A Content Analysis of Social Media in Tourism During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract. The tourism sector is one of the most important drivers of the Portuguese economy. Indeed, any impacts on tourism organizations’ performance have a huge influence on the economic, social and cultural dynamic of the Portuguese society. As such, considering the challenges and pressure that the recent pandemic of COVID-19 has put on tourism organizations, much attention has been devoted to the problem.

This paper focuses on web communication strategy followed by key organizations in the tourism sector during COVID-19. It is an exploratory study based on a multiple case-study approach that combines different methodologies and techniques. The cases under study were selected through an analytic tool - SimilarWeb - and the preliminary findings, obtained through content analysis of websites and social media profiles of the organizations, indicate that Portuguese tourism organizations have entered in a new age of communication with their clients, characterized by more flexible, complex, and unbureaucratic communication strategies.

Keywords: Business · Tourism · Social media · Pandemic, content analysis · Multiple case studies

1 Introduction

Since the revolution on April 25, 1974, Portuguese tourism has seen a huge expansion. The openness of Portuguese society created new opportunities for the Portuguese economy and tourism became one of the fastest growing economic sectors. According to Costa, Nunes e Castro [1], there were several factors that contributed to the exponential growth of this sector, namely an increase in income and wealth, advances in public transportation, changes in consumers’ lifestyles and values, an increase in leisure time activities, international openness and globalization, immigration, special events, education, information and communication technologies, marketing and promotion of destinations and improvement in general conditions of tourism infrastructure, among others.

For the last two decades, Portugal has been developing a strategy that established status quo of a “Sun and Sea” tourism. The cultural heritage, creative tourism, sports,
business, academic, and so on, created new markets, products and seasonality in tourist activity. This strategy has shown great results.

Indeed, the National Institute of Statistics [2] indicated 24.6 million of non-resident tourists arriving in Portugal in 2019, corresponding to a growth of 7.9% compared to the previous year, higher than the one registered in 2018 (+7.5%). Moreover, in accordance with Banco de Portugal [2], the tourism sector is the largest export economic activity in the country, having been, in 2019, responsible for 52.3% of services exports and 19.7% of total exports and tourist revenues, registered an 8.7% contribution to the national GDP.

Nevertheless, the outbreak of COVID-19 has caught all of us by surprise and its economic impact became highly unpredictable. So far, the short term damages have surpassed the most pessimistic predictions. According to UNWTO [3], the near-universal introduction of travel restrictions, due to COVID-19, led to a fall of 97% in international tourist arrivals, after a 55% decline in March. In a matter of weeks, COVID-19 destroyed any economic or business plans. As Baum and Hai [4] point out, “the hospitality and tourism operations of many countries have been virtually shut down and international travel (and, in some countries, domestic travel as well) has all but ceased”. The effects of the coronavirus outbreak were felt mainly in March, with a 50% drop in the number of tourists, and during May 2020, Portuguese tourist activity almost stopped [5].

In such a context, this paper focuses on web communication strategy followed by key organization of tourism sector during COVID-19. It is an exploratory study based on a multiple case-study approach that combines different methodologies and techniques. The cases under study were selected through an analytic tool - SimilarWeb - and the preliminary findings which were obtained through content analysis of websites and social media sites of the organizations.

The present paper is structured in four sections. After the introduction, a brief description of the theoretical background was described, followed by Sect. 3 with the research methodology used. In section four the results are presented and discussed. Finally, we end the paper with conclusions and future perspectives in Sect. 5.

2 Theoretical Background

One of the defining features of globalization is the personal mobility. During the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century, international traveling registered the highest rate ever. Tourism activities are deeply tangled into the globalization process. Indeed, tourism is at the forefront of globalization and represents one of the main pillars in the world economy. However, differently from some other global activities, tourism involves physical movement of persons. By the beginning of 2020, the unprecedented outbreak of novel coronavirus pneumonia, termed COVID-19, has disrupted the world’s social and economic puzzles, and tourism has been dramatically affected. Under such circumstances, the balance between macroeconomic and health care aspects of the coronavirus pandemic became hard to achieve [6].

Acknowledging the relevance of the tourism cluster in the global economy, and the fact that tourism drives many other activities with which it relates, recent literature in
the field of tourism and hospitality management tries to shed some light on finding better ways to deal with such challenge and “to offer strategies that the tourism industry can adopt to adjust to the new ‘normal’ following this pandemic” [7, p. 731]. In accordance with Brouder et al. [8, p. 1], the emergence of topic “reflect the need that so many people have to express themselves as a way of releasing the anxieties and integrating the hopes that the COVID-19 pandemic has engendered in individuals and groups around the world”. In order to demonstrate the diversity of the literature on the topic, the authors summarize the reflections and discussions of almost thirty researchers about the new normal of tourism in post COVID-19 era.

Following an economic perspective, Tsionas [9] analyses the cost structure of hotel industry and discusses three different scenarios for the reopening of hotel industry, concluding that “(i) reopening gradually requiring only nonnegative profits is quite feasible but (ii) reopening requiring the same level of profit as in the pre-COVID-19 period is considerably more difficult, and seems feasible by reopening at capacity near 33%” [9, p. 1]. The level of 33% is the break-even point below which government subsidies would be necessary. However, the truth is that companies are taking tentative steps towards re-opening their facilities in an absolute sight navigation approach, with or without government subsidies.

Iaquinto [10] looks at this crisis from tourists’ mobility point of view and its impact on the transmission and the spread of COVID-19. The author emphasizes that the categorization of people mobility as touristic, social, professional or business might influence the way “how the spread of the virus is understood by policy-makers, governments, and medical researchers” [10, p. 176]. In that sense, “mobilities theory highlights how tourism is entwined with the political ramifications of COVID-19 and offers some considerations for those seeking to use the pandemic as an opportunity to enable low carbon forms of tourism” [10, p. 177].

Gretzel et al. (2020) underlines the role that information technology has been playing in tourism sector, namely as facilitator and disruptor for the sector. In that sense, the authors challenge e-Tourism researchers to a more profound reflection on the critical questions, and respective answers, regarding the role of IT in creating a better future for tourism. Hence, this crisis can be seen as an opportunity “to rethink the ontology and epistemology of e-Tourism research” (Gretzel et al. 2020:190), specifically regarding the following points [11, p. 198–199]:

- mindful of the past and the value of continuity (historicity);
- aware of the factors that influence knowledge creation (reflexivity);
- explicit about its values (transparency);
- sensitive to differential opportunities to participate in research and varying impacts of its findings (equity); open to diversity in topics and approaches (plurality);
- and willing to break boundaries and be prescriptive (creativity).

Following a completely different approach, Mao et al. [12] draws our attention to the impact of COVID’19 on the employee psychological capital (self-efficacy, hope, resilience and optimism) in tourism from the point of view of corporate social responsibility (CSR). The authors collected data through a questionnaire survey among employees from different kinds of tourism companies and concluded that:
Tourism CSR is beneficial to employee self-efficacy. The more CSR the tourism companies initiated, the higher was employees’ satisfaction with corporate COVID-19 responses.

Tourism CSR promotes employee hope through employees’ perceived satisfaction with corporate COVID-19 responses. Tourism CSR is positively related to employees’ perceived satisfaction with corporate COVID-19 responses.

Tourism CSR helps employees maintain resilience through satisfaction with corporate COVID-19 responses. This means that CSR helped employees persevere, seek quick growth and achieve success when in adversity.

Tourism CSR helps employees remain optimistic through perceived satisfaction with corporate COVID-19 responses.

Loss orientation strengthens the correlation between employees’ satisfaction with COVID-19 responses and self-efficacy.

Loss orientation strengthens the relationship between employees’ satisfaction with corporate COVID-19 responses and hope.

Loss orientation strengthens the relationship between employees’ satisfaction with corporate COVID-19 responses and resilience.

Loss orientation strengthens the relationship between employees’ satisfaction with corporate COVID-19 responses and optimism.

Fennell [13] anticipates a new age for travel and tourism because new technologies will intensify touristic experiences from home. The author puts information technology at the centre of a disruptive answer to this economic, health and environmental chaos faced by tourism and travel sector. Thus, Fennell [13, p. 2] argue that “personalised, interactive, real-time tours, or PIRTs (5 G streaming in real-time using 360-degree view cameras, webcams, drones, and with appropriate hardware, software and infrastructure) will change how we consume touristic experiences”.

Another branch of literature argues that the impact of travel and tourism on environmental sustainability regains public eye attention and literature refers to an increase of global consciousness regarding sustainability issues of travel and tourism. According to this perspective, the pandemic is “a result of planetary time-space compression and is forcing an expansion in human consciousness that will make humankind better able to address global problems” Galvani, Lew, and Perez, [14, p. 1]. Thus, this crisis will drive new “ways of thinking, behaving and operating that are more closely aligned with the goals of sustainable development” [14, p. 1] and it can be understood as “a wake-up call and an opportunity for the tourism industry to embrace the mindfulness movement, trusting in its capacity to reflect on the current problems and to pave a new way forward towards more compassionate and meaningful tourism for both hosts and guests [15].

Looking for an understanding of how this watershed moment has been covered by the Chinese media, Chen, Huang and Li [16] applied an automated content analysis of 499 newspaper articles. The author identified nine major subjects, namely “COVID-19’s impact on tourism, people’s sentiment, control of tourism activities and cultural venues, the role of the hospitality industry, national command and local response, tourism disputes and solutions, corporate self-improvement strategies, government assistance, and post-crisis tourism product” and identified the “topics such as people’s sentiment changes during the outbreak of COVID-19, the effectiveness of crisis
response strategies, and the marketing of post-crisis tourism product” [16, p. 4] as the research opportunities.

As we can conclude from the above, scientific literature about COVID-19 is exploratory, diverse and it is still in its early beginning. As Hall et al. [17, p. 1] points out, although travel and tourism were confronted with a significant list of pandemics and global diseases in the past “there is a surprisingly limited literature on the inter-relationships between pandemics and tourism, and its long-term implications”. So, despite the bleak future facing hospitality businesses, government, companies, workers, agencies, and other actors tangled in the sector are thinking about the best way to deal with such uncertain times. By trying to contribute to the research agenda, this paper intents to identify web communication strategies drawn by the hospitality industry during the emergence and evolution of COVID-19, i.e., in times of celestial navigation.

3 Methodology

The methodologic options are one of the most relevant decisions since they outline the expected results and restrict their clarity and accuracy. Given our research questions, which are necessarily generic and comprehensive – (i) How the pandemic caused by covid-19 was treated by tourism e/m-commerce companies (ii) What kind of information is available on social media about COVID-19 – we understood the multiple case studies as the strongest approach. We carried out a qualitative analysis of the main communication channels, namely websites and social networks with text content. Our focus was on web communication strategy followed by key organization of tourism sector during COVID-19, however, other data sources were consulted.

For data collection and the analyses of the content we carefully followed all the procedures recommended for exploratory qualitative research, especially those indicated for multiple case-study research [18]. To enhance the validity and reliability of the case study [19], we used different data sources, namely portable document format (PDF) documents and Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML), disclosure in the website and available on social media channels. We also complemented this information with external documents such as laws and statements elaborated by the Portuguese government and the European Union that had impacts on tourism organizations during COVID-19 state of calamity and emergency period – March to July, in particular with the following:

– Guide of Recommendations by Theme and Sector of Activity, General Directorate of Health, 9 June 2020 [20];
– Guideline No. 14/2020, General Directorate of Health [21];
– Clean and Safe” Stamp [22];

This research was an opportunity to experience qualitative research as a learning process, where the researcher is “continually and consciously making decisions that affect the questions pursued and the direction of the study” [24, p. 3]. To increase data consistency, before proceeding with content analyses, a pilot test was carried out to understand the potential bias due to different interpretations of individual researchers involved in the content analyses. There is no assessment test to qualify a researcher for
qualitative investigation. However, if the researcher is aware of the difficulties and demands that this type of research involves, he/she can develop his/her abilities and prevent any errors in procedures and mental attitudes that may make the research unfeasible. According to Yin [18, p. 127],” key to understanding the needed training is to understand that every case study researcher must be able to operate as a “senior” researcher. Once you have started collecting data, you should think of yourself as an independent researcher who cannot rely on a rigid formula to guide your inquiry. You must be able to make intelligent decisions throughout the data collection process”. Indeed, to conduct a quality case study, a well-trained and experienced researcher is necessary because this type of research requires a continuous interaction between the theoretical approach being followed and the data that are being used.

Thus, the pilot test was done by three researchers who simultaneously analyse 10% of the data. This test did not reveal any important differences between individual research interpretations, and so, the subsequent content analyses continued with the three researchers working autonomously, in spite of following the same techniques. All the details about the data collection procedures will be given in the next section.

The selected study cases consisted of the e/m-commerce companies with the most access in Portugal. These companies were selected using WebSimilar automated tool. SimilarWeb is a tool which provides web analytics services for businesses such as measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of web data [25]. With SimilarWeb tool, the most visited companies in the field of tourism, in e/m-commerce mode, were identified in Portugal. The answer was based on data available until 3 of July 2019.

The following table shows, by category, the companies, the URL of the website’s home page and the links to the companies’ social networks, if they are accessed through existing links on the website.

| Table 1. Websites analyzed |
|----------------------------|
| Similar web category       | Company       | Web address         |
|----------------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Accommodations and Hotels  | Booking       | https://www.booking.com |
|                            | AirBnb        | http://airbnb.pt    |
| Car Rentals                | Rentalcars CP | https://www.rentalcars.com/ |
|                            | Europcar      | https://www.europcar.pt/ |
| Air travel                 | FlyTap        | https://www.flytap.com/en-pt/ |
|                            | Ryanair       | https://www.ryanair.com/ie/en/ |
| Travel and tourism         | CP            | https://www.cp.pt   |
|                            | Viagens Sapo  | https://viagens.sapo.pt/ |
| Travel and Tourism > Tourism Attractions | Viator | https://www.viator.com/ |
|                            | Zoomarine     | https://www.zoomarine.pt/pt/ |
| Travel and Tourism > Transportation and Excursions | Megabus | https://www.megabus.com/ |
|                            | Sleeping in Airports | https://www.sleepinginairports.net/ |

After that, we looked into each company’s social media. As already stated, the qualitative methodology was used, which can be generically defined as a method of social research that uses analysis of qualitative data. The technique used was content
analyses of social media, websites and social networks. In order to guide the three researchers during data collection and data analyses of each case, there were five well-defined guiding questions:

1. Regarding the reservations made before the knowledge of the pandemic, what are the procedures carried out with regard to the possibility of: rescheduling; cancellation; and refund (Yes/No)?
2. As for the services provided, what type of information is available?
3. What kind of information is provided by companies on the website about healthcare within the scope of the Covid-19?
4. In terms of social responsibility, what were the measures implemented by the companies?
5. With regard to insurance, what are the risks covered by the companies?

To select the pages to be analysed, all those belonging to the same domain and where the URL site contained the word COVID were searched. For this, the following Google command was used: allinurl: covid site:https://[domínio do site]

To define the search criteria, SEO (Search Engine Optimization) strategies were taken into account, organic search was used and the keyword “Covid” would have to be part of the URL of the page [URL Structure [2020 SEO Best Practices]. (n.d.). Moz. Retrieved August 3, 2020, from https://moz.com/learn/seo/url]. The search carried out resulted in 63 html pages and one pdf file.

After analysing the websites, the respective social networks of text content were analysed, namely Facebook and Twitter, accessed through the company’s institutional website (see Table 2).

| Company          | Social network          | Posts | Likes  |
|------------------|-------------------------|-------|--------|
| Booking          | No links available for social network | –     | –      |
| Europcar         | Facebook Twitter        | 7     | 1.892 K |
| CP               | Facebook                | 6     | 839    |
| Zoomarine        | Facebook Twitter (only to online survey forms) | –     | –      |
| AirBnb           | Facebook Twitter        | 6     | 9.6 k  |
| FlyTap           | Facebook Twitter        | 76    | 106.4 K|
| Viagens Sapo     | Facebook Twitter        | –     | –      |
| Megabus          | Facebook Twitter        | 12    | 370    |
| Rentalcars       | –                       | –     | –      |
| Ryanair          | Facebook                | 7     | 18.4 K |
| Viator           | Facebook Twitter        | 7     | 121    |
| The Guide to Sleeping in Airports | Facebook Twitter | – | – |
By looking at the previous table, we realise that most companies do not have direct access to social networks and, those which have direct social network access also have little expressiveness, both in terms of the number of publications and the number of likes.

After these previous appreciation of social network channels, the content analysis of the selected documents was carried out. According to Krippendorff [26], content analysis is a research technique used to make valid and replicable inferences of data, within their contexts. The analysed data can be viewed based on different perspectives. Berelson [27] views content analysis as “a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication”.

The organization of content analysis starts from three chronological segments:

i. Pre-analysis - It is the organization of work itself. After the problem and the research questions are defined, it is necessary to proceed with the constitution of the documentary corpus. The Corpus is a set of material that will be submitted to analysis [28]. In our case, it comprises the social media of the most used e-commerce companies in Portugal (see Table 2).

ii. Exploration of the material or coding – It consists of the process by which the raw data are systematically transformed and aggregated into units, which allows for an accurate description of the characteristics relevant to the content expressed in the text [28]. We then executed two fundamental actions suggested by the author, namely: - The choice of registration units of analysis (UR); - The choice of categories (classification and aggregation)

iii. Treatment of results, inference and interpretation.

In the study, the type of adopted UR was thematic or semantic (rule of clipping of meaning and not form, represented by sentences, paragraphs, abstract, etc.). Bardin (2007) states that the choice of categories is an “operation of classification of constituent elements of a set, by differentiation and then by regrouping according to gender (analogy), with the criteria previously defined”. Categories are rubrics or classes that bring together a group of elements (registration units) that have common characteristics [28]. Homogeneity (uniformity), completeness (exhaust the entire text), exclusivity (the same element cannot be classified into two different categories), objectivity (different coders should arrive at equal results) and adequacy or pertinence (adapted to the content and objective of the study) are some of the characteristics that can help in the construction of empirical categories in content analysis.

The categories in the textual analysis can be produced by different methodologies, in this case the inductive method was used. This method implies constructing the categories based on the information contained in the corpus. Through a process of constant comparison and contrast between the units of analysis, the researcher organizes sets of similar elements, usually based on tacit knowledge, as described by Lincoln and Guba [29]. Following this approach, we constructed the codification tree shown in Fig. 1.
As already mentioned, the material was then explored by code. Afterward, the results, inference and interpretation were treated, as described in the following section. This codification was a very important advance in our study because it allowed us to go forward with the interpretation of the communication strategies followed by the companies under study [30]. Indeed, as Ryan and Bernard [31, p. 81] claim, “theme identification is one of the most fundamental tasks in qualitative research. It also is one of the most mysterious.”

4 Analysis and Discussion of Results

The free use of the SimilarWeb tool gives us an orderly list of the two most used websites by the Portuguese, grouped by categories (we selected the subcategories: Accommodation and hotels; Air travel; Car rentals; Ground transportation; Tourism attractions; Transportation and excursions from the travel and tourism category).

We tested the 12 most used tourism websites in Portugal, according to the SimilarWeb tool (see Table 1).

As mentioned before, the data were collected in 2020, from March to July. The results obtained are exposed in the next points.

4.1 Analysis of the Documentary Corpus

The identification of the most relevant key-words is determined by the number of times one word is present in a given database. A summary or a list of keywords is important because it helps to map the dominant thematic [32]. By analysing the most relevant words, it is possible to map search themes in the area. In Fig. 2 we can see the most relevant keywords used, in a form of word clouds.
In both cases, it was found that there is a great emphasis on the terms Covid-19, country under analysis and category of companies studied. Then, there is policy, cancellation, restrictions and customers (guests/passengers). Finally, the month in which the period of confinement in Portugal began.

The Fig. 3 shows a pie chart that represents the UR percentage by category.

![Fig. 2. English websites keywords versus Portuguese websites keywords](image)

In the previous image, it can be seen that most of the occurrences were distributed by reservations (32.8%), which comprises the subcategories refunds (12.4%), rescheduling (7.0%) and cancellations (13.4%), services offered (31.3%) and health (18.4%). Of the categories identified, the one with the least impact is insurance (2%).

Regarding social networks, it was found that most websites (75%) have a direct link to the companies’ social networks. However, matters related to COVID are much more present on websites than on social networks, 89% and 11%, respectively.

4.2 Answers to Guiding Questions

As mentioned before, the researchers followed five guiding question to tailor the information:
1) Regarding the reservations made before the knowledge of the pandemic, what are the procedures carried out with regard to the possibility of: rescheduling; cancellation; and refund (Yes/No)?

From the analysis of the information contained on the websites analysed, the policies will depend a lot on the type of category. Thus, in Accommodations and Hotels companies, cancellations are carried out in an usual way, in one of the companies if the cancellation is due to illness, there are no associated costs. As for rescheduling - are always dependent on the booking conditions. The refunds depend on the type of reservation, but for reservations from March 14th only in case of illness. If the reason is Covid-19 it can be refunded in full.

In the Car Rentals category, cancellations are always possible, but it may be possible to do so only up to 48 h before. In the Air Travel category, there was a suspension of flights, so rescheduling is always possible and sometimes with the offer of additional discounts on new bookings. Refunds are full and may still be in excess. It may happen that the issue of travel vouchers with reimbursement is only possible from one year after their issue.

In the Travel and Tourism category, attention is drawn to the fact that cheaper airlines have not given rise to refunds. Activities linked to animation announce the resumption of activity only after the month of September.

In the Tourism Attractions category, companies report 100% refunds until June 30 and cancellations are made in accordance with national policies for covid-19. As for rescheduling, the validity of the tickets purchased is extended.

In the category Transportation and Excursions, there is no information related to this theme.

Regarding social networks, information is scarce. Some inform that there is a return policy and others on procedures to be used to use the services they provide.

2) As for the services provided, what type of information is available?

The kind of information about alternative services depends on the category of the website and the activity of the company. Some companies gave information about the new on-line services provided, some distinguished the services that became on-line from those that remain personal contact services, others just limit to give information about the services that were suspended or restricted access, for example, closing of several physical stations, indicating only the only physical station available, restrictions on the transport of materials, conditions about cleaning services, and so on. It seems clear that there is a shift from personal interactions to technologies in order to limit contact.

3) What kind of information is provided by companies on the website about healthcare within the scope of the Covid-19?

Regarding this issue, all websites, with no exception, provide specific information about the careful procedures clients should follow to preserve health, highlighting the etiquette and safety standards that customers should apply to preserve health. As for social networks, companies in the Air Travel category explain the need to wear a mask when traveling and the air transport of products needed for health care.
In general, the rules mentioned were in accordance with those described in Clean & Safe. Portugal Establishment Complying with health measures, published by Turismo de Portugal [32], i.e., it lags behind the legal recommendations. Anyway, it seems clear that new health safety norms forced companies to rethink their premises in terms of cleaning and sanitizing protocols and air handling, for example.

4) In terms of social responsibility, what were the measures implemented by the companies?

From the analysis of information on the websites observed in the scope of social responsibility, it appears that the policies used differ greatly from the type of category. Thus, in the Accommodations and Hotels category, the information available on the different sites, in case of COVID-19, highlights safe facilities, cleaning and disinfection checklist, information about cleaning professionals, social distance practices, line accommodations ahead you have to wait 72 h between reservations for cleaning and sanitizing, lastly the information on interruption of face-to-face experiences from March 18 until at least June 28, 2020.

In the Air Travel category, some companies highlight the existence of re-patrolling flights, even to countries where it would not be possible to fly, due to air space restrictions. Some airlines have remodelled their planes to allow more space, ensuring greater humanitarian cargo.

In the Travel and Tourism category, some companies emphasize the payment of medical expenses of any visitor who is infected with COVID-19 during their stay.

In the Tourism Attractions category, the information available on the websites during the visit highlights the use of face masks, hand sanitizer, disinfection between the use of transport vehicles and regular hygiene, increased cleaning regimen and constant changes of filter air conditioning units.

With regard to social networks, the actions that the companies have carried out, namely the provision of free vehicles for health professionals, the distribution of protective equipment by volunteers, and the provision of accommodation for health professionals, are publicized.

5) With regard to insurance, what are the risks covered by the companies?

From the analysis of the information on the websites observed in the scope of insurance, it appears that the policies used differ greatly from the type of category. Thus, in the Car Rentals category, the information made available on some websites is aimed at providing full protection insurance to its customers.

In the Travel and Tourism category there are companies whose insurance does not protect, unless reservations have been made before the notice of country constraints or restrictions.

With regard to social networks, nothing to highlight.

Responses from companies regarding COVID-19 vary according to the type of business and range from inhibiting activity (flights) to postponing dates to be scheduled (shows and cultural activities), including the possibility of rescheduling with or without reimbursement of amounts already paid for stays. There is a concern with the hygiene of spaces and procedures and recommendations to prevent the spread of the disease. Companies have taken hygiene measures, especially in Accommodations and Hotels.
Hygiene measures such as wearing a mask, disinfectants and social distance are also frequently recommended. Facilities and vehicles were also made available free of charge to some health professionals.

5 Conclusions and Future Work

The clusters of tourism have a truly strategic prominence in national and regional economy. The huge position of tourism in Portuguese economy rely heavily on its indirect impact in other sectors. Indeed, any impacts on tourism organizations performance have an enormous influence on economic, social and cultural dynamic of Portuguese society. As such, considering the challenges and the pressure that recent coronavirus pandemic has put on tourism organizations, much attention has been devoted to the problem.

This paper focuses on web communication strategy followed by key organization of tourism sector during the pandemic. The purpose of this article is to identify what kind of information about COVID is made available in the social media of tourism companies and/m-commerce with more access in Portugal in times of pandemic.

It is an exploratory study based on a multiple case-study approach that combines different methodologies and techniques. We had the opportunity to experience how qualitative research is “recursive, iterative, messy, tedious, challenging, full of ambiguity, and exciting” [24, p. 3]. The cases under study were selected through an analytic tool - SimilarWeb - and the preliminary findings obtained through content analysis of websites and social media sites of the organizations indicate that Portuguese tourism organizations have entered in a new age of communication with their clients. This new era is characterized by a more flexible, complex and unbureaucratic communication:

(i) flexibility is mainly expressed in the way companies managed reservations: refunds; rescheduling; and cancellations.

(ii) complexity is mainly expressed in the diversity of the thematic covered: help centers; social responsibility; insurance information; health care rules; complementary services

(iii) unbureaucracy is mainly expressed through the capacity of dealing with particular situations, demonstrating a narrative oriented more oriented to the “end” than to the “mean”.

Finally, in line with Assaf and Scuderi [7], we can anticipate that, “in the long term, automation technologies, robots and artificial intelligence may help facilities to decrease their fixed costs, improve liquidity and resilience and help to maintain social distance”.

Our data was collected at the individual and micro level, however, it is now widely accepted that economic and financial consequences of COVID-19 are as much worrisome as health consequence. Thus, future strategies are expected to be highly politically oriented.

In spite of the novelty and the contribution of the paper for the ability of tourism organizations to rethink their communication strategy regarding Pandemic issues, we should recognize the limitations of the study, specifically those concerning the
narrowness of the data sources and, of course, the subjective experiences that researchers bring to qualitative research.

Undeniably, the core idea that tourism sector has entered an age of structural uncertainty can only be understood within a comprehensive framework, integrating the macro, micro and individual levels, as well as the abstract ideologies that support the actions and interactions of the main actors at each level. Therefore, future attempts to develop this research topic should be grounded on political orientations, as well as on other documents, such as annual financial statements of the cases under study. These data will provide deeper knowledge about how companies have adapted in terms of business models and how organizations are influenced by cultural dimensions in communicating their social responsibility efforts [30].

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