Online and offline integration: omnichannel a strategy for increasing sales and strengthening corporate reputation

Integração online e offline: omnicanal uma estratégia para aumentar as vendas e fortalecer a reputação corporativa

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ABSTRACT
Broadcast media vehicles, like television still represents an important media of information transmission in Brazil. However, many different factors are striking directly the format they operate. Internet gains, each time, more space, and it is in this conjuncture that the omnichannel strategy gains more power. The concept refers to the engagement between the client - participative agent in web actions - and the company, that, in part, contributes, in the long term, strengthening corporate reputation. This engaging process must be followed by an active articulation by the company's part, keeping in mind an approximation with targeted groups. This communication needs to be efficient, once the information flux in the digital environment is constant, with instant potential impact for any positive or negative messages. For this presented work, we redeem analysis and notes about broadcast and multicast medias, concepts of omnichannel and reputation, aside from successes cases for illustrative analysis.
Keywords: Omnichannel, Reputation, Communication

RESUMO
Os veículos de mídia de transmissão, como a televisão, ainda representam um importante meio de transmissão de informações no Brasil. No entanto, muitos fatores diferentes estão afetando diretamente o formato em que operam. A Internet ganha, cada vez, mais espaço, e é nessa conjuntura que a estratégia omnicanal ganha mais força. O conceito refere-se ao engajamento entre o cliente - agente participativo das ações na web - e a empresa, que, em parte, contribui, no longo prazo, para o fortalecimento da reputação corporativa. Esse processo de engajamento deve ser acompanhado de uma articulação ativa por parte da empresa, tendo em vista a aproximação com os públicos-alvo. Essa comunicação precisa ser eficiente, uma vez que o fluxo de informações no ambiente digital é constante, com potencial de impacto instantâneo para quaisquer mensagens positivas ou negativas. Para este trabalho apresentado, resgatamos análises e notas sobre mídias broadcast e multicast, conceitos de omnicanal e reputação, além de casos de sucesso para análise ilustrativa.

Palavras-chave: Omnicanal, Reputação, Comunicação

1 INTRODUCTION

Several data pointed out that, in Brazil, transmitted vehicles (model with large-scale transmission of information, that only one vehicle is responsible for communication) still occupy a prominent place, since “[...] television is the communication vehicle with greater reach in the country and the most used information and entertainment medium by Brazilians”, according to data from portalbrasil1. However, other communication vehicles are gaining space in the national territory, a phenomenon that has also happened in a large part of the world.

Although, focusing at television, it can be seen that the dispute for the audience has provoked a revolution in people's way of life. Every day, massive and popular programs are appearing on the programming of free channels, Broadcast TV. This phenomenon made that, since the 1990s, this type of programming has challenged the established television programming standards. And because of this new way of making television, many researchers have sought to study topics such as the reach, programming and the emission of television information, among others. In this perspective, other factors are directly affecting the television format that is known. It can be said that new media have been influencing broadcast vehicles2, such as television, radio and newspapers, for example. In this way, the broadcast model has been impacted directly or

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2“Mass media are information media, emitting from a centralized pole to a mass of receivers” (Lemos, 2007, p.10).
indirectly, since the new media, especially the internet, provide several tools that converge in a single product. Therefore,

[Convergence] is a multidimensional process that, at a minimum, comprises aspects related to information production and consumption technologies, with the internal organization of the company, with the profile of journalists, and also with the content that they communicate. (Salaverría; Negredo, 2008, p. 16).

This phenomenon that causes broadcast production to be put at stake by the new media is characterized by Lemos (2006) as the “release of the emitting pole”, in which several directions are added to the communication. In other words, thanks to new technologies, communication has ceased to be one-to-many (as is done in the broadcast model) and has now become many-to-many. And the main factor that potentiates this phenomenon is the “personal computer, which put everything, from the printing machines to the film and music production studios, in everyone's hands” (Anderson, 2006, p. 52).

However, it is necessary to consider the use of the word “liberation”, used by Lemos (2007), considering that large media conglomerates still dominate much of the information that circulates on the network. Thus, we can think that “the concentration and diversification of the media industries led to the formation of media conglomerates that have great interests in a variety of industries linked to information and communication” (Thompson, 1995, p. 258).

And due to this expansion, the new ways of thinking about the company in the midst of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT’s) era, how it formats its products and enhances its spread among people, through the media, several criticisms were made in an attempt to better understand which environment is consumer formation is and how the media can transform society in general. Thus,

[...]contemporary society is permeated by the media in such a way that it can no longer be considered as something separate from cultural and social institutions. In these circumstances, our task, instead, is to try to understand the ways in which social institutions and cultural processes have changed in character, function and structure in response to the ubiquity of the media. (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 54)

3 Considered post-massive, “they allow bidirectional communication through a networked information flow” (Lemos, 2007, p.10).
4 Still complementing what is a conglomerate, Gisela Taschner (1992) indicates that a conglomerate is a group of companies that have different aspects, working in different fields and, thus, being able to grow both externally and internally, or simultaneously.
If the consumer is also analyzed as a content builder with direct participatory activities on the internet, it is clear that companies are no longer able to massively instill information, given that the target audience, thanks to the dissemination of information via multicast, is diversified.

This phenomenon is largely maximized by the internet, which multiplies user action, generating strategies and possibilities for users to produce collaborative content. This possibility directly affects the routine and culture of the new media, once it modifies the structure of the dissemination of information, leaving “producers and consumers - in the same reality, that of flows and which would allow to know and recognize at the same time.” (Fausto, 2008, p.93)

Jenkins (2009, p. 30) corroborates this perception that producers and users have a direct link, integrating similar spaces and interacting “according to a new set of rules, which none of us fully understands”. Thus, anyone can, thanks to technological development and the opening of new sources coming from the internet, become an information producer.

Because of this, the internet is such a wide communication vehicle in recreations, reconfigurations and restructurings that it is considered by many to be infinite. Straubhaar and LaRose (2004, p.15) say that:

> [...]The application of information technologies, such as computers and advanced digital telephone systems, greatly expands the coverage and nature of these activities, making it possible to aggregate responses from much larger audiences or adapt presentations to individual users, for example.

However, there are several possibilities for information, interactivity and knowledge that the Web allows us. With the creation of platforms that seek interaction, the informative content is more and more diversified and, consequently, it is expanding and, currently, it is perceived that there is no way to go back. Even more, thinking about the new generation potentially connected that already uses the various tools available. Using the words of Manuel Castells (1999, p. 553):

> [...]The mixture of times in the media within the same communication channel, chosen by the viewer / interactant, creates a temporal collage in which not only genres are mixed, but their times become synchronous in an open horizon with no beginning, neither end, nor sequence. The timelessness of multimedia hypertext is a decisive feature of our culture, shaping the minds and memories of children educated in the new cultural context.
Therefore, one cannot think in a disconnected way about the knowledge provided by these new means, especially with the use of these contemporary tools, since in addition to the informational value, users deal directly with machines that provide better benefit in the search for information they consider relevant.

This search for information and the use of technological devices to enter virtual reality can be demonstrated through increasing annual numbers of internet access, whether in the workplace, school, home, universities, among others. In 2015, Brazil, for example, was the third country in the ranking of people on the internet network and\(^5\), the following year, these data increased dramatically. According to IBGE\(^6\), in 2016, 64.7% of the Brazilian population had access to the internet, which corresponds to a total of 116 million people connected to the world wide web.

In 2018\(^7\), when it comes to global data, 53% of the world population had access to the internet, with a 7% growth compared to 2017 numbers. And of those 4.021 billion with access to the network, 3.2 billion use social networks.

In view of the growth in the use of the internet, some actions have been created by entrepreneurs who are entering the network, especially given that 74% of people with internet access\(^8\) prefer the online mode when making purchases. One of the main ones is the omnichannel, which we will see in detail later.

2 PLACES OF PURCHASE: OMNICHANNEL EXPERIENCE AND AGENCY

Omnichannel is a relatively recent concept in academic research, but it has been studied intensively since 2011. In the retail market it is already a reality for many companies. The discussion of this topic demonstrates how prominent the term is and determines that theoretical and reflective research should be carried out.

The concept is a fact in some segments and a general trend in retail. It results in the convergence of all sales channels used by a company, aiming at a unique experience


\(^8\)Online shopping is preferred by 74% of Brazilian consumers. 2019. Available at: <https://www.ecommercebrasil.com.br/noticias/compra-online-preferencia-de-consumidores-brasileiros/> accessed on August 19, 2019
for the consumer, stimulating the possibility that the consumer does not notice nuances and differences in online or offline purchases.

Omnichannel means an integrated sales channel, although, according to Forbes (2014), the customer does not always perceive this hybridity of channels. Through this concept of convergence, the customer finds a company's products and services through its website, social networks, physical store, call center, blog, catalog, among others; making purchasing a unified process.

With the improvement of new technologies and social media, expanded by the possibilities of the internet, new and different channels appear in a fast and intense way, changing the identities of companies, and more broadly, of retail and wholesale. Consumers, on the other side, also create and recreate their consumption behaviors and habits (Juaneda-Avensa, et al., 2016).

In this way, the omnichannel promotes an integration of sales channels as well as product and consumer data - in the sense of knowing the behavior and preference of their customers -, interacting physical stores (stores, kiosks, stands) and virtual (website company, social media, mobile) with customers, who have the autonomy to satisfy their shopping needs.

Many are the authors who undertake brave studies on the concept of Omnichannel such as Juaneda-Avensa, et al. (2016); Brynjolfsson, Hu and Rahman (2013); Hansen and Sai (2015); among others. However, our line of thought in this work understands the concept of Omnichannel in the light of the authors and works cited, in order to highlight how essential information technologies are in this convergence of channels and the end of the distinctions between physical and online (Brynjolfsson; Hu; Rahman, 2013). Mobile device media provide broad consumer experiences (Hansen; Sai, 2015) and challenge this new configuration of customer relationships.

In this direction, we understand the client's experience from the sociological notion of Joan Scott (1999), who sees “experience” within an identity procedure, where the subject knows, connects, creates and recreates itself; giving form to new possibilities of action (in this case “buying action”) and positioning itself as a modern subject of multiple identities and framework of experiences.

It is important to note that this experienced interaction occurs through the company's relationship with customers, through the optimization of consumer data, as well as the possibility of excellence in service in the sales cycle: before, during and after (Sebrae, 2017).
In this sense, what is essential in the concept of Omnichannel is the notion of reconstruction, both of structures and processes, promoting a convergence of customer experiences and leading new marketing practices, remodeling the company's moral and social values that are built and recreated by through social relations between company and client. These practices make the customer an active agent in the purchase process. This perception of agency, by the company and the client, occurs through the realization of technological devices, unified platforms and channel and relationship management.

In this integration of channels managed by the company and also by the client himself, who interacts with the platforms, it's evident a consumer who observes, witnesses, consumes and reproduces information, disseminating narrative and ideological conceptions provided by new technologies, social media, and through the company's own channels in which the customer is engaged. These acts embody agency actions resulting from different perceptions, experiences contextualized economically, culturally and socially.

Therefore, for a company to have agent consumers, it needs to promote agencying that implement a convergence and integration of its data, its languages and its sales practices. For this, they choose the customer service, supporting devices that solve problems regardless of the place of sale and the ways of approach; marketing strategy that links channels and customer profile; and integration of administrative and financial data from physical and online stores (Sebrae, 2017).

An active customer, whom interacts with the company's sales channels that have to do with his personal device interests, buys his or her own product in a practical and practically autonomous manner, creating a playful complicity with the company. And the company, in turn, optimizes data and costs, retaining and engaging the customer. This phenomenon is especially potentiated by the strong advance of multicast vehicles and which surpasses traditional broadcast channels.

3 THE OMNICHANNEL PRACTICE IN BRAZIL

Despite being spreading rapidly as a retail sales model, the omnichannel concept is not yet widely applied in Brazilian companies. According to the “Zendesk Omnichannel Benchmark 2018”, a study carried out by the company Zendesk, involving more than 37 thousand companies in 14 countries, in Brazil, only 3.5% of the analyzed companies offer omnichannel support (ESPM, 2018). Still according to the study, the retail and finance sectors are the ones that most use omnichannel in the country, applying
more than four integrated points of contact for the customer's shopping experience. The sectors identified as those that least use this strategy were consulting and hospitality/tourism.

In the world ranking, the survey points to the United States as the leader, with 6% of the companies analyzed using omnichannel, followed by Australia, with 5.5%, and Canada, with 5.4%. Brazil occupies the 10th place in this ranking (ESPM, 2018).

Although, in Brazil, there are still few experiences with the use of omnichannel by companies, it is possible to observe some cases that deserve to be highlighted. Through information disclosed by the companies themselves and by websites specialized in retail and entrepreneurship in Brazil, it was possible to identify several cases, albeit at initial levels, of applying the omnichannel strategy in companies (Oliveira, 2019; Ziebarth, 2019; Duarte, 2019; Grant, 2019). The five most significant cases (in alphabetical order: Centauro, Magazine Luiza, Natura, O Boticário and Via Varejo) were selected in the context of the publication of this study:

3.1 CENTAULO

Centauro, a sporting goods store, has more than 180 physical stores located in 22 states of the country. In addition to these physical points, the company makes its sales through telephone, website and its own app. In addition, Centauro explores partnerships with other virtual marketing channels, providing exposure and access to a greater number of people within its consumer profiles. In addition, when making a purchase through virtual channels, the company offers the customer the possibility to exchange the product purchased in any physical store, generating an experience of discovering the products and exposure to new goods at its points of sale.

3.2 MAGAZINE LUIZA

Magazine Luiza is another interesting example of the use of omnichannel strategies in Brazil. According to information provided by FORBES Brasil (GRANT, 2019), the company recorded, between 2015 and 2018, an increase of 241% in e-commerce and 51% in physical stores, especially due to the adoption of omnichannel in its service. The positive result was also reflected in the company's share price in the stock market, which went from R $ 8.00 in January 2015 to more than R $ 180.00 in January 2019 (Duarte, 2019). After investing in the creation and structuring of digital platforms to access its products, the company offers integrated online and offline experiences for
its customers, such as the brand's mobile app, which currently covers most of the company's online sales; technology to assist the work of physical store sellers, integrating the systems of these stores with the company's virtual structure; and the “Buy Online Pickup in Store” system, which allows the customer to buy in a virtual channel and pick up their product in a physical store, which reduces the delivery time for the customer and eliminates the cost of shipping, in addition to enabling a integrated experience between the company's online and offline spaces, currently representing 30% of its sales initiated through online channels.

3.3 NATURA

Structured from direct sales made only through consultants who used printed product catalogs as a tool, Natura saw its market threatened by competition from 2014 onwards. In view of this, it began its process of creating new service and purchase channels, bringing more convenience to your customers. They created a portal on the internet, which functions as a marketplace, and opened several physical stores or points of sale throughout Brazil. Currently, it has more than 50 “Aqui Tem Natura” franchises in five Brazilian states, working with omnichannel strategies to improve the customer's shopping experience.

3.4 O BOTICÁRIO

“O Boticário” can be considered one of the most complete Brazilian examples in terms of using omnichannel. Selling its products from physical stores since 1980, the company started selling on the internet in 2002, through its own website. Currently, exploring the potential of several channels closer to its target audience, such as social media, sponsored ads and e-mail marketing, “O Boticário” invests in an omnichannel experience with promotions that distribute product samples for free. The contemplated customer, after making a registration in the company's system, must go to a nearest physical store to collect the product. By doing this, “O Boticário” provides a concrete experience to the customer, which originated in a virtual channel, allowing the consumer to see and try new products in the brand's physical stores, which creates the opportunity for new sales. These actions are an excellent example of integration between physical and virtual spaces, aimed at a better customer shopping experience.
3.5 VIA VAREJO

Responsible for controlling three major brands - Casas Bahia, Ponto Frio and Extra.com.br - Via Varejo, active in the electronics and furniture sectors, is another interesting example of success in the use of omnichannel strategies. The company has, among its purchase channels, a digital laboratory store in São Paulo, using technologies such as virtual showcases, totems and cameras, the latter with the intention of measuring customer satisfaction through reading expressions. In addition, it works with stores in the compact style, exposing only the most sold products and with direct access to digital shopping channels; “Smarts” stores, which act as a physical point for the brand's virtual stores; kiosks, located inside or close to other physical stores, also focusing on integration with virtual channels; in addition to their websites, brand applications and marketplaces that bring together various products and distributors. The company's main objective is to increasingly integrate online and offline spaces, providing customers with a more convenient and complete shopping experience.

4 OMNICHANNEL AND THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE CORPORATION REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

It is possible to notice, since just before 2010, as shown by the research Social media in companies: the online relationship with the market, carried out by the auditor and consultancy Deloitte (2010), a considerable and increasing investment in monitoring and direct articulation of company's social medias.

This does not mean that companies should abdicate investment in massive vehicles, even because social media can, to a certain extent, frustrate expectations for those who want to interact with their strategic audiences without receiving criticism or suggestions. This dynamic occurs because the internet networks provide a different format than traditional vehicles. Instead of a monologue, dialogue should reign, as the Web environment is poorly controllable, which can terrify representatives of companies that understand that criticism of their products and / or services could damage the institutional image due to the volume of comments without prompt answer.

This also happens because, in general, teams delimit the main monitoring social media networks and more active performance (through engagement, influence, reach and interactivity), since, especially in the case of large companies, it is humanly impossible to answer everyone comments, on all available social medias, at all times of the day. One should even reduce the idea that everyone is communicating with everyone and note that,
in general, communication is restricted to small groups, which have similar interests, which allows the stimulus of sending information personalized and updated, making it possible to increase the impact of the message disseminated by the company or to exchange more constructive information with its stakeholders (Cachia, 2008; Barker, Wahlers; Watson, 1995).

Fábio França (2008) highlights this synergy with audiences when stating that this relationship is responsible for building the company's reputation. In the same line of reasoning, Jim Macnamara (2010) points out that the constant dialogue with these strategic audiences is what will allow problems arising from some type of product or service provided without total consumer satisfaction to be more easily solved, without significant depreciation to the company's image.

In view of the use of the words “image” and “reputation” in some moments of the article, it is necessary to clarify the concept behind the terms. Basically, it can be said that the guiding thread for the formation of a company's image and reputation is given by its corporate identity, which is nothing more than a set of characteristics, principles, values and beliefs that differentiate a company from its competitors. (Schmidt, 2011; Capriotti, 2005).

The image, in turn, concerns how a company is actually perceived, deriving, in particular, from how the company is exposed and expressed (Carvalho, 2011; Terra, 2011). In other words, “The image is what you perceive [...] and not what you want to project” (França, 2010a, p. 654-655).

Therefore, while the image, to a certain extent, would be a little more punctual, the reputation would be built over time, becoming, in this perspective, more lasting (Argenti, 2006; Carvalho, 2011). According to Argenti (2006, p. 97), “[...] reputation differs from image because it is built over time and because it is not simply a perception in a given period”. In other words, reputation could be considered as a “trust credit acquired by the organization, which is associated with a good name, familiarity, goodwill, credibility and recognition” (Almeida, 2005, p. 120).

In this sense, there would be the possibility for an organization to have many images momentarily, according to specific segments of society and, on the other hand, reputation, with few exceptions, would tend to be more homogeneous.

In this context, managing a company's reputation increasingly requires media monitoring that is not restricted to traditional vehicles. Ignoring the Web environment or
participating inappropriately in social medias can damage corporate reputation (França, 2010b, Macnamara, 2010).

If in the past, only opinion polls - with all their time constraints for preparing, applying and analyzing results - had a methodological basis for measuring the image of companies, new technologies allowed, through "quantifiable metrics" (Yanaze; Freire; Senise, 2010), a continuous and instantaneous monitoring of possible changes in mood - of an active part of society on social medias - regarding the company. In this way, it leaves to identify how the image of the organization is doing at a specific moment and, a process begins, rather in the long term (with comparative analyzes in subsequent periods), to carry out an assessment of how consolidated the corporate reputation is (Straubhaar; Larose; Davenport, 2010).

5 CLOSING REMARKS

Given the context presented and the presentation of cases throughout the article, it is clear that when using the omnichannel strategy, in which the digital world and the real world are integrated with consumers, companies create a favorable environment, improving the experience of stakeholders (public's interest), which, in part, contributes to the reputation of companies with less risk of being impacted.

Despite having a greater focus on sales, the omnichannel strategy, by integrating consumers with business practices, it improves the relationship with stakeholders and, consequently, strengthens the institutional image and, in the long run, the corporate reputation.

In this context, Jenkins (2008, p.325) states that there are:

[...]

A shift from specific media content towards content that flows through multiple channels, towards a high interdependence of communication systems, towards multiple modes of access to media content and towards increasingly complex relationships between corporate media, from top to bottom, and participatory culture, from bottom to top.

In comparison with the pre-Internet period, it can even be said that, nowadays, with the Web, “conflicts related to reputation are even more serious due to the possibility of immediate disclosure of any slip made by organizations in the whole world [through social media] ”(France, 2010b, p. 1074). In other words, according to Flavio Schmidt (2011, p. 105), companies must have an “effective presence in the analog and digital environment”, which, as previously mentioned, is related to the omnichannel strategy.
The contemporary facilities for monitoring the institutional image, therefore, allow a realignment of company strategies that make it possible to recover or strengthen the trust of stakeholders. This process, however, should preferably be accompanied by a more active articulation on the part of the company, with a view to getting closer to strategic audiences. Such communication needs to be efficient and effective, since the flow of information in the digital environment is constant, with potential instantaneous impact of any positive message (for example, about products and services offered) or negative (which may include negative comments and, even slander and defamation).

It is necessary to take into account that this corporate digital presence cannot become a simple Customer Service on the web. The potential of the environment can provide new opportunities for dialogue, potential for increasing brand visibility, humanizing the company and, in the long run, consequent strengthening of reputation (Terra, 2008; Macnamara, 2010).

It should be noted that the Web should not be treated as a solution to all the problems of a company. The ideal is a union, with an aligned discourse, between communication for the online and offline worlds, which can contribute to the institutional image and, with the stimulus of a feeling of group belonging generated in the users, a relationship construction throughout the time that can strengthen the corporate reputation. In this regard, the omnichannel strategy can significantly contribute to processes being optimized, people being engaged, results can be measured and, ultimately, in addition to marketing gains from sales of products and services, the company will be able to leave with its even more solid reputation.
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