also necessary to know the relationship between the target and the event agencies on social media, as well as their level of interest in interacting with them or not. It is possible to conclude that 52,6% don't follow event agencies on social media (Annex H.1 – Chart 12). There are many justifications to explain why they don't follow this type of content, they are: 1) not interested; 2) the content is not attractive, and; 3) because they don't know any (Annex H.1 – Chart 14). However, and despite these statements, the truth is that 47,4% also mentioned that they follow event agencies on social media (Annex H.1 – Chart 12), as they want to be updated about the next events (74,6%), want to know better their services (37%) and are interested in using these services in the future (30,4%) (Annex H.1 – Chart 13).

Regarding attending an event, 69,9% of the target revealed that if they want to go to an event, they will search for it on social networks (Facebook, Instagram...), while 63,6% explore on search engines (Google) and 41,5% on companies' websites (Annex H.1 – Chart 15). Since social networks are the most used tool to research and obtain information about events that the target wants to participate in, it is important to understand the role and effectiveness of each social platform concerning some aspects such as 1) The social platforms that most influences the decision about attending an event are Instagram (63,2%), Facebook (32,7%), and LinkedIn (15,4%) (Annex H.1 – Chart 16); 2) Those that work best to catch attention towards an event

are Instagram (67,6%), Facebook (23,9%), and LinkedIn (17,3%) (Annex H.1 – Chart 17); 3) The most used to interact with companies are Instagram (59,6%), LinkedIn (28,7%) and Facebook (23,5%) (Annex H.1 – Chart 18); 4) The most used to get valuable information about products/services are Instagram (54%), Facebook (26,5%) and LinkedIn (24,3%) (Annex H.1 – Chart 19).

Regarding planning an event, 65,8% of the target stated that if they want to plan it, they will search for event agencies on social networks, 59,9% will explore on search engines and 40,1% will check on companies' websites (Annex H.1 – Chart 20). As expected, social networks are the most used tool among the target to find event agencies, so it is important to understand, depending on the type of the event, in which social network they will look. For 58,8%, considering a corporate event (e.g. seminar), they will look on LinkedIn, then on Instagram (29%), and on Facebook (25,4%) (Annex H.1 – Chart 21). For 65,8%, considering a social event (e.g. birthday party), they will look on Instagram, then on Facebook (44,9%) and on Google+ (10,7%) (Annex H.1 – Chart 22). In terms of a children's event (e.g. workshop for kids), 60,3% will look on Instagram, then on Facebook (47,8%), and on Google+ (12,1%) (Annex H.1 – Chart 23).

Since companies' websites are also highly sought after by the target audience when it comes to attending or planning events, it is important to analyze what kind of content(s) they like to see on an event agency webpage. These are 1) information about their services; 2) portfolio of events and; 3) budget request for an event (Annex H.1 – Chart 24).

4.4. SWOT Analysis

Strengths

1. RConcept has a qualified team of promoters, with excellent training, to support all types of events nationally;
2. RConcept is a family-run business, with a stable, comfortable, and favorable intern environment;
3. RConcept's portfolio of clients is very satisfied with its services, and through word-of-mouth, the network of contacts of the company (Alegro, KPMG...) ended up promoting the agency to other clients;
4. RConcept operates in the event market with high quality and commitment with its customers;

5. RConcept's wedding page on social networks (Instagram and Facebook) performs very well. They have very dynamic and interactive content for their followers.

Weaknesses

1. Due to the pandemic Rconcept was forced to cancel many of the events that were already scheduled, which took a toll in its profitability;
2. The social media presence of RConcept is very weak and unclear;
3. RConcept lack online strategy and interaction with customers, it doesn't know how to behave on online channels;
4. RConcept has a very limited team to dedicate time and resources to manage social networks;
5. RConcept has a low marketing budget, so it is difficult for this company to spend money catching people's attention on social media.

Opportunities

1. Due to the pandemic, consumer behavior has changed, increasing the consumption of digital tools;
2. In response to Covid-19, many companies have adapted the way they communicate and approach customers, resorting to online platforms;
3. At least 85,2% of the population in Portugal is already fully vaccinated (data updated on October 11, 2021) (Ritchie et al., 2021);
4. Covid-19's restrictions in Portugal are getting smaller, and things are slowly returning to normal life;
5. Social media have been rising;
6. Cheaper and faster online tools have been implemented;
7. The social and experiential shifts have changed the way people spend their leisure time, increasing the number of events;
8. Consumers want more authentic and rewarding experiences, providing the right level of surprise, novelty, and excitement;
9. The customer-brand relationship strengthened through digital tools. Managers can listen and understand the target, answering to their preferences and sending customized content based on the analysis of their behavior;

10. Consumers are attributing more importance to event agencies online because they want to be updated about the next events, want to know better the services provided, and are interested in making or attending events in the future;
11. Even in the long term, the effects of the virus will successively disappear, the digital adoption is here to stay.

Threats

1. The event industry is facing one of the biggest global crises ever registered;
2. Portuguese are showing cautions in practicing activities such as gathering in crowded spaces because they are afraid of getting Covid-19;
3. Safety and hygiene became a key concern, so consumers will seek higher hygiene and security standards;
4. A strong online presence requires constant innovation, keeping content updated, and real-time responses;
5. People don't follow event agencies on social media because they are not interested, the content is not attractive, and also because they don't know any;
6. Greater online exposure may be harmful, and negative feedback from customers could trigger problems for the company;
7. There is a lot of competition on the market.

4.4.1. Dynamic SWOT

Offensive Strategies

- S1O8. Develop and promote the qualified service that RConcept's team of promoters offers, to create more complete, personalized, and authentic experiences;
- S3O5. Take advantage of its portfolio of clients to generate word-of-mouth online, by sharing, identifying, and interacting with them particularly in social media;
- S4O7. Bet more on the promotion of the high-quality business that RConcept's offer, to increase the number of weddings/events with the company;
- S5O1. Take advantage of their knowledge and expertise of the wedding's page on social media to leverage the event's page at a time when online consumption has increased.

Confrontation Strategies

- S2T1. Take advantage of the good team spirit and working environment that exists within the company to face the adversities caused by the pandemic;
- S3T5. Create an action plan for the promotion of RConcept, interacting with clients online, to reach more people and make the brand more known;
- S4T7. Try to maintain a high quality and gain a strong position on the Portuguese event market both online and offline;
- S5T4. Define a strategy, based on their performance on the wedding's page, to have always dynamic and updated content, ensuring real-time responses.

Strengthening Strategies

- W1O3. Take advantage of the fact that the Covid-19 vaccination program is having good results to progressively, and complying with all safety and hygiene measures, start holding events, in order to recover the pace they had before;
- W2O2. Develop a social media strategy in order to improve the way they communicate and approach customers, increasing awareness and engaging with users;
- W3O9. Since RConcept doesn't know how to behave online, it's important to define a strategy that has room to grow. Starting with small steps, listening, and checking the progress over time. In this way, they will understand the target, and better match their preferences;
- W5O6. Make the best possible use of social media tools, which are fast, cheap, and effective to catch people's attention;

Defensive Strategies

- W2T6. Develop a social media strategy that protects the brand, giving support to users online and redirecting all the negative occurrences to private messages to prevent negative content;
- W4T4. Structure the team within the company and leave a person responsible for managing everything related to online;
- W5T7. At least once a year, invest in advertising on social media. It will be an investment that will certainly pay off, because will generate more awareness in the market, reaching more possible clients for RConcept.

5. Social Media Marketing Plan

5.1. Social Media Planning Cycle

The design and implementation of the Social Media Marketing Plan for RConcept is the purpose of this Master Thesis and will be defined on the next paragraphs.

5.1.1. Setting Goals

The objectives will be defined based on the entire analysis in Chapter 4, including the SWOT analysis performed. But before outlining the objectives for this Social Media Plan, the overall objectives of the company were also taken into account, they are: 1) gain a strong position on Portuguese event market both online and offline; 2) increase the number of weddings/events for 2022 and; 3) act with high quality and commitment to make customers fulfilled. The main goals of RConcept's social plan are to strengthen its online presence, to get closer to its customers and to stand out in a pandemic context. If RConcept wants to get closer to its clients, its Social Media Marketing Plan must follow the following objectives and respective actions that should be applied to every platform:

1. **Listening:** Listen to customers' opinions, questions, and needs in order to understand preferences and trends about RConcept but also about the competitors. Use tools like Instagram stories, and post copies to ask questions, ask for feedback, run a poll, encouraging the target audience to participate and collaborate, gaining real-time and valuable consumer insights that can spark new ideas to address the right content online.
2. **Talking:** Communicate RConcept's services and events to generate dialogue. Dedicate time to answer all the comments and messages, nevertheless, the response rate should be 100% and questions should be responded in a timely manner. Give personalized support, redirecting to private messages all help requests and negative contents. Participate in conversations with clients to clarify not only the doubts from those who participate but also from those who just read them.

Specific Objectives

In order to define the specific objectives for RConcept's social networking sites the SMART criteria was considered:

- 1- Increase the number of social media followers;

- 2- Increase of the reach (number of people who had any content by the page of RConcept enter their screen);
- 3- Increase the number of interactions (sum of reactions, comments, and shares on posts);
- 4- Increase user engagement (sum of all interactions on posts published in a given period);
- 5- Increase the number of contents updated;

5.1.2. Defining Strategies

To define the strategy of the social media plan, all insights from the objectives (general and specific) to all the previous analyses carried out, were taken into account. The company doesn't know how to behave online, so as stated by Li and Bernoff (2011) it must start with small steps and allow for growth. Therefore, it's important to listen to what people are saying about the brand, set time intervals to check the progress of the strategy through measurement metrics, and adjust whenever appropriate. In this way, they will start to understand the target and better match their preferences. Besides, and having into consideration the fact that Facebook is the most used social network in Portugal (Marktest, 2020) and Instagram is getting stronger in terms of audience (Socialbakers, 2021), it is of the utmost importance to initially put more effort on these two platforms and later, if everything goes according to the plan, to move to LinkedIn.

To have a meaningful social media strategy, companies need to choose someone to be responsible for implementing and monitoring the social media plan. Since RConcept doesn't have enough budget to hire a social media expert or an agency, someone inside the company must be responsible and dedicate 50% to 100% of his/her time to monitor social media channels, adapting the strategy whenever required. This person should also receive training and should be someone who has some social media knowledge.

Regarding brand personality and tone of voice, they should be consistent with the RConcept positioning (see chapter 4.1.2.1., p. 21). Thus, they must be guided by sincerity, transparency, and kindness, being helpful and friendly towards the audience to get personal with the user and earn the target audience's trust, showing the human side of the company.

5.1.3. Identifying the Audience

As possible to conclude from prior analyses, the RConcept followers are mostly women, between 25 and 44 years old, and the majority is from Portugal, more precisely from Lisbon (chapter 4.1.2.3., p. 22-23). However, since one of the objectives is to increase the audience,

we are not going to limit it by considering only demographic data, it is also important to identify the online profiles according to the Social Technographics Ladder by Li and Bernoff (2011).

Knowing that the main social media behaviors among Portuguese users are sending messages, reading the news, comment and liking posts (Marktest, 2020) it is possible to conclude that the online target of RConcept will be the conversationalists, joiners, and spectators. Conversationalists because they facilitate communication and dialogue, and as already mentioned, one of RConcept's goals is to talk with its customers. Joiners and Spectators, because although they have quieter profiles, they usually have social networking accounts and they get information from it, so even if they don't actively participate, it doesn't mean that they cannot be a future RConcept client.

Nevertheless, it is essential to consider the platform on which it is communicating, in order to adapt the content to the target audience of that digital environment such as Instagram, which is used mostly by younger generations (Marktest, 2020).

5.1.4. Selecting Tools

If the company aims to achieve conversationalists, joiners, and spectators, it needs to be on social networking sites. Also, according to the Target analysis, if they want to do or to go to an event, they will search for event agencies and for upcoming events on social networks (chapter 4.3.4., p. 29-30). For that reason, the existent Facebook and Instagram pages will be a part of this new social media plan. Also, Facebook remains the dominant social network in Portugal (Marktest, 2020) and Instagram is where the engagement is stronger (Socialbakers, 2021), thus RConcept cannot stay away from these social networking platforms. Moreover, Instagram is the social network that most influences the decision to attend an event, it is the one that works best to catch attention towards an event, it is the most used to interact with companies, and it is the most used to get information about products/services (chapter 4.3.4, p. 29-30).

Since one of the overall objectives of RConcept is to increase the number of events in 2022, the company should create a LinkedIn account since one of the core businesses of the company is corporate events. Thus, the presence on LinkedIn will be important to communicate with other companies and to promote the business since 58,8% of the target mentioned that if they want to do a corporate event (e.g. seminar), they will look for event agencies on LinkedIn (chapter 4.3.4, p. 30). Furthermore, the company must communicate through diverse tools in order to offer different types of experiences (Getz, 2008). That said, the LinkedIn account will be used to be more linked to corporate events and other companies, rather than Instagram and

Facebook which will be more linked to social events (e.g. birthday party) and children's events (chapter 4.3.4, p. 30). Also, as RConcept is a Portuguese company and its online target audience is Portuguese, it must always post in this language.

5.1.5. Implementing

After the listening, the definition of the objectives, strategy, online target audience, and technologies, the implementation of the social media plan should be defined. The entire plan will be defined following the corporate strategy (mission and values) and RConcept's positioning, with the ambition to achieve the brand's vision, which intends to move towards a more digital market. In the next paragraphs, it will be possible to find the main actions applied to all the platforms and the specific actions to each social networking site. Each action was designed to accomplish the proposed objectives and achieve success.

5.1.5.1. General Actions across every Tools

First, plan and follow a monthly Content Calendar which should include: the date, day of the week and time that the post is going to live, the subject, the copy/description (including #hashtags and @mentions), the creative assets (e.g., photos), the social network where the post will be published, and the format (e.g., carousel). Update contents with more frequency to be on "top of mind" and to not be forgotten, with more emphasis on the weekends, which are when the Portuguese spend more time online (Marktest, 2020). Additionally, as the best time to post varies depending on the social media platform in question (see chapter 4.3.1.1., Table 4), it is important to consider those when scheduling the content calendar. In order to facilitate these tasks and save time, take advantage of the *Facebook Business Suite*, a site that works for Facebook and Instagram, where it is possible to find and manage messages, notifications, comments in one place and to publish in both platforms simultaneously, scheduling posts to publish later (source: *Facebook Business Suite* website, accessed 20th September 2021).

As already stated, one of the actions to fulfill the objective of Talking on social media is to dedicate time to answer and react to all the comments and messages in a timely manner. So, responses should not take longer than 24h and is also important to redirect any negative occurrences or requests for help to private messages so that it is given personalized help. This will help improve customer experience and prevent negative content.

Regarding the content, diversify the format of the content, avoiding unattractive and “boring” posts. Increase content related to upcoming events that the company will conduct. They must be interactive and answer the doubts that consumers may have. This only applies to events that the company is authorized to share. Also, according to the Target analysis, one of the reasons to follow event agencies on social media is to know their services better (chapter 4.3.4., p. 29). Hence, RConcept must be clear with what they do and what they offer on social networks. Moreover, they must have an email in the contacts or bio for those who want to request a budget for an event. Another highly important action is to improve the quality of the content by, for instance, avoiding low-quality pictures. Having more posts including the team of promoters, in order to share the qualified and personalized services that RConcept offers is highly recommendable. Furthermore, to reassure the audience who seeks high standards of hygiene, make sure that the followers know that all events are following Covid-19 security measures.

In addition to the contents, use post copies (descriptions) to mention someone or other companies. Regularly include 1-2 hashtags such as #events, #eventplanner, or others related to the theme of the post. Always tag the clients, even when they are other companies, to promote the business, reach more people and generate word-of-mouth online.

To this day, as events are running at a slower pace, it is important to think in other themes to share online, such as inspirational quotes. This is a great way to not only show what the brand stands for but also to generate more exposure, as people can share it around. Additionally, never miss a holiday or a festive period. Make use of these opportunities to post something and interact with the audience (e.g. Christmas, summer vacations, the first day of autumn).

5.1.5.2. Facebook

The posts on Facebook should be made three times per week. Moreover, since when it comes to brand profiles, images represent 71,2% of all Facebook content (Socialbakers, 2021) and a video is a favorite format among the targeted audience to be published by companies (chapter 4.3.3., p. 29), bet more on videos and images format. This can be done through sharing photo albums or a making-of (video that records the entire performance of an event from backstage until the end of the event) of some events that the company held. Also, do Facebook Lives as the company is already used to do on the weddings page (see Annex A.1). Do a Live once a week, interacting and answering followers’ questions in real-time. For this to perform well, it is central to choose a quiet, bright spot to film the live stream.

Even with the limited marketing budget that the company has, it is important to invest in paid advertising on Facebook News Feed at least twice a year, since 57% of the advertising revenue is generated from there (Socialbakers, 2021). Given its spontaneity, it can help the company get more well-known and boost social media followers. Therefore, it will be an investment that will certainly pay off.

5.1.5.3. Instagram

Bearing in mind that an average Instagram business account posts once a day (Newberry, 2021), RConcept must follow the same frequency. During the week of posts the company can use different formats. For example, three images and four Instagram stories. Regarding the content, choose more selective content for Instagram, sharing only the best photos of an event, and bet more on carousel posts, the most engaging format (Socialbakers, 2021), mixing images and videos in the same post. Share fun, authentic, and friendly posts about RConcept, showing selfies of the employees or photos of the workplace. The idea is to show the human side of the company as it is important to develop personal connections with customers and to generate engagement. This is possible to verify as posts with Rita Abecassis are the ones that have the most interactions and reach (see chapter 4.1.2.3., p. 23).

Run a giveaway to promote the business, engage with followers and reach new customers. For instance, RConcept can do a partnership offering a popcorn car or a face painting for a children's party. Notice that to participate in the giveaway users must follow these steps: like the post; follow RConcept and tag someone. Additionally, work together with influencers and share always it on Instagram, as it proved to be an effective method to boost brand awareness, as seen with Mafalda Aires's example (see chapter 4.2.2., p. 25). For that choose someone who fits the RConcept profile and shares the same targeted audience, such as, Inês Gutierrez.

Since Instagram had 22.7 times more interactions than Facebook (Socialbakers, 2021), it is the perfect place to engage with customers, asking them fairly simple questions and receiving answers from them. For instance, one could ask whether they prefer outdoor or indoor events. To make those questions, use stories or post copies. Regarding copies, short (less than 150 characters) or very long (between 1500 to 2000 characters) Instagram copies are the best performers (Socialbakers, 2021). Another good way to collect valuable information from your following is by running a poll, using the polls feature on Instagram stories. Ask the audience what they would like to see or even if they like a particular content. For example: "Do you want to see photos from KPMG's Christmas party?". These insights will be very useful to learn

something from the followers as well as to define future posts. Additionally, allow the followers to ask questions to the company. Use the Question Stickers on Instagram Stories and then answer them by sharing a video on Instagram Stories. This is one of the most efficient ways to talk to all the online community.

5.1.5.4. LinkedIn

Once a week share photos of some corporate events. Also, bet on more formal and institutional content, such as sharing news, studies, reports, or opinion articles about the event sector. In the light of what Desafio Global does (see chapter 4.2.1., p. 24), interact with other companies by liking, commenting, tagging, and sharing their post, mainly if they are part of RConcept’s portfolio of clients. Promote content about the company’s operation, including testimonials from employees or customers. This will foster proximity with the LinkedIn community.

5.1.6. Monitoring

The digital world makes it possible to track, measure, and evaluate each interaction carried out online, information that can be analyzed and used to improve the company’s efforts and processes. To carry out the monitoring of RConcept on Social Networking Sites, quantitative and qualitative approaches will be considered. Therefore, the main measurement metrics (KPI’s) for each objective of the Social Media Marketing Plan are the following (see Table 5):

Table 5 – The main measurement metrics of the social media plan of RConcept (own elaboration)

Goal	Measurement Metrics
Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracking of the customers’ hot topics about the industry, preferences, and trends to adapt the contents that are being created; • Evaluation of the reviews/ratings and valence of the content created and shared by users, understanding how people feel about the company;
Talking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of social media followers and followers’ growth rate ($\frac{\# \text{ new followers}}{\# \text{ existing followers}} \times 100$); • Page reach and post reach; • Number of likes, comments, and shares; • Post engagement rate ($\frac{\# \text{ of likes and comments}}{\# \text{ followers}} \times 100$); • Account @mentions; • Response rate ($\frac{\# \text{ responses}}{\# \text{ messages}} \times 100$);

It is very important to evaluate all actions carried out in social media through the indicated metrics. To help on this task, *Facebook Business Suite* is a useful tool that provides insights tabs about relevant quantitative metrics (reach, engagement, and post-performance) from a single location, to optimize resources and time (source: *Facebook Business Suite* website, accessed 20th September 2021). In order to know the target perceptions about a particular post or the company in general, the evaluation of the qualitative metrics, through the analysis of reviews/ratings and valence of the user-generated content, is crucial to understand whether user feedback is positive, negative, or neutral. Monitoring should be an ongoing action to understand the impact of the Social Media Marketing Plan.

5.1.7. Tuning

After the evaluation of the metrics, it is crucial to make the necessary adjustments to guarantee a more successful strategy. It shouldn't be the end of the process as this is a flexible, adaptive, and continuous cycle. Therefore, the plan must be permanently evaluated and readjusted.

5.2. Budget and Calendar

The calendar for the new Social Media Marketing Plan starts in January 2022 (see Annex I.1). The idea is, throughout the year, there will be revisions of its performance every month, so that, if necessary, some readjustments can be made. Since someone within the company will be responsible for the social media plan, that person will receive training at the beginning of the year. Regarding platforms, as already mentioned, Facebook and Instagram actions are a priority, and after, if everything goes according to the plan, the LinkedIn actions can be implemented.

Moreover, March and October were selected as the times for paid advertising on Facebook News Feed as they were mentioned by Rita Abecassis the best seasons in the event sector. The summer season was not included as it is considered a very quiet time in this market, except for summer festivals. On Instagram, the work with influencers will occur twice a year but despite being scheduled on the calendar in Annex I, it will be somewhat flexible as it will have to be agreed with the influencers. The giveaways will occur twice a year and will be partnerships with companies that RConcept wants to promote alongside with its business. Having into consideration the sum of the proposed budgets, which can be found in Annex I.1, it is possible to obtain a total budget of 750€-1200€ for the Social Media Marketing Plan.

6. Conclusions

Internet usage in Portugal continues to grow over the years and, with Covid-19 it is estimated that the penetration rate will be even higher, due to the rapid and universal adoption of online technologies as an immediate effect of the pandemic. The Covid-19 has been shaping the way we live, work, and connect with each other. Despite all the losses and difficulties experienced over the past two years, some companies have found ways not to be forgotten and to strengthen the connections they have with their customers. In times of crisis, the connection is more important than ever and social media's power to connect people in a split second has proven to be truly effective throughout the ups and downs of 2020 and 2021. Knowing this, many companies moved away from their original strategies as consumer behavior practically changed overnight to adapt to the "new reality", turning to social media to communicate with their customers, strengthening their image in response to the Covid-19.

Furthermore, one of the things that attracts most users to the online world is social media. On average, Portuguese people are spending 96 minutes per day on social media and the most used social networking sites in Portugal are Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Tik Tok. Since users are spending most of their online time on these platforms, each one of them provides an opportunity to shorten the distance between brands and customers, creating more authentic and long-term relationships. In addition to creating genuine relationships, when well designed, social media sites increase awareness, engagement and generate word-of-mouth among the target audience, allowing firms to have direct and timely contact with the end consumer at a relatively low cost. Thus, social media platforms offer companies endless opportunities to talk with users and listen to them, in order to get to know them better, detecting preferences and trends. Moreover, the more a company knows its target audience, the more it can address the right content and influence users' behavior.

RConcept is one of those companies that has been negatively affected by Covid-19, being forced to give up holding events, resulting in revenue loss. However, unlike many companies that looked to Covid-19 as an opportunity to identify new business models and adapt creatively, RConcept didn't reinvent itself and, despite its already existing presence on two social networks (Instagram and Facebook), it didn't take full advantage of the rise of social media to engage and to create relationships with their customers. Therefore, to achieve the companies' vision to move towards a more digital market, and to give a long-term solution for this challenge, a Social Media Marketing Plan, based on the Social Media Planning Cycle of Barker et al. (2013) was carefully developed, to be implemented in 2022. An ongoing and cyclical plan which brings

together all the knowledge gathered about a company and the market, monitoring the progress of social media elements over time through continuous adjustments and improvements. Moreover, since the company has a low marketing budget because of the lack of revenue due to Covid-19, a social media strategy it is the fastest, cheapest, and most effective way to catch people's attention.

Not only social media usage has increased as an effect of the pandemic, but also other immediate effects have emerged, such as the threat of disease that has taken root in people's minds. Therefore, people began to have more prudence towards crowds and closed spaces with fear of Covid-19. This had a huge impact on the events industry, in which RConcept belongs, which felt the need to move to virtual solutions to continue hosting events. Now, even though there is still a lot of concerns about physical events, the target audience admitted that nothing replaces face-to-face interactions, so it is possible to conclude that once the pandemic is no longer a threat, physical events will come back at full force. That said, and considering that digital adoption is here to stay and will still rising, it's more important than ever that RConcept strengthen its social media presence in order to gain more followers who can later become future clients when the events season returns to the pace it had before.

It is believed that with the implementation of this Social Media Marketing Plan, RConcept will succeed in the long run, creating closer connections with its customers, mainly because of the listening and talking focus, contributing to the exchange of information that will benefit both customers and the company. This social media marketing approach will allow the company to get people engaged, to promote its services, to generate awareness, to use social media as an active communication channel and to create stronger relationships with customers. All of these complementing traditional events that the company has again held, thanks largely to the efforts to fight the pandemic such as the vaccination plan, but at a very slow speed.

In the beginning, the implementation of this social media plan will probably be time-consuming. But with the experience over time, it will certainly become something more routine and simpler, especially with the help of the content calendar that can be thought out right away for the entire month, saving time and energy. It is believed that, if properly implemented, this plan can meet the overall objectives of RConcept, contributing to the achievement of its social media goals to the improvement of the results.

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8. Annexes

Annex A.

Annex A.1 RConcept Interview

1- Why and when you create RConcept?

RConcept emerged from a few years of professional experience in events. I had already worked in other agencies and that's why I decided to create my own agency that was established in October 2010.

2- What is the core business?

Initially, it started just as an event agency, doing different types of events. I adapted my services according to the market flow. I started in schools, birthday parties, etc. At a certain point, I decided to develop a specialized service in human resources, recruiting teams of promoters, with specialized training to support events. A few years later, there was also high demand for weddings, so I decided to create the RConcept Weddings. Therefore, the company was divided into two brands.

3- Where is the headquarters?

The head office is in Belém and we have a fixed team of promoters in Lisbon and Porto. However, through a payment for travel allowances, we also move the team for national events and roadshows.

4- How are you organized inside the company?

I handle both events and weddings. Then I have a person who exclusively manages the events and works with an intern. And I have another employee and a freelancer who handle weddings. This is a small, family-run business. The area of accounting and payments is done by an outsourcing company.

5- What are the mission and values?

Our primary mission is to create a strong relationship with our customers, it is not by chance that it is R of Rita and Relationship, acting in the event market with high quality, ensuring that our human resources provide an excellent service. Our values are always total transparency, excellence, teamwork, and passion inside of the company.

6- How does the company communicate with customers?

In terms of communication, the tools that we use to reach our customers are Facebook and Instagram and we have also a website. For us, word-of-mouth is very important, because a satisfied customer ends up sharing the message with others. Even word-of-mouth can be a bit limiting, it is a tool that has worked very well with us. I admit that we don't have a strong online presence.

7- Do you have an online strategy?

Considering the pages of events, we don't have a strategy, we publish when we want. On the wedding pages, we have a strategy, we have four monthly rubrics and Facebook Lives about different contents. In terms of social media, Instagram works better than Facebook. In terms of content, we bet on a more direct and creative language.

8- Do you already try Instagram Ads?

Yes, we did that to get more views and, consequently, more likes and comments but the results were mediocre.

9- How the demand for your services has been impacted by Covid-19?

Some laws prohibited gatherings and events. Events, often seen as superfluous, were quite impacted. For all this, the demand for our services dropped a lot, resulting in less revenue and a major financial crisis for my company.

10- What is the biggest challenge?

Right now, RConcept's biggest challenge is to reposition itself and think outside of the box to remain active in the very challenging market. Also, move towards a more digital market to connect with customers.

11- At what time of the year do you hold more events?

It is always the seasons around Christmas, such as October, November... and the beginning of the spring, March, April... the quietest time is summer, except for the companies that organize the summer festivals, which is not our case.

Annex B.

Annex B.1 Social Media Audience

Público

Exportar

Gostos na Página do Facebook

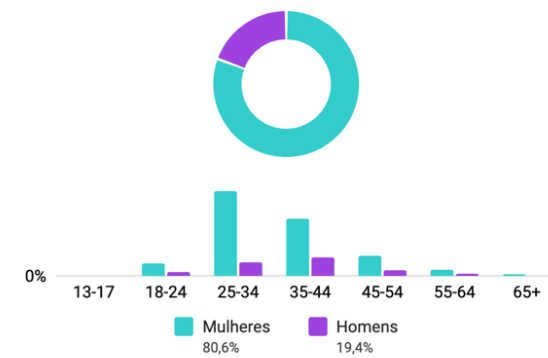
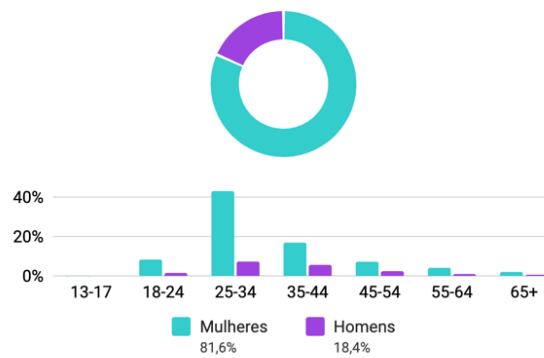
2,1 mil

Seguidores do Instagram

647

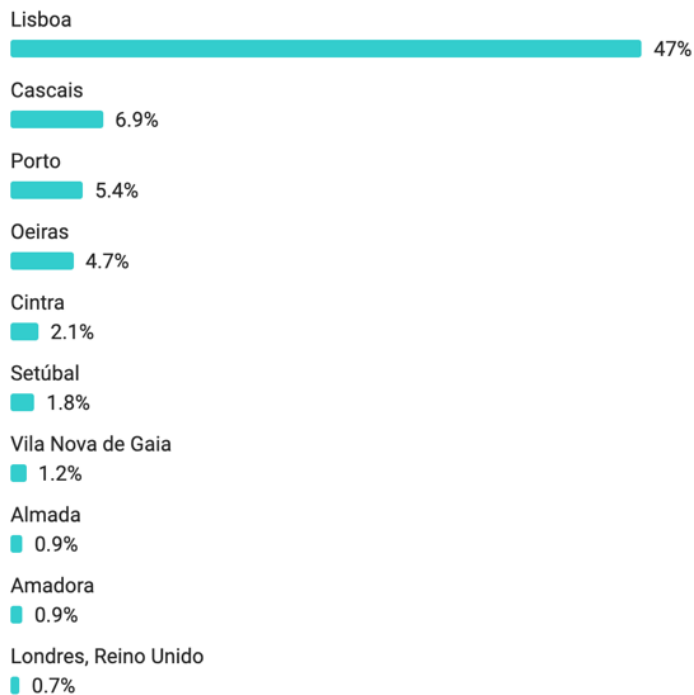
Idade e género

Idade e género

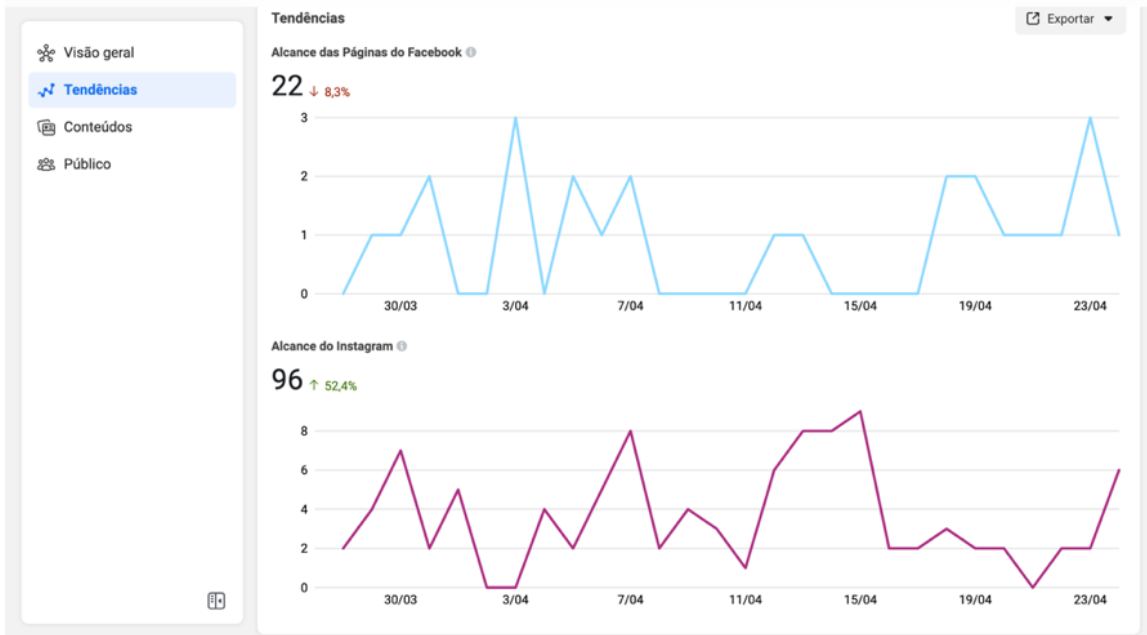


Annex B.2 Followers by Region

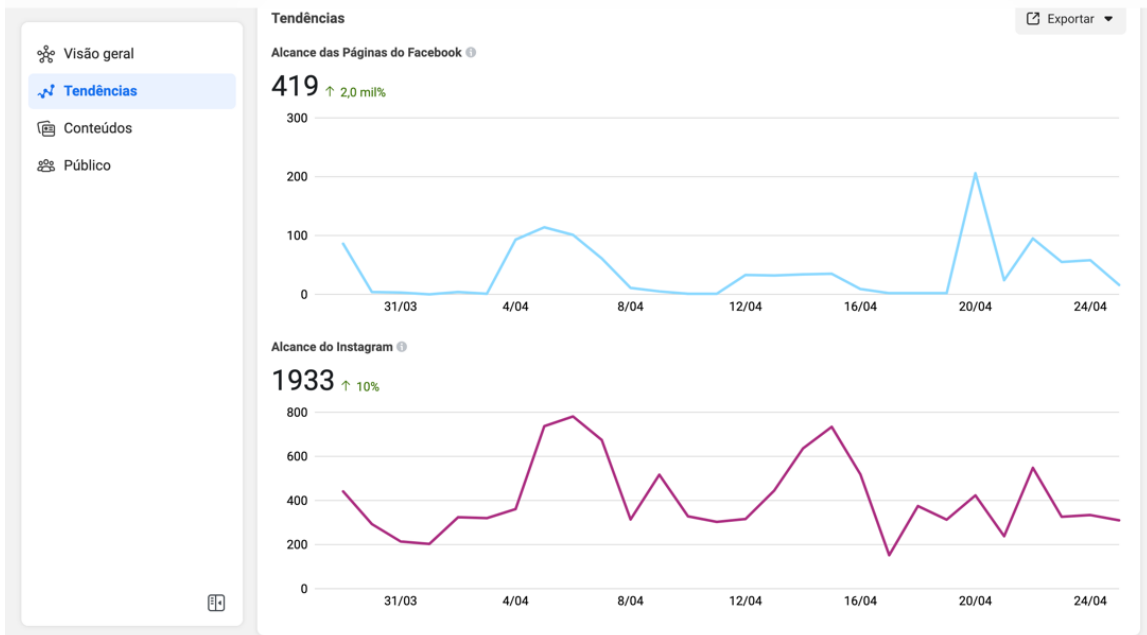
Principais cidades



Annex B.3 RConcept's Event Page Reach



Annex B.4 RConcept's Wedding Page Reach



Annex C.

Annex C.1 *Desafio Global Interview*

1- How did you react to the pandemic?

In the first phase, it was the shock then, we reinvented ourselves creating Go Live. A digital platform that ensures all the potential of a virtual event, reproducing the most emblematic characteristics of a face-to-face event, enhancing creativity, authenticity, and involvement. Online, each event is designed in terms of duration, the program, the interactions, and the platform used to surprise the audience. The feedback has been very positive.

2- Did the target change with the pandemic?

It has not changed. We have our portfolio of customers for physical events and when we went to digital, new clients appeared.

3- Do you communicate online? How?

Yes, we use Instagram and LinkedIn. We don't follow any guidelines, we punctually share an award, a making-of, an interview, etc. We never felt the need to be "aggressive" in terms of social media, because we already have a strong presence and we are a reference in the market, due to the reputation built over the last 20 years. Our goal is to do a good job, it is a small country, the trick is to retain customers, not lose customers and do the best job possible always.

4- Which are the social media platforms most used? Who manages them?

We use LinkedIn for a more institutional point of view and Instagram in a more personal way. For example, on LinkedIn we communicate with other companies, we share opinion articles, reports, etc., on Instagram we share more images and videos, to entertain our followers and share our work online. In terms of online management, we have a person responsible for these matters.

5- What kind of content do you use to attract potential customers?

We have the advantage that our area is very scenic. We like to communicate impactful content, professional photos of the events, share important and known speakers, videos effectively edited to make them more dynamic and attractive. We like to be at the top of our mind, whether you are a regular or a new customer, for that we must show what we are doing and that is why we end up using social media, for don't be forgotten.

Annex D.

Annex D.1 *Mafalda Aires Events Interview*

1- When and how did the company “Mafalda Aires Eventos” appear?

I have a degree in Interior Design and have always liked the area of decoration of events. When I finished the course, I was already organizing some parties. However, in 2018, I created the Mafalda Aires Interior Design Event Planner brand. In September of that year, I had the opportunity to do Inês Herédia’s Baby shower and it was a great boom.

2- What is the concept and values behind the company?

For us, each client is unique and special, that's why all the events we organize are personalized, adapted to each client, to each moment, and each celebration. We have a simple style, but every detail is thought out and idealized in detail. Above all, we work with sincerity, friendliness, availability, and customer service before, during, and after events.

3- Considering Covid-19, how did you react to this sudden change?

Initially many projects that we had already prepared did not happen. During the initial months, everything was unknown, and we stopped completely. Then we started to see how we could reinvent ourselves and we thought about creating the Home Party Kits that started to have a huge success. Kits were delivered at home for customers who had their mini-party.

4- What are the main platforms you use to reach your audience?

In terms of online media, we operate a lot in terms of social networks and Instagram is a very strong tool. On the offline level, we are also often invited to go to television programs, and we consider it a medium that still has a great impact and brings many customers.

5- Why did you choose Instagram and Facebook? The strategy is the same in both?

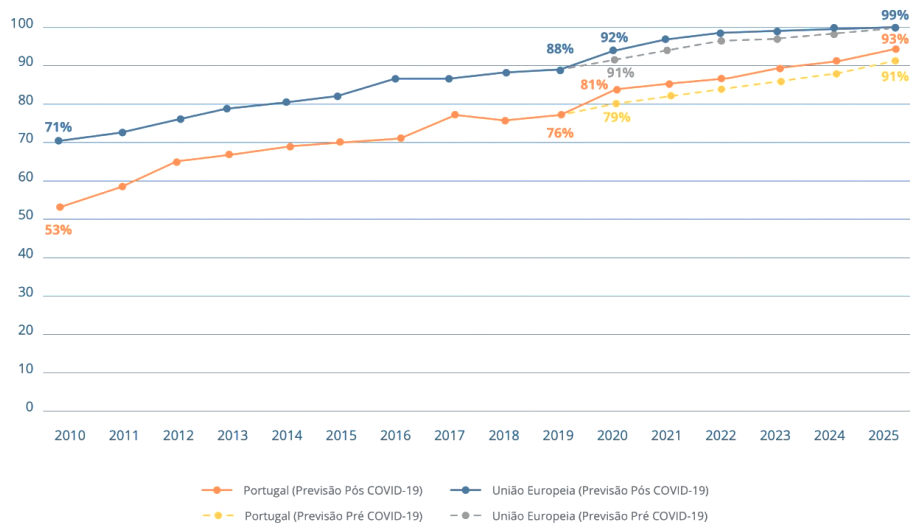
We use these two social networks, but we ended up using Instagram a lot more. We realized that Facebook is no longer in such demand compared to Instagram. For this same reason, we ended up adopting different strategies in each one. On Facebook, we share more albums of the events, on Instagram we are more selective in choosing the publication. I don't have a defined strategy, the only aspect I have defined is to publish at least one content every week. In the case of Facebook, I always publish, but in the case of Instagram, since people don't go to the feed as much and watch stories more often, I choose to publish more stories.

6- What type of content do you use to attract more customers and followers?

I do some events for celebrities/influencers and this type of content ends up giving me another projection. That's why we do at least one event a year with someone known. Another type of content that we also use a lot to connect with followers more closely is using stories to answer our followers' questions or even share the feedback they send to us.

Annex E.

Annex E.1 Internet Penetration Rate in Portugal and European Union (INE & IDC, 2020)



Annex E.2 Internet Penetration Rate in Portugal and Regions (INE & IDC, 2020)



Annex F

Annex F.1 Social Media Trends

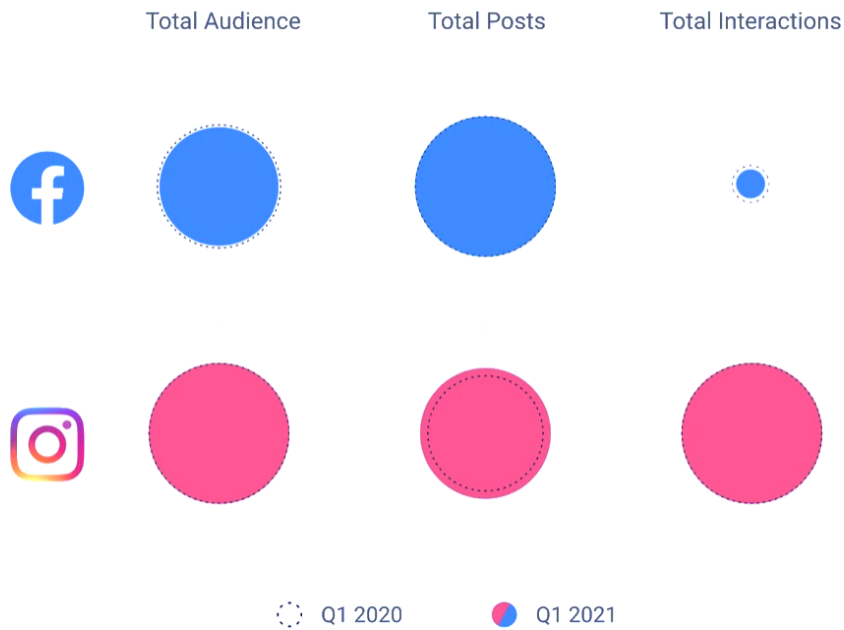


Chart 1 - Total Audience, Posts, and Interactions (Socialbakers, 2021)

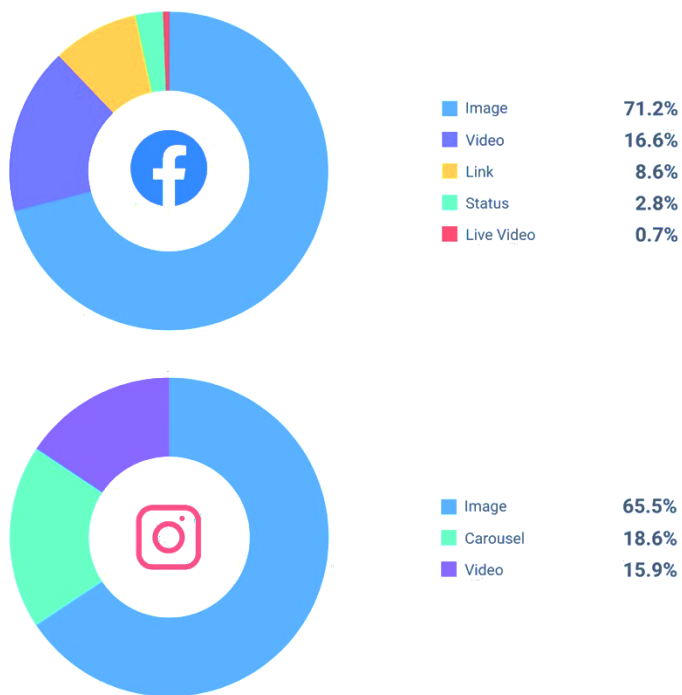
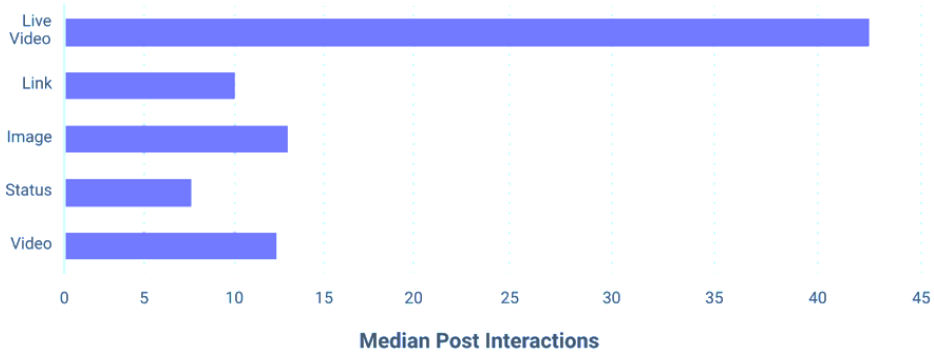


Chart 2 – Type/Format of Posts (Socialbakers, 2021)

Facebook Organic Interactions by Post Type



Instagram Organic Interactions by Post Type

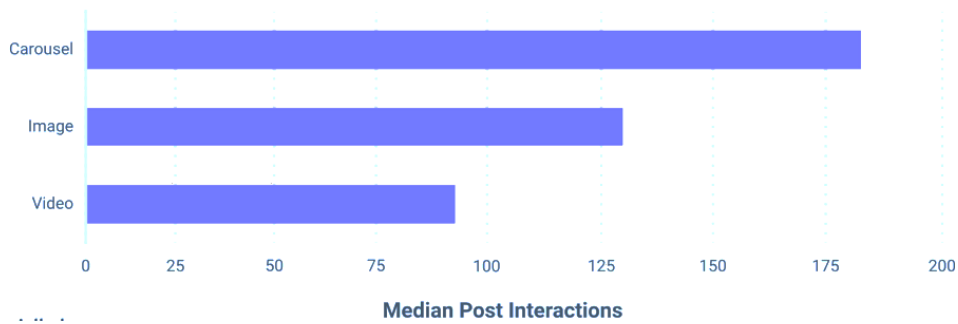


Chart 3 – Median Post Interactions (Socialbakers, 2021)

Median Interactions on Instagram

By Number of Hashtags Used by Brands Worldwide

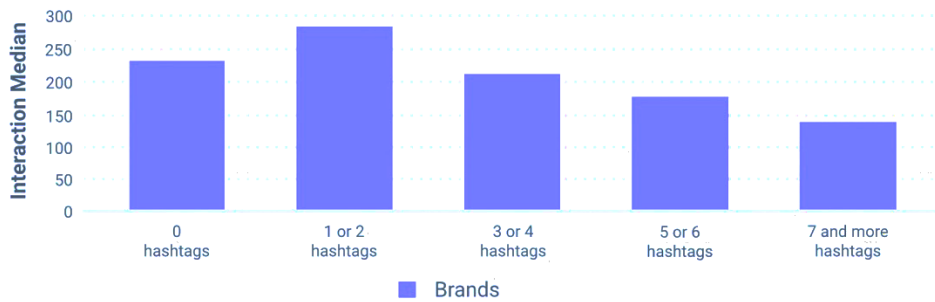


Chart 4 – Number of Hashtags (Socialbakers, 2021)

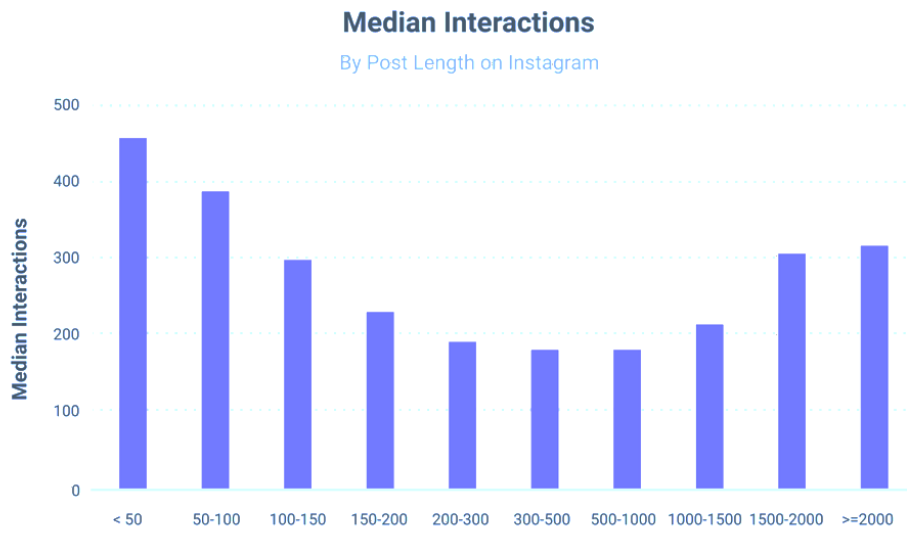


Chart 5 – Post Length (Socialbakers, 2021)

Annex G

Annex G.1 Online Survey

The impact of Covid-19 on event management and how they are tracking the situation: A social media marketing plan for RConcept

I am a student of the Master in Marketing at ISCTE Business School and I am currently writing my thesis. Therefore, I need your help to answer the following questionnaire. My thesis consists of a Social Media Marketing Plan for an event agency, which is facing some challenges due to Covid-19. For this reason, this questionnaire aims to study the perceptions and behaviors regarding Events and the use of Social Media. Responses will be treated confidentially and anonymously. The answer to this survey will not take you more than 5 minutes. Thank you for your cooperation and participation.

*Obrigatório

Habits and attitudes regarding events during Covid-19

Event definition:

Consider an event an occurrence with an audience, around a common goal, in a certain location and time (e.g. music festival, birthday party, school seminar...)

Before the Covid-19 did you used to attend events? *

Yes

No

Since the beginning of the pandemic, have you... *

	Yes	No
...physically attended an event?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...digitally attended an event?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

On a scale of 1-10, how much are you worried about attending an event because of Covid-19? *

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Nothing worried Very worried

Right now, what are your biggest concern(s) regarding physical events? *

- Fear of getting Covid-19
- Crowds / People that don't respect the distance measures
- Concern that the spaces are not disinfected
- Fear of being so stressed with the virus that I don't take advantage of the event
- I'm not worried, I feel comfortable going to an event
- Outra: _____

Did you feel that by being restricted at your house, the use of online technologies has... *

Seleccionar ▼

What is your opinion about virtual events? *

- More innovative
- I like the idea of attending an event and being in the comfort of my house
- Makes me feel safer (Covid-19)
- It's more sustainable and preserves the environment
- I think will be the future
- Nothing replaces face-to-face interactions
- Outra: _____

Are you present on social media? *

- Yes
- No

Social Media Use

Select the social media platform(s) where you have an active profile: *

- Facebook
- LinkedIn
- Instagram
- Twitter
- YouTube
- Google+
- TikTok
- Outra: _____

Which social media do you use most?

Seleccionar ▼

Time spent on every visit on Social Media? *

- Less than one hour
- 1-2 hours
- More than 2 hours

Social media for business

Do you think companies should be on social media? *

- Yes
- No

Why (Only for the ones who answered "Yes")?

- To become well-known
- To create awareness
- To communicate and engage with customers
- To post information about their products and services
- To increase brand exposure
- To increase web traffic
- To gain market exposure
- To acquired new customers
- To interact with their target
- Outra: _____

Which type of content(s) do you prefer a company to post? *

- Images (any visual object that's modified or altered by a computer)
- Videos
- Photos (anything taken by a camera)
- New services information
- Upload status
- Outra: _____

How active do you think a company should be on social media? *

- Less than one post a day
- Just 1 post a day
- 2 posts a day
- Between 3-5 posts a day
- More than 5 posts a day

Have you already unfollowed a company because it posted too much? *

- Yes
- No

What kind of content(s) do you follow on social media? *

- Fashion
- Sports
- Food
- Entertainment (Music, TV shows...)
- Events planners
- Influencers (Bloggers, actors, models, artists...)
- Outra: _____

Social Media and the Event Industry

Do you follow event agencies on Social media? *

- Yes
- No

Why do you follow event agencies on Social Media? (Only for the ones who answered "Yes")

- To be updated about next events
- To know better their services
- To be able to easily contact the agency
- Interest to use their services in the future
- Because I like the agency
- To receive entertaining content
- Current customer
- Outra: _____

Why don't you follow event agencies on Social Media? (Only for the ones who answered "No")

A sua resposta _____

If you want to go to an event, where will you search for it? *

- Social networks (Facebook, Instagram...)
- Blogs
- Content communities (YouTube...)
- Search engines (Google, Internet Explorer...)
- Companies' websites
- Offline methods (word-of-mouth)
- Outra: _____

Which platform(s) do you...

Facebook LinkedIn Instagram Twitter Youtube Google+ TikTok

... think most influences your decisions about attending an event?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

... think works best to catch your attention towards an event?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

... use to interact with the companies you follow?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

... use to get the most valuable information about products or services?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------	--------------------------

If you want to do an event, where will you look for an event agency to plan it? *

- Social networks (Facebook, Instagram...)
- Blogs
- Content communities (YouTube...)
- Search engines (Google, Internet Explorer...)
- Companies' websites
- Offline methods (word-of-mouth)
- Outra: _____

In which social media you will look for an event agency to plan it if you have to do a... *

	Facebook	LinkedIn	Instagram	Twitter	YouTube	Google+	TikTok
corporate event (e.g. seminar)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
social event (e.g. birthday party)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
children's event (e.g. workshop for kids)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What type of content(s) would you like to see on the web page of an event agency? *

- Information about their services
- History, mission and vision of the company
- Portfolio of events
- Chat to make questions
- Budget request for an event
- Institutional video
- Social media information
- Main clients (e.g. MEO)
- Outra: _____

Personal Info

Gender? *

- Male
- Female

Age? *

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55 or older

Education Level? *

- Elementary school
- High school diploma
- Technical-vocational school diploma
- Bachelor degree
- Post Graduate diploma
- Masters degree
- Doctoral degree
- Outra: _____

Professional Situation? *

Student

Employed by others

Self-employed

Unemployed

Housewife

Retired

Outra: _____

Annex H.

Annex H.1 Survey Results Analysis

Since the beginning of the pandemic, have you physically attended an event?

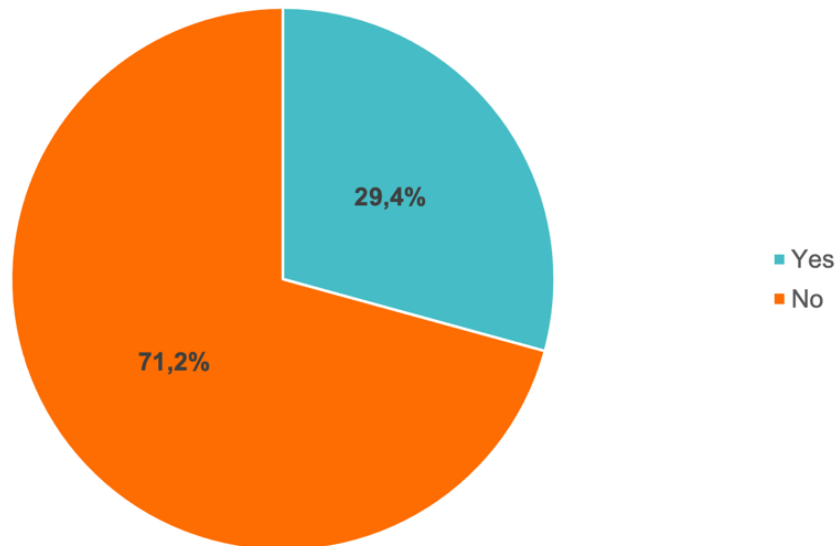


Chart 1 - Habits and attitudes regarding events during Covid-19 (own elaboration)

Since the beginning of the pandemic, have you digitally attended an event?

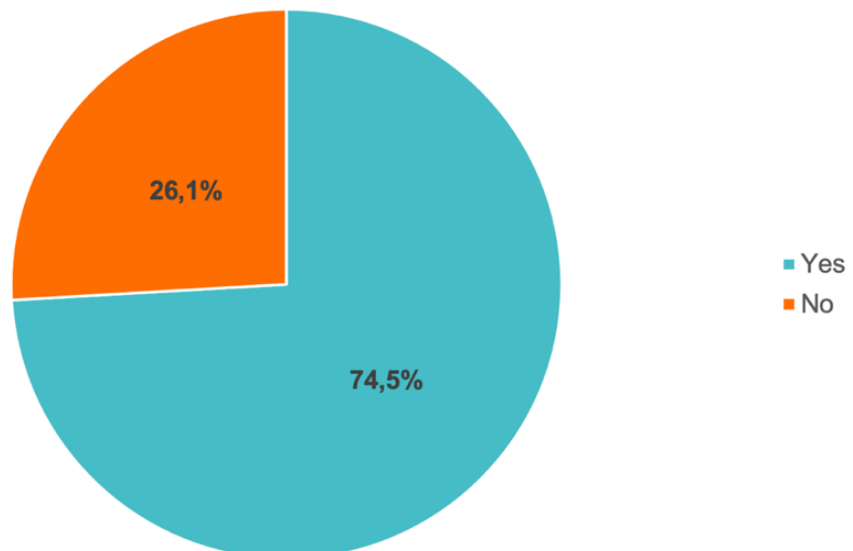


Chart 2 - Habits and attitudes regarding events during Covid-19 (own elaboration)

On a scale of 1-10, how much are you worried about attending an event because of Covid-19?

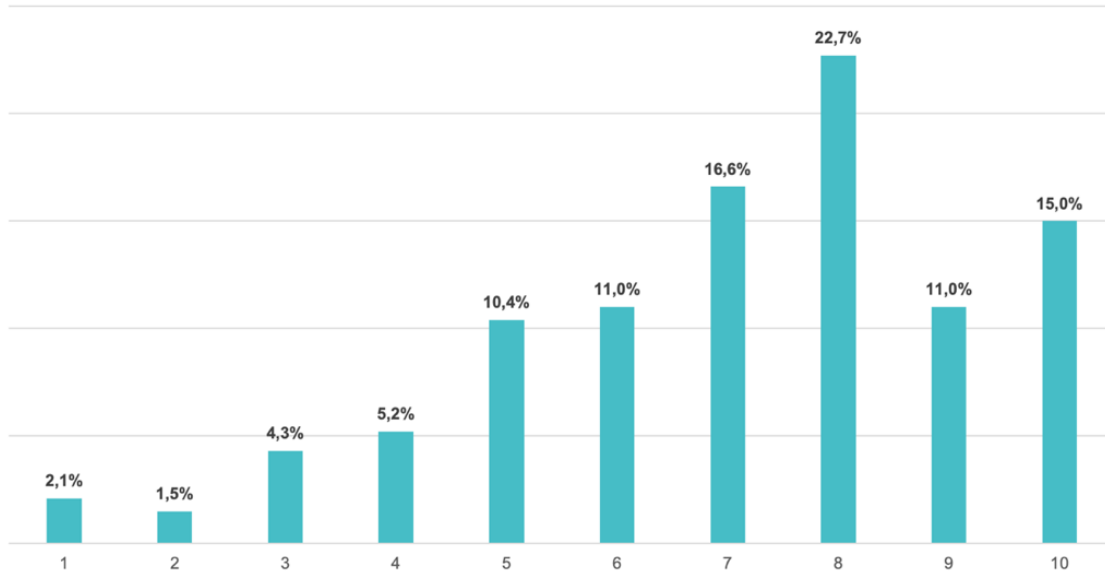


Chart 3 - Habits and attitudes regarding events during Covid-19 (own elaboration)

Right now, what are your biggest concern(s) regarding physical events?

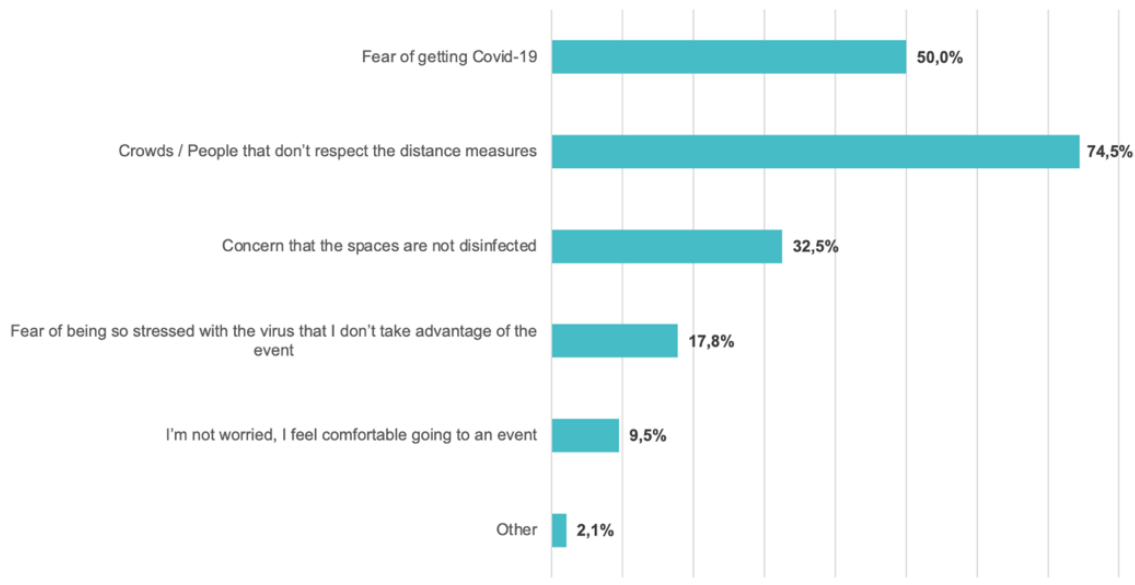


Chart 4 - Habits and attitudes regarding events during Covid-19 (own elaboration)

Did you feel that by being restricted at your house, the use of online technologies has...

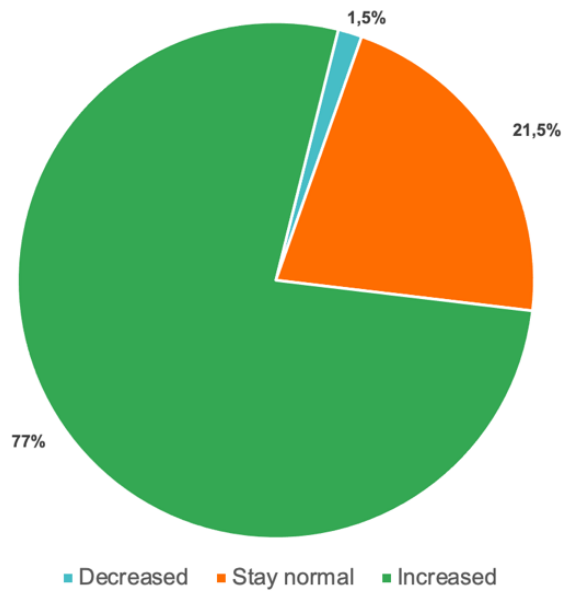


Chart 5 - Habits and attitudes regarding events during Covid-19 (own elaboration)

What is your opinion about virtual events?

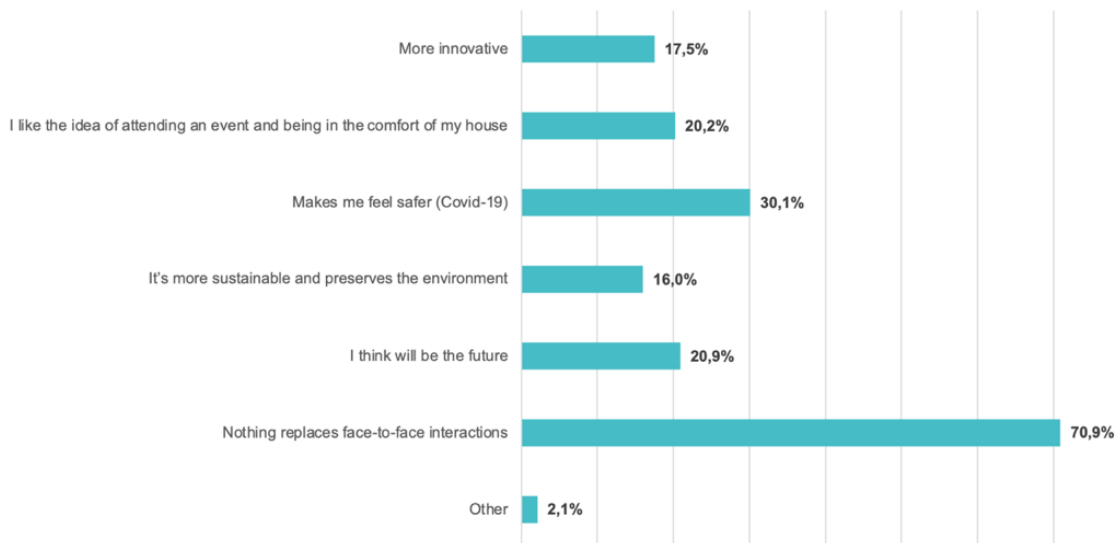


Chart 6 - Habits and attitudes regarding events during Covid-19 (own elaboration)

Do you think companies should be on social media?

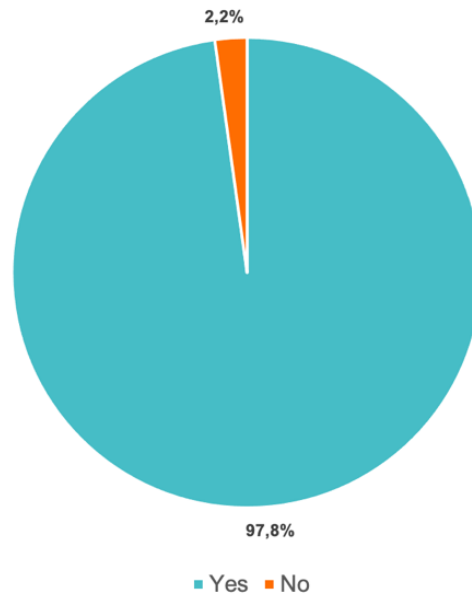


Chart 7 - Social media for business (own elaboration)

Why (Only for the ones who answered "Yes")?

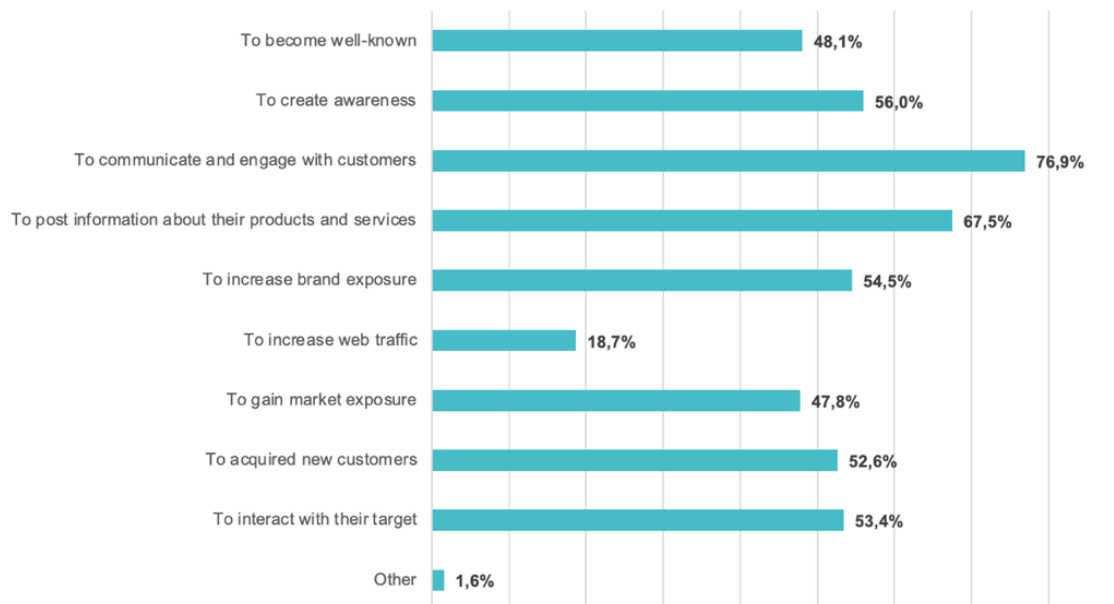


Chart 8 - Social media for business (own elaboration)

Which type of content(s) do you prefer a company to post?

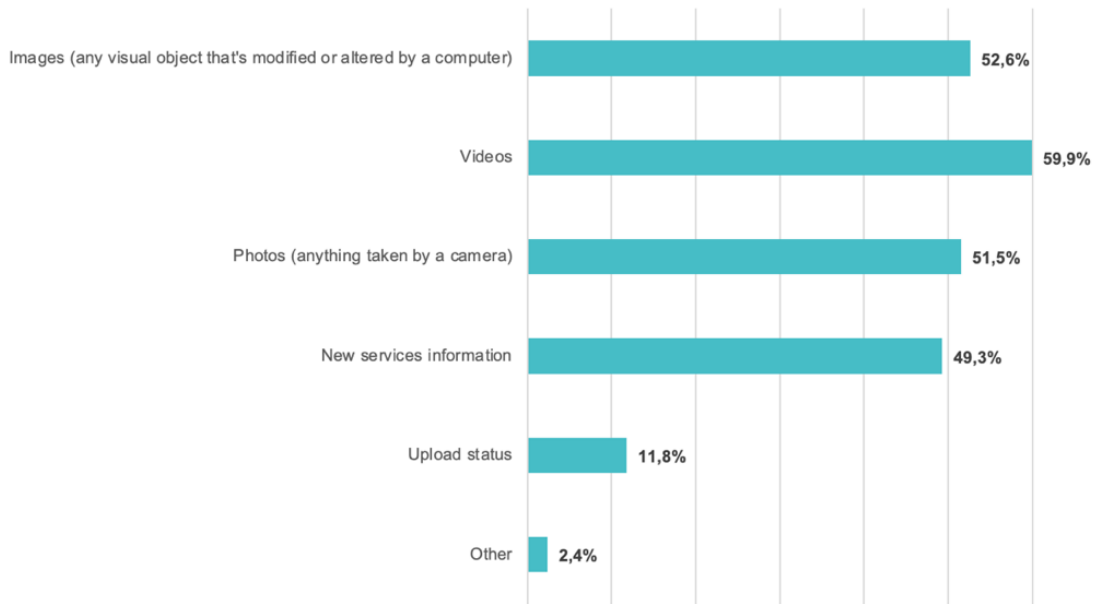


Chart 9 - Social media for business (own elaboration)

How active do you think a company should be on social media?

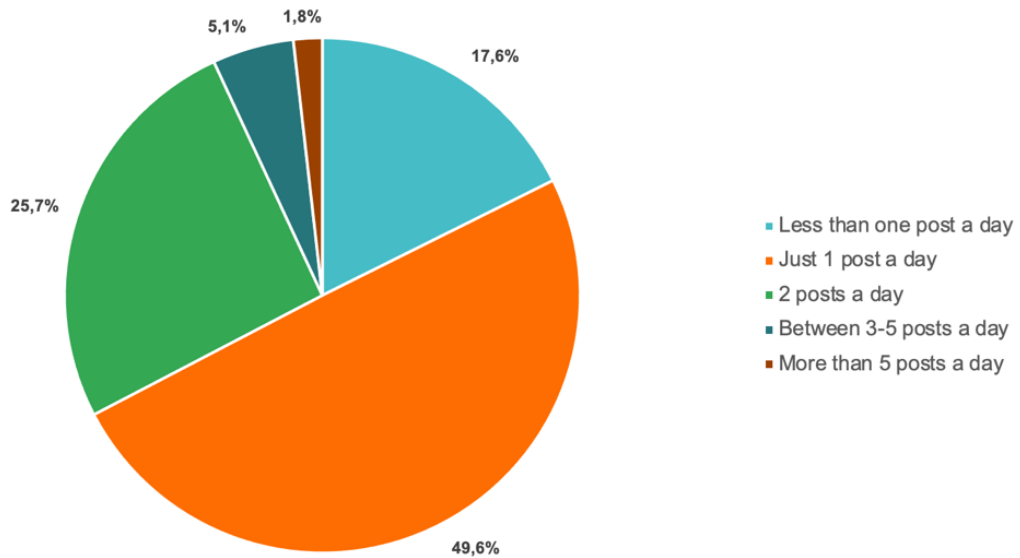


Chart 10 - Social media for business (own elaboration)

Have you already unfollowed a company because it posted too much?

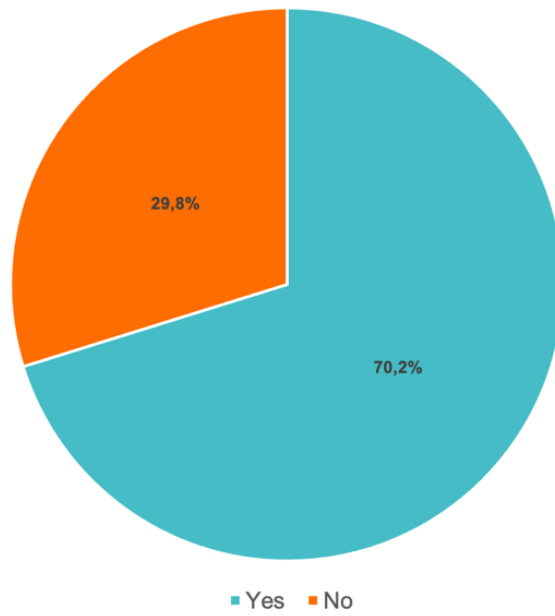


Chart 11 - Social media for business (own elaboration)

Do you follow event agencies on Social media?

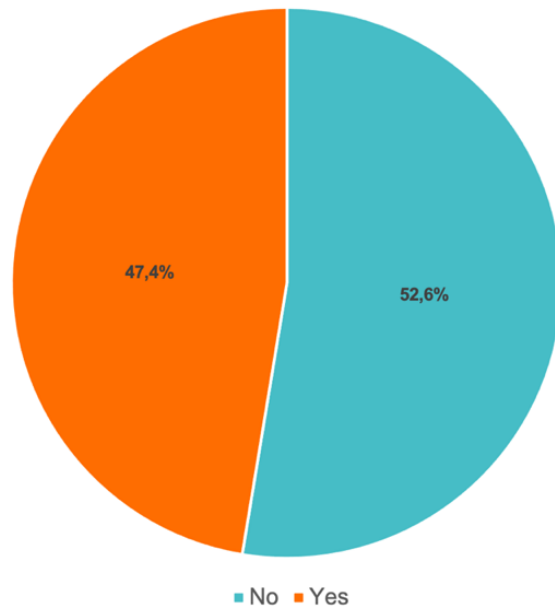


Chart 12 – Social media and the event industry (own elaboration)

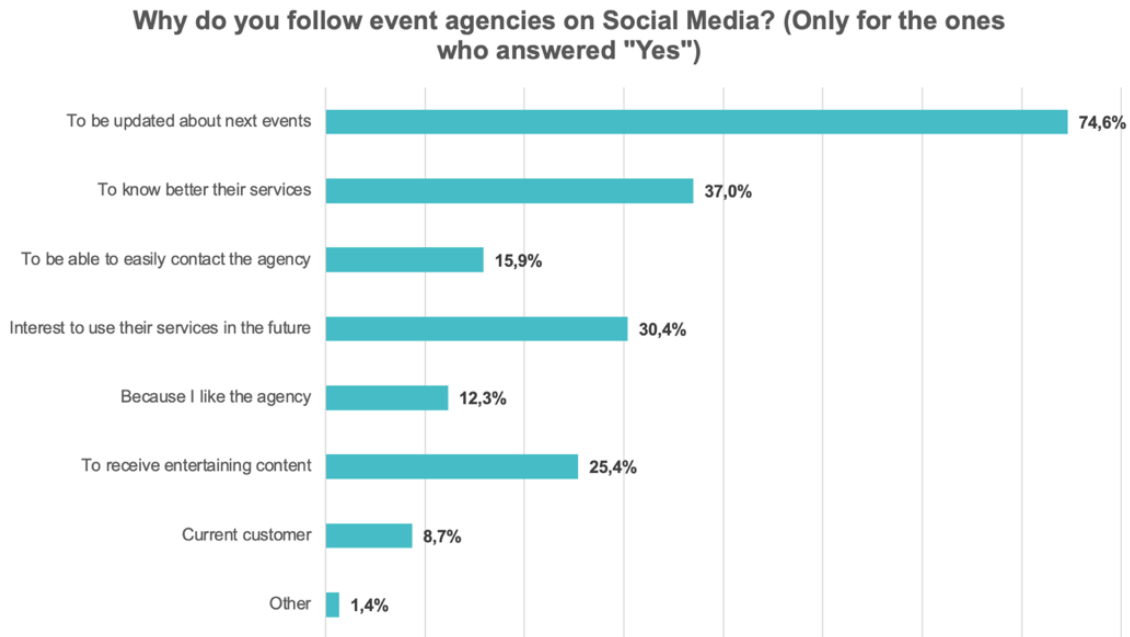


Chart 13 – Social media and the event industry (own elaboration)

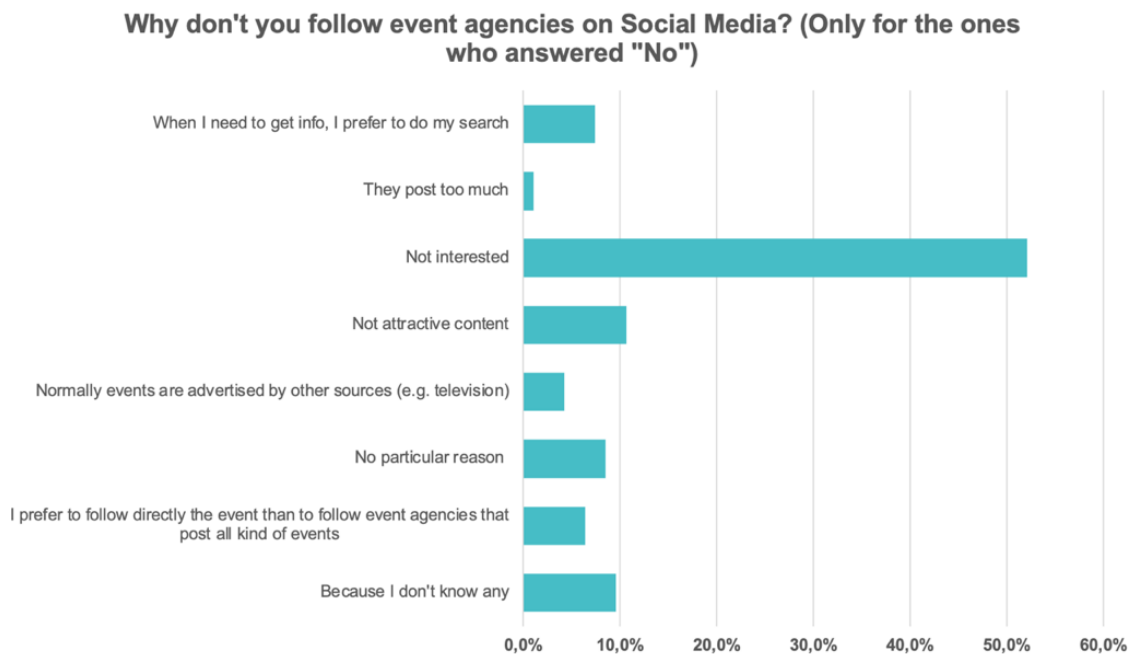


Chart 14 – Social media and the event industry (own elaboration)

If you want to go to an event, where will you search for it?

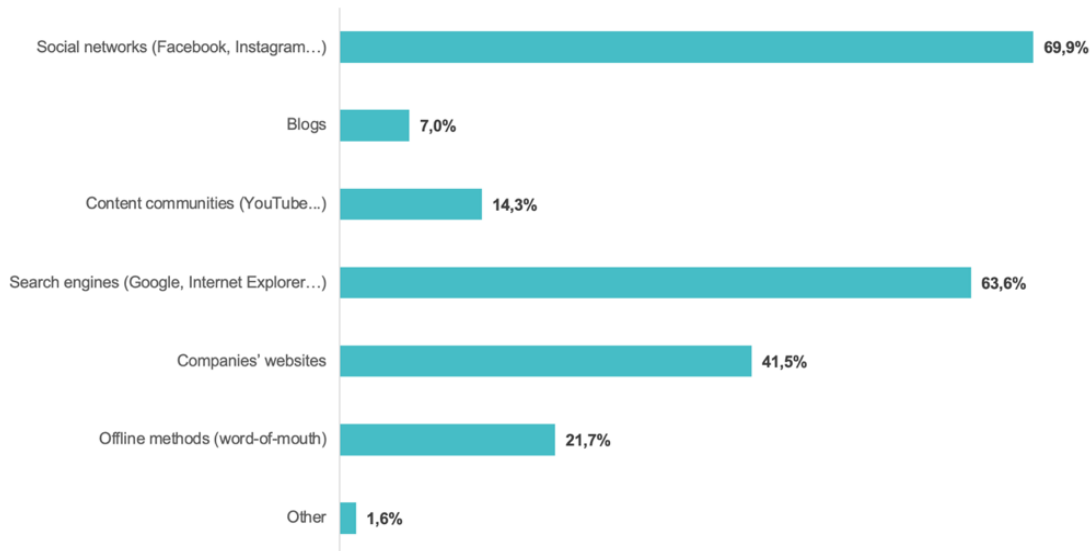


Chart 15 – Social media and the event industry (own elaboration)

Which platform(s) do you think most influences your decisions about attending an event?

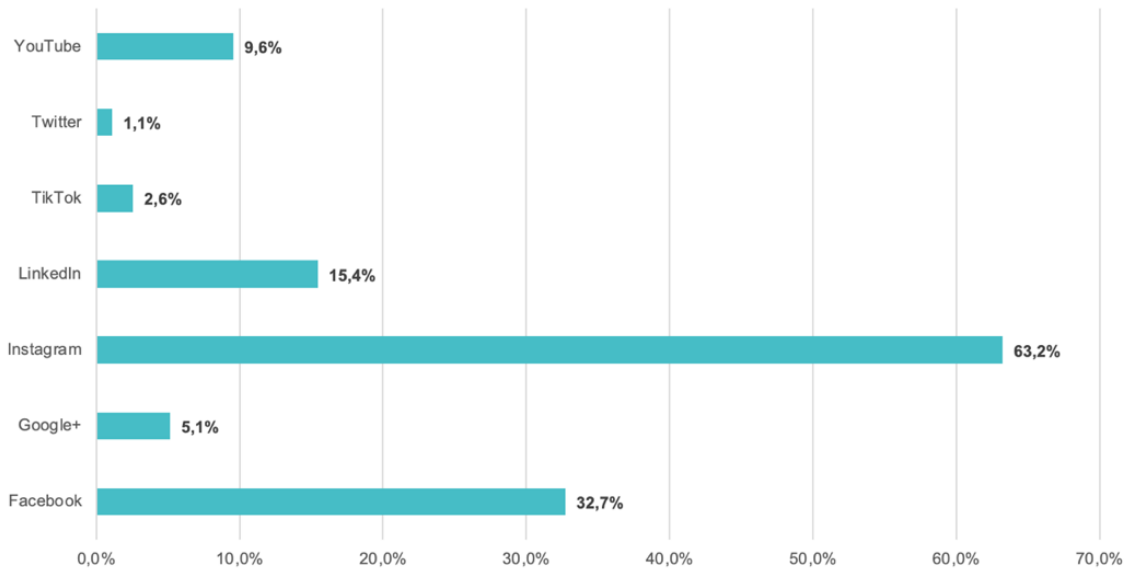


Chart 16 – Social media and the event industry (own elaboration)

Which platform(s) do you think works best to catch your attention towards an event?

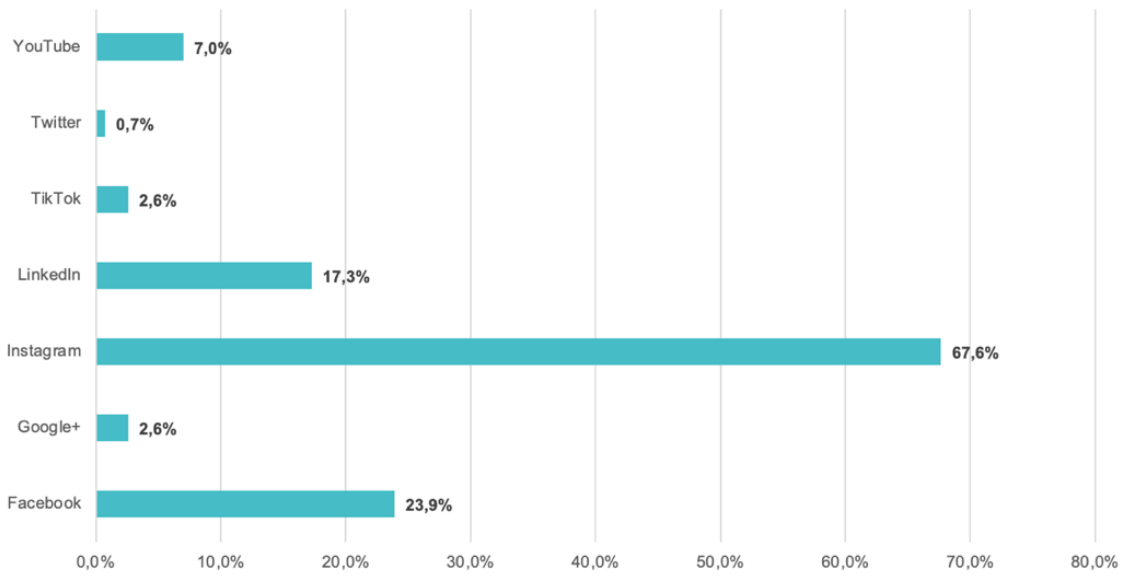


Chart 17 – Social media and the event industry (own elaboration)

Which platform(s) do you use to interact with the companies you follow?

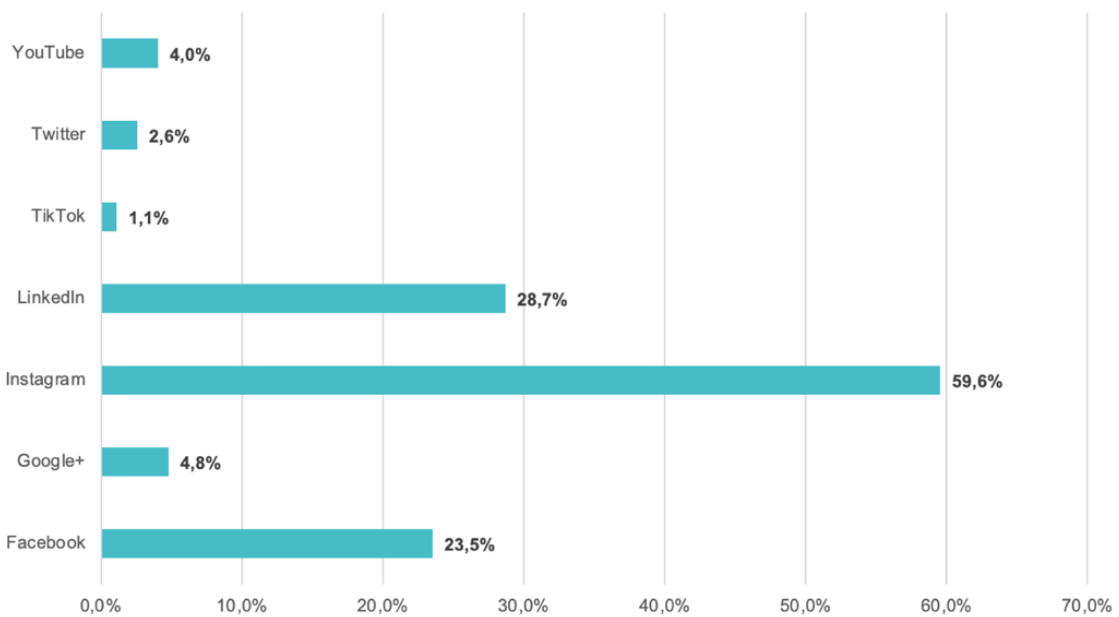


Chart 18 – Social media and the event industry (own elaboration)

Which platform(s) do you use to get the most valuable information about products or services?

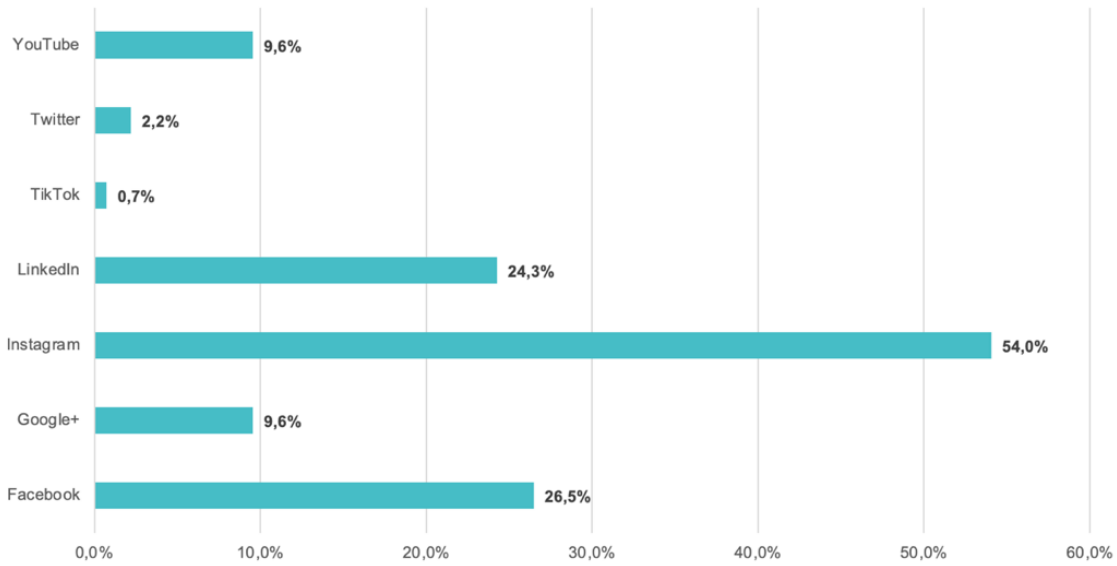


Chart 19 – Social media and the event industry (own elaboration)

If you want to do an event, where will you look for an event agency to plan it?

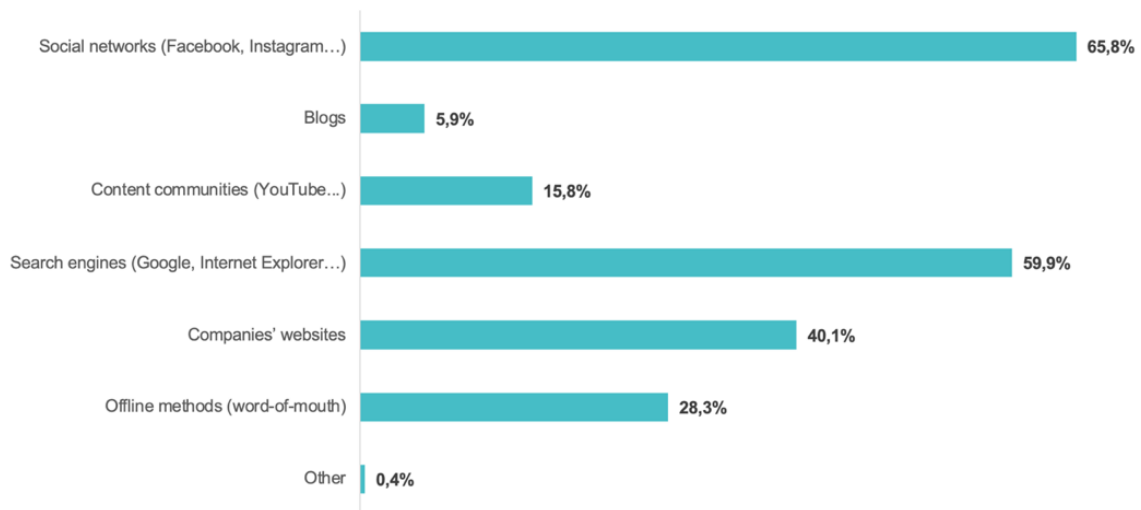


Chart 20 – Social media and the event industry (own elaboration)

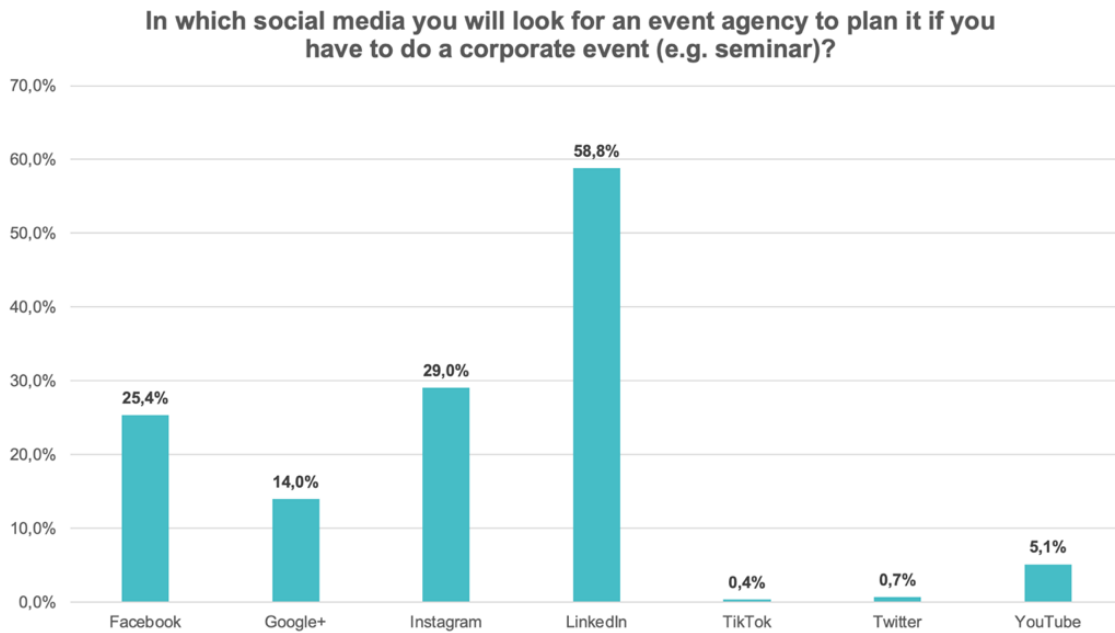


Chart 21 – Social media and the event industry (own elaboration)

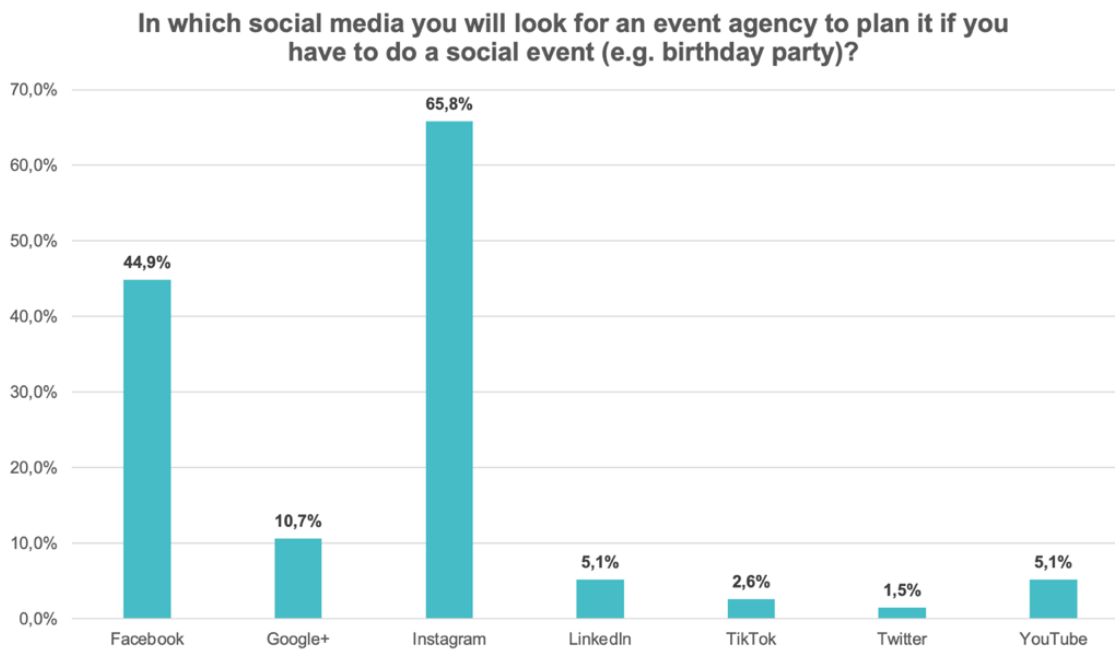


Chart 22 – Social media and the event industry (own elaboration)

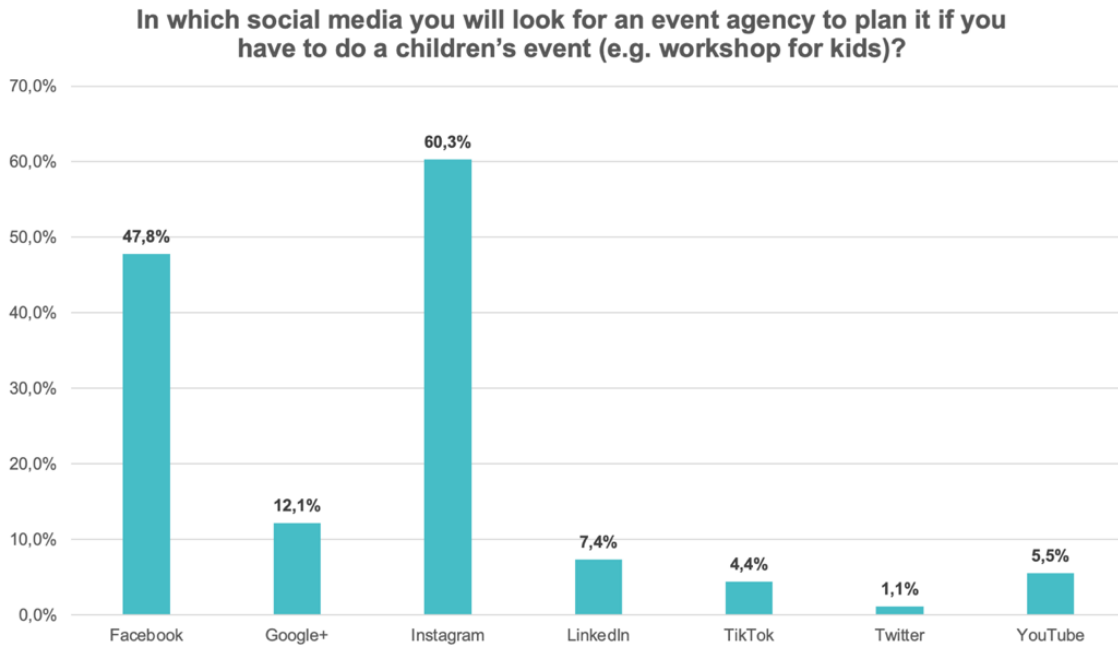


Chart 23 – Social media and the event industry (own elaboration)

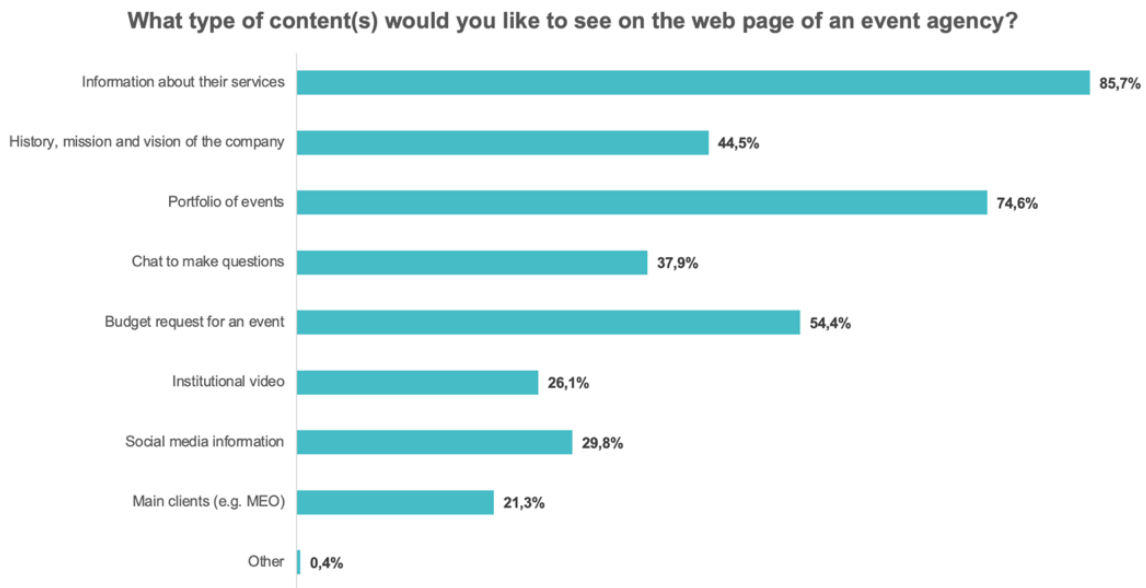


Chart 24 – Social media and the event industry (own elaboration)

Annex I.

Annex I.1 Schedule and budget for the Social Media Plan (own elaboration)

Communication Actions	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Budget
Training													200€- 250€
Instagram													-
Influencers													350€- 700€
Giveaways													-
Facebook													-
Paid Ads													200€- 250€
LinkedIn													-
Total													750€- 1200€