

Age 2.0: Motivations and Brand Engagement

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Abstract: The demographic winter that is widespread throughout Europe, along with the spread of network society, has brought to contemporary societies a striking new world of opportunity and challenge. The growing adherence of the senior population to Information and Communication Technologies, with a focus on digital social networks, is perceived as a positive sign of inclusion and digital literacy. In this context and given the potential of this segment as a marketing target, brands need to understand the interests, motivations, and profiles of these users to achieve greater interaction and proximity with this audience. Taking into account two countries, Portugal and Spain, the aim of this research is 1) to discuss the role of social networks in promoting active aging; 2) to understand the level of importance and how this senior segment interacts with the brands on social networks and 3) to compare the results among the two sociocultural realities. Methodologically, an exploratory qualitative investigation was carried out based on the realization of a Focus Group in which users of social networks residing in Spain and Portugal participated. Results point out that more than seeking and get information about brands, seniors navigate the social networks in search of affiliation, support, and socialization not only broadening their network of contacts in the virtual world but mainly by networking with their "acquaintances" to retrieve memories and strengthen bonds of friendship. As little research has been undertaken so far into the ways that older consumers are adopting or rejecting new digital technologies, this study contributes to the academic literature regarding this subject. Furthermore, for marketers, it is important to tailor their strategies and to convey appropriate messages as there is evidence that seniors have still to be pushed to join and use pages of brands on Facebook as a platform to interact with brands.

Keywords: aging, social media, motivations, brand engagement

1. Introduction

Demographic changes and aging populations in Europe and in a global context are macro-trends that will have a substantial social (and economic) impact over the 21st century. In the European Union zone, the percentage of persons over 65 is expected to be around 30% of the total population in 2060 (United Nations 2015). Aging can bring factors making social relationships difficult. Loss of connections after retirement, distance from family members or other physical factors, all reduce opportunities for face-to-face encounters (Schehl, Leukel, and Sugumaran, 2019).

Concurrent to this demographic trend, social media is one of the primary technological influencers of the last decade regarding human social relations, organizational structure, and cultural practices (Fuchs, 2017). Thus, Internet in general and social media in particular have become important for the daily lives of many older adults. It is a useful means to enhance the engagement and participation of seniors in their social environment contributing in diminishing their loneliness and social isolation. At the same time, provides opportunities for older adults to pursue an active and self-determined lifestyle (Chopik, 2016). By enabling online relationships, social media provide ways to overcome barriers to face-to-face interaction, even replacing physical with virtual interaction.

Taking a different perspective, the dynamic and real-time interaction enabled by social media has substantially changed the state of marketing and the landscape for brand management. Consumer adoption of social media provides a platform not just for fostering customer relationships but for customers to influence purchasing behavior by sharing their experiences with products and services. Seniors are an attractive market segment due to their economic power, leisure time and increasing longevity (Friemel, 2016). Understanding the motivations that led seniors to interact online and become aware of how different strategies and types of communications impact consumers' brand engagement and ultimately loyalty is nowadays essential. However, a challenge still remains in which several companies still feel the need to understand how to engage customers in social media effectively (Nunan and Di Domenico, 2019).

Addressing the challenges created by rapidly aging populations is a topic of intense interest for marketers, policymakers and researchers (Çarçani and Mörtberg, 2018). However, relatively little research has been undertaken so far into the ways that older consumers are adopting or rejecting new digital technologies.

Thus, the research question of this investigation is how older people integrate social media into their daily lives? identifying the major motivations to adopt these new digital technologies, the main online activities and ultimately how seniors interact with brands are the main research purposes of this study. As generational cohorts differ across national contexts, due to the various contextually based social, political and economic events they experienced, a comparative study between Portugal and Spain was carried out.

2. Literature review

Contemporary society experiences a critical demographic aging process and has inspired studies in different areas of knowledge. The data referring to the Iberian Peninsula show that this is a structural phenomenon and common to both countries, being evident both in the decrease in the young population, as well as in an increase in the older population. In Portugal, this trend took place late, however accelerated, having moved, in 1980, from the country with the least aged population to that which currently has one of the highest aging rates in the context of the European space and, as such, in the world (Rosa, 2012). According to data and projections from INE (2018), the deterioration tends to perpetuate itself over the next 40 years, going from 2.1 to 2.8 million elderly people, more than doubling the distribution from 147 to 317 elderly people, for every 100 young people.

As we watch the planetary process of population aging, we observe the internet drawing itself, according to Castells' metaphor (2003), in the fabric of our lives! realizing the inevitability of information and communication technologies and the web, having assumed an ubiquitous position in our world, to the point of being essential in the most diverse spheres of our daily lives and activities.

It is both a networked and screen society (Castells, 2003) which, while contributing predominantly to the transformation of the classic models of information dissemination, transformed agents into potential producers, transmitters and receivers of information and made online social networks in new territories that amplify relationships, sociability and reconfigurations of life projects (Neves & Amaro, 2013); it also poses important challenges, namely those that are associated with a set of skills less present among the groups of so-called digital immigrants (Prensky, 2001), as is the case with older generations. As Prensky (2001) explains, when compared to digital natives, late contact with communicational mediation technologies makes digital immigrants more distant and reveal more difficulties in dealing with new digital technologies, removing the possibility the exercise of active and full citizenship, with all the consequences that such deprivation can have on the level of quality and well-being. At the limit, we can see phenomena of social exclusion as a direct consequence of social exclusion (Gil, 2019), since the structure of the Internet develops in an open dialogue with the existing economic and social inequalities, being able to not only reproduce these inequalities but also aggravate them (Witte & Mannon, 2010). For Rosa (2001), the obstacle is not so much the aging of the population, but rather the difficulty that societies have in adjusting to this demographic change, verifying that, in a more or less explicit way, there is an effective discrimination against older people which is mainly due to the outdated knowledge associated with new technologies. Clearly, there remains a markedly negative societal discourse about the elderly that highlights situations of scientific and technological literacy, reproducing the widespread acceptance that this segment does not want or is unable to use the internet (Mauriti, 2004).

According to data from the network society in Portugal (2015), the distribution of internet use by age groups shows that in the case of individuals aged 65 and over, the usage rate is 12%. However, in spite of being small, it appears that among the older generations the rate of internet use has seen a positive evolutionary movement since in 2003 it did not exceed 5% (Cardoso, Firmino, Coelho, Pereira, 2015). Among the more than 80% non-users, the lack of skills to do so (60%), as the main reason for the removal, is followed by the lack of interest and perception of the utility of the resource (22%). Regarding this last point, Rebelo (2013) points out that the lack of interest may be the result of a weak capacity for domestication (Silvestorne, 2003) and adaptation of technology to daily life, needs, habits, sensitivities and values of Older. Regarding Spain, the data obtained by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística (2017) show that age is inversely proportional to the use of the internet, decreasing considerably from 55 years old and reaching the minimum level between 65-74 years old, with 38% of elderly people using the internet frequently (at least once a week).

With regard specifically to the possible reasons and motivations of seniors for the presence and use of digital networks and communities, the literature proves that the component of sociability, affiliation and support is very evident, corroborating the thesis that social networks “do not they only have a multiplier effect of contacts established with family and friends, regardless of where in the world they are, as it is also among users that there are less occurrences of the feeling of being isolated from the world or depressed ”(Cardoso, Costa, Conceição and Gomes, 2003: 179). For Rebelo (2013), social networks (in this case, Facebook) are instruments that enhance the reinforcement and multiplication of social ties through a constant dialogue with the past, multiplying in reunions with people, friends and family to those who had lost track and recovering memories of personal history, of places, photographs, music, traditions and experiences. In addition, seniors' adherence to social networks should be seen as an encouragement of intergenerational relationships since it makes them more adept at decoding and participating in conversations and in the world of younger people, but also because the help in using social networking and internet is, as a general rule, done by family members or younger friends.

As this segment becomes a phenomenon of longevity and, as a rising tide, it is installed in the network - making it a vehicle for active aging, a set of studies and market indicators bring highlight its enormous consumption potential. In “Forget the Millennials! The seniors are going to dictate the trends”, Kantar World Painel (2018) underscores the enormous potential and the sexy side of these shoppers, who, in addition to their refined purchasing power, are the ones who have the most weight when buying, they give more value to quality, they are more loyal to brands, they are more digital and, finally, they are sensitive to the way brands communicate with them.

A careful analysis of the specialty literature provides some evidence of theoretical and empirical trends, but, above all, exposes the limitations and weaknesses of academic investment in the area. If, on the one hand, the literature is still scarce and fragmented, on the other hand, a certain focus is placed on the drivers and reasons for the use of social media, seeking to understand their effects and benefits in dimensions such as quality of life (Yang, et al., 2016), depression (Cotten, Anderson & McCullough, 2013); or the promotion of well-being (Nimrod, 2014).

Specifically in the area of communication and marketing, the research by Hutto et al. (2015: 69) who, in addition to saying that “very little research has examined the use that seniors make of digital platforms”, reinforce the need to understand how, in this context, they relate to brands and how they want brands relate and communicate with them to generate engagement. It should be noted that, at this level, the role of communication as a predictor of engagement is particularly important. Engagement is a concept with an eminently relational basis, which brings brands and users together. Calder and Malthouse (2009) suggest that engagement links audiences and brands in order to allow and establish a dialogue and a continuous and intermingled interaction in both directions, co-creating value.

3. Method

Following the guidelines of the main studies in this research area, an exploratory, qualitative investigation was chosen, using the Focus Group (FG) as a privileged technique of data collection.

3.1 Participants

This study had 18 participants, who were distributed by two mixed Focus Groups. Regarding the totality of participants, 61.1% are female and 38.9% male. The average age is 68.3, with a minimum age of 60 and a maximum age of 79. As for education, the participants are evenly distributed among those who graduated up to the 9th grade (50.8%) and between 10 and 12 years old (49.2%). All participants are retired, being students at senior universities and not exercising any professional activity.

4. Results

Behaviors on social networks: what, how, where and when?

Interviewees have profiles on various social networks, namely: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Skype, WhatsApp and Youtube. The frequency of people in each of these networks is different. Facebook is the social network that most people have an active profile, of the 18 interviewees, 16 have an active profile. In this case, the interviewees who do not have an active profile are Spanish. The data shows that there is no discrepancy between the data collected in the two countries, but a similarity with regard to the presence of these people on social

networks. Regarding devices, the cell phone is the device most used by respondents in both countries. Of the 18 people, 17 people use their cell phones to access social networks, and one (Spanish interviewee) does not access this device because she does not have one. The computer is another device that is also used by the majority of interviewees in both countries. Regarding tablets, it is only used by one of the Portuguese interviewees. The interviewees indicated several locations where they access social networks, such as: home, car / bus, supermarket and cafe. Home is the place where Portuguese and Spanish interviewees spend the most time on social networks. However, some mentioned that they can access anywhere, as evidenced in the following excerpts: "Anywhere. Walking around, while drinking coffee." FGE1PH; "As long as there is a network, anywhere." FGP1PH. From these data we can evidence that the access to social networks by the interviewees, both Portuguese and Spanish, occurs in several places, not being restricted to the home space. Regarding the time of day, they access social networks, most people did not specify a time. Of the 8 that pointed out a time, 7 access anytime and 1 in the morning and at night, as evidenced in the following testimonies:

"I don't have a set time to go to Facebook. Usually it is if I have internet, if I receive information that there is a friend request, I will see who sent that request. If it is, therefore, a time to send congratulations to a person, in advance, send congratulations." FGP1PH

"Usually, I go in the morning and then in the evening. If I have time, I go in the morning and see if anything is of interest. Eventually I even answer. If not, I just take a look. Then at night I'm there." FGP1PH

Motivations to be on social networks: adherence and current motivations

The data analysis shows that there are four reasons to adherence motivations for creating a profile on social networks, such as: encouragement of others (5 interviewees); to be where the others are (3 interviewees); to apply knowledge acquired in classes (2 interviewees); and for work reasons (2 interviewees). The reason with greater expressiveness - encouragement of other people - has a higher in the case of Portuguese interviewees (4). The people who played an important role in creating these profiles are family or co-workers, as evidenced in the following testimonies:

"But I'm interested in everything. Then I have a son who also encourages me to do these things, who doesn't let me fall asleep. That's it. It is a mixture of these two things. For that reason, I have Facebook, I'm on Facebook." FGP1PM

"It was a co-worker, working, and at that time it was different than it is now." FGE1PM

The reason given for being where the others are was mentioned by the Portuguese interviewees. This need to be on social media exists because there are other people, who do not want to be excluded from the dynamics existing in them: "(Regarding Facebook) But it was my initiative, assuming everyone's there.

We're here too." FGP1EPH.

The reasons for applying knowledge and for work reasons have little expressiveness however are evidenced by both Portuguese and Spanish interviewees. From the analysis it is possible to identify two types of current motivations. One that focuses on relational issues – communicating, making friends, sending messages – and another in which the motivations are more related with the interests of each – consult, share / publish, watch news and music. The possibility of being able to communicate with the family, who is in other places / countries, or with colleagues through social networks is one of the features most valued by some Portuguese interviewees, since it allows to speak and see what is happening, as explained in the following testimonies:

"What I really like is that a lot of friends of mine, including my daughters and grandchildren, call me via WhatsApp and it is wonderful because we do not pay. (...) "Hey, grandma, where are you? And you look pretty, and you look ugly." And it's cute." FGP1PM

Regarding Spanish interviewees, it is identified that this feature has little expression, but when used, it involves communicating with a person who is very close, as evidenced in the following excerpts: "For example, I have been communicating at home with my husband via WhatsApp for days. Because he's in the office, and I'm in the living room, and I write a message instead of getting up." FGE1PM

Still in this type of motivations, making friends is one of the motivations identified in the interviewees' discourse – "I already have many personal friends that I met on Facebook." FGP1PH. However, this subcategory has little expression, since it was mentioned by only two Portuguese interviewees. In the matter of sending messages, it

was also mentioned by two interviewees, one Portuguese and one Spanish. The motivations related to the interest of each person to be on social networks, in the Portuguese interviewees case, are essentially focused on the possibility of being able to consult the publications of other people: "I really like to see. Writing, I don't write. But I really like to see and to know." FGP1PM; "I'm going too, I consult, but now to publish ? (...) No, no. No." FGP1PH. In the Spanish case, this consultation has very little expression, but it involves consulting information about a certain brand in order to deepen knowledge about it. Although some interviewees assume that they do not publish/share, there is only one Portuguese person who assumes that he shares: "I like to put the photographs that are on the Story, only for 24 hours." FGP1PM. Watching news and music are two categories that are only mentioned by two Spanish interviewees. The data also allow us to show that in these activities the most used social networks are Facebook and WhatsApp.

Digital literacy on social networks

In the analysis performed, it is possible to identify that there are some people who have difficulty using Facebook. Of the 18 people interviewed, 8 consider using this social network to be very difficult. In this case, the number of people per country is equal. These difficulties may include not being able to use the network, because they do not know, or even using a network functionality, as evidenced in the following testimonies: "I said to my grandson," please, eliminate that man because I don't know how to eliminate "FGP1PM; "I have a Facebook account, but I don't use it because I don't know how." FGE1PM. Of the remaining 10 people interviewed, only two Portuguese interviewees assumed that they have no difficulties in using social networks. However, the fact that the remaining 8 people did not make any reference to this issue does not allow us to understand whether they have (or not) difficulties.

Interest in brands through facebook: different speeds and intensities

Of the 18 respondents, only 7 demonstrated that they were interested in brands through Facebook, albeit at different intensities. When we analyze these data, taking into account the country, we identify that: of the 8 Portuguese interviewees, 4 people say they consult brands on Facebook; in the case of Spain, of the 10 people interviewed, only 3 said that they performed this task on Facebook. Regarding the intensity with which these people consult the brands, 2 Portuguese and 2 Spanish assume that they use a lot and 2 Portuguese and 1 Spanish report that they use little. These data show that for the majority of interviewees (61.2%), whether Portuguese or Spanish, are not interested in brands through Facebook.

5. Discussion

Our preliminary findings suggest that the senior participants actively participate in social networks, especially in Facebook, a trend already documented in recent European and American reports (Eurostat, 2019) as well as in the academic literature (Sinclair & Grieve, 2017), which acknowledge the rising adherence to social media by these digital migrants. The steady growth of adoption of social media platforms was visible in a minority of the participants, that started their social media experience on Facebook but have already joined other social networks, namely Instagram, Twitter, Skype, WhatsApp and Youtube, maintaining in some cases, several accounts simultaneously. Our findings suggest a digital investment that goes against some stereotypes of the elderly, that sustain a digital illiteracy of this age group. However, it is important to bear in mind the so-called "digital divide" since senior citizens are still less likely to use a range of internet communication activities (including participating in social media) when compared with other age groups. For instance, a recent Eurostat (2019b) report reveals that only approximately one-fifth of Portuguese and Spanish people aged 65 and over participate in social networks and many older people remain apart from digital life.

Our preliminary results also suggest that Facebook is deeply embedded in most of these seniors' lives, that access it anytime, anywhere, by either desktop or mobile devices. This is consistent with previous research by Mitzner et al. (2010), who found that older adults use a wide variety of technological devices and present an overall positive attitude towards technology. Also, Birsén (2018) found that the elderly use several means to reach the internet, from desktop and laptop computers to mobile devices, and access Facebook from smartphones. Yet, not all senior participants are equally proficient in the use of social media. Several Portuguese and Spanish seniors evaluate the use of Facebook as difficult, and their limited skills may, as Jung et al. (2017) refer, lead to a minor use, avoidance or even exit of this social network. This suggests clear differences in digital

literacy in this age group, that seem to be transversal to these two cultures and emphasizes the notion that the 65+ is not a homogeneous age segment on what pertains to digital literacy.

Initial reasons for joining Facebook seem to be related to social issues, as well as academic and labour reasons. Regarding the motives of actual use, our early findings suggest that both Portuguese and Spanish elderly use Facebook primarily to communicate with their family and friends. These results are consistent with prior work by Hutto et al. (2015), who found that older adults reported using social media to stay in touch with family, friends, acquaintances, and colleagues. As Carstensen et al. (2003) claim, the elderly put more value on existing meaningful and close relationships instead of new ties. Therefore, Facebook's value for the elderly can primarily derive from its role in relationship building and maintenance, and its ability to strengthen meaningful social bonds, thus avoiding experiencing feelings of loneliness and fostering social inclusion.

Yet, while Portuguese seniors seem to be more oriented towards meeting new people on Facebook, for sending messages, posting photos and staying up to date on news concerning their friends, Spanish seniors prefer to use this social network for news and music-related purposes. The implications of these results are worth discussing. Our results suggest that Portuguese seniors use Facebook as a social interaction and participation tool, stressing their social value. On the other hand, Spanish seniors regard this social network as a functional tool, derive other benefits from Facebook, namely actualization and enjoyment, besides sociability motives. Differences in cultural values between the two countries may help make sense of these findings. Culturally, Portugal and Spain seem to avoid uncertainty and are both feminine societies, where power distance is accepted and people are restrained by social norms, attending to the cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede (1980) and the cultural comparison analysis provided by Hofstede Insights (n.d.). Albeit these similarities, Portugal is a collectivist culture, that is, emphasizes belonging and maintaining strong ties with groups, the family and friends, while Spain presents a tendency to individualism. This means that Spanish seniors may attend more to their own personal needs instead of focusing on social issues. This may help explain the differences detected, namely why Spanish seniors also look for news update and music in Facebook.

Searching for brand or product-related information was also identified as another relevant motive for several senior participants using Facebook. This indicates that this social platform can be one of the sources of information on these subjects. Yet, stereotypical views on the elderly persist (Cole et al., 2008), with the critics pointing that the communication directed at this target is also stereotyped (Meiners & Seeberger, 2010). Among these stereotypes is the idea that senior citizens are people with limited digital literacy, that don't possess the necessary skills and knowledge to be present in social media, although there is evidence of a wide heterogeneity in this age group (Jung et al., 2017). Our initial findings suggest that marketers must revisit their understanding of the grey market and their communication strategies with these consumers.

6. Conclusion

Focusing on Facebook, the purpose of this study was to identify the main factors that drive seniors to adopt or reject this social network in two cultural contexts: Portugal and Spain. Despite some differences, Facebook is playing an increasingly important role in how older internet users communicate online. To be able to form and maintain social relationships has been identified as an important factor in using this social medium. Although there is some evidence on using Facebook to seek and get information on brands, seniors have still to be pushed to join and use pages of brands on Facebook as a platform to interact with brands.

Future work should be aimed at a deeper understanding of the motives and benefits of social media in older adults, and of aspects that complicate for them the use of these tools. Moreover, little research was made particularly on older' motivations to interact with brands on social media. Being able to identify what drives seniors to participate and at the end to engage with brands on social media is of great importance for marketers to tailor their strategies and to convey appropriate messages to this specific target group.

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