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Business to Business (B2B): Beyond Business Communication

Too often when speaking about communication management, it is not made the distinction between the action in *Business-to-Consumer* (B2C) or *Business-to-Business* (B2B) companies. Nevertheless, although in both business models the strategic communication management process should be focused on building a strong reputation, in the case of B2B companies investing in detailed stakeholder relationship management is crucial, in order to reach trust and long term interactions. For this reason many authors consider the B2B Communication as an emergent and essential research object within Public Relations/Corporate Communication (Coulon & Eloy, 2018; Yaxley, 2013; Theaker, 2004). As Cornelissen (2004) pointed out, the Business-to-business (B2B) model can be defined "as relating to the sale of a product for any use other than personal consumption. The buyer may be a manufacturer, a reseller, a government body, a non-profit-making institution or any organisation other than an ultimate consumer" (in Tench e Yeomans, 2017:432).

The option for studying B2B companies wasn't innocent. There are thousands of businesses with this profile, having a huge contribution to the economies, namely in Portugal. The activity of these companies is the starting point of a large number of supply chains that underpin well-know big brands with whom we get used to live as final consumers. However, these companies work in the "backstage" of the value creation process.

This paper has as its main purpose to defend, upon a theoretical reflection and departing from an empirical exploratory study, that the communication management within B2B companies should be understood as more than "business communication". A convergent parallel mixed methods approach was developed. In terms of data collection, 124 B2B portuguese companies answered an online survey and 32 interviews were conducted. Content analyses was the method chosen to organise and present the data.

If up to now, for the majority of the B2B companies interviewed the communication function seems to be understood as a tool to support the commercial activities, focused on products/services promotion, things are changing. The results pointed out an urgent need to look in a different way at the Public Relations / Corporate Communications investments. Companies declared that in order to be more competitive in this new "normal" it is needed to anticipate and implement news solutions that go beyond "business communication".

KEYWORDS

B2B Model, B2B Communication, Public Relations, Corporate Communications, Covid-19