



Portuguese Born-on-the-Net Brand's Strategy on Instagram

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Abstract. The internet has become a primary communication and advertising platform, leading to the rise of born-on-the-net brands. These brands are born and widespread on the internet, and their communication strategy is based on this platform. This strategy combines digital marketing and social media like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, which allows brands to establish a close relationship with their customers. This study's main goal was to understand the communication strategies adopted by the born-on-the-net brands on Instagram and to identify their preferences regarding a publication on this social network. It was also intended to understand the brand's motivations for choosing the online medium instead of the physical one and to realise how important social networks are for them and which are the most relevant. The research was conducted through a mixed methodology that met qualitative and quantitative methods and included an interview with six born-on-the-net fashion brand managers and a social media specialist, followed by the content analysis of 293 Instagram publications of those same brands. Thus, this investigation intended to contribute to a better knowledge of the born-on-the-net brands and their ways of communication through social media and reflect on the growing domination and importance of the online medium and its platforms.

Keywords: Digital marketing · Social networks · Instagram · Born-on-the-net brands · Fashion brands

1 Introduction

Consumer culture has been increasingly present in people's lifestyles (Berger 2010). Consumption, despite going back to distant times, is something that has been increasingly encouraged over time (especially after the Industrial Revolution and the introduction of mass production) (McKendrick et al. 1982), ensuring not only a greater economic flow as well as a guarantee of the satisfaction of desires and needs, of a personal or material (Baudrillard 1999). The individual's identity also ends because it's defined by what he buys and acquires and his choices (Bourdieu 1984). Inevitably associated with consumer culture are its main drivers, the brands (Rosa 2014). The technological revolution and the development of the internet at the end of the 20th century contributed to traditional

marketing tools and, more recently, digital marketing; these can more efficiently and more persuasively lead the consumer to purchase their products (Smart 2010), promoting a consumerist lifestyle, in which the act of purchase becomes a routine and important moment (Berger 2010).

With the internet becoming one of the primary communication and advertising media, this led, at the beginning of the 21st century, to the emergence of social networks, which are virtual communities based on sharing other types of content (Kaplan and Haenlein 2009). Whether to share, read the news or go shopping, every individual ends up accessing them at some moment of their day, having witnessed in recent years its exponential growth and a constant appearance of new virtual communities of this gender (Weber 2007). Aware of the new domain of social networks, brands also migrated to this platform (Kerpen 2011). What gives social networks such significant importance is the fact that these allow brands to dialogue and create a relationship with the consumer efficiently and economically like never before. A strategy that integrates social networks allows for creating/reinforcing recognition of a brand, connecting with the target audience and influencing marketing messages content, as well as the way they are disseminated (Smith and Chaffey 2005).

The main objective of a brand or company should always be to establish a strong bond of trust with its consumers (Kerpen 2011). These ties have become much easier to generate with the emergence and growth of social networks because the communication established through these is faster, practical, and efficient, allowing a direct and personalised interaction with everyone (Kerpen 2011). If the brand can relate to the consumer profoundly and emotionally, this will inspire them much more quickly to share it with their contacts (Kerpen 2011), thus having a mutual benefit. That is why having a presence in a single social network may not be enough (Marques 2014).

Social networks thus become not only a path of closer relations between brands and consumers (Smith and Chaffey 2005) but also a means conducive to the emergence of contemporary brands. These new brands are usually created by young and dynamic entrepreneurs, who immediately create profiles on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, among others, as a way to get more audiences; they don't even start in a physical context, in a store, giving their genesis on social networks such as Facebook or Instagram, in which they share photos and information of their products. From there, gradual growth is expected, reaching a status that allows them to be mentioned in the press and (perhaps) open their stores. The brand created on the internet is aimed mainly at digital natives and primarily focuses on customer experience. Despite being born-on-the-net¹, this type of brand does not have to be limited to that context; it can be extended to an offline environment, that is, to be marketed in physical sales spaces. Don't have to adapt to the future, already being, doesn't even need to get young clients because it starts with them (Dunn 2008).

One of the most used social networks today is Instagram, which allows sharing photos or videos (permanently or temporarily) with the follower's community. Aware of this phenomenon, brands have thus migrated to this type of platform, where they interact

¹ Born-on-the-net brands (born in the online context) or, according to Dunn (2008), DNVB (digital native vertical brands), are brands born and first experienced on the Internet.

more efficiently and personalise with their consumers, allowing them to achieve a more accessible approximation.

2 Methods

The study's main goal was to understand the communication strategies adopted by the born-on-the-net brands on Instagram and to identify their preferences regarding a publication on this social network. It was also intended to understand the brand's motivations for choosing the online medium instead of the physical one and to realise how important social networks are for them and which are the most relevant. A mixed methodology was selected due to the heterogeneity of the data. Through its adoption, a qualitative instrument was applied, which will be an interview with the founders of fashion brands created in the online context (see Table 1), a social media specialist, and a quantitative one, which consists of applying a content analysis of publications made by the brands on Instagram, too identify the aspects that they consider most relevant (at the level of the image and the caption) in those same publications.

Table 1. Research sample brands.

Brand	Industry	Instagram
Cinco	Jewellery	http://www.instagram.com/cincostore
Mahrla	Clothing accessories	https://www.instagram.com/mahrla_store/
Feliz é Quem Diz	Stationery decoration	http://www.instagram.com/felizquemdiz
Josefinas	Footwear accessories	http://www.instagram.com/josefinasportugal
Rust & May	Clothing accessories furniture	http://www.instagram.com/rustandmay
Alameda Turquesa	Footwear accessories	http://www.instagram.com/alamedaturquesa

The choice of a mixed methodology will be since none of the methodological instruments mentioned is, in isolation, sufficient to achieve the objectives set for this research. In the qualitative part, interviews with brands and the social media specialist will only allow collecting information about the aspects to which brands attribute (or should attribute) greater importance at the time of publication on Instagram, as well as about the preference for the online medium rather than the physical environment and the importance attributed to social networks, overall, and Instagram in particular.

The interview with the social media specialist will be seen, in addition to what has already been mentioned, as a reference point for establishing some of the parameters to be analysed in the quantitative methodological part. This is also essential to explain, from a more informed point of view, the choices of communication strategies conducted by brands on the social network Instagram, as well as to explain, in a scientific way, the recent and growing phenomenon of brands created in an online context.

The quantitative element will cover a content analysis based on the Herring (2004) model, whose parameters will later be presented in the form of a grid (see Table 2) partially adapted from the Serrano and García (2016) model. This element will then analyse the publications made by the brands on Instagram to understand which characteristics they prefer regarding the features that make up the image and the caption.

Table 2. Content analysis grid.

Variable	Element	Author
Image	Predominant colours	Birren (1961), Holtzschue (2011), Ciotti (2016)
	Colour temperature	Holtzschue (2011), Serrano and García (2016)
	Product position	Serrano and García (2016)
	Product layout	Lee (2014)
Caption	Language	Hammond (2014)
	Name and description	Author’s elaboration
	Presence of another user	Author’s elaboration
	Size	Bacon (2009), Trembath (2015), Trappe (2016)
	Own hashtags	Author’s elaboration

The choice of the mixed method makes it possible to analyse the phenomenon of the creation and expansion of brands created on the Internet through social networks, not only from the point of view of the brands themselves, which explain the options they carry out to establish their communication strategy on Instagram (interviews, Tables 3a and 3b) but also from the perspective of what the follower/consumer will see and perceive through the publications of the brands concerned on this social network (content analysis). The interview with the social media specialist thus complements the two previous approaches, offering the point of view of those who observe and follow the phenomenon of brand creation and expansion in the online context and their communicative choices on social networks, as well as suggesting new options for an improvement of their communication strategy on Instagram. This gives a more comprehensive approach to the market, which allows us to analyse the theme in question from the perspective of brands, consumers, and a social media specialist.

Table 3a. Domains and objectives of the interviews (brands).

Domain	Goals
Brand	Identify the reasons that led to the creation of the brand in an exclusively online context
Social networks	Recognise the importance of social networks and Instagram
Strategy	Understand the strategies on Instagram

Table 3b. Domains and objectives of the interviews (social media specialist).

Domain	Goals
Social networks	Understand the value of social networks for brands and their engagement with consumers
Instagram	Recognise the importance of the social network for brands created in an online context
Instagram post	Identify the components that may be predominant in the brand's communication strategy in the social network

3 Results

3.1 Analysis of the Interviews Conducted with the Brand Founders

The structure of the interview included ten questions. In the first question, the founders were questioned about the reason for their brand creation. No equal answers were obtained, and two brands mentioned the taste for the type of product created and two others the need for creative freedom and to create something personal. Other reasons cited were the desire to create a trademark of its own and unemployment. The second question searched the reason for the brand's launch through the Internet as an alternative to a physical space. The responses indicated the belief in eCommerce, the online presence already achieved through another online content platform (such as a blog), an initial goal of internationalisation and the ease of creating a low-cost close relationship with the customer.

The third question was intended to know if social networks were considered an essential tool to boost the growth of the brands and the social networks that were favoured beyond Instagram. All brands have acknowledged that, saying they also attach extreme importance to Facebook. In one of the responses, they also referred to the social networks Tumblr and Pinterest. Through the fourth question, it was intended to know the opinion of brands about what would distinguish them from others belonging to the same segment and how they tried to convey this difference through Instagram. Of the six responses obtained, two indicated personality and originality. In contrast, the others mentioned the absence of a defined strategy and a common factor among the brand's followers, positioning (luxury) and diligence, transparency of the brand and loyalty to oneself.

All the answers were affirmative regarding the fifth question, which would ask whether the brands attributed a degree of importance to the relationship established with their followers on Instagram to make them grow. Following the previous question, the brands were asked about the strategies adopted to create and maintain this relationship with their followers in the social network. Two of the answers obtained were identical, pointing to a total absence of this strategy. The other responses indicated the presence of a philosophy rather than a system (that of honouring customers and followers), the use of texts or subtitles that hold the attention of those who see the publications, the sharing

of their daily life and the creative process and sending a personalised card along with the orders accompanied by an adjustment to the customer and a search for feedback.

The seventh question revealed that brands considered the visual aspect of their Instagram posts to be fundamental, disclosing special attention to the optical element.

Asked whether the language used in their Instagram posts related to their own identity and target audience, three of the brands responded to using English as a vehicle for internationalisation or easier communication with the public through consolidated internationalisation, and two others claimed to use both English and Portuguese since they also have a solid market presence in Portugal. One brand claimed to use only Portuguese as a way to communicate with an audience, also Portuguese (also being aware that the use of the English language would allow it to reach a more significant number of people).

The ninth question, which consisted of identifying the strategies adopted by brands to stand out on Instagram, obtained answers that referred to the absence of strategy and creativity, a constant routine of publications and a sharing of images of real customers, to simple, sincere, and genuine communication and the sharing of photographs and contact with digital influencers (in this case, bloggers and Instagrammers).

The interview concluded by questioning the brands about whether they consider the creation of unique and focused hashtags a way to attract more followers and users. Two of the responses achieved were negative, despite mentioning their use, and the remaining four responded to consider them, in some way, necessary, both to give them identity and to gather images with the same concept, find users who shared their products or create a relationship with Instagram users.

3.2 Analysis of the Interview Conducted with the Social Media Specialist

The interview with the social media specialist consists of ten closed questions. The first question was to understand brands' current value attributed to social networks and whether they could definitively replace physical interactions. The response highlighted the fact that Portugal is the third country that uses more social networks, serving them to promote interaction with individuals and brands. In the second part of the question, there is a belief that, in the future, social networks will completely replace stores and physical means of interaction, believing that brands still need them (although their importance tends to decrease).

The second question of the interview sought to identify whether social networks brought closer customers and followers to the brands. The answer was yes, noting that social networks balance the relationship between brands and consumers and have raised a need for brands to be close to their customers and provide them with positive experiences to avoid negative reviews.

Through the third question, it was intended to understand whether a brand created on the Internet could establish itself, expand and exist only through social networks. Some examples of born-on-the-net brands with physical expression have been presented, which do not only exist in social networks but expand through these, and others that exist only thanks to the Internet, stating that, in these cases, communication and growth go through social networks.

Then, the fourth question was to realise how important Instagram is to born-on-the-net brands. The response indicated that it did not consider any social network crucial to a brand's survival but a strategy based on various platforms so that it can be affirmed in the online context.

Through the fifth question, we sought to know if it were considered that through Instagram, the follower/client could create a closer relationship with the brand than that produced on another social network. The response was negative: Instagram allows consumers to be more easily exposed to the brand's message and, consequently, more influenced by it. It was also highlighted that the proximity between brand and consumer goes far beyond the platform, based on the values and personality promoted by the brand. Keeping the theme centred on Instagram, the sixth question focused on the main elements to be considered by a brand on this social network to attract more followers. It was said that it was essential for the brand to understand if its audience uses Instagram and that its strategy on this social network should safeguard its own identity, also mentioning the importance of elements such as the creation of images, the language used, the use of the right hashtags and iconography and the reference to other profiles of the network and the location of certain events. Following the previous question, the seventh question wanted to know if the image was more important than any other publication element (caption, links to purchase the product, hashtags, identification of other users...) on the social network Instagram. The response obtained shows that the image is a dominant element.

The eighth question tried to discover that Portuguese born-on-the-net brands already aim at internationalisation when they access social networks, such as Instagram. The answer was affirmative, indicating that a brand born in this specific context will only succeed if it realises that its market is global (not local) and adapts to be understood worldwide.

Regarding the best strategy for a brand to differentiate itself from others on the social network Instagram, it is considered that it should include a helpful content strategy and that it is essential for the brand to have creative content at the level of image and copy. It also mentioned the involvement of other users, and digital influencers, for example, in brand communication and creating stories through this platform.

3.3 Analysis of Posts on the Social Network Instagram

The analysis of publications content on Instagram consisted of creating a unique model based on the Herring (2004) model, Garcia and Serrano (2016) and the content collected during the interviews phase. This analysis is structured in the image (predominant colours, colour temperature, product position and layout of the product) and caption (language used, name and description of the product, indication of how and where to buy it, presence of another user, size of the caption and use of own hashtags) and was made to the publications of the six brands chosen and interviewed (Fig. 1).

The results of the content analysis grids (image and caption) to the publications of six Portuguese born-on-the-net fashion brands are presented. A total of 293 publications were analysed (Figs. 2 and 3 and Tables 4a and 4b):



Fig. 1. One of the publications analysed.

Table 4a. Results were obtained through image analysis.

Element	Variable	Number of publications
Colours	Clear	189
	Neutral	67
	Dark	37
	Hot	212
	Cold	81
Position	Central	167
	Central bottom	29
	Central upper	29
	Right centre	20
	Left centre	20
	Top left	18
	Bottom right	11
	Top right	8
	Bottom left	8
Product	Arranged without model	174
	Arranged with model	119



Fig. 2. Example of one of the images.

Table 4b. Results were obtained through caption analysis.

Element	Variable	Number of publications
Language	English	167
	Portuguese	104
	Combination of two languages	14
	Non-use	7
	Another combination	1
Name	Name	121
Description	Description	7
Reference	Presence of another user	124
	Where/How to buy	84
Size	Small	125
	Medium	88
	Big	80
Hashtags	Use of own hashtags	196

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Fig. 3. Example of one of the captions.

4 Summary and Conclusion

A joint analysis of the results obtained through qualitative methods (interviews) and quantitative methods (content analysis of publications) allowed the following conclusions:

1. Through the content analysis of the 293 posts on the social network Instagram of the six chosen brands, it was possible to trace a “profile” of a post on this social network with the characteristics preferred by the brands:
 - a. The most used colours in the image are light and neutral, with hot temperatures. Besides being more appealing, the light and neutral colours convey more positive and harmonious sensations. In addition, warm colours make it possible to create a relationship of greater empathy with those who visualise an image, giving a sense of more excellent proximity between the brand and its followers. Thus, the image is an intention to approach and create a sense of familiarity between the brands and the consumers;
 - b. The most common position for the arrangement of a product in the image is central, whether superior, centred, or lower. The disposition of any product in a prominent position captures the individual’s attention more instantaneously since the gaze immediately focuses on the central area of any image (Serrano and García 2016). Thus, it is intended to instantly capture the attention to the brand/product of those who visualise the image, as well as to awaken feelings and emotions through it;
 - c. The captions of the publications are primarily medium or small due to their more practical and fast character and summarising the essential information. This demonstrates an awareness of how quickly everything is happening today and an explicit consideration by the follower/user, who does not want to waste too much time with a caption to have more information about the product displayed in the image. Most of the subtitles analysed had a generous size and were more personal, revealing, for example, gratitude to their followers for the success of the brand, telling its history or a particular product.
 - d. The most widely used language in captions is English. This aspect supports the internationalisation strategy, thus aiming, as proven in the responses collected through the interview’s method, to reach a more significant number of international users and communicate with an international audience already previously called. The market for a brand thus becomes global, no longer existing any barrier to its growth;
 - e. The brands present their products individually and through “models”, illustrating their use’s visual result. This shows the prominence that gives the product itself, its elaboration, and its visual appearance, but also to the followers themselves, valuing its use of the product and thus intending to appeal to the purchase of it, showing the satisfaction of other consumers. The user/consumer thus ends up taking part in the “history” of the brand itself, contributing to engagement between the brand and other followers.

2. As verified through the responses collected in the interviews, all the above aspects regarding the image reflect the concern of brands with the imagery content they share (Weber 2007) since the image is the first contact with the brand and their respective products. Brands should consider the iconography and creativity of the image, as this will be the most crucial aspect to consider in an Instagram post. The importance attributed to the image in an Instagram post also meets a societal trend in which everything happens at an increasing speed and more instantaneously and visually, making the image the fastest and most effective way of capturing the individual's attention;
3. No significant importance is given to the sign of the name or description of the product, as the follower/consumer may have access to this information on the brand's website;
4. There are many references to the presence of other users in the publications, which shows the importance that brands attribute to them and the content they create (with their products). In the responses obtained through qualitative methods (interviews), most brands assumed to share posts from other users/followers as part of their communication strategy to make it simpler and more genuine. Sharing publications from digital influencers will also integrate this strategy to achieve greater reach in the social network (Uzunoglu and Kip 2014). This is in line with what was said by the social media specialist interviewed, who argues that an effective communication strategy, which allows a brand to differ from the rest on Instagram, should integrate a sharing of content created by other users (including digital influencers). Brands value and use content created by other users, thus incorporating them into their communication strategies and allowing them to function as their "ambassadors";
5. Although their importance has been increasing, hashtags themselves have not yet been considered an essential element for posting on the social network Instagram. Still, the presence of this element was found in most Instagram posts analysed (196 out of a total of 293). Hashtags can be used to create their own identity and to bring together images with the same concept, also allowing to find users who share their products and create a closer relationship with those who use Instagram. They also make the brand easier to find on this network;
6. Creativity was considered critical in believing in the communication strategy. Allows brands to differentiate themselves from so many others found in the same market segment, which becomes paramount to attracting more followers and, consequently, more customers;
7. The results obtained through the qualitative method (interviews with brands and social media specialists) also allowed us to conclude that nowadays, the establishment and growth of a brand created in an online context would be impossible (or quite tricky and time-consuming) without the use of social networks (since increased time is spent on the Internet or working). In a world where everything becomes easily disposable and outdated (Bauman 2007) and time is considered a rarity, the means provided by the Internet thus become quite suitable to adapt to the new lifestyles of the individual.

5 Limitations and Future Research

The present study has some limitations that should be considered for this purpose. Despite the choice of fashion brands, it would be possible to select other business areas to cross some of the results, considering that even in the fashion brands segment, it is possible to find a diversity of products and brands.

Since the analysis conducted in this investigation was limited only to the image and the caption, an in-depth study of the comments in each post would have helped analyse the communication between the brand and its followers/potential customers. A quantitative analysis of the metrics of various publications, such as the number of likes and comments, would also have served to verify the scope of each post in the social network studied.

Future research may add the study of reception (effects) and not just the emission of content by the brands; it would show the predisposition of sender and receiver and their behaviour in the communication strategy as well as other business areas, thus generating insights that can add value to the investigation.

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