

The Influence of COVID-19 on Online Sales in the Wine Sector: A Portuguese Case Study

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COVID-19 reinforced the adoption of an online sales strategy, with e-commerce proven to be an asset in achieving positive results. Based on this premise, a case study was developed in the wine sector, to identify a strategic model for the implementation and management of a virtual store. The simultaneous presence of businesses in the largest number of distribution channels is the differentiating factor in the wine sector, as it currently has an extremely attractive market dynamics for its stakeholders. A qualitative methodological case study was developed analyzing the wine sector e-commerce in the context of a theoretical model. The conclusions highlight an increase of online sales in the wine sector in Portugal, and consequently, the importance of creating a virtual store. The growth of the B2C online sales channel indicates there is 'divergence' from the traditional offline B2B sales channel. There is resistance by the B2B sales model to adopt online B2C, but despite this, the wine sector favoring e-commerce has seen a boost in sales profits. Pandemic restrictions reduced consumer physical contact which is a limitation of this single case study.

Keywords: Covid-19, digital marketing, e-commerce, marketing, wine sector

INTRODUCTION

E-commerce has proven to be an ally in the economic crisis. Therefore, the online transaction tool has increasingly become an area of investment for industries in different sectors of activity, including the wine sector (Ghandour, 2015). Portugal, in particular, has been facing a similar crisis since March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic with leading industries especially Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), to adapt their business model to the format of virtual stores (Araújo et al., 2019). Thus, previously fading consumer behaviour was now magnified, requiring wine industries to adjust to new market demands. Online shopping has become a favourable option for consumers, as they save time by searching on their own electronic devices for the same products from various brands, comparing prices quickly and effectively, and also avoiding the hassle of going to physical stores (Kitukutha et al., 2021). In this context, the number of

Portuguese who make online wine purchases has been progressively increasing (Baptista & Costa, 2021; Mendonça, 2016).

Due to the advent of the pandemic, and the ongoing decrease of store-wide sales, wine industries in Portugal benefited from the mass use of the internet to implement online sites to address the drop of in-store sales volume (Baiôa, 2020). This was an effective alternative to the 'traditional' distribution channel. The data indicate a 90% growth in online sales and a 25% increase in recurrence, indicating that on average, each person in Portugal makes 20 wine purchases online per year (SAPO, 2021). However, currently only approximately 19% of persons in Portugal aged between 16 and 74 years shopped online for food or beverages (INE, 2020). Although the data indicated that in 2020 the percentage of consumers who purchased wine online was 7%, compared to 5% in 2019 (Martins, 2021), even though this is a small percentage of all online sales, it is significant and should be taken into account by businesses integrated into the wine sector. The data indicates that online sales are gaining more and more importance in consumer behaviour. In fact, the wine sector is one of the most dynamic sectors of the world economy, especially in Portugal.

Although wine production represents different volumes annually, with considerable differences from one harvest to another, its proactivity forces marketing managers to develop strategies for continuous growth and market development, mostly focused on distribution channels.

Based on this growing importance of e-commerce, especially for SMEs, the starting point of this study is to identify in the literature the strategic models to apply in the implementation of e-commerce projects, applying to a real case, inserted in the wine sector, to leverage its virtual store. To achieve this objective a broad review of the reference literature was conducted and an analysis of the data was collected in a case study (which in this article is called ALFA). Hence, a definition of several possible strategies for improving e-commerce in the wine sector is presented.

Marketing digital literature is relatively recent (Kingsnorth, 2022; Olson et al., 2021; de Baat Doelman et al., 2021) and although we identified several theoretical strategic models of Digital Marketing Plans, few apply these models to real cases (Nikolaiev & Cherniavska, 2021; Yim, 2020). In this article, we provide marketing managers with insights into how businesses can apply various strategies in digital marketing, with the ultimate goal of being able to assist marketing managers in the efficient and effective implementation of digital marketing strategies in their businesses.

The methodology applied here was qualitative, documenting the analysis of published literature and a case study in which two distinct phases were approached. In the first phase, ALFA's internal environment, history, marketing-mix, target audience, and positioning were explored. In the second phase, the external environment and the competitive market were analysed to understand the dynamics of an SME integrated into the wine sector. After the study was completed, theoretical strategic models were selected to carry out the e-commerce project proposal and applied to ALFA.

This study impacts academia and the business community. In terms of theoretical contributions, this study contributes to the development of the digital marketing literature, especially from the perspective of e-commerce in SMEs integrated into the wine sector. The identification of the marketing strategies in SMEs that can be adopted in similar processes, with natural adjustments to the business area, the real context, and the timing in which it is applied, was a major theoretical contribution. It also contributes to the definitions of marketing strategies in SMEs, in order to avoid aspects that are unfavourable to organizational success and to reduce the degree of risk of its applicability. At a practical level, based on the study of a real case it allows to better understand the transference of a theoretical model to practice in the context of SMEs. Ultimately, it offered positive insights to ALFA, in a strategic line for a virtual store, designed and with SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) outlined.

This article is structured as follows: after the introduction, the methodology is presented, followed by a brief introduction to the topic of e-commerce and online sales in the wine sector in Portugal. A review of the existing strategic models in the literature for e-commerce has been performed in order to identify the most appropriate strategic model to be implemented in the area studied. The fourth part presents the ALFA case study, which includes an analysis of the wine industry, containing its description and an external and internal situational analysis. Following are the theoretical models applied to ALFA, based on objectives,

strategies, key performance indicators (KPI), and targets. Finally, the results discussion and the conclusions of the work developed are presented.

LITERATURE REVIEW

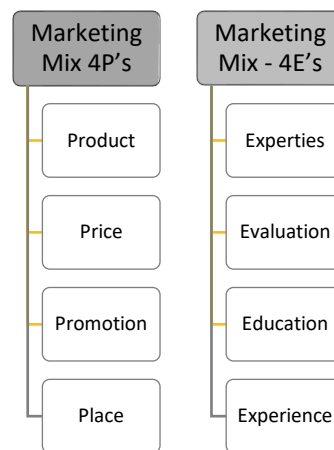
E-Commerce as the Impact of COVID-19 on the Wine Sector

COVID-19 is a pandemic situation with devastating consequences worldwide, which goes far beyond health, namely in terms of economic and social well-being (Arias et al., 2022; Rojas-Berrio et al., 2022; Rojas-Berrio et al., 2022a; Ratten, 2020). Despite social distancing and remote working measures, which allowed companies to continue working, the disruption in consumption and consumer confidence was so great that it ended up disrupting global supply chains (Strange, 2020). The shock caused by COVID-19 had devastating effects and created an unprecedented wave of unemployment and economic crisis (Landesmann, 2020). Despite the adaptability of SMEs, as a result of their more flexible structure vis-à-vis multinationals, economic crises leave them vulnerable, not being an exception to COVID-19, whose effects have been significantly noticeable in the growth of the economy of each country, having taken into account the crucial role of these companies worldwide (Juergensen, Guimón & Narula, 2020). In addition to the immediate financial impacts, this pandemic has been challenging SMEs, who are currently facing serious logistical problems. From a perspective of ensuring survival, concepts such as internationalization, innovation, and networking become relevant, as well as rationality in the planning of decision-making (Juergensen et al., 2020). In Portugal, wine industries had to adjust and expand their business to virtual stores to survive (Baiôa, 2020; Araújo et al., 2019). With the scarcity of sales in the traditional channel, many companies risked e-commerce as a new and different channel compared to the usual one (Arias et al., 2022). E-commerce symbolizes more than a simple financial transaction process carried out between consumers and brands. It involves all electronic transactions carried out between the brand and any third party (Chaffey, 2014), where internet connection and communication are essential for making a sale or negotiation of a product or service (Turban et al., 2018; Chaffey, 2014). The sales channel, referred to by Bertholdo (2020) as the most important in e-commerce, is the virtual store, as it provides information to the consumer about the products' prices, the payment method, the specialization of the product, and the delivery time. Through e-commerce, it is possible to create a direct relationship with the consumer, as well as to reach a comprehensive target audience, with reduced costs and 24/24 availability (Bertholdo, 2020; Castro, 2011). When making purchases in the e-commerce arena, the consumer is left to make decisions on his own, unsupported, and this leaves the consumer vulnerable to branding. This provides an opportunity for the brand to implement its strategy, position itself, monitor, and respond to the needs and desires of consumers (Baptista & Costa, 2021). A interested and willing consumer is more likely to make a purchase. For this reason, businesses will have to appeal and motivate consumers Chaffey & Smith (2013) list 6 (six) Cs, namely: content, customization, community, convenience, choice, and cost reduction. In this context, the 4P's take on a new guise - 4E's as suggested by Festa (2016): Expertise (Knowledge), Evaluation (Evaluation), Education (Education), and Experience (Experience). This appeal to the consumer experience allows for a reasonable evolution to be found according to the knowledge that the consumer can carry, apply, and develop. Knowledge about wine and its unique characteristics is the aggregator, facilitator, and amplifier of this market.

Other studies suggest that wine promotion through knowledge has its starting point in a person other than the consumer (for example, a professional sommelier: Chocarro & Cortiñas, 2013; Dewald, 2008; Manske & Cordua, 2005). However, Festa (2016) considers consumer experiences fundamental to the perception of the value of the wine to be consumed, as well as in the dynamism of the wine sector, both in physical stores and online. The particularities in the case of wine, as well as its complexity, require a progressively deeper knowledge on the part of consumers, which allows for a better understanding (product as expertise) and appreciation of the usefulness of the product (wine), not only in terms of money but in a more generalized appreciation (price as evaluation). This effect may result in a better contextualization of the perception of the product for present/future consumption occasions (communication as education), enriching the purchase situation (place as an experience) (Festa, 2016). A driving force for the development

of this sector is the evolution of the consumer towards the taster with a greater/better knowledge about the wine culture. Starting with the tasting, it contributes to the success of the commercial development of the wine markets, making the role of knowledge theory and experience, essential. The organoleptic analysis provides greater knowledge about wine (product – knowledge) while the scoring assessment allows one to appreciate wine more accurately (price – assessment). The technique of harmonizing food and wine (or wine and food) also makes it possible to fully express the usefulness of wine (communication-education), and the place of purchase and/or consumption (wine shop, wine bar, restaurant, supermarket, and e-commerce, etc.) further qualifying the overall experience (distribution-experience) (Festa, 2016). The dissemination of wine culture and the behaviors intrinsic to this product promote the dissemination of its value proposition and creation of awareness in the target audience. In Figure 1, the correspondence of the four marketing-mix variables between the 4P's and the 4E's can be analyzed as a way of describing the wine purchase path, including several channels (offline and online).

FIGURE 1
ADAPTATION OF THE 4 P'S CONCEPT TO THE WINE SECTOR



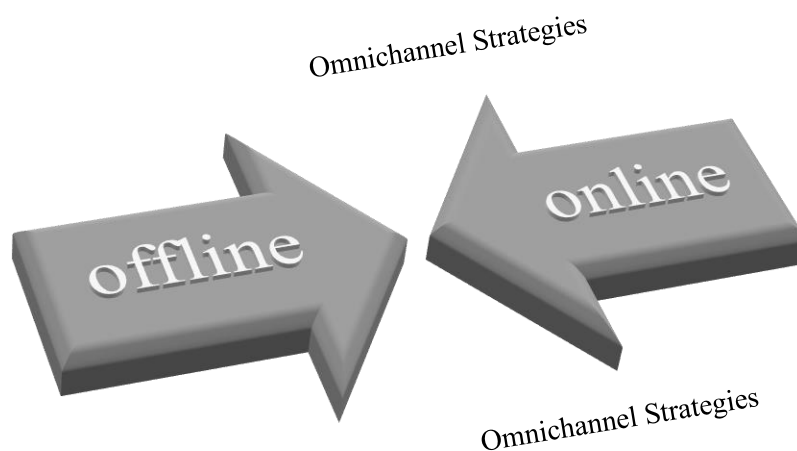
Source: Own elaboration, based on Pellicano, Ciasullo & Festa (2015); Anderson, (2004); Berkowitz, Kerin & Rudelius, (1989); Pine & Gilmore (1998); Kotler & Paczkowski (1986); McCarthy (1960).

As a way of spreading the wine culture and its consumption, industries within the wine sector have been exploring the online channels to market their products, interact with consumers, and gain notoriety for their brands. In this time of greater seclusion imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, many brands were able to take advantage of the online sales opportunity, managing to normalize the practice of buying wine through this channel. In addition, the pandemic has made online wine shopping more common and convenient. The trend of this digital engagement practice is here to stay. With the restrictions still in place, consumers tend to continue to consume wine in the comfort of their homes, which allows them a greater variety of choices, with the most affordable price when selected in any store just a click away. Digital marketing practices and online presence are essential to achieve maximum exposure and for brands to distinguish themselves in a market as competitive as this one. The process of choice in purchasing has changed in recent times (Mishra, Singh & Koles, 2021). With the influence of brand storytelling, the site's ability to interact with social media influences potential consumers at the time of choice. The online channel is essential to complement the recommendation of a friend or a sommelier, with the business website being the privileged place to access quality and credible information about the brand, its history, and the quality of its wine (Oliveira, 2019).

The online explosion confronted wine brands with a kind of strategic duality. Will the presence of offline channels be incompatible with online channels? Offline sales channels will continue to be a valuable option for wine brands, which will increasingly have to live with online sales channels. The insertion of online will never take the place of offline, on the contrary, these two channels complement each other.

Brands must find a balance between both channels so that together they can achieve positive and sustainable results for the brand (Figure 2). From this perspective, it makes sense for wine brands to converge on omnichannel strategies (Silva, Duarte & Sundetova, 2019). The consumer may discover the wine brand online, search for more information about the brand, search with their smartphone, and make a visit to a physical store specializing in wines. Then, purchase the wine online or at the store (one can see the operationalization of the 4E's in an online-offline convergence). This integration aims to provide the consumer with a consistent experience between channels (which should lead to consumer loyalty to the selected wine/brand). Integrated systems with information must be shared so the consumer does not identify differences between the various channels where the brand is present.

FIGURE 2
ONLINE VS OFFLINE CONVERGE IN OMNICHANNEL STRATEGIES



Source: Own elaboration.

In e-commerce, customer service is a key factor for the success of the virtual store. For the consumer to have a positive experience, it is crucial to provide all information about the products and the company, making payment easier (Ghandour, 2015). Through e-commerce, consumers can access stock, launch new products or similar versions of existing products, detailed information about products, prices of different brands, and delivery times (Castro, 2011). E-commerce does not only cover B2C, but also B2B, which has been referred to as an expanding channel, which helps the execution of management processes and tasks through technology (Magalhães, 2021). B2B e-commerce also presents advantages inherent to the comfort of making the purchase, the organization and management of orders, the optimization of purchase and sales processes, 24/24 hours, the ease of price estimation, the reduction of value in the sales process, and the possible decrease in value for the final consumer (Netgocio, 2019). However, in other instances, (Gusmão 2019) the advantages of B2B e-commerce are related to the price strategy, and customer retention through the creation of links and recurring sales. In B2B e-commerce, the virtual store becomes a very attractive tool since it benefits from a reduced investment cost, however, this channel requires some attention in the personalization of the sale, since businesses have specific characteristics and conditions compared to B2C (Eugênio, 2019a). In the case of online wine stores, it is important to describe all their products in detail, with information on the vintage year, flavor classification, soil characteristics, storage conditions, and food accompaniment for each type of wine (Bressolles & Durrieu, 2010). Despite all the advantages, there are still improvements needed to be implemented in Portugal in the area of e-commerce, such as online payment method, delivery method, and price charged for the delivery (Baptista & Costa, 2021). Marketing plays a key role in the growth of the virtual store. In order for investments to be successful, it is essential to increase the visibility and interaction of the virtual store by working on SEO, SEM, and social networks and media,

and generating quality leads. However, to increase visits it is important to capture user interests through media promotions both online and offline with enough quality information that will attract users and also contain several payment options (Ghandour, 2015). Design is considered a great advantage when the quality of the virtual store is exposed to consumers (Augusto et al., 2020). Therefore, in order to capture the user's attention, it is beneficial to work on the store's design, in order to allow good reading, usability and experience (Baptista & Costa, 2021).

In a strategic e-commerce model, some steps must be followed in detail, such as adding value in the description of products and using the video tool to convert and sell; creating content regarding needs and problems (that only the brand's products can satisfy and solve); partnerships with influencers; investment in affiliate marketing and sponsored strategy; focus on customer service; and the definition of an integrated content strategy (Baptista & Costa, 2021). However, consumers also place great importance on (1) the ease of finding the information they want; (2) the ease of navigating the website; (3) price; (4) informing on the day and time of delivery; (5) sending e-mail alerts regarding product delivery date; (6) security and privacy of personal data; (7) on-time delivery; (8) and return policy information (Chaffey & Smith, 2013). In order for industries to arouse greater consumer interest, product visuals must be taken into account to create an initial attraction, as well as the Product benefits, the reason why the purchase is completed prior to consumer purchases (Baptista & Costa, 2021). The main factors that make up for repeat e-commerce purchases is the ease of website use (way in which users navigate through a menu driven website with hyperlinks), website structure (ease of performing searches, page layout containing relevant information, and user interaction (Chaffey & Smith, 2013). Bressolles and Durrieu (2010) identify seven dimensions of e-commerce quality when consumers evaluate a wine website, namely: (1) information dimensions; (2) design; (3) ease of usability; (4) supply dimensions; (5) interactivity; (6) security/privacy and (7) reliability. For Bertholdo (2020), the effective operation of the virtual store must contain seven key elements: (1) a platform to customize, without restrictions; (2) detailed description of the products; (3) safe and secure online store; (4) personalized service; (5) sufficient stock for the demand; (6) differentiated payment methods; (7) use of digital marketing and email marketing strategies.

The use of e-commerce is the best option for the pandemic environment we are witnessing (Kitukutha et al., 2021). Some industries are considering leaving their physical presence (physical stores) and focusing solely on the online platforms (Ghandour, 2015). The pandemic accelerated not only B2C e-commerce but also B2B, reflected in the growth of online sales (Silva, 2021). In this sense, DHL Express (2021) predicts a 70% growth in e-commerce by the year 2027 worldwide. The trend of e-commerce, even post-pandemic, will be of constant growth, as many consumers have adopted the convenience of buying products online which will be difficult to abandon completely (Luo, 2021).

Online Sales in the Wine Sector in Portugal

The online sale of alcoholic beverages was accelerated with the pandemic, increasing consumer engagement with these products (Hora & Lanari, 2020). In Portugal, the highest number of online sales was the Douro, the most sought-after region, followed by Alentejo, together with 70% of total sales. In terms of wine categories, red table wines from the Douro and Alentejo region are also the most sought-after, representing 90% of online sales (Carvalho, 2020; Marques, 2020). The category of sparkling wines, port, and rosé wines showed a decrease in sales during the pandemic (Pinto, 2021). In 2018, 2019, and 2020 there was a 40% increase in online wine sales in Portugal (Martins, 2021). Despite the increases described above and 2.3% increase in direct purchases on wine websites, as well as 6% on other platforms, people in Portugal remain somewhat reluctant to purchase wine online (Pinto, 2021). With a focus on increasing sales at the beginning of the pandemic, Garrafeira de Telheiras created a virtual store with 50 wine references and by 2020 it had increased to 150-200 references (Marques, 2020). OnWine's online wine cellar recorded a 540% increase in billing in four weeks (from March 16 to April 10, 2020, compared to the period from January 1 to March 15) (Carvalho, 2020). Also, at OnWine, orders placed totaling €55, were equivalent to approximately nine bottles costing €6.20 each, referring to the idea that each consumer buys at least one bottle of Port Wine, Sparkling Wine and Spirits (Catarino, 2020). Adegga MarketPlace aggregates 100 virtual stores from various producers (Marques, 2020).

Results From Documental Analysis – Strategic Models

The structure of a digital marketing plan depends a lot on the type of industry and organizational objectives, since for some businesses a simpler model is preferred, while for others, a composite models are preferred (Marques, 2018; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). The SOSTAC model was proposed by Chaffey & Smith (2013). The model is based on parameters that include (1) situation analysis (beginning with the analysis of the situation); (2) objectives (followed by the definition of objectives); (3) strategy (definition of the strategy); (4) tactics (definition of tactics); (5) actions (identification of actions); and (6) control (identification of control measures). It states this model is used by thousands of professionals to develop various plans including marketing, corporate, advertising or digital marketing. This model was explored by Baptista & Costa (2021). There are other models carry out a digital marketing plan, more elaborated, which start with an introduction, followed by an internal and external analysis, SMART objectives, segmentation and positioning, identification of tools, identification of indicators for measuring results. (Marques, 2018). A proposal was made by González-Fernández-Villavicencio (2015) of a digital marketing plan aimed especially at social networks, which includes the following: objectives, target audience segmentation, identification of the digital channels to be used, action plan, identification of the control and evaluation system, definition of the policy to be used in social networks, and reporting results regularly.

Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of each theoretical model.

TABLE 1
INTEGRATIVE TABLE OF DIGITAL MARKETING PLAN TEMPLATES

Aspects to consider	Marques (2018) Model	González-Fernández-Villavicencio (2015) Model	Chaffey & Smith (2013) SOSTAC Model
Steps	Introduction, internal and external analysis, SMART objectives, segmentation, positioning, tools, measurement of results, and summary.	Objectives, target audience, digital channels, action plan, control and evaluation, social media policy, and communication of results.	Situation analysis, objectives, strategies, tactics, actions, and control.
Questions	Introduction – What will unfold in the plan? Internal and external analysis – understand the reality of the business by developing a SWOT analysis.	Not specified.	Situation analysis - ‘Where are we?’ Goal - ‘Where do we want to be?’ (5S model to outline goals) Strategy - ‘How are we going to get there?’ Tactic - ‘What tactics are we going to use?’ Actions - ‘What actions are needed to implement?’ Control - ‘What actions are needed to control?’
Strong points and weak points	Strong point: specification to define segmentation and positioning, despite being inherent to internal analysis.	Strong point: social media policy; Weak point: no situational analysis.	Strong point: 5S model; concise questions, well defined by stages, clear and objective; the questions allow retaining the information necessary for the development of the plan.

Source: Own elaboration, based on the cited literature.

In this article, we will make a symbiosis between the SOSTAC Model and the model proposed by Marques (2018), with adaptation to the real case.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, a qualitative approach was applied, since it offers an insight related to the applicability of the data in the literature and leads to a greater understanding of the phenomena. This is a more interpretive and descriptive approach to reality, where a case study analysis was carried out. This conjecture is supported by Yin (1994) who defends the use of case studies for the analysis of complex social phenomena. This method is also relevant when one wants to understand the theory in different contexts, where multiple factors prevail so that reality can present different behaviours in the face of the various variables present. The use of a case study also makes it possible to analyse the discrepancies between theory and practice and to explain these differences. Since a situation and the context in which it occurs is described, we attempt to provide clarifications, however, due to certain conditions, neither situation always presents the expected results (Yin, 1994). In this approach, the researcher is seen as an instrument (Cassell & Symon, 2004), so the validity of the method depends on its capacity, skill, and rigor when using it in the field. The limitations that resulted concern the prejudice and subjectivism that came from the researcher.

The paradigm adopted in the present study was “realism”, which epistemologically values the generation of acceptable knowledge (Wahyuni, 2012). Realists consider that only observable phenomena provide credible data and focus on explaining phenomena within certain contexts. Realism aims to generalize the theoretical propositions and not specific populations (Yin, 2009), that is, it shows how the empirical findings of a given research project align with the theories. Axiologically, it is valuable research in which the researcher is influenced by worldviews, cultural experiences, and education (Saunders et al., 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Based on the objective initially outlined (apply a theoretical model of Digital Marketing in the context of SMEs integrated into in the wine sector), the choice selection of the business to be analysed was based on the following criteria: being a Portuguese SME that was integrated in the wine sector and that already enjoyed a consolidated situation in the sector and sales in the traditional distribution channel and large surfaces. The main method for data collection was the semi-structured interview, using open-ended questions (Lune & Berg, 2017; Lichtman, 2013; Fisher, 2007) which answers the presented case study was built (applying a real case to a theoretical strategic model previously identified in the literature). The interviews were carried out in the first phase with the administrator of the business and the commercial manager (developed individually) and were guided by a set of open-response questions with a view to greater interaction with the interviewees. The interviews lasted between 1h30 and 2h.

The information obtained was later validated by comparing it with secondary data, namely in company documents, triangulating it with the data obtained from the interviewees, and crossing it with the interview with the person in charge of communication at ALFA, in a second phase. The collection of information in internal documents and available publications, as well as in commercial works about the company was the main source of secondary data. These data were used in this study through documents provided by the company and the information on its website. This method of collecting data from multiple sources aided in data triangulation and helped researchers not only to gather more comprehensive relevant information but also to verify its consistency to increase the robustness of the results. For reasons of confidentiality, we will not reveal the name of the business, and in this study, it will be called ALFA.

The results of this method of data collection (first and second phases) will be presented in the next section of this article.

CASE STUDY – COMPANY CHARACTERIZATION

ALFA was founded in 1926 and produces and markets wines from the regions of Bairrada, Douro, Dão, Vinho Verde, and Port Wine. Its Natural Sparkling Wines and Spirits are highly regarded. ALFA tests Portuguese grape varieties in its vineyards and invests in winemaking technology, selecting the grape varieties. Foreign markets recognize the quality of ALFA and its products, exporting 65% of its production

to five continents. Germany, Brazil, USA, UK, Russia, France and China are among the countries with the highest percentage of sales. Table 2 shows the relevant factors in the characterization of ALFA.

TABLE 2
ALFA CHARACTERIZATION

Internal situational analysis	ALFA’s strengths are organization, financial capacity, technological capacity, product development and portfolio, the sales and support team, distribution/logistics channels, the price/quality ratio of the product, and the relationship with customers, consumers, and suppliers. Weaknesses are faced with the internal communication system, the ‘domain’ of the consumer market and consumer profile, and the strategic use of communication tools.
Marketing-mix	<p><u>Product:</u> The brand produces unique and special wines, such as the ‘Triumvirato’ and the Port wines with Age Designation. In addition to these wines, it produces still wines from Bairrada, Dão, and Douro, brandies, natural sparkling wines, Doc with quality designation, ALFA DOC, Vinho Verde, and wines without denomination of origin.</p> <p><u>Price:</u> Market penetration pricing strategy, in general terms. The price for the consumer differs from product to product, with more affordable prices for the middle class and higher prices for consumers with greater purchasing power. There are discounts and promotions in festive seasons such as Christmas, Valentine’s Day, and Mother’s Day.</p> <p><u>Communication:</u> Marketing communication; communication blended marketing: outbound marketing (television advertising, newspapers, magazines, and physical stores) + inbound marketing (sales force, promotions, exhibitions, press relations, social networks, website). The typology of the message to the target audience is basically through social networks, website or email marketing, and mouth-to-mouth strategies.</p> <p><u>Distribution:</u> favors the traditional channel and its physical store (strategy applied to wide and narrow long chain and narrow short chain). The products are sold to supermarkets, restaurants, wine cellars, hotels, supermarkets, hypermarkets, grocery stores, cafes, bars/clubs, wholesalers, agents, cash, trading, and companies; and also, for virtual stores such as Portugal vineyards and Quinta de Jugais.</p>
Target	Mostly men aged between 35 and 64 years, mainly residing in the region of Coimbra and Aveiro, with an average Portuguese income. They value a good price/quality ratio, a safe purchase, and a personalized service when buying a wine (by advice).
Positioning	ALFA positions itself as a business of excellent wine products from the Bairrada, Dão, and Douro regions. The brand values products with a good price/quality ratio and with the desired safety for the consumer. Values such as integrity and transparency are key factors in creating a lasting and faithful relationship with its consumers and suppliers.
External situational analysis	The opportunities capable of influencing the company are the attractiveness of the market, communication, and distribution/logistics channels. When it comes to threats, they are mainly competitive intensity, tight legislation, and barriers to entry and exit from the business, as well as substitute products.

Competition	ALFA’s three biggest competitors are Sogrape, Aliança, and Global Wines. However, Sogrape stands out as its main competitor, as it has a wide range of high-quality products, has brands with a high degree of notoriety, a highly sophisticated sales force, an excellent quality/price ratio, an enormous capacity for constant innovation, a strategically defined budget for the marketing area, a large and diversified portfolio of clients and consumers. Its size, economy of scale, Mateus wine, port wine, and worldwide presence also stand out as strengths. As a weak point, it exposes difficulties in selling more exclusive products.
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Source: Own elaboration, based on the case study.

Strategic Plan

The business model proposed for the ALFA virtual store is described below, adopting a brief and objective structure, as follows:

- a) Name: ALFAshop.
- b) Positioning: ALFA with online access to consumers around the world.
- c) Target audience: Individuals of both genders aged between 25 and 44 years old, residing mainly in the region of Porto, Aveiro, and Coimbra and countries of ‘saudade’ (with rooted Portuguese communities), with Portuguese medium-high incomes.
- d) Marketing-mix strategies for the online channel:
 - i. Product: All ALFA range
 - ii. Price: Penetration price
 - iii. Distribution: Narrow short-chain
 - iv. Communication: SEO, SEM social media and networks

The strategic objectives defined were based on the SOSTAC model (Chaffey & Smith, 2013), with the identification of the 5S (Sell, Speak, Serve, Save, Sizzle).

Table 3 summarizes these objectives.

TABLE 3
SMART GOALS BASED ON THE SOSTAC MODEL

<i>Sell</i>	<i>Speak</i>	<i>Serve</i>	<i>Save</i>	<i>Sizzle</i>
15% increase in sales volume (online channel only), through email marketing campaigns in the 1st half of 2022.	10% increase in the open rate of emails, through CRM in the 1st half of 2022.	Generate 100 leads through a landing page in the 1st half of 2022.	4% reduction in acquisition cost, based on SEO strategies, in the 1st half of 2022.	Achieve 40% engagement on the social networks Facebook and Instagram, through content creation, in the 1st half of 2022.

Source: Own elaboration, based on the case study.

The strategic plan for the ALFA virtual store is schematically represented in Table 4, where the objectives, metrics, SWOT analysis, the value proposition for the virtual store are shown in simple and direct language. The budget to be invested to meet the objectives, the duration of implementation, and the three biggest competitors. This format was the most suitable for the reality of ALFA, resulting from the interpretation of the SOSTAC Model and the model proposed by Marques (2018) (presented above), evidencing the sales funnel.

TABLE 4
STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE ALFA VIRTUAL STORE

Strategic Plan				
SMART Goals	Current situation (SWOT)	Value proposition	Channels (traffic gathering)	Target
<p>Increase the sales volume</p> <p>Increase in retention rate</p> <p>Generation of leads</p> <p>Reduction of acquisition cost</p> <p>Increase in engagement</p>	<p><u>Strengths</u>: Significant number of followers on Instagram and, mainly, on Facebook; Large network of contacts; Know-how and experience in the sector.</p> <p><u>Weaknesses</u>: Weak digital presence; Contents poorly elaborated and original.</p> <p><u>Opportunities</u>: Exponential growth of digital; Great opening on the part of consumers to online purchases of wine products.</p> <p><u>Threats</u>: Competition with a stronger digital presence.</p>	<p>The wines that provide you with unforgettable moments. Whatever the occasion, ALFA wines accompany you with the quality and safety you are looking for.</p>	<p><u>Facebook</u> and <u>Instagram</u>: video production; content with the participation of employees/team; opinion questionnaires; Flat Lay publications; show 'behind the scenes' of the company; publications on commemorative days.</p> <p><u>Only on Instagram</u>: <i>Instastories</i> with a more concrete and direct question box and biography.</p> <p><u>SEO</u>: optimizing keyword and header tags, using link building, and improving content quality.</p> <p><u>Landing page</u>: attracting contacts from potential consumers.</p>	<p>Individuals of both genders aged between 25 and 44 years, residing mainly in the region of Porto, Aveiro, and Coimbra and countries of 'saudade' (with rooted Portuguese communities), with medium-high Portuguese income.</p>
Metrics			Tools	Tactics
<p>Conversion rate</p> <p>Open rate</p> <p>Number of leads</p> <p>Purchase Cost</p> <p>engagement rate</p>			<p><i>Website</i></p> <p>Virtual Store</p> <p><i>Social Media</i></p> <p><i>E-mail</i> marketing</p> <p>CRM</p>	<p>Content marketing</p> <p>Marketing automation</p> <p><i>Social Media</i> Marketing</p> <p>SEO</p> <p>SEM</p>

Budget	Timing	Competition	Engagement
<p>E-mail marketing: Platform Mailchimp 15 € p/month Landing Pages: Platform Unbounce to create and optimize 100,79€ p/month CRM: software CRM +/- 25€ by user/month</p>	<p>1 year (2022)</p>	<p>Sogrape Aliança Global Wines</p>	<p><u>CRM</u> (Customer Relationship Management) – email marketing with an emphasis on discounts (including the wine outlet section, highlighting e.g. the last bottles in stock), confirming a purchase that the user made in the virtual store, communicating the launch of a new products, and selling a product.</p> <p>Sell</p> <p><u>E-mail marketing</u>: Cart abandonment email and abandoned cart email series; Email marketing campaigns for Up-Sell and Cross-Sell; Email marketing campaigns for promotional offers; E-mail for customer loyalty and recovery.</p>

Source: Own elaboration, based on the case study.

DISCUSSION

As we saw previously, statistics of Portuguese wine industry showed a 30% increase in the volume of online orders by consumers (SAPO, 2021). The 25% increase in the purchase recurrence rate by consumers aged between 16 and 45 years is also evident (Eurostat - Statistics Explained, 2021; SAPO, 2021). In the wine market, the percentage of consumers buying online increased by 7% in 2020, a significant increase for this market (Martins, 2021). The pandemic accelerated the sale of alcoholic beverages in e-commerce and increased consumer engagement (Hora & Lanari, 2020). It is therefore considered that selling Portuguese wine online represents a great opportunity for growth. Furthermore, if this channel is aimed at Portuguese people living abroad, growth is more pronounced, since Portuguese wine abroad is scarce, and demand is abundant (Casimiro, 2019).

At a time when consumers are directed to the online channel, the 4P's are also undergoing a renovation and adaptation to 4E's. The specifics and complexity of this channel require knowledge on the part of individuals looking for wine products. The evaluation can be done through pricing, thus wine businesses contribute to the education of their consumers through communication. The consumer experience is carried out in the most diverse places of contact (Festa, 2016), thus, it is currently impossible to break apart the online channel. Given the success of the online sales channel and the change in consumer behaviour, businesses will have no option but to invest in online platform advertising and implement virtual stores.

Statistics suggest the online distribution channel is a sustainable strategic option for wine businesses of which marketing managers cannot escape. Based on this fact, this research intended to identify in the published literature several theoretical strategic models of Digital Marketing Plans and apply these models to a real case providing marketing managers with various strategies by using digital marketing. With these digital marketing tactics, marketing managers can determine the most appropriate mix of digital marketing tactics for their online business.

The uncertainties of the area in which ALFA operates, specifically the divergences between the B2C online sales channel and the traditional offline B2B channel, stem from the fact they already have a solid strategy in the traditional offline B2B and hesitate to invest in the new channel. However, even if the resistant businesses try to deviate from the present digital trend the changes to a marketing online environment will motivate them to adapt. The popularity of online will never replace offline, on the contrary, these two channels complement each other. ALFA will have to define converging strategies between both so that integrated companies achieve positive results in the company's total sales.

Based on the theoretical strategic models of the Digital Marketing Plan that we identified in the literature, we selected the SOSTAC Model and the model proposed by Marques (2018), to apply to the real case. We proposed the strategic plan for the ALFA virtual store in a schematic way, integrating the objectives, metrics, SWOT analysis, the value proposition, the budget to be invested to meet the objectives, the duration of implementation, and the competitors. We opted for this format, in a simple and direct language, for several reasons, namely (1) the most suitable for the reality of ALFA, resulting from the interpretation of the SOSTAC Model and the model proposed by Marques (2018); (2) the way to evidence the sales funnel; (3) an easy format for marketing managers interpretation, who are in the field work and value rationale and schematic thinking for the implementation of tactics strategies, focused on real objectives for the success of their business.

With the real case presented in this article, we can more easily justify the adoption of a theoretical model to a real case, which is easily perceived by marketing managers who may easily adopt it to their specific business. This is the ultimate goal of this article, helping marketing managers succeed in designing and implementing their digital marketing strategies.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to investigate and demonstrate the most effective and relevant models in the implementation of a strategic plan for a virtual store, applied to a real case, the ALFA business model. To achieve this goal, we started our research with a brief introduction to the topic of e-commerce and online

sales in the wine sector in Portugal, followed by the identification of theoretical strategic models for e-commerce projects and the presentation and discussion of the real case.

This research complements the literature on e-commerce. In practical terms, we conclude there is an evidenced growth in online sales in the world, and especially in Portugal, as a result of the impact of the pandemic, denoting that purchasing online is the present and future. Using a brief literature review, the topic of e-commerce and online sales in the wine sector was addressed. It was found, from values recorded the various industries, that e-commerce is a growing tool and beneficial for business. After this research, it was concluded the creation and management of the virtual store is a key sales channel for ALFA to adopt to the changes in consumer behaviour, reinforced by the pandemic. However, the definition of good management is always related to good strategic planning. In this sense, a strategic model was planned for the objective nature of ALFA. This study offers positive insights into the operationalization of strategic models in digital marketing projects, namely the virtual store. The present study has some limitations. The first is due to the qualitative nature of the study, with only one case being studied, the ALFA. The second stems from the fact it is impossible for wine products stay in the business physical facilities for long periods due to the pandemic, which led to an increased DCF. The most important limitation of this strategic model pertained to the fact that testing in the field was impossible. If testing was possible, it would be analysed in a longitudinal study.

In the future, it would be interesting to expand this research and design a longitudinal study, enabling the analysis of results from the implementation of the digital marketing plan, in order to verify if the defined objectives were achieved. In addition, we could apply the digital marketing plan proposed to other businesses, into the core business of ALFA and diversify to other companies in other core business.

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