

Digital Marketing of Tourism Destinations: The Case of Lisbon

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Abstract: There is now a widespread recognition that the Web is the privileged place to search for and gather information in a wide variety of fields, as well as for consumers to share information about their experiences and interactions with brands, products and services. Moreover, it is increasingly important to realize that today digital communication is not completely controlled by the organization, there is a lot of content produced and shared by consumers, so their experience and involvement with the brand is crucial for the reputation and recognition of organizations on a global level. Tourism, particularly the management and promotion of tourist destinations, is no exception to this reality, so implementing an appropriate digital marketing strategy is essential for success in an increasingly global and competitive world, specially to create a strong digital brand. The aim of this work is to study the digital marketing strategies of the city of Lisbon. For that, it was analysed the social media networks Instagram and Facebook, and the official website, of Lisbon Regional Tourism Authority. Therefore, it was carried out a quantitative study to the social networks by analysing the official hashtags used through the platform Apify, and of the website using the framework proposed in the literature by Martinez-Sala et. al. In addition, it was conducted a qualitative study on 463 social media posts and to the website using the Access Monitor tool. The results shows that most of the posts using the hashtag #VisitLisbon are from Portuguese users and from companies, and that Instagram is much more used, which reveals that Portuguese companies are promoting the region, when promoting themselves, and for a younger audience. The website has a very attractive design and is coherent with social networks, but it has some weaknesses in terms of navigability and usability, as well as accessibility. In this sense, the digital marketing of the Lisbon region should be worked on so that tourists become its allies in promoting the destination.

Keywords: Digital marketing, Digital brand, Tourism destination, Lisbon, Portugal

1. Introduction

This paper analyzes the social networks Instagram and Facebook and the website of the Regional Tourism Authority of the Lisbon Region, called Visit Lisboa.

The importance of digital marketing strategies for organisations It is now widely recognised that the internet is the privileged place to search for and obtain information in the most varied fields, as well as for consumers to share information about their experiences and interactions with brands, products and services. Decision-making regarding the choice and purchase of products and services, as well as the realisation of that purchase, essentially involves digital channels.

The field of tourism, particularly the management and promotion of tourist destinations, is no stranger to this reality, so implementing an appropriate digital marketing strategy is essential for success in an increasingly global and competitive world.

In the tourism sector, digital marketing involves applying online tools and channels to bring tourist destinations closer to their public. Regional organisations are expected to use these resources for more comprehensive and efficient promotion.

One of the fundamental aspects of effective and successful communication and interaction is the need to understand consumers' wants and needs. Another essential point is to realise that nowadays communication is not completely controlled by the organisation; there is a lot of content produced and shared by consumers, so their experience and involvement with the brand is crucial for the reputation and recognition of organisations on a global level. The paper is structured as follows: first is made a literature review on the main topics of the study, the third section presents the methodology applied in the study, the next section the main results are discussed, and the last section presents the main conclusions and limitations of the study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digital Marketing in Destination Management

The web is now widely recognized as the privileged place to search for and obtain information in the most diverse areas, as well as for consumers to share their experiences and interactions with brands, products and services. According to Kaur (2017), digital marketing has now become an indispensable part of every business, regardless of its size and type. Tourism, in particular the management and promotion of tourist destinations, is no exception to this reality, with digital marketing being an essential element in the changes that have taken place in the way tourists interact with destinations (Magano & Cunha, 2020). Implementing appropriate digital marketing strategies is essential for success in an increasingly global and competitive world, especially for creating a strong digital brand. To implement successful digital marketing strategies, destination management should consider six crucial points – website quality, strong social media presence, search engine optimization (SEO), email-marketing, content and mobile responsivity (Kaur, 2017). Tourist destinations are complex combinations of tourism products and services that offer an integrated experience to consumers and are increasingly recognized as a concept that encompasses the tourist's own interpretation as a consumer (Buhalis, 2000), as well as their perception of the destination, which is formed from information and content based on searches carried out. The literature recognizes that all stages of the travel process, from inspiration to post-travel, are influenced by digital and mobile technologies (Cunha, 2019).

Organizations empowered by digital technologies can create value for themselves and their customers (Kannan & Li, 2017) and increase a deeper understanding of them, which improves the customer experience while fostering the development of lasting and long-term relationships (Kaur, 2017).

Digital marketing can be defined as an adaptive, technology-enabled process through which organizations collaborate with diverse stakeholders to create, communicate, deliver and sustain value for all stakeholders (Kannan & Li, 2017). Recognizing the importance of all stakeholders is a fundamental aspect, as digital communication is currently not entirely controlled by destination management organizations, and involves the participation of several stakeholders, including tourists. Digital marketing has transformed the traditional concept of marketing and the way in which all stakeholders, especially consumers, are viewed in this process, recognizing them as active co-creators (Baser, 2020). Consumers play an important role (Kannan & Li, 2017), with much of the digital content produced and shared by tourists themselves, so their experience and involvement with destinations as brands is crucial to their reputation and recognition on a global level.

2.2 Promoting Tourist Destinations Through Websites

In an increasingly digital world, the website has become the gateway to discovering new places for many travellers.

For tourist destinations, a well-designed website is the showcase that attracts, informs and inspires those who search them, transforming their computer screen into a window to paradise, presenting basic information about the location, but also, if well-crafted, a series of videos, photos and stories, creating an immersive experience for the viewer who connects with the culture and atmosphere of the place without even stepping a foot on the ground.

The Web, especially websites, have added new dimensions to the definition of communication, bringing with them different possibilities, perspectives and obstacles, transforming the means of interaction between organizations and the public (Augusto, 2014; Oliveira et al., 2023; Santos et al, 2020).

Kent et al. (2003) reinforces the idea that these transformations and almost minute-by-minute technology updates create new types of relationships, pointing out that websites have become very important for creating, adapting and modifying relationships between consumers and companies. The promotion of a destination thus goes beyond information. Stories, testimonials from locals and visitors, videos about the local culture, and even suggestions for personalized itineraries, create an emotional link between the traveller and the destination, awakening the desire to get to know the place up close.

A tourist destination's website needs to be a complete and inviting guide, and there are three different ways of perceiving them, according to Martínez-Sala et al. (2020), who created a quantitative evaluation framework to analyse websites: graphic design, usability and navigability. These categories are in line with the view that already Kent and Taylor (2003) defended, by stating that the main points that a website must consider capturing the public's attention are ease of use, the relevance of the information it contains, attractive design and interactivity.

In fact, the features of a website have a significant impact on public perception. A captivating, easy-to-navigate website that provides quality data and information and offers accessible interaction can increase the customer's willingness to buy (Stephanie et al., 2019).

Thus, promoting a destination through a website transcends the simple presentation of photos and information, becoming an immersive and interactive experience. As Grönroos (2016) points out, creating bonds and relationships with the customer is one of the key points that a company must pay attention to distinguish itself.

Promoting a destination through a website is a strategic investment that guarantees visibility, interaction and, above all, a connection with potential tourists. A well-designed website, adapted to any device, with engaging text, breathtaking photos, videos that convey the vibrant atmosphere of the place, detailed information on attractions, events, accommodation, transport, gastronomy and local culture, as well as interactive maps, booking portals and tour packages that make it easy to plan a trip, are a guarantee of success and constant viewing at any time and place.

2.3 Social Media Strategies and Destination Management

The development of a destination through tourism depends on much more than its natural and cultural resources. It requires the creation and coordination of a set of actions capable of transforming these resources into potential tourism products and experiences, promoting the destination's competitiveness. The planning and execution of these actions consists of the destination management process, conducted by Destination Management Organizations (DMO).

A DMO is a non-profit entity that represents a city or urban area in attracting and maintaining all types of travellers to that city or area, whether for business, leisure or both (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2011). DMOs play a central entrepreneurial and innovative role, providing destinations with the capacity to cope with changes and turbulence in the market.

Social media has emerged as a key tool in destination management, providing an interactive and dynamic platform that allows direct communication with tourists, both potential and actual.

Social media plays a crucial role in shaping a destination's image. Social platforms such as Instagram and Facebook allow destinations to share content that imprints the essence and authenticity of destinations, influencing consumers' travel decision-making process (Ketter & Avraham, 2012). In addition, the quality and ease of use of online information provide essential clues that influence tourists' behavioural intentions (Armutcu et al., 2023).

Literature highlight that the creation of attractive visual content is fundamental, because using high-quality photographs and videos tends to increase user engagement and shares, especially through social networks (Santos et al., 2023).

Online reputation management is also a vital strategy, in which social networks play an important role. Monitoring visitor comments and opinions on social media allows destination managers to respond quickly to problems and build a positive image. A good online reputation represents a significant advantage for any product or service provider (Cillo et al., 2021) and can be a source of benefits such as improving image, increasing consumer loyalty and ultimately increasing consumer retention capabilities.

Therefore, for this study was defined the following research question "How digital marketing strategies used by a DMO can improve its reputation online?". To answer the research question, it was defined two goals (1) identify, according to Martínez-Sala et al. (2020) framework, the design, usability and accessibility improvements that can be made to the "VisitLisboa" website to provide a better experience for Lisbon tourists; and (2) identify the social media reach through the hashtags defined by DMO of Lisbon.

3. Methodology

This exploratory study aims to analyse digital marketing strategies carried out by Lisbon Regional Tourism Authority, namely the website "VisitLisboa" which is one of the main digital marketing tools used to promote Lisbon as a tourism destination, and its social media networks, Instagram and Facebook.

The methodology for the website analysis includes a quantitative analysis based on the framework proposed by Martínez-Sala et al. (2020) to evaluate its usability, followed by a qualitative analysis using the Access Monitor tool to evaluate its accessibility. Through the Martínez-Sala et al. (2020) framework, it was considered

the following parameters: graphic design, navigability, and usability. Regarding the parameter usability it was considered the content; ergonomics; processes, errors and adaptation; interactivity; and distribution and marketing.

Additionally, it was analysed the publications on social media networks from October 2023 to April 2024. This data was collected using the platform Apify. All the content was transferred to an Excel file. We analysed information related to the date of publication, the kind of publication (text, photo, or video), the number of comments, the number of likes, the profile type of the user (individual or organizational).

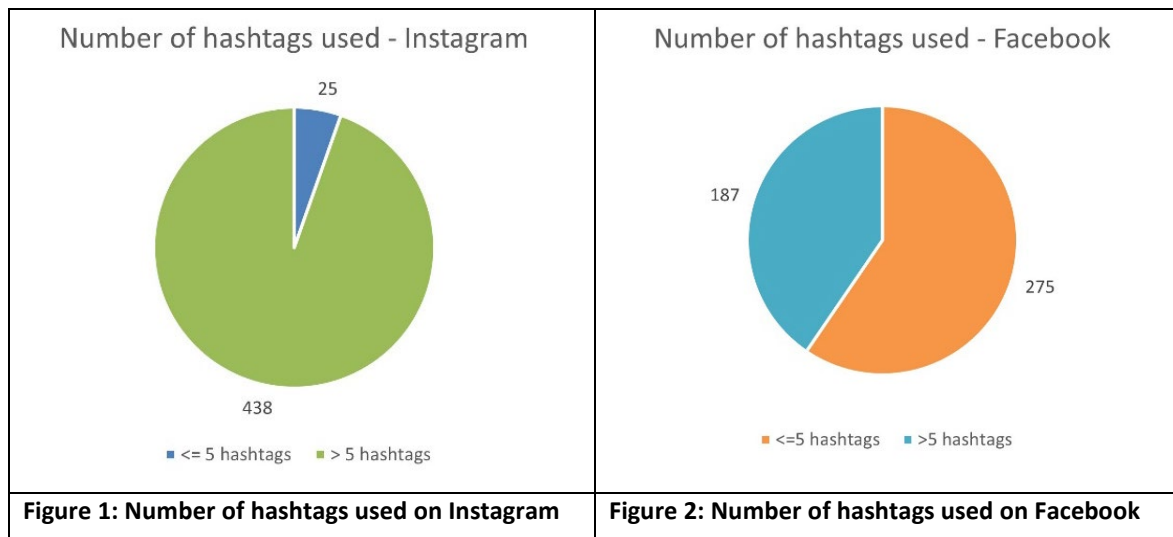
Regarding Instagram, our sample is composed of 463 results. In the Facebook platform, it was analysed 463 posts: 214 videos, 186 photos, 4 media attachments and 59 without specific information.

4. Results

4.1 Social Media Networks

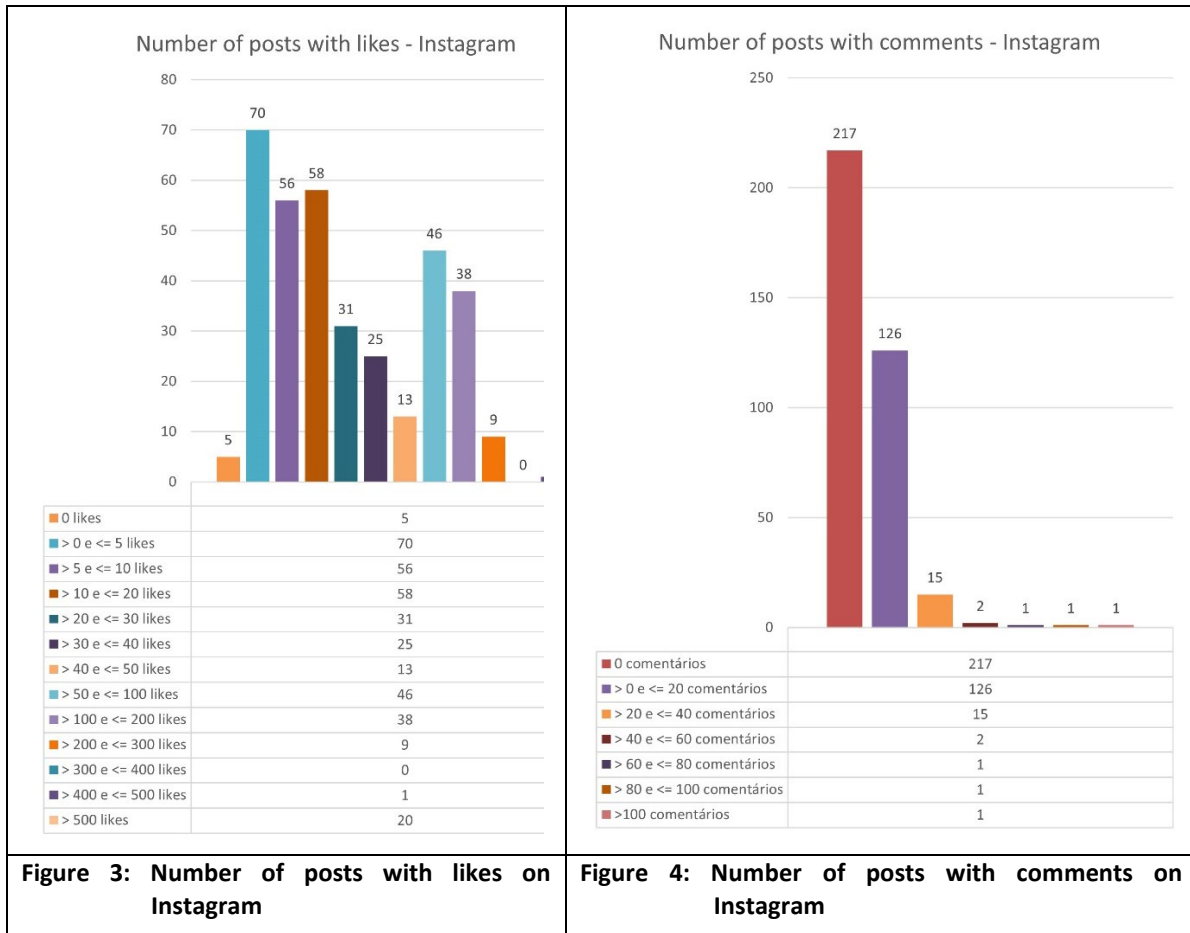
Regarding social media networks, the Instagram and Facebook were analysed to understand how these channels are used to communicate the destination, namely which hashtags are used and information related to the date and type of publication (text, photo or video), the number of comments and likes, and the type of user profile (individual or organizational). As the starting point was analysing the same number of posts, the last 463 at the time of the study, on both Instagram and Facebook, it was clear that Instagram is the most used social network. The 463 posts made on Instagram were made in 6 days (between 20 March 2024 and 26 March 2024), which represents around 77 posts per day. On Facebook, the 463 posts were made in 420 days (between 28 October 2023 and 2 April 2024), which is approximately 1 post per day.

The official hashtag defined by DMO is #VisitLisboa, and this is used in all the organization's posts on Instagram and Facebook, usually without recourse to others. About posts made by users, both individual profiles and organizations, numerous additional hashtags are used in addition to the official one. An excessive use of hashtags was even identified in many publications, especially on Instagram, considering the recommendations for use which indicate between 3 and 5 hashtags per publication. On Instagram, 25 posts with 5 or fewer hashtags and 438 posts with more than 5 hashtags were identified, as can be seen in the graph in Figure 1. Facebook identified 275 posts with 5 or fewer hashtags and 187 posts with more than 5 hashtags, as can be seen in the graph in Figure 2. Considering the relevance of Instagram as the social network with the most posts, the 8 most used hashtags were identified: #VisitLisboa, #lisboa, #portugal, #lisbon, #visitlisbon, #visitportugal, #lisbonlovers and #travel.

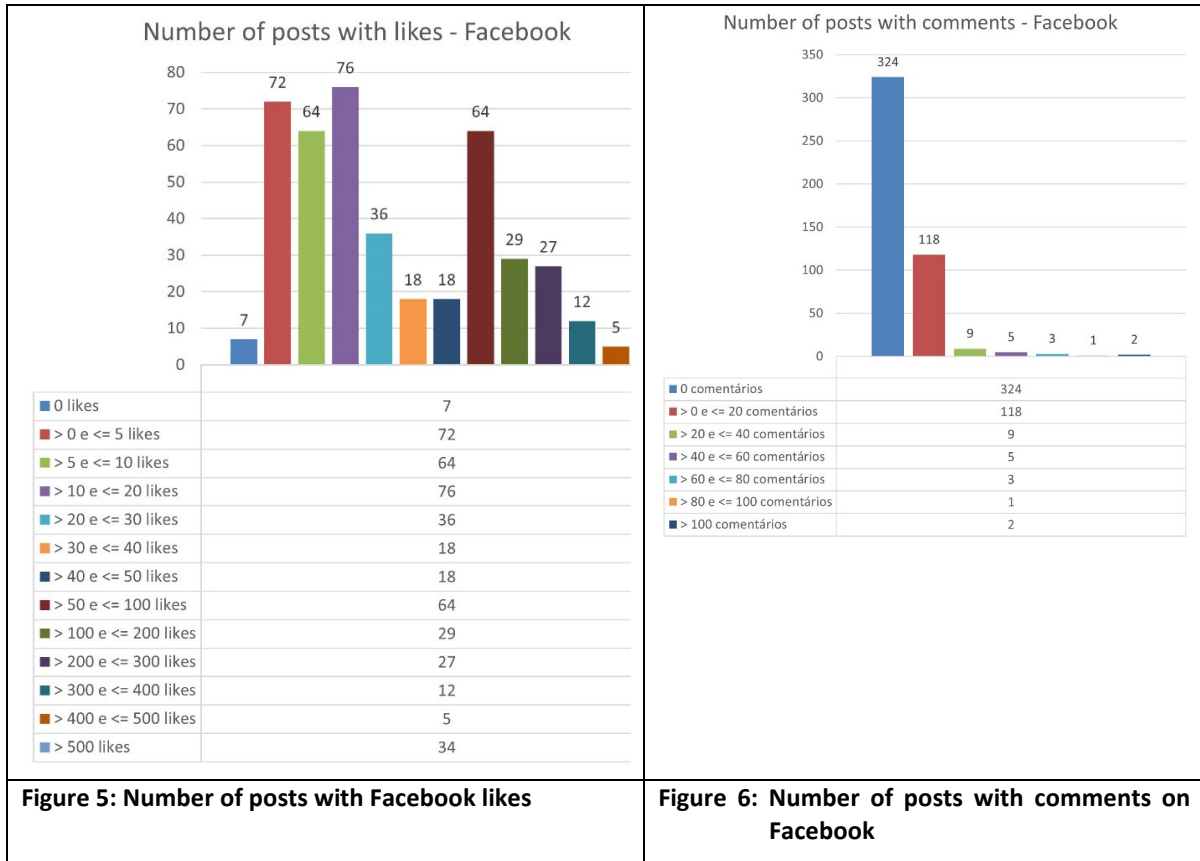


At the time of the study, the Instagram account had a total of 125,000 followers. The day with the most posts (98) was 21 March. Data on the number of posts with likes was analysed, as can be seen in the graph in Figure 3, with thirteen different intervals defined for this analysis. It was found that the post with the most likes (16,106) is a photo, originates from England and was made by an individual profile on 21 March 2024. Regarding the number of posts with comments, the data on this indicator was analysed, as can be seen in the graph in Figure 4, and seven different intervals were defined for this analysis. It was found that the post with the most comments (233) is a photo, originates from Belgium and was made by an individual profile on 22

March 2024. As for the type of posts, 292 photos and 171 ‘sidecars’ were identified, this being a type of collection of multiple photos in a carousel. Regarding the type of user profile, there was a balance, with 234 individual users and 229 organizational users. As for the origin of the users, 32 different countries of origin were identified, with a higher prevalence of publications originating in Portugal, 191, followed by 58 originating in France and 56 originating in England.



The Facebook page had a total of 771,000 followers. The month with the most posts (295) was March 2024. Posts with likes was analysed (Figure 5), in a range of thirteen different intervals. It was found that the post with the most likes (7074) is a photo, originates from Portugal and was made by an organizational profile on 24 March 2024. The number of posts with comments analyses (Figure 6) shows that most of them don't have comments. Nevertheless, the post with most comments (150) is the same one that had most likes. As for the type of publications, 214 videos, 186 photos, 4 media attachments and 59 with no specific information were identified. Regarding the type of user profile, there was a balance, with 234 individual users, 221 organizational users and 7 publications with no information to identify the profile. As for the origin of the users, 17 different countries of origin were identified, with a higher prevalence of publications originating in Portugal, 329, followed by 32 from Brazil and 17 from Spain.



4.2 Website

To complement the analysis of this enigmatic city's social networks, we analysed its website, an essential assessment since it acts as the city's main digital showcase, concentrating detailed information on the products, services, values and identity of the *VisitLisboa* brand.

Two different analyses were carried out on the DMO website: one quantitative, focusing on the Martínez-Sala et al. (2020) framework and other qualitative, analysed according to the Access Monitor tool.

Martínez-Sala et al. (2020) framework analyses three different parameters based on three scales classified as 0-1, 0-2 and 0-3, where 0-1 is used for characteristics that are present (1) or not (0) and where 0 to 2 or 0 to 3 classifies different details from bad (0) to excellent (3).

In the graphic design parameter, the site scores highly in all indicators, with a parameter score of 2 (Table 1). The website then uses bright colors, both in the logo and on the page itself, achieving an appealing brand image. However, since it is such a lively and diverse city, with a wide range of information on activities, tickets, news and so on, it ends up having too much information on a single page, making it difficult to read. Since the eye can only focus on one stimulus at a time, the score for this parameter was not maximum due to problems with clarity and legibility that don't form a cohesive visual narrative and don't guarantee pleasant read.

Table 1: Score obtained per indicator in the parameter Graphic Design

Indicator	Score
Brand image	2
Discursive, argumentative and rhetorical Analysis	2
Clarity	2
Legibility	2
Total Score	2

In the navigability parameter, the site obtained an average score of 1.81 (Table 2), slightly lower than maximum score of 2.27. This result stems from navigation problems, flaws in the presence of indicators, fonts and dates, the lack of remote navigation, as well as the fact that the tags defined don't cover the entire site and the search engine results aren't very precise. However, there are small details with a maximum rating, such as the presence of well-divided and subdivided main navigation, giving users the perfect possibility of finding what they are looking for using basic buttons.

Table 2: Score obtained per indicator in the parameter Navigability

Indicator	Score
Main navigation	3
Expressiveness	1
Identification	1
Structural navigation	3
Orientation	3
Hierarchy	3
Local navigation	1
Remote navigation	0
Semantic or hypertext navigation	1
Tags	1
Search engine	3
Total Score	1,81

About usability, the overall score is 2, out of a maximum of 2.5 (Table 3). This score is justified by : content, as already mentioned, the site presents a variety of very detailed and up-to-date content; in distribution and marketing, the site provides links to other sites that allow the user to book tourist products and services, such as accommodation, transport, catering and complementary nature, sports, cultural and leisure activities, ticket offices, making it interactive; as well as having links to the brand's different social networks and online shopping and booking, location map and news section. However, it also has flaws, which focus on details such as the lack of a personalised newsletter according to the user's preferences, consequences for errors that may occur on the site and adaptation to the previously defined preferences of each user.

Table 3: Score obtained per indicator in the parameter Usability

Indicator	Score
Content	
Consistency between theme, audience and objectives	1
Interest and opportunity	3
Quantity	3
Accuracy	2
Editing	2
Relevance	2
Ergonomics	
Easy	3
Flexibility	2
Multimedia resources	3
Speed	3
Processes	
Presentation of status	2
Conventions	3
Errors	

Indicator	Score
Error correction (possibility of going back)	1
Notifications	1
Consequences	0
Adaptation	
Adaptation	0
Frequent access	3
Terms and Policies	3
Interactivity	
Contact information	3
Personalized access	1
Personalized newsletter	0
Specific tourism/hotel applications	3
Specific web 2.0 applications	1
Blogs and social networks	3
Distribution and marketing	
Online shopping and booking tools	1
Flexibility	3
Security	2
Total Score	2

The overall score of the website is 1.94, with a maximum UI/UX score of 2.44, showing that it has a good graphic design, organised navigability and very well-thought-out details. Nothing is missing for those looking for the city, with high quality informative content providing an engaging and satisfying experience for visitors, thus guaranteeing a positive user experience, only needing to improve parameters of clarity, legibility, navigability, adaptation and interactivity.

About the qualitative analysis of the website, the Access Monitor tool analyses and evaluates the accessibility and usability and gives a summary of the overall score of the *VisitLisboa* website of 7.2 out of 10, where 35 web accessibility practices were analysed, with 23 practices considered acceptable, 7 unacceptable and 5 requiring manual analysis.

The unacceptable errors concern the lack of text on images, hierarchical violation at header level and buttons without accessible names. In the links, 18 were identified with empty content and another 27 without accessible names, jeopardising navigation and the clarity of the content, which can result in a confusing and frustrating browsing experience. Regarding colour contrast, 13 colour combinations with less than the minimum permitted contrast and less than the optimised proportion were found, making reading difficult for users with visual impairments or vision difficulties, and it is important to ensure that all colour combinations meet the recommended contrast standards for good readability.

The 5 practices that need to be analysed manually are related to recommendations as best practices and not mandatory rules. These included 175 images with an empty *alt*, 47 headers on the same page and 4 cases of colour combinations with lower contrast than expected.

Finally, acceptable practices were found that allow the website to stand out with a high ranking. Structured navigation, such as the possibility of going directly to the main content, correct titles, accessible headings, well-structured forms with working buttons and error-free HTML, are essential for improving the user experience. In addition, the correct use of titles and attributes is important for the structure and navigation of the website.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This research project aimed to study the digital marketing strategies of the city of Lisbon, analysing the social networks Instagram and Facebook, and the official website of the Lisbon Regional Tourism Authority. Knowing

that digital marketing is now an essential part of any business (Kaur, 2017) and that tourism, in particular the management and promotion of tourist destinations, is no exception to this reality, it was possible to identify that a cohesive and appropriate online presence plays a fundamental role in attracting and engaging the organisation with its target audience. Our results indicate that, despite the work already done by the Lisbon DMO, namely through its website, its social networks and the definition of official hashtags, the digital marketing strategy can, and should, be improved, presenting more consistency and thus achieving a greater reach.

Digital marketing is an essential element in the changes that have taken place in the way tourists interact with destinations (Magano & Cunha, 2020). In this study, it was possible to see that on the social media networks analyzed, many of the posts with the organisation's official hashtag #VisitLisbon are made by individual profiles and organisations, most of them based in Portugal, which thus become active participants in the communication, dissemination and promotion of the city of Lisbon, while providing valuable data that can then be processed and used to improve the destination's own digital marketing strategies. The fact that there are many profile posts from Portuguese organisations shows that these companies are promoting the region while promoting themselves. It was also possible to see that Instagram is the social network that users most use, being clearly more used than Facebook, which is in line with the literature, which identifies an increase in the use of Instagram, along with a decrease in Facebook, particularly in the younger age groups.

Unlike social networks, websites offer an institutionalised and controlled space where companies have more freedom to organise and present their content in a strategic way. Therefore, two different analyses were carried out on the website of Lisbon DMO: one Quantitative and the other Qualitative; the first focusing on the Martínez-Sala et al. (2020) framework and the second analysed according to the Access Monitor tool.

In the quantitative analysis, in the graphic design parameter, the site scores highly in all indicators, with the parameter score equal to 2. In the navigability parameter, the site obtained an average score of 1.81, slightly lower than the parameter's maximum score of 2.27. This result stems from navigation problems, flaws in the presence of indicators, fonts and dates, remote navigation not existing, as well as the tags defined not covering the entire site and search engine results not being very precise. Regarding usability, the overall score is 2, out of a maximum of 2.5. The website's overall score is 1.94, out of a maximum score for UI/UX of 2.44, showing that it has a good graphic design, organised navigability and very well-thought-out details so that nothing is missing for those looking for the city.

Regarding the qualitative analysis, the overall score of the website is 7.2 out of 10, where 35 web accessibility practices were analysed, with 23 practices considered acceptable, 7 unacceptable and 5 requiring manual analysis.

Thus, we conclude that digital marketing is currently essential in the management and promotion of tourist destinations, requiring continuous investment in a carefully planned and implemented strategy that considers the various digital channels available and identified as important for the destination. Data collection and constant monitoring are also essential for improving results and adapting to market trends and changes in consumer behaviour and preferences.

Our country's regional tourism organisations, particularly those in the Lisbon region, must work actively to have an increasingly relevant online presence in relation to the objectives defined in the national tourism strategy, thus positioning Portugal competitively in an increasingly competitive global market.

6. Limitations and Future Work

Although this study has provided valuable insights into Lisbon's digital marketing as a tourist destination, several limitations must be recognised. Mainly, the fact that Lisbon DMO itself has such an under-utilised official website and doesn't even have associated social networks. Not all tourists may have reached the Visit Lisboa website, and this limitation may have influenced the results and interpretation of the data. To overcome these limitations, future studies should consider improving the official website of Lisbon DMO, as well as its presence on the social networks. In addition, a more interactive website that allows sharing and posting could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon in question. With these approaches, researchers will be able to validate and expand the knowledge acquired, thus contributing to the advancement of the field.

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