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Digital brand in the field of travel agencies

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Abstract. *The Internet has brought along many important changes in recent years, both in terms of the manufacturing and marketing of products or services, and in terms of human relations that have undergone significant changes, due to the ease with which the travel agencies today access unlimited audiences. With the evolution of mankind and the introduction of technology in most fields of activity, the lifestyle of people has changed, so they choose more and more often to buy vacations online.*
The aim of this paper is to analyse how the brand, from a customer-based perspective, is a key resource for the company when the consumer automatically associates a product with the image of a particular brand. In this sense, we conducted quantitative marketing research that has as main objectives: measuring the importance of the digital brand for deciding to purchase tourism products: measuring the frequency of using the Interne in purchasing a tourism service; the impact of brand elements on Romanian consumers.
This paper is very topical, in the context in which many activities in different fields have focused on the online environment. The research results can raise the interest of both individuals and travel agencies that want the development of their brand in the digital environment.

Keywords: Brand, Digital Brand, Travel Agencies, Marketing Research, Tourism Product

Introduction

Modern marketing means more than good products, good prices, and customer access to goods. Companies need to connect with their customers and this crucial communication process should not be left to chance. The success of promotional efforts can influence tourist demand. Given the high level of competition in all areas of the market, the company must communicate properly and effectively with both current and potential customers, but it must also maintain an inverse relationship with the market, in which a key factor in the success of an organization it is ability to receive, interpret, and process consumer feedback correctly. (Page & Connell, 2020).

Some brands create products that are constantly competing with those already established, but customers often choose the best-known brand, so these companies with a well-defined band have become leaders in their competitive fields, studying the motivations and desires of consumers and building attractive images. around their brands.

Intelligent brand positioning at a symbolic level in the minds of consumers is in fact capable of generating attributes of differentiation and superior positioning compared to the competition, offering economic advantages. Moreover, in some cases, a well-positioned brand can become a bearer of additional commercial profit and a vector of symbolic and social value.

As we can see in the current context, it is no longer enough to reveal the existence of a product or the information about it; but in order to make a product known it is necessary to reveal a specific identity.

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When it comes to a simple one-way trip for one or two people, the internet can be an advantageous solution for those who want to save money. This is mainly due to the fact that the online offer is undoubtedly wider and includes boarding houses, hotels, tour operators, and low-cost companies with which the physical agency does not cooperate and therefore does not offer. In general, the Internet offers more flexibility, as booking at travel agencies has much stricter and shorter cancellation terms than bookings made directly at hotels or companies.

Romanian travel agencies need to reaffirm that providing very easily accessible information in a short time, up-to-date and relevant information, will increase the trust of customers in the agency and increase the number of scientists. Therefore, Romanian companies need to offer greater mobility to their customers, by providing very detailed and easily accessible information.

The aim of this paper is to analyze how the brand, from a customer-based perspective, is a key resource for the company when the consumer automatically associates a product with the image of a particular brand.

Thus, we conducted quantitative marketing research, based on an online survey, among the Romanian population, over 18 years of age. We aimed to measure the importance of the digital brand in making the decision to purchase tourist products: the frequency of using the Internet in purchasing a tourist service, as well as the impact of brand elements on Romanian consumers.

In conclusion, through this work, we tried to provide an overview of the digital brand in the field of travel agencies.

Literature review

Tourism can be considered an important economic phenomenon in economic and social development worldwide. In the last period, the tourism sector has been strongly influenced by several factors, among which: the development of the online environment and the transition to sustainable practices. Tourists have become aware of the impact of tourism on local communities and the environment, on the measures that can be implemented by travel agencies, and on the contribution that they can make. (Madar and Neacsu, 2020).

The accelerated development of the online environment, especially in the last 3 years, has led to a radical change in many fields, hence in the world of tourism. This area has been severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, because of the travel restrictions. Therefore, in these years there has been a progressive increase in the number of operators who choose the online environment to promote their brand.

The brand is a combination of elements such as name, slogan, logo, communication, history, and corporate reputation, which function as a distinctive and exclusive sign of a company. The brand (or brand name) includes the image and reputation of the company that differentiates it from competitors, determining the relationship with customers and other stakeholders.

Numerous definitions of the brand concept are recognized in the literature. One of the first definitions in this regard was developed by a group of experts from the Institute of Marketing Sciences Experts, who have defined, in 1988, brand capital as the combination of associations and behavior that has led branded products to increase sales and margins. of profit compared to those without a brand (Ibáñez & Barbu, 2017; Leuthesser, 1998). Keller and Kotler also defined the brand as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumers' response to brand marketing" (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

With the help of the digital brand, but not only, the companies have also had to make an extraordinary transition from physical to online. So far, they have traditionally adopted a broadcast perspective, that is, in which the brand communicates and the customers listen. However, with the

exposure of the digital marketplace, where you can be recognized very quickly, companies enter into an equal relationship with people, informing and communicating in real-time with their customers.

In order to be able to stand out in the overcrowded environment of logos in which they have to "live", brands receive a certain personality, which is shaped and strengthened over time. The concept of brand personality was developed based on studies of consumer behavior, resulting in individuals tending to give brands traits close to human personality, so they are more likely to choose the brand that comes closest to the image that represents them. themselves or which they would like to share with other users (Cirnu, 2004).

Erdem and Swait (1998) adopted a more rational-economic approach to brand definition, considering that when consumers are unsure of product attributes, firms can use brands to communicate product positions and signal that their product claims are credible. In this approach, the content, clarity and credibility of a brand are seen as strengths. These three factors they can increase the perceived quality of the brand and reduce the cost of information and perceived risk to consumers. Increasing perceived quality and reducing risk costs and perceived information will increase the expected utility of consumers, which is really the added value of the brand that it gives to a product.

Brands cannot be limited to naming a particular product line but must offer values, a lifestyle, an aesthetic aspect, and even an ethic and a vision of the world. The more the brand will be able to create a possible and coherent world around it, in which the consumer meets his needs, the higher the positive return on the brand.

Over the years, the brand's personality has clearly shown that a brand can be understood as "meaning" and not just as a product, to differentiate itself from competitors. If the brand "behaves" more like a person, the more chances it will have to find a consumer.

The brand fulfills an essential informative function towards the consumer, it represents the entire product in the minds of those who buy it. It can be considered as the fundamental engine of the company's value. (Kim, Sharma, & Setzekorn, 2002).

Online travel services, especially OTA (Online Travel Agency) have attracted the attention of researchers and so various relevant studies have been conducted around the globe showing that the online mode has become a fairly popular way to book hotel rooms (Guillet, Mattila & Gao, 2020).

Lee et al. found in 2017, that the functionality of websites affects customer satisfaction, which also influences customer loyalty and brand attachment. (Lee, Han & Hwang, 2017)

Dwikesumasari and Ervianty found a positive relationship between the determinants of the application image, customer inertia, application knowledge and customer satisfaction studied. (Dwikesumasari & Ervianty, 2017)

Previous tourism literature has discussed the importance of functional value in consumer choice and predicting user intentions. Jamrozy and Lawonk (2017) found that functional value is a significant predictor in influencing the purchase intention towards ecotourism (Jamrozy & Lawonk, 2017). This value has also been shown to be associated with local tourist choices (Kim, Tang & Bosselman, 2018). Chang et al. highlighted the positive association between functional value and perceived value, which also has a positive association with intentions to book a hotel room through OTAs (Chang, Hsu & Lan, 2019).

The success of e-tourism is considered to be largely based on user education. therefore, in order for e-tourism to have an impact, a certain amount of information needs to be implemented in

the public. In Romania, this culture is not developed, and that is why Romanian e-tourism is just a concept of marketing, promotion and does not mean more efficient services.

Methodology

In order to achieve the objectives, set for the study, quantitative marketing research was performed. In 2021, we conducted research among the Romanian population, aged over 18 years, of both genders, the level of education, profession, or income, as regards the importance of the digital brand in purchasing tourist services.

The main objectives of the present research are:

- measuring the importance of the digital brand for making the decision to purchase tourist products;
- measuring the frequency of using the internet in purchasing a tourist service;
- the impact of brand elements on Romanian consumers.

As a research instrument, we used an online questionnaire which was designed in Google Forms and submitted online for completion. The collection period of the questionnaires was 01.04.2021 - 01.05.2021. The questionnaire has 22 questions structured in 2 sections: one section containing questions specific to the research objectives and the second section containing demographic questions.

Table 1. Gender-based sample structure

	Absolute frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Male	462	66	66	66
Female	308	44	52,5	100
Total	700	100	100	-

Source: Authors' own research.

After collecting the data, we found that 700 people responded, of which 66% were men (462 people) and 44% were women (308 people). (See Table 1). They were statistically processed with the help of the SPSS program Statistical Package for Social Sciences.

Results and discussions

Analyzing the obtained data, the following results specific to the proposed objectives were outlined:

Asked if the brand is important for the purchase of a product or service, the respondents (79.3%) gave an affirmative answer. However, 20.7% of respondents do not consider the brand so important when buying.

Regarding the degree of importance that the respondents give to the brand, we have the following results (See Figure 1) where 1 represents - Unimportant, and 5 represents - Very Important.

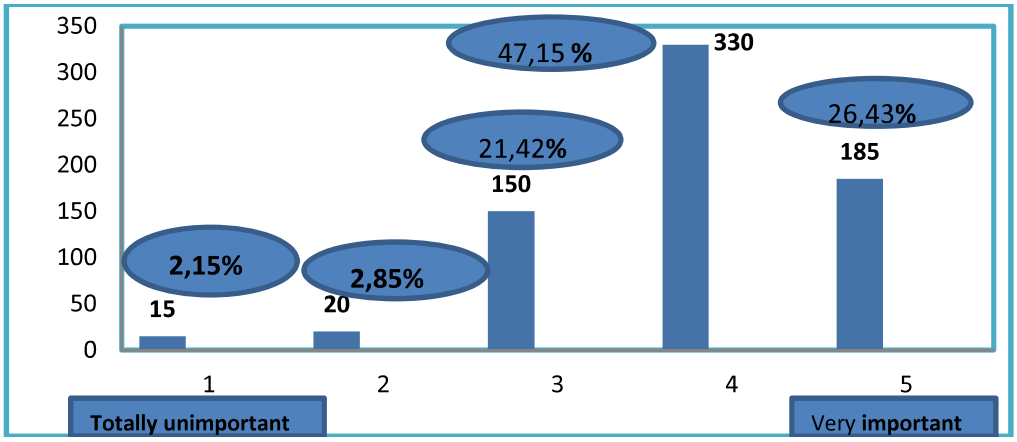


Figure 1. The importance of the brand

Source: Authors' own research

The brand was considered by a large part of the respondents (330 people - 47.15%) as an important factor in the decision-making process, but not significant enough because the value 5, which designates only 185 respondents (26.43%) were very important. We notice that 21.42% of the answers come under the level 3- that is, indifference in choosing the product/service depending on the brand. The brand was considered totally unimportant, only by about 2.15% of those surveyed. Also, the results show that, on average, consumers give importance to the brand, when they choose a certain tourist product (the average score is 3.92, a value close to 4, which is the choice Important).

When asked about the brand element that most attracts their attention, the respondents stated that the promoted values are very important (73.9%), and the Logo accumulated appreciations from 16% of the respondents. Fonts, color, and text accounted for insignificant percentages in all respondents. The promoted values refer especially to maintaining permanent contact with the client, this being the central point of the company's activity.

The very important question about the use of the Internet for the purchase of goods and services showed that a significant percentage of 65% of respondents sometimes buy online, 33% said they always buy if possible online. Only 2% of respondents said they never buy online.

To the question regarding the extent to which the respondents are satisfied with the last tourist service purchased, we see in the following figure what the results were. (See Figure 2).

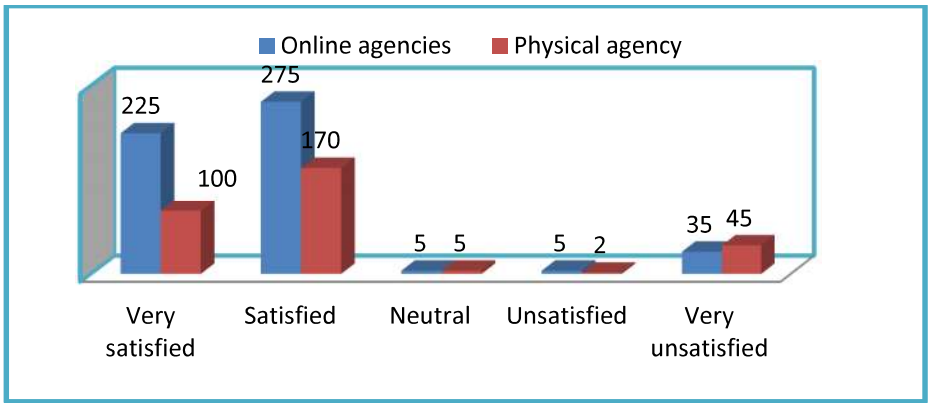


Figure 2. The preference for the way of purchasing a tourist service

Source: Authors' own research.

We refer to the degree of satisfaction with the last tourist service purchased, from online agencies or from physical agencies. We notice that the respondents declare that they are very satisfied with the product purchased from the online environment, compared to the situation of the purchase from the physical environment. The number of very dissatisfied people was higher for the option to purchase from physical agencies, but very close to the one for purchasing from online agencies.

The preference for purchasing a tourist product, online or physically from a travel agency, is seen in the following figure. (See Figure 3). We find that 46% of respondents prefer both options, 36% prefer online agencies and only 18% prefer only physical agencies.

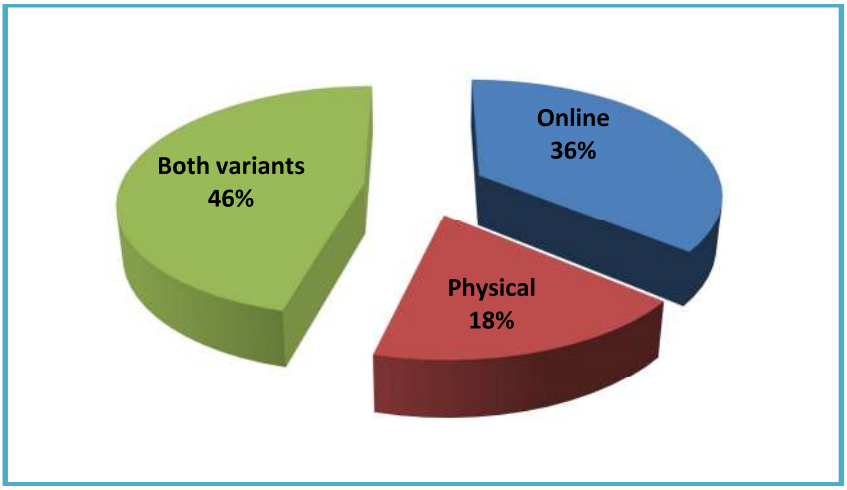


Figure 3. The preference for the way of purchasing a tourist service

Source: Authors' own research.

Regarding the question on why respondents choose to buy tourism services online, we see what the results are in the following figure (See Figure 4).

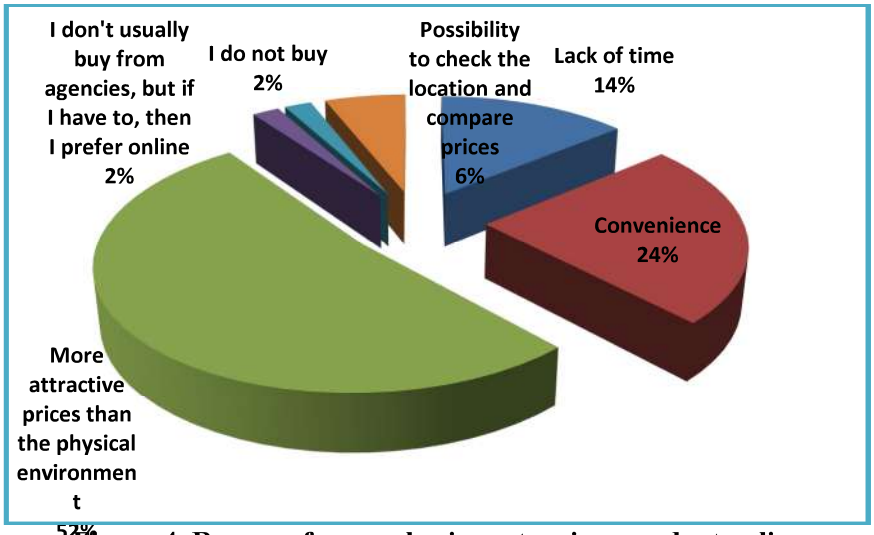


Figure 4. Reasons for purchasing a tourism product online

Source: Authors' own research.

We notice that 52% of the respondents choose the online option of purchasing tourist services because they consider that the prices are more attractive in this case. Also, the reason for convenience is chosen by 24% of respondents, and 14% say they buy online due to lack of time. 6% of respondents offered another reason why they buy online, namely the possibility to check the location and compare prices.

Also, when asked how many tourist products they bought in the last 3 years online, about 35% bought only one product online, 30% bought 2-3 products, 15% said they bought 3-4 products. A rather important percentage, about 20% have purchased more than 5 tourist products using online. This result shows that the online environment is a very attractive option for choosing holidays.

In this digital ecosystem, the company is exposed every day. And exposing yourself means accepting risk. For this, it is necessary to have a full awareness of the relationship that the brand wants to have with users. On the Internet, the company can decide to listen and talk.

Listening means opening a channel of communication with the user to know what he thinks. Speaking, on the other hand, means saying something intentionally to the audience. In the dialogue, the company speaks and the user - if he considers the interlocutor credible - answers; the brand thus becomes a point of reference for a certain subject.

Developing the questions, we wanted to find out which is the online travel agency from where the respondents purchased the tourist products (See Figure 5).

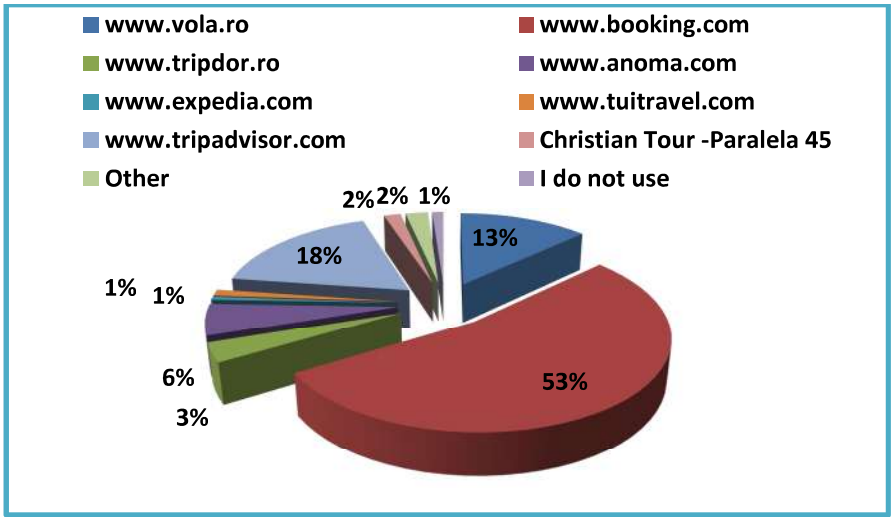


Figure 5. The online travel agency where you bought a tourist product

Source: Authors' own research.

It is noteworthy that a significant percentage of respondents, 53%, purchased the trips on Booking.com. Tripadvisor meets 18% of the preferences of the Romanian respondents, and 13% of the respondents stated that they buy the services from www.Vola.ro.

Regarding the promotion part, we wanted to find out which of the types of advertisements, according to the media, have a greater effect of persuasion on the respondents, when they want to purchase a tourist service. (See Figure 6). We are talking about a generation that is very connected to the internet. Therefore, it is expected that 68.1% consider that online advertising has the greatest persuasive power regarding the decisions to buy tourist packages. In this case, we observe, as expected, that more than half of the respondents (65%) stated that they are guided by the

advertisements on the Internet, while 20% of the respondents stated that they consider the advertisements broadcast on television. 8% of respondents listen to radio commercials. We also found out that 5% of those who answered the questionnaire are convinced by street advertisements, in the form of posters.

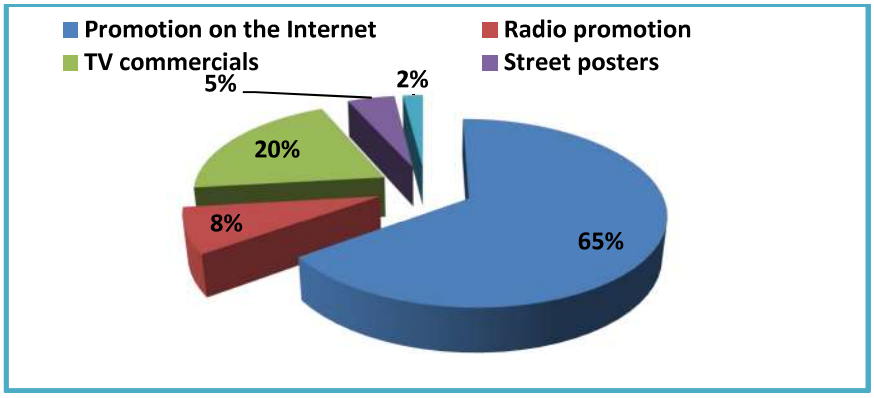


Figure 6. Types of advertisements that have an effect on respondents

Source: Authors' own research.

Other important results were those related to the amount of money that respondents allocate for the purchase of a tourist product. (See Figure 7).

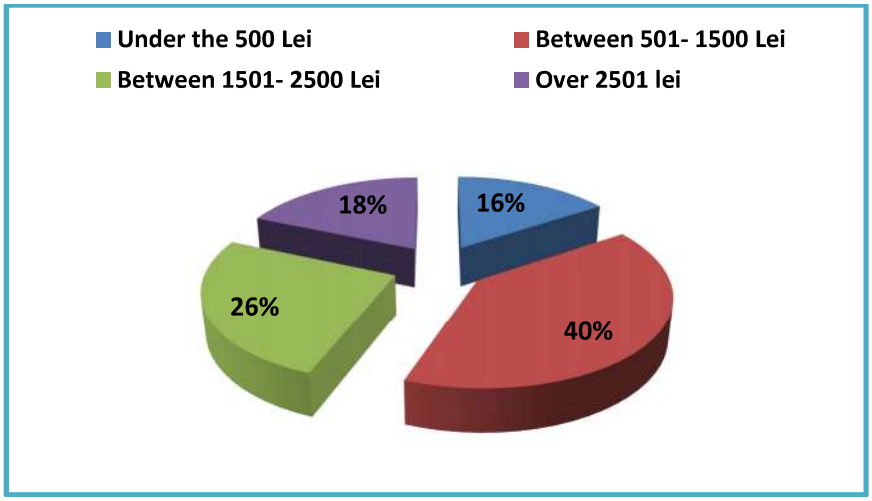


Figure 7. The budget allocated for the online acquisition of the latest tourist service

Source: Authors' own research.

The results show that 40% of the respondents spend between 501-1500 lei, so a significant part of the respondents allocated an average value to their last purchase.

Also, a significant percentage of 26% of the respondents spent on the last acquisition between 1501-2500 lei. Although they are opposed, the option under 500 lei and the option over 2501 lei gathered close percentages, of 16%, respectively 18%.

We specify that 71.4% of the respondents live in urban areas and 28.6% live in rural areas. Also, regarding the age of the respondents, we found that the highest percentage is 70.2% for the age between 20-39 years, the next percentage is in the proportion of 29.1% for those aged 40-59 years and the lowest percentage is 0.7% for those over 60 years of age. Accordingly, most of the

respondents are young people between the ages of 20-39. Also, with higher education, we have 48.6%, and 22.1% of the respondents graduated from a post-secondary school, 12.1% of the people graduated from vocational school, 9.3% have a master's degree, and the lowest percentage is 7,1% is for those who have not graduated. The majority of people who answered the questionnaire are 89.4% employees, 7.1% are students, and 1.4% retirees.

Based on the research, it can be deduced that all people who have purchased an online travel service at least once are very satisfied and have a positive opinion about the prices on the travel sites.

Conclusion

In connection with all that has been highlighted, travel is a passion that unites many people, and the internet has certainly made available a rich range of tools.

The functions of the Internet have been greatly modernized in recent times. We can talk about the Internet both as a tool for mass communication and as a new opening to the global market. This modernization has certainly led to very big changes in the scenario of business opportunities in which travel agencies play a very important role.

As we have seen in the marketing research that we have done the brand is extremely important for a travel agency, many people choose to buy from a company that has a well-known brand. Building a digital brand is a complex process, which is why the building activities must be done by considering all the elements that make it up.

For years, marketing research techniques have analyzed consumers' responses based on information they were able to retrieve from memory; therefore, they are based on explicit and conscious memories.

From the marketing research, we found out that the most important element of a brand is the story assimilated to it, a very large number of respondents claim that the biggest impact on them is the story behind the brand and not its colors or logo.

So, in order to make a brand known in the online environment, we need to consider mainly the story behind it and the values it promotes.

At the same time, in order to make a travel agency known, we need to know where we promote its brand, and where is this place if not on the internet? From the above analysis, I found out that most of the ads that people encounter are in the online environment. The online environment is the place where travel agencies meet people all the time, without putting in too much effort.

Many people have stated that they prefer to buy travel services from an online agency, the main reason is that online travel agencies have much better prices than physical agencies.

It can be said that most respondents choose to work with a travel agency depending on the importance of the digital brand, that the brand is very important in making the purchase decision and that the brand element that has the greatest impact on respondents is represented by the values promoted by this.

To be successful, a brand in the online environment must keep in mind that the most important aspect is the site on which it is displayed.

There are different types of websites that can be made for a business that specializes in the tourism industry, such as a tour operator or a travel agency.

An e-commerce site is the one that comes closest to the needs of a company with an already strong position in the tourism sector, such as a travel agency or a large tour operator, as it offers the possibility to publish the entire catalog online and to book trips and experiences directly online.

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