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Change or fail? Small business survival and digital marketing strategies during Covid-19 pandemic.

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Master in Marketing

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PhD Prof. Daniela Langaro da Silva do Souto, Assistant Professor,
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November, 2022

BUSINESS
SCHOOL

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Abstract

Purpose - Covid-19 has brought a paradigm shift, many small businesses have gone bankrupt, and many others have not known how to take advantage of the digital world to survive and succeed. Seeking to investigate this case, particularly in Portugal and in the Fashion and Handicraft sector, we could see a pattern of digital strategies successfully used by real companies and would come closer to defining the future of digital marketing in the small business sector.

Design/methodology/approach - The research employs an interpretative paradigmatic positioning, using the deductive method through qualitative analysis. The research object of this study are the answers of 23 small enterprises owners in Portugal, of the fashion and handicrafts sector, who were interviewed with the aim of analysing the digital marketing strategies currently in place related to providing access to the company, engaging the audience, personalising the offer, connecting with the audience and inviting consumers´ collaboration.

Findings – The findings suggest that the identified set of digital strategies found in the literature can be employed by small enterprises, leading to better performance, both financially and socially. It analyzed ways of putting them into practice, their advantages, negative aspects and how they all connect to the consumer. The digital strategies most used by SME's are social media and the use of a website, and they are one of the most effective. The use of product configuration software and CRM (Customer Relationship Management) were proven to be the least used and therefore least effective by SMEs.

Originality/value – As a recent topic, it doesn't have many studies on digital strategies when it comes to small enterprises. Intercepting what was found in the literature with the answers of these small company's owners creates a practical and real model of what happens with its use. The contributions of this study could help SME companies to improve their digital marketing strategies and brings another point of view in terms of academic contribution.

Keywords: Digital strategies; Covid-19; Digital Marketing; Innovation; SME´s; Social media.

JEL Classification System: Marketing (M31)

Resumo

Objetivo - Covid-19 trouxe uma mudança de paradigma, muitas pequenas empresas foram à falência e muitas outras não souberam tirar partido do mundo digital para sobreviver e ter sucesso. Procurando investigar este caso, particularmente em Portugal e no sector da Moda e Artesanato, pudemos ver um padrão de estratégias digitais utilizadas com sucesso por empresas reais e que se aproximariam da definição do futuro do marketing digital, no sector das pequenas empresas.

Conceção/método/abordagem A investigação emprega um posicionamento paradigmático interpretativo, utilizando o método dedutivo através da análise qualitativa. O objeto de investigação deste estudo são as respostas de 23 pequenos empresários em Portugal, do sector da moda e do artesanato, que foram entrevistados com o objetivo de analisar as estratégias de marketing digital atualmente em vigor relacionadas com o acesso à empresa, o envolvimento do público, a personalização da oferta, a ligação com o público e o convite à colaboração dos consumidores.

Conclusões – Os resultados sugerem que o conjunto identificado de estratégias digitais encontradas na literatura pode ser utilizado por pequenas empresas, levando a um melhor desempenho, tanto financeiro como social. Foram analisadas formas de as pôr em prática, as suas vantagens, aspetos negativos e a forma como todas elas se ligam ao consumidor. As estratégias digitais mais utilizadas pelas PME's são as Redes Sociais e a utilização de um Website, destacadas como as mais eficazes. A utilização de software de configuração de produtos e CRM provou ser a menos utilizada e, portanto, menos eficaz pelas PMEs.

Originalidade/valor - Como tópico recente, não existem muitos estudos sobre estratégias digitais quando se trata de pequenas empresas. Intercetar o que foi encontrado na literatura com as respostas dos proprietários destas pequenas empresas cria um modelo prático e real do que acontece com a sua utilização. As contribuições deste estudo poderiam ajudar as PMEs a melhorar as suas estratégias de marketing digital e traz um outro ponto de vista em termos de contribuição académica.

Palavras-chave: Estratégias digitais; Covid-19; Marketing digital; Inovação; PME's; Redes Sociais

Sistema de Classificação JEL: Marketing (M31)

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1. Introduction

The world was caught off guard, with a virus that was said to exist only in China, appeared in Wuhan for the first time on November 17, 2019, in just three months affected the world, socially and economically (Porfírio, 2020). According to the Portuguese Government, in its press release of 26 March 2021, on the portal of the Portuguese Republic: "Portugal has gone from the first budget surplus achieved in democracy, of 0.1% in 2019, to a deficit of 5.7% of GDP in 2020, explained by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In April 2020, around a quarter of micro enterprises closed down temporarily, in contrast to 12% of large enterprises (OECD, 2020). The vast majority of companies (80%) experienced a significant drop in the level of sales compared to a situation without the pandemic, the SMEs in different sectors remained even more vulnerable to the economic complications from COVID-19 crisis given their smallness and limited resources (OECD, 2020). In this context of significant and lasting impacts on sales, it is expected that companies will seek strategies that make them more resilient to shocks (Sequeira et al., 2020).

For individuals and companies, this long-term “living with Covid” will require the recognition of a widened spectrum of “moving-on mindsets”, the opportunity for business leaders lies in understanding how these underlying needs and personal preferences are impacting shopper, lifestyle, and spending habits (Aronson, 2021).

The theme addressed concerns the digital marketing strategies used by SME´s. With the changes that have come with covid-19, many businesses will need to adapt to digital to survive. I seek to explore, and this will be my research question, which digital strategies SME use the most, which have been successful and why. I seek to investigate this case particularly in Portugal and in the fashion, handicrafts area. That way, we would be closer to defining the future of digital marketing in the small business sector. This study aims to fill the existing gap pointed out in the literature regarding rethinking how small businesses can use digital marketing strategies to their advantage. But also, what was learned from the pandemic, which helped small businesses to compete, and what future digital strategies might be. This fact will capture the attention of researchers, entrepreneurs, small business managers and policy makers looking for ways to recover economically from covid-19 efficiently and quickly.

1.2. Research Questions

1) What are the digital marketing strategies that SME use the most?

2) Which digital marketing strategies generated the most impact from the perspective of SME managers?

1.3. Research Outline

This dissertation consists of five chapters.

The first chapter is the dissertation introduction, where the research questions are named. The second chapter presents the literature review. Chapter three clarifies the conceptual model under study, with the research opportunity. Chapter four describes the research methodology that was adopted, depending on a sample, data collection and the interview model chosen. Chapter five discusses the empirical results, which were based on a review of scientific literature, as well as on the collection of experiences and testimonies of the chosen sample. Finally, chapter six concludes by presenting the overall results, contributions to existing theory, theoretical implications, management implications, limitations, and future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. **Defining Small Businesses**

Micro and small business, theoretically, could mean different things to different people across different landscapes, because of its subjective definitions, the key metrics for defining MSBs include the number of employees, and the value of fixed and/or financial assets (Owoseni et al., 2021). All studies on Small and Medium Enterprises are faced with the problem of its definition, this should be an unanimous concept that can be defined according to the general conditions of each country, region and each institution (Leone, 1991).

The definition provided by INE (National Statistics Institute) is quite precise, since the geographical area under study is restricted to the Portuguese national territory, the concept of Small and Medium Enterprises to be adopted in this dissertation will be the one recommended by the European Commission. Its classification followed the European Commission Recommendation that defines SMEs as enterprises with fewer than 250 employees, whose annual turnover does not exceed 50 million euros or whose annual net total assets do not exceed 43 million euros. This definition encompasses micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises. Small companies are distinguished from medium-sized enterprises by having fewer than 50 employees and an annual turnover (or total net assets) not exceeding 10 million euros (INE, 2010). In Portugal, Decree-Law No. 372/2007, of November 6, stipulates the following: In the SME category, a micro enterprise is defined as a company that employs fewer than 10 people and whose annual turnover or annual balance sheet total does not exceed €2 million.

In 2018, in Portugal, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises accounted for 99.906% of all enterprises, and the number of large enterprises was quite small, 0.094% (1199 in a universe of 1278164 enterprises), it should be noted that the number of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises was 1,127,285 in 2014 and 1,276,965 in 2018, there is an effective growth of around 13.28% (INE, 2019).

Company category	No. of employees	Annual Turnover	Total annual Balance
Medium	< 250	50 million Euros	43 million Euros
Small	< 50	10 million Euros	10 million Euros
Micro	< 10	2 million Euros	2 million Euros

Exhibit 1. *Micro, Small and Medium enterprise classification (European Commission, 2003)*

2.2. Covid-19 and its impact on Small Businesses

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is caused by SARS-COV2 and represents the causative agent of a potentially fatal disease that is of great global public health concern, person-to-person transmission of COVID-19 infection led to the isolation of patients that were subsequently administered a variety of treatments, extensive measures to reduce person-to-person transmission of COVID-19 have been implemented to control the current outbreak (Rothan & Byrareddy, 2020).

The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic in Portugal, in March 2020, led to the Portuguese government pronouncing a state of siege or state of emergency. This law gives the government the power to temporarily limit the freedom of citizens for the citizens' freedom for the common good, this state meant the closure of numerous commercial establishments and the limitation of entry of citizens to spaces that remained open during its validity (Decree approving the Constitution - Diário da República no. 86/1976, Series I of 1976-04-10 (1974).

Despite this, the declaration of a state of emergency in Portugal on 18 March 2020 meant that all non-essential commercial establishments were forced to close their doors, those that remained open were forced to follow strict hygiene rules and control the entrance of people in their spaces, this limiting situation contributed to many consumers resorting to digital channels to make their purchases (Meyer, 2020).

The restrictions imposed to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 outbreak have had more severe effects on SMEs than on larger and global firms because they have lower capital reserves, fewer assets and lower levels of productivity, even if firms had been developing their IT systems before, the lockdown speeded the process up, more and more SMEs are using information technologies to achieve better and better results, and those that use IT technologies are more resistant to external disturbances and are more able to survive (Dyduch et al., 2021). The largest exporters and the biggest players in global value chains - have closed some or all their cross-border trade, or else slowed it down, this has had major repercussions on many MSMEs, both as exporters and as users of imported inputs (UNCTAD, 2022).

However, it should be noted that SMEs are more flexible and adaptable than their larger counterparts because of their small size, their tendency to be privately owned, and their relatively flat hierarchical structures, all of which can be beneficial during a crisis. But on the other side, SMEs are generally less resilient compared to larger firms, meaning that they take longer to return (if at all) to ‘normal operations’ following a crisis (Juergensen et al., 2020). The lack of digitization, technology adoption, and limited online presence of MSEs has made the pandemic even more damaging for them; increasing MSEs vulnerability, especially for individuals and family businesses (Bartik et al., 2020).

Economic crises and times of uncertainty require quick responses from organizations to prepare innovative solutions and create new value for customers, what may seem a threat to one organization can be an opportunity for another (Barney et al., 2018). The current pandemic has shown how important digital resources are for a country's economy, networks, connectivity, data exchange, artificial intelligence as well as basic and advanced digital skills support the economy and facilitate the functioning of enterprises. One of the few positive economic effects of the pandemic has been the increased awareness of the importance of digitization on the part of SMEs (Gavrila & Ancillo, 2021). For most SMEs, the organization of work with the use of online tools has been of key importance (Oliveira et al., 2021). One of the biggest trends to emerge during the COVID-19 pandemic is small businesses going online and creates different opportunities to solve many challenges, for many small businesses, the internet remains a lifeline, helping them to stay afloat during the pandemic (Engidaw, 2022).

2.3. Finances and Access to Capital

The government announced the first support measures for companies and workers on March 9, a week after the first confirmed case of COVD-19, and a week before the main containment measures were adopted. Launched in late November 2020, the “Apoiar” program was an instrument to support the treasury of companies in sectors particularly affected by measures to combat the Covid-19 disease pandemic, ensuring and preserving their liquidity in the market and the continuity of their economic activity during and after the pandemic outbreak. (Portuguese Government, 2021). A dynamic program that has adjusted to the different realities, supporting more than 106,000 company projects, with a funding volume of around 1.2 billion euros, through European Union funds channeled to mitigate the strain on companies and ensure job retention. The last measure implemented, “apoiar rendas”, was launched in February 2021 and came to mitigate the impact of falls in activity and the weight of companies' fixed costs, supporting the payment of non-housing rents due (Portuguese Government, 2021).

However, some associations report that many companies are still waiting for decisions or payments from support systems, and small businesses complain about the associated excessive bureaucracy (Mamede et al., 2020).

On May 13, 2020, Jorge Pisco, President of the Portuguese Confederation of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (CPPME) in the Budget and Finance Committee spoke about how the lines of support for the economy are being made available, through banking, to companies. Addressed the fact Bank credit lines have not reached most small and medium enterprises, either by the "excessive bureaucracy" associated with the processes, or by the requirement of bank guarantees. *"The bank is not able to work with this segment of the economy. “The lines of credit have run out. But with whom? Who were the companies? The creation of the treasury*

fund was fundamental currently, a fund with zero interest cost and an extended grace period to meet the payment of salaries and fixed costs of the companies." (Parlamento, 2020).

2.4 Digital Transformation

Digitalization refers to the sociotechnical process of leveraging digitized products or systems to develop new organizational procedures, business models, or commercial offerings (Saarikko et al., 2020). One likely consequence of COVID-19 is the accelerated trend towards digitalization of business models, coupled with the shift of commercial activities from predominantly offline and brick-and-mortar outlets to online outlets, digital technologies such as websites, social media, smartphones, content-sharing platforms, blockchain, automation technology, robotics, and wearable devices have helped pave the way for businesses to engage effectively with innovation and R&D activities and exploit new market opportunities (Amankwah et al., 2021). Although digitization is not a new phenomenon, the challenges and opportunities that are associated are constantly changing, they opened new markets for new types of products and have transformed entire industries, dematerializing the products that had been commercialized. Providing consumers with solutions or models that are flexible to their needs, leads to a faster purchase decision (Almeida et al., 2020).

In Portugal, according to the Minister of Education, in 2030, about 80% of the population will have digital skills and 8% will be specialists in information and communication technologies. According to the National Digital Competencies Initiative, Portugal intends to position it- self on the top of European countries in digital competences by responding to three major challenges: the generalization of digital literacy, by stimulating employability and participation in internationalization networks for innovation and development (Governo de Portugal, 2021).

Digital transformation is critical for the competitiveness of SMEs, digital Innovation Hubs aim to regionally support companies in the development of new products, processes, or services, providing access to advanced technologies (Rissola & Sörvik, 2018). In Portugal, we can emphasize the government policies that have fostered innovation and the adoption of new industrial policies to create value-added products and services for international markets (Council of Ministers Resolution N. 112/2012 of 31 December 2012), and initiatives to encourage SME: "SME Digital", which encourages SMEs to use digital tools, to access new markets, better management and to make their relationship with customers and suppliers more efficient (Portugal Digital, 2018). The Action Plan for Digital Transition, decreed by the Portuguese Government, created under the scope of the RCM nº 30/2020, of April 21st, defined in its Pillar II - Digital transformation of the business fabric - as a priority measure, the promotion of a National Network of Digital Innovation Hubs to be developed in connection with competitiveness clusters and recognized technological interface centers, a network that will be

interconnected with the European Network of Digital Innovation Hubs, to be promoted by the European Commission under the European framework programs for 2021-2027. The Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs) are collaborative networks that include specific digital competence centers, aiming at the dissemination and adoption of advanced digital technologies by companies, especially SMEs, and Public Administration, through the development, testing and experimentation of these technologies. With the support of DIHs, SMEs will be able to access advanced digital skills, obtain specialized training, advice and support to access the necessary funding for their digital transition (Direção Geral das Atividades Ecónomicas 2022).

2.5 Digital Marketing

With the introduction of Web 2.0 there has been a great shift in marketing communications. Brands are no longer only controlled by their managers, but increasingly shaped by consumers (Christodoulides et al., 2012). Marketing is an administrative and social process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through the creation, provision, and exchange of products and value to others" (Kotler, 2003). The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines Marketing as “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large” (AMA, 2007). Digital marketing is a new technique in the field of online marketing by impacting consumers through a wide range of interaction channels, such as social media, mobile apps, blogs, emails, and even search engine optimizers (SEOs), aimed at closer communication in various forms that convey advertising to consumers (García et al., 2019), is the use of technologies to help marketing activities in order to improve customer knowledge by matching their needs (Chaffey, 2013). The Digital Marketing Institute defines digital marketing as “the use of digital technologies to create an integrated, targeted and measurable communication which helps to acquire and retain customers while building deeper relationships with them” (Smith, 2007).

Malesev (2021) concluded in their study around how digital marketing and social media are beneficial for SMEs, that an increasing number of customers choose to engage only online, and SMEs could exploit this preference by appearing in tune with these marketing and communication preferences. Doing so would help SMEs compete against larger competitors, who have established online presences but are exposed to more negative interactions and comments given their size. Proper adoption of digital and social media marketing strategies can provide a cost and efficiency advantage over traditional marketing strategies.

2.6 Digital Marketing Strategies

To understand the adaptation strategies associated with digital, will be used as research model, the digital marketing strategies as in Rogers (2011) consisting of five parts. *Acess:* The ability to connect to networks easily, flexibly, and effectively. *Engage:* The ability to find relevant and valuable content and experiences in networks. *Customize*: The ability to match or adapt those network experiences to unique customer needs. *Connect*: The ability to express oneself and communicate with other customers networks. And *Collaborate*: The ability to engage in purposeful action, with shared goals, in networks (Rogers, 2011).

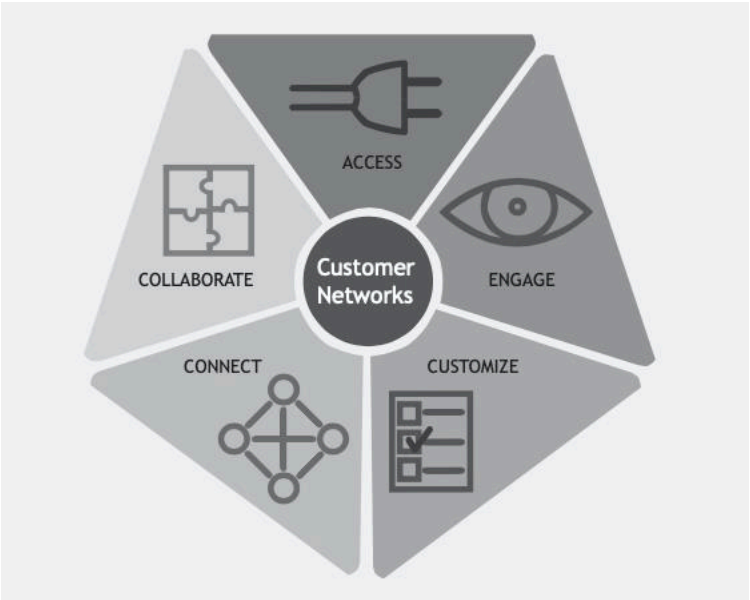

Exhibit 2. *AECCC model (Rogers, 2011)*

a) Access

Portuguese people between 16 and 64 years old with Internet access spend an average of 7 hours and 20 minutes a day online, with more than 30% of that time allocated to social networks (Marktest, 2022). Business, to compete, must find ways to provide customers an easier, faster, more pervasive connection to digital networks, like Nike and Life scan, that are connecting customers to their data by embedding digital access in more and more products, from cars to medical sensors to running shoes, and e-tailers such as Amazon.com and products like the Flip Video camcorder demonstrate how offering simpler and easier digital access can increase sales and market share. (Rogers, 2011) The digital technology is making wants into needs (Sheth, 2020). The purchase decision by the consumer is influenced by two main factors: speed and ease with which they can contact or reach the products they seek, based on theories of customer decision-making researchers have focused on three stages in the consumer's decision process: (1) information search, (2) purchase, and (3) aftersales

support (Berry et al., 2010). Today, networked customers use tools like search and social networking to find a much broader range of information, including information from other customers on blogs, product review sites, the stages of “action” and “loyalty” often take place in a digital space as well, with mobile shopping, online bookmarking, and a digital opt-in for further communications (Rogers, 2011). Many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have built web presence, but few have advanced further to embrace the Internet as an online direct sales channel, the usage of online direct sales channels among SMEs not only help improve SMEs’ technological competitiveness but help fuel their over- all business performance (Li et al., 2020).

Rogers (2011) identify several approaches for companies to succeed when it comes to access. First, Be On-Demand, companies must offer their services and content to customers when and where they want it, on their schedule, not yours. For example, with covid-19 many people have been forced to stay at home, and experience all the concerns that come with having to do so. Companies are acting to make home life more enjoyable and to ensure the well-being of their customers. Entertainment companies have released content ahead of schedule: the Walt Disney Company, for example, released the blockbuster Frozen 2 on its streaming platform, Disney+, three months ahead of schedule (Dore et al., 2020).

Harness the Cloud: Make your customers' data accessible to them from any device they use through Cloud Computing. For example, like Gmail, which keeps customers in the cloud (Rogers, 2011). Salesforce founder Mark Benioff offered small businesses a way to buy database and customer relationship management (CRM) capabilities without being a big financial investment. With visibility and easy access to data, everyone in your company can see how customers have been communicated with, what they bought with, when they last bought, what they paid, and more. CRM can help companies of all sizes drive business growth, and can be especially beneficial for a small business, where teams often need to find ways to do more with less (Benioff, 2013). Cloud computing-based customer relationship management (CRM) can not only reduce the cost of managing SMEs, but also improve SME business agility, and help SMEs create new business models and market opportunities (Xu, 2018). Companies combine data science with digital marketing strategies to sell products, generate brand awareness, or access new markets, the concept of data science is an interdisciplinary field that employs methods, processes, and algorithms to collect, identify, and extract knowledge from structured or unstructured databases (Saura et al., 2021). Every SME knows the value of a customer database as a sales and marketing tool, used correctly, the customer database is one of the potentially most effective devices for strengthening customer loyalty and driving sales (Lloyd, 2007). Customer databases provide accurate information about customers (including past, present, and future data), enabling SME´s to make the right decisions (Andreopoulou et al., 2012).

Go Mobile: Take advantage of how smartphones and devices allow us to be fully networked wherever we go (Rogers, 2011). The number of smartphone subscriptions worldwide today surpasses six billion and is forecast to further grow by several hundred million in the next few years. In 2022, there are 6,567 millions of smartphone subscriptions (Statista, 2022). Mobile-user banking interactions in the context of technology services create opportunities for positive experiences that can nurture trust, foster brand equity, and eventually lead to long-term relationship building (Jamshidi et al., 2018).

Whenever a customer plans to buy a new product the first place he/she approaches is about the product's web existence and its detailed information, businesses can decide to sell online by building their own website/app, by leveraging online marketplace/platforms, or both. There are digital marketing agencies or firms that manage the company's website and it´s branding via a digital platform (Sharma et al., 2020). People use mobile devices of different screen sizes. When designing a user interface, customize it for different screen resolutions using a tool like Media Queries. Remember to always have a website that is compatible with all major devices, both current and past, and that needs to load quickly (Forbes Business Council, 2021). In that sense, Online visual merchandising is the act of using visual elements in order to enhance the overall experience provided by online websites. Is all about creating an exciting and engaging webpage and designing the customer experience with it (Gopu, 2019). Website design is the navigational scheme and hierarchy used on a website together with its visual design, such as its visual appeal, innovativeness, aesthetics and use of colors and shapes (Dedeke, 2016). It plays even a greater role in online purchasing than the service provided to customers in traditional stores (Hasan, 2016).

Online platforms dedicated to e-commerce ("marketplaces") offer integrated solutions for SMEs at relatively low cost, allowing them to leverage positive direct and indirect network effects and offering complementary services. In OECD countries within the European Union, in 2019 on average 15% of all small enterprises sold their products online via their own website, while 6% sold on online platforms/marketplaces (OECD, 2021). The security measures of the websites should ensure that the user can shop easily. Users' trust is at the forefront (Menzheres 2018). Online retailers use many on-line tools and service elements that respond to unique customer queries for example free contact phone numbers, live chat tools, emails (ensuring that they are replied timely) (Zehir & Narcıkara, 2016). Voice search is another tool that allows immediate answer or recommendation, is the term given to the context in which a user performs a search through a virtual assistant using their voice (Rehkopf, 2019). Recent studies indicate that about 40% of North American consumers use voice assistants on their smartphones and 26% use smart devices at least once a week. Consumers are increasingly interested in hands-free technologies, something that is also a result of the fear caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Gartner, 2020). The term voice search is closely linked to digital

assistants. There are different virtual assistants, each of which draws information from different sources: Alexa and Cortana provide answers from Bing results, while Google Assistant and Siri are powered by Google's search engine (Andrienko, 2020).

However, it is also necessary for SMEs to bring traffic to their websites. Typical traffic targets include the quantity, quality and cost of traffic. Although a successful site is often referred to in terms of quantity, such as the number of visitors, it is the traffic quality that really indicates the success of each media channel. The Digital communication mix for traffic is made up of several inputs. Search engine marketing, which use different approaches to improve a site's listing in search engines including search engine optimization (SEO) and Pay Per Click (PPC). Online PR, manage your reputation online through supporting journalists and maximizing your representation on portals and social networks. Online partnerships, it use link building, affiliate marketing and online sponsorships to exploit the network effect of the Internet. Interactive advertising, that identify the elements of a successful online display ad campaign. Opt-in email, build traffic and relationships through opt-in email. Offline traffic building, create a balance between offline and online promotion techniques and Viral marketing (Smith & Chaffey, 2005).

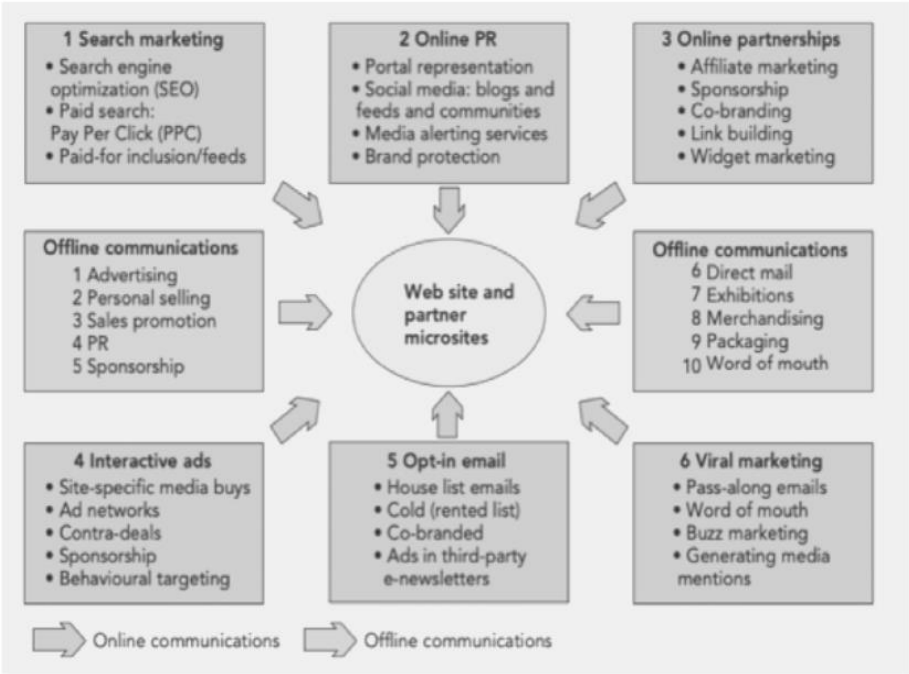

Exhibit 3. *Options available in the digital communications mix for traffic building. (Smith & Chaffey, 2005)*

Another access strategy is to use location awareness to improve communication and target your customers with more relevant interactions, mobile computers include geo-positioning

capability (via GPS satellite and other technologies), they also open the possibility for what are called location-based services (LBS), one company that does this is Uber. (Freedman, 2022). Hailing a ride from your phone relies on the power of location-based services, with location-based services, your ride-sharing app immediately knows where you are, the app then locates drivers near you on demand and gives you a quick ride to your destination (Freedman, 2022).

b) Engage

Companies can engage with their costumers if they become a source of valued content, every business needs to think like a media business, companies are engaging audiences by creating content that is useful for their core customers, by focusing on niche audiences and their interests are creating content that engages influential segments (Rogers, 2011).

Social media have provided new opportunities to consumers to engage in social interaction on the internet, a tested tool for achieving success through digital marketing is the use of word-of-mouth WOM on social media (Trusov et al., 2008). Branded social campaigns provide additional touch points to encourage ongoing interaction between the consumer and the brand story throughout the day, which can deepen consumer–brand relationships, help marketers uncover common themes in consumer feedback, and persuade consumers to engage with online content (Murdough, 2009). Marketers have several options within the social media landscape for branding including placing paid display advertising, participating in social networks as a brand persona, developing branded engagement opportunities for customer participation within social networks, and publishing branded content in social channels (Tuten & Solomon, 2013).

According to Eurostat (2020), more and more enterprises in the European Union (EU) are using social media to engage prospects and to create values. During the COVID-19 crisis, diversified attitudes and behaviors of structural equation modeling (SME) retailers were observed in using social media marketing that could have helped mitigate the adverse effects of this crisis on businesses (Salam et al., 2021). In social media, engaged consumers participate and share, participation may be passive involving simply consuming the social content or active including such behaviors as submitting consumer-generated stories (Hutton & Fosdick, 2011). Social media facilitate the social interaction of consumers, leading to increased trust and intention to buy (Hajli, 2014), facilitating word-of-mouth communication (Chen et al., 2011), significantly contributing to resolving a nagging challenge of effectively advertising their goods and services (Amoah et al., 2021), enables SMEs to relate with their consumers at the right time, directly at a lower cost, with higher efficiency (Casaló et al., 2020), and can compete with larger companies (Gomez et al., 2020). Social Media influence on business performance became especially obvious during the pandemic unlike to favorable

phase of the economic cycle when it was relatively low. For many companies, it seems to be necessary to work with social media and implement them in their strategy (Belás et al., 2021).

The increasing use of social media as a marketing tool has affected the fashion industry as well, and it might even be safe to say that the fashion industry has already embraced social media as one important marketing platform to reach their customers online, as well as to reignite brand passion and customer loyalty (Wright Lee, 2009). Companies will have the opportunity to increase their brand equity, brand association, and perceived quality (Yan, 2011). Instagram has established itself as the fastest growing social network in Spain and Portugal, with 45% and 50% penetration (Marktest, 2017). With over 800 million monthly users, has become one of the most popular social networking sites utilized by individuals and businesses alike (Adegbola et al., 2022). This presents an opportunity for businesses to engage with consumers and increase brand awareness, interest, loyalty, and profit (Brodie, 2011). Facebook users gained satisfaction from the ability to find updated information about brands that they like (Patterson, 2011). Twitter use by entrepreneurs can increase opportunities to interact with their customers (Fischer & Reuber, 2010). Linkedin provide a way for firms to connect their corporate identity with their corporate audiences (Prodromou, 2015), attracts millions of firms with about 99% of them being classified as SMEs, and offers a variety of ways to expand your network by finding and connecting with relevant professionals in your industry (Burt, 2021).

TikTok is one of the most used social media platforms, it has 1 billion active monthly users in 141 countries (Statista, 2022). According to one study, 49% of users said they bought a product after seeing it promoted on TikTok (Lundstrom, 2021). TikTok's unique ability to bring shared experiences to life offers brands a world of creative opportunities, consider the impact of showing—not just telling—how a brand's products/services solve consumer pain points or provide value, through the influential creators who have mastered the intricacies of the platform (Wiley, 2022).. TikTok provides marketers with a level playing field when it comes to reach and engagement, unlike social media platforms such as Instagram or YouTube, TikTok accounts with zero followers can get millions of views on a new video thanks to the viral nature of the algorithm (Battisby, 2021). TikTok marketing can help businesses: Increase brand awareness, build engaged communities, sell products and services, get feedback from customers and audiences, provide customer service and advertise products and services to target audiences (Hirose, 2022). Small businesses can do this through various strategies, such as creating authentic, relevant and informative videos, sharing user-generated content, considering paid advertising, researching and using the right hashtags and partnering with TikTok influencers (Medina, 2022).

Studies have indicated that several post characteristics such as interactivity (e.g., links, hashtags) and creative post formats (e.g., text, images, videos), in addition to message

content, influence customer interaction and engagement (De Vries et al., 2012). However, the proportion of companies using social media as a means of digital communication "increases with company size, ranging from 44% in companies with 10 to 49 employees, 57% in medium-sized ones, and 73% in large corporations (INE, 2019). Nevertheless, social media is about listening, participation and sharing, customers expect to be heard, listened to and taken notice of, which challenges SMEs to be genuinely customer centric, if a company can provide the best possible experience to its customers, those customers are likely to relate their experiences of dealing with the company on the web (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015).

Motivations that drove the use of social media or the reasons for SMEs to apply social media marketing were classified into four categories: Customer (what the customers wants, and needs are and how to satisfy them), Cost (not only the cost of products, but also the cost of the time and effort to get the products and the opportunity cost) , Convenience (Ensuring the product is available as conveniently as possible to each target costumer), and Communication (isn´t just about how a brand communicates with its customers, it's also about what the customers communicate to the brand, and how that information is used), which are the four elements in "4Cs" or "Marketing Mix" (Chen et al., 2021). In this study it was concluded Communication and Customer are the most focus in the motivation of social media marketing for SMEs and that through social media, it is accessible for SMEs to understand and attract valuable customers, communicate, and keep relationships with them in order to offer products or services which can satisfy them (Chen et al., 2021).

According to *Business Insider*, annual business investment in influencer marketing will reach $15 billion by 2022 (Schomer, 2019). A growing number of brands that recognize this new opportunity to reach their target markets are collaborating with social media influencers (Masuda et al., 2022). In terms of influencers on social media, most marketers use the definition by Brown & Hayes (2008): "Influencer is a third party who significantly shapes the customer's purchasing decision". Although everyone could be an influencer, especially on social media where "all have a voice", some are "more influential than others within a community". Social media influencers are those individuals who shape consumers' perceptions regarding a brand or product through photos, videos and other updates on social media platforms (Saima & Khan, 2021). Are common individuals who grow famous online for their knowledge and expertise on a specific topic such as food, fashion, technology, travel, education, reviews, music, movies, sports… (Lou & Yuan, 2019). The rise of fashion bloggers, individuals who provide fashion tips and introduce certain products and brands via their social media accounts and blog posts, caught the interest of fashion brands (Paton, 2014). What some brands found intriguing is that these Instagram personalities are effective in spreading messages about new products, starting and popularizing new trends and driving up sales (Dewey, 2014). Social media influencers have a huge number of followers in their social media;

thus, social media influencer could promote to and reach many consumers in a short time, the result is more effective than celebrity endorsement for small-and-medium-sized enterprises (SME) (Lokithasan et al., 2019).

Consumers are becoming more critical of the products/services offered by companies with the many choices they have, the existence of influencers is a bridge or communication medium that connects companies with consumers in the digital era (Hermawan, 2021). Influencers themselves are divided into two categories, namely micro-influencers and macro- influencers. Micro-influencers usually have less than 10,000 followers, this type of influencer is suitable for targeting potential consumers who are in certain locations, rather than reaching social media users globally (Hermawan, 2021). Some brands prefer mid-level micro-influencers because they believe they can be more authentic in their published posts, more accessible, have higher engagement rates and can be more cost-effective for brands that will endorse them (Wells, 2019).

Another aspect in terms of social media content creation that helps consumers make purchasing decisions is User-generated content or UGC, is any content about a brand created by a user of the brand designed to be shared with others (Tang et al., 2014). Is a promising alternative source for identifying customer needs (Timoshenko & Hauser, 2017). UGC includes electronic word-of-mouth, sharing of content among internet users via e-mails, forums, or social networks (Ho & Dempsey, 2010). *"Let's face it, not all online content is good, and only a handful is really great. Once your community starts generating great content, it's smart to reuse it across as many platforms as possible. While syndication is crucial, community content has real value, because you know it has value to the customer. That intersection of business and customer value is where you break through the noise and make memorable connections. After putting user-generated social reviews in the product purchase path, Dell Japan saw a 3x increase in revenue per visitor"* (Quintos, 2013). One company that has invested in UGC and succeeded is Farfetch, one of the most successful companies at a national and international level. In 2019, Farfetch implemented a new content experience on their site that allows people to shop selects and edits chosen by the global Farfetch community. This consideration of their community affirms the importance they see in it and helps their consumers to feel part of the brand. *"The new content experience on Farfetch allows people to shop selects and edits chosen by the global Farfetch community, sharing inspiration from around the world, updated daily, community content will bring to life Farfetch's unrivalled range of luxury fashion"* (Farfetch, 2019).

Particularly in marketing and management, storytelling has received increasing interest offline, especially in online communication, to convey brand values (Lundqvist et al., 2013). It creates desirable images and foster consumer-brand interaction and enables an efficient transmission of brand-related associations in consumers' minds, enhances their explicit and

implicit brand attitudes and increases the monetary value of the brand by enhancing consumers' willingness to pay a higher price (Karampournioti & Wiedmann, 2021). Rather than featuring solely factual product characteristics, storytelling focuses on conveying brand values through emotional content (Dessart, 2018). As an example, of a brand that successfully used storytelling, in the "Worn Wear" series Patagonia invites brand consumers to share about their outdoor adventures, their lives, and the stories their gear would tell if it could talk. Patagonia shows an old jacket — a jacket you can't even buy! A jacket from the 1980s. They don't tell you to buy a jacket, instead they do the opposite and tell you to keep the jacket you already have forever and reuse it a million times. They do this to show you the value of clothing that is made to last, which is part of Patagonia's core value system (Adams, 2014).

c) Customize

Networked customers are not looking for cookie-cutter experiences, identical content, and mass-produced products, especially in the digital realm. By giving them tools to customize products, services, and content to suit their needs and interests, businesses can add real value that will differentiate them from competitors and engage their customers more deeply. Personalized playlists allow brands like Nissan and media companies like Pandora and NPR to provide customers with exactly the content they are looking for (Rogers, 2011). Creating the right SME product and service package for certain customer segments is very important. Identification is needed for different customer segments, such as: different needs, different channels, different methods of interaction are used, different clients, and several aspects that can determine certain profitability (Fitriasari, 2022). With CRM, the Tescos and Amazons of this world were not only able to win new customers, clients, and users – they got lifetime value out of them. Let's take Apple ID as an example. If you've ever used iTunes (Apple's online music streaming service), you'll have an Apple ID – and if you've ever used an Apple device, you'll have had to register it using an Apple ID, too. (Binns, 2021). These unique IDs synchronise across devices, remember music and film selections, and provide personalised recommendations based on what's you've been watching or listening to, for the user, it offers convenience, and for Apple, it's a constantly updating data set, telling the company exactly what its customers like and allowing for effortless, targeted marketing (Binns, 2021). SMEs may also be able to build on their strength in CRM using social media technologies. Dynamic capabilities theory holds that unique organizational processes, must be combined with raw resources to create a recipe for sustained competitive advantage. (Harrigan & Miles, 2015)

In relations with the customer, it is very important to collect and use information about customers, their preferences, and likings, in a skillful manner, a good recommendation should be provided with customer convenience in mind, providing a list of products that customers most want can help customers find products quickly and conveniently (Hung, 2005). Most

recommendation systems fall into two major categories: a content-based approach and a collaborative filtering approach. In the content-based approach, it recommends products or services that are like what the user has been interested in the past (Lang, 1995). In the collaborative filtering approach, it recommends products or services to customers based on other customers with similar interests (Shardanand & Maes, 1995).

Many of today's auto manufacturers, such as BMW and Toyota Motor Co, build to predetermined individual customer specifications, in the computer industry, Dell Computer allows customers to configure a unique computer, have it manufactured to their needs, and delivered within a few days, at prices comparable, or better than pre-configured computers in retail outlets, these examples illustrate the critical advantage of mass customization; meeting the unique, individual needs of customers (Richard et al., 1998).

Salvador & Piller (2009) propose three fundamental capabilities for mass customization: Solution space development, robust process design, and choice navigation. First, solution space development refers to identifying the product attributes along which customer needs diverge. To develop this capability will require: Innovation toolkits, as a software that allows large groups of customers to translate their preferences into unique product variants, allowing each taker to highlight possibly unmet needs. Virtual concept testing, an approach to efficiently submit scores of differentiated product concepts to potential customers by creating and evaluating virtual prototypes, and finally, customer experience intelligence, a tool for continuously collecting data on customer transactions, behaviors, or experiences and analyzing that information to determine customer preferences. By systematically analyzing that information, managers can learn much about customer preferences.

Second, Robust Process Design, which means Reuse or recombine existing organizational and value-chain resources to fulfill a stream of differentiated customer needs. To develop this capability, it is necessary Flexible automation, this means, automation that is not fixed or rigid and can handle the customization of tangible or intangible goods. The company can serve different customer requirements by appropriately recombining the process segments, without the need to create costly ad-hoc modules. BMW’s Mini factory, for instance, relies on individual mobile production cells with standardized robotic units. BMW can integrate the cells into an existing system in the plant within a few days, thus enabling the company to adapt quickly to unexpected swings in customer preferences without extensive modifications of its production areas. Process modularity, segmenting existing organizational and value-chain resources into modules that can be reused or recombined to fulfill differentiated customers' needs. And Adaptive human capital, by developing managers and employees who can deal with new and ambiguous tasks (Salvador & Piller 2009).

“Learning to choose is hard, learning to choose well is harder, and learning to choose well in a world of unlimited possibilities is harder still, perhaps too hard, choose less and feel better” (Schwartz, 2004). In such situations, customers might postpone their buying decisions and, worse, classify the vendor as difficult and undesirable, to avoid that, a company can provide choice navigation to simplify the ways in which people explore its offerings, it supports customers in identifying their own solutions while minimizing complexity and the burden of choice. (Salvador & Piller 2009). In this sense, it is necessary to develop several approaches, such as Assortment matching, refers to software that matches the characteristics of an existing solutions space (that is, a set of options) with a model of the customer's needs and then makes product recommendations. Fast-cycle, trial-and-error learning, an approach that empowers customers to build models of their needs and interactively test the match between those models and the available solutions. And finally, Embedded configuration, products that "understand" how they should adapt to the customer and then reconfigure themselves accordingly (Salvador & Piller 2009).

Since many small and medium enterprises (SMEs) produce high variety in lower volumes, mass customization is intuitively an attractive business strategy, the SMEs typically perceive the individualization trend as an opportunity to produce more customized craft products, in the past world of mass production, their justification for existence were their responsiveness to the individual needs of the customers who could not have their needs satisfied by the mass-produced products, the core of these SME is not as much the product as it was the deep understanding of transforming a customer need into a specific “built to order” product (Mukherjee, Smith & Burton, 2021). Product marketers are increasingly using pre-ordering as a promotional tool for various products and new startup ventures, google trends show an overall 46.21% increase in pre-ordered products in 2020 when compared to 2019 (Mukherjee et al., 2021). This competence, some SMEs rely on, will create an advantage on the growing market for mass customized products, the key for SMEs to achieving the flexibility, agility and effectiveness needed on a competitive market for customized products is internal industrialization of information processing (Svensson & Barfod, 2002). One example of where the tools of mass customization have become more accessible is product configuration software, which is used for clarifying customer requirements and translating these into a product specification from which a product can be manufactured, this means that product configuration is no longer only for large companies but can now be implemented by SMEs as well (Taps et al., 2017). We have repeatedly seen SMEs being cursed by the devastating force of industrialization, supermarkets replace small shops, local diaries replaced by a monopoly; global players have bought local manufacturers, the threat for the SME will typically be a mass production company moving into the lucrative market for customized standardization products, by adding value through small but well-placed product variation (Eastwood, 1996).

d) Connect

When it comes to connecting it is necessary for companies to become part of their customers' conversations, one way to do this is through various platforms, such as social media (Rogers, 2011). Customers are constantly sharing ideas and opinions on the Web today, in social media conversations shape brand perception, companies can benefit by joining these conversations— either in popular forums like Facebook and Twitter or by creating their own forums where customers express themselves (Rogers, 2011). With Social Media Users can connect with people through many-to-many, one-to-one and one-to-many connections (McCann & Barlow, 2015). A recent survey shows that 40% of users expect a brand to respond to them within the first hour of connecting, and nearly 80% expect a response within the first 24 hours, showing customers that you appreciate them can improve their connection to your brand (Williams, 2022) The use of social media networks has also provided a modern networking approach for many businesses, requiring less time for business interactions and building business relationships, providing new mechanisms for communication, interaction, and collaboration (Quinton & Wilson, 2016). They have become an integral part of marketing strategies to improve business performance and growth for many businesses, including Small- and Medium-sized Enterprises (Naudé, 2014). Small and medium-sized enterprises can use social media because of its ease of use, low cost, technical manageability, and its ability to connect with many potential consumers (Tajudeen et al., 2018).

E-mail can be used for various marketing purposes including sharing information, promotion, building and maintaining relationships and guiding customers to websites (Simmons, 2007). An email newsletter is basically an email used in a marketing campaign, it contains important news and updates to make your audience aware of your brand or products and other significant information, it can expand the horizons and give your audience a broader picture of who you are (Sharma, 2019). The first step in the beginning is started by engage and downloads marketing programs by electronic mail, therefore, these programs provide the basis of the addition of the data by your target customers and the one by the collection of email addresses and other details about your visitors to the site (Andreopoulou et al.,2012). According to statistics, revenue from email marketing has reached more than 9 billion in2022 globally, it is anticipated that the revenue will be around 17.9 billion by 2027, which means that email marketing is still actively considered as key strategy (Statista, 2022).

e) Collaborate

One of the most powerful ways to engage customer networks is to invite them to collaborate with your business on shared goals and projects. (Rogers, 2011) Reviews are one of the key areas that have emerged from social media, customer reviews are widely available for products

and services, generating great value for both consumers and companies (Nambisan, 2002). In fact, consumers are actively encouraged by firms to rate and review products and services online (Bronner & De Hoog, 2010).

It is also worth highlighting that customer collaboration can happen at any stage of the product life cycle, with brands able to start collaborating at the ideation stage, imagine launching a product knowing that it is going to be a huge success. (Ramaswamy & Gouillart 2010). Co-creation is the ultimate in consumer collaboration, is an experience-oriented concept which focuses on the interaction between the firm and the customer (Ramaswamy & Gouillart 2010). Customers have three specific roles in knowledge co-production that have a substantial impact on different innovation tasks: passive user, active informer and bidirectional creator (Blazevic & Lievens 2008).

In many cases, consumers are likely to view brands more positively when they're involved in product development, Lego is a great example of a brand that does this really well by engaging their most vocal fans and consumers in product creation on a dedicated innovation platform (Schwarz, 2022). Wikipedia with its commitment to involving people in the development of content has challenged the traditional idea of the encyclopedia and has become the dominant form of knowledge dissemination (Ind & Coates, 2013). As Brandon Hartness, an integration product manager at Adobe said "Consumers don't want to be marketed to, and I think that's great. I don't want to market to them, either. I want to create personalized, long-term experiences and relationships born of collaboration and connection. Because that's what keeps consumers coming back, and that's what drives the powerful word-of-mouth marketing and advocacy no amount of budget, strategy, or promotional outreach can buy" (Hartness, 2022).

According to Kaulio (1998) there are three designs strategies that can be used by a company. These strategies are design for, design with and design by. Design for denotes a product development approach where products are designed on behalf of the customers. Very little input is generated from their customers. In the design with strategy, consumers can react on concepts and designs, however, they still do not create new products that fit their own needs. Design by denotes a product development approach where customers are actively involved and create and design their own products (Kaulio, 1998).

The online environment, through special platforms for open innovation and social media are used by companies in order to engage customers in co-creation by successful interaction and continuous dialogue, the Heineken company approach regarding open innovation involves policies, strategies, new product development efforts, team management interventions and on-going interactions with external stakeholders on platforms for co-creation value (Silvia & Gabriela, 2015). Co-creation practices improve the performance of handicraft SMEs as co-creation enables producers and customers to jointly produce a mutually valued and

customized products (Hamdani et al., 2019). It is important to distinguish personalization from customization. Customization assumes that the manufacturer will design a product to suit a customer's needs, it is particularly pronounced over the Web, where consumers can customize a host of products and services such as business cards, computers, greeting cards, mortgages, and flowers simply by choosing from a menu of features (Ramaswamy & Prahalad, 2000). Personalization, on the other hand, is about the customer becoming a cocreator of the content of their experiences, an on-line florist, for example, would let customers specify and design the type, quantity, and arrangement of flowers, and colors they desired, rather than forcing the customer to pick from a menu of services, the florist would also make it possible for the customer to discuss his or her ideas with in-house experts and other customers (Ramaswamy & Prahalad, 2000) .

IKEA launched 'Co-Create IKEA', a digital platform encouraging customers and fans to develop new products. "We believe that the best things are those we create together. We want to open, listen, learn and connect with people throughout the product development process to make sure that we solve the real needs of life at home." (IKEA, 2018)

3. Conceptual Model

3.1. Research Opportunity

As we can infer from the literature review, there are plenty of digital strategies that are beneficial for SME´s and that lead them to be more successful. However, there is very little speaking space for these small businesses, the point is to find out what really works for them in practical terms. Which ones do they use the most and what were the patterns of results that emerged from them. The intersection of what was identified in the literature with the responses of small businesses will prove the pattern of success of the digital strategies used and can serve as an example for other companies that want to adapt them.

3.2.Research Model

Once the literature review is finished and before starting the research methodology, it is necessary to make a background of the conceptual framework of this project, that is, all the digital strategies found in the literature that fall into each of the blocks of the digital marketing strategies as in Rogers (2011): Access, Engage, Customize, Connect and Collaborate. This model makes a visual representation of the digital strategies found in the literature and the various authors who address them, using different perspectives. It aims to illustrate how the digital strategies found could be used by small enterprises and lead them to perform better, both socially and financially.

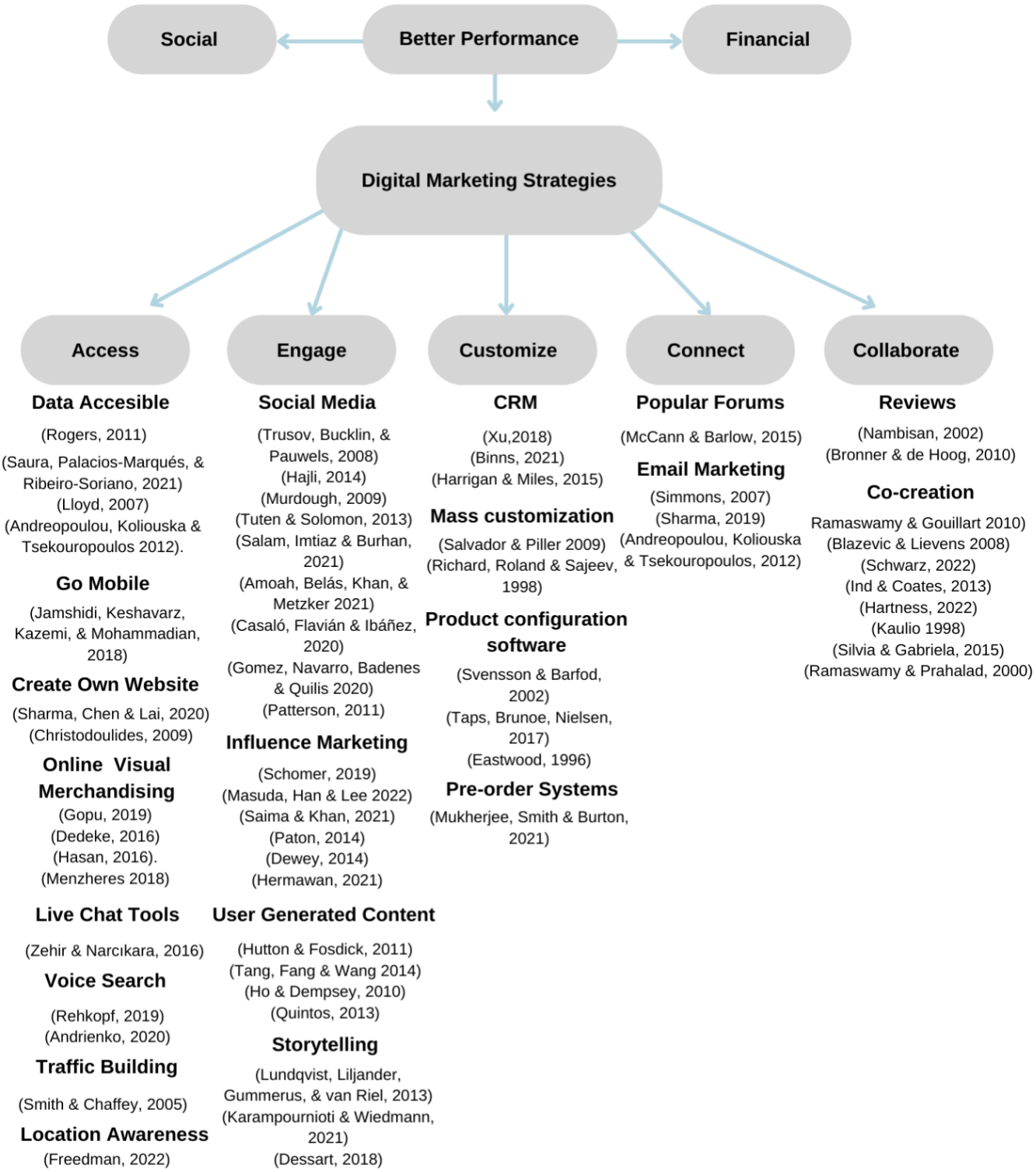

***Exhibit 4**. Proposed research model elaborated by the author.*

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Approach

In order to understand the digital strategies found in the literature, interviews will be conducted. This study follows an interpretive paradigmatic positioning, using the deductive method through qualitative analysis. Considering the objectives of this research, it aims to analyse the digital strategies that are linked to each block of David Rogers model: Access, Engage, Customize, Connect, and Collaborate. And how they are or could be implemented by SMEs.

The formulation of such objectives justifies the use of a method that allows the observation and interpretation of data collected from people who have experienced the reality under study. Qualitative research is an umbrella covering an array of techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and somehow come to terms with the meaning, rather than the measurement or frequency of phenomena in the social world (Rowlands, 2003). Interpretive paradigm aims to characterize how people experience the world, the ways they interact together, and the settings in which these interactions take place (Packer, 1999).

Therefore, it is expected that the establishment of inferences and the evaluation of connections between the information collected, and abstract patterns will allow the researcher to sustain an answer to the starting question: To what extent the "digital strategies lead to the success of small enterprises? and which are the most used?”

4.2. The Sample

For data collection, the researcher opted for qualitative methods, such as interviews with small enterprises In Portugal.

4.2. Data Collection

4.2.1. Interviews Development

It is important to mention that the core is the digital strategies used, so it will be necessary to do previous research of companies that follow this requirement.

First, it was verified if they met the small business requirement, as present in the definition of the European commission, referred to earlier in the literature. Then it was necessary to check if the company had enough online presence, either by being easy to find on social networks or on the internet, or by having a website. In this way, all the companies were located through social networks, the interview was directed to the owner of the company and the invitation was made through social media or via email. Most of the interviews were done in person and some companies that have no availability for the meeting was done by zooming ,

calling or email exchange. By doing the data collection in these SMEs, the goal was to find out which digital strategies enable better performance.

Before the interviews, a script was created in advance, which would allow the conversation to be guided in a fluid manner. It was divided into 6 parts. First, to find out who the person behind the company is, their age, gender, and then to focus on the company itself, its age, whether it has a physical space or only exists online.

Then the remainder of the script was divided into the five points: access, engage, collaborate, customize and connect. Questions were designed for each of these topics, based on the digital strategies found in the literature and the company itself. It is also important to point out that despite the existence of the script, there were extra questions that were asked simply to follow the conversation, as they made sense to further explore and deepen the topic in question. The moderator managed the interview according to the answers collected, in certain situations reversing the order of some questions or refraining from asking some so as not to interrupt the natural flow of the debate.

In a first step, an extensive reading of the interview transcript was performed, allowing the researcher to identify segments of the text that represented different dimensions of the theme under study. Subsequently, and in order to structurally organize the data, tables were built identifying the digital strategies used, the number of respondents mentioning them, and the most relevant quotes raised from the transcript. Finally, in a third step, the main results were compared and discussed with the literature reviewed.

4.2.2. The Script

a) About you/the company

1.1 Name:

1.2 Age:

1.3 Gender:

1.4 Name of the brand:

1.5 How old is the brand?

1.6 Do you have a physical shop or only online?

1.7 Where are the stores located?

b) Digital Marketing Strategies

Acess

1.1 What are the sales channels you use to sell your products? For example: Only online or in the shop, in other shops, pop up stores?

1.2 What is the website like? Can you show me?

1.3 What are your most important points in managing your website? What are your investments?

1.4 How you bring traffic to your website?

1.5 Do you use Communications agencies?

1.6 Do you use any software that allows you to access all your customers' data? Can you access what they bought, how they communicate with them, how they paid?

1.7 Do you invest in design elements on the website (e.g. colours, shapes, layout, style) so that the consumer has a pleasant shopping experience?

1.8 Does your website have a live chat tool?

1.9 Does your website have a voice search tool?

2. When paying, the consumer has the option to pay with his mobile phone? (eg: mbway)

2.1 Do you get the location information of your consumers?

2.3 Do you sell more through your website or physical store?

2.2 Do you think that through your website you reach an audience outside Portugal?

2.3 Is investing in a website some advice you would give to other small businesses?

Engage

1.1 Do you use social networks as a way of advertising your business?

1.2 Which are the Social Networks you are present?

1.3 Which are the Social Networks you use the most?

1.4 How often do you post new content?

1.5 Do you monitor social media?

1.6 What are your objectives when using Social Media?

1.7 Do you use Influencers?

1.8 How did you approach influencers to work with you?

1.9 How is the choice of influencer made?

2. Do you usually opt for micro influencers, macro influencers or a mix of both to advertise your products?

2.1 Do you worry about making a feed (grouping photos by colours/patterns/to look more aesthetic) on Instagram?

2.2 Do you use User-generated content in your brand communication channels?

2.3 Do you use storytelling strategies in your company? Can you give an example?

2.4 Do you feel that by using social media you sell your products more and reach more audience?

2.5 Investing in social media advice you would give to other small businesses, if so, why?

Customize

1. Do you use a CRM system?

1.2 Do you do any kind of customization of your products at your customers' request?

1.3 On your website, when a person puts a product in their cart, do they have the option to have other recommendations appear based on their interests?

1.4 When it comes to customizing your products, do you adapt this to a product you already have on the market, or do you come up with a completely new design?

1.5 Do you use pre-order systems? That is, first the person pays for the product, and only then does it start to be created?

1.6 Do you use any kind of product configuration software?

1.7 By making customized products do you believe you sell more?

Connect

1.1 Do you send newsletters to your consumers?

1.2 How often does it happen?

1.3 Does your newsletter have links that allow consumers to go directly to your website?

1.4 Do you feel that by doing newsletters you sell more? or do you have some positive effect, even if it is not sales, what is it?

1.5 Do you find it advantageous for other small businesses to do a newsletter?

1.6 Do you participate in discussion forums on Facebook or social networking groups?

Collaborate

1.1 Do you adapt any of these co-creation strategies? For example: ask your customers for suggestions for product ideas, your customers support the selection process by reviewing and evaluating the brand's ideas, give customers the opportunity to customize any of your products.

1.2 Do you have the option on the website to leave reviews from your customers?

1.3 Do you feel that leaving your customers' reviews is an advantageous thing? If yes, why?

5. Analysis and Discussion of Results

23 Small Enterprises were interviewed. All interviewees are the owners of the company, except for R10, where the communicative manager was interviewed and at R18, the media management. All the correspondents are Female, except R19, R1, that are Male. All interviewed companies are from the fashion sector, except R6, R8, R9, R21, R22, R18 that are from the handcrafted products sector.

Table 5.1 *Codes used for the respondents*

Respondents	
R1: Male	R12:Female
R2: Female	R13: Female
R3: Female	R14: Female
R4: Female	R15: Female
R5: Female	R16: Female
R6: Female	R17: Female
R7: Female	R18: Female
R8: Female	R19: Male
R9: Female	R20: Female
R10: Female	R21: Female
R11: Female	R22: Female
	R23: Female

5.1 Access: Sales Channels

In order to gain an overview of the digital strategies used, we began by understanding the sales channels used by each company, and whether, in addition to online, any of these companies had physical spaces, either their own shop or were present in showrooms or retail outlets. Five respondents exist only online (R20, R2, R17, R11, R7 and R18) and all the rest are physically present in the market with their products.

Today, websites are business-building assets that not only support brand and fee prospects, information needs, but also build a relationship with customers and act as highly profitable cashflow machines - digital assets that generate more leads, prospects, customers, orders and sales directly from the website (Bly, 2018). It is concluded that all respondents except R22 own one. All the respondents except four (R19, R14, R22, R6) stated that they sell more through the website than the physical space and that they reach audiences outside Portugal. When asked how they bring traffic to the website, most of the respondents answered that it was through social media. Other ways were also mentioned such as Traditional press, Email marketing, Paid ads and through SEO.

Next, an effort was made to understand what the most important points are in managing a website and what investments were made. The nominated keywords were to be easy to work with, both in terms of stock and in terms of design, navigation and conversion, having an intuitive layout, being effective, fast and be user friendly. In terms of investment, most of the respondents affirm having invested by buying the domain, which they pay annually and the monthly shop fee. We also highlight an investment in design, with, for example, R1 claiming to have invested in a designer that helped them set up the website. "We worked with an e-commerce designer initially to set up our website, and we now work with a freelance coder that helps prefect the user experience of our website." In fact, it is something that is of huge importance today, it is the first impact when a customer opens the website. A website must be seen to be clear, easy to navigate/manage, beautiful/attractive, well organized/sectioned, with an attractive logo and which facilitates the transaction (security, confidentiality etc.) (Kim, Sham & Schneider, 2005). All interviewees said they invest in design elements so that the consumer can have a good experience, with only R1, R5 having a communication agency, the rest have a designer on staff, or they take care of these issues themselves, such as R20, that affirms: “I am the one who designed and programmed the website, since I have web design skills. Everything I do at Cuscuz has to be in the same language. The website is one of those things, it must convey the image of our brand, in the colors, in the layout. Everything must be interconnected and have a coherence.” It is also noteworthy that only 9 of the respondents have a live chat button on the site, none have voice search and when it comes to mobile payments only 6 do not allow their customers to pay with MBway.

However, there was one case of an interviewee who does not have a website, but does many of her sales online, through a professional group on WhatsApp. "I don't have a website, I had one for many years, but I started to work more and more with handmade products, each one unique and no two are the same, so it became impossible to put all the products on the website, it's not something that many people use, but for those who don't want to invest in a website or for those who use unique, handmade products like me who can't constantly update the website it works very well" (R22). In this group, news is shared, new products coming to the shop, promotions, shop hours, questions customers may have. The group has many people and as the person buys more than once in the shop, the respondent asks if the person wants to be part of the group. "I have more proximity to them and firsthand feedback" (R22).

Table 5.2 *Elaborated by the author based on transcripts of interviews – ACCESS*

Citations
"It is not even optional, it is mandatory if you want a business with a future and enough exposure that allows you to make that business a way of living." (R3) "It´s a way to make the brand happen, at a relatively low cost." (R19) "Yes, there is no better 24/7 shop window available to everyone!" (R4) "It's basically like having a store, you have your products there, you must update the stock daily, and this allows you to have a store open 24 hours a day. Nowadays people have less and less patience to go to physical stores to see clothes, they buy everything online." (R2) "It allows us to reach farther, to international audiences ." (R13) "Our sales are 99,9% in there." (R12)

5.2 Engage: Social Media and Influence Marketing

From this topic it was introduced in the debate the subject of the presence in social media exercised by these small enterprises in the digital environment. All brands stated that they are present in social networks, and the ones they use most is Instagram, followed by Facebook and TikTok (only few present in this social network). According to the frequency they post new content the vast majority claim to post every day, being that they are extremely active. Only R14, R20 and R19 take longer without posting content, such as posts or stories on Instagram/Facebook. Another question asked was about monitoring social media, most do it in exception of four brands. They do it so that they can improve their engagement and see "the best times to publish content, the ages of the people who follow us, the country of our followers, so we understand the kind of communication we must do. In our case we do a universal communication, in English, to get all our community to understand us." (R2) Due to the Instagram feed, the vast majority are concerned with grouping photos by color/patterns/to look more aesthetic, only a few respondents say they care more about the quality of the photos themselves and try to make posts in a more spontaneous way. "I prefer natural content, more spontaneous, but I try to make a feed lot of times. I like to have quality content above all." (R5) Regarding Hashtags, only 4 respondents claim not to use it. The rest always try to use and

study hashtags that match the publication and its market. “With the hashtags I explore the universe of natural products, gender-free products.” (R20) “I use and study this a lot. See the ones that work best for my market, #flowerslovers, for example reach a lot of people.” (R9) “On posts with hashtags I notice that I get more income, more engagement.” (R15)

Respondents stated that the main objectives when using social media are to Increase brand awareness, reach new customers, bring organic visitors to the site, build customer loyalty, show brand values, insert lifestyle, follow trends, build customer base and brand position. The Respondents who have physical shops say that social networks also make more customers move to visit them. "Although we sell much more in stores, many people find us on social media, like Instagram and then try to visit our stores, to try on sizes, see the pieces live, touch the materials, feel the textures of the pieces." (R13) "For example, I have people who visit my shop because they found it on social media. And they come here when they're in the Algarve." (R22) Another topic of debate was Influencer Marketing. “Influencer Marketing is the most important new approach to marketing in a decade for those professionals at the leading edge of purchasing decision making” (Brown, 2016). Only four correspondents do not work with influencers (R6, R14, R16, R19). The rest who works say that it was through product offers that they approached them, and sometimes they also offer paid content when they want to collaborate with an influencer with many followers and recognition. When it comes to the choice of influencer it is decided based on style and content, the target audience, aesthetics, whether it is aligned with brand values and the number of followers. Most opt for a mix between micro and macro influencers. Macro influencers have a large audience, by sharing a product there is more likelihood of a follower seeing it and wanting to know what brand it is from. However micro influencers are becoming more and more desirable. " We often get a greater reach with micro, since they have an audience. And we also look for micro influencers from other countries. So, I get an audience with more buying power." (R20) “Easy to reach and with better target audience.” (R10) "A mix of both, although we also develop actions with Lovely customers who are our best promoters, who although they don't have many followers and the engagement is not high, manage to translate through their publications the real value of the brand, based on the quality of the material, the service provided and the proximity between the brand and the customer. (R15)

From this topic it was introduced in the debate the User generated content. Most correspondents say they share content made by customers on social networks, and only 2 do not usually share, for aesthetic reasons. They share a very study Instagram content, based on photo shoots and do not want to break this language. Several small enterprises mentioned that it is something that brings more confidence to their brand and engagement. "Yes. we repost all the stories in which we are identified and use photos sent by the clients wearing Tarda garments. As well as being something that gives more confidence in our brand and shows how

people can wear and create looks with our pieces, many people save the post as inspiration." (R7)

Storytelling improves consumers' cognitive responses through consumer–brand identification and stimulates consumers' emotional responses through brand affective involvement, is an effective way of improving the consumer–brand relationship experience (Crespo, Ferreira & Cardoso, 2021). Only two correspondents said they do not use this strategy, with the remaining 21 saying it is something they use a lot to create emotional bonds with their customers. "Storytelling has been the brand's main form of communication since day one. I have always been responsible for all this communication and client involvement with the brand. The emotional connection, our journey as a small and familiar brand, which starts in a kitchen, and that nowadays allows our parents to leave the country where they were emigrating and work with us, is much of what connects people to our brand. The human side of the brand is what stays and what builds loyalty. Sincerity, honesty and openness about our journey, about the battles and all the little achievements. Luxury and premium brands have a very impersonal and disconnected approach to the audience. We have always wanted to be the opposite." (R3) "We try to tell our customers, how our Candles are made and we like to tell the story about the mother and daughter, as we believe our customers really like this." (R6)

We conclude that all small enterprises are present and bet a lot on social networks. However, the social network Tiktok has not been explored much by them yet. With the exception of three companies that are increasingly using tiktok and the video format to reach younger audiences and bring people to Instagram or the website and generate sales. "Yes, a lot of our videos have gone viral, they bring us new followers to Instagram and a lot of sales. We reach a younger audience." (R11) "Although recent, it has a lot to explore, it's in video format so you can make different content from other networks, people nowadays use TikTok a lot, the videos go viral, they reach a huge audience and that generates sales of course." (R17) The easiness of having "viral" videos with many views because of the algorithm was addressed. "Many of TikTok's followers are new people, who don't know our brand, after seeing a video go to our Instagram. Since the algorithm is better to work with, the more easily a video goes viral." (R10)

Table 5.3 *Elaborated by the author based on transcripts of interviews – ENGAGE*

Citations
These digital platforms are without a doubt the most used communication system of our generation." (R1) "Nowadays it's the best way to be present online, it's where all our potential customers are, most people take hours and hours on Instagram feeds, if small businesses put in recurring content, it will make those people discover them, if they like the brand they will buy." (R2) "This is the first piece of advice. I always tell people when they are only starting is to always start social media pages. Why? Because nobody will know who you are what you sell or what you do if you do not put it out there even if the content isn't very good at the start, you are still creating brand awareness from when you are posting." (R6) "Online is the future and through social networks we can reach any part of the world with just one click. These networks are essential to the communication of any brand communication." (R7) "It is one of the ways to show yourself to a wider audience and grow from there. It's not everything, but if you succeed there, it's the first stone laid." (R10) "100%. Our brand was created in the social networks and look where it got us." (R11) "It has made us grow immensely as a brand and expansion of the business, we have had growth in target audience around the world and consequently increased sales. It is one of the most important tools for a business today." (R16)

5.3 Customize: Product Personalisation

Research into customer relationship management (CRM) technology adoption in the small and medium-size (SME) sector shows that there is a slow rate of adoption (Ismail et al., 2007). This fact is in line with the literature gathered, since most companies do not use a CRM system, many for lack of knowledge, except for some respondents who said they have the system embedded on the website itself. "To be honest, I don't know how it works and I think it's a big investment. Maybe in the future." (R20) "I don't know how it works". (R2)

Regarding the respondents' argumentation about product customization, all claim to do so except seven. Always adapting to a product that already exists on the market, such as by putting the initial of the customer's name, changing a color, " With the initials of family names, for example. " (R22) In certain product sizes, being possible to make the tailor-made hems. "We make small adaptive fitting adjustments". (R1) Only two respondents claim to make a new product. " If it is a business customer there is a possibility to design a new one". (R21) "I have

brides who ask me to make a custom piece for their wedding, I ask them to tell me things that characterize them, meanings and from there I create a unique piece. “(R5)

When asked if when customers are buying something and put it in their cart, other products based on their interests appear, most of them say yes, they have put that option on the website.

Analysis about pre-orders has concluded that one half of the respondents fit this scheme, both because of limited pieces and to reduce waste. "I work with a lot of precious stones, sometimes hard to find, so I don't have many units available. I always try to pre-order; the customer says their size and only then do I make the product." (R23) " When we have a limited collection, few sizes in stock, all our t-shirts are handmade, so it is possible. We try to be more and more sustainable, and it is also a way to fight against waste." (R2) When it comes to product configuration software only a minority use it.

It is found that correspondents who do product customization claim it is something that makes the customer come back to buy from their brand, brings proximity and above all projects in sales.

Table 1.4 *Elaborated by the author based on transcripts of interviews – CUSTOMIZE*

Citations
“People increasingly want something uniquely and exclusively made for them.” (R21)
“I think customization will be one of the most important tools in the future.” (R16)
“I have more and more sales with customized products, I would say more than half.” (R22)
"Many of my clients keep coming back because I make each piece personalized to their size, to their taste.” (R23)
“We know that the customer comes back, because we had that "attention" and we were able to gain more customers, that's for sure. “(R4)

5.4 Connect: The use of Newsletter and Participation on Facebook Groups.

“E-mail offers a promising tool to enhance brand loyalty as it helps marketers keep in touch with their customers on a regular basis at low cost “ (Merisavo & Raulas 2004). The analysis of the information related to the sending of newsletters by small companies allowed us to verify that the great majority sends them to their customers, with links that allow them to go directly

to their website. Regarding frequency, can be divided into two groups. Those who send them more frequently, two to three times a week and those who send them only three to four times a month or only when they have new launches, actions, promotions that they want to share with the customer. At the same time, there were also three respondents who said that too much frequency is not good and ends up saturating customers, causes the effect to be reversed. "Not every day, so as not to saturate the customer." (R2) But only if it's not authentic spam, people get bored." (R19) This is supported by the literature, intrusive unsolicited commercial email (spam) has decreased the acceptance (Heinonen & Strandvik, 2007).

Regarding the positive effects of newsletters, several responses strongly pointed out advantages, such as a positive effect on sales. "It makes products reach consumers faster and people feel more tempted to buy." (R12) More traffic to the website, create a bond and connection between the brand and the customer, is more effective than social media (due to the algorithm), make customers feel special and loyal and "it´s a way to have an active community, to have proximity to the customer." (R18)

Table 5.5 . *Elaborated by the author based on transcripts of interviews – CONNECT*

Citations
"Better way to communicate with the customer. Customers feel special in some way." (R4)
"I truly believe as a small business, people sign up to the newsletter as they are genuinely interested in what you have to offer and what you have been doing with your business and day-to-day time." (R6)
"Is a good touchpoint for communicating with our audience, introducing new products, in a more personalized way." (R1)
"It is something easy to do, no big investment is required, and many customers find out about news through our newsletter. It is one more sales channel." (R2)
"It sells more! Remind the customer, involve him more, if the newsletter really means something extra. There always has to be an advantage for the customer who is a subscriber and that makes him feel more important than the rest." (R3)
"It reminds the consumer that we are here" (R9)
"You get loyal customers." (R10)

When asked if they participate in Facebook groups or other social media, the vast majority state that they do not participate, with 2 respondents seeing this as something in the past and not actual. However, one respondent says participating in groups is very advantageous when it comes to relating to your clients. Having created a private Facebook group for their

customers and people who relate to their product. “We have our own private group for the Algarve candle Company full of local ladies, who like to talk about our product, and I always add any new product launches within this group. I believe having a Facebook group is a lot more personal over a Facebook page and I get more engagement from this.” (R6)

5.5 Collaborate: Co Creation Strategies and Reviews

The ability to adopt new digital technology is a very challenging endeavour, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), who because of resource poverty are dependent on external input and cooperation with other companies. Recent research has indicated that co-creation among SMEs is a promising way to overcome such limitations. (Eikebrokk et al., 2021). Co-creation is the process by which mutual value is expanded

together, where value to participating individuals is a function of their experiences, both their engagement experiences on the platform, and productive and meaningful human experiences that result. (Ramaswamy, 2011) All respondents claim to use co-creation strategies, except 8. They do this either through social media, for example in a Q&A or Stories to find out customer preferences when it comes to design and materials”. (R20) "I use Instagram stories to find out customer preference, both as designs and for materials." Through Facebook groups “We always ask our Facebook group for suggestions on new products, we launch different styles of things so that we can reach the tastes of more customers.” (R6) or through private message, where they contact the customer directly. It is emphasized that when using co-creation strategies, respondents state that customers feel more integrated into the brand, listened to, and tend to participate more, which is seen in engagement levels and this translates into more sales “I am making a product that I already know my customers will like, because they have had integrated into its creation.” (R20)

In terms of Reviews, it can be stated that distinct opinions were analyzed, 12 respondents do not have the option on the website for reviews and 11 do. When asked why, some respondents put it as a result of the fact that their website platform does not allow it and others because they think it is disadvantageous to the brand as negative reviews can do the opposite, and lead people not to buy. "I think it is advantageous, but we haven't put it up yet because there is also the downside, pretty unfair customers and since we are a small brand, we are a bit afraid of not getting enough good enough feedback to sometimes cover undesirable comments. As we take time to deliver the product, we still have some complaints in this regard. We will not change this strategy and we make sure that we get it into the customers' minds: "good things take time", but until then we need to grow a bit more." (R16) However, studies state that responding to negative comments also builds trust "Brand managers or e-commerce managers should respond to negative reviews in order to reassure those reading the reviews about the trustworthiness of the company. Companies should consider trust-building

approaches when responding to negative reviews in order to reassure the consumer that the company is a reputable company and would not engage in fraudulent practices of publishing fraudulent positive reviews" (Fogel & Zachariah, 2017).

Most respondents, even those who do not have this option on their website, say that reviews are a positive thing for brands. It creates trust in the brand, people feel secure buying and it's a vote of confidence.

Table 5.6 *Elaborated by the author based on transcripts of interviews – COLLABORATE*

Citations
"We always ask our customers to leave google reviews for our store for example, and we think it contributes to bringing a lot of new customers to the store when they read positive reviews." (R1)
"Is the best way to "rate" our product. And of course, it gives more security to other people who visit our site." (R4)
"100%, builds trust, gives more information about the products, talks about experiences with them." (R8)
"Brings people closer to our brand. And it makes the brand more real." (R12)

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Once the analysis and discussion of the results is complete, the time comes to return to the starting questions that launched the research and thus formulate an answer to it based on the results achieved: Which *" are the digital marketing strategies that SME use the most? And which of them generated the most impact from the perspective of SME managers?"*

Through the literature it was made a mapping of digital marketing strategies, strongly used nowadays and with the ability to be implemented by SME. Divided into five groups for better understanding and organization: Access; Engage; Customize; Connect and Collaborate, all digital strategies mentioned in the literature were included in the interview guide, seeking to understand their use by the SME. It is concluded that the most used strategies are be present in social media, mainly Instagram, Facebook and Tiktok. The theme that had more depth in the interviews, since all the interviewed companies are present in more than one social network, most of them publish daily and most of them monitor, to understand their engagement, what they can improve and how to communicate better with their target consumer, is the digital strategy they dedicate the most time to and then, secondly, managing the website. Twenty-two SME´s have one and it is their biggest selling point, along with some physical spaces, enabling them to reach an international market.

In terms of the effectiveness of digital strategies, the following conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, in relation to Access, which frames the sales channels used, it was concluded that using a website to sell products, focusing on design and visual elements, is an essential strategy for success in terms of profit for small enterprises, a way to reach international audiences and creates more trust. Through the website by getting a sense of where customers are located, as companies can access the geographic location of customers after purchase, SMEs can improve communication and target their customers with more relevant interactions.

Secondly, in relation to Engage, which refers to social media and influencer marketing, it was concluded that being present on social media, focusing on both visuals, brand feed and image quality, using Storytelling strategies to connect emotionally with your customers, is another strategy that allows for more success, both in financial and social terms, and brand equity. Using influencers as brand "ambassadors" allows companies to reach a wider audience and improve brand quality perception.

Next, Personalize, focusing on product customization, the use of CRM technology is virtually non-existent for small enterprises, with the minority not using any product configuration software, therefore they are two strategies without much effectiveness by the SME. Nonetheless, customizing products according to customer tastes, adapting a product that already exists on the market or creating a completely new product is a competitive advantage.

Regarding Connect, sending newsletters brings a positive effect on sales, reminds the consumer of the brand. Participating in Facebook groups, even though it's not something super trendy, you can find people of different generations to connect.

Finally, regarding Collaborate, it is concluded that co-creation strategies are a way to create bonds and a connection with the customer, the customer feels integrated by the brand. Reviews obtain trust in the brand and should be used as a vote of confidence.

It is further acknowledged that a method based on the interpretative paradigm and based on content analysis was suitable for collecting the perception of small entrepreneurs regarding the practice of these digital strategies. With an often-cohesive opinion, the respondents were able to contribute to the objectives pursued with this work, helping to prepare a portrait of the advantages of using digital strategies daily, some of their fewer positive appeals, and will be a starting point to help other small enterprises that are starting to integrate digital as pillars in their businesses.

6.1. Theoretical Implications

There is no single approach to digital strategy due to its complex nature. Successful change becomes difficult and ever more challenging as uncertainty becomes hyper turbulence (Raskino & Waller 2015). With covid-19, many small businesses had to adapt to digital to survive. 62% of businesses that shifted to digital approaches and technologies, such as online shopping and delivery, during the pandemic said they would maintain those changes, and expand options going forward (The Bank of America, 2022). Most of the development studies and research in innovation focus on medium and large companies, leaving aside the smaller ones. The purpose of the current research was to explore the digital strategies that were most successful by small enterprises and how they were put into practice.

Several authors in the literature name various digital strategies and their benefit for small businesses, whether it is through the use of Social media strategies, CRM, reviews, the creation of a website, voice Search , the use of storytelling, co-creation, strategies that enable product customization, influence marketing or email marketing (Tuten & Solomon, 2013 ; Christodoulides, 2009; Dessart, 2018; Rasmaswamy & Gouillart, 2010; Salvador & Piller, 2009; Schomer, 2019; Simmons, 2007; Rehkopf, 2019). However, there are few studies that portray whether small businesses use, in practice, these digital strategies successfully. This is something that authors encourage further research.

With the 23 interviews with small enterprises, the results prove that the use of digital strategies leads these companies to be more successful, both in terms of sales and in social terms, by reaching a wider audience and their closer relationship with the customer. In the case of CRM, although there are authors who justify the use of this strategy by SMEs (Harrigan

& Miles, 2015), it was found that a minority of the interviewed companies use this strategy, both because they lack knowledge and because they consider it to be a large investment. Another strategy that stands out with less effectiveness is the use of Customer Reviews on the website itself, a fact much supported by the literature as advantageous (Nambisan, 2002; Bronner & De Hoog, 2010), yet a minority of the SME's use it. This has a lot to do with the fact that a dissatisfied customer, for example, with the waiting time for the product to arrive and who leaves a bad review, may influence the purchase decision of the next customer who puts the product in the cart and then reads the review. In the literature it was discussed that responding to negative reviews is also an advantage that brings confidence to the brand and enhances its reputation. In this sense, SME should not exclude any negative review, everything has to do with addressing the issue in a crisis (Fogel & Zachariah, 2017). However, another way that makes it possible to have the consumers' opinion is to use User generated Content on social networks, being something that most SME use with consistency. This fact allows creating bonds of trust with the consumer, because he feels integrated into the brand.

Finally, Voice search, used for example on the website, is another strategy that none of the interviewed SME's claim to use, since their platform doesn't have that option, but many stated that it is something interesting to research in the future.

The most used digital strategies, as mentioned earlier in the conclusion are the use of social media and a website. In the case of traffic to the website it is concluded that, using the model of Smith and Chaffey (2005), mentioned in the literature, most companies bring traffic through Online PR, with the use of social media. Opt-in Email, with the sending of newsletters and Viral marketing, through media mentions and word of mouth. It is noteworthy that a minority uses Interactive ads and search marketing, such as SEO to bring traffic to the website.

6.2. Managerial Implications

In an era strongly linked to digital, many small enterprises try to stand out in this medium. Digital transformation is critical for the competitiveness of SMEs (Rissola, Sörvik, 2018). Living in the digital age is linked to changes that logically also influence entrepreneurs who operate on the internet and run shops in the digitalized form (Martiskova & Svec, 2019). Brands find themselves compelled to innovate more and more, capturing the consumer's attention, and responding to their needs.

The use of digital strategies has proven to be an essential tool for the success of SME, they allow access to their products, quickly and easily. Consumers relate to them by having the option to customize something to their liking, making them feel special. The agility to connect with the consumer in a clear way and collaborate with them to reach a joint goal. It serves as a strong example the 23 interviewed small enterprises, which are very successful in

being present in social networks, using content made by the user, having a cohesive website with their language, customizing products, sending newsletters, using storytelling strategies and co-creation in their brand and betting on influencers as ambassadors of their products.

Furthermore, it highlights the importance of this study for other small businesses, which are starting out or for those that have difficulty understanding digital and its advantages, something that came with covid-19 and will carry over into the future. This study could be for them a small manual on how to understand the use of digital in their favor. In the case of social media and website, they were considered the most used strategies by most of the SME's. In the literature it is observed how much both strategies impact the consumer and how easy it is for SME's to use them, since it doesn't require huge investment. Many of the enterprises do it by the owners or have a person from the team that takes care of that matter. This fact can be an encouragement for other SME's who want to be present on digital and sell their products online, both strategies interconnect, using social media as a consistent practice leads consumers to go to the website and that way generates more sales and brand visibility. In the case of using a product configuration software, Voice Search and CRM are three tools poorly developed by SMEs, as most of the interviewed SMEs do not use it and some do not even know what it is. However, these are strategies with potential to be explored.

We can say that the future of SME's lies in digital, in the use of all these practices and in innovation. Artificial intelligence, Big data/analytics and Virtual reality are emphasized as future practices to be implemented by them. However, there is a lack of investment and conservatism on the part of these companies, which must see technology as a key driver of competitive advantage, rather than a necessary cost or risk. Still, many see IT as a necessary cost rather than seeing it as an investment in their growth (Barnard,Bakkers & Wünsche, 2017).

6.3. Limitations

Throughout the research, two major limitations were recognized, especially when considering the goal initially set. First, concerning the literature. There is not much current literature regarding digital strategies used by small businesses. It was a fact more addressed with the arrival of covid-19, which made many companies create a digital-based business, and there are still not many studies on this yet. Secondly, the fact the findings were based on a small number of small companies' interviews, namely 23, and despite having companies from all over the country, the vast majority are located in Lisbon. Furthermore, the method was qualitative, which allows dimensions to be explored, but does not indicate objective implications.

6.4. Future Research

Future research is needed to explore in more detail the digital strategies used in a larger number of small enterprises, in several parts of the country, in order to get more consistent results. Another aspect for future research is to reinforce the relevance of an investigation capable of obtaining the perception of all the key elements in the process of digital strategies, one of the elements is undoubtedly the consumer. All this is done thinking about him and his behaviour. It would be interesting to understand his side, how these digital strategies lead the consumer to buy a product of a certain brand and the way he relates to the brand itself.

Another suggestion would be to explore the use of CRM by SMEs, given its potential. How other SMEs have implemented it, its costs, its long-term benefits.

Finally, there is a lot of potential for SMEs to use digital strategies that are the future, such as artificial intelligence and Virtual Reality. However, the lack of studies on how to implement these strategies in order to become profitable in SME's is very scarce, being a study usually done only in large companies. It would be interesting to understand how to implement these strategies in Smes, name support tools, costs and the main advantages. Being that although SME's have little investment compared to big companies they shouldn't be put aside in the future, since they are a high point in the European economy.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Small Business Owners Interviews

Note: The questionnaire was developed in Portuguese as it was exclusively addressed to Portuguese small enterprises owners. All questions and answers were translated by me. The remaining interviews (there are 23 in total) are in an online file that can be accessed through this link: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1tuEsizJRUn829_rhzpA-OowxHb0I90wr

a) About you/the company

1.1 Name: **Vera Caldeira & Pedro Ferraz**

1.2 Age: **32 & 29**

1.3 Gender: **Female & Male**

1.4 Name of the brand: **Mustique**

1.5 How old is the brand? **5 years**

1.6 Do you have a physical shop or only online? **Two physical shops (Mustique's own stores), 1 concept store in Lisbon, 1 hotel re-seller in Ericeira, and online shop.**

b) Digital Marketing Strategies

Acess

1.1 What are the sales channels you use to sell your products? For example: Only online or in the shop, in other shops, pop up stores… **Our own website (www.mustiqueworld.com) and physical stores mentioned above, we also participate in pop-up markets (eg. Stylista Summer & Winter Market) and in wholesale fairs.**

1.2 What is the website like? Can you show me? **www.mustiqueworld.com**

1.3 What are your most important points in managing your website? What are your investments? **We worked with an e-commerce designer initially to set up our website, and we now work with a freelance coder that helps prefect the user experience of our website. Our website is built on shopify (we use the paid version of shopify). One of the most important aspects of the website is creating good content (photographs) that**

show and sell the product well, this is a big investment on our part (we have to invest in photographer, studio hire, models, stylist, etc.) which all contributes to the website being successful. The day-to-day management of the website is done by us in partnership with the freelance coder (whenever we want to make a change to the structure of the website we ask her to do it).

1.4 How you bring traffic to your website? **Facebook ads, instagram ads, instagram content, traditional press (magazines & interviews)**

1.5 Do you use Communications agencies ? **Yes, we work with The Communication Studio, they take care of our communication in local press and help us with events.**

1.6 Do you use any software that allows you to access all of your customers' data? Can you access what they bought, how they communicate with them, how they paid? **Yes, all of this data is captured by Shopify which is the system our website is built on.**

1.7 Do you invest in design elements on the website (e.g. colours, shapes, layout, style) so that the consumer has a pleasant shopping experience? **Yes. We worked with a webdesigner who helped us set up the website initially, and since then with a freelance coder / UX designer.**

1.8 Does your website have a live chat tool? **No. But it´s something we want to add, for sure.**

1.9 Why? **I think that it is more advantageous for our customers, because certain questions they ask us are frequent and we can already have pre-made answers to them, or we can respond more quickly to solve problems.**

1.9 Does your website have a voice search tool? **No.**

2.When paying, the consumer has the option to pay with his mobile phone? (eg: mbway) **Yes.**

2.1 Do you get the location information of your consumers? **Yes, in shopify we can access.**

2.2 Do you sell more through your website or physical store? **About 40% website 60% physical store.**

2.3 Do you think that through your website you reach an audience outside Portugal? **Yes**.

2.4 Is investing in a website an advice you would give to other small businesses? **Of course.**

Engage

1.1Do you use social networks as a way of advertising your business? **Yes.**

1.2 Which are the Social Networks you are present? **Instagram, Facebook, tik tok.**

1.3 Which are the Social Networks you use the most? **Instagram.**

1.4 Com que frequência publica novos conteúdos? **Almost every day.**

1.5 Do you monitor social media? **Yes**.

1.6 What are your objectives when using Social Media? **Raising brand awareness and communicating our brand story / vibe. This then translates into gaining more notoriety and following, which translates into sales.**

1.7 Utiliza Influencers? / Do you use influencers as ambassadors for your brand? **Yes.**

1.8 How did you approach influencers to work with you? Through for example Paid content, Product offer**,** Exposure offer… **Mostly through product offer. But we have done some paid content, and continue to do so.**

1.9 How is the choice of influencer made? For example based on the followers, the content, on the target audience? **Based on the influencer's style and content creating, if we think it matches our style it will be a good fit**.

2. Do you usually opt for micro influencers, macro influencers or a mix of both to advertise your products? **Mainly micro. We have only worked with 1 or 2 "macro"influencers (on a Portuguese scale)**

2.1 Why? Because of the investment for example? **No, we think they are easier to communicate with and also because they have a good target audience.**

2.2 Do you worry about making a feed (grouping photos by colours/patterns/to look more aesthetic) on instagram? **Yes.**

2.3 Do you use hashtags? **No**.

2.4 Do you have Tiktok? **Yes.**

User-generated content or UGC, is any content about a brand created by a user of the brand designed to be shared with others. For example when a customer posts a picture on a social network wearing one of your brand's products and you share that same picture on the brand's Instagram.

2.5 Do you use User-generated content in your brand communication channels? **Yes.**

2.8 Do you use storytelling strategies in your company? Can you give an example? **Yes, we talk a lot about the formation of the brand, about our own personal. Journeys in creating and building the brand.**

2.9 Do you feel that by using social media you sell your products more and reach more audience? **Yes, for example, we have several sales from the instagram store itself.**

3. Investir nas redes sociais é um conselho que daria a outros pequenos negócios, se sim porquê?/ Is investing in social media advice you would give to other small businesses, if so why? **Yes, because these digital platforms are without a doubt the most used communication system of our generation**

Customize

1. Do you use a CRM system? **Yes, it's embedded in our Shopify system**

1.2 Do you do any kind of customization of your products at your customers' request? **Yes, we make small fitting changes (hems).**

1.3 On your website, when a per- son puts a product in their cart, do they have the option to have other recommendations appear based on their interests? **Yes.**

1.4 When it comes to customizing your products, do you adapt this to a product you already have on the market or do you come up with a completely new design? **Adapt.**

1.5 Do you use pre-order systems? That is, first the person pays for the product and only then does it start to be created? **Yes, we have trialled it.**

1.6 Do you use any kind of pro- duct configuration software? **No**.

1.7 By making customized pro- ducts do you believe you sell more? **Not really.**

Connect

1.1 Do you send newsletters to your consumers? **Yes.**

1.3 How often does it happen? **Once every 2 weeks**

1.4 Does your newsletter have links that allow consumers to go directly to your website? **Yes**

1.5 Do you feel that by doing newsletters you sell more? or do you have some positive effect, even if it is not sales, what is it? **Yes, it always brings sales. It also is a good touchpoint for communicating with our audience, introducing new products, in a more personalized way.**

1.6 Do you find it advantageous for other small businesses to do a newsletter? **Yes, very.**

1.7 Do you participate in discussion forums on Facebook or social networking groups? **No.**

Collaborate

1.1 Do you adapt any of these co-creation strategies? For example: ask your customers for sug- gestions for product ideas, your customers support the selection process by reviewing and evaluating the brand's ideas, give customers the opportunity to customize any of your products? **I think we have done it once or twice using polls on instagram, but not too much.**

1.2 .1 Do you have the option on the website to leave reviews from your customers? **Yes.**

1.3 Do you feel that leaving your customers' reviews is an advantageous thing? If yes, why? **Yes, we always ask our customers to leave google reviews for our store for example, and we think it contributes to bringing a lot of new customers to the store when they read positive reviews.**

1.4 Of all these digital strategies mentioned, which two would you say you use most daily with your brand? **Social Media and Storytelling.**

a) About you/the company

1.1 Name: **Lauren slater**

1.2 Age: **32**

1.3 Gender**: female**

1.4 Name of the brand**: Algarve candle company, we make soy candles and home fragrances.**

1.5 How old is the brand? **2 years**.

1.6 Do you have a physical shop or only online? **Both.**

1.7 Where is it located? **Boliqueime, Algarve.**

b) Digital Marketing Strategies

Acess

1.1 What are the sales channels you use to sell your products? For example: Only online or in the shop, in other shops, pop up stores? **Physical store, markets and online.**

1.2 What is the website like? Can you show me? **www.algarvecandlecompany.com**

1.3 What are your most important points in managing your website? What are your investments? **To keep on top of stock levels, and learn how to direct traffic.**

1.4 How you bring traffic to your website? **Instagram mainly.**

1.5 Do you use Communications agencies? **No.**

1.6 Do you use any software that allows you to access all of your customers' data? Can you access what they bought, how they communicate with them, how they paid? **Yes, in the website que can see all that.**

1.7 Do you invest in design elements on the website (e.g. colours, shapes, layout, style) so that the consumer has a pleasant shopping experience? **Yes.**

1.8 Does your website have a live chat tool? **No.**

1.9 Does your website have a voice search tool? **No.**

2. When paying, the consumer has the option to pay with his mobile phone? (eg: mbway) **We can accept Apple Pay but not MBway. The server we use does now have that.**

2.1 Do you get the location information of your consumers? **Yes.**

2.2 Do you sell more through your website or physical store? **Physical store.**

2.3 Do you think that through your website you reach an audience outside Portugal? **Yes.**

2.4 Is investing in a website an advice you would give to other small businesses? **100% yes, a website is good for expanding our market, we can reach other places, because not all people come to our store, and this would greatly reduce our profit.**

Engage

1.1 Do you use social networks as a way of advertising your business? **Yes.**

1.2 Which are the Social Networks you are present? **Instagram, Facebook.**

1.3 Quais são os que usa mais? / **Which are the Social Networks you use the most? Instagram.**

1.4 How often do you post new content? **Everyday.**

1.5 Do you monitor social media**? Yes.**

1.5 b) Can you give an example? **We see the best times to post on Instagram.**

1.6 What are your objectives when using Social Media? **Build a customer base and reach new clients.**

1.7 Do you use influencers as ambassadors for your brand? **No.**

2.2 Do you worry about making a feed (grouping photos by colours/patterns/to look more aesthetic) on instagram? **Yes. By using Lightroom filters.**

2.3 Do you use hashtags? **Yes.**

2.4 Do you have Tiktok? **Yes but don't use a lot.**

2.5 Do you use User-generated content in your brand communication channels? **No.**

2.6 Do you use storytelling strategies in your company? Can you give an example? **Yes we try to tell our customers, how our Candles Ahmed where they are made and we like to tell the story about the mother and daughter is this side of things as we believe our customers really like this.**

2.7 Do you feel that by using social media you sell your products more and reach more audience? **Yes, I strongly agree with this we wouldn't have as many customers as we do without Instagram.**

3. Is investing in social media advice you would give to other small businesses, if so why? **This is the first piece of advice. I always tell people when they are only starting is to always start social media pages. Why? Because nobody will know who you are what you sell or what you do if you do not put it out there even if the content isn't very good at the start, you are still creating brand awareness from when you are posting.**

Customize

1. Do you use a CRM system? **No.**

1.2 Do you do any kind of customization of your products at your customers' request? **Yes we do. Like put a phrase on the label, or the name of the person.**

1.3 On your website, when a person puts a product in their cart, do they have the option to have other recommendations appear based on their interests? **Yes.**
1.4 When it comes to customizing your products, do you adapt this to a product you already have on the market or do you come up with a completely new design? **To a product we have, always.**

1.5 Do you use pre-order systems? That is, first the person pays for the product and only then does it start to be created. **We haven't yet, no. But we are about to do this when we are launching our advent calendar.**

1.6 Do you use any kind of product configuration software? **No.**

1.7 By making customized products do you believe you sell more? **I am not too sure about this as we do a lot of wholesale with different brands, but I'm not sure if they would just take on our candles without their brand anyways.**

Connect

1.1 Do you send newsletters to your consumers? **We don't send out newsletters, but I do send out emails to our email list when we have new products or something interesting to talk about. I don't like to spam our mailing list.**

1.2 How often does it happen? **3 to 4 times per month.**

1.3 Does your newsletter have links that allow consumers to go directly to your website? **Yes**

1.4 Do you feel that by doing newsletters you sell more? or do you have some positive effect, even if it is not sales, what is it? **Yes when we send out a newsletter or a new product launch, we do always get sales from those emails.**

1.5 Do you find it advantageous for other small businesses to do a newsletter? **Yes, I truly believe as a small business people sign up to the newsletter as they are genuinely interested in what you have to offer and what you have been doing with your business and day-to-day time.**

1.7 Do you participate in discussion forums on Facebook or social networking groups? **We have our own private group for the Algarve candle Company full of local ladies, who like to talk about our product and I always add any new product launches within this group. I believe having a Facebook group is a lot more personal over a Facebook page and I get more engagement from this.**

Collaborate

1.1 Do you adapt any of these co-creation strategies? For example: ask your customers for suggestions for product ideas, your customers support the selection process by reviewing and evaluating the brand's ideas, give customers the opportunity to customize any of your

products**? We always ask our Facebook group for suggestions on new products, we launch different styles of things so that we can reach the tastes of more customers.**

1.2 Do you have the option on the website to leave reviews from your customers? **Yes, after a few weeks of purchasing there is an automatic mail sent to the customer to review the product which then appears on our website.**

1.3 . Do you feel that leaving your customers' reviews is an advantageous thing? If yes, why? **Yes, as I believe it grows, trust to all new potential customers.**

1.4 Of all these digital strategies mentioned, which two would you say you use most daily with your brand? **Using Social media, Instagram and facebook, and our online shop.**

a) About you/the company

1.1 Name: **Rita**

1.2 Age: **28**

1.3 Gender: **Female**

1.4 Name of the brand: **GUAJA**

1.5 How old is the brand? **3 and a half years.**

1.6 Do you have a physical shop or only online? **Online store, but we so sell in 2 multi brand stores owned by The Feeting Room group.**

1.7 Where are the stores located? **Porto and Lisbon**.

b) Digital Marketing Strategies

Acess

1.1 What are the sales channels you use to sell your products? For example: Only online or in the shop, in other shops, pop up stores? **Website + Google, IG and Facebook Shopping and the stores In Porto and Lisbon.**

1.2 What is the website like? Can you show me? **www.guajastudio.com**

1.3 What are your most important points in managing your website? What are your in-vestments? **Intuitive, fast, effective website. That answers customers' questions before they arise. Live chat, integrated exchanges and returns forms, size guides and various inputs on integrated sizes. Integrations with carrier platforms, IP translators, email MKT and phased payment providers, among others**.

1.4 How you bring traffic to your website? **Organic, IG, google ads, Facebook Ads, email marketing.**

1.5 Do you use Communications agencies? **No.**

1.6 Do you use any software that allows you to access all your customers' data? Can you access what they bought, how they communicate with them, how they paid? **Shopify has all this information available in analytics, but also google analytics which is linked to all our platforms.**

1.7 Do you invest in design elements on the website (e.g. colours, shapes, layout, style) so that the consumer has a pleasant shopping experience**? Of course, all of these. The site design process is always being improved. We make it a point to get external feedbacks and improve the smallest details. The consumer experience starts there.**

1.8 Does your website have a live chat tool? **Yes.**

1.9 Does your website have a voice search tool? **Only through the keyboard on iPhones.**

2. When paying, the consumer has the option to pay with his mobile phone? (eg: mbway) **Yes.**

2.1 Do you get the location in- formation of your consumers? **Yes, through shopify.**

2.2 Do you sell more through your website or physical store? **Website**.

Do you think that through your website you reach an audience outside Portugal**? Our Portuguese audience is only 25% of the monthly turnover. Everything else is international**

2.4 Is investing in a website some advice you would give to other small businesses? **It is not even optional, it is mandatory if you want a business with a future and enough exposure that allows you to make that business a way of living.**

Engage

1.1 Do you use social networks as a way of advertising your business? **Yes.**

1.2 Which are the Social Networks you are present? **Instagram, pinterest, tiktok and Facebook.**

1.3 Which are the Social Networks you use the most? **Instagram.**

1.4 How often do you post new content? **Everyday.**

1.5 Do you monitor social media? **Yes**.

1. 6 What are your objectives when using Social Media? **Engagement, organic site visits, creating a community and building customer loyalty.**

1.7 Utiliza Influencers? **Rarely**

1.8 How did you approach influencers to work with you? **Product Offer.**

1.9 How is the choice of influencer made? For example based on the followers, the content, on the target audience ? **Content and target audience. There are influencers we contact to generate content for our social media (because they have content we admire) and other influencers are chosen because reach our target audience. Influencers are rarely a way to get an immediate return. They are always more associated with visibility.**

2. Do you usually opt for micro influencers, macro influencers or a mix of both to advertise your products? **Both.**

2.2 Do you worry about making a feed (grouping photos by colours/patterns/to look more aesthetic) on instagram? **Yes**.

2.5 Do you use User-generated content in your brand communication channels? **Yes, when it suits the brand communication.**

2.8 Do you use storytelling strategies in your company? Can you give an example? **Storytelling has been the brand's main form of communication since day 1. I, Rita, have always been responsible for all this communication and client involvement with the brand. The emotional connection, our journey as a small and familiar brand, which starts in a kitchen, and that nowadays allows our parents to leave the country where they were emigrating and work with us, is much of what connects people to GUAJA and to both of us. The human side of the brand is what stays and what builds loyalty. Sincerity, honesty and openness about our journey, about the battles and all the little achievements. Luxury and premium brands have a very impersonal and disconnected approach to the audience. We have always wanted to be the opposite.**

2.9 Do you feel that by using social media you sell your products more and reach more audien- ce? **For sure.**

3. investing in social media advice you would give to other small businesses, if so why? **It is the only way to get some attention in such a competitive market. Social media and other media channels expose people to more than 10000 ads a day... only with paid pub we can have some leverage. And, even then, it must be the right pub. It is increasingly difficult to advertise successfully, but it is also increasingly necessary.**

Customize

1. Do you use a CRM system? **Yes.**

1.2 Do you do any kind of customization of your products at your customers' request? **Yes, one of our competitive advantages**

1.3 On your website, when a per- son puts a product in their cart, do they have the option to have other recommendations appear based on their interests? **Yes**.

1.4 When it comes to customizing your products, do you adapt this to a product you already have on the market or do you come up with a completely new design? **It depends. In fashion nothing is new. Nothing. Everything results from inspiration of past designs, but we like to believe that we are a mix of classic designs with a personal and unique touch, which distinguishes us from all other brands. Our type of design has always made us stand out, from the beginning, but many brands are now starting to bet on this type of models.**

1.5 Do you use pre-order systems? That is, first the person pays for the product and only then does it start to be created? **We do use pre-orders, but not in this system. Pre-orders exist**

only for products that are already in production, but may take longer than usual, and so the person can guarantee that his or her product will not sell out.

1.6 Do you use any kind of pro- duct configuration software? **Yes.**

1.7 By making customized products do you believe you sell more? **Nowadays, with the volume of orders, it is almost impossible to make customized products. We only make small adjustments, like hems and other small changes. Still, it is something that sets us apart.**

Connect

1.1 Do you send newsletters to your consumers? **Yes.**

1. 3 How often does it happen? **2 in 2 days in high seasons (more launches, more new products) and at least 1x per week in low seasons.**

1.4 Does your newsletter have links that allow consumers to go directly to your website? **Always.**

1.5 Do you feel that by doing newsletters you sell more? or do you have some positive effect, even if it is not sales, what is **it? It sells more! Remind the customer, involve him more, as long as the newsletter really means something extra. There always has to be an advantage for the customer who is a subscriber and that makes him feel more important than the rest**.

1.6 Do you find it advan- tageous for other small businesses to do a newsletter? **Yes, very.**

1.7 Do you participate in discussion forums on Facebook or social networking groups? **No.**

Collaborate

1.1 Do you adapt any of these co-creation strategies? For example: ask your customers for sug- gestions for product ideas, your customers support the selection process by reviewing and evaluating the brand's ideas, give customers the opportunity to customize any of your pro- ducts. **Not really. We take suggestions, we do polls to understand what they prefer**

between two pieces, for example, or between colors, but the decision is always ours. It is important that the client feels part of the process, but that the design is ours.

1.2 .1 Do you have the option on the website to leave reviews from your customers? **No.**

1.3 Do you feel that leaving your customers' reviews is an advantageous thing? If yes, why? **Yes, but we don't have that on the website. Only in Trustpilot.**

1.4 Of all these digital strategies mentioned, which two would you say you use most daily with your brand? **Social Media is the core of our brand, but I would also say our website, as it is our big selling point.**