

Relationship Marketing in Social Networks for Small Businesses

Marketing de Relacionamento nas Redes Sociais para Pequenas Empresas

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to demonstrate the importance of a small business relying on the relationship marketing throughout the social media, according to an enquiry in articles and books specialized in this subject and field research to identify customer needs and behaviours in small business and social media users. The research resulted in a sample of 100 individuals, in which answers were collected via one questionnaire. As a result, noticed that one of the key reasons mentioned by the individuals to follow a small business in the social media is to be aware of news about the brand. Most part of the individuals answered that they know the social network of a small business via sponsored posts in the social media and by having a good relationship with the brand, it could lead them to buy, reinforcing the importance of an appropriate management in this relationship channel.

Keywords: Social Media. Relationship Marketing. Small businesses.

Resumo

Este artigo teve como objetivo mostrar a importância do marketing de relacionamento de uma pequena empresa. Foram consultados artigos e livros de autores especialistas no assunto, e realizada uma pesquisa de campo para conhecer as necessidades e costumes dos consumidores de pequenas empresas e usuários de redes sociais. A pesquisa resultou em uma amostra não probabilística por conveniência de 100 sujeitos, cujas respostas foram coletadas por meio de um questionário. Como resultado, notou-se que um dos principais motivos citados pelos sujeitos para seguir uma pequena empresa nas redes sociais foi para conhecer as novidades da marca. Grande parte dos sujeitos respondeu que tem conhecimento das redes sociais de uma pequena empresa por meio de postagens patrocinadas nas próprias redes sociais e que um bom relacionamento da marca os impacta a comprar, reforçando a importância da boa gestão desse canal de relacionamento.

Palavras-chave: Redes sociais. Marketing de Relacionamento. Pequenas empresas.

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1 Introduction

Large companies have already recognized the importance of using social networks to interact with customers, both to promote products and services and to keep in touch. In the same way that large companies need to have a management for the Social Networks area, small businesses also have this need.

Today's businesses have to be open and transparent, creating communication channels with and accountable to society. They need, above all, to target strategic audiences, considering that an indirect audience today can be a priority tomorrow. (Terra, 2010, p. 122)

Knowing what network to find the user in, finding out which social networks are most popular and being accessible are key factors in ensuring success in relationship marketing. According to Ferreira (2017, p. 142), "social media give voice to companies and establish a public web presence, reinforcing messages and all communication activities".

The forms of communication with the customer change at any moment, whether in the migration from traditional marketing to digital marketing or the emergence of digital influencers that, according to Karhawi (2017), have diversified amidst the countless new digital platforms such as bloggers or simply influencers.

The purpose of this article was to diagnose and analyze ways to implement relationship marketing in social networks for small companies that sometimes leave this channel of communication with the client, losing business opportunities.

Some questions have been raised about consumer behavior in social networks in relation to companies: what he expects of a company in the digital environment; which social media he access the most; what becomes differential and what bothers him in content management by brands. These questions were answered through a field survey, discussed throughout this paper.

2 Marketing Being Used by Companies in Social Media

2.1 The context of social media

Until the 1980s, all communication work with customers, whether small or large, was based on traditional media. According to Powell, Groves and Dimos (2011), traditional media is considered unidirectional, the message was sent to the target audience that could not respond by the same channel as the message was received.

The popularization of the Internet since the mid-1990s has meant that these companies need to adopt new ways of communicating directly with the consumer through social media.

The Internet provides large-scale communication and, thus, contributes to the advancement of companies, as it allows companies to have scalability; interactivity; flexibility management; brand use; and customization on the network. (Castells, 2003 apud Barreto et al., 2017, p. 49)

Social media is defined as "activities, practices and behaviors among communities of people who meet online to share information, knowledge and opinions using means of conversation." (Safko and Brake, 2010, p. 5)

Among the digital media available to companies to communicate with their public of interest are: social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube), forums, blogs, newsletter, mobile applications, among others.

It was from the 2000s that companies began to take a new look at internet marketing aimed at the internet user, resulting in web 2.0.

The web 2.0 tool has renewed the relationship between users, internet services and online communication by creating the principle of a shared network culture, making the internet a new mass media. The concept of social media is born here, a second generation of technology that transformed markets and the exchange of information between organizations, users and / or consumers. (Ferreira, 2017, p. 141)

From there, social networks were no longer seen as fun and were considered by business as a potential business.

With the growing use of the network for business purposes and not just for knowledge sharing and collaboration as in its inception, the internet has been used strategically to exalt the image and brand of organizations and contributes to the competitiveness among corporations. (Terra, 2010, p. 16)

Social networks are seen as one of the main ways of communication of the brand with the consumer, being one of the fields in which small companies can be as competitive as the big corporations. This is because both can compete in the market equally when it comes to engagement, which consists of "interacting, sharing, exchanging ideas, information, knowledge, data, between users connected to the network and having common communication mechanisms" (Terra, 2010, p. 31).

The new digital media allow the small business to have the same possibility of interacting with its consumers as the big company, carrying out campaigns sponsored according to their expectation and necessity. With this, they reach the specific potential customer, since the market in social networks is segmented, as will be analyzed in a timely manner.

2.2 The Digital marketing scenario

According to Cruz (2018) analysis of a 2008 Ibope survey, it was pointed out that 93% of people had television at home and that they used it constantly versus 23% of connected individuals. Ten years later, with the emergence of new technologies and social networks, the way consumers receive, consume and share content has changed. "Currently, the population plugged into the Internet makes up approximately 135 million Brazilians, equivalent to more than 60% of the population of Brazil." (Cruz, 2018, p. 28)

The major shift from traditional marketing to digital marketing is to have an increasingly separate market in niches, according to Vaz (2011). The trend is for consumer groups to be more segmented, a big advantage for small businesses seeking to reach specific audiences. The more effective the communication and relationship with this group, the better the sales result.

Digital marketing tends to be more assertive in reaching the desired audience, less costly and more affordable for small businesses. "With the market so segmented, so sprayed, with an active and restless consumer, it becomes increasingly difficult to find it in front of your TV or reading the newspaper." (Vaz, 2011, p. 270)

One action that should be taken by small businesses would be to conduct field research. This would help identify which social network fits better with each type of business and, consequently, achieve better results. Although Facebook is still the most used, about 2 billion users worldwide (Statista, 2018), not always the desired target audience will be in this option.

2.3 Relationship marketing

Every business should consider implementing relationship marketing in the digital age. Kotler and Keller (2012) explain that the concept aims to establish relationships in the long run to win over and retain customers.

The four key components of relationship marketing are: customers, employees, marketing partners (channels, vendors, distributors, resellers and agencies) and members of the financial community (shareholders, investors and analysts). Companies must bring prosperity to these components by balancing returns to all key stakeholders (Kotler; Keller, 2012, p. 19).

Relationship marketing must be established with the customer in all phases of his interaction with the company. The first visit, the price analysis, the details of the logistics until the realization of the purchase. After this step, the work does not end. It must be continued for this relationship to continue and the repurchase occurs.

The method of communication to generate repurchase can be done in several ways, from thanks for the purchase, subscription to the newsletter, sending promotional newsletters, launches or loyalty programs, complementary product offerings. For example, if a customer has purchased wines, you can offer wine glasses.

The internet has been progressively used as a tool capable of collaborating in organizational structures and processes, impelling a new value chain proposal for the relationship with the client. (Qualman, 2009 apud Soares; Monteiro, 2015, p. 43)

Another concept that should be considered when it comes to relationship marketing is Customer Relationship Management (CRM), which emerged as an aid to the Marketing industry in the 1990s and contributed a lot in the relationship with customers.

CRM is the integration of technology and business processes, used to meet customer needs during any interaction. Specifically, CRM involves acquiring, analyzing and using the knowledge of customers for more efficient sales of products and services. (Bose, 2002 apud Madruga, 2004, p. 105)

2.4 Influence on social networks

According to Safko and Brake (2010), in social networks it is not possible to have control over what is commented about the company in real time. However, if there is a good strategy and influence in these media, it is possible to have greater chances of success with your stakeholders.

In this way, small companies should be aware of the tendencies of digital influencers, also known as bloggers, who "are those with some power in the purchasing decision process of a subject; power to put discussions in circulation; power to influence decisions regarding the lifestyle, tastes and cultural assets of those in their network " (Karhawi, 2017, p. 2).

These new influencers produce stories seen by companies as good opportunities to advertise their products. At the same time, they launch trends and determine behaviors, charging a value that can reach up to R\$ 40 thousand (Folha, 2014).

Although this value is initially above what a small company can afford, in some cases even small influencers may be the key to disclosure through barter or serve as a basis only for observing market trends and behaviors.

Berger (2014) explains that social media has a potential to reach significant content. However, it is not always absorbed correctly by the receiver, due to the large volume of materials shared by users every day. The author also argues that social media should be used as technology and not strategy, because if nobody passes the information, they run the risk of disappearing. At the same time, knowing whether content will be shared is often unpredictable.

Thus, Berger (2014) asserts some criteria that allow content to be more likely to be shared among users. One is the social currency, which is to influence how the content will be viewed. Another principle is the trigger, which stimulates the user to think of the products of the companies through actions with images. Finally, the emotion. When something is important, it is shared.

In this way, a small decoration company, for example, can analyze what is a trend at the moment among digital influencers, contacting them or not for partnerships. Understanding how consumers see the company and how to make them remember their products are: the details, the service, the handmade, among others. Finally, launching campaigns on social networks that involve important issues for this consumer, for example, consumers who like products made with manual techniques may be interested in knowing who these craftsmen are and what motivated them to work in this segment. The example is one of the ways in which small businesses can enter social networks competitively with large companies.

2.5 Insertion of social networks in small enterprises

According to Law No. 9,841 of October 5, 1999, of the Statute of Microenterprise and Small Business Company (1999 apud MAXIMIANO, 2011), it is considered a small company that obtains gross annual revenue in excess of R \$ 433.755, 14 and equal to or less than R \$ 2,133,222.00. This category has a capital and reputation that must be well managed in the digital environment.

For a successful management in social networks, it is essential that the small company hire liberal professionals with communication skills, use the support of organizations such as SEBRAE, which work is to help small entrepreneurs and companies, offering services with results.

The basic functions to be offered by professionals responsible for social networks would be: strategic analysis of content, identification of the networks most appropriate for each client, content production and visual identity of profiles and publications, sponsored campaigns, reports with analysis of results and metrics, competition analysis, complete page management, such as customer service, interaction and research of pertinent topics to be disclosed.

Safko and Brake (2010) teach some ways of strategies to immediately start interacting with the target audience, such as creating a blog to educate on something, linking blogged knowledge to a YouTube channel, using Google Alerts, be informed whenever your company is quoted or accompany the competitor.

2.6 Applicability of a viral action by companies

A fact that institutions, including small businesses, should be aware of in social networks, are the viral memes and actions that are happening at the moment. "The meme would be a unit of information that passes from one brain to another, by imitation and heredity ... it is directly linked to the study of the diffusion of information and what kind of idea survives." (Recuero, 2009 apud Terra, 2010, p. 95)

A fact that happened recently and had great repercussion in the media, was the self-destruction of the work of artist Banksy (Figure 1) after being auctioned in London for 1 million pounds. The event generated great repercussion in traditional media as well as digital media, allowing the news to travel around the world.

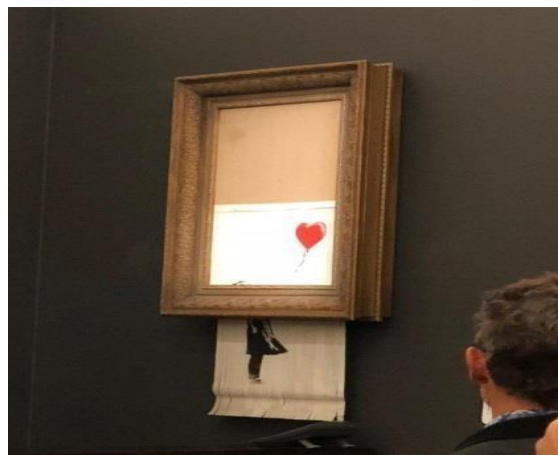


Figure 1 – Banksy's work destroyed at London auction
Source: Público Portal (2018).

To take advantage of the wave of social networking, McDonald's made a short video linking it to a branded product (Figure 2).

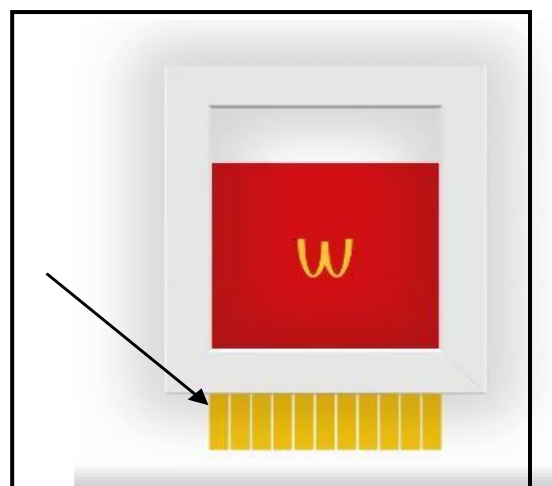


Figure 2 – Post by Mc Donald's in allusion to Banksy's work, with the title "As they say: life imitates art"
Source: Adapted from Facebook (2018).

Although the fact is used by a multinational, the advantage of social networking for small businesses is that practically everything can be adapted to this reality, reaching the ideal audience. For example, if the small business is in the field of decoration, the professional in charge of the company's digital media arts can develop something similar to a painting or other object sold in the store.

This campaign, coupled with a post sponsored with certainty will bring great visibility to the small business. Because it is a viral fact, the chances of sharing the publication with free interaction for different audiences is very great.

3 Methodology

This feature is descriptive. According to Gil (1999 apud Oliveira, 2011), the descriptive research aims to describe the characteristic of a certain group of people or establish relations between variables.

It is considered an exploratory study. "Exploratory research has as main purpose to develop, clarify and modify concepts and ideas, in order to formulate more precise problems or searchable hypotheses for later studies" (GIL, 2008, p. 27).

A field survey was conducted with a quantitative approach, one that aims to validate hypotheses through structured data, quantifying the sample data (Matar, 2011 apud Oliveira, 2011). The Survio online platform (www.survio.com) was used to collect the answers of the questionnaire that consisted as a basis for this research.

Initially, the sample consisted of 103 subjects, selected in a non-probabilistic way for convenience, resulting in a final sample of 100 valid questionnaires.

A non-probabilistic sample for convenience, according to Gil (2008), is characterized by the researcher's choice of subjects that he has access to, assuming that they can portray the studied universe.

The questionnaire was elaborated with 20 questions, with ten exclusive multiple choice questions, three non-exclusive multiple choice questions, six Likert scale questions and one dichotomous question.

The subjects answered the questionnaire during the period from October 03 to 10, 2018, on Facebook, WhatsApp and LinkedIn, being transmitted and shared with other subjects through the snowball modality. According to Vinuto (2014), this modality refers to the non-probabilistic sample format distributed in chains of relationship networks. Used to evaluate groups that could hardly be reached. The mean time to complete the questionnaire was 7 to 10 minutes.

4 Analysis and Interpretation Results

The subjects' answers were analyzed descriptively and inferentially. They will be represented below by Figures.

The sample space of 100 subjects was represented by 64% of respondents of the female gender and 36% of the male gender (Figure 3).

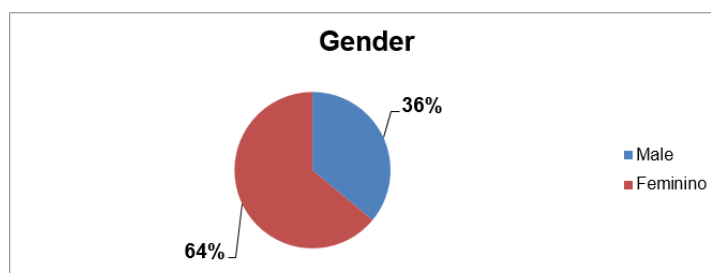


Figure 3 – Gender
Source: Research data.

Twenty-nine percent (29%) of the subjects are between 19 and 30 years old (Figure 4).

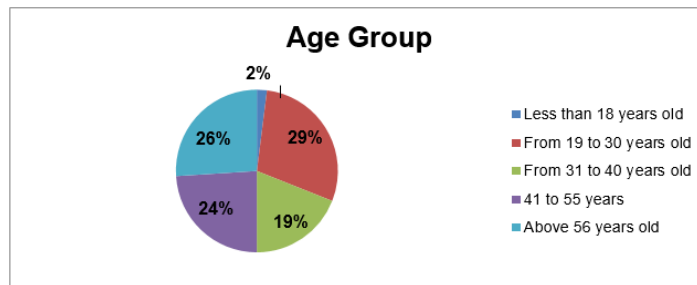


Figure 4 – Age group
Source: Research data.

Subjects also responded to schooling and most responded to having either a full or postgraduate degree (Figure 5).

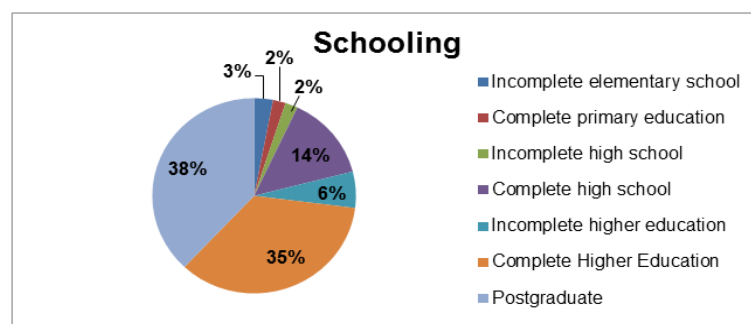


Figure 5 – Schooling
Source: Research data.

In another question to evaluate the demographic data, it was verified that the majority of the subjects reside in the ABC (Figure 6).

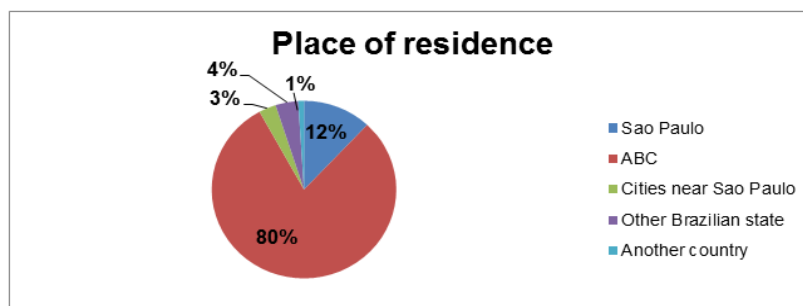


Figure 6 – Place of residence
Source: Research data.

Regarding the marital status, 50% of the subjects are married (Figure 7).

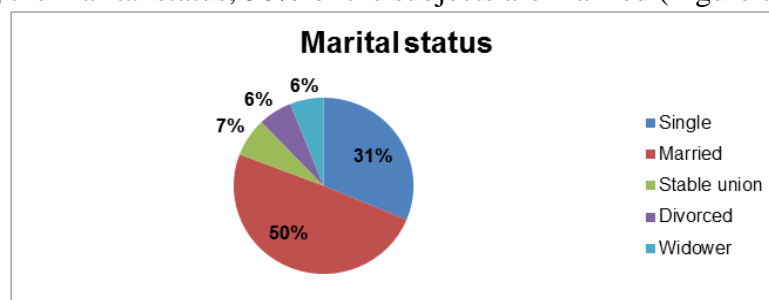


Figure 7 – Marital status
Source: Research data.

Fifty-eight percent (58%) of the subjects had children (Figure 8).

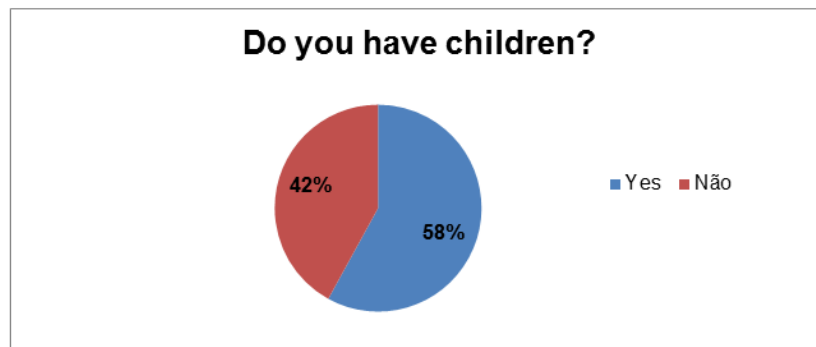


Figure 8 – Do you have children?
Source: Research data.

The predominant family income was more than R\$ 5,001.00 corresponding to 48% of the subjects. From R\$ 3,001 to R\$ 4,000 were accounted for 18% (Figure 9).

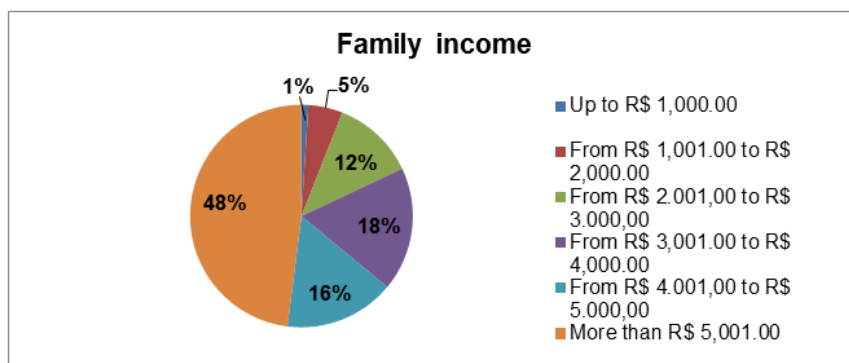


Figure 9 – Family income
Source: Research data.

When questioned about the frequency of access to social networks, 86% of respondents used daily (Figure 10). These data confirm what Cruz (2018) claimed that more than half of the Brazilian population is connected to the Internet and, consequently, to social networks. A fact that every small company should consider when making the disclosure of their products.

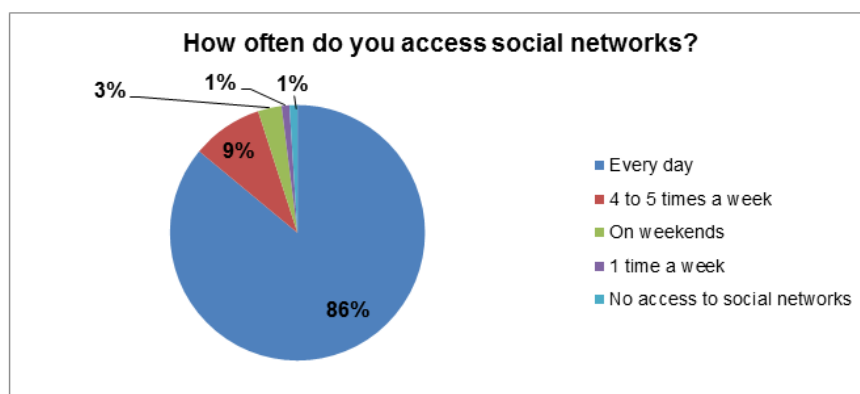


Figure 10 – Frequency of access to social networks
Source: Research data.

The subjects were also questioned about which social network has knowledge, being allowed to mark more than one option as an answer.

Facebook still appears as the most popular social network (95%) followed by WhatsApp (93%) and YouTube (83%). It is in these social networks that digital influencers are present and, according to Karhawi (2017), has power of the purchases that consumers make. In this case, the small company can act, for example, on YouTube, with a small digital influencer that does not yet require very high values for disclosure, as explained in sub-item **2.4 Influence on Social Networks**.

Even so, it is important to verify if this is the social network that your target audience is present, since not always the best known option is the one that will bring more benefits, according to what was discovered in sub-item **2.2 The Marketing Scenario Digital**. The results are shown in Figure 11.

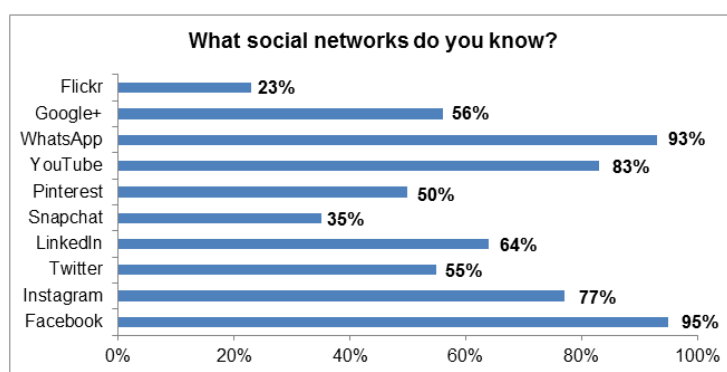


Figure 11 – Social networks better known by the subjects
Source: Research data.

When dealing with social networks that the subjects have an account, WhatsApp went ahead with 91%, (Figure 12). Second place was Facebook, 90%. An interesting fact is that although YouTube is well known, only 58% of the subjects have an account in the network. An important point is that all subjects have a register in at least one social network mentioned.

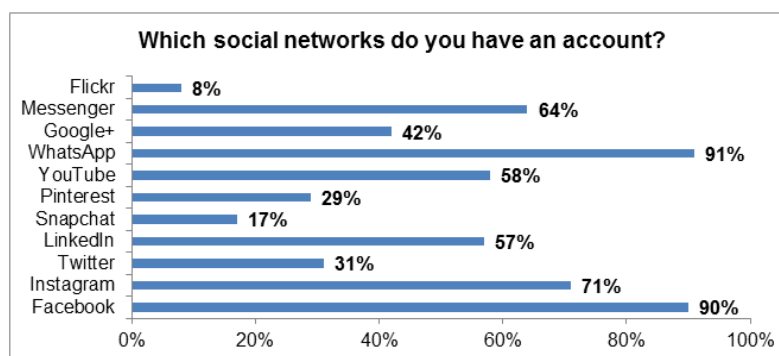


Figure 12 – Social networks that they have a registration
Source: Research data.

Using the Likert scale of research, the subjects were asked if they usually follow the social networks of their favorite brands. 43% said they follow frequently. However, the number of subjects who rarely follow is also considered high, 35% (Figure 13).

To increase the number of brand followers in social networks, small businesses can share ideas and information (Terra, 2010).

Also according to what was researched in sub-item **2.4 Influence in Social Networks**, promoting relevant contents, such as tips related to the segment of the company, can become a differential in the conquest by new followers.

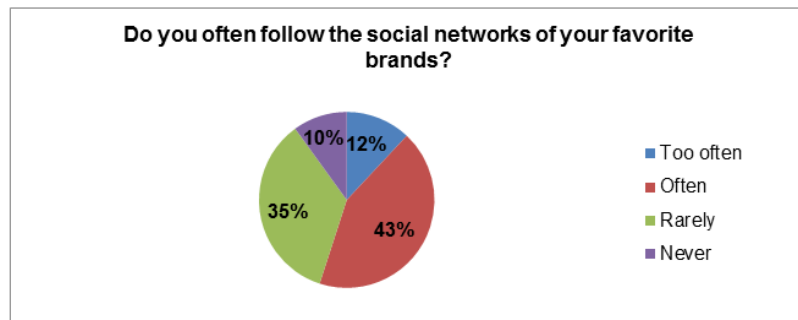


Figure 13 – Subjects follow brands in social networks
Source: Research data.

More than half of the sample, 52%, responded that they do not usually buy products from small businesses. Point that deserves attention to clarify if the factor of impediment is the price, lack of knowledge or for another reason. Another 39% reported that they buy frequently, and only 3% responded that they buy small business products very often (Figure 14). Analyzing Figure 13, it is possible to suggest how to increase presence in social networks with the dissemination of content relevant to consumers, this can increase the subject's knowledge about the company and its products, generating an increase in sales.

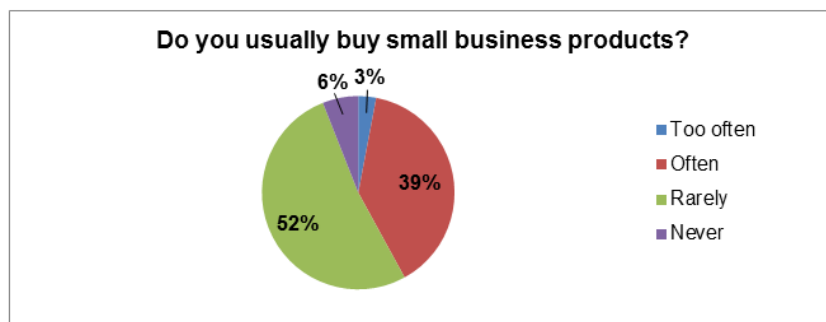


Figure 14 – Buying Small Business Products
Source: Research data.

With regard to buying products by the social network itself, most of the subjects do not have this habit. 57% of the subjects rarely buy this way and 34% never made a purchase through social networks (Figure 15). This result, together with the data presented in Figure 21, shows that the small company should invest in an e-commerce site before sale by the social network itself.

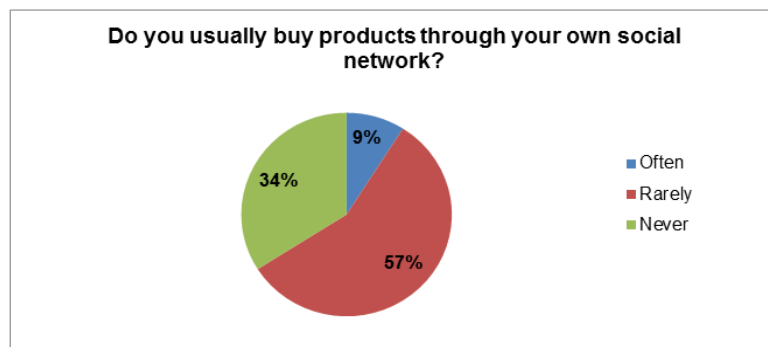


Figure 15 – Purchase of products through social networks
Source: Research data.

Figure 16 shows that 51% of the subjects said that they did not have the habit of following brands belonging to small companies in social networks, and 33% frequently followed them.

Investing in actions of interest to the target audience can be a determining factor for a customer to follow a small company on social networks.

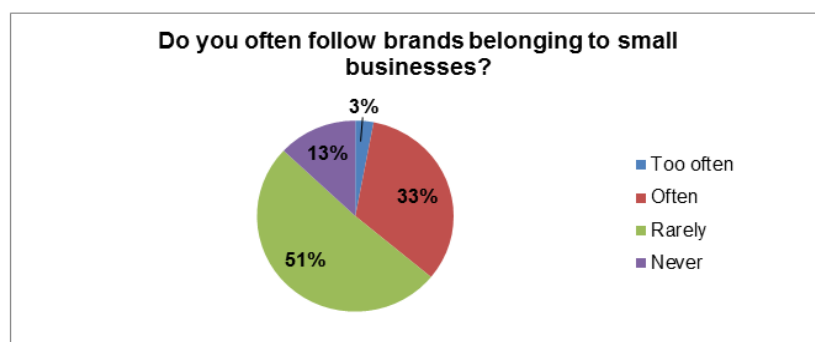


Figure 16 – Subjects follow small businesses in social networks
Source: Research data.

The main reason alleged by the subjects as motivation to follow small companies is to know the news (56%). Other points to consider are promotions and loyalty programs. Thus, companies that invest in these two paths will be more likely to win customers in the digital world (Figure 17).

As mentioned, one of the main reasons stated by the subjects in following the social networks is to know their news, in this way it is necessary that this communication be, according to the information obtained in sub-item **2.2 The Digital Marketing Scenario**, effective. In addition, the better the relationship with the target audience, offering them promotions and having loyalty programs, the better the sales result.

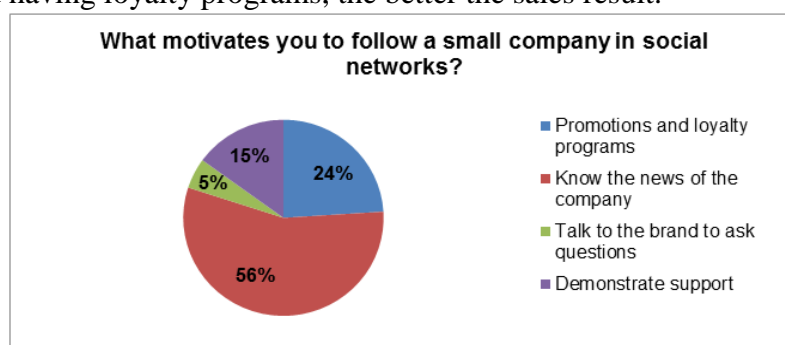


Figure 17 – Reasons to follow a company in social networks
Source: Research data.

Clothing, consumption and tourism, sequentially, are the segments that most have interest in social networks (Figure 18).

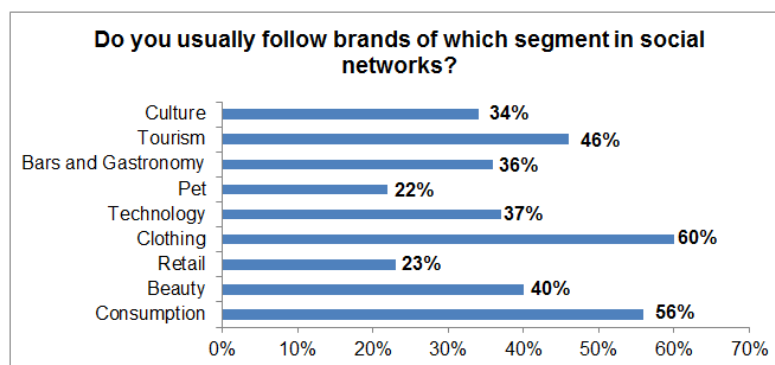


Figure 18 – Most liked segments in social networks
Source: Research data.

When questioned about how they know about small business social networks, the majority (54%) answered by advertising in their own social networks, which reinforces the importance of small business to have a good management of social media and, if possible, have more relevant publications, even with low values (Figure 19).

Terra (2010) comproves that an use of internet, on comercial way, is the main ways of win between company and stronger to the image of the company.

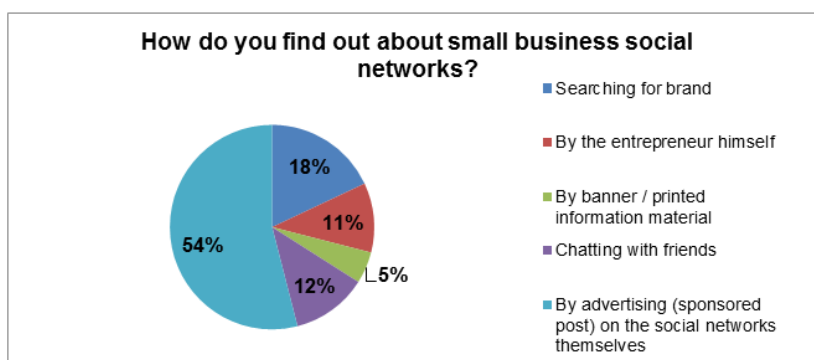


Figure 19 – Knowledge of small business social networks
Source: Research data.

The profile of the companies in the social networks impacts, in the opinion of the subjects, to buy. Thus, 41% consider the good online relationship of companies is very important (Figure 20), which again reinforces the need for a good management of social media, with adequate content, consumer feedback, as evidenced by Qualman (2009 apud Soares; Monteiro, 2015), in which the Internet has been increasingly used for the production of a value chain that encompasses the relationship with the customer.

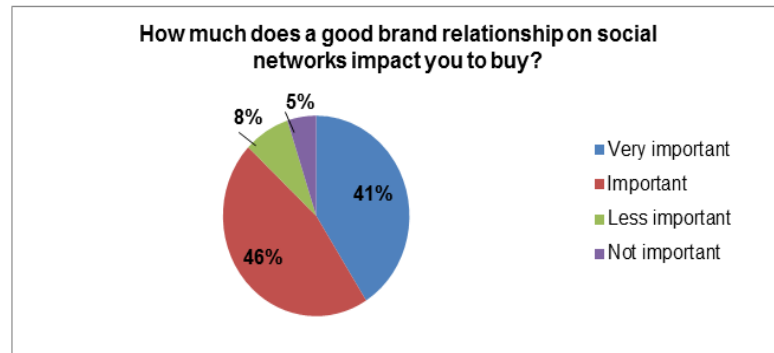


Figure 20 – Results and interference of good relationships in networks
Source: Research data.

Although, in Figure 16, 51% of respondents say that they seldom follow small companies in social networks; in the case of e-commerce, 36% agree that they are more likely to follow it and 26% agree fully, as shown in Figure 21. If, for a small physical store company, social networks are important, for an e-commerce is critical. According to Ferreira (2017), these media allow a relationship between consumers and companies through the exchange of information.

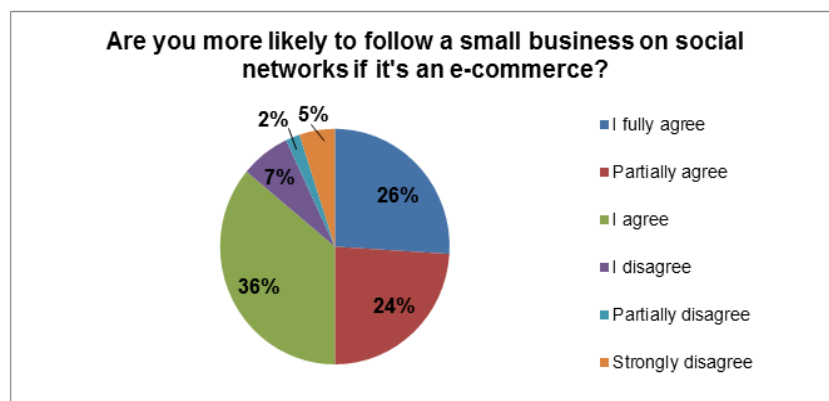


Figura 21 – Influence of networks on e-commerce in small businesses
Source: Research data.

There are some factors that annoy followers in a small business social network. For 41% of the subjects, too much publishing is the most annoying factor. Another 26% argue that repeated postings make it unpleasant to follow a certain page (Figure 22).

Berger (2014) has shown that every user receives a large amount of information per day on social networks, which is not always fixed in the best way by the user. Thus, the author recommends that they be considered points that influence and stimulate the consumer to be interested in the contents and products of the company. The chance for content to be absorbed more effectively and even shared is much better.

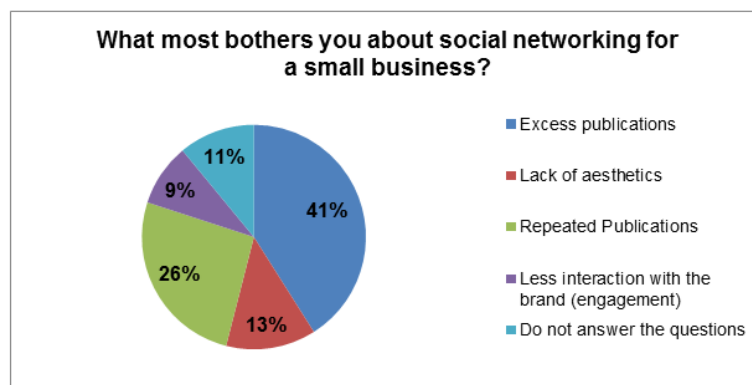


Figure 22 – Negative actions in social networks in the view of the subjects
Source: Research data.

5 Conclusions

With the results obtained in the research, it was possible to identify the importance of social networks for the relationship with clients. Both large companies and small businesses have the possibility to rely on liberal professionals or organizations such as SEBRAE to manage this channel. The important thing is to relate to the customer and be present, whether through relevant content or through digital influencers.

It must be understood that traditional media are important, but they are no longer sufficient. The customer has changed, and they are more aware and expect a greater interaction with the companies, either in the speed of knowing some brand newness or in being attended with agility to their doubts.

Relationship marketing is no longer practiced en masse to enter an increasingly segmented market. It has been found that most consumers have daily access to social networks and that Facebook and WhatsApp are the most popular.

Most of them are in the habit of keeping up with their favorite brands in social networks, but a few of them are small companies, which may be the object of another research study to delve into the reasons for this low adherence to the digital channel. However, if the small business is an e-commerce, the chances of the consumer following it are higher.

The majority also indicated that, besides the news, they have an interest in promotions and loyalty programs. The segments that are most interesting are apparel, consumption and tourism, respectively.

Clients take notice of small businesses through social networks through ads, reinforcing the importance of being present in the digital world and having good social network management to reach the target audience. The good relationship in this channel is considered by the customers as crucial at the time of the purchase decision. However, it is necessary to relate in the right measure, since publishing in excess was reported as one of the biggest annoyances on the part of the clients.

This study had as limitation the research more focused on social networks destined to the entertainment, like Facebook, YouTube, among others, analyzing the behavior of the final consumer. In future research, can be expanded to networks focused on professional relocation, such as LinkedIn, evaluating how small companies can use this way to hire new employees or relationships with intermediaries. Another study that can be developed is why subjects do not often buy small business products, as described in Figure 14, analyzing possible hypotheses for this resistance.

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