

The impact of social media on the reputation of Delta and Starbucks coffee brands

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the impact of social media on the construction and management of the reputation of the Delta and Starbucks brands, considering dimensions such as content, frequency, interaction, and the use of artificial intelligence in projecting their image. The choice of topic is justified by the growing relevance of the coffee sector in the digital environment, as a strategic space for communication and consumer relations. To achieve the outlined objectives, a quantitative methodological approach was adopted, using an online questionnaire applied to a convenience sample, which resulted in the collection of 109 valid responses. The results highlight the importance of a strategic, humanized, and consistent digital presence for the brands under analysis, providing relevant contributions to strengthening their positioning and their relationship with the public on social media.

Keywords: Delta, Starbucks, social media, digital reputation, artificial intelligence

1 Introduction

In a context where digital communication has become indispensable for marketing strategies, social media has established itself as a central pillar in building brand image and reputation. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), these platforms enable the creation and sharing of user-generated content, profoundly transforming the way consumers interact with brands. According to France et al., 2025, and Park & Namkung, 2022, recent research indicates that digital social interaction strengthens the relationship between brand and consumer and contributes positively to brand value. With regard to technology and according to Turunen, E., & Varjonen, J. (2024), interaction establishes a closer relationship between the supplier, the tourist, and other tourists, encouraging discussion and mutual feedback (Haller 2020 and Richards 2021 in Fusté-Forne & Wolf 2023). In the coffee shop sector, presence is no longer limited to physical space, expanding into the digital environment, where it plays a differentiating role in the consumer experience.

Given the technological developments and the growing use of artificial intelligence in these areas, there is a need to further explore and complement existing studies on this

topic. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the impact of social media on the construction and management of digital communication for brands, considering dimensions such as visual impact, the use of artificial intelligence, and the relevance of connection and interaction in consolidating the reputation of coffee brands.

The research question is to understand how social media influences the construction and management of digital communication for coffee brands, considering the visual impact, the use of artificial intelligence, and interaction with consumers in consolidating reputation.

To this end, we conducted a literature review to better understand the “state of the art” with an empirical study, whose objective is to provide relevant insights that enable brands in the coffee sector to optimize their online reputation and encourage active consumer participation. As a methodology, a questionnaire was applied to consumers, with the aim of understanding elements such as the type of content, the frequency of publications, interaction with followers, as well as the use of innovative and emerging artificial intelligence tools and their influence on the visual image of brands.

The study focuses primarily on brands with a strong digital presence, exemplified by leading companies such as Starbucks and Delta Cafés, which clearly illustrate how the strategic use of social media can strengthen brand identity and connection with the target audience. The structure of this work is organized into an introduction, literature review, methodology, analysis of results, and conclusions, including the respective limitations, suggestions for future research, and bibliography.

1.1 Literature review

In Portugal, Delta Cafés is a Portuguese multinational company founded in 1961 by Rui Nabeiro in the city of Campo Maior. From the second half of the 1970s onwards, Delta Cafés began to consolidate and develop new quality products and services. Today, it is a benchmark brand in the coffee sector and has been considered a trusted brand for 20 consecutive years, standing out in the ranking of brands with the highest index and reputation in Portugal, according to Mota (2024).

Starbucks, on the other hand, despite being a global giant, has a more limited presence in Portugal, with around 20 stores. According to data obtained from Statista (2024), the brand positions itself as a premium and cosmopolitan experience, aimed primarily at a young, urban, and globalized audience. Although Starbucks is very relevant worldwide, in Portugal it does not have the same level of penetration or emotional symbolism as Delta.

The exponential growth of social media over the last decade has transformed the way brands create, build, and manage the reputation of their visual identity. Today, digital communication is increasingly bidirectional, with consumers playing an active role in co-creating meaning and value (Kietzmann et al., 2011). According to Xiaoxuan Gu (2024), analyzing brand marketing strategies from the perspective of multimodal discourse analysis and visual grammar is a widely accepted and appropriate approach.

Recent studies point to the growing relevance of influencer marketing as a determining factor in the digital reputation of brands. According to De Veirman (2023), the perceived credibility of influencers directly impacts brand trust and loyalty, particularly in experiential consumer sectors such as coffee. Additionally, Kumar and Mirchandani

(2022) point out that the integration of omnichannel strategies and social media increases the consistency of the brand message and reinforces digital reputation.

In a landscape increasingly shaped by digital communication, social media not only increases visibility but also improves brand reputation. Its relevance in contemporary marketing goes far beyond the simple promotion of products or services, playing an active role in how consumers perceive, interact, and relate to brands. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media are democratic platforms that enable the creation and sharing of user-generated content, profoundly transforming the nature of communication between brands and consumers.

In the food and beverage sector, particularly in the coffee segment, a brand is no longer defined solely by product quality, but by the narrative it manages to create on digital communication platforms (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2015). In the coffee shop sector, in particular, this digital presence has taken on strategic and crucial importance. What was once just an extension of the physical point of sale has now become an essential differentiating element of the consumer experience. Brands such as Starbucks and Delta Cafés stand out for their intelligent, creative, and consistent use of visual communication on social media, through which they construct visual and symbolic narratives designed to reinforce brand values and promote a closer and more emotional relationship with their consumers.

Recent studies show how social media activities, such as interactions, entertainment, and personalized content, increase brand value, which includes image and perceived quality, and in turn drives consumer loyalty. Al-Abdallah et al. (2024) develop a theoretical model that shows how different components of social media marketing (such as credibility and interaction) directly affect loyalty and willingness to pay more. In the coffee industry, Lee & Namkung (2022) identify that, more specifically on Instagram, visual marketing, which consists, for example, of attractive images or storytelling, positively influences the dimensions of brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, and behavioral and emotional loyalty. The use of social influence and 'Word of Mouth' is decisive in building trust. A study by Salmiah et al. (2024), focusing on Generation Z, shows that the use of social media, mediated by trust, has a significant impact on purchase intention and loyalty in cafes. Although eWOM is not directly effective on its own, this trust emerges as the crucial mediating element.

Other studies conducted in various contexts reinforce this trend: Armawan et al. (2023), for example, show in their study that, in Surakarta coffee shops, both social media promotion and service quality have a very positive influence on consumers' repurchase intention.

Personalization through Generative AI on social media represents an emerging theoretical frontier. A recent study by authors Feng, Y., & Kim, H. J. (2025) reveals that Generative AI applied to content personalization increases consumer confidence and their perception of usefulness. However, the direct impact on engagement depends on how privacy and transparency issues are managed. In the context of coffee shops, this suggests that Generative AI could strengthen emotional and utilitarian identification with the brand, provided it is used in the best possible way, ethically and with a special focus on the consumer.

Finally, the concept of parasocial interaction, studied by Sokolova & Kefi (2019), explains how consumers develop emotional ties with brands and influencers, even

without direct interaction. These relationships are symbolic and affective and create a feeling of closeness, which generates greater trust and a higher probability of recommendation and/or repurchase, which acts as an indirect mechanism for building digital reputation.

The literature shows that aspects such as the type of content shared, the frequency of posts, the ability to respond to followers' interactions, and the use of emerging technologies—such as artificial intelligence—have a direct impact on brand perception, trust building, and customer loyalty. Therefore, understanding the role of social media in brand management in the coffee shop sector is essential not only to assess the effectiveness of current digital strategies but also to anticipate future trends and practices that can maximize the symbolic and commercial value of these brands. However, managing “online reputation” involves not only creating increasingly attractive, creative, and frequent content, but also ensuring consistency and authenticity in tone and form of communication (Hudson, 2016), allowing personalized interactions on social media to significantly increase the level of engagement and, consequently, strengthen brand loyalty.

It should also be noted that the use of Generative AI, such as chatbots and personalization algorithms, makes it possible to optimize the consumer experience. However, this raises some challenges in terms of perceived authenticity (Grewal et al., 2020). Studies show that, although Generative AI is useful, consumers still value the humanization component of communication, says Mikalef (2021).

3. Methodology

For the development of this study, a quantitative methodology was adopted, aimed at obtaining measurable data that could be statistically analyzed. To this end, an online questionnaire was structured, consisting of 21 questions: 18 multiple-choice questions and 3 questions based on images generated by artificial intelligence. The questionnaire was adapted from previous studies, namely Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), on digital segmentation and platforms; Gensler et al. (2013), on brand storytelling and consumer engagement; and Grewal et al. (2020), on aspects related to artificial intelligence.

Prior to sharing them, we conducted a pre-test with three digital marketing professionals in order to evaluate the structure of the questions and ensure that they could be read and interpreted correctly.

After preparation, the questionnaires were disseminated through the research team's social media channels (LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook). In addition, personalized participation was requested through direct contacts and email to encourage responses. Data collection was carried out using a convenience sample between March 20 and May 18, 2025.

The sample consists of responses from participants from different regions of Portugal (North, Center, South, as well as the Autonomous Region of Madeira), which enhances the representativeness of the study. Regarding data reliability, this is a descriptive study in which data and information are presented without applying internal consistency analyses, such as Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

4. Analysis of results

A total of 109 valid responses were obtained. After confirming the respondents' understanding of the nature of the study with the question "Having read the information about the study, I agree to participate in this study," the first question in the questionnaire asked about the respondent's age group in order to better analyze each participant's responses. To obtain a more accurate and rigorous analysis, we presented the questionnaire to people of different age groups and, according to the graph obtained, although most respondents were between 18 and 49 years old, we received responses from people of different age groups.

After analyzing the age group of respondents, we analyzed the first question of the questionnaire about social media and its use. Instagram and Facebook are (unsurprisingly) in first place, with 61.5% and 56.9%, respectively. In third place is TikTok, with 45% of the votes, a social network that has been gaining a lot of popularity in recent years. In last place is X (formerly Twitter), with only 9.2% of the selections.

What social networks do you usually use?

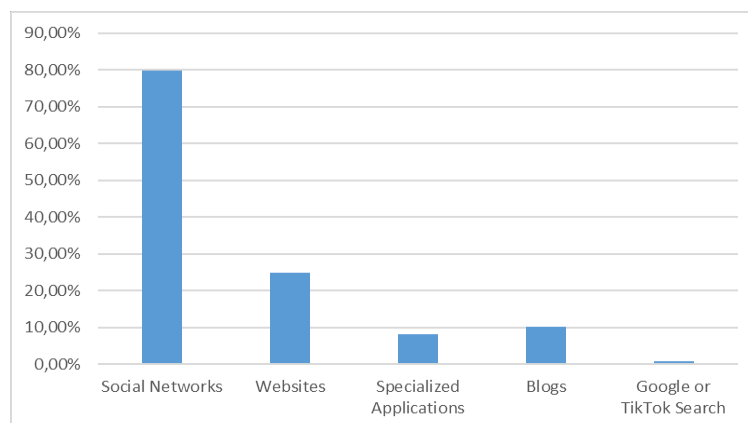


Figure 1 - most used social networks (source: author)

Next, we asked respondents which social media platforms they follow coffee machine brands on, revealing that the most relevant platforms for this content are Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. We will also add X (formerly Twitter) to this list, since of the 9.2% of respondents who voted that they use this social network, 8.3% also voted that they follow coffee machine-related content on this network, which shows that the majority of respondents who use X also follow coffee machine-related brands/content on this social network.

Which social networks do respondents follow coffee maker brands?

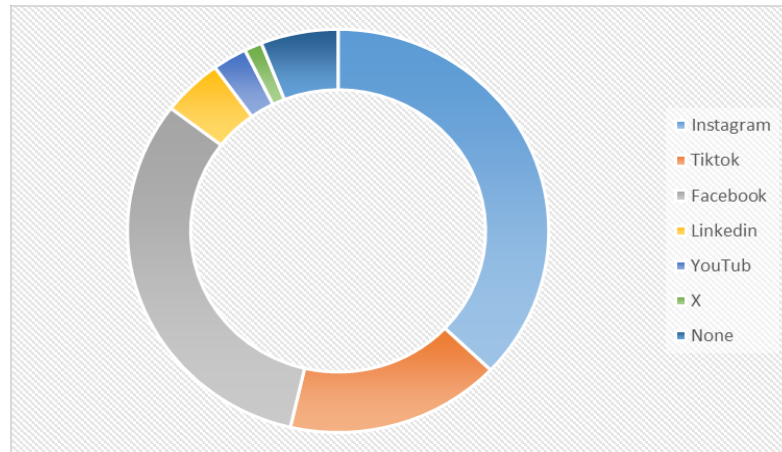


Figura 2 - Of the social networks you use, which of them do you follow coffee shop brands or content on (for example, Starbucks or Delta)? (source: author)

The frequency with which respondents interact with coffee shop content on social media is also very important for understanding their level of engagement with these brands. The majority (44%) said they interact with this type of content when it appears on their home page, suggesting more passive behavior based on social media algorithms. Only 22% said they interact daily, indicating that this percentage is a more engaged group and possibly more loyal to the brands. On the other hand, 21% of respondents said they rarely interact and 12.8% never do, revealing that there is still a significant portion of the sample with little or no engagement with coffee shop content on digital platforms.

With regard to the channels used to search for information about new coffee shop services, the data shows a clear preference for social media, with a majority of 79.9% of respondents indicating it as their main source. This figure reinforces the importance of these platforms in discovering and promoting brands, which is the theme that motivated this survey. In second place, with a significant difference, are official websites (24.8%), showing that, although still relevant, they are much less sought after compared to the more dynamic and visual content of social media. Specialized apps (8.3%) and blogs (10.1%) were less popular among the sample. In addition, one spontaneous response mentioned Google and TikTok as sources of research, reinforcing the role of TikTok already observed in previous questions, even though it was not a predefined option in the questionnaire.

When asked why they believe coffee shops invest heavily in social media content, the majority (50.5%) cited increased visibility as the main reason. This result confirms the perception that social media is a very effective channel for reaching a wider audience and promoting the brand on an ongoing basis. Next, 19.3% selected the option “all of the above,” recognizing that, in addition to visibility, factors such as greater interaction with the target audience (13.8%) and the ease of creating advertising campaigns (15.6%) also play an important role. One open-ended response also mentioned that it is “a way to advertise and make the product known,” which is in line with the options presented and reinforces the idea that social media is seen as an important multifunctional tool in digital marketing for coffee shops.

In the next question, “How do you think direct interactions (such as comments) between brands and consumers on social media can strengthen public trust and loyalty?”, respondents’ answers demonstrate a very positive perception of the impact of direct interactions between brands and consumers on social media. Many of the responses highlight that these interactions create closeness and humanize the brand, as well as making consumers feel valued and heard. The exchange of comments is seen as a way to build trust, encouraging spontaneous engagement and strengthening brand loyalty. Several respondents mentioned that when a coffee shop responds to or interacts with customer posts, there is a feeling of recognition that encourages not only repeat purchases but also recommendations of the brand to others. In addition, there is an understanding that this direct communication provides brands with valuable information to improve their services. Although some were uncertain about the direct impact of this practice, the overall tone of the responses confirms that social media interaction is an essential tool for building strong relationships between coffee shop brands and their audience today.

Next, according to the chart below, we can see that most respondents (67.9%) agree that when they see a less positive post about a particular brand, it usually changes their perception of it. The rest (32.1%) say that if they see a less positive post, it does not change their image and perception of that brand.

In the next question, “How should a brand react to a negative comment on social media?”, the results show a notable division between two strategies that can be adopted by brands: “Ignore it so as not to give it more prominence,” with (43.1%), and “Respond in a friendly manner and try to resolve the issue,” with (40.4%) of the responses. Thus, we can say that 83% of respondents support the adoption of less confrontational solutions, which could cause less embarrassment for the brand. The most censured options, such as “Respond directly to defend the brand” and “Delete the comment immediately,” were the least selected.

Therefore, this chart can serve as a guide for brands to understand how their consumers expect them to handle criticism on social media.

Consumers prefer more active, more human, more authentic interaction, and a constant presence when it comes to the quantity and relevance of digital content or the type of digital content that brands define on their social media.

When analyzing the following chart, we can conclude that “Posting infrequently” (55.6%) is a negative factor when it comes to a brand's reputation. We can therefore say that maintaining a regular posting frequency is a crucial factor in maintaining a brand's good reputation on social media. The graph also highlights the preference for a variety of content (30.6%), as well as the need for consumers to want interaction between themselves and the brand. The options “Not responding to negative comments” (22.2%) and “Posting too much content” (20.4%) were pointed out, to a lesser extent, by respondents as a detrimental factor.

What is most damaging to a brand's reputation on social media?”

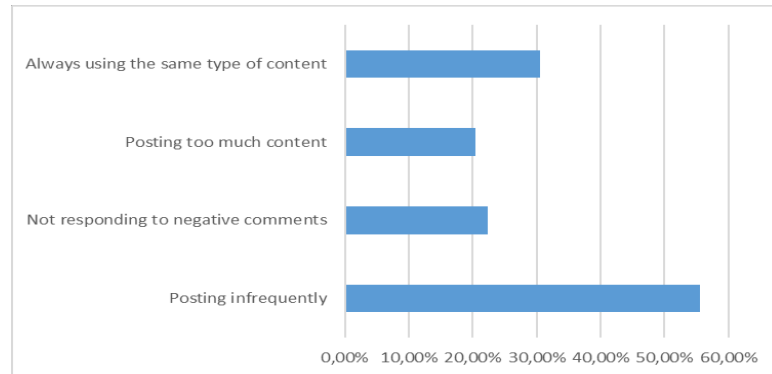


Figure 3 - brand's reputation on social media (source: author)

In the graph for the following question about the trends that have gained the most prominence in building brand reputation, we see that the modern trend toward more efficient, agile, and personalized communication that has been gaining the most prominence is “Artificial Intelligence and Chatbots,” as an essential tool for building brand reputation on social media. We also found that “Traditional Advertising” is highly valued by some respondents, which could lead to an interesting combination of the modern and the traditional. On the other hand, “Strategies without interaction with the public” have become increasingly ineffective and obsolete, as consumers today attach greater importance to the proximity and dialogue that the brand maintains with its audience on digital platforms.

Next, the graph shows that the various interaction strategies used by brands to motivate their audience offer an almost immediate reward, as they are the most effective, such as “Contests and sweepstakes” (46.8%) and “Personalized, quick responses, with humor and language close to the audience” (42.2%).

Options that require more effort on the part of the consumer, such as “Involving followers in simple decisions” (19.3%) and “Encouraging content creation by followers” (11%), partnerships with third parties, and “Partnerships with influencers to promote interactions” (25.7%), have the least significant impact.

How can a brand motivate you to interact on its social networks?

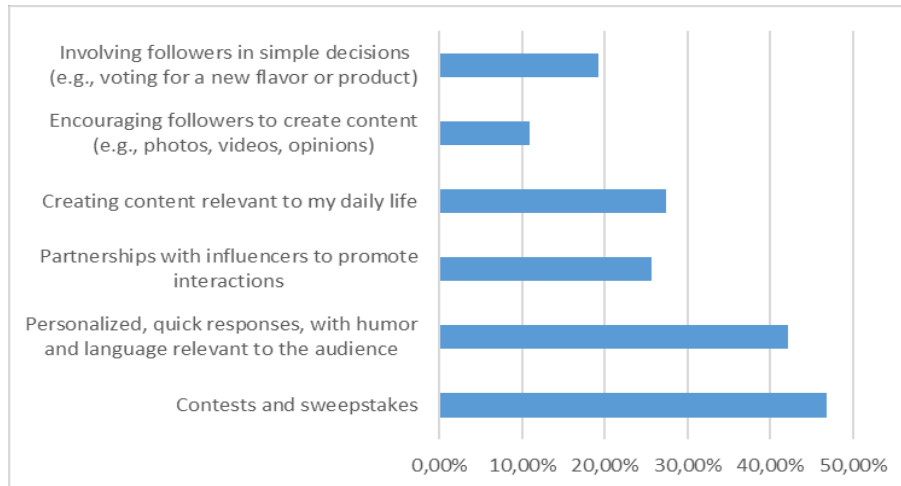


Figure 4 - brand interaction strategies to motivate your audience (source: author)

After analyzing the issue of brand advertising appeal, it was found that “short, interactive videos (stories, reels, TikToks),” with 59.6%, are a major trend in audiovisual content creation that ultimately engages the audience more. This type of content is more valued on social media because it is fast and arouses consumer curiosity about the brand. Therefore, the marketing strategies to be adopted should prioritize this more interactive format and should be combined with informative texts/content in order to balance value and entertainment on social media.

Regarding the relationship between brands and networks, the aspects they consider most important are, above all, fast and interactive communication from brands, with 58.3% indicating this as the most important aspect. This result highlights the need to strengthen digital customer service, either through dedicated teams or the implementation of automated tools, such as chatbots, to ensure timely responses. Brand authenticity comes in second place (37%), demonstrating that consumers expect a genuine, close, and transparent presence. In addition, 30.6% value the reliability of the information shared, reinforcing the importance of clear, accurate content based on real data. Based on these results, brands should focus their digital strategy on a constant presence, building trusting relationships, and direct and honest communication, rather than purely emotional or generic posts.

After asking respondents to identify which of two images was generated by artificial intelligence and which was not, the results show that 66.1% of respondents correctly identified the image generated by Generative AI, while 33.9% considered the real image to be the one created digitally. These data show that, although most people can distinguish artificial content, there is still a significant percentage of users who cannot accurately identify this type of image. These results point to two distinct strategic directions: on the one hand, they confirm the growing sophistication of artificial intelligence tools in the production of realistic visual images; on the other hand, they highlight the need for more transparent communication on the part of brands when using this type of content. Therefore, it is important for brands to clearly indicate when they are using

images generated by Generative AI, promoting trust and avoiding perceptions of manipulation. At the same time, this technology can be an ally in creating impactful and low-cost visual content, as long as it is used responsibly and ethically.

It is important to note that, although 66.1% of respondents correctly identified the AI-generated image, the fact that 33.9% were unable to do so highlights the need for greater transparency. This is in line with recent recommendations by Dwivedi et al. (2023), who advocate clear policies on the use of Generative AI in digital content.

Regarding the attractiveness of coffee brand profiles, Starbucks' international profile stands out with 39.4% of preferences, followed by the same brand's national profile with 32.1%. This result shows that users value visually appealing communication that is consistent with the brand's global identity but also adapted to the local context. Nespresso, with 22.9%, shows some impact, albeit less significant, while Intelligentsia Coffee, with only 5.5%, seems to have a less striking presence. Based on these preferences, it is recommended that brands invest in a strong visual content strategy, with regularity and creativity, reinforcing the connection with the public through formats such as short videos, stories, and interactive campaigns. Adapting the language and style to the specifics of the local market, without losing consistency with the brand's international image, may be the key to increasing engagement and awareness among followers.

Regarding social media trends, Nespresso demonstrated that the majority of respondents (84.1%) believe that Nespresso is attentive to trends and changes in social media, which reveals a positive perception of the brand's digital presence. The campaign presented uses careful aesthetics, striking characters, and visual storytelling, in line with the most valued formats on Instagram. The brand is up to date, but the 15.9% who responded negatively indicate that there is still room to strengthen interaction and diversify content. Given this assessment, it is essential that Nespresso continues to invest in a dynamic digital strategy that keeps pace with the evolution of platforms and user behavior.

The following chart shows that 54.1% of respondents believe that the brand's publications are made by automated systems, while 45.9% do not. This indicates a divided perception, with a slight tendency to associate brand communication with technology.

This result suggests that the brand should focus on more humanized content, with familiar language, spontaneous sharing, and more personalized interaction. If it uses Generative AI, it can communicate this in a creative way, reinforcing innovation without losing authenticity. On this subject, the graph shows that 36.7% of respondents have a positive opinion about the use of Generative AI in social media management, considering that it facilitates and improves customer service. However, the majority (37.6%) have a neutral view, stating that it can be useful, but it depends on how it is used. On the other hand, 20.2% have a negative view, fearing that it will make communication less human, and 5.5% have no opinion. These results indicate that the public is receptive to the use of Generative AI, as long as it is used in a balanced way. Brands must therefore ensure that technology complements rather than replaces the human side, focusing on authentic and personalized communications.

However, it should be noted that, in addition to the frequency and variety of content, consumers value above all the perceived authenticity of visual communication, confirming that this is currently a decisive criterion in digital reputation (Hassan, 2024). The role of digital influencers has become increasingly important for brands, playing a decisive role in amplifying trust and creating more credible narratives (De Veirmen, 2023).

In the last question, an open question about “... suggestions for improvement to optimize the management of these brands (and others in the sector) and their presence on social media?”, the answers reveal some points for reflection. Several respondents preferred not to suggest anything specific, which may indicate that recommendations depend heavily on the identity that each brand wishes to convey. Some pointed out the importance of “following elegance” in tone and images, that is, maintaining more careful communication that reinforces the perception of quality. On the other hand, one participant criticized the excessive use of Generative AI and advocated a more human approach, combining efforts to bring coffee closer to the customer instead of treating it as a luxury product. In conclusion, although some did not offer specific suggestions, there was consensus on the need to align each social media strategy with the desired brand image and to favor more authentic interactions that are less dependent on algorithm-generated automation.

5. Conclusions

The main conclusions of this study are that most respondents seek information about new cafeteria services, preferably through social networks (79.9%), official websites (24.8%), specialized applications (8.3%), and blogs (10.1%), which were the main preferences of users, as reported by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010).

From the responses collected, it became clear that consumers value fast and close communication (58.3%) and authenticity (37%), which shows that consumers expect a genuine, close, and transparent presence, and 30.6% value the reliability of the information shared.

Regarding the attractiveness of brand advertising, it was possible to see that “short and interactive videos (stories, reels, TikToks),” with 59.6%, are a major trend for creating audiovisual content that ends up engaging the audience more. Social networks such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok stand out as promising digital communication channels both for following brands and discovering new digital consumption experiences.

It is recommended that Delta Cafés invest in consistency in digital communication with its historical reputation in Portugal. However, it is also recommended that Starbucks adapt and improve content to the local context without losing its global identity. In both cases, it is essential to explore short and interactive formats, such as reels and TikToks, which are now the main drivers of engagement in the digital age.

There is also a clear appreciation of direct interactions with the brand, such as responding to comments, contests, and sweepstakes (46%) and quick, personalized responses (42.2%), which are believed to reinforce trust and bring the brand closer to the customer, as mentioned in previous studies by Sokolova & Kefi (2019).

However, it was also noted that aspects such as the frequency and manner in which the brand communicates on social media can directly affect consumer perception, both positively and negatively. With regard to digital trends, the growing acceptance of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a communication support stands out, although the need to maintain a balanced approach that preserves the human character in interactions is reinforced, as mentioned in the studies by Grewal et al. (2020).

The results show that 66.1% of respondents correctly identified the image generated by Generative AI, while 33.9% considered the real image to be the one created digitally.

In summary, we can see that effective social media management in the coffee shop sector must combine technological innovation, visual consistency, continuous interaction, and transparent communication, focused on the needs and expectations of digital consumers, who play a considerable role in building the image and reputation of brands in the coffee shop sector, responding positively to the main research question of this study.

The limitations of this study include the sample (mainly focused on northern Portugal) and the respondents' answers, which may not be representative of the population residing in northern Portugal, requiring an international comparative study. Future studies could benefit from mixed methodologies (quantitative and qualitative), allowing for deeper insights and comparisons between different markets in the coffee shop sector. However, in the future, it would be pertinent to extend the study to different audiences and other geographies, and also to analyze the evolution of perception with the growing use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in brands' digital communication strategies.

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