



MASTER'S DISSERTATION

THE INFLUENCE OF CONTENT MARKETING AND SOCIAL MEDIA
ON THE FOLLOWERS OF PRIVATE HOSPITALS PAGES

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“Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared.” - Buddhist proverb.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on content marketing in social media of private healthcare hospitals in Portugal. The main purpose of this study is to understand how social media and content marketing influence the followers of private hospitals pages. The research questions of this study are (1) What are the reasons that lead people to follow the social media of private hospitals?, (2) What content creates more interaction in the social media of private hospitals?, (3) What are the reasons that lead social media followers to interact with posts in the social media of private hospitals?, and (4) How does social media influence the relationship between followers and private hospitals hospital?

A qualitative approach was used to accomplish the main purpose of this dissertation. The research methods used were interviews made with twelve social media followers and an analysis of the Instagram and Facebook pages of four Portuguese private hospitals: CUF, Trofa Saúde, Lusíadas, and Luz Saúde.

With this research, it is possible to understand the influence of social media and content marketing on the followers of private hospitals pages. The interaction between followers and social media pages of private hospitals has increased the trust and closeness between the follower and the private hospital. This study also helped to understand what type of content followers value the most and the reasons for interacting with social media posts. These findings can help marketers to build a better content marketing strategy for the social media of private hospitals.

RESUMO

Esta dissertação centra-se no marketing de conteúdo e nas redes sociais dos hospitais privados em Portugal. O principal objetivo deste estudo é compreender como as redes sociais e o marketing de conteúdo influenciam os seguidores das páginas dos hospitais privados. As questões de pesquisa utilizadas neste estudo foram (1) Quais são as razões que levam as pessoas a seguir as redes sociais de hospitais privados?, (2) Que conteúdo cria mais interação nas redes sociais dos hospitais privados? , (3) Quais são as razões que levam os seguidores das redes sociais a interagirem com publicações nas redes sociais de hospitais privados? , e (4) Como é que as redes sociais influenciam a relação entre seguidores e hospitais privados? .

Foi utilizada uma abordagem qualitativa, que consistiu na realização de uma entrevista a doze seguidores das redes sociais e uma análise da página do Instagram e Facebook de quatro hospitais privados portugueses: CUF, Trofa Saúde, Lusíadas e Luz Saúde.

Ao longo da pesquisa foi possível compreender a influência das redes sociais e do marketing de conteúdo nos seguidores de páginas de hospitais privados. A interação entre os seguidores e as redes sociais aumentou a confiança e proximidade entre o seguidor e o hospital privado. Este estudo também ajudou a entender que tipo de conteúdo os seguidores dão mais valor e as razões para interagir com as publicações nas redes sociais.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CE – Customer Engagement

COVID-19 – Corona Virus Disease 2019

INE – Instituto Nacional de Estadística

SARS-CoV-2 – Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2

SEO – Search Engine Optimization

WHO – World Health Organisation

INTRODUCTION

Social media is used by over 3.6 billion people online worldwide, and it is predicted that in 2025 the number of social media users will be 4.41 billion people (Statista, 2020). In 2019, the average time spent on social media worldwide was 145 minutes, while during the pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus people in the United Kingdom spent 36% more time on social media (Statista, 2020; Martin, 2020).

Social media is, often, the way people communicate with each other by sharing opinions, information, pictures, and experiences and has introduced a change in the dynamic between customers and hospitals (Pletikosa & Florian, 2013; Radu et al., 2018). Brand pages are social media pages where consumers interact with brands (Tsai & Men, 2013). These pages have changed how brand-related content is created, distributed, and consumed (Tsai & Men, 2013). This has led hospitals to use brand pages of social media as a form to interact with their customers and engage them (Tsai & Men, 2013).

The increase in social media usage has led hospitals to invest their marketing strategy in digital media, in order to increase their brand awareness and customer engagement (Radu et al., 2018). Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach based on creating and distributing content to attract and retain customers and increase profitability (Content Marketing Institute, n.d.).

According to Ajina (2019), content marketing is one of the most used digital marketing strategies and can engage customers, especially through social media.

Social media engagement has proven to influence consumer loyalty by increasing the consumer's trust in healthcare brands (Ajina, 2019; Reichheld & Schefter, 2000). Increased trust in a healthcare brand represents more repeated visits to the same hospital and positive word of mouth (Ajina, 2019). Understanding the role of different content in the social media of hospitals pages is needed to better understand its impact on customer engagement and the consequences of its usage (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). The importance of content marketing is growing but it has received small attention from the scientific community (Koob, 2021). There is a limited number of exploratory analyses and investigations regarding the efficacy of content marketing that focuses on specific sectors and types of media (Koob, 2021).

This study focuses on content marketing in social media of private healthcare hospitals in Portugal. The main purpose of this study is to understand how social media and content marketing influence the followers of private hospitals pages. In the year 2013 there were 107 private hospitals in Portugal and in 2019 there were 127 (INE, 2020). In six years, 24 private hospitals were built, which shows that the market of private hospitals is growing and therefore is becoming more competitive.

The research questions of this study are:

- I. What are the reasons that lead people to follow the social media of private hospitals?
- II. What content creates more interaction in the social media of private hospitals?
- III. What are the reasons that lead social media followers to interact with posts in the social media of private hospitals?
- IV. How does social media influence the relationship between followers and private hospitals hospital?

This study is expected to contribute to a better understanding of content marketing and social media management phenomena. A qualitative approach was employed to have an in-depth understanding of content marketing and social media management phenomena. This study's primary data was collected by interviewing social media followers of private hospitals and the social media posts of the social media pages of the private hospitals.

The dissertation is structured in six chapters. The first chapter presents a literature review that has the goal to understand the state-of-art of the domains addressed in this study. The literature review is divided into three sub-chapters that are dedicated to different topics that are fundamental to understand the development of the study. The second chapter defines and explains the methodology adopted and the process of research. In the third chapter, the

findings of the study are presented. In the fourth chapter, the discussion and the analysis of the results will be developed. The fifth chapter shows the main conclusions of the study. In the last chapter, the limitations of the study and possible future research are presented.

1.LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, an analysis of the state of the art about content marketing, social media engagement, and healthcare marketing will be presented. This analysis will help to understand the current knowledge on these topics.

1.1.CONTENT MARKETING

The revolution brought by the digital era has caused many disruptions in the marketing world (Baltes, 2015). The emergence of digital marketing made hospitals rethink their marketing strategies in order to be competitive in this era (Baltes, 2015). Digital marketing focuses on the customers and identifies their needs (Baltes, 2016; Wymbs, 2011). To establish effective communication with the customer, hospitals use digital technologies to support interactive and noninteractive marketing activities to acquire customers and have a profitable customer lifecycle (Baltes, 2016; Wymbs, 2011). The digital era is also characterized by the amount of information available to everyone, making customers look for useful information to help them in the decision-making process (Kee & Yazdanifard, 2015).

It is well known that customers and hospitals are interdependent in the market, and hospitals should execute marketing activities that satisfy the

requirements and needs of their customers (Kee & Yazdanifard, 2015). This is where marketing research and consumer behaviour play an important role, by helping to enhance the value of the market exchange for the customer and the hospital by collecting information about customers and potential customers to understand their needs and requirements (Rowley, 2008).

Most customers are present on the Internet and they are looking for information available on digital platforms, this is where content marketing has become a key for successful online marketing (Kee & Yazdanifard, 2015; Baltes, 2015). The consumption of online content is becoming a common habit among digital users, they are expected to be entertained 24/7 (Kee & Yazdanifard, 2015). This represents an opportunity for hospitals because they can present the latest information about services or products to feed the curiosity of the audience with a content marketing strategy (Kee & Yazdanifard, 2015).

There is no universally accepted definition of content marketing, but according to the Content Marketing Institute (n.d.) "content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly-defined audience and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action". This definition helps to understand why content marketing has such an important role in the digital marketing strategy, it is through content marketing that hospitals can present

their services and/or products to their customers and potential customers efficiently and profitably.

To clearly understand content marketing, it is important to differentiate this strategy from others. Content marketing is different from copywriting and advertising because through content marketing a brand can raise awareness between the target segment and increase loyalty through information and education (Baltes, 2015). Copywriting focuses on influence the target segment to act in the desired direction, like purchasing a particular product or service (Baltes, 2015). On the other hand, advertising aims the purchase of a product or service, it can be said that a hospital uses advertising when they want to tell they are good but uses content when they want to show it (Kee & Yazdanifard, 2015; Baltes, 2015; Solomon, 2013).

As discussed before, content marketing helps hospitals to raise awareness by sharing relevant content to their target segment, therefore it should be based on the values of each hospital (Baltes, 2015). Nonetheless, there are common elements in every content marketing strategy, they are (Baltes, 2015):

- Content marketing objectives;
- Analysis of the target segment;
- Type of content marketing used according to the analysis of the target segment;
- Promotion channels;

- Frequency;
- Metrics.

Besides the common elements in every content marketing strategy, there are ways in which content marketing can be implemented to make the strategy effective. Although these elements may be influenced by the values of each hospital, it is important to consider them. Table 1 presents the elements that can make a content strategy more effective.

Table 1 – Elements for an effective content marketing strategy.

Source: Kee & Yazdanifard (2015)

1 – Localization	Marketers need to adapt the content to the culture of each place to be relevant, appropriate, and accurate.
2 – Personalization	Customers feel the need for individual inclusivity, they want to have a personalized experience but also feel that they belong to a group.
3 – Emotions	Positive content is more viral than negative content (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Kee & Yazdanifard, 2015). According to Berger & Milkman (2012), a message has a higher possibility to go viral if it is positive and if it evokes a high-arousal emotion like anger (independent of its positive or negative) than a low-arousal emotion like sadness.
4 – Diversification of approach	It is important to change the style of information format because a repetitive tone of voice can disengage customers

5 – Co-creation and trust	It is important to encourage customers to participate in business operations because it will help the hospital to have a better understanding of the customer but also creates a feeling of belonging
6 – Ethics and honesty	Content marketing is a pull marketing strategy and while marketers create attractive content and publish them on various platforms, customers are free to search and read the contents.

Regarding the second element – Personalization it is important to analyse the target segment. The analysis will allow marketers to create personalized contents that are relevant to every customer, and customers can respond to the contents individually or share with others with common interest aiding to fulfill the need for individual inclusivity (Kee & Yazdanifard, 2015).

In addition to these six elements, other factors should be considered. It is important to create quality content that appeals to the target segment instead of volume, this can be achieved by referring to topics of interest of the target segment and use a wide variety of media (Baltes, 2015). This will allow to fulfill the needs of the customer and concede diversification of approach. Aligning content marketing and advertising efforts will help to create consistency for the hospital and support the building of trust in the hospital (Baltes, 2015). For an effective and successful content marketing strategy, marketers should also monitor the metrics and engage with people who share and comment conceding the possibility of co-creation (Baltes, 2015).

Content marketing activities can be effective if they generate higher levels of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral customer engagement (Koob, 2021). Content marketing effectiveness can help a hospital reach its strategic objectives (Koob, 2021). In his study, Koob (2021) investigated the context features that determine content marketing effectiveness from a managerial perspective. His study gathers data from 263 medium to large hospitals with more than 250 employees in the German-speaking area (Germany, Switzerland, and Austria), the hospitals eligible for the study range from industrial, services, finance, and trade sectors.

Koob (2021) purposed in his study which content marketing activities occur in a hospital context that can influence its effectiveness. They were content marketing strategizing, content production, content distribution, content promotion, content marketing performance measurement, and content marketing hospital.

In his study, Koob (2021) concludes that there is a positive association between a strong content marketing strategizing context in which there is a clear and strategic commitment and content marketing effectiveness. It was also demonstrated that when hospitals have stronger content marketing performance measurement their content marketing is more effective. Koob (2021) also found that there is a positive effect on content marketing effectiveness when there is a specialized content marketing hospital with

supporting process and information technology systems. The results found in this study support that providing content aligned with a target group subjective judgment of usefulness will increase the probability of interacting positively with the content promoting content marketing effectiveness.

Content marketing is one of the most important strategies in the digital world, it allows companies to accomplish their marketing goals by enhancing and distributing the most valuable content instead of interruptive marketing (Kee & Yazdanifard, 2015). To reach quality content marketing marketers have to produce accurate, informative, and interesting content for their target segment to build a relationship and brand loyalty with their customers based on trust and admiration (Baltes, 2015; Kee & Yazdanifard, 2015).

It is important to refer that content marketing plays a crucial role in delivering effective communication information to the consumers and therefore attracts them to keep engaging with brands (Ahmad et al., 2016). Social media marketing is dependent on content marketing because it is through content marketing that hospitals can share and post information (Ahmad et al., 2016).

1.2. SOCIAL MEDIA AND ENGAGEMENT

Social media is a group of internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content and real-time interactions, it also allows

users to present themselves publicly and interact with their network. (Cao et. al, 2020; Tafesse & Wien, 2017). For marketers, social media allows them to manage customer relationships, promote their brands, educate and entertain customers and also influence purchase decisions (Tafesse & Wien, 2017).

Social media is now more valued by customers as a communication medium than traditional communication methods (Nisar & Whitehead, 2016). It helps brands to analyze customers' interests and use this information to personalize their products and services to meet customers' needs (Nisar & Whitehead, 2016). According to a study elaborated by Nisar and Whitehead (2016) that examined the reasons why individuals communicate with brands through social media, they concluded that the most popular reasons for following social media of brands are to obtain general information about new products, to see reviews and product ratings, to get discounts, to be able to participate in events and to submit their own opinions as new ideas for products and services. This study analyzed the answers from 530 users of retail services between the age of 18 and 49 and the results presented are in order of importance.

The rising of social media popularity across the world has made the social media of hospitals increase at a fast pace (Tafesse & Wien, 2017). Hospitals recognize that social media advertising revenue has been increasing and are growing their investment in content creation and distribution within social media (Shahbaznezhad, Dolan & Rashidirad, 2021). To succeed in the investment

it is important to understand how to effectively create and distribute content within social media platforms to promote the desired outcome (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021; Tafesse & Wien, 2017). The most important component of social media marketing is brand pages because they are interactive and allow to connect with customers through brand posts (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021; Tafesse & Wien, 2017).

Brand posts are a form of communication that facilitate a wide variety of brand meaning and experiences (Tafesse & Wien, 2017). Social media posts of brand pages are mostly unpaid and allow brands to create daily updates for their followers (Tafesse & Wien, 2017).

The emergence of social media has changed the role of customers from passive observers of content to active participants, the interactivity in brand pages allows customers to voice their opinions, express their feelings and share their personal experiences with the brand (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021; Tafesse & Wien, 2017). In social media, customers have the opportunity to like or follow brand pages, allowing themselves to be exposed to brand communication and other customer reactions and followers' posts (Tafesse & Wien, 2017).

The capabilities provided by social media through interactivity may connect the customer and the hospital fostering customer engagement (Hollebeek, Glynn & Brodie, 2014). It is expected that increasing levels of customer engagement

lead to better hospital performance outcomes, including sales growth, cost reductions, and brand referrals (Hollebeek et al., 2014).

Customer engagement is a “psychological state, which occurs by virtue of interactive customer experiences with a focal agent/object within specific service relationships” (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric & Ilic, 2011, p.258). Customer engagement is interactive and context-dependent and understand it and each of its various aspects is extremely important to attract new customers and to build and maintain customer loyalty (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). Another consequence of customer engagement is positive customer satisfaction, due to the fact that customer engagement is focused on customers cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dynamics during specific brand interactions that may lead to customer satisfaction right after (Hollebeek et al., 2014).

Customer engagement is composed of three dimensions, they are cognitive, affective and activation/behavioral (Cao et al., 2020; Hollebeek et al., 2014). The cognitive dimension is about the attention, thought processing, and elaboration a customer has towards a brand interaction (Cao et al., 2020; Hollebeek et al., 2014). The affective dimension is the degree of positive emotion towards a brand, like enthusiasm and enjoyment (Cao et al., 2020; Hollebeek et al., 2014). The final dimension is activation or behavioral dimension, it is the manifestation of active engagement like effort and time spent on a brand, they can be

manifested by sharing and endorsing behaviors (Cao et al., 2020; Hollebeek et al., 2014).

Table 2 – The three dimensions of customer engagement.

Source: (Adapted from Cao et al., 2020; Hollebeek et al., 2014)

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Definition</i>
<i>Cognitive</i>	Attention thought processing and elaboration towards a brand interaction.
<i>Affective</i>	Degree of positive emotion towards a brand interaction.
<i>Activation/Behavioral</i>	Manifestation of active engagement.

There are six types of social media engagement, that can be divided into two groups: Active engagement and Passive engagement (Dolan et al., 2016, cit in, Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021): see Table 3.

Table 3 – Types of social media engagement.

Source: Adapted from Dolan et al. (2016) cit in, Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021); Pentina et al., (2018)

Active engagement Members participate and contribute to activities.	Creating
	Contributing
	Destructing
Passive engagement Members consume content but do not participate in activities.	Consuming
	Dormancy
	Detaching

Active engagement is when members participate and contribute in activities, i.e. sharing information (Dolan et al., 2016, cit in, Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021; Pentina et al., 2018). Passive engagement is being a member and consuming content but not participating in activities, i.e. reading a post (Dolan, Conduit, Fahy, Brodie et al., 2016, cit in, Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021; Pentina et al., 2018). Regarding the six types of social media engagement they are creating, contributing, and destructing that fit in the group of active engagement and consuming, dormancy, and detaching that fit in the group of passive engagement (Dolan et al., 2016, cit in, Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). When customers perceived a brand as highly engaging they are willing to use a big amount of cognitive, affective, and behavioral activity in the interaction with the brand, while for non-engaging brands customers are less willing (Hollebeek et al., 2014).

There are some moderating variables on social media such as context and format of publications and social media platform type that can influence customer engagement, therefore it is important to understand the relationship between these variables and engagement in order to know how to use them (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). In their study, Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021), concludes that the format of the content has an influence on different types of engagement. When comparing publications with video and photo formats it encourages different types of engagement, publications with video formats encourage active engagement while publications with photo format encourage a

more passive type of engagement. The study elaborated by Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021) analyzed the Instagram and Facebook of two international airlines, during 12 months they analyzed the posts of these two social media and their corresponding engagement metrics of likes and comments.

In their study, Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021) also compared engagement between two social media platforms: Facebook and Instagram. On Instagram, customers tend to have a more passive behavior and on Facebook, it happens the reverse, customers tend to have a more active engagement behavior. Another finding in his study is that Instagram stimulates more positive comments when compared to Facebook, although it is also concluded that customers have more tendency to express their negative feelings in the comments than the positives.

Understanding and categorizing brand posts is important to understand their impact on customer engagement and also to provide guidance when creating content to stimulate customer engagement (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021; Tafesse & Wien, 2017). The authors Tafesse and Wien (2017) proposed in a study a framework to categorize social media posts, there are twelve categories that can be merged into main message strategies. The twelve categories are:

Table 4 – Categorization of social media posts.

Source: Tafesse & Wien (2017).

Categorization of social media posts	
1 – Emotional	The goal is to interact with customers on an emotional level and to connect with them on an emotional level. The main force of emotional posts is to represent the brand in emotional terms.
2 – Functional	Posts that emphasize the functional characteristics of products and services. They represent a category that empowers customers with in-depth product or service information which helps them to make informed purchase decisions.
3 – Educational	The objective of these posts is to educate and inform customers on different topics, in order to help them obtain skills about the products or services.
4 – Brand Resonance	Posts that reflect and highlight the brand identity, the main goal is to differentiate, but they can also be attractive for customers who are looking to express their self-image.
5 – Experiential	These posts allow the customer to feel, they can be sensory, visual, auditory, gustatory, or behavioral. They can be an opportunity to plan a brand experience on social media.
6 – Current event	Posts that use events occurring in the present and stimulates timely conversations with customers. These posts help the brand to remain active.

Categorization of social media posts	
7 – Personal	These posts encourage deep conversations with customers and stimulate customers to express themselves. The objective is to improve a more personal connection with the brand.
8 – Employee	These posts allow employees to communicate directly with customers, providing a more in-depth connection with customers that may extend to the focal brand.
9 – Brand Community	Posts that represent an opportunity to promote and increase brand community and stimulate interaction between its members.
10 – Customer relationship	The objective of these posts is to create opportunities in order to learn about customers' needs and priorities.
11 – Cause-related	Posts that promote social causes supported by the brand, can help to create positive brand impressions.
12 – Sales Promotion	The main objective is to drive sales through social media.

These twelve categories can be merged into three main message strategies, that can be informational, transformational, and interactional (Tafesse & Wien, 2017). The informational strategy provides customers with logical and relevant data to empower the ability of customers to evaluate the functional attributes of products and services, the transformational strategy associates the particular experience of using a specific product or service with unique psychological characteristics that differ from other brands, the interactional strategy promotes the interaction between the brand and the customer on social media (Tafesse & Wien, 2017). Tafesse and Wien (2017) proposed that each category of brand posts could be merged into three main messages strategies: the emotional,

experiential, brand resonance and social causes posts fit into the strategy of transformational, the educational, functional, and employee posts fit into the informational strategy and current event, personal, brand community, and customer relationship posts fit into the interactional posts: see figure 1.

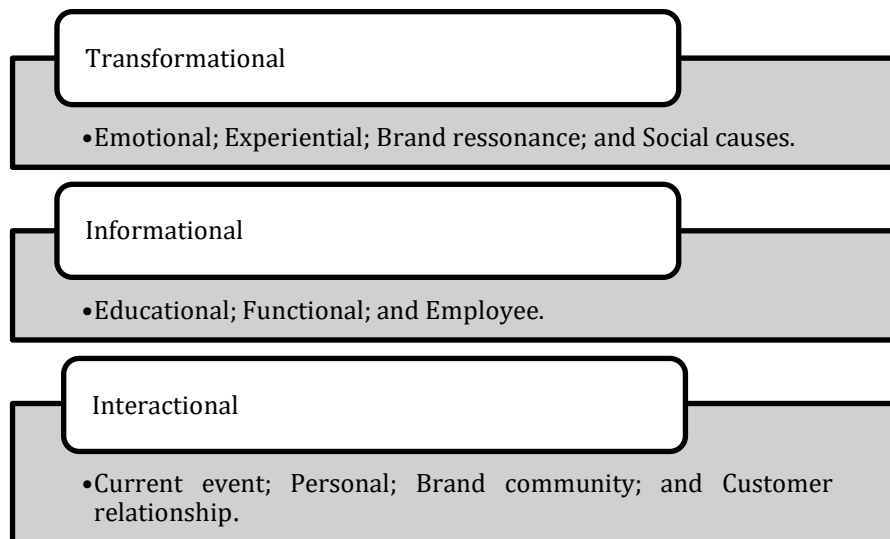


Figure 1 - Framework for categorization of social media posts.

Source: Tafesse & Wien (2017).

The framework proposed allows understanding what type of posts are more used by brand pages on social media and which categories promote customer engagement (Tafesse & Wien, 2017). Besides that, it offers the possibility to code and analyse social media brand posts (Tafesse & Wien, 2017).

1.3. HEALTHCARE MARKETING

Healthcare marketing is the application of marketing principles in the field of healthcare but it should consider its complexity, characteristics, and constant evolution (Crié & Chebat, 2013; Purcarea, 2019). Healthcare marketing is an interdisciplinary field that is in permanent evolution, and it has become an important element for health hospitals by helping healthcare professionals in providing value to the customers (Crié & Chebat, 2013; Purcarea, 2019).

In 1948, the World Health Organisation (WHO) defined health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO, 2006, p. 1). This means that health is not a good, it is a process where different variables play an important role, and health hospitals are responsible for the maintenance of health and well-being of their community, making them important assets (Crié & Chebat, 2013; Purcarea, 2019).

In order to understand how healthcare marketing operates and its main goals, it is important to differentiate the health context from other contexts of consumption (Crié & Chebat, 2013). Customers in the healthcare context may be sick which makes them vulnerable and frightened, making the demand for customization high (Crié & Chebat, 2013). In healthcare, the consumption of a product or service may have serious or even lethal consequences, besides that the complex decision situations often lead customers to rely on their feelings or emotions as the basis for their decisions (Crié & Chebat, 2013). The primary goal

of healthcare professionals is to treat patients and for a successful outcome, the customer and the healthcare professional must have trust between them (Gray, 2007).

The field of health is in permanent evolution, hospital reconfigurations are common, the boundaries are very subtle, and have a main objective epitomize prevention, promote health, treatment, and patient support (Crié & Chebat, 2013; Purcarea, 2019). Another change in the healthcare field is the empowerment and emancipation of customers, nowadays customers are involved in the process of care, this has changed the relationship between doctor and patient but also between individual-society-patient (Crié & Chebat, 2013). This shift from passive to active customers made it important to acknowledge the importance of what customers want, and to incorporate the customer input in the decision-making process is vital to decisions on treatments and wellness plans (Agarwal, Dugas, Gao & Kannan, 2020). As in other industries, customer experience is becoming more important, this makes the healthcare industry put customer experience as one of the main goals for care (Agarwal et al., 2020).

The new communication and information technologies have affected the healthcare field, they had to leave their reserved approach and open themselves to the world in order to engage all the stakeholders (Crié & Chebat, 2013). This change has generated big transformations in the healthcare field making marketing an indispensable element for healthcare brands (Purcarea, 2019). As

stated above, healthcare is a different context of consumption, the principles, and philosophy of marketing in other fields may not apply in the healthcare field because of its particular characteristics (Purcarea, 2019). Healthcare marketing needs its own approach and it must be seen as an interdisciplinary field (Purcarea, 2019).

The main goal of healthcare marketing is to reach individuals who are healthy and desire to remain that way and individuals who need to recover their health (Crié & Chebat, 2013). The effectiveness of the application of marketing can be seen in the image of a healthy population (Purcarea, 2019). To have an effective marketing approach in the healthcare field it is important to have an in-depth understanding of the customer needs and offer new health services (Purcarea, 2019). When designing a marketing strategy, marketers should look first at the customers' needs to build a sustainable relationship, the goal is to reach a high level of customer satisfaction that can represent more returns to the same hospital (Purcarea, 2019). Applying a marketing mix strategy has benefits for the hospitals, it helps to improve the competitive advantages, increases visibility, helps to build a reputation, and helps to gain a more in-depth understanding of customer needs and expectations (Purcarea, 2019).

Reputation is an important asset because it helps to build brand loyalty and leads to repeated purchases, this is particularly important in the healthcare field (Gray, 2007). The customer must have trust in the quality of the treatment to accept it and choose a specific healthcare hospital (Gray, 2007). Principles are

the means that hospitals can protect their reputation, when a brand develops its brand proposition it also develops the core values that represent what the hospital stands for (Gray, 2007). Marketers should guarantee that these principles are applied in every aspect of the hospital in order to come alive in the business activity and promote reputation and trust in the brand (Gray, 2007).

1.3.1.Content Marketing in Healthcare

Hospitals are moving towards a content marketing strategy, which has shown promising results in terms of creating general awareness regarding a particular area of interest, and the healthcare sector is not an exception (Ajina, 2019). For a hospital to have successful communication with its customers it is important to maintain a high level of engagement (Ajina, 2019).

The findings of a study elaborated by Ajina (2019) concluded that content marketing strategies have a greater influence on building a loyal customer base, this means that the customers and their families are less likely to change the healthcare hospital in case they need health assistance. During the study, it was proved that content marketing has a positive effect on customer engagement, trust, and loyalty, it was also verified that customer engagement has a positive effect on trust and trust has a positive effect on loyalty. The positive correlation between customer engagement and trust shows that content marketing is important in promoting trust and confidence among customers (Ajina, 2019).

The study of Ajina (2019) collected 400 respondents who are patients of private hospitals in Saudi Arabia. The respondents answered a questionnaire.

When defining the content strategy, customers themselves can represent a source of online health content (Cuomo et al., 2020). Very often it is possible to find a big amount of raw content from different sources, normally based on voluntary information given by individuals (Cuomo et al., 2020). This information is starting to be used in medical research to find individual differences and group dynamics and motivate the healthcare systems to shift from a model based on reactive medicine to one based on proactive medicine (Cuomo et al., 2020). Understanding the value of user-generated content is important because is the raw material in the new digital healthcare context, that is based on information such as knowledge from customers, for customers, and about customers (Cuomo et al., 2020).

1.3.2.Social media and engagement in healthcare

Social media is changing the nature of the interaction between hospitals and individuals (Moorhead et al., 2013). The introduction of social media in the healthcare industry has enabled social networking, participation, and openness between healthcare customers and professionals and has affected the healthcare systems (Koumpouros et al., 2015; Smith, 2017).

Social media is allowing information to be presented in ways other than text but it has also the potential to increase the number of interactions and provide more available, shared, and tailored information (Moorhead et al., 2013). Healthcare information can be easily accessed through social media enabling younger people, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, and lower socioeconomic groups to have access to this information (Moorhead et al., 2013).

Customers of healthcare services and products are well informed and demanding and hospitals want to attract potential customers, this leads to the need for applying new marketing strategies (Koumpouros et al., 2015). Social media is being used for health promotion and health education, effective use of social media by hospitals has the potential to improve hospitals' financial performance by improving customer service and providing hospitals with a low-cost marketing performance (Apenteng et al., 2020; Moorhead et al., 2013). In a study elaborated by Apenteng et al. (2020), it was concluded that there was a positive relation between Facebook engagement and patient revenue for hospitals in rural areas but not in urban areas it was stated that this relation may be affected by the marketing strategies adopted by each hospital, which could mean that a good marketing strategy that promotes engagement can lead to better patient revenue.

Hospitals that allow communication to happen through social media can offer important peer, social and emotional support for the general public and its

customers, but they can also benefit from receiving feedback by permitting customers to submit comments, ask questions and receive answers through their social media page (Moorhead et al., 2013; Smith, 2017). Another advantage of healthcare communication through social media is for health surveillance because information can be spread in real-time, and it can also help to monitor public response to health issues, track disease outbreaks, identify misinformation and help to reach important health information to target communities (Moorhead et al., 2013). It is important to create good social media posts to promote engagement, one of the keys to create a good social media post is to share information that will make the customers' lives better and meet their needs (Smith, 2017).

Hospitals are using social media to promote healthier habits and health-related information, as an example when looking through a hospital Facebook page it may contain content about advice on healthy living, facts about seasonal illness, tips on preventive health behaviours, and relevant discoveries in medical research (Smith, 2017). There are also other uses of social media for the hospitals, they can use it for spreading standard marketing messages, such as mission, showing credentials, or a description of the services provided (Smith, 2017). Social media can also be a mean to employee recruitment by posting vacant positions (Smith, 2017). It is important to acknowledge that different social media platforms can be used for different purposes and to reach people with specific demographics or with specific needs and interests (Smith, 2017).

2. METHODS

This chapter will present the methodology employed in this study. It is developed into four sub-chapters that present in detail the methodology used in this study.

2.1. PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this study is to understand how social media and content marketing influence the followers of private hospitals pages. Below are presented the research questions of the study:

- I. What are the reasons that lead people to follow the social media of private hospitals?
- II. What content creates more interaction in the social media of private hospitals?
- III. What are the reasons that lead social media followers to interact with posts in the social media of private hospitals?
- IV. How does social media influence the relationship between followers and private hospitals?

2.2. APPROACH

The research approach of this study is qualitative and exploratory. Qualitative research methods allow to understand what is important for people by finding out about people's experiences (Silverman, 2004). Qualitative research is concerned with subjective meanings and allows an in-depth understanding of problems involving the behaviour and activity of people and hospitals (Silverman, 2004). This method is the most suitable for the current study because it allows a deeper understanding of the phenomena of how content marketing can influence social media engagement and the relationship with the customer of private hospital hospitals.

2.3. EMPIRICAL SETTING

The management of hospitals in Portugal can be private, public, or under public-private partnerships that result in different missions, values, and visions (Gonçalves, 2020). In Portugal, there are 238 hospitals: 108 are public hospitals, 127 are private, and 3 have a public-private partnership. In 2018, private hospitals represented 46,5% of the hospitals in Portugal (INE, 2020).

Due to the number of private hospitals in Portugal, it is important to understand who the biggest hospitals are. A study elaborated by the consultant society Augusto Mateus & Associados in 2017 analysed the volume of sales of the private sector in Portugal and concluded that there are four main players in the

market: José de Mello- Saúde, more known as CUF, Luz Saúde, Lusíadas, and Trofa Saúde (Mateus, Ramalho, Oliveira, Rodrigues & Ferreira, 2017).

2.4. DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES AND SOURCES OF DATA

A semi-structured interview and a documental analysis were the data collection techniques employed in this study. The semi-structured interview was made to social media followers and a documental analysis of social media content of the private hospitals was executed.

Using an interview as a data collection method has “the purpose (...) to explore the views, experiences, beliefs and/or motivations of individuals on specific matters” (Gill et al., 2008, p. 291). It is believed that interviews allow a more in-depth understanding of the social phenomena (Gill et al., 2008). For this study, the type of interview used was a semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview “consists of several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allows the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail” (Gill et al., 2008, p. 291).

To gather respondents for the interviews it was elaborated an online questionnaire that was shared through social media (Facebook and Instagram). This online questionnaire helped to select the respondents for the interviews because only the people who had an account on social media and followed Trofa

Saúde, CUF, Lusíadas, or Luz Saúde on Instagram or Facebook could be contacted to the interview.

After gathering the participants, they were contacted via email, social media, or telephone to schedule the interview. For the interviews, it was developed an interview guide, which can be found in appendix 1. The interview guide was developed based on the literature review of this study. On table 7 you can find the authors that contribute to the formulation of the questions for the interview.

Table 5 – Theoretical basis for the interview guide.

Research Question	Question	Autor
RQ 1	What are the reasons that lead you to follow the social media of these hospitals?	Nisar and Whitehead (2016)
RQ 1	How did you know they were present in these social media?	-
RQ 1	What is the reason that makes you continue to follow the social media of these hospitals?	Kee and Yazdanifard (2015)
RQ 2	What posts do you pay more attention to?	Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021)
RQ 3	What are the reasons that lead you to interact with the posts?	Tafesse and Wien (2017)
RQ 3	How do you interact with the content from the social media page?	Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021)
RQ 2	What type of content do you most like to see?	Baltes (2015)

Research Question	Question	Autor
RQ 2	Where do you prefer to see content from the hospital, on social media, ads on the internet, or advertisements on television?	Nisar and Whitehead (2016)
RQ 4	What was your biggest change in the relationship with the hospital since you start following their social media?	Hollebeek et al. (2014)
RQ 2	In which social media do you prefer to follow the hospital page?	Baltes (2015)
RQ 4	What is the influence of social media on your knowledge about health-related themes?	Smith (2017)
RQ 4	How did your health decisions were influenced by the content posted on the social media of hospitals?	Smith (2017)
RQ 4	How did the content from the hospital social media make you adopt a healthier lifestyle?	Smith (2017)
RQ 4	When you schedule an appointment do you use social media to see other followers' opinions?	Nisar and Whitehead (2016)
RQ 4	For you, what is the biggest advantage of following the social media of the hospital?	Baltes (2015)
RQ 4	What was the influence of social media on your degree of trust in the hospital?	Ajina (2019)
RQ 4	In what way seeing the content on social media has influenced your decision for choosing a specific hospital?	Hollebeek et al. (2014)
RQ 1	Do you just follow the social media of hospitals you usually frequent or do you follow the social media from other hospitals?	Ajina (2019)

Research Question	Question	Autor
RQ 1	What are the reasons that lead you to follow the social media of the hospitals you do not usually go to?	Ahmad et al. (2016)

The interviews were made via WhatsApp, Zoom, or phone call and were recorded with the permission of the respondents. Before the interviews, all the respondents were informed about the confidentiality of their personal information and were assured that the recording of the interviews wasn't going to be shared. The interviews were transcribed and then translated into English. In total 12 respondents were interviewed. In table 8 the social media used by the respondents are presented.

Table 6 – Characterization of the respondents.

#	Respondent	Social Media	Private hospital followed
#1	F.D.	Instagram	Trofa Saúde
#2	F.C.	Instagram	CUF
#3	M.P.	Facebook	CUF
#4	M.T.	Instagram	CUF
#5	C.H.	Facebook	CUF
#6	P.O.	Facebook	CUF
#7	C.F.	Facebook	CUF
#8	A.F.	Instagram	CUF & Trofa Saúde
#9	T.S.	Facebook	CUF & Lusíadas
#10	J.L.	Facebook	CUF
#11	R.T.	Facebook	CUF & Lusíadas
#12	X.M.	Instagram	CUF

In addition to interviews, a documental analysis was employed. A documental analysis “is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material” (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). For this study, the data collected for analysis was

from social media of the following hospital hospitals: CUF, Trofa Saúde, Lusíadas, and Luz Saúde.

Based on preliminary research of the private hospitals and their social media, it was decided to analyse their Facebook and Instagram pages. These social media were chosen because they were the ones with the most published posts during the month of November of 2020.

The presence on social media platforms and the respective number of followers are presented in Table 7.

Table 7 – Social Media Followers.

Sources: ^a CUF Facebook page (2020). ^b Trofa Saúde Facebook page (2020). ^c Luz Saúde Facebook page (2020). ^d Lusíadas Facebook page (2020). ^e CUF Instagram page (2020). ^f Trofa Saúde Instagram page (2020). ^g Lusíadas Instagram page (2020).

<i>Hospital group</i>	Facebook Followers	Instagram Followers
<i>CUF</i>	241 051 ^a	3 701 ^e
<i>Trofa saúde</i>	104 525 ^b	1 761 ^f
<i>Luz saúde</i>	7320 ^c	-
<i>Lusíadas</i>	99 317 ^d	7 907 ^g

To organize and synthesize the number of posts during November 2020 in each platform, table 8 was developed.

Table 8 – Number of posts in each social media.

Source: ^a CUF Facebook page (2020). ^b Trofa Saúde Facebook page (2020). ^c Luz Saúde Facebook page (2020). ^d Lusíadas Facebook page (2020). ^e CUF Instagram page (2020). ^f Trofa Saúde Instagram page (2020). ^g Lusíadas Instagram page (2020).

Hospital	Facebook	Instagram
	1 month 1 st Nov. to 30 th Nov.	1 month 1 st Nov. to 30 th Nov.
CUF	27 posts ^a	13 posts ^e
Trofa Saúde	62 posts ^b	12 posts ^f
Luz Saúde	10 posts ^c	-
Lusíadas	27 posts ^d	15 posts ^g

To analyse the social media content of Instagram and Facebook pages the posts from the month of November were gathered on a PDF document. In total there were 126 posts from the Facebook pages of these hospitals' hospitals and 40 posts from Instagram.

To have a better understanding of how the documental analysis and the interviews will be used for answering the research question of this study, table 9 was built.

Table 9 – Data collection techniques and research questions.

	Documental analysis	Interviews
RQ1		X
RQ2	X	X
RQ3		X
RQ3		X

2.5. DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected through the interviews and through the Instagram and Facebook of the hospital hospitals were carefully analysed through the processes explained below. There are two approaches to analyse qualitative data: Deductive and Inductive (Burnard et al., 2008). In this study, the approach used will be inductive. This approach allows data to be analysed with little or no predetermined theory, structure, or framework and uses data itself to build the structure of the analysis (Burnard et al., 2008).

The method used to analyse the interviews was thematic content of analysis. The process of thematic content analysis requires analysing transcripts, identifying themes within data, and gather examples of those themes from texts (Burnard et al., 2008). After recording the interviews, they were transcribed and translated to English so they could be analysed carefully. Interviews transcripts, field notes, and observations provide a descriptive story of the study but don't provide explanations (Burnard et al., 2008). The researcher has the responsibility of making sense of the data that has been collected by exploring and interpreting it (Burnard et al., 2008). For this, the researcher has to go through a process that involves identifying themes and categories that emerge from the data (Burnard et al., 2008). This involves finding themes in the interview transcripts and attempt to verify them by searching through the data and repeating the process to identify themes and categories (Burnard et al.,

2008). After the interviews were transcribed and translated, they were explored, this allowed to identify the main themes that emerged from the data.

According to Burnard et al. (2008), once the interviews are transcribed verbatim, the researcher should read each transcript and take notes in the margin of the paper with words, theories, or short phrases of what is being said in the text, this is known as open coding. This was also the first step of the analysis of the interviews of this study. The aim of this is to summarize statements or words that are discussed in the transcripts (Burnard et al., 2008).

After that, the researcher should collect all the statements and words so they can be worked through and all duplication eliminated (Burnard et al., 2008). This will diminish the number of categories and will help the researcher to look for overlapping and similar categories (Burnard et al., 2008). This process was also applied in the analysis of data collected in the interviews of this study. The reduced list form of themes is the final theme system that can be used to divide all interviews (Burnard et al., 2008).

After defining the final theme system, the next step is to allocate a colour to each theme and then each transcript is worked through and data that fit under a particular theme should be marked with the according colour (Burnard et al., 2008). After that, the key findings are reported into the main themes using appropriate verbatim quotes to illustrate those findings (Burnard et al., 2008). After defining the final theme system of the study, it was given a specific colour

to each theme that permitted to gather of the quotes that demonstrated the findings of the study.

A document analysis “contains text and/or images that were recorded without the researcher’s intervention” (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). The main advantage of document analysis is being less-time consuming because it requires data selection instead of data collection; its easily available; is unaffected by the research process (Bowen, 2009).

According to Bowen (2009), a document analysis should include skimming, reading, and interpretation. This process includes elements of content analysis and thematic analysis (Bowen, 2009). Content analysis is “the process of organising information into categories related to the central questions of the research” (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). The content analysis should identify meaningful and relevant passages of text or other data, demonstrating the capacity of the researcher to identify pertinent information (Bowen, 2009). Thematic analysis is a “form of pattern recognition within the data, with emerging themes becoming the categories for analysis” (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). The thematic process involves a more careful reading and review of the data (Bowen, 2009). The researcher should use coding and category construction, if the document analysis is supplementary to other research methods such as interviews, the codes used in interview transcripts, for example, can be applied (Bowen, 2009).

For the documental analysis of this study, it was elaborated a document with all the posts from the month of November of Instagram and Facebook of the hospitals' hospitals. After that, content and thematic analysis of the posts was developed. After defining the main themes, the posts with more reactions, shares, and comments were identified. This allowed to have a better understanding of the themes with more interactions.

3. FINDINGS

In this chapter, the results will be presented. For each research question of the study, I will present the main findings.

3.1. REASONS TO FOLLOW SOCIAL MEDIA OF PRIVATE HOSPITALS

The main reasons presented by the social media followers for following the social media of private hospitals were (1) receive updates about the services provided by the private hospital, (2) receive news and updates about health-related topics. Other reasons included (3) become a customer of the hospital, (4) receive information about healthier habits, (5) job search, and (6) receive information about preventive health behaviours.

Table 10 – Reasons to follow social media of private hospitals.

Theme	Empirical excerpts
Became a customer of the private hospital	"I had an appointment and decided to start following the social media" (Respondent F.D.) "I've been going for a while, and I don't remember... If me or my mother. (...) but we had an appointment, and I went to see. I followed just because I did." (Respondent M.T.)

Theme	Empirical excerpts
	"Derived from the fact that I am a customer. Already was a customer before start following social media... I have been a customer of the CUF group as I am, now more, of the Trofa Saúde group." (Respondent A.F.)
Receive updates of the services provided by the hospital.	"... and I ended up already 2/3 years ago to follow the social media because sometimes there is information that will go out there ... that appear... at the time of the pandemic I even started to pay more attention because there were appointments that I had scheduled there and everything (...)" (Respondent M.P.) " (...) news that they have at the level of clinical staff... and the level of campaigns they sometimes have for certain times of the year for people to be able to access CUF services at certain times of the year to provide certain health services, in particular, isn't it?!" (Respondent P.O.) "When I had. . . when I needed to search through the health center, I went through social media for the contacts and services they provide" (Respondent J.L.)
Receive information about healthier habits.	"(...) and because... they pass on some messages of healthy habits (...)" (Respondent P.O.) "... general interest on health and not only. . . Nutrition, health in general (...)" (Respondent R.T.)

Theme	Empirical excerpts
Receive news and updates about health-related topics.	"Ahm... because it is easier to receive... information on current affairs, other health care in Portugal." (Respondent T.S.) "I think it has to do with being able to learn more about certain health-related issues." (Respondent F.D.) "(...) to have new knowledge... often they advertise new... hm new pathologies, new treatments, alert to symptoms of some pathologies and I think it is interesting to go having this information (...)" (Respondent A.F.) "(...) Okay, and it's a little bit to be on top of it, a little bit by the family background that ends up being interesting for me to read some things about matters related to that." (Respondent M.P.)
Receive information about preventive health behaviours.	"It's because they often have new posts about various health measures for prevention issues. Uh... don't know... disclose several aspects that in my view are... are pertinent"(Respondent C.F.)
Job searching.	"Hm... for job search reasons to see the supply that exists... there is in the market of private hospitals in this case work differently and it is something that is interesting to me ... know what's available." (Respondent C.H.) "(...) for recruitment issues (...)" (Respondent C.F.)

It is important to understand how the respondents got to know about the presence of the private hospital on social media since it could influence the reason why they are following the social media pages of these hospitals. In table 11 are listed the reasons for how the respondents were informed about the presence of the hospital on social media.

Table 11 – Reasons for how the respondents learned about the presence of the private hospital in social media.

Theme	Empirical excerpts
Suggestions from other people.	"Ahm... In fact, I already knew they were present because of my family. I have members of my family who follow" (Respondent FC) "By Co-workers" (Respondent C.H.) "(...) they themselves have communicated that Facebook has information and that it passes... are not newsletters because they do not pass me newsletters in my email. But I was told that I could follow CUF (...). And as in hospitals, in this case, CUF in concrete, I was unaware I was unaware and from there I started to follow." (Respondent P.O.)

Theme	Empirical excerpts
Suggestions from social media.	“On Instagram appeared the suggestion of the Trofa Saúde group by... do not know if it is for the sake of data crossover by being their customer... . It appeared to me in the suggestions to follow, I started to follow and then appeared ... I remembered Ah! There is also the CUF group, I was also a customer and so that's what led me to follow.” (Respondent A.F.) “(…) they themselves have communicated that Facebook has information and that it passes... are not newsletters because they do not pass me newsletters in my email. But I was told that I could follow CUF (...). And as in hospitals, in this case, CUF in concrete, I was unaware I was unaware and from there I started to follow.” (Respondent P.O.)
Individual search of the page.	“I just... I looked for... Everywhere I go I always try to see if there is a page on Instagram. It was me, I didn't see anywhere that they had.” (Respondent M.T.) “Okay, CUF is a hospital that I've been going to for a while and so I decided on free initiative to search and found Facebook, so I decided to start following. There was no one to tell me or anything like that. I simply decided to start following them. ” (Respondent C.F.) “Ahm, came up in a search ”(Respondent T.S.) I looked for them. Because I'm a hospital customer, I go to both hospitals. Uh... and intended to be up to date, so... and followed their pages, in addition to receiving the newsletters. ” (Respondent R.T.)

The respondents learned about the presence of the private hospital in social media through (1) suggestions from other people, (2) suggestions from social media, and (3) individual search of the page.

3.2. CONTENT THAT CREATES MORE INTERACTION IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA OF PRIVATE HOSPITALS

Table 12 allows to understand what content creates more interaction in the social media of private hospitals according to the respondents. The content that creates more interaction was mentioned by the respondents as the content they paid more attention to and most like to read on the social media pages of private hospitals.

Table 12 – Content that creates more interaction in the social media of private hospitals.

Theme	Empirical excerpts
New healthcare procedures	"Uh... the part of new procedures that I can implement on my professional side, things I do not... do not know and can investigate more about it, and there are the offers that exist both in my nursing area and in others. " (Respondent C.H.) "(...) I don't know, some novelty in terms of treatment, some specific disease" (Respondent T.S.)
Information about the services of the hospital	"Those who meet what we need, the services they provide, new services. " (Respondent J.L.)

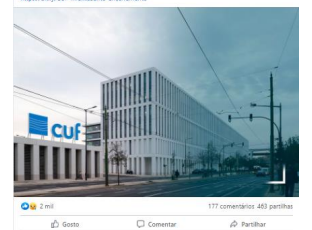
Theme	Empirical excerpts
	"(...) but I find it really interesting by the testimonies with cases that happened there (...), as I've been through some similar things there (...) is a little more in the perspective of evaluating their service in other people." (Respondent M.P.)
Information about health-related topics	"Medical information articles." (Respondent R.T.) "(...) but I think the informative is the kind of post, content that I like the most" (Respondent M.T.) "(...) or pathologies that I do not know and that ... and that I usually stop and read a little bit about about them, are... are... basically these are." (Respondent A.F.)
Recommendations for healthier eating habits	"Uh... healthy eating habits, eating habits... sometimes nutrition messages too, interest me these 2 strands... Uh... I have some pathologies so... so I follow with more with more attention" (Respondent P.O.) "(...) The posts where they recommend certain food (...)" (Respondent F.C.) "(...) in nutritional terms yes! It alerts us a lot and teaches... teach us to be more alarmed to good practices or to adopt good practices (...)" (Respondent R.T.)

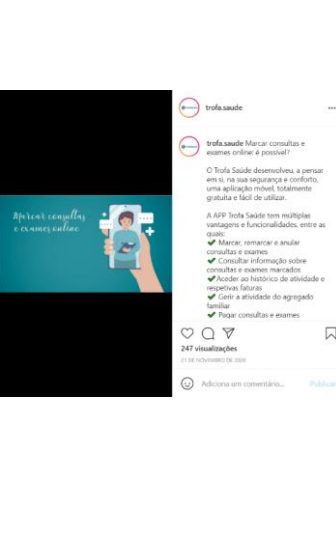
Theme	Empirical excerpts
Information about the COVID-19 pandemic.	"The ones who say... for instance... don't know... techniques to overcome this phase of COVID! (...)" (Respondent C.F.) "(...) now with COVID telling you what to do and this kind of information I think is always important (...)" (Respondent M.T.)
Suggestions for a healthier lifestyle.	"Um, I think... it is not any in particular maybe when they give health tips and healthy habits..." (Respondent A.F.) "(...) When the part of health comes along... tips, tips to be able to understand what you can do or can't do (...)" (Respondent X.M.)

The contents that respondents pay more attention to are (1) New healthcare procedures, (2) Information about the services in the hospital, (3) Information about health-related topics, (4) Recommendations for healthier eating habits, (5) Information about the COVID-19 pandemic, and (6) Suggestions for a healthier lifestyle.

Table 13 presents the posts with more interactions from the Facebook and Instagram pages of the private hospitals' pages during the month of November 2020. Table 13 allows to have a detailed perspective on the content with more interactions and compare it to the answers given by the respondents of the interviews.

Table 13 – Posts with more interactions from the social media pages of private hospitals.

	Facebook		Instagram	
CUF		Theme		Theme
More reactions		Information about the services of the hospital		Suggestion for a healthier lifestyle.
More shares		Information about the services of the hospital		
More comments		Information about the services of the hospital		Information about the services of the hospital
Trofa Saúde		Theme		Theme

More reactions	Facebook 	Information about the services of the hospital	Instagram 	Information about the services of the hospital
More shares	Facebook 	Recruitment	Theme	Theme
More comments	Facebook 	Information about the services of the hospital	Instagram 	Information about the services of the hospital

	Facebook		Instagram	
Lusiáda s				
More reactions		Theme		Theme
		Prizes won by the hospital		Prizes won by the hospital
More shares		Themes		
		Information about the services of the hospital		
More comments		Theme		Theme
		Prizes won by the hospital		Prizes won by the hospital
Luz Saúde				
		Theme		

	Facebook		Instagram
More reactions		Information about health-related topics	
More shares		Prizes won by the hospital	
More comments		Prizes won by the hospital	

The social media posts of private hospitals with more interactions were (1) Information about the services of the hospital, (2) Suggestions for a healthier lifestyle, (3) Recruitment, (4) Prizes won by the hospital and (5) Information about health-related topics. Analysing table 13 it is possible to conclude that the posts with more interactions between all the ones mentioned were posts with information about the services of the hospital. Another conclusion after analysing table 13 is that posts have more interactions on Facebook than on Instagram. When analysing the number of reactions and comments on each post

and compare it between the two social media it is possible to observe that the number of likes/reactions and comments is always bigger on Facebook.

Comparing table 12 and 13 allows to understand the contents that create more interaction regarding the respondent's opinion and the follower's interaction with the posts. It is possible to observe that there is content in common between the two tables such as (1) Information about the services of the hospital, (2) Suggestions for a healthier lifestyle, and (3) Information about health-related topics. In addition to the contents common to the two tables, it is also important to consider what is not common because it comes from different perspectives. These contents are (4) New healthcare procedure, (5) Recommendations for healthier eating habits, (6) Information about COVID-19, (7) Recruitment, and (8) Prizes won by the hospital.

3.3. REASONS TO INTERACT WITH SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS OF PRIVATE HOSPITALS

The reasons to interact with social media posts of private hospitals are mostly related to the value of the content to the respondent. Some of the respondents mentioned in the interview that they do not usually interact with posts with likes or shares, but usually just read the content.

Table 14 – Reasons to interact with social media posts of private hospitals.

Theme	Empirical excerpts
Likes the content because it approaches important themes for the respondent	“Actually, I'm not sharing the content, but I read it and when I like it or when I'm interested in it... Hm... look at an example... for example, the posts that are related to Alzheimer's disease, I read and put like. Share, I'm not sharing yet... and nutrition also think it's quite important.” (Respondent R.T.) “I like it because I do. Sharing not... I don't usually share. (...) I think if the message is well transmitted, well communicated, I put like. (...) It has to be something that jumps in sight has to be content that I like and worth it for that like too, the content is important for me.” (Respondent P.O.) “No, is rare to share and even put like or so is also rare. It depends a lot on my predisposition, sometimes I end up putting like, but I usually read only. My interaction is just reading. (...) When I think that it is really interesting... when I think it's interesting, I usually put a like to give feedback to those who are on the other side managing the page that ... that that content is really interesting.” (Respondent A.F.)
Shares the content because it is important for someone they know	“I'm not much used to sharing content on the page, but... but if I see something that I think is important for my friends on Facebook to know... some alert for better health care yes I think I should share.” (Respondent C.H.) “If I see it, eventually, if I cross and it interests me, I am able to put like. Not generally... I do not comment or anything ... when at

Theme	Empirical excerpts
	maximum I put like or share with someone (...) But mostly it's by message and it is for my family or to comment with someone on the subject or sometimes to show something, but mostly, it's always a message." (Respondent M.P.)
Does not interact and only reads the content posted.	"No, no... I don't usually interact, I usually read what they post" (Respondent F.C.) "(...) Yes, I usually just read " (Respondent F.D.) "I don't usually interact, but as a rule... as a general rule I do not interact, I usually read. " (Respondent T.S.)

The main reasons for the respondents to interact with social media posts are: (1) it approaches important themes for the respondent, (2) it is important for someone they know. It is important to mention that the respondents tend to like the post when the information is relevant for them and share a post when the information is important for someone they know. It is important to acknowledge that some respondents have a more passive engagement with the content and only read it.

3.4. SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FOLLOWER AND THE HOSPITAL

The influence of social media on the relationship between the followers and the hospital made the followers feel closer to the hospital, improved the trust in the private hospital and improved the ability to make an informed choice between private hospitals.

Table 15 – Influence of social media on the relationship between the customer and the hospital.

Theme	Empirical excerpts
Closer Relationship	"I felt a closer relationship with the hospital, more familiar. I feel like it's become more familiar" (Respondent F.D.) "Increased... Hmm... And they're closer to people. They give the idea that they provide a quality service..." (Respondent T.S.) "I think it gives me more closeness, that feeling of proximity to the company, to the hospital (...)" (Respondent A.F.) "A while ago I went to an appointment with the Lusíadas because my mother was there in a particular doctor. ahm... that's just why I went, if not I would probably go to CUF because it is the one I'm most familiar with." (Respondent M.T.)
Ability to make an informed choice between private hospitals.	"(...) I like to understand how the process was with others and that's a little more in the perspective of evaluating their service in other people." (Respondent M.P.)

Theme	Empirical excerpts
	"It's not social media that make us choose. Now if we have good information and if the page gives us good information is easier to decide"(Respondent J.L.) "(...) What I... what I feel is that some services that I didn't know existed and that, probably makes me look for a hospital by knowing through Facebook that they have these services or clinical body in a certain area of health (...)" (Respondent P.O.) "(...)to have more knowledge and to make a more thoughtful decision(...)" (Respondent A.F.)
More trust	"(...)unconsciously ends up transmitting me more confidence. There is greater transparency among those who provide... the company that provides health care services and who acquires (...) Because when a person, when he has the will to demonstrate work techniques, he ends up transmitting more confidence, in this case, I don't say a person – an entity." (Respondent A.F.) "It is their intention, is not?! try to gain confidence with followers so they can feel at ease going to the hospital ... but yes the trust relationship has become more established." (Respondent C.H.)
No influence	"Hm... in fact, they did not have because I follow these hospitals for a long time, because I have confidence in them and the doctors who work in these 2 hospitals and all the services they give us, so it did not have much influence only in the information part." (Respondent R.T.)

Theme	Empirical excerpts
	"No, I don't think so. Nothing has been changed. Not for better or for worse, no." (Respondent C.F.)

In the statements given by the respondents, it is possible to see that the social media of a private hospital page gives its followers more knowledge and information about the hospital. This makes social media influence trust, closeness, and the ability to make an informed choice between private hospitals.

It is important to mention that some of the respondents felt that social media did not influence the relationship between them and the private hospital. Looking at the transcriptions of the interviews it is possible to conclude that is mainly because they were already customers before following the pages and because they have a relation with the hospital from a long time ago.

4. DISCUSSION

After analyzing the results, it is important to reflect and interpret them. This process should consider the literature review presented and it should allow to understand how this study has contributed to the existing knowledge. This study aims to understand how social media and content marketing influence the followers of private hospitals pages.

In the study of Nisar and Whitehead (2016) the most popular reasons to follow social media of brands is to obtain general information about new products, to see reviews and product ratings, to get discounts, to be able to participate in events and to submit their own opinions as new ideas for products and services. The results of the study are not aligned with the findings of Nisar and Whitehead (2016), this may be caused by the context of the studies. The Nisar and Whitehead (2016) study was developed in the context of retail services, which means that in other contexts the reasons for following social media can be different.

The findings of this study are different from the ones stated in the study of Nisar and Whitehead (2016). The reasons that lead people to follow the social media of private hospitals pages are because they have (1) become a customer of the hospital, (2) they can receive updates of the services provided by the hospital, (3) they can receive information about healthier habits, (4) they can

receive news and updates about health-related topics, (5) they can receive information about preventive health behaviours, and (6) they are job searching. It is possible to notice that the common reason between the two studies is to gain general information about new products since one of the reasons mentioned by the social media followers of private hospitals is to receive updates of the services of the hospital.

According to Crié and Chebat (2013), nowadays customers are more involved in their healthcare process and look for health information. This study confirms the claims of Crié and Chebat (2013) since some of the reasons to follow the social media of private hospitals are to receive information about healthier habits, receive news and updates about health-related topics, and receive information about preventive health behaviours. These results show that customers are looking for health information and this is making them more empowered to make decisions about their health.

Understanding the reasons that lead people to follow social media of private hospitals is also important because it helps to understand the subjective judgment of usefulness of the social media followers. According to Koob (2021), providing content aligned with a target group subjective judgment of usefulness will increase the probability of interacting and increase content marketing effectiveness. This means that understanding what is considered useful for the social media followers will help to create content that is considered helpful to

them and increase the engagement on social media, promoting likes and shares of the posts. In table 16 it is possible to see the reasons mentioned by the respondents to follow the social media pages of the private hospitals and what reasons are presented as new and the reasons that corroborate other studies.

Table 16 – Reasons to follow the social media pages of private hospitals.

Source: Own elaboration

New reasons presented by the study	Became a customer of the private hospital
	Job searching
	Receive information about healthier habits
	Receive news and updates about health-related topics
	Receive information about preventive health behaviours
Reasons that corroborate other studies	Receive updates about the services provided by the hospital – Nisar and Whitehead (2016)

According to Tafesse and Wien (2017) and Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021), it is important to understand how to effectively create and distribute content within social media to promote the desired outcome. For this reason, understand what type of content creates more interaction between social media followers of private hospitals is important.

The results of this research show that the content that creates more interaction between the respondents are (1) information about the services of

the hospital, (2) suggestions for a healthier lifestyle, (3) information about health-related, (4) new healthcare procedures, (5) recommendations for healthier eating habits, (6) information about COVID-19, (7) recruitment, and (8) prizes won by the hospital. When analyzing the content of Facebook and Instagram of the private hospitals' page, the content with more interactions was information about the services of the hospital.

In the interviews, some of the respondents said that, usually, they do not interact with the content and just read it. The main reasons that lead them to interact are different for sharing and liking the post. The main reason for liking the content is because it is important for them, and for sharing it is because it is important for someone they know. These findings can help private hospitals understand what type of content is important for their followers, but also what content creates more interaction. Understanding this can lead to better social media engagement by effectively create content that gets the attention and interest of its followers.

Looking at the reasons that lead people to follow the social media pages of private hospitals, the content that creates more interaction, and the content with more interactions on the social media pages, it is possible to understand what type of content is more valued by the social media followers. In table 17 are stated what type of content is more valued by the social media followers of

private hospitals pages. Table 17 also shows the type of content that is identified by other studies and what type of content was found by this study.

Table 17 – Valuable content to the followers of social media pages of private hospitals.

Source: Own elaboration based on the interviews of the study and social media pages of the private hospitals.

		Type of content identified by other studies	Findings of the study
Health related content	New healthcare procedures		x
	Information about health-related topics	Moorhead et al. (2013); Smith (2017)	x
	Recommendations for healthier eating habits		x
	Information about COVID-19		x
	Suggestions for a healthier lifestyle	Moorhead et al. (2013); Smith (2017)	x
Non-health related content	Information about the services of the hospital	Smith (2017)	x
	Recruitment	Smith (2017)	x
	Prizes won by the hospital	Smith (2017)	x

As it is possible to see from table 17, the findings of this study support the findings of other studies on valuable content for social media followers. Moorhead et al. (2013) and Smith (2017) stated that social media is being used to foster health promotion and health education by sharing healthier habits and health related information. Information about COVID-19 is also valuable health content, although COVID-19 is a recent disease, Moorhead et al. (2013) stated in their study that social media pages of hospitals can help in health surveillance by facilitating the arrival of information to target communities. This means that

information about COVID-19 can be spread by the social media pages of private hospitals because followers look for this kind of information on the hospital's social media page.

The study revealed two more health-related type of contents that are valuable to social media followers: new healthcare procedures and recommendations for healthier eating habits. These findings show that social media followers are interested in new healthcare procedures, this is important because the social media managers must be aware of new procedures and inform their followers in order to present valuable content to them. Regarding the recommendations for healthier eating habits, it is shown in the literature that followers value suggestions for healthier lifestyles, in this study besides mentioned that type of content the respondents mentioned separately healthier eating habits which means that this content is important and should be present when defining a social media content strategy for the social media pages of private hospitals.

Regarding non-health related content, Smith (2017) stated that social media can be used for spreading marketing messages, such as mission, showing credentials such as licenses and prizes won, or a description of the services provided. This statement made by Smith (2017) is corroborated by this study because two of the most valuable type of content for social media followers are information about the services of the hospital and prizes won by the hospital. Recruitment is another non-health related content valued by social media

followers that is supported by Smith (2017), in her study it is stated that social media can be a mean to employee recruitment.

When comparing the reasons to follow the social media pages of private hospitals and the most valuable content to its followers it is possible to see some common content. This is not unexpected since the reasons to follow a social media page are directly connected with what type of content the follower wants to see. The common reasons and valuable content are information about the services of the hospital, suggestions for a healthier lifestyle, and information about health-related topics.

According to Tafesse and Wien (2017) and Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021), the most important component of social media marketing is brand pages because they are interactive and allow to connect with customers through brand posts. Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021) define two types of social media engagement: active and passive. When analyzing the posts of the Instagram and Facebook page of the hospitals' pages it is possible to conclude that the posts on Facebook have a higher number of likes/reactions and comments when compared to Instagram. This supports the claims made by Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021) that engagement is more active in Facebook, even in the context of healthcare.

The results also favor the statement made by Ahmad et al. (2016) that content marketing plays an important role in delivering effective communication to the customers and therefore attracts them to keep engaging with brands. The

outcomes of this research show that when content is important for the followers or someone they know, they have a tendency to interact with the post which keeps them engaged with the brand.

The categorization model proposed by Tafesse and Wien (2017) allows to categorize the most valuable type of content presented in this study. The categorization of the content can help marketers to have a more effective content marketing strategy (Tafesse & Wien, 2017). Besides the categorization of posts, Tafesse and Wien (2017) suggest that each category can fit into three main message strategies: Transformational, Informational, and Interactional.

Using the categorization model proposed by Tafesse and Wien (2017) the most valuable type of content for social media followers of private hospitals can fit in three categories. The type of content that mentions information about the services of the hospital is in the category of functional posts, this category includes posts that emphasize the functional characteristics of services. Content about new healthcare procedures, health-related topics, healthier eating habits, COVID-19, and healthier lifestyle fits the category of educational posts, these posts educate and inform the followers on different topics. The content about prizes won by the hospital is in the category of brand resonance, these posts reflect and highlight brand identity and the main goal is to differentiate from other brands.

As discussed above, Tafesse and Wien (2017) suggest that each category can be merged into three main messages strategies. These three main strategy messages will allow to have a better understanding of the general topics that each type of most valuable content fits in. The categories that the most valuable type of content fit in are: Informational and Transformational. Informational message strategy provides followers with logical and relevant information to empower the ability of the followers to evaluate the functional attributes of services, and transformational message strategy associates the particular experience of using a specific service with unique psychological characteristics that differ from other brands (Tafesse & Wien, 2017). In table 18 are presented the categories and message strategies that the most valuable type of content for social media followers of private hospitals fit in.

Table 18 – Categorization of the valuable content for social media followers.

Source: Own elaboration based on Tafesse & Wien (2017) and the findings of the study.

Valuable type of content to social media followers	Post category
Information about the services of the hospital	Functional
New healthcare procedures	Educational
Information about health-related topics	
Recommendations for healthier eating habits	
Information about COVID-19	
Suggestions for a healthier lifestyle	

Prizes won by the hospital	Brand resonance
Recruitment	Not applicable

One valuable content that is not present in table 18 is recruitment because this type of content is not contemplated in the categorization model proposed by Tafesse and Wien (2017). They only refer posts that allow communication between employees and followers, which is not the case for the recruitment posts. The recruitment posts allow followers to learn about job opportunities in private hospitals.

According to Moorhead et al. (2013) and Smith (2017), when hospitals allow communication to happen through social media they can offer peer, social and emotional support for the general public and its customers. It is showed in the findings of this study that followers look for healthier lifestyle recommendations, new healthcare procedures, and general information about health. This means that followers trust the social media of private hospital pages to look for information that can have impact in their personal lives. For this reason, the findings of this study show that social media of private hospitals can offer important social support for general public and its customers.

The reasons that lead followers to interact with the social media posts are important for marketers and social media managers because when defining and applying a social media content strategy it is important to reflect on what will engage customers. According to Hollebeek et al. (2014), social media may

connect the customer and the hospital fostering customer engagement, and it is expected that increasing levels of customer engagement lead to better hospital performance outcomes, including sales growth, cost reductions, and brand referrals.

Kee and Yazdanifard (2015), mention that for an effective content marketing strategy the marketers should take into consideration ethics and honesty because while marketers create attractive content and publish them on different platforms, customers are free to search and read the contents. This statement made by Kee and Yazdanifard (2015) means that the content posted by the private hospitals' social media pages is read by their followers and they trust in the information that is posted as it is demonstrated by the results of this study. Since the content is read by the followers and they trust in the information that is posted, this means that the content posted should be validated by a healthcare professional when the content is about health-related issues, so it can be true because it can influence the behaviours of their followers.

When looking at the findings of the influence of social media in the relationship between the customer and the hospital it is possible to see that some of the followers feel that their trust and closeness to the hospital increased. The findings also showed that some followers felt that social media contributed to the ability to make an informed choice between private hospitals.

Baltes (2015) and Kee and Yazdanifard (2015) stated that for a quality content marketing strategy marketers have to produce accurate, informative, and interesting content for their target segment in order to build a relationship and brand loyalty with their customers based on truth and admiration. The findings of the study reinforce this perspective because followers specified in the interviews that social media made them have a better understanding of the services provided by the hospital and has increased their trust and closeness to the hospital.

In a study elaborated by Gray (2007), it is stated that the customer must have trust in the quality of the treatment to accept it and choose a hospital. This study has shown that social media can increase trust but it is not the main factor when choosing a hospital. When the respondents were asked what was the influence of social media on choosing a private hospital the majority of them stated there was no influence, while some said it facilitates their decision because of the information given. These results are not surprising since health is a very important issue and the decision of choosing a healthcare provider is believed to be influenced by various factors.

Ajina (2019) found that content marketing has a positive effect on customer engagement, trust, and loyalty, it was also verified that customer engagement has a positive effect on trust and trust has a positive effect on loyalty. The positive correlation between customer engagement and trust shows that content

marketing is important in promoting trust and confidence among customers. The results of this study emphasize that content marketing has a positive relation in promoting trust among social media followers, although it cannot confirm if it has a positive effect on loyalty.

Although some of the respondents mentioned that following the social media of private hospitals did not influence their relationship with the hospital, it is important to mention that some respondents felt that social media improved their closeness and trust towards the hospital and improved their ability to make an informed choice between private hospitals. These results mean that social media content can be seen differently by the followers and their experiences. It also means that customers value information about the services and it helps the decision of choosing a hospital. The findings of this study strengthen the statement made by Moorhead et al. (2013) that social media is changing the nature of the interaction between hospitals and individuals since following the social media of private hospitals can influence the trust and the knowledge about the services provided by the hospital.

These results are important to understand the influence of social media on the customers who follow the social media pages of private hospitals. The findings allow more insight into what is influenced by social media but also help marketers to define a more effective content marketing strategy.

Smith (2017) stated that hospitals are using social media to promote healthier habits and health-related information. This statement is substantiated by the outcomes of this research since it is mentioned as one of the reasons why the respondents are following the social media pages of private hospitals, and it can also be seen as one of the contents posted by the hospital's pages. This is important for this study because customers trust what is posted on the social media pages of these hospitals and they can have the ability to promote healthier lifestyles among the population.

In figure 2 are presented the main contributions of this study. Initially, the findings allowed to understand what are the reasons that lead people to follow the social media of private hospitals. After that it was possible to understand what type of content is more valued by the social media followers of private hospitals, this type of content was divided into two main categories: health related content and non-health related content. This division helped to have a better understanding if the type of content that is more valued is related to health or not, which can facilitate the elaboration of a content marketing strategy for social media pages of private hospitals. Finally, it was possible to understand how social media of private hospitals pages could influence its followers.

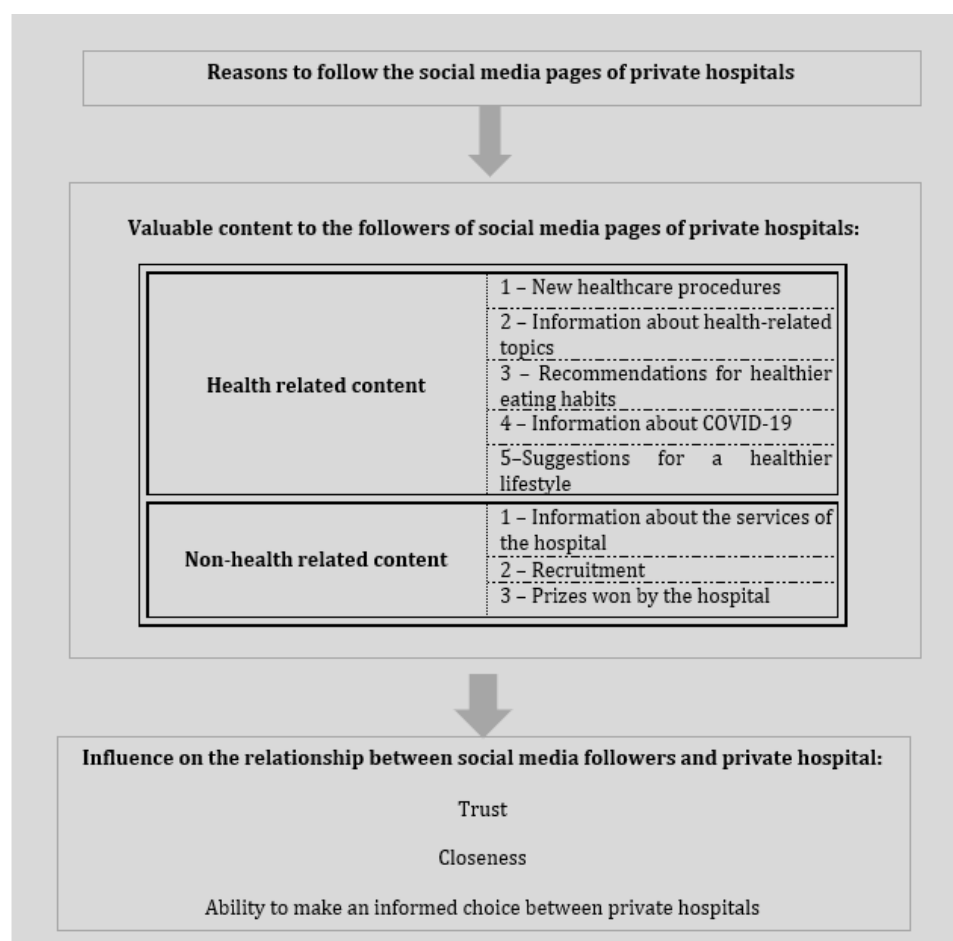


Figure 2 – Influence of content marketing and social media on followers of private hospitals pages.

Source: Own elaboration based on the findings of the study.

As seen in figure 2, the social media followers of private hospitals value more content that is health related. The non-health related content valued by the social media followers is associated with the private hospital itself and is mostly related to the services provided and its quality, and also recruitment. Information about the services of the hospital is related to health, but in the case of this study, the respondents mentioned that they value knowing more about the clinical team that provides the service and the testimonies that allow having an overview of how the services work for other customers, this is not directly related to health content and therefore it was consider has non-health related

content. Recruitment is a valuable content type because, as discussed above, one of the reasons for following the social media of private hospitals is job searching. The content of social media of private hospitals can influence the relationship between social media followers and private hospitals. This study has shown that it can increase trust and proximity to the hospital and improved the ability to make an informed choice between private hospitals.

The findings can help the hospital to accomplish its marketing objectives because it will help define a more effective content marketing strategy for their social media. By understanding the reasons that lead people to follow the social media pages of private hospitals marketers can build a social media content strategy that will meet the needs and expectations of their followers. Besides that, understanding the reasons for following the social media of private hospitals and the most valuable content for its followers, marketers can identify what type of content the social media page can have more influence on and how it will influence their followers.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The main purpose of this study was to understand how social media and content marketing influence the followers of private hospitals pages. The findings of the study showed that social media and content marketing influence the relationship between social media followers and private hospitals. It was also shown in the findings the reasons that lead people to follow the social media pages of private hospitals, the type of content more valuable for social media followers, and the influence of social media in the relationship between social media followers and private hospitals. Social media can influence trust, closeness, and the ability to make an informed decision between private hospitals.

It was possible to understand that social media followers of private hospitals pages not only value health related content but also non-health related content. Concerning non-health related content followers value content related to the private hospital such as understanding the services provided, prizes won by the hospital and recruitment. Regarding health-related content followers value content that can help them learn more about health topics or that can make them adopt healthier habits.

Interaction with the social media posts is also important for the private hospitals. This study helped to comprehend the reasons that lead people to

interact with social media posts, followers mostly read the content but tend to interact when the content is important for them or someone they know. It is important to mention again the followers share the post when the content is important for someone they know and like the post when the content is important to them.

The findings of the study are important because they can help the private hospitals to accomplish their marketing objectives, allowed to have a better understanding of how to promote the social media pages of private hospitals and understand the influence of content marketing delivered through social media on the followers of private hospitals pages. The context of healthcare is different from other marketing contexts, this study also helped to have a better insight into the context of healthcare in social media.

This study has contributed with some theoretical contributions, such as increasing in the knowledge about social media and content marketing in the healthcare field. It also reinforced some of the theories presented by other studies in the context of healthcare content marketing.

Some practical contributions are presented below in the form of recommendations:

- Marketers that manage the social media of pages of private hospitals should always validate their content about health-related topics with

a healthcare professional to provide correct information to their followers since they trust their page to look for this information.

- When defining a content marketing strategy for social media of private hospitals it should consider the reasons for following the page aiming to satisfy the followers' needs and expectations.
- Creating content that encourages more interactions on the social media page of private hospitals will lead to a more effective content marketing strategy.

This study will help marketers to define a strong content marketing strategy for the social media followers of private hospitals pages and with that increase their trust and closeness to the private hospitals and improve the ability to make an informed choice between private hospitals.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This chapter presents the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research. Presenting the limitations of this study is important because it will allow to understand how the context of the study may impact the findings.

First, the interviews of this study only gathered 12 respondents. This is a low number of followers when compared to the total number of followers of the private hospitals. Future research on this topic should consider a bigger number of respondents to the interviews. Secondly, due to the pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2, it was not possible to make interviews in-person which diminished the perception these interviews can have because it is not possible to see all the body behaviour through the online platforms available for the interviews. Thirdly, because of the number of respondents and the approach used in this study, it is not possible to generalize the findings directly.

As a suggestion for future research, it could be relevant to spread this research to public hospitals and compare the differences and similarities between public and private hospitals. Another important suggestion would be to see if different cultures from different countries have different results from the ones stated in this study and understand what could cause them.

A quantitative approach to the findings of this study could help understand which type of valuable content is more valuable for the social media followers of private hospitals and understand the most important reason for following the social media pages of private hospitals. Lastly, future research on this topic could include a more in-depth understanding of how content marketing could influence the choice between private hospitals.

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