



UNIVERSIDADE
CATÓLICA
PORTUGUESA

DO BRANDS EXPERIENCE FOMO?
NAVIGATING MOTIVATIONS, STRATEGIES, AND
CHALLENGES IN REAL-TIME MARKETING IN THE
PORTUGUESE MARKET

Dissertation to Universidade Católica Portuguesa to obtain
a Master's Degree in Communication Studies with
specialization in Communication, Marketing and
Advertising

By

Ana Lúcia Carvalho Venes

Universidade Católica Portuguesa

September 2025



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Under the supervision of Professor Patrícia Dias

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*In the race against time, the truest urgency is to
be part of the shared moment.*

— Author's own reflection, based on research findings

Abstract

This dissertation investigates why brands engage in Real-Time Marketing (RTM) during unpredictable events and what benefits and challenges arise in the Portuguese market. While RTM is often portrayed as spontaneous, this study reveals it as a structured practice shaped by motivations, pressures, guardrails, and evolving expectations.

The research adopted a mixed-methods design. Phase I consisted of a systematic content analysis of 140 Instagram posts published by 46 brands in response to 32 unplanned events in 2024, coded for tone, format and engagement metrics. Phase II comprised 13 semi-structured interviews with professionals representing brands active in RTM during 2024, offering insider perspectives on motivations, decision-making, challenges, and future trajectories.

Findings show that RTM is primarily driven by proximity and participation, with brands seeking to join cultural conversations and refresh positioning through humor, irreverence, or reinvention. Timeliness and shareability were crucial triggers, yet abstention was often the strategic choice when cultural fit, distinctiveness, or credibility could not be assured. Although interviewees acknowledged surrounding pressure, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) emerged less as a fear of exclusion and more as a belongingness-driven desire to be part of collective talk. Challenges were concentrated around time pressure, balancing speed with creative quality and brand coherence. This explains the dominance of static formats and humorous tones, which are faster to produce, easier to approve, and reliably rewarded with engagement. Benefits were framed in terms of visibility, salience, humanization, and organizational learning, with commercial impact occurring only when activations were tied to promotions or partnerships. Looking ahead, professionals foresee RTM becoming more selective, video-first, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) supported, with differentiation emerging only when activations are culturally owned, creatively sharp, and strategically managed.

Keywords: Real-Time Marketing (RTM), Instagram, Unpredictable Events, FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), Brand Strategy, Social Media Engagement

Resumo

Esta dissertação investiga a razão pela qual as marcas recorrem ao *Real-Time Marketing* (RTM) durante acontecimentos imprevisíveis e quais os benefícios e desafios que emergem no mercado português. Embora o RTM seja frequentemente retratado como espontâneo, este estudo revela-o como uma prática estruturada, moldada por motivações, pressões, salvaguardas e expectativas em evolução.

A investigação seguiu um desenho de métodos mistos. A Fase I consistiu numa análise de conteúdo sistemática de 140 publicações no *Instagram*, realizadas por 46 marcas em resposta a 32 acontecimentos não planeados em 2024, codificadas segundo o tom, o formato e métricas de engagement. A Fase II envolveu 13 entrevistas semiestruturadas com profissionais de marcas que participaram em RTM em 2024, oferecendo perspetivas internas sobre motivações, processos de decisão, desafios e trajetórias futuras.

Os resultados mostram que o RTM é sobretudo impulsionado pela proximidade e pela participação, com as marcas a procurarem integrar-se nas conversas culturais e a renovar o seu posicionamento através do humor, da irreverência ou da reinvenção. A atualidade e a partilha surgiram como gatilhos cruciais, embora a abstenção fosse muitas vezes a escolha estratégica quando o enquadramento cultural, a distintividade ou a credibilidade não estavam assegurados. Apesar de os entrevistados reconhecerem pressões contextuais, o *Fear of Missing Out* (FOMO) surgiu menos como medo de exclusão e mais como um desejo de pertença, orientado para integrar a conversa coletiva. Os principais desafios relacionaram-se com a pressão temporal, equilibrando rapidez com qualidade criativa e coerência de marca. Isto explica a predominância dos formatos estáticos e dos tons humorísticos, mais rápidos de produzir, fáceis de aprovar e sistematicamente recompensados com engagement. Os benefícios foram enquadrados em termos de visibilidade, saliência, humanização e aprendizagem organizacional, sendo o impacto comercial visível apenas quando as ativações estavam associadas a promoções ou parcerias. Para o futuro, os profissionais antecipam um RTM mais seletivo, centrado no vídeo e apoiado por IA, em que a diferenciação só emerge quando as ativações são culturalmente próprias, criativamente consistentes e estrategicamente enquadradas.

Palavras-chave: *Real-Time Marketing* (RTM), *Instagram*, Acontecimentos Imprevisíveis, *FOMO* (*Fear of Missing Out*), Estratégia de Marca, Engagement nas Redes Sociais

Acknowledgements

To my parents, Paula and Nuno, for their unconditional support, their inspiration, and their constant encouragement at every stage of this journey.

To my brother, João, for his constant presence, his unwavering support, for always believing in me, and for being my biggest inspiration.

To my grandparents and the rest of my family, especially all those who can no longer be here to witness this moment, for the affection and strength they have always given me.

To my boyfriend, Rafael, for the patience, understanding, and strength he has always shown me.

To my friend Catarina, my companion throughout this journey from the very first to the very last day, for every shared moment and the mutual support that sustained us. To Carlota, Catuxa, and Mariana, for their companionship and encouragement over the past two years. To Margarida, Madalena, and all the friends this journey has brought me. And, in a special way, to all my friends who have always stood by my side.

To my amazing supervisor, Professor Patrícia Dias, for her dedication and attentive guidance throughout this process. Her availability, clarity, and constant support were essential for the development of this dissertation, and every moment of help reinforced my certainty that I could not have made a better choice.

Finally, to all the professionals who agreed to participate in this study, without whom this research would not have been possible.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you all.

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Introduction

In contemporary communication, speed has become one of the most decisive variables in shaping how brands interact with their audiences. Real-Time Marketing (RTM) embodies this principle: it is generally defined as the integration of current events, news, or cultural trends into brand content to boost relevance and stimulate engagement (Mazerant et al., 2021; Kerns, 2014), and applies both to predictable events, where campaigns can be planned in advance, and to unpredictable events, where planning isn't possible (Willemsen et al., 2018; Chae et al., 2025). Far from being an irrelevant tactic, RTM has grown into a mainstream expectation of digital culture, where consumers reward timeliness, humor, and cultural resonance with disproportionate visibility and engagement. This dissertation focuses specifically on RTM responses to unpredictable events, examining how Portuguese brands navigate the motivations, challenges, and outcomes of acting under conditions of uncertainty.

The relevance of RTM lies precisely in this tension between risk and opportunity. On the one hand, a single post can generate virality, amplify brand proximity, and rival traditional campaigns at a fraction of the cost. On the other, the same immediacy exposes brands to backlash, accusations of opportunism, and reputational damage if execution misses the mark. For practitioners, the challenge is to calibrate speed with judgment, seizing the narrow now or never window without compromising authenticity or coherence. For researchers, RTM offers a unique lens to study how brands navigate cultural participation, strategic differentiation, and technological acceleration in a digital landscape saturated with content. Studying RTM in Portugal adds further relevance. As a small and culturally cohesive market, Portugal offers fertile ground for real-time participation, where national events, sports, or collective moments often trigger high levels of public attention, and studying the unpredictable dimension of such contexts becomes particularly relevant. At the same time, the market's scale and competitive dynamics make it an ideal context to observe how brands balance agility, creativity, and restraint in their communication strategies.

To address these dynamics, this dissertation is structured in five main chapters: Literature Review; Methodology; Results; Discussion; and Conclusion. Each of them plays a specific role in advancing the central research question, namely why brands engage in Real-Time Marketing during unpredictable events, and what benefits and challenges arise in the Portuguese market.

The literature review was organised into three major sections. The first examined the Contemporary Digital Environment, showing how the evolution of Web 2.0 and the rise of social media platforms reshaped communication dynamics. It highlighted the shift towards immediacy, interactivity, and algorithmic filtering, which not only intensified content flows but also created a climate of constant visibility and surveillance. These dynamics provided the cultural and technological backdrop for practices like real-time marketing, where timeliness and cultural participation are central. The second section addressed Brand Presence and Social Media Marketing, focusing on how digital platforms have altered the ways brands connect with audiences. Literature shows that social media allows brands to humanise their communication, build trust through conversational tones, and strengthen consumer relationships. At the same time, challenges such as content saturation, algorithmic reach limitations, and the demand for differentiation make it harder for brands to stand out. This duality sets the stage for understanding why RTM may act as both a visibility engine and a strategic risk. Finally, the third section explored RTM itself. It defined the strategy, outlined its typologies (planned and unplanned), and discussed its potential for engagement, virality, and cultural relevance. At the same time, it highlighted risks such as superficiality, herd behaviour, and reputational backlash when reactions lack originality or cultural fit. The review also noted how RTM connects to broader marketing debates: agility and speed, but also the need for governance, authenticity, and coherence with brand identity. Importantly, the literature revealed gaps, particularly around how brands experience pressure (including FOMO-like dynamics) and how benefits are assessed beyond engagement metrics. These gaps informed the empirical design of this dissertation.

Regarding methodology, this dissertation uses a qualitative, exploratory design in two sequential phases focused on Portugal and Instagram. Phase I is a qualitative content analysis of 140 RTM posts published in 2024 by 46 brands across 32 unplanned events (e.g., sports, politics, natural events, viral culture). Each case was coded manually for event, tone, format, and engagement (likes, comments and shares, normalized by follower base). Phase II comprises 13 semi-structured interviews with brand-side professionals from diverse sectors who had executed RTM, probing motivations, guardrails, executional constraints, and perceived outcomes. The phases were intentionally sequential: Phase I mapped behaviors and informed targeted prompts for Phase II; interview data were then analyzed via thematic analysis to surface patterns and explanations behind the observed practices. Ethical safeguards included informed consent, anonymity via codes, and secure data handling. The

Portugal/Instagram focus maximizes cultural specificity and platform relevance while acknowledging limits to generalization.

Both research phases generated complementary insights. The results chapter presented the main empirical findings from content analysis and interviews, mapping how Portuguese brands approached RTM in 2024, what tones and formats prevailed, and how practitioners described motivations, pressures, benefits, and constraints. The discussion then built on these findings to answer each research question, systematically connecting the empirical evidence with the existing literature. This integration highlighted not only points of alignment, such as the role of timeliness, humor, and brand-territory filters, but also novel contributions, including the reinterpretation of FOMO as belongingness-seeking and the identification of professional guardrails that enable agility without eroding coherence. To consolidate these insights, the discussion concluded with a conceptual diagram that visualizes the interdependencies between the research objectives, showing how motivations, challenges, formats, benefits, and future expectations are interlinked as dimensions of RTM. In this way, the discussion transformed descriptive results into a critical account of why brands engage in RTM, how they manage its risks, and what its future trajectories may be.

Finally, the conclusion brings together the main insights of the study, showing that Real-Time Marketing has become a mainstream practice in Portugal: one that sustains brand salience by default, but only achieves real distinctiveness when anchored in ownable territory, creative craft, and clear guardrails. The chapter consolidates how motivations, pressures, challenges, and benefits interact, and outlines three possible paths for RTM's future (normalization, re-differentiation, or automation). It also highlights contributions to academia, practitioners, and society, acknowledges the study's limitations, and points to future lines of research. In this way, the conclusion closes the analytical path of the dissertation while opening new directions for inquiry.

Part I - Theoretical Framework

1. The Contemporary Digital Environment

1.1. Introduction to the Contemporary Digital Landscape

1.1.1. The Evolution of the Internet and Internet of Things

Nearly a decade ago, Madakam et al. (2015) stated that “the future is Internet of Things” (IoT) (p. 1), in which objects in the real world would turn into intelligent virtual ones, with the ability to digitally interact and act in an intelligent and automated way. Now that we have arrived at this so-called future (Konenkov et al., 2024), it is crucial to understand how we got here and what foundations were laid to create the digital world we inhabit today. The internet, which began as an experimental system developed by the U.S. Defense Department research agency in 1969 has since transformed into a revolutionary tool for global communication and collaboration (Abbate, 2001; Leiner et al., 2009). Initially, its primary purpose was to connect computers in a network in a way that such connections would resist a nuclear attack, but it quickly evolved into a worldwide medium for broadcasting, disseminating information, and fostering interaction between individuals and machines, transcending geographic limitations (Leiner et al., 2009). This technological evolution has profoundly impacted daily life and organizational operations, paving the way for new paradigms like IoT (Mouha, 2021; Sulthana & Vasantha, 2023). The Internet of Things represents a shift from an internet driven by human-created data to one dominated by interconnected intelligent objects capable of generating, sharing, and reacting to information autonomously (Madakam et al., 2015; Sulthana & Vasantha, 2023). This shift highlights how the internet has not only expanded in scale and functionality but also redefined the essence of connectivity, setting the stage for a digital ecosystem in which there is less-and-less control over the information shared publicly, through the Internet (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Mouha, 2021).

1.1.2. The Rise of Social Media

Social media, a game-changing phenomena, arose within this ecosystem, as a revolutionary step in online interaction and communication, as defined by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (p. 60). Platforms like MySpace (2003) and Facebook (2004) emerged in the early 2000s,

bringing social networking to the general public and contributing to the prominence of the term social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). These platforms were developed using Web 2.0 technologies, such as Wikis, RSS feeds, user-generated content (UGC), and Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), which enabled greater interactivity and participation (Sajithra & Sajithra, 2013; Feng, 2022). According to these authors, these technologies not only allowed users to consume information but also empowered them to create and distribute content in a highly dynamic digital environment.

By 2008, social media adoption had surged, with 75% of internet users engaging in activities such as joining social networks, reading blogs, or contributing with reviews on shopping sites, a dramatic rise from the 56% registered in the previous year (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Teenagers were not the only generation to use social media, since older groups, such as Generation X (who were 35-44 years old at the time), joined these platforms in greater numbers as users, viewers, and critics. This widespread acceptance mirrored a larger societal shift toward participatory online engagement (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

With 100 million monthly active users and 20 billion tweets by September 2011, X, former Twitter, was launched in March 2006 and established itself as "a key communications channel during major political events and natural disasters" (O'Reilly & Milstein, 2011, p. 16). Consequently, brands had already started using the platform for purposes such as marketing, PR, and customer service (O'Reilly & Milstein, 2011). This early adoption reflects the broader rise of social media marketing (SMM), defined by Tuten and Solomon (2018) as the use of social media technologies, channels, and software to create, communicate, deliver, and exchange offerings that provide value to an organization's stakeholders. SMM encompasses various activities including content marketing, influencer collaborations, community management, and viral campaigns, which collectively aim to build brand presence and foster engagement (Tuten & Solomon, 2018).

Despite the rapid growth and increasing impact of social media, the ecosystem has remained highly dynamic, shaped by evolving user behaviors and technological advancements. According to Xx & Caporusso (2018), platforms like Facebook and YouTube secured their dominance through strong network effects, diverse content formats, and continuous innovation. In contrast, the authors also highlight that platforms such as MySpace, Flickr and Xanga struggled to stay relevant and eventually disappeared as user preferences shifted toward mobile-friendly and feature-rich alternatives.

The launch of Instagram in 2010 (Laestadius, 2016) marked a significant turning point in the evolution of social media (Chaudhary, 2021). Initially envisioned as an instant photo-sharing app emphasizing aesthetics and filters, this concept was highly well received by the one million users who had already joined the platform by October 2010. In the first year of existence, Instagram gathered ten million users and Facebook couldn't ignore this success purchasing the app for one billion dollars in April of 2012 (Metz, 2014). Over time, the platform evolved by introducing some new features like Stories in 2016 (Instagram, 2016) and Reels in 2021 (Safitri, 2022), adapting to user preferences and responding to competition from platforms like Snapchat (Isaac, 2016) and TikTok. Despite the emergence of multiple content types over the years, Instagram's two core formats have remained photo and video, which continue to serve as the foundation for both user-generated and brand-produced content (Doney et al., 2020). Stories, in particular, have been identified as a key feature of contemporary social media, offering users the ability to share ephemeral content with a lifespan of 24 hours (McRoberts et al., 2017), which has become a widespread habit among users (Haldborg Jørgensen et al., 2023; Safitri, 2022). Instagram's emphasis on short-form, visually-driven content was further strengthened in 2021 with the launch of Reels, which gave users the ability to edit videos, add audio, and apply effects. This made Instagram a platform for brands and entrepreneurs to draw in target audiences (Safitri, 2022). By 2025, Instagram has reached over 2 billion monthly active users globally, with more than 500 million users engaging with Instagram Stories daily (DataReportal, 2025a), showing the lasting appeal of ephemeral content. In Portugal, Instagram's reach is particularly noteworthy, with over 80% of internet users aged 16-64 actively engaging with the platform, driven by a high interest in visual and ephemeral content such as Stories (DataReportal, 2025b). This points to Instagram's dominance in the Portuguese market, a trend that closely mirrors global behavior, further solidifying its importance in the marketing and branding landscape.

Snapchat, referred previously as competition for Instagram, was launched in 2011 with the goal of allowing users to “send each other photos and short videos, called snaps” (Spalding, 2016, p. 6), which disappear after a few seconds. Its Stories feature's popularity was what inspired Instagram to have one of their own (Isaac, 2016). In 2017, the platform had over 158 million active daily users (Patel et al., 2017) and McRoberts et al. considered Snapchat as millennials' third most used social media platform. By 2025, Snapchat's active daily users have remained steady at over 300 million (DataReportal, 2025a), despite fierce competition

from Instagram and TikTok. In contrast, in Portugal Snapchat has experienced a gradual decline in popularity, with daily active users remaining around 1.5 million, as newer platforms such as TikTok have captured the attention of younger audiences (DataReportal, 2025b).

With the goal of encouraging creativity and spreading joy, TikTok formally debuted in 2018, after being first introduced as Musical.ly and then purchased by ByteDance in 2017 (Stokel-Walker, 2021; TikTok, n.d.). TikTok, well-known for its algorithm-driven For You Page (FYP), caters to Gen Z's need for authenticity and personalization by tailoring content to user preferences (Jain & Arakkal, 2022). Unlike other social media platforms that primarily rely on past user behavior (Postinguel, 2022), TikTok's algorithm also incorporates trending content, making the feed more varied and unpredictable (Junqueira & Freitas, 2023). DataReportal (2025a) reveals that TikTok now boasts over 1.4 billion active users globally, with an astonishing 90% of users spending at least 1 hour per day on the platform, a clear testament to its rapid growth and dominance. In Portugal, TikTok has gained significant traction, with over 3 million active users in 2025, a staggering 40% of the population aged 16-64 now engaged with the platform (DataReportal, 2025b). This growth reflects TikTok's success in appealing to younger generations and underscores its increasing relevance in Portuguese digital marketing strategies.

In contrast to Instagram, TikTok encourages a “messy, chaotic, and genuine” image (Jerasa & Boffone, 2021, p. 220), which appeals to younger audiences by encouraging relatability, creative freedom, and international networking options. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok have exemplified how ephemeral and interactive content is reshaping user engagement and advertising strategies, as consumers increasingly prefer quick, digestible content formats (Haldborg Jørgensen et al., 2023).

Taking a slightly different approach, platforms like BeReal, considered the current main representative of spontaneous online social networks (SOSN) (Bulchand-Gidumal, 2024), have sought to take a different direction from Instagram's curated nature, encouraging spontaneity and authenticity, so much that it has even been named “anti-Instagram” (Maddox, 2023, p. 1). Launched in 2020, BeReal conquered 21.6 million active monthly users in the first 3 years of its existence (Maddox, 2023). The app emphasizes real-time sharing through unfiltered snapshots, reflecting a broader cultural shift toward less polished digital interactions (Bulchand-Gidumal, 2024; Maddox, 2023). Along the same line, SOSN's main goal is to “try to guarantee that the content available is as real [and unfiltered] as

possible” (Bulchand-Gidumal, 2024, p. 8). This trend aligns with McRoberts et al.’s (2017) perception that while platforms like Instagram are associated with highly curated and polished content, features like Stories can facilitate more authentic self-presentation, capturing life as it happens. DataReportal (2025a, 2025b) indicates that BeReal's growth continues, now reaching 30 million monthly active users globally, and approximately 1.5 million active users in Portugal, further solidifying its position in the market of authentic, real-time sharing.

Beyond these platform-specific trajectories, it is also important to note that the very term ‘social media’ has evolved to become somewhat outdated, and ‘social media platforms’ is now more commonly used, emphasizing the algorithmic nature of these platforms and their role in shaping user experience and content visibility (Gillespie, 2018). Over the past decade, social media platforms have evolved from environments primarily focused on peer-to-peer communication and user-generated content into complex digital ecosystems integral to integrated marketing strategies (Tuten & Solomon, 2018). According to Tuten and Solomon (2018), this evolution has fundamentally reshaped how content is produced, distributed, and consumed, as brands increasingly develop strategic content plans based on audience preferences. The authors emphasize that social media management tools and paid media are now essential for optimizing reach and engagement (Tuten & Solomon, 2018). Moreover, Tuten and Solomon (2018) argue that platforms like Instagram have transcended their original function as social networks to become digital social platforms where consumer interaction, content promotion, and brand storytelling converge. These platforms, they note, have become crucial touchpoints within the digital marketing ecosystem, empowering users to engage with brands, influence cultural trends, and co-create value through participatory mechanisms such as sharing, commenting, and advocacy (Tuten & Solomon, 2018). Understanding this transformation is critical to grasp the strategic role platforms like Instagram and TikTok play in contemporary digital marketing and branding.

Together, these platforms highlight the diversity and dynamism of the contemporary social media ecosystem. Each one caters to different user behaviors and content formats, contributing to a rich and multifaceted digital landscape. This diversity not only reflects the evolving preferences of users, but also shapes cultural and communicative practices in profound ways (Miller et al., 2016). Recent data from DataReportal (2025a) suggests that the global social media penetration reached 60% of the world's population, with an estimated 5.5 billion active users as of early 2025, showcasing a further intensification of this trend. In

Portugal, social media penetration has reached 62% of the population, with approximately 6.5 million active social media users in 2025, an even higher adoption rate than the global average, signaling the strong presence and importance of digital engagement in the country (DataReportal, 2025b). As social media continues to evolve, its influence on communication, culture, and commerce grows ever more profound, reshaping public discourse, cultural production, and market dynamics (Fuchs, 2021). The rise of temporary and ephemeral content has particularly impacted how users interact with brands and share personal experiences, with these new affordances fostering greater immediacy and engagement (Haldborg Jørgensen et al., 2023; Kircova et al., 2020).

This dynamic environment underscored the competitive and ever-evolving nature of social media, as platforms vied to capture and retain user attention in an increasingly crowded digital space. Social media's rise not only redefined how people connected and shared information but also introduced significant challenges for organizations (Silva & Valente, 2024). As consumers gained unprecedented freedom to express their opinions and share experiences, businesses faced a new reality in which they had less control over their public image and the information circulating about them online (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Moreover, as social media usage has expanded and become more sophisticated, these platforms have become shaped by data and algorithms, thus becoming environments highly driven by personalized information and targeted advertising (Zuboff, 2019). In Portugal, as well as globally, the pervasive influence of algorithm-driven content curation has become increasingly evident. DataReportal (2025a, 2025b) reveals that 87% of social media users worldwide report receiving personalized ads on a regular basis, with 79% of Portuguese users reporting the same, highlighting the extent to which users are now accustomed to personalized experiences across these platforms. This reflects what Dijck et al. (2018) critically define as the dominance of highly monetized algorithmic platforms, governed by the interrelated processes of datafication, commodification, and algorithmic selection, which collectively shape social and economic life within a global platform ecosystem.

Temporary social media features, such as Instagram Stories, provide new modes of mass personal communication that are distinct from traditional feed posts, allowing brands to create relatable and authentic content (O'Sullivan & Carr, 2018; Evans et al., 2017). The introduction of new analytical tools has allowed brands not only to enter this space, but also to interact directly with consumers in real time, with 78% of marketers now relying on real-time analytics to refine their campaigns, underscoring the importance of immediate

consumer insights in shaping brand strategy (DataReportal, 2025a). Paschen et al. (2019) emphasize that these tools, particularly those powered by Artificial Intelligence (AI), enable brands to deliver personalized and timely content, fostering deeper consumer engagement. Similarly, Schultz (2020) agrees that real-time data analytics have become indispensable for brands seeking to understand and respond to consumer behavior dynamically. This evolution has generated unprecedented interaction dynamics, in which companies are constantly challenged to create content that resonates with consumers' desires and expectations, often in an increasingly immediate and reactive format (Li et al., 2021). Yadav and Pavlou (2020) further support this view, highlighting how technology-mediated interactions have made real-time responsiveness a critical component of brand success. Brands, aware of the engagement and reach potential, began adopting social media on a large scale, using it as a key channel to connect with audiences at moments of relevance, as exemplified by Real-Time Marketing (RTM), which demonstrates the integration of quick responses to events and trends as part of brand strategy (Kumar et al., 2019; Dwivedi et al., 2021).

1.1.3. The Changing Landscape of User Engagement

Currently, social media platforms' users exhibit a diverse range of demographics and psychographics, encompassing various age groups, genders, and geographic locations (DataReportal, 2025a). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok have gained popularity among middle-aged and even older demographics, in addition to younger ones, and each group uses the platforms differently (DataReportal, 2025a; Vogels et al., 2022).

Users' online activities differ psychologically, as some use social media platforms for enjoyment, knowledge exchange, or brand discovery, while others use it to express themselves and find personal connections. According to Dhir et al. (2020), these behavioral variations are caused by personal incentives like the need for informational content or social validation. Similar to this, Vogels et al. (2022) believe that social media platforms have been compelled to modify their features in order to accommodate a wider variety of demands and preferences due to the growing diversity of social media platforms' users. However, some academics warn against oversimplifying these developments. Hunsaker and Hargittai (2018), for example, point out that although social media participation has increased across age groups, older users frequently encounter obstacles such as difficulties with digital literacy, which might restrict their engagement in comparison to younger, more tech-savvy demographics. Despite these difficulties, social media's broad use by a variety of

demographics highlights its potential as a universal medium for brand connection, entertainment, and communication (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

As user preferences continue to evolve, certain trends and patterns have emerged. According to Auxier and Anderson (2021) and DataReportal (2025a), the rapid evolution of social media platforms has been driven by shifting user behaviors, particularly the demand for more interactive and engaging content. A dominant feature in the way people interact with social media today is the culture of constant engagement and sharing. Users are driven by the desire to stay connected, express themselves in real-time, and be part of an ongoing conversation, leading to the rise of content formats like stories and reels, that emphasize impermanence and immediacy (Haldborg Jørgensen et al., 2023; Kircova et al., 2020). In this context, social media marketing (SMM) plays a crucial role, as brands must adapt to these changing behaviors and preferences to create content that resonates with consumers (Parveen et al., 2024). This concept will be explored in more detail in Chapter 2. Brand Presence and Social Media Marketing.

The preference for visual over text-based content has further cemented the prominence of images, videos, and interactive media, shaping the way users experience social media and how brands communicate with them. DataReportal (2025a) highlights that visual content is increasingly favored by social media users, with over 75% of interactions on platforms like Instagram and TikTok driven by images and videos. Moreover, Tafesse and Wien (2018) and Lou and Yuan (2019) demonstrate that visual content generates higher engagement rates compared to text-based posts, as it is more likely to capture attention and evoke emotional responses. This shift has not only influenced user behavior but also forced brands to adapt their strategies, prioritizing visually appealing and interactive formats to maintain relevance in an increasingly competitive digital landscape (Vogels et al., 2022).

The digital landscape, particularly social media platforms, has profoundly influenced emotions and behaviors, often acting as a catalyst for emotional experiences. One of the most significant emotional pressures in today's social media culture is the pursuit of perfection (Barone et al., 2023). Platforms like Instagram have long been associated with an idealized version of reality, where users curate their lives to project an image of success, beauty, and happiness (Fardouly et al., 2017), classified as “unattainable pedagogical exemplars” by Kotsonis & Dunne (2024, p. 56). This has led to a culture of comparison, which is built on top of the concept of social comparison, defined by Wood as analyzing information regarding one or more other people in light of one's own characteristics (1996). Thus, this

culture of comparison in which we live nowadays is characterized by individuals constantly measuring themselves against the carefully crafted personas of others (Verduyn et al., 2020). The pressure to conform to these ideals can result in feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and self-doubt (Meier & Schäfer, 2018). In contrast to the idea that social comparison only results in upward contrastive emotions such as depression and envy (Park & Baek, 2018), some studies suggest that social comparison can also be positive and improve well-being (Meier et al., 2020; Valkenburg et al., 2021), leading to upward assimilative emotions like optimism and inspiration (Park & Baek, 2018).

However, there are signs that this obsession with perfection may be slowly diminishing. With the rise of more authentic platforms like BeReal and an increasing demand for authenticity, realness and relatability, social media is shifting toward a more honest, imperfect portrayal of everyday life (Hund, 2023; Pinch et al., 2024). Despite this shift, the underlying culture of validation remains pervasive. Tomar and Tiwari (2024) go even further and approach the concept of “validation sickness”, defining it as “the pervasive need for affirmation and approval on social media, where individuals seek validation through likes, comments, and shares to validate their self-worth” (p. 122), reinforcing a cycle of validation-seeking behavior that has a profound impact on self-esteem and self-worth (McRoberts et al., 2017). This digital ecosystem has contributed to a complex emotional landscape where feelings of connection coexist with the pressures of comparison and external validation (Verduyn et al., 2021).

The ever-evolving nature of social media platforms has created an environment where being connected, present, and up-to-date feels almost obligatory. Algorithms are designed to prioritize trends and real-time events, encouraging users to actively engage and participate in the digital conversation as it unfolds (Bhandari & Bimo, 2022). This constant cycle of updates and interactions reinforces the sense that one must always be online, aware, and ready to respond. Such dynamics not only shape the way people interact with content but also cultivate a heightened awareness of what others are doing, contributing to behaviors driven by the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) (Vanden Abeele, 2021).

1.2. FOMO and its Psychological Implications in the Digital Era

According to Akbari et al. (2021), Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is "one of the most well-known phenomena in the internet use context" (p. 888). It was first introduced as a psychological concept in 2004 by the author Patrick J. McGinnis in an article titled

"McGinnis' Two FO's: Social Theory at HBS" that appeared in a Harvard Business School magazine (Macias, 2018). Numerous academics have since investigated and examined the idea (Elhai et al., 2020; O'Connell, 2020; Przybylski et al., 2013; Van-Den-Eijnden et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2019), becoming increasingly relevant in the digital age due to the rise of social media and the constant connectivity it fosters. According to Przybylski et al. (2013), it is generally described as the apprehension that others are engaging in rewarding experiences from which one is absent, often accompanied by a compulsive desire to stay connected and informed about others' activities. On the other hand, FOMO is defined by Erciş et al. (2020) as the dread that arises when one learns about the incredible experiences that another person may have.

FOMO is a complex concept that has been operationalized and defined differently in many fields. Fundamentally, FOMO is defined as a feeling of uneasiness or anxiety brought on by the belief that one is losing out on fulfilling experiences, which is frequently made worse by social media use (Alt, 2018). This notion has been extended in recent research, with a focus on its dimensionality. For example, Zhang et al. (2020) developed the Fear of Missing Out scale (FoMOs-Z), which identifies two primary dimensions of FOMO: Personal Fear of Missing Out, representing the individual's anxiety about losing out on information or personal experiences that they consider significant, as well as concerns about not taking part in events or activities that could increase their personal fulfillment or satisfaction; and Public Fear of Missing Out, which is the worry of losing out on experiences or social activities that other people are having. It highlights the social component of FOMO, which is the fear of being left out of experiences that others openly share, especially on social media. This distinction shows that FOMO encompasses both the fear of falling behind in a fast-paced, digitally mediated world (relational dimension) and the fear of missing out on events (temporal dimension) (Zhang et al., 2021). As examined in Hayran and Gurhan Canli's (2022) study on the temporal perspective of FOMO, research indicates that the temporal part of FOMO is related to worries about missing events from the now or the future. Meanwhile, the relational dimension reflects the need to belong and the anxiety of social exclusion, as highlighted in Alabri's (2022) study linking FOMO to social connection deficits.

According to research by Kuss and Griffiths (2017), FOMO is closely linked to the always-on mentality that social media and cellphones have promoted, especially among people who were born after the late 1990s. This generation finds it nearly impossible to envision life without constant connectedness because they grew up in a society where technology is a part

of everyday existence (Kuss & Griffiths, 2015). According to Kuss and Griffiths (2017), this culture encourages a sense of urgency and a need to keep current, frequently at the price of mental health. Additionally, FOMO has been connected to problematic social media use (PSMU) in communication studies (Li et al., 2024) or social media addiction in Psychology, reflecting differences in disciplinary perspectives and emphasis (Elhai et al., 2021; Servidio et al., 2024). While ‘addiction’ implies clinical criteria commonly explored in Psychology, Communication research tends to use more cautious terms like ‘problematic’ or ‘excessive’ use to describe frequent and compulsive engagement with social media platforms (Li et al., 2024).

The psychological processes that underlie FOMO are intricate and interconnected. The fundamental human need for acceptance and social belonging is one of the main motivators. FOMO is a manifestation of the need for belongingness in the digital age, which is a basic human motivator according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Mathes, 1981; Reer et al., 2019). People experience anxiety and feelings of exclusion when they believe that their social connections are enjoying fulfilling activities without them (Garg & Shourie, 2023; Mellinger et al., 2024). According to research, FOMO causes elevated anxiety and even depressive symptoms by preying on feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem, and fear of social exclusion (Parmar, 2022). Furthermore, research shows that loneliness and social avoidance might trigger FOMO, worsening its detrimental effects on mental health (Liu et al., 2023). Since social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) is thought to be at the heart of FOMO, it is essential to comprehending it (Kumar & Sharma, 2024). Social media platforms offer a carefully chosen perspective of other people's life, frequently highlighting their accomplishments and happy moments (Tandon et al., 2020). This fosters a culture in which people are continuously contrasting their real lives with the romanticized representations seen online, which causes FOMO and feelings of inadequacy (Kumar & Sharma, 2024). According to recent research, FOMO is especially strongly predicted by upward social comparisons, which involve comparing oneself to others who are thought to be in a better financial situation (Scarpi et al., 2022). Furthermore, some academics think that identity formation and self-esteem are intimately related to FOMO. Because they could depend on social media for external reinforcement to support their sense of value, people with lower self-esteem are more prone to FOMO (Servidio, 2023). This dependence can lead to a vicious cycle in which behaviors motivated by FOMO, including excessive social media use, worsen feelings of inadequacy and further damage self-esteem (Tandon et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, several studies have shown that FOMO is not isolated, rather, it is influenced by and interacts with a variety of pertinent behavioral and psychological aspects. For instance, FOMO strongly predicts problematic or excessive use of social media platforms, often described as social media addiction in psychological literature (Elhai et al., 2021). Fear of missing out is what drives people to constantly check, which may lead to harmful usage patterns (Elhai et al., 2020; Rinaldi, 2024). Dhir et al. (2018) found that FOMO acts as a mediator in the relationship between psychological discomfort and social media addiction. This suggests that people who are feeling down are more likely to use social media as a coping strategy, which feeds their FOMO. The term digital well-being describes how people's mental, emotional, and physical health are affected by digital technologies (Büchi, 2024). Because it causes worry, anxiety, and sleep disruptions, FOMO poses a serious risk to digital well-being (University of Nottingham, 2024). Research has indicated that those who suffer from high levels of FOMO are more likely to report higher levels of burnout and poorer levels of life satisfaction (Lu et al., 2024; University of Nottingham, 2024).

Beyond mechanisms of comparison and belonging, recent work notes a reluctance to self-ascribe FOMO among adults and young adults. Because FOMO is often framed as a childish impulse or as a threat to autonomy and competence, individuals downplay or rationalize it, leading to systematic under-acknowledgment in self-reports (Littman-Ovadia & Russo-Netzer, 2024; Zylinski & Davis, 2022). This impression-management dynamic is especially evident in occupational and career contexts, where admitting to FOMO conflicts with norms of professional rationality (Dogan, 2019; Goldman et al., 2025). As a result, FOMO may shape everyday and work-related decisions even when people are unwilling to name it explicitly.

The role of AI and algorithm-driven content personalization amplifies FOMO, as social media platforms and digital services leverage sophisticated recommendation systems to curate highly engaging, individualized content (Montag & Hegelich, 2020; Valkenburg et al., 2022). These algorithms prioritize emotionally charged content that creates urgency and exclusivity, heightening the fear of missing out on trending topics, social events, or limited-time opportunities (Alutaybi et al., 2020; Tandon et al., 2020). Push notifications and personalized feeds further reinforce habitual engagement, making users feel compelled to check their devices incessantly to stay updated (Rozgonjuk et al., 2020). As a result, AI-driven platforms not only sustain but actively exacerbate FOMO by fostering digital

environments where disconnection feels synonymous with social exclusion and lost opportunities (Hussain & Griffiths, 2021; Meier & Reinecke, 2021).

The prevalence and impact of FOMO are not uniform across cultures, societies, or demographic groups. Cultural factors, such as societal norms around technology use and digital connectivity, play a crucial role in shaping FOMO. As Dhir et al. (2020) and Oberst et al. (2017) highlight, in societies in which constant connectivity is normalized and even expected, individuals may experience heightened levels of FOMO due to the pressure to remain perpetually engaged. Tandon et al. (2020) and Elhai et al. (2021) further emphasize that this societal expectation creates an environment where disconnection is perceived as a deviation from the norm, amplifying feelings of social exclusion and anxiety. Additionally, Kuss and Griffiths (2021) argue that cultural pressures to stay digitally connected can lead to compulsive behaviors, as individuals strive to meet these expectations and avoid the fear of missing out on important social or professional opportunities. Collectively, these studies underscore how cultural norms and societal expectations around technology use significantly influence the prevalence and intensity of FOMO. Macias (2018) believes that this phenomenon is particularly prevalent among young adolescents, especially students in high school, college, or graduate school. While social media platforms' users span all age groups from 18 to 64, younger individuals are the most active online (Smahel et al., 2020). The author states that many adolescents rely on digital platforms not only for social interactions but also for academic purposes, as they are often required to use online media to complete assignments and retrieve necessary information. This widespread dependence on digital connectivity may further exacerbate the experience of FOMO among younger populations (Macias, 2018), especially considering that these people are "dealing with age-related transitions and developmental tasks, such as forming their identity" while exposed to a variety of online activities (Raiziene et al., 2022, p. 150). This aligns with Servidio's (2023) argument that FOMO is deeply intertwined with identity formation. However, some findings challenge the common perception that FOMO primarily affects younger individuals, suggesting that while its triggers and expressions may evolve, its presence persists across the lifespan. Barry and Wong (2020) found that FOMO is present across various age cohorts, with no significant differences in overall levels, indicating that the phenomenon is not exclusive to adolescents or young adults. For instance, research on older adults suggests that FOMO in later life is influenced by emotional intelligence and attachment styles, rather than

the peer-driven social comparisons that typically affect younger populations (Durao et al., 2023).

As discussed before, the effects of FOMO are extensive, including people's relationships, behavior, and mental health. Anxiety, despair, and stress are among the detrimental mental health effects that are closely linked to FOMO (Elhai et al., 2020). Chronic stress and emotional tiredness might result from the ongoing urge to stay connected and the dread of losing out (Ye et al., 2023). Furthermore, because people may neglect sleep in order to stay current on social media, FOMO has been connected to sleep disruptions (Scott & Woods, 2018). A variety of activities, such as excessive social media use, compulsive gadget checking, and even unsafe decision-making, are fueled by FOMO. The overwhelming quantity of possibilities might cause people to overcommit or make impulsive choices that might not be in their best interests out of a desire to not miss out, as Gupta and Sharma (2021) point out. Fear of Missing Out can also cause people to value online communication over in-person contacts, which can strain relationships and cause friends and family to feel neglected and unsatisfied (Wang et al., 2021). Furthermore, according to the scientists, FOMO can intensify jealousy and resentment in romantic relationships, especially when one spouse thinks the other is more involved or socially active.

Beyond individual user behavior, FOMO has also been examined in the context of consumer decision-making, particularly through marketing strategies that leverage scarcity and urgency (Alfina et al., 2023; Argan & Argan, 2019; Matić Šošić, 2024; Mavilinda et al., 2024). Scholars have highlighted how limited-time offers, exclusive product releases, and last-unit alerts can effectively induce FOMO, prompting impulsive purchases and enhancing brand engagement (Alfina et al., 2023; Argan & Argan, 2019; Matić Šošić, 2024). These tactics are grounded in the psychological appeal of scarcity, which increases the perceived value of a product or experience by emphasizing its potential unavailability (Alfina et al., 2023; Matić Šošić, 2024). From a theoretical perspective, the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) framework has been applied to explain how such stimuli, designed to create urgency, can influence consumers' emotional states and behavioral responses (Alfina et al., 2023; Matić Šošić, 2024). The concept of 'Fomsumerism' further expands this view by incorporating social and psychological drivers of consumption behavior, illustrating how emotional states like anxiety or fear of exclusion, often triggered by social media marketing, contribute to FOMO-driven consumption (Argan & Argan, 2019; Matić Šošić, 2024).

In this context, ephemeral marketing has emerged as a particularly effective tactic for triggering FOMO, especially on platforms like Instagram Stories, where temporary content creates a heightened sense of urgency and exclusivity (Mavilinda et al., 2024). The transient nature of this content motivates users to remain engaged in order to avoid missing out on time-sensitive promotions, product reviews, or limited-time offers (Mavilinda et al., 2024). This strategy aligns with Blumler and Katz's (1974) Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory (Sichach, 2023), whereby consumers actively seek out ephemeral content to satisfy psychological and social needs, particularly those intensified by the fear of exclusion (Mavilinda et al., 2024). Moreover, the gratification derived from this interaction mediates the relationship between FOMO and user engagement, reinforcing the idea that urgency and scarcity not only influence behavior but also enhance perceived satisfaction (Mavilinda et al., 2024). Additionally, recent research has emphasized that brands deliberately apply neuromarketing strategies, such as promoting limited-time offers, exclusive deals, and unique experiences, to evoke emotional engagement and reinforce perceptions of scarcity and exclusivity, thereby intensifying the urgency that drives prompt purchasing behavior (Dwivedi & Sharma, 2024). These insights suggest that FOMO operates not only as a psychological consequence of digital connectivity but also as a deliberate, emotionally charged tool embedded within contemporary marketing communication strategies (Alfina et al., 2023; Argan & Argan, 2019; Mavilinda et al., 2024; Matić Šošić, 2024).

While research extensively explores FOMO in user and consumer behavior, as seen throughout this chapter, there appears to be limited academic investigation into how brands themselves may experience FOMO-like pressures and behaviors in their digital strategies. FOMO has been shown to influence consumer behavior and advertising engagement on social media, leading to increased click-through rates and conversions (Agarwal & Mewafarosh, 2021; Bui et al., 2022), and is commonly associated with concerns about missing socially rewarding experiences on social media (Alabri, 2022). Moreover, the need to belong has been identified as a strong predictor of FOMO, increasing it both directly and indirectly through social media use (Alabri, 2022). Thus, as brands strive to maintain relevance and engagement within the digital landscape (Hudson et al., 2016), in which visibility and participation impact perceived strength, value, and competitiveness (Deng et al., 2020; Topuz, 2022), this psychological mechanism, extensively studied in individuals, might also play a critical role in brand-consumer relationships. It might be worth considering whether brands, much like individuals, may experience pressures that resemble FOMO.

While empirical research on this specific phenomenon remains scarce, these insights open avenues for further investigation into how brands navigate the digital environment to avoid missing valuable engagement opportunities.

2. Brand Presence and Social Media Marketing

2.1. The Role of Brands on Social Media

Social Media Marketing (SMM) has progressively become a strategic imperative for brands seeking to establish a strong online presence, foster meaningful relationships with consumers, and be easily recognized (Zeqiri et al., 2024). Beyond serving as a communication channel, social media enables organizations to achieve multiple marketing objectives that contribute to customer-based brand equity (CBBE) and business performance (Al-Abdallah et al., 2023). While earlier perspectives positioned SMM primarily as a tool to extend marketing campaigns and increase visibility (Paquette, 2013), contemporary literature highlights a broader spectrum of strategic goals associated with social media usage.

One of the primary objectives of SMM is enhancing brand awareness and visibility within increasingly saturated and competitive digital environments (Zeqiri et al., 2024). Social media platforms allow brands to shift from traditional one-to-many communication models to more dynamic, interactive, and personalized one-to-one interactions, thereby fostering stronger consumer engagement (Safeer, 2024). The capacity to increase brand recognition and recall among potential customers has been consistently emphasized as a key SMM goal (Al-Abdallah et al., 2023; Kumar et al., 2025). Moreover, social media platforms facilitates the dissemination of promotional content that drives website traffic and ultimately aims to influence purchase behavior (Kumar et al., 2025).

In addition to increasing visibility and driving sales, fostering customer engagement emerges as a central goal of SMM strategies (Zeqiri et al., 2024). Interactive content and two-way communication foster active participation, encouraging consumers to engage in brand-related conversations and co-create content (Al-Abdallah et al., 2023; Banerji & Singh, 2024). Banerji and Singh (2024) believe such engagement is closely linked to the development of brand loyalty, as consistent and meaningful interactions contribute to long-term customer relationships and repeat purchasing behaviors.

Another critical objective of SMM involves gathering customer insights through social listening and analytics (Harsini & Snega, 2024). Social media platforms provide access to

real-time data regarding customer preferences, behaviors, and emerging trends, which can guide product development and marketing plans (Al-Abdallah et al., 2023). The growing significance of consumer-centric marketing, “in order to strengthen relationships and develop long-term loyalty” (Padmanaaban et al., 2024, p. 86), is consistent with this insight-driven strategy. Within this context, Zeqiri et al. (2024) stress that Customer Brand Engagement (CBE), which includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, is a critical component for companies seeking to build enduring relationships with their audiences and shapes how consumers engage with brands.

Furthermore, recent research has highlighted the role of SMM in influencing consumer behavior and fostering brand resonance, understood as the emotional connection and identification consumers develop with brands (Safeer, 2024). Social media marketing seeks not only to inform or persuade but also to elicit emotional responses that significantly impact consumers’ decision-making processes (Zeqiri et al., 2024). In this sense, SMM helps brands in building stronger attachment, engagement, and positive judgment from consumers (Banerji & Singh, 2024).

The integration of marketing communication efforts across platforms is another prominent objective (Banerji & Singh, 2024). Brands strive to implement cohesive strategies that combine both brand-directed and influencer-directed content, leveraging synergistic effects that enhance overall marketing effectiveness (Kumar et al., 2025). The believability and authenticity of content, especially when framed from a self-gain perspective, further contribute to influencing consumer perceptions and behaviors (Mulcahy et al., 2024).

Alongside these goals, the benefits or advantages of SMM are widely acknowledged in the literature. Cost-effectiveness is among the advantages that are most highlighted. Social media allows firms to reach a larger audience with comparatively less investment than traditional marketing techniques (Al-Abdallah et al., 2023; Safeer, 2024). Additionally, social media platforms include sophisticated segmentation and targeting tools that enable more effective audience reach and customized messaging (Banerji & Singh, 2024).

Another valuable advantage of communicating through social media lies in its immediacy and capacity for real-time interaction. Unlike traditional channels, it allows brands to jump into conversations as they happen, whether it’s to offer support, clarify misunderstandings, or respond to trends before they lose relevance (Al-Abdallah et al., 2023). At the same time, the availability of social media analytics provides companies with up-to-the-minute insights

into consumer behavior and sentiment, allowing them to monitor performance and make timely adjustments to their strategies when needed (Safeer, 2024; Kumar et al., 2025).

SMM's ability to promote user-generated content (UGC) is another significant advantage. By fostering genuine consumer advocacy, UGC increases brand credibility and trust (Banerji & Singh, 2024). Additionally, SMM gives brands the chance to establish themselves as leaders in their respective fields, increasing their authority (Singh, 2024).

Ultimately, SMM's strategic function goes beyond communication and visibility, it is a potent instrument for fostering relationships, evoking strong feelings, and influencing customer behavior (Celestin & Sujatha, 2024). As highlighted by Sohaib and Han (2023), SMM comprises several hierarchical elements, including entertainment, engagement, and interaction, that contribute to customer value creation and brand success. In sum, the evolving objectives and multifaceted benefits of SMM reinforce its status as an indispensable component of contemporary marketing strategies (Celestin & Sujatha, 2024). In this relational dynamic, the interaction between brands and consumers emerges as a central element in the development of enduring connections within social media environments (Postova et al., 2018). As Ciunova-Shuleska et al. (2024) argue, social media platforms have become spaces where interaction, particularly through commenting, operates as a strategic mechanism to foster proximity and connection. This interaction assumes particular relevance in attracting new consumers while simultaneously cultivating loyalty among existing audiences (Ciunova-Shuleska et al., 2024). This goes along with Postova et al.'s (2018) point of view, that it's important that brands "build relationships with the audience, to maintain their interest in the brand" (p. 66). In this regard, brands are increasingly called upon to engage actively with users, responding to inquiries, providing feedback, and creating a sense of recognition, a practice that not only strengthens relationships but also contributes to the co-creation of value (Marchowska-Raza & Rowley, 2024). As these authors highlight, brand-to-consumer interactions may be initiated by either party, with both playing a pivotal role in the creation of shared experiences. Moreover, the perception of brand interactivity, defined by Ndhlovu and Maree (2024) as the brand's willingness to engage in two-way communication, is a critical determinant of the quality of consumer-brand relationships, fostering trust, participation, and commitment.

Simultaneously, the informal and relaxed tone often adopted by brands on social media further contributes to emotional connection and consumer engagement (Ciunova-Shuleska et al., 2024). Postova et al. (2018) emphasize that the nature of social media communication

differs significantly from traditional advertising, with creative and high-quality content, including videos and visually engaging posts, being more effective in capturing user attention. Similarly, Harsini and Snega (2024) reinforce the capacity of social media to facilitate more personal and humanized interactions, enabling “businesses of any size [to] communicate and network with customers on a more personal level” (p. 25), fostering stronger relational bonds.

In this context, the motivations underlying consumer engagement, particularly in commenting on brand content, have been the focus of growing academic interest. According to Ciunova-Shuleska et al. (2024), consumer engagement behaviours are driven by a combination of communal incentives (related to participation in a community), self-interest incentives (personal benefits), and reward-driven incentives (external recognition or prizes). These motivations influence consumer intentions to interact with different types of brand content, such as commercial messages, personal opinions, or lifestyle-related publications (Ciunova-Shuleska et al., 2024). Furthermore, proactive brand engagement, namely, the brand’s active participation in conversations and responsiveness to consumer comments, is identified by Marchowska-Raza and Rowley (2024) as a key strategy for enhancing consumer trust and loyalty. Responding to consumers’ contributions, acknowledging their preferences, and incorporating feedback are practices that reinforce the perception of proximity and relational commitment (Marchowska-Raza & Rowley, 2024). This process is also influenced by factors such as brand trust, self-expressive brand characteristics, and perceived interactivity, all of which contribute to positive brand outcomes, including brand evangelism and enhanced consumer-based brand equity (Ndhlovu & Maree, 2024).

However, while interacting across global social media contexts, brands must take linguistic and cultural adaptation into account (Singh et al., 2023). As Postova et al. (2018) point out, tailoring communication to the specificities of different cultural contexts is crucial to enhancing brand perception, fostering emotional identification, and cultivating consumer loyalty. This is particularly relevant in the context of Online Reputation Management (ORM), defined as “one’s online reputation” (Singh et al., 2023, p. 4490).

Overall, the evolution of consumer-brand relationships within social media is characterized by a growing emphasis on participatory engagement and co-creation (Ndhlovu & Maree, 2024). Consumers are no longer passive recipients of brand messages but are instead “becoming important collaborators and contributors in brand communication activities” (Ciunova-Shuleska et al., 2024, p. 2). As such, brands are required to adopt a relational

approach to marketing, fostering continuous interaction, emotional connection, and value co-creation (Marchowska-Raza & Rowley, 2024; Ndhlovu & Maree, 2024). In line with the service-dominant logic perspective, value is not produced unilaterally by the brand but emerges from collaborative processes in which consumers play a fundamental role (Ndhlovu & Maree, 2024).

Consequently, the relational approach in SMM advocates for long-term relationship-building rather than transactional exchanges, aligning with contemporary consumer expectations of personalization, recognition, and authenticity (Marchowska-Raza & Rowley, 2024). Communal incentives, in particular, are found to positively influence consumers' willingness to interact with brands, especially in the context of lifestyle content and personal opinion-sharing, while self-interest incentives may generate more negative perceptions of brand authenticity (Ciunova-Shuleska et al., 2024).

In the long run, two-way communication emerges as a defining feature of successful social media marketing practices, enabling brands to foster dialogue, learn from consumer feedback, and develop emotional connections that transcend purely commercial interactions (Ciunova-Shuleska et al., 2024). In doing so, brands not only strengthen consumer loyalty but also position themselves as relational entities within the digital ecosystem, capable of co-creating value and fostering meaningful engagement in an increasingly participatory media landscape (Sallaku et al., 2024).

This evolution in brand-consumer dynamics has also given rise to the concept of value co-creation, a process that positions consumers not merely as passive recipients of marketing messages but as active participants in shaping brand experiences and offerings (Ciunova-Shuleska et al., 2024; Marchowska-Raza & Rowley, 2024). Social media platforms have emerged as critical facilitators of this collaborative approach, enabling brands to engage consumers directly in value-generating processes (Sallaku et al., 2024). As Hazmi et al. (2024) emphasize, “through co-creation, businesses can create more value for consumers by involving them directly in determining product and service standards” (p. 398). In this sense, social media transforms traditional marketing paradigms by fostering a two-way communication flow that empowers consumers to contribute ideas, feedback, and content that enhance brand value (Mamuladze & Mamuladze, 2024; (Sallaku et al., 2024).

Social media's participative nature strengthens customer loyalty and trust while fostering deeper brand-consumer connections (Hazmi et al., 2024). According to Sallaku et al. (2024), value co-creation is a defining feature of contemporary interactions, as the active

involvement of users in creating and sharing brand content amplifies reach within peer networks. Consumer participation thus becomes central to the brand experience, allowing companies to leverage consumer creativity and insights for product and service development (Hazmi et al., 2024).

Brand communities, defined by Santos et al. (2022) as “places where consumers and brands can meet each other as equals” (p. 2), further strengthen this dynamic by fostering belonging and enabling value co-creation. Hazmi et al. (2024) add that such communities allow consumers to feel more involved in developing products and services, ultimately increasing perceived value.

User-generated content (UGC) represents another critical dimension (Basile et al., 2024). Its authentic and organic nature fosters trust and relatability, positioning consumers as brand advocates (Zhuang et al., 2023). Positive reviews and shared experiences can reinforce brand image, expand reach, and attract new customers (Hazmi et al., 2024). Ultimately, encouraging UGC allows companies to cultivate more meaningful relationships and stimulate deeper engagement (Sallaku et al., 2024).

Alongside consumers, external actors such as social media and creative agencies also play a significant role by contributing cultural awareness, agility, and executional expertise (Lone, 2021; Vejnovic, Purchase, & Tarabashkina, 2024). However, these partnerships are not without tensions, as differing objectives and perspectives can shape collaboration (Lone, 2021; Vejnovic et al., 2024).

As co-creation redefines brand-consumer relations, brands are increasingly adopting human-like attributes, engaging in authentic, two-way conversations (Mamuladze & Mamuladze, 2024). This trend highlights the need to build emotional connections by embodying values and personality traits that resonate with consumers, reinforcing brand loyalty. As Mamuladze and Mamuladze (2024) note, “when a customer sees not only the logo, but the people who create it, the consumer becomes more sensitive and loyal to the brand” (p. 95). This evolution underscores the growing tendency for brands to humanize their communication strategies (Lourenço et al., 2023).

However, alongside these opportunities, several challenges also arise in the aim of SMM. Content saturation on digital platforms has become a significant obstacle for brands, specifically for social media and public relation teams, as the abundance of advertising messages can result in diminished consumer attention and fatigue caused by information

overload (Vinodh et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2025). Consumers are bombarded by vast amounts of information daily, which can make it harder for them to process marketing messages (Vinodh et al., 2024). In response to this challenge, Vindoh et al. (2024) believes that brands must focus on creating content that stands out for its quality rather than its quantity in order to generate a deeper and more genuine engagement with the audience and to avoid fatigue from excessive promotional content.

In parallel, algorithms on social media platforms further complicate the dynamics of visibility and engagement. As noted by Krasylnykova et al. (2024), algorithms determine the reach and visibility of content on social media platforms, meaning that the way content is displayed to users is controlled by these complex formulas. The challenge arises when brands try to maintain consistent organic reach, as algorithms are constantly evolving, adjusting their priorities based on user behavior and other internal factors (Feitosa & Mosconi, 2022; Krasylnykova et al. 2024). Additionally, the introduction of algorithmic bias may hinder the equal representation of content, favoring certain types of posts or interactions over others (Kim, 2017). However, Krasylnykova et al. (2024) note that while algorithmic changes present many challenges, they are also very important opportunities for creative adaptation and strategic refinement. In this sense, the authors believe that brands should embrace innovation and the agility that's needed in this context in order to unlock new opportunities for growth and engagement.

Reputation crises are also a growing concern in the context of SMM, as the speed at which negative information spreads on social media can severely damage a brand's image (Singh et al., 2023). This goes along with Celestin and Sujatha's point of view (2024), that "the speed of social media has transformed public relations crises into real-time events where responses must be immediate" (p. 124). Studies show that companies that respond to crises within the first hour have 60% higher chances of maintaining customer loyalty (Celestin & Sujatha, 2024). Therefore, effective crisis management involves not only an immediate response but also implementing an online reputation management (ORM) strategy that includes clear and transparent communication to restore consumer trust, minimize the negative impact of a reputation crisis and facilitate the restoration of consumer confidence (Singh et al., 2023).

Lastly, according to Kotorov et al. (2024), authenticity has become one of the primary challenges in social media marketing. Deng et al. (2024) distinguish three dimensions of brand authenticity, each with a distinct focus: true-to-self authenticity shows the brand's

dedication to its core values and internal motivations rather than external pressures; true-to-ideal authenticity concerns the brand's adherence to societal standards and consumer expectations; and true-to-fact authenticity stresses the alignment of a brand's actual performance with its marketing claims. In a digital environment saturated with content, consumers are looking for brands that convey transparency and align their values with their own (Kotorov et al., 2024; Lin & Ku, 2023). Putri and Dirgantari (2024) emphasize that authenticity is crucial for building a genuine connection with consumers. Moreover, brands that fail to communicate their values authentically risk losing trust and, consequently, customer loyalty (Kotorov et al., 2024; Rodrigues et al., 2024). Therefore, to succeed on social media, brands must invest in strategies that promote genuine interactions and reflect their core values, maintaining an authentic voice that resonates with their audience (Putri & Dirgantari, 2024).

In this context, the evolution of social media has not only reshaped the way brands communicate but also redefined consumer expectations towards more humanized and emotionally engaging interactions (Lourenco et al., 2023). The authors believe that, while the development of a distinctive brand personality and the adoption of human-like attributes are essential to fostering closer relationships with consumers, these efforts alone may not be sufficient in an increasingly competitive and saturated digital environment. As the number of brands, content creators, and messages multiplies across platforms, the challenge of capturing consumer attention intensifies (Harsini & Snega, 2024). Therefore, beyond authenticity and emotional connection, brands are increasingly required to differentiate themselves strategically and creatively to stand out in the crowded social media landscape (Lin & Ku, 2023), a dynamic that will be further explored in the following section (1.2.2), dedicated to the need for brand differentiation within a saturated digital environment.

2.2. The Need for Brand Differentiation in a Saturated Digital Environment

For brands looking to sustain exposure and engagement in a fragmented digital landscape, algorithmic filtering and content saturation on digital platforms present serious hurdles, as discussed in the previous chapter (Lin et al., 2021; Ou et al., 2023). While users are bombarded with vast amounts of information daily, resulting in cognitive overload, social media algorithms further complicate this situation by selectively prioritizing content, thus limiting brand reach and engagement (Dhir et al., 2019; Zheng & Ling, 2021). This situation gives rise to what has been conceptualized in the literature as the paradox of abundance (Dhir et al., 2019; Zheng & Ling, 2021; Lin et al., 2021), the phenomenon where, despite the

exponential increase in content production across social media platforms, this abundance does not necessarily lead to greater brand visibility (Lin et al., 2021), engagement, or impact (Ou et al., 2023). On the contrary, users frequently experience disengagement or content fatigue, resulting in a decline in the effectiveness of social media as a communication tool for brands (Ou et al., 2023). As Zheng and Ling (2021) argue, more content does not automatically translate into more meaningful interactions or stronger brand-consumer relationships.

In light of these challenges, differentiation becomes an increasingly critical strategy. The notion of brand differentiation, rooted in traditional marketing theory, emphasizes the need for brands to position themselves uniquely within the marketplace in order to stand out amidst this overwhelming content noise (Baynast et al., 2018; Kotler et al., 2015). According to Porter (1985), differentiation was initially conceived as a means to create a unique position for a product or brand, one that is distinct from its competitors. Baynast et al. (2018) further define differentiation as “the company's ability to deliver to its customers an offering perceived as different from that of its competitors”¹ (p. 487). In their framework, differentiation is a key element of brand positioning, answering the fundamental question: “What distinguishes us from other products in the same category?”² (Baynast et al., 2018, p. 215). Along similar lines, Kotler et al. (2015) argue that brand differentiation points are those “attributes or benefits that consumers strongly link to a brand, perceive as favorable, and consider difficult to encounter at a comparable level in competing brands”³ (p. 307).

This classical view of differentiation, primarily focused on product attributes, has been expanded and adapted in the context of digital environments, particularly within social media marketing (Corejova et al., 2020). In social media platforms, brands no longer compete solely based on the functional qualities of their products or services, but rather on their ability to construct a distinctive online identity, voice, and content strategy that resonate with their target audience (Li et al., 2023). The fragmentation of consumer attention across multiple platforms has thus amplified the importance of strategic brand differentiation beyond the traditional marketing mix and its classic 4 Ps (Product, Price, Place, Promotion) to include

¹ Original text in Portuguese: “capacidade da empresa de valorizar aos seus clientes uma oferta percebida como diferente da dos seus concorrentes”

² Original text in Portuguese: “O que o distingue dos outros produtos do mesmo género?”

³ Original text in French: “Les points de différence sont les attributs ou les bénéfices que les consommateurs associent fortement à la marque, qu’ils jugent positivement et dont ils pensent qu’ils ne pourraient pas les trouver au même niveau chez un concurrent.”

additional dimensions such as positioning, perceptions, purchase process, and popularity, among others (Mir-Bernal & Sadaba, 2022). Brands must thus develop innovative communication strategies that go beyond volume and focus on distinctiveness, creativity, and consumer-centricity to capture attention and foster engagement (Lin et al., 2021).

The immediacy and interactivity of social media demand that brands move beyond functional differentiation towards what some scholars describe as identity-based differentiation (Zwakala & Steenkamp, 2021), where the brand's values, personality, and storytelling capabilities become primary competitive assets. This approach aligns with the evolution of the Promotion Mix framework, traditionally described by Kotler et al. (2015), where differentiation is not solely achieved through price or product innovation but also through communication strategies capable of delivering added value and emotional connection. In highly saturated digital environments, being present on social media is no longer sufficient, and brands must be meaningful and foster a unique value proposition that transcends visibility metrics (Kotler et al., 2015).

Differentiation is closely linked to the construction of brand equity, a strategic asset that enhances customer loyalty, reduces price sensitivity, and facilitates long-term relationships (O'Rourke et al., 2022). In digital ecosystems, differentiated brands are better positioned to overcome the challenges of content overload, algorithmic filtering, and consumer fatigue, previously mentioned (Ou et al., 2023). By cultivating an authentic and recognizable identity, brands can establish a competitive advantage that is difficult to replicate (Zwakala & Steenkamp, 2021). Moreover, differentiation strategies contribute to the development of brand salience, the extent to which a brand is noticed or considered in purchase situations, according to Errmann (2023). Building on Keller's (1993) conceptualization of brand awareness as a foundational dimension of customer-based brand equity, Top of Mind Awareness (TOMA) represents the strongest level of salience, positioning the brand as the first-recalled option in the consumer's mind. As Romaniuk and Sharp (2004) argue, TOMA captures the strength of salience in competitive contexts and serves as a proxy for the likelihood of brand choice at the point of purchase. In this sense, TOMA reflects the awareness of a brand in consumers' minds even without physical interaction, contributing to popularity and reputation (Kangara & Eranda, 2025). It is typically operationalized as the brand mentioned first when consumers are asked about a product, service, or retailer category (Pauly et al., 2018). Tchelidze (2023) frames it as one of the three levels of brand awareness, alongside unaided and aided recall, defining it as the condition in which a brand

spontaneously comes to mind before others. Similarly, Putri (2021) emphasizes that high top-of-mind awareness indicates a brand's strong mental availability in unprompted recall situations, a condition that requires consistent marketing and advertising efforts to maintain.

Brand storytelling has emerged as one of the most powerful differentiation strategies in social media marketing, enabling brands to create compelling narratives that resonate emotionally with consumers (Wibowo et al., 2024). As Rachman et al. (2024) argue, effective storytelling allows brands to foster emotional bonds, enhance loyalty, and convey authenticity in a marketplace inundated with promotional content. Narratives that reflect the brand's core values and mission not only humanize the brand but also help to position it as relatable and memorable in the minds of consumers (Rachman et al., 2024). Wibowo et al. (2024) emphasize that such storytelling becomes particularly impactful when it incorporates emotional engagement and strong visual elements, creating content that audiences are more likely to remember, share, and associate with their own values. Furthermore, the integration of technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data into storytelling processes enables hyper-personalized experiences, although it raises important ethical considerations regarding privacy and data use (Rachman et al., 2024).

Visual consistency also plays a fundamental role in differentiating brands on social media, where aesthetic appeal and recognizability are key to capturing user attention. As highlighted by Aginsa and Wulansari (2024), maintaining uniformity across visual elements, such as color palettes, logos, and typography, enhances brand recall and reinforces identity, making the brand more relatable and trustworthy in the eyes of consumers. Zhou and Xue (2021) support this view by noting that cohesive visual strategies can foster stronger emotional connections with the audience and positively influence brand perception. In a similar vein, Luarn et al. (2024) underline the importance of color congruence in creating immersive brand experiences, arguing that consistent visual cues significantly enhance aesthetic engagement and marketing effectiveness. A carefully curated visual identity not only aids in recognizability but also allows the brand to express its personality and values, further distinguishing it in the crowded digital space (Luarn et al., 2024).

Another very important element in the scope of differentiation is the tone of voice employed by brands on social media, which serves as a crucial mechanism for conveying brand personality and fostering emotional resonance (Barcelos et al., 2022). Ceccotti et al. (2024) propose that as consumers become familiar with a brand's voice, they begin to anticipate certain styles of communication, which contributes to a sense of familiarity and relational

continuity. Gonzalez (2024) expands this discussion by framing tone of voice as a culturally adaptive strategy that reflects linguistic, aspirational, and societal nuances. Brands that integrate cultural sensitivity and demographic awareness into their tone are better positioned to establish trust, avoid reputational risks, and connect more effectively with diverse audiences (Gonzalez, 2024). The author further believes that the ability to adapt tone according to context, be it humorous, formal, or empathetic, allows for a more nuanced brand expression, enhancing authenticity and reinforcing differentiation in a competitive market.

Content strategy remains at the core of brand differentiation efforts on social media, as it encompasses the creation, distribution, and management of value-driven communications tailored to audience needs (Shen, 2023). Pathak and Kaushik (2024) argue that well-designed content, especially that which entertains or offers tangible value, enables brands to stand out in digital environments marked by rapid scrolling and low attention spans. Their research demonstrates that entertaining content, such as memes or creative storytelling, increases engagement by providing emotional relief and capturing interest through humor and originality. Salonen et al. (2024) adopt a more strategic B2B perspective, distinguishing between educational, transactional, and cause-related content types, each serving different functions in the customer journey. These typologies highlight how brands can address specific informational, emotional, or value-oriented needs, thereby fostering deeper relationships and brand trust. Meanwhile, Bubphapant and Brandão (2024) emphasize the importance of user-generated and interactive content in amplifying brand reach and community involvement, illustrating how participatory content strategies enhance loyalty and competitive advantage. Similarly, Wardani et al. (2024) stress the role of relevance, consistency, and motivational appeal in sustaining consumer attention and differentiating brand voice in an increasingly commodified digital landscape.

Brand differentiation is not merely the result of isolated tactics but emerges from a comprehensive strategy that integrates emotional narrative, aesthetic coherence, and cultural nuance through brand visual aesthetics (Buschgens et al., 2024). These elements, when deployed consistently and authentically, allow brands to build stronger identities, connect more deeply with audiences, and ultimately secure a lasting competitive position in the digital arena (Bazi et al., 2023).

Despite the availability of effective differentiation strategies that help brands thrive on social media platforms, where content saturation is constant, brand undifferentiation is increasingly recognized as a critical challenge in the digital communication environment (Mir-Bernal &

Sadaba, 2022; Atienza-Barthelemy et al., 2025). A key factor is brand noise, which results from the excessive presence of generic and indistinct messages that overload users' cognitive capacity and hinder meaningful engagement (Atienza-Barthelemy et al., 2025). This is often compounded by content fatigue, where brands adopt similar strategies, leading to homogenized messaging and visuals that limit audience recall and differentiation (Fernandes & Oliveira, 2024). Furthermore, the absence of emotional connection reduces brand memorability and weakens consumer-brand relationships, making it harder for brands to stand out (Badran & Al-Dosari, 2025; Yang, 2022). Finally, the globalization of content intensifies competition by placing local brands alongside global players, elevating expectations around content quality, consistency, and cultural relevance (Content Creation As A Catalyst For Global Brand Building, 2024).

In response to the challenges of undifferentiated branding, scholars have increasingly emphasized the need for more humanized and personalized brand experiences on social media (Ceccotti et al., 2024; Rachman et al., 2024). As algorithmic exposure becomes more selective and users gravitate toward brands that reflect their values and identities, differentiation through emotional resonance, authenticity, and individualized communication emerges as a critical strategic priority (Badran & Al-Dosari, 2025; Gonzalez, 2024). This shift signals a growing relevance of brand personality and humanization as mechanisms not only to stand out in crowded digital spaces, but to build meaningful, trust-based relationships with consumers (Goel & Garg, 2025), a topic that will be further explored in the following section.

2.3. Brand Personality and Humanization as Drivers of Consumer Connection

Humanization has become a crucial tactic for brands looking to create emotional connection and set themselves out in an increasingly crowded and doubtful digital landscape (Oh & Ki, 2025). This strategy is based on the idea of authenticity, which academics like Yang et al. (2021), Malodia et al. (2024) and Oh & Ki (2025) believe is a major factor in determining customer engagement, trust, and marketing efficacy. On social media, where content is scrutinized and co-created by users, authenticity is no longer a fixed or objective trait, it is, as Maares et al. (2021) put it, a relational and performative phenomenon, co-constructed through ongoing interactions between brands and audiences. The four fundamental pillars identified by Bulmer et al. (2024) provide a helpful framework for understanding how authenticity functions in brand communication: continuity (connected to brand heritage and consistency over time), credibility (sincerity and reliability), integrity (alignment with

ethical values), and symbolism (the representation of what the brand stands for). These dimensions help explain why authenticity remains so crucial in digital environments, where visibility and transparency amplify consumer expectations and skepticism.

Moreover, scholars have shown that authenticity is not just about consistency or honesty, it is deeply emotional (Salem, 2023). Malodia et al. (2024) emphasize how emotionally resonant and hedonic content increases engagement by creating a sense of relevance and connection. This emotional humanization, when done through value-driven storytelling or relatable content, can reduce consumer skepticism and foster deeper relationships between brands and users (Malodia et al., 2024). Yang et al. (2021), building on McCracken's meaning transfer model (McCracken, 1989), suggest that even the perceived genuineness of influencers can impact brand authenticity, demonstrating the power of emotional cues in constructing credible identities online.

Furthermore, Oh & Ki (2025) and Jeong et al. (2022) tested two opposite communication tones for social media: a conversational human voice, characterized by being friendly, first-person, interactive and using emojis; versus an organizational voice, described as formal, impersonal, with no emotive paralanguage. According to both studies, the conversational voice, also referred to as humanization, leads to higher trust, satisfaction, commitment, control mutuality, and greater social media engagement compared with a formal organizational voice.

Within the conversational human voice, scholars have identified a range of tonal variations that convey different relational and emotional cues, such as warmth, humor, and empathy, as well as more formal or authoritative tones. These tonal shifts significantly influence how audiences perceive brand messages, affecting judgments of authenticity, relatability, and competence (Jeong et al., 2022; Barcelos et al., 2018). For example, Kate Moran (2023) proposes four key dimensions of tone: humor vs. seriousness; formality vs. casualness; enthusiasm; and respectfulness, each positioned on a spectrum, enabling nuanced adjustments in tone to align with context. Although it has not been empirically validated in peer-reviewed research, the Nielsen Norman Group's framework (Moran, 2023) is commonly adopted by practitioners and content strategists due to its conceptual clarity and practical applicability (Moran, 2024; Phillips, 2025; Hawkins, 2024). Other scholars identify tone variants such as humorous, informative, empathetic, encouraging, authoritative, and celebratory. Empirical research has shown that playful or humorous tones often yield higher engagement, while informative or empathetic approaches may perform better in response to

crises or sensitive topics (Pias et al., 2024). The humorous tone is operationally defined by Warren and McGraw (2016) as communication that elicits higher perceived funniness, amusement, or laughter compared to another stimulus. Informative tone, as defined by Lee and Hong (2016), delivers useful information that helps users make choices and learn about product alternatives. Complementing these findings, professional guidelines from industry practitioners also highlight similar tonal distinctions, particularly noting the effectiveness of celebratory and encouraging tones in fostering brand affinity (Minkie, 2025). Ultimately, tone of voice is a core manifestation of a brand's personality and must be aligned with its broader identity strategy. Against this backdrop, the development of a compelling and coherent brand personality becomes essential (Pryor, 2024).

The phenomenon of assigning human traits to a brand so that customers can relate to it in ways similar to interpersonal interactions is known as brand personality (Andrade et al., 2024; Jun & Lee, 2024). Based on the Five-Factor Model of human personality, Aaker's (1997) original study presented a systematic framework for assessing brand personality. Sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness are the five archetypal aspects into which this framework divides brand personality. These dimensions remain central to the study of consumer-brand relationships, providing a basis for understanding how personality traits influence brand differentiation, emotional attachment, and consumer loyalty.

Brand personality, as highlighted by Pryor (2024), allows brands to differentiate themselves in crowded markets by evoking human-like qualities that appeal to consumers' self-concept. This emotional resonance contributes not only to preference formation but also to trust and long-term engagement. Similarly, Andrade et al. (2024) define brand personality as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (p. 68), reinforcing the idea that such characteristics are central to consumer-brand identification and emotional connection.

While Aaker's model continues to serve as a foundational reference, more recent scholarship has revised and expanded its scope to account for the increasing complexity of brand-consumer interactions, especially in the digital age. According to Jun and Lee (2024), brand personality is no longer a static construct solely determined by marketers or perceived unilaterally by consumers. Instead, it is co-created through dynamic exchanges among multiple agents within the brand ecosystem, including the brand, its consumers, and broader cultural narratives. Contemporary models have updated Aaker's original dimensions in two keyways. First, researchers have introduced alternative labels for existing dimensions, e.g.,

‘Dynamism’ for Excitement or ‘Toughness’ for Ruggedness, while preserving the core traits (Jun & Lee, 2024). Second, new personality dimensions have emerged, such as Peacefulness, Authenticity, Simplicity, Extraversion, and even negatively valenced traits like Snobbism and Superficiality, reflecting a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of brand identity (Jun & Lee, 2024). These evolutions underscore the need for multi-dimensional and degree-sensitive models that account for both the strength and complexity of traits rather than rigidly categorizing brands into fixed archetypes.

A critical factor in the effectiveness of brand personality lies in its consistency across time and digital platforms. Maintaining a consistent personality promotes emotional trust and credibility, both of which increase brand loyalty (Pryor, 2024). This consistency must be seen across all social media platforms in all aspects of brand communication, such as interactive behavior, vocal tone, and visual aesthetics. Coherence in personality expression reinforces the symbolic and emotional attributes associated with the brand, ensuring that consumer perceptions align with the brand’s intended image (Pryor, 2024). Jun and Lee (2024) emphasize that consistency is particularly vital in a context where consumers actively participate in the co-creation of brand meaning. Without alignment between the brand's intended personality and consumers' perceived personality, discrepancies may emerge that undermine brand credibility and relational authenticity. Therefore, strategic brand management requires not only the projection of a clear personality but also its continuous monitoring and adaptation, guided by consumer feedback and evolving cultural expectations.

Beyond loyalty, brand personality plays a fundamental role in ensuring communication coherence. Andrade et al. (2024) argue that personality traits provide a stable framework that guides all communicative elements, ranging from color schemes and typography to language and storytelling styles. This alignment ensures that all brand expressions contribute to a unified identity, which is essential for maintaining competitive advantage in a saturated digital landscape (Andrade et al., 2024).

Furthermore, by providing emotional and symbolic cues that consumers can internalize and relate to, brand personality improves consumer identification (Andrade et al., 2024). Attributing human traits enables customers to view brands as recognizable, reliable, and personally relevant, a crucial aspect in digital spaces with fragmented attention and ephemeral material. Aaker’s (1997) multidimensional framework continues to provide a robust foundation for understanding how brand traits influence consumer preferences and

market positioning, although it must be continually refined to reflect the complexity and interactivity of contemporary brand experiences.

While brand personality provides a structured framework for attributing human-like traits to brands, contemporary branding strategies increasingly emphasize brand humanization as a broader, more relational approach. As highlighted by Lourenço et al. (2023), brand humanization entails portraying brands not only with distinct traits but also with intentionality, emotions, self-awareness, and social behaviors, attributes that foster deeper emotional resonance and a sense of social presence. This approach transforms the brand from a mere commercial entity into a relatable and empathetic persona (Vera et al., 2024), capable of expressing authentic feelings and purposeful intentions. Unlike brand personality, which centers on trait consistency and symbolic positioning, brand humanization seeks to create emotionally meaningful connections by portraying the brand as capable of emotional expression, social interaction, and intentional behavior. When brands consistently convey emotions and purposeful narratives, they appear more accessible, trustworthy, and meaningful, strengthening the emotional bond with consumers and enhancing overall brand perception, engagement, and loyalty (Lourenço et al., 2023; Vera et al., 2024). This shift reflects the increasing relevance of relational authenticity in digital and social media contexts, where consumers are drawn to brands that behave and communicate like social actors.

In light of the emotional and relational benefits of brand humanization, it becomes crucial to identify the specific factors that foster its implementation on social media. According to Lourenço et al. (2023), the strategic use of anthropomorphic traits, such as portraying brands with emotions, self-awareness, and social behaviors, is essential to making them feel relatable and socially present. These authors also emphasize that active engagement with consumers across multiple digital touchpoints reinforces perceptions of human intentionality and responsiveness. Additionally, they argue that using first-person narratives, incorporating emotional expressions, and adopting colloquial language allows brands to communicate from a seemingly personal perspective, enhancing authenticity and trust (Lourenço et al., 2023). The same study notes that inviting consumer participation in marketing campaigns and product co-creation strengthens the perception of the brand as a social actor, capable of forming collaborative and dialogical relationships with its audience. Vera et al. (2024) further highlight the importance of storytelling that reflects empathy, stressing that narratives which align with consumers' emotions and values contribute to emotional engagement and

long-term connection. These authors state that content should be designed to provoke reflection, generate dialogue, and invite sharing, thus stimulating interaction and memorability.

Similarly, Mirzaei et al. (2024) argue that brand anthropomorphism must incorporate human value-expressive traits, such as benevolence, achievement, or universalism, so that consumers perceive the brand as sharing their own values. Drawing on Schwartz's framework of human values, they show that such alignment fosters identification, emotional resonance, and trust (Mirzaei et al., 2024). These authors also identify several tactical elements that amplify humanization, including the use of emotional cues to influence message processing, management of message complexity to ensure clarity, and timing of social media posts, with higher engagement observed during weekends. Moreover, Mirzaei et al. (2024) highlight the role of user-generated content that reflects shared human values, reinforcing contagious engagement and community building. The authors also underline the use of hashtags linked to specific human values as a means of promoting participation and emotional alignment. Taken together, these studies demonstrate that the affordances of social media, its interactivity, emotional richness, and capacity for value expression, serve as powerful enablers of brand humanization strategies that end up fostering deeper emotional bonds and encourage consumers to view brands as friends or social allies.

Building upon this emotionally engaging strategies, social media platforms serve as a fertile ground for the expression of humanized brand content. Across these platforms, brands adopt a variety of content formats and linguistic styles that reinforce their human-like presence and foster proximity with users. According to Nani (2024), several types of humanized content contribute to interaction and communication by making language more informal, expressive, and relatable. These include the use of spontaneous stories and reactions to viral trends, which allow brands to share timely and authentic moments that resonate with audiences. Real-time marketing strategies that incorporate humor also play a crucial role, enabling brands to respond playfully to current events with the light, conversational tone characteristic of social media platforms. Moreover, expressive tools such as emojis, GIFs, and memes serve as semiotic shortcuts that convey complex emotions and cultural references, enhancing the human-like feel of brand communication (Nani, 2024). The adoption of youthful vocabulary, internet slang, and even code-switching reinforces this dynamic, signaling to audiences, particularly younger ones, that brands are socially aware and culturally embedded (Nani, 2024). Supporting this view, Harrison and Kwon (2023) emphasize the emotional

immersion enabled by spontaneous storytelling and the strategic use of humor and real-time cultural references to boost engagement. Razzaq et al. (2024) further highlight the relevance of memes in fostering brand humanization, noting that their effective use demonstrates cultural literacy and signals belonging within digital communities.

However, while this socially interactive and increasingly human-like behavior may enhance brand relatability and engagement, it also introduces significant risks and boundaries that must be carefully managed. According to Mouritzen et al. (2023), an excess of human traits in brand communication, such as exaggerated expressions, forced informality, or overuse of emojis, can evoke the uncanny valley effect (Gray & Wegner, 2012). This effect describes a phenomenon in which increasing anthropomorphism enhances affinity only up to a point, after which subtle deviations from natural human behavior trigger discomfort and mistrust (Mouritzen et al., 2023). The resulting cognitive dissonance may reduce the brand's perceived credibility and authenticity, as consumers interpret such portrayals as inauthentic or unsettling, ultimately undermining engagement and brand trust. To avoid such dissonance, it is essential that brands align their humanization efforts with their sector, mission, and target audience (Fournier & Eckhardt, 2018). Fournier and Eckhardt (2018) emphasize that coherence in human expression strengthens perceived authenticity and prevents a disconnect between the symbolic and operational dimensions of the brand. Incongruence in tone or behavior, such as overly playful communication in traditionally formal industries, can erode brand value by violating audience expectations and cultural norms (Fournier & Eckhardt, 2018). These authors believe that calibrating the extent and type of human traits allows brands to maintain a balance between warmth and professionalism, intimacy and credibility.

Moreover, heightened humanization creates higher consumer expectations regarding ethical and empathetic behavior, particularly in moments of crisis. Garcia-Collart (2023) notes that when brands cultivate emotional closeness and authenticity, they are expected to respond to crises with corresponding levels of care and responsibility. Failure to meet these expectations can backfire, leading to skepticism and reputational damage. Similarly, Siqueira Junior et al. (2023) argue that brands perceived as honest, empathetic, and accountable are held to higher ethical standards by consumers. Inconsistencies between a brand's humanized persona and its crisis response, such as ignoring social issues or exhibiting corporate indifference, can result in consumer backlash, including negative word-of-mouth, boycotts, and loss of trust.

In essence, the more human a brand becomes, the more it is expected to behave as a morally responsible social actor (Siqueira Junior et al., 2023).

3. Real-Time Marketing (RTM)

3.1. Definitions, Typologies and Conceptual Evolution of Real-Time Marketing

Although the term Real-Time Marketing (RTM) has gained popularity in recent years, particularly in the context of social media campaigns, its conceptual foundations can be traced back over two decades. McKenna (1995) was one of the earliest authors to articulate the potential of RTM, emphasizing how new technologies could enable brands to communicate with customers in real time. Early literature approached RTM from a data- and operations-centric perspective, focusing on the ability to rapidly transform market data into customer insights, deliver personalized offerings, and adapt product development processes in real time (Achrol & Kotler, 1999). Despite these early contributions, academic research on RTM has remained relatively scarce (Borah et al., 2020).

An alternative, historically grounded perspective is proposed by Willemsen et al. (2018), who argue that RTM predates the digital era. According to this view, brands have long sought to align their messages with public events to capture audience attention, a strategy already visible in traditional campaigns like J&B's 1990 Christmas ad, which capitalized on the festive context to maximize its emotional and persuasive impact. This moment-driven approach was echoed by Sutherland and Holden (1997), who described marketing as an opportunity to hitch a ride on public attention, enabling brand messages to travel further and faster with cultural momentum.

In its contemporary understanding, RTM is typically defined as the integration of current events, news, or cultural trends into brand content, often disseminated via social media, with the aim of boosting relevance and stimulating consumer engagement (Mazerant et al., 2021; Kerns, 2014). From a content perspective, it involves creating branded messages that are tightly aligned with events that are generating significant public attention at a given moment (Kerns, 2014). Importantly, RTM is considered a cost-effective strategy (Sanchez Torres & Restrepo, 2015) that enhances brand humanization and entertainment value (Chae et al., 2025), making it attractive for both large and small organizations operating in a competitive attention economy (Sanchez Torres & Restrepo, 2015).

To achieve such relevance and resonance, RTM often requires cultural awareness and strategic preparation, as highlighted by Chae et al. (2025), especially when anticipating events that can be leveraged in brand communications. Cultural context management is thus a critical variable in crafting real-time messages that not only align with the brand's strategy but also enhance audience comprehension and engagement (Chae et al., 2025).

However, the term real-time marketing is used inconsistently across the literature. While some scholars focus on its reactive nature in social media environments, especially in response to trending or viral moments (Willemsen et al., 2018), others adopt a broader view that includes planned and automated tactics driven by consumer data, predictive analytics, or location-based triggers (Macy & Thompson, 2011; Kallier, 2017). This definitional ambiguity complicates both academic classification and managerial application, raising questions about RTM's distinctiveness as a marketing construct and its positioning within integrated brand strategies.

A widely referenced framework for understanding the typologies of RTM is proposed by Lieb et al. (2013), who classify six distinct use cases based on two intersecting dimensions: whether the action is proactive or reactive, and whether it is planned or unplanned. In the quadrant of planned and reactive actions lies the use case of Brand Events, where companies anticipate the need to respond to their own scheduled milestones, such as product launches, conferences, or corporate announcements, with pre-prepared but adaptable content. Moving to planned and proactive strategies, there are two key categories: Anticipated Events, in which brands develop campaigns in advance of widely expected cultural or media moments like the Super Bowl or the Oscars; and Predictive Analytics-Based RTM, in which data-driven insights from Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems, defined by Lieb et al. (2013) as the management of customer interactions, or behavioral tracking are used to preemptively deliver tailored content that anticipates consumer needs. On the unplanned and proactive side, we find Location/Object-Based RTM, which relies on emerging technologies such as geolocation, beacons, or sensor-triggered mechanisms to initiate content delivery in specific contexts. Conversely, the unplanned and reactive dimension includes highly spontaneous formats such as Customer Interaction, in which brands engage directly and in real time with individual users, typically on social media platforms, and Breaking News, in which companies respond rapidly to emerging news stories or viral moments. While these last two types can yield high engagement due to their immediacy and relevance, they also carry a higher reputational risk if misjudged. This categorization is synthesized visually in

Figure 1, which illustrates how RTM approaches vary according to their level of planning and degree of responsiveness.

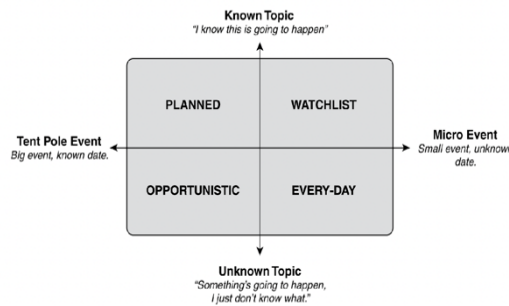
Figure 1
The Six Use Cases of Real-Time Marketing



Note. From Real-Time Marketing: The Agility to Leverage 'Now', by R. Lieb, J. Groopman and C. Li, 2013, p. 4.

Complementing this conceptual model, Kerns (2014) proposes a four-part classification (Figure 2), that reflects how brands approach RTM in real-world contexts: planned, opportunistic, watch-list, and daily. Planned RTM refers to content created ahead of time for highly predictable events, such as major award ceremonies or sporting finals, closely aligning with Lieb et al.'s Anticipated Events category. In contrast, opportunistic RTM is triggered by unexpected developments that require a rapid and creative response, such as viral incidents or breaking news. This form of RTM is the most reactive and, due to the absence of prior preparation, often carries a higher reputational. The watch-list category involves monitoring semi-predictable events that may or may not unfold as expected, such as political debates or trending media topics, enabling brands to prepare conditional strategies in advance. Finally, daily RTM reflects the ongoing need for brands to remain alert to smaller, spontaneous moments that emerge in public discourse or online trends on a day-to-day basis. These more sudden developments, while often overlooked, can offer agile brands an opportunity to demonstrate cultural relevance and engage audiences with immediacy and creativity.

Figure 2
Kern's RTM four-part classification



Note. From Kerns (2014, p. 21).

Further simplifying the dichotomy between predictable and unpredictable moments, Willemsen et al. (2018) and Chae et al. (2025) offer more simplified and similar models. Willemsen et al. (2018) distinguish between predictable moments (e.g., holidays, elections) and unpredictable moments (e.g., viral topics, sudden crises), whereas Chae et al. (2025) differentiate between planned RTM messages, prepared in advance for expected scenarios, and improvised RTM messages, created on-the-fly in response to unexpected developments. While planned messages tend to improve message comprehension and relevance, improvised content often benefits from perceived spontaneity and originality but risks lower clarity and engagement (Chae et al., 2025). Table 1 presents a synthesis of these typologies, enriched with examples and a critical assessment of the associated reputational risk. While the risk level is not explicitly defined in the original literature, it is inferred here based on the degree of spontaneity, brand control, and public scrutiny involved in each type. This perspective aims to illuminate the strategic and operational challenges inherent to different RTM approaches.

Table 1
Typologies of Real-Time Marketing Based on Planning, Reactivity, and Associated Risk

RTM Type	Description	Planning	Reactivity	Risk
Brand Events (Lieb et al., 2013)	Pre-prepared responses to brand-owned milestones (e.g., product launches, anniversaries), adaptable to the moment.	Planned (Willemsen et al., 2018;	Reactive	Low

RTM Type	Description	Planning	Reactivity	Risk
Anticipated/Planned Events (Lieb et al., 2013; Kerns, 2014; Willemsen et al., 2018)	Content developed in advance for predictable cultural/media moments (e.g., Oscars, Super Bowl, national holidays), to be published in real time.	Chae et al., 2025)	Proactive	Medium
Predictive Analytics-Based RTM (Macy & Thompson, 2011; Lieb et al., 2013; Kallier, 2017)	Data-driven or AI-powered messages based on CRM and behavioral tracking to anticipate consumer needs or preferences.		Proactive	Low
Watch-List RTM (Kerns, 2014)	Monitoring semi-predictable topics or events (e.g., trending discussions, weather alerts) that may or may not happen, and preparing content contingently.	Semi-Planned (Kerns, 2014)	Reactive	Medium
Location/Object-Based RTM (Lieb et al. (2013)	Automated activations triggered by physical context (e.g., sensors, geolocation, beacons), often via connected devices.	Unplanned (Willemsen et al., 2018; Chae et al., 2025)	Proactive	Medium
Costumer Interaction RTM (Lieb et al., 2013; Chae et al., 2025)	Spontaneous replies to user-generated comments or messages on social media.		Reactive	High
Breaking News / Opportunistic RTM (Lieb et al., 2013; Kerns, 2014; Willemsen et al., 2018)	Immediate responses to unpredictable, high-impact moments, including breaking news (e.g., crises, elections) or culturally relevant spontaneous events (e.g., viral memes, celebrity incidents). Often highly visible and emotionally charged, requiring fast judgment.		Reactive	High

RTM Type	Description	Planning	Reactivity	Risk
Daily RTM (Kerns, 2014)	Capitalizing on trending topics and micro-moments that emerge daily (e.g., memes, conversations), often subtle and short-lived.		Reactive	Medium

Note. Elaborated by the author based on Lieb et al. (2013), Kerns (2014), Macy and Thompson (2011), Kallier (2017), Chae et al. (2025), and Willemsen et al. (2018). Planning dimensions (Planned vs. Unplanned) are interpreted using the conceptual distinctions proposed by Willemsen et al. (2018) and Chae et al. (2025). Risk levels are interpreted by the author based on the degree of spontaneity, planning, and brand control described in the referenced literature.

It is also important to distinguish RTM from similar, yet distinct, practices such as newsjacking and occasion marketing. Newsjacking, often linked to RTM in journalism-related literature, refers specifically to the insertion of branded messages into ongoing news cycles (Angell et al., 2020). RTM, however, covers a wider range of opportunities, including spontaneous engagement with online trends or cultural moments that are not necessarily newsworthy (Kerns, 2014). While some view newsjacking as a narrower subcategory of RTM, others argue that it captures the essence of what RTM aims to do, namely, leveraging current events to build relevance and visibility for a brand (Scott, 2012). Occasion marketing, in contrast, is typically associated with planned campaigns tied to recurring events like holidays or seasonal celebrations. It is more deliberate and predictable, whereas RTM blends this type of preparation with the flexibility to respond in real time to unexpected developments (Willemsen et al., 2018). Therefore, RTM's strength lies precisely in its versatility, ranging from structured campaigns to spontaneous social media reactions.

Notably, RTM is also closely linked to automation and personalization. In the marketing automation literature, RTM refers to the delivery of personalized brand communications in real time based on consumer behavior, context, or preferences (Macy & Thompson, 2011; Kallier, 2017). This version of RTM intersects with CRM systems and predictive analytics, revealing the strategy's technological underpinnings. Consistent with this view, RTM is not a one-size-fits-all strategy. The same message may perform differently depending on the platform or audience segment, requiring careful adaptation of tone, format, and timing to maximize resonance (Scott, 2012).

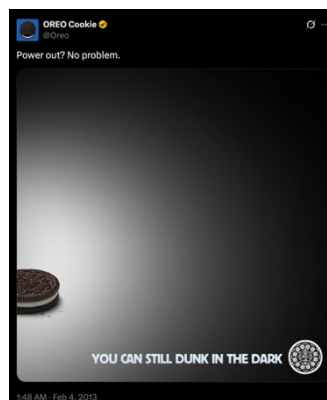
The most significant driver of RTM's recent proliferation has been the rise of social media. Digital platforms have fundamentally redefined what it means to act in real time, offering

brands an infrastructure for monitoring trends, engaging with audiences instantly, and amplifying their messages through viral sharing mechanisms (Park et al., 2017; Rauwers et al., 2016). Social media's immediacy and networked nature have revitalized RTM practices, transforming them from scheduled communications around predictable events into agile, participatory interactions with unfolding digital culture (Willemsen et al., 2018; Lieb et al., 2013). Moreover, these platforms serve as fertile ground for unpredictable RTM, which, despite its risks, often generates more emotional resonance and sharing behavior than planned messaging (Chae et al., 2025).

One of the most widely cited examples of successful RTM is Oreo's response during the 2013 Super Bowl⁴ blackout (Figure 3), when the brand tweeted "You can still dunk in the dark" within minutes of the unexpected power outage (Lieb et al., 2013; Willemsen et al., 2018; Chae et al., 2025).

Figure 3

Oreo's reaction to Super Bowl blackout.



Note. From OREO Cookie's X profile (OREO Cookie [@Oreo], 2013).

The post quickly went viral and became a benchmark for improvisational marketing done well. It is now frequently referenced as a milestone in social media-based RTM, demonstrating the effectiveness of speed, creativity, and brand alignment in seizing cultural moments (Willemsen et al., 2018).

⁴ The Super Bowl is the final game of the US American football championship.

Similarly, a compelling Portuguese example of successful RTM was IKEA’s viral campaign in response to Operation Influencer in 2023 (Figure 4), during which authorities discovered €75,800 hidden in books and wine boxes linked to the Prime Minister's chief of staff. In a striking blend of humor and immediacy, IKEA released a billboard and social media ad showcasing a bookcase with the caption “Good for storing books. Or €75,800”⁵. The campaign resonated deeply with the public, exemplifying RTM's power to humanize a brand and ease social tensions through contextual wit (Euronews, 2024a; SIC Notícias, 2024).

Figure 4

IKEA’s advertising campaign that references Operation Influencer



Note. From SIC Notícias (2024).

3.2. Strategic Relevance and Effectiveness of RTM

Following its conceptual evolution, Real-Time Marketing (RTM) has become increasingly embedded within contemporary brand strategies, especially in the realm of social media, and its value lies not only in immediacy but in its potential to foster cultural relevance and emotional resonance (Willemsen et al., 2018). As digital platforms transform consumer-brand interactions, RTM allows companies to demonstrate agility by aligning their messaging with trending topics, events, or social conversations in real time (Willemsen et al., 2018). While Saura (2021) does not explicitly discuss RTM, his emphasis on continuous social listening as a driver of competitive advantage provides an important conceptual foundation for understanding how brands succeed in this practice. Mendes (2024) reinforces this view by describing RTM as a form of “surfing the wave”⁶ (p. n.d.), a dynamic tactic that

⁵ Original campaign in Portuguese: “Boa para guardar livros. Ou 75.800€.”

⁶ Original text in Portuguese: “surfer a onda”

enables brands to ride the momentum of public attention. By addressing topics consumers are already discussing, RTM bridges the gap between brands and audiences (Kerns, 2014).

Marketing agility, the ability to detect changes and respond quickly, has been identified as one of the most significant strategic assets in digital marketing (Kalaighnam et al., 2021). While not specific to RTM, this notion of agility provides a useful lens for framing the responsiveness that underpins real-time activations. This capability is tightly connected to active social media listening, which enables brands to anticipate or immediately react to emerging topics. RTM is particularly attractive in saturated digital environments because of its cost-efficiency, viral potential, and capacity to humanize brands through humor, relevance, and shared cultural meaning (Mazerant et al., 2021; Kumar et al., 2019; Dwivedi et al., 2021). This aligns with the idea that brands approach RTM not only as a way of being present in cultural conversations, but also as part of the commercial and promotional mechanics of their campaigns (Kallier-Tar & Wiid, 2021). However, as Mendes (2024) notes, identifying the moment is only the first step. What really matters, and proves more difficult, is understanding its emotional impact and turning it into a message that both reflects the brand's identity and connects meaningfully with its audience.

Empirical research suggests that real-time content performs particularly well in terms of visibility and engagement. Willemsen et al. (2018) show that RTM messages typically generate more shares than non-real-time content, especially when perceived as meaningful and original. This interplay between real-timeness, creativity, and effectiveness is also highlighted by Mazerant et al. (2021), who suggest that originality, message relevance, and emotional appeal are key drivers of consumer engagement. Humor, timeliness, and improvisation further enhance virality, a point supported by Borah et al. (2020), who found that improvised marketing interventions can positively impact both social media traction and firm value. Humor, in particular, has become a defining element of many successful RTM campaigns. When used appropriately, it increases engagement, fosters brand affinity, and amplifies content reach by encouraging likes, shares, and comments (Yeo et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2023). The combination of RTM and humor enables brands to respond to trending topics in ways that are both relevant and entertaining, helping them stand out in crowded digital spaces (Lopopolo, 2021). However, several authors caution that humor must align with brand identity and cultural context to avoid misinterpretation or backlash, especially during emotionally sensitive events (Atal & Richey, 2020; Ning et al., 2022). Broader research in social media advertising further supports this view, suggesting that while bold or

risky campaigns may generate engagement and visibility, their success ultimately depends on perceived authenticity, credibility, and audience perception (Jabeen et al., 2024). Thus, humor may sometimes backfire, as Warren and McGraw (2016) demonstrate that humorous brand communication can harm perceptions when the joke is perceived as inappropriate, misaligned, or offensive. Their research highlights the benign violation framework, showing that humor is effective when audiences perceive a message as simultaneously playful and non-threatening, but it can damage brand equity when this balance is not achieved.

Recent research also emphasizes the importance of cultural alignment in RTM. Chae et al. (2025) argue that crafting contextually appropriate brand responses that align with culturally relevant moments is essential to enhance message comprehension and audience engagement. Without this cultural fit, improvised RTM messages may fail to resonate or even cause confusion or backlash, undermining their strategic effectiveness (Chae et al., 2025).

Additionally, several mediating variables have been found to shape RTM performance: clear and comprehensible messages tend to boost engagement (Chae et al., 2025), while creative execution enhances consumer motivation to interact. Audience composition also matters, with RTM content targeted at core fans typically yielding stronger results. Moreover, factors like product visibility in the content, the congruence between brand and message, and the emotional tone (whether positive or negative) all play a role in shaping campaign effectiveness (Chae et al., 2025). In this regard, Mendes (2024) emphasizes that authenticity, the alignment of message, tone, and brand values, is not optional but essential in ensuring that RTM content has meaningful impact rather than momentary attention.

In terms of performance measurement, specific metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs) are commonly used to assess RTM effectiveness. According to Chae et al. (2025), the most widely adopted engagement metrics include likes as attitudinal signals, shares as indicators of content virality and dissemination, and comments as reflections of consumer interaction and conversation. These metrics provide brands with actionable insights into the reach and resonance of their RTM content, helping to evaluate both short-term impact and long-term engagement potential.

Yet, RTM's effectiveness depends not only on creativity and metrics but also on internal structure. As Mendes (2024) argues, to act effectively in real time, brands must be equipped with the necessary resources, clear guidelines, and predefined processes. These elements ensure that responses are not only quick but also consistent with the brand's identity, reducing the risk of misalignment or reputational damage. This strategic infrastructure

becomes particularly crucial when responding to unplanned events, where time pressure is high and margin for error is low (Mendes, 2024). Recalling the example of Oreo during the Super Bowl blackout, the brand's iconic tweet was the result of careful planning: a 15-person cross-functional team, including strategists, creatives, copywriters and executives, had been assembled in advance, ready to respond to any unexpected moment. This preparation enabled the brand to act within minutes, combining speed with creative consistency (Watercutter, 2013).

Despite these strategic benefits, scholars also caution against potential drawbacks of RTM. Verma and Yadav (2021) warn that the pressure to be constantly reactive can lead to superficial interactions, where brands focus more on speed and visibility than on building meaningful connections. Opportunistic or poorly aligned RTM efforts, often referred to as culture-jacking (Lieb et al., 2013), may result in reputational backlash, especially in contexts of tragedy or sensitive issues. For instance, in 2012 Duracell received praise for its real-time support to Hurricane Sandy⁷ victims by distributing batteries, aligning the message with brand purpose and public sentiment. In contrast, American Apparel's attempt to promote a sale during Hurricane Sandy was widely condemned as exploitative, highlighting the risks of insensitivity in RTM execution (Scott, 2012).

In this context, Mendes (2024) raises important questions regarding the integration of RTM into broader brand strategy: Is RTM an inherent part of the brand's approach to communication, or merely a reaction to digital noise? If it is strategic, does the brand have the processes and capabilities in place to respond consistently and meaningfully? And crucially, is the brand truly measuring the impact of its RTM efforts, not just in terms of reach, but in alignment, engagement, and brand equity? These questions highlight the need for brands to not only react to trends but also to ensure they have the necessary infrastructure and metrics in place to evaluate the effectiveness of their RTM efforts.

3.3. The Influence of FOMO on RTM Adoption

Following the potential drawbacks of RTM, an increasingly blurred line emerges between agility and anxiety. As pointed out by Gustavo Mendes, Director of the Brand Management program at Porto Business School and founder of Ichika Brand Consulting, it is not the brands themselves that act, but the people behind them. In a hyperconnected ecosystem

⁷ Hurricane Sandy was a devastating hurricane that struck the eastern United States in 2012, causing widespread damage, particularly in New York and New Jersey.

where immediacy rules and attention are currency, these decision-makers often feel compelled to act not because of deliberate strategy, but because of a fear of being left out (2024). This emotional undercurrent is what Mendes (2024) identifies as a potential subtle overlap between RTM and FOMO.

This industry-driven insight is echoed and expanded upon by João Carvalho Oliveira, Executive Creative Director at ACNE/Deloitte Business, introduced the idea of a new form of FOMO, the Fear of (Missing) Marketing Out, during the 23rd Marketeer Conference (Almeida, 2024). He describes it as a modern form of anxiety taking hold of brand managers, driven by an urgency to be everywhere and act fast. In his words, this phenomenon reflects a broader cultural condition: despite being more capable, educated, and visionary than ever, marketers are simultaneously overwhelmed by public scrutiny and an accelerating pace of communication. This environment cultivates a compulsion to react quickly to trending topics, not necessarily with strategic intent, but to avoid being perceived as absent or disengaged.

Although FOMO has traditionally been studied as a phenomenon affecting consumers (Cebecioglu & Altıparmak, 2022), recent literature has started to consider its impact on brand behaviour, particularly in the context of real-time marketing. Mendes (2024) argues that brands, or more precisely, their representatives, are equally susceptible to the pressure of staying visible in trending conversations. The fear of appearing asleep or disconnected can push brands to respond hastily, not with the aim of adding value, but rather to avoid silence, leading to performative participation. As he describes, the objective often shifts from meaningful engagement to winning the unofficial contest for the coolest post, thereby reducing strategic communication to reactive one-upmanship.

This reactive dynamic may, in fact, compromise the originality and consistency of brand messaging. Vila, Bharadwaj and Chae (2016) explicitly link real-time marketing decisions to the fear of missing out, noting that the pressure to respond rapidly to trending topics, driven by this fear, can undermine message originality and brand coherence. Similarly, Mazerant et al. (2020) argue that while RTM aims to foster meaningful connections with consumers, the creative development behind such spontaneous content is often constrained by immediacy. This time pressure can diminish the originality and clarity of the message, increasing the risk that audiences may misinterpret or disengage from the brand's intent.

Further supporting this perspective, Verma and Yadav (2021) discuss how the pressure to act fast may compel brands to engage with trending topics simply to avoid irrelevance,

echoing this FOMO-driven urgency. Almeida (2024) reinforces this paradox, noting that brands today have unprecedented access to vast amounts of data but little time to process it, often leading to hasty decisions motivated more by the fear of missing out than by informed strategy.

However, it is necessary to explore the possibility of professionals resisting to label their own impulses as FOMO. Among adults, the term is often dismissed as childish or incompatible with workplace norms of strategic autonomy. In professional and career-related settings, admitting to FOMO can be read as a weakness, prompting euphemisms and underreporting, even when behavior reflects FOMO-like pressures (Dogan, 2019; Littman-Ovadia & Russo-Netzer, 2024; Zylinski & Davis, 2022; Goldman et al., 2025).

This highlights a notable gap in academic literature: although professionals in the field, such as Mendes (2024) and Almeida (2024), have offered strong and detailed insights into how FOMO may influence brand behavior in real-time contexts, academic research explicitly addressing the connection between these two concepts remains limited. Bridging this gap could be essential to better understanding how FOMO shapes brand decision-making, potentially turning RTM from a strategic opportunity into a reactive obligation.

3.4. Future Directions of Real-Time Marketing

Although the future of real-time marketing (RTM) has not yet been widely explored in academic literature, a few contributions provide valuable anticipatory perspectives. For instance, Willemsen et al. (2018) predicted that RTM would continue to grow in importance and advised practitioners to shift from extensive planning to real-time responsiveness. They argued that brands should act more like journalists or publishers: continuously monitoring social conversations, creating meaningful ad-hoc content, and preserving creativity under time pressure. In their view, RTM is real business, likely to become increasingly unpredictable, with success hinging on seizing unexpected opportunities and leveraging moment-driven visuals.

This anticipatory view by Willemsen et al. (2018) aligns with what more recent literature has shown. RTM has gained increasing weight within digital strategies, requiring brands to act in real time through continuous social listening and ad-hoc creativity. Although Saura (2021) and Kalaignanam et al. (2021) frame these capabilities more broadly within digital marketing and agility, their insights can be directly applied to explain why such practices are crucial for effective RTM. Improvised interventions have been found to generate both social

traction and firm value (Borah et al., 2020), provided that they combine originality and clarity to successfully seize unpredictable moments (Mazerant et al., 2021; Chae et al., 2025).

Expanding beyond tactical execution, Haider et al. (2025) suggest that the next stage of RTM will be characterized by hyper-personalized, context-aware, and instantaneous consumer engagement. This evolution is expected to be powered by IoT devices, AI-driven analytics, and hybrid edge–cloud architectures, enabling more precise prediction of consumer needs and tailoring of offers. Alongside hyper-personalization, cross-channel orchestration will become critical: brands must synchronize responses across platforms to deliver a coherent yet adaptive experience. Supporting infrastructures such as 5G, edge computing, and serverless paradigms will provide the low latency and scalability required for such interactions.

Yet these opportunities are accompanied by persistent challenges. Haider et al. (2025) emphasize that data privacy, security, interoperability, and organizational readiness remain significant hurdles. Without robust management frameworks, ethical guidelines, and regulatory coordination, the technological promise of RTM risks undermining consumer trust.

Part II - Empirical Research

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Objectives, Scope and Research Questions

As emphasized by Maxwell (2012), a successful research project begins with a clearly defined problem and a guiding structure that informs all subsequent stages of the investigation. In this context, the present study seeks to explore the motivations, perceived benefits, and challenges associated with RTM during unplanned events, with a particular focus on the Portuguese market.

The scope of this research is deliberately limited to unplanned events, with a specific emphasis on Breaking News, Daily, and Opportunistic RTM situations, those that are entirely unforeseen and require immediate brand response (Lieb et al., 2013; Willemsen et al., 2018; Kerns, 2014). The choice to focus on this specific category of RTM is grounded in its inherently reactive and high-risk nature. According to Lieb et al. (2013) and Kerns

(2014), breaking news and opportunistic scenarios allow little or no time for preparation, compelling brands to make swift decisions under pressure. This context is particularly relevant for investigating not only the strategic logic behind RTM, but also its emotional and psychological dimensions, especially the potential influence of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out).

Additionally, this study is geographically restricted to the Portuguese market. This decision is based on both practical and analytical considerations. On a practical level, the researcher's familiarity with Portuguese brands, media landscape, and cultural references allows for a deeper and more accurate interpretation of brand behavior. From an analytical standpoint, unpredictable events often have culturally specific impacts. For instance, some recent events, such as the 2024 earthquake in Portugal, generated widespread national attention but had little resonance beyond the country's borders. Understanding how brands react to such moments requires local awareness, not only in terms of language, but also in interpreting the social and emotional weight of the events themselves (Chae et al., 2025). Analyzing similar phenomena in foreign markets would pose significant challenges in terms of real-time tracking and contextual depth.

Taking these considerations into account, this study is guided by the following central research question: Why do brands engage in Real-Time Marketing during unpredictable events, and what are the benefits and challenges in the Portuguese market?

To address this question, the study is guided by seven specific objectives that together build a coherent analytical path from antecedents to outcomes. The objectives and their associated research questions are presented in Table 2. These questions are not only central to the design of the research, but also serve as a bridge between the study's goals, conceptual framework, and methodological choices, helping to ensure coherence and validity throughout the research process (Maxwell, 2012). O1 identifies the broad motivations that lead brands to react in real time to unpredictable events, while O2 zooms in on a potential psychological mechanism, FOMO, to test whether perceived pressure contributes to that decision. Then, O3 examines the executional constraints that condition what is feasible in practice, and O4 analyses the creative levers that operationalize those constraints, tone and format, and connects them to audience engagement and reception. Moreover, O5 assesses the benefits perceived by practitioners and triangulates them with the engagement indicators from the content analysis to qualify what is gained. O6 reframes the practice at the strategic level, asking whether RTM functions as bold differentiation or has become an expected factor.

Finally, O7 looks ahead to how professionals anticipate RTM will evolve, helping delimit the scope and transferability of the findings. In combination, these objectives link the “why” (O1 and O2), the “how” and “with what” (O3 and O4), the “so what” (O5 and O6), and the “what next” (O7), thereby ensuring conceptual and methodological coherence.

Table 2

Research Objectives and Questions

Research objectives	Research questions
O1: To explore what motivates brands to engage in RTM during unpredictable events.	Q1: What drives brands to respond in real time to unpredictable events? What strategic, emotional, or contextual factors influence their decision?
O2: To investigate whether FOMO plays a role in RTM decision-making.	Q2: Are brands engaging in RTM because they want to, or because they feel they must, out of fear of missing out?
O3: To identify the main challenges brands face when executing RTM under time pressure.	Q3: What difficulties do brands encounter when reacting quickly to unplanned events, particularly regarding creativity, authenticity, and timing?
O4: To analyse the most commonly used tone and format in RTM during unplanned events, and how it relates to audience engagement and reception.	Q4: What tones and formats do brands tend to adopt in RTM during unpredictable events, and how are these received by audiences, in terms of engagement?
O5: To assess the perceived benefits of RTM for brands in the Portuguese market.	Q5: What do brands see as the main advantages of engaging in RTM in the Portuguese context?
O6: To explore how RTM is perceived by brands in terms of strategic differentiation and boldness.	Q6: How do brands perceive RTM in the current digital landscape, as a bold, differentiating strategy, a standard practice, or something else?
O7: To explore how professionals expect RTM to evolve in the near future	Q7: How do marketing professionals anticipate that RTM will change in the near future, and what factors do they believe will shape its evolution?

Note. Elaborated by the author.

4.2. Research Methods and Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, exploratory approach, appropriate for investigating emerging practices and perceptions in contexts where theoretical foundations are still evolving (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019). Such an approach is particularly relevant in the context of digital and social media marketing, where practices often advance more rapidly than academic theory and where agility and adaptability are essential (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Instead of testing predefined hypotheses, the aim here is to generate rich, contextual insights into the motivations, challenges, and strategic reasoning underlying the use of Real-Time Marketing (RTM) during unplanned events, with a particular focus on the Portuguese market and the Instagram platform.

The research design is organized in two sequential phases of data collection:

- Phase I consists of a qualitative content analysis of RTM publications made by Portuguese brands on Instagram during the year 2024. The purpose of this phase is twofold: (1) to map and categorize RTM activity across brands and events, and (2) to identify recurring tones, engagement patterns, and brand behaviors that can inform the second phase of the study.
- Phase II involves a series of semi-structured interviews with professionals involved in the creation or management of RTM content. This phase aims to explore the reasoning behind the actions observed in Phase I, as well as to gain a deeper understanding of the strategic, creative, and organizational dynamics surrounding RTM in real-world contexts.

The decision to conduct the study in sequential order, starting with content analysis and followed by interviews, is methodologically grounded in the logic of sequential exploratory designs (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Morgan, 2014). The first phase generates an empirical foundation that supports the development of tailored interview questions, thereby ensuring context-specific and relevant conversations with brand representatives. This sequencing also facilitates informed sampling, since the identification of active brands and the classification of their communication styles in Phase I directly guide the selection of participants for Phase II (Saunders et al., 2019). More broadly, the design reflects the principle of progressive focusing, whereby early findings inform the refinement of subsequent inquiry, enhancing both depth and relevance in qualitative research (Parlett & Hamilton, 1976).

4.3. Phase I - Exploratory Content Analysis

4.3.1. Sampling

The sampling process for Phase I began with the identification of the most relevant unplanned events that occurred in Portugal throughout 2024. These events, such as breaking news, unexpected political developments, natural disasters, and viral phenomena, were selected based on their suddenness, wide media coverage, and significant presence in online discourse.

To build an initial list of such events, the researcher relied on a triangulated approach combining: (i) personal memory and daily media consumption, (ii) monitoring of professional LinkedIn pages such as *Marketing Tuga* (*Marketing Tuga, n.d.*), which regularly document and curate examples of brand reactions, and (iii) online news articles covering brand responses to specific events. This initial mapping was conducted in chronological order to preserve contextual accuracy and event evolution.

Once this preliminary event list was created, the researcher identified the brands mentioned in those sources as having reacted in real time. These brands were then individually investigated through a systematic review of their Instagram feeds, analyzing all their 2024 posts to identify additional instances of RTM that may not have been captured in the initial scan. This step not only validated previously identified events, but also uncovered new ones, further enriching the sample.

In addition to online sources, an informal consultation was conducted with eight peers from the researcher's close network, all of whom had academic or professional backgrounds in marketing and communication. This group included colleagues currently studying in the field, as well as early-career professionals working in communication and social media roles. They were asked to spontaneously recall brands they remembered reacting to unplanned events in 2024. These brand accounts were then reviewed using the same criteria to verify whether they had indeed published relevant RTM content.

In cases where the nature of a post was unclear, for example if the visual or caption alluded to a specific event without directly naming it, the researcher conducted reverse research (e.g., keyword searches such as “banana art November 2024”) to determine the event's context and confirm its unplanned nature.

To define the sample of brand posts to be analyzed, two main inclusion criteria were established:

- The brand must have published at least one Instagram post in direct reaction to an unplanned event that occurred in 2024.
- The post must have been published within a 48-hour window after the occurrence or peak of the event.

The decision to extend the timeframe to 48 hours reflects the nature of certain events that develop progressively, with key moments or updates sustaining public attention over one or two days. This broader window captures both immediate and near-immediate responses while maintaining the core principles of RTM: timeliness, contextual relevance, and agility in content creation.

Instagram was chosen as the sole platform for analysis due to its dominant position in Portugal, where over 80% of internet users aged 16-64 actively engage with it, reflecting its strategic relevance for brand communication (DataReportal, 2025b). Its global scale, with more than 2 billion monthly active users, further reinforces its suitability as the primary context for examining RTM practices (DataReportal, 2025a). Beyond its scale and penetration, Instagram has consolidated itself as the primary context for the study of real-time marketing (RTM), as it is the most frequently examined platform in both scientific articles (Mazerant et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2023) and academic dissertations (Duarte & Paulo, 2024; Sardinha, 2023). This dual prominence, as the leading social platform in Portugal and as the most researched environment for RTM, reinforces its suitability as the exclusive focus for the present analysis.

Following this multi-step, iterative sampling process, a total of 140 qualifying posts from 46 brands were identified and included in the analysis, representing a diverse range of brands, events, and creative approaches to RTM. In total, 32 unplanned events were documented, covering domains such as sports (e.g., Portugal's performance at Euro 2024), politics (e.g., the *Operação Influencer*), natural events (e.g., the 2024 earthquake), and viral cultural phenomena (e.g., the Pineapple at Mercadona Dating Trend). A detailed overview of the 32 events is presented in Appendix A, Table 4, which provides their categorization and a brief description to contextualize each case, ensuring that readers unfamiliar with specific episodes can clearly grasp the nature and scope of the events analyzed.

4.3.2. Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

To ensure the systematic collection and organization of data, a custom-built database was developed using Google Sheets. For each RTM case identified during the sampling process,

the following information was recorded: brand name, brand follower count on Instagram, date of publication, event reacted to, a direct hyperlink to the original Instagram post, post description, dominant and secondary tones of voice, main format, engagement metrics (likes, comments and shares), total engagement, and engagement rate (calculated as total engagement divided by follower base). This structure enabled both chronological and thematic tracking of brand responses and served as the primary foundation for subsequent content analysis.

In addition to storing the hyperlinks, the researcher created visual backups of each post through full-resolution screenshot captures, uploaded and organized in a secure Google Drive folder. Each file was clearly named using a standardized format (*Brand_Event_Date*) and cross-linked within the main database. For posts in video format, the original videos were downloaded and stored in the same cloud folder. This redundancy was implemented to safeguard against potential deletions or edits on Instagram, ensuring that all material referenced in the analysis remained accessible in its original form.

This structured and redundant approach to data collection was designed to ensure both reliability and contextual depth, enabling a robust foundation for qualitative content analysis.

It is important to note that both engagement metrics and follower counts were collected at a fixed point in time (May 2025) and applied retrospectively to all 2024 posts. While this may not perfectly capture fluctuations throughout the year, it ensured consistency and comparability across all cases.

For transparency and replicability, the full dataset of coded posts (140 entries across 46 brands and 32 events) is provided in Appendix B, Table 5.

4.3.3. Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis presented in this section was conducted on the dataset detailed in Appendix B, Table 5, using content analysis, a systematic and replicable method for interpreting communication content in social media (Fu et al., 2023). In particular, content analysis is widely used for examining social media posts to study communicative patterns and attitudes across (Durham, 2022). Moreover, the use of content analysis in this study aligns with recent methodological discussions that emphasize its suitability within mixed-methods designs, as it can be complemented by other qualitative techniques to provide a more comprehensive understanding (Castro et al., 2023).

Each variable was operationally defined and coded based on a predefined scheme to ensure consistency and replicability. In the case of the variable tone, the researcher introduced an additional distinction between a dominant tone (the most salient communicative style in each post) and secondary tones (implicit or complementary undertones when applicable). This decision was taken to ensure analytical clarity: allowing multiple primary tones per post would increase complexity and hinder comparability, particularly in relation to engagement metrics. By focusing the main analysis on the dominant tone, consistency was preserved for cross-post and cross-brand comparisons. At the same time, recording secondary tones enabled the researcher to capture additional nuances in communicative style, enriching the interpretation of how brands employ layered strategies in RTM. The full coding scheme, including definitions, subcategories, and their linkage to the research questions, is presented in Table 6, Appendix C.

It is important to note that not all engagement indicators provided by Instagram were available for analysis. At the time of data collection, saves were not publicly visible to the author, being restricted to account owners via Instagram Insights. Similarly, views were excluded from this study, as they are only displayed for video formats (e.g., Reels, feed videos) and not for static posts. To ensure consistency and comparability across all sampled content, the analysis focused exclusively on publicly available metrics (likes, comments and shares), which are uniformly accessible across both static and video formats.

The coding was performed manually, without the use of automated methods nuanced interpretation of humor, empathy, and contextual references, which automated tools cannot reliably capture (Saldaña, 2021). All coding decisions were documented in the database, and ambiguous cases were revisited and re-evaluated to ensure internal consistency.

4.4. Phase II - Semi-structured Interviews

4.4.1. Sampling

The sampling strategy for Phase II followed a purposive sampling approach (Patton, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019), grounded in the outcomes of Phase I. After identifying a set of brands in the Portuguese market that had engaged in Real-Time Marketing (RTM) in response to unplanned events during 2024, those same brands were considered potential candidates for participation in the semi-structured interviews. This approach ensured a coherent continuity between the two phases of data collection, allowing insights from the content analysis to inform and contextualize the interviews.

The inclusion criteria for the interview sample were as follows:

- The brand must have published at least one RTM post on Instagram during 2024 in direct response to an unplanned event.
- A representative of the brand, preferably someone involved in social media, communication, or marketing, had to be available and willing to participate in the interview.

While the final sample was determined by the availability and willingness of participants, the purposive selection ensured that all interviewees were directly engaged in the conception or execution of RTM, thus able to provide in-depth and experience-based insights. In addition to contacting brand representatives, the author also sought to include perspectives from creative agencies, either directly or through the brands they represented. However, these attempts were unsuccessful, given that responses were either not received, declined, or the brands themselves opted to answer, stating they could also speak to the agency's role in RTM.

In total, 36 brands were contacted, and 13 interviews were successfully conducted. While the final sample was determined by the availability and willingness of participants, the sample size is consistent with established qualitative research practice, where sample adequacy is determined by thematic saturation rather than statistical representativeness. For full transparency, Appendix D, Table 7 provides a detailed overview of all contacted brands, including the date and outcome of each approach. Prior studies indicate that saturation can often be achieved with a relatively small number of interviews (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Hennink et al., 2017), while other scholars argue that the sufficiency of qualitative samples depends on the richness and depth of the data collected rather than adherence to a fixed number (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). The summary of the interviews' sample, including interviewee roles and dates, is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Summary of interviews' sample

Brand Name	Interviewee's Position	Interviewee's Code Name	Interview Date
Staples	Marketing Director	Interviewee A	06.06.2025
JCA Eletrodomésticos	Communications Advisor	Interviewee B	20.06.2025
Uniairea	Founder	Interviewee C	20.06.2025

Brand Name	Interviewee's Position	Interviewee's Code Name	Interview Date
Vodafone	Social Media Manager	Interviewee D	25.06.2025
Sagres	Marketing Manager	Interviewee E	27.06.2025
Portugália	Marketing Director	Interviewee F	01.07.2025
Super Bock	Senior Brand Manager	Interviewee G	08.07.2025
Pingo Doce	Senior Digital Marketing Manager	Interviewee H	10.07.2025
Era Portugal	Marketing Director	Interviewee I	14.07.2025
Schweppes	Marketing Assistant and Brand Manager	Interviewee J	24.07.2025
MEO	Head of Digital Marketing	Interviewee K	30.07.2025
Lidl	Social Media Manager	Interviewee L	30.07.2025
Paladin	Brand Manager	Interviewee M*	11.08.2025

Note. Elaborated by the author.

* Besides the Brand Manager (Interviewee M), an intern was also present. However, the intern was not counted as an interviewee, since they did not actively participate in the meeting but was only observing in order to learn more about the topic.

For reporting purposes, each interviewee was assigned a letter code (Interviewee A-M), ordered chronologically by the date of the interview. This coding system was adopted to facilitate clarity in referencing quotations and to ensure a consistent structure across the analysis. While quotations are generally attributed using these codes, the brand name may occasionally be mentioned when analytically relevant, provided this does not compromise confidentiality.

The study aimed to encompass the widest possible range of sectors to capture diverse perspectives on RTM practices. The final sample encompassed a diverse cross-section of industries, including retail and consumer goods, food and beverages, telecommunications, education, and real estate. This variety allowed the study to capture different strategic approaches, organizational contexts, and attitudes toward RTM practices. The detailed distribution of sectors and corresponding brands is presented in Appendix E,

Table 8, providing a clearer view of the market segments represented in the research.

4.4.2. Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

The primary data collection method for Phase II consisted of semi-structured interviews, guided by a flexible interview script. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a middle ground between structured formats, which impose rigid control over questions and answers, and unstructured interviews, which are fully open-ended (Denscombe, 2017). This format was considered the most appropriate, as it balances consistency with flexibility, enabling the collection of comparable data while still allowing participants to elaborate freely on their experiences.

The script was designed in four parts:

1. an introductory segment to build rapport and clarify the participant's role⁸;
2. a core set of questions exploring general perceptions of RTM during unplanned events;
3. a personalized section with brand-specific prompts based on posts previously identified in Phase I, including a cluster of questions on the brand's communication tone and, when relevant, other brand-specific extra questions; and
4. a concluding section designed to capture final reflections or additional insights.

These four sections resulted in a total of 15 fixed questions (Q1-Q15), including the communication tone cluster, which were consistently asked across all interviews. In addition, extra brand-specific questions were occasionally introduced when relevant (e.g., QX1, QX2). This numbering system ensures clarity by distinguishing between the fixed script and the flexible, context-driven questions.

This modular structure allowed for consistency across interviews while also encouraging depth, reflexivity, and contextual nuance. The interview script was informed by both the literature review and the exploratory content analysis conducted in Phase I, ensuring that the questions were grounded in theory but also sensitive to the specific practices observed in the Portuguese context. The full script can be found in Appendix G, while the table mapping

⁸ In this introductory segment, participants were also presented with and asked to sign an informed consent form, which outlined the purpose of the dissertation, the scope of data collection (including their professional role and company name), and clarified confidentiality measures. Further details on the informed consent process are provided in Section

each question to its theoretical underpinning and corresponding research question is provided in Table 10, Appendix H.

The semi-structured format, widely recognized for balancing consistency and flexibility, enabled the adaptation of questions in real time, probing for clarification, and the exploration of emerging themes as conversations unfolded (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2021b). Nonetheless, this method has its own challenges, as questions may unintentionally bias responses, comparability across interviews may be reduced, and some information may remain undisclosed if participants choose not to elaborate (Driscoll, 2011; Goldenberg, 2004).

Although the script was designed for an approximate duration of 20 to 30 minutes, the actual length of the interviews varied considerably. This variation reflected the researcher's decision to give participants full freedom to elaborate on each question without interruption, and to add follow-up questions when relevant to the flow of conversation. As a result, interviews ranged from 18 to 50 minutes, with an average duration of approximately 33 minutes (see Appendix F, Table 9). This variation was not seen as a limitation but rather as an indicator of the richness of data provided by each participant.

Participants were contacted via LinkedIn, Instagram, Whatsapp (in cases of direct contacts existing) or through official email addresses found online. Whenever possible, in-person interviews were proposed, but all interviews were ultimately conducted online, as preferred by participants, and the platforms used were Google Meet and Microsoft Teams. This choice, while participant-driven, does not represent a methodological constraint. On the contrary, recent research has demonstrated that online interviews are equally effective for qualitative inquiry, since they offer advantages such as greater accessibility, reduced logistical barriers, and enhanced flexibility for participants across diverse professional contexts (Archibald et al., 2019; Dodds & Hess, 2020). Moreover, online interviews have been found to foster rapport and disclosure comparable to face-to-face settings, particularly when researchers adopt strategies to build trust and engagement (Gray et al., 2020). In this study, such strategies included a brief informal introduction at the start of each session, reassurance of anonymity and confidentiality, and the use of active listening cues to create a relaxed atmosphere that encouraged participants to share their perspectives freely. Attention was also paid to creating a neutral and comfortable setting, as well as ensuring that participants felt trust and confidence during the process (Goldenberg, 2004).

4.4.3. Data Analysis Procedures

All interviews were audio-recorded with the explicit consent of the participants, and confidentiality was assured in line with ethical research practices (see Section 4.5. Ethical Considerations). For analytical purposes, only organizational information directly relevant to the study was recorded, specifically the participant's role within the company and the name of the brand they represented, in line with the data-minimization principle in research ethics and data protection frameworks (Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council, 2016; The British Psychological Society, 2021b).

All interviews were transcribed in Portuguese, their original language, using the clean or intelligent verbatim approach (also referred to as the naturalized approach), as described by McMullin (2021). This method adapts spoken language to written norms by editing out false starts, smoothing grammar, and removing unnecessary repetitions or fillers, while retaining nonverbal cues (e.g., laughter, pauses, hesitations, tone) when they conveyed relevant meaning. The transcripts were then translated into English for analysis purposes. Such an approach increases the readability of transcripts and facilitates systematic qualitative analysis, while preserving fidelity to participants' accounts. For ethical and confidentiality reasons, as further explained in Section 4.5. Ethical Considerations, the complete transcripts are not included in this dissertation. Instead, summary tables of each interview, containing the questions asked, the key insights from each answer, and supporting quotes, are provided in Appendices I to U, which corresponds to Table 11 to Table 23.

The analysis was conducted using Thematic Analysis, a widely applied method in qualitative research for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012). In line with their six-phase framework, the researcher engaged in a process of familiarization with the transcripts, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and refining these themes, defining and naming them, and, finally, producing the written account. More recent methodological adaptations condense these stages into four steps: familiarization, coding, theme development, and refinement (Nowell et al., 2017; Kiger & Varpio, 2020), which also resonate with the procedures adopted here.

Consistent with Guerra (2006), the analysis was further understood as an iterative and reflexive process, in which reading, coding, and interpretation progressed in cycles, allowing themes to emerge progressively from the data. In practical terms, the coding process was managed through Excel spreadsheets, where excerpts were systematically categorized and

compared, in line with Guerra's (2006) recommendations for the systematic organization of qualitative interview data.

The resulting codebook, detailing the themes, their definitions, illustrative excerpts, and links to the research questions, is presented in Table 24, Appendix V. This structured yet adaptable approach to analysis ensured that the interviews generated rich, contextually grounded insights, while remaining focused on the core research objectives.

4.5. Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards for qualitative inquiry, emphasizing respect, voluntary participation, and data protection (Mantzorou, 2011; The British Psychological Society, 2021b; Mirza et al., 2023). Participants were treated with dignity and sensitivity throughout the process, avoiding any disempowering language and ensuring that the interview setting fostered openness and comfort (Mirza et al., 2023).

Informed consent was obtained in writing through a consent form sent in advance to all participants (see Appendix W). The form outlined the study's aims, procedures, and ethical safeguards regarding confidentiality, anonymity, and data protection, explicitly requesting authorization for the collection and secure storage of organizational information such as professional role and brand represented. This written consent was reinforced at the start of each interview with a verbal confirmation before recording began. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at any point without consequences. In line with ethical recommendations, no material incentives were offered, ensuring that participation was non-coerced and motivated only by genuine interest in the topic (Mirza et al., 2023).

Confidentiality and anonymity were rigorously protected. Each participant was assigned a code (Interviewee A-M), ordered chronologically by the date of the interview, to ensure clarity of reference while minimizing the risk of identification. Where analytically relevant, the brand name was mentioned, but personal identities remained confidential. In line with the principle of data minimization established in the General Data Protection Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council, 2016), only organizational information essential to the study was collected (i.e., the participant's role and the brand represented). No further personal identifiers, such as names, gender, or age, were included in the dataset.

All audio recordings, transcripts, and associated files were stored securely in a Google Drive folder accessible only to the researcher and the academic supervisor. This approach is consistent with best practices for secure handling and storage of sensitive data (Mirza et al., 2023).

In line with the ethical commitment made in the informed consent form, the full interview transcripts were kept confidential and accessible only to the researcher and the academic supervisor. They were securely stored and may be made available to the examination committee, for a limited period of time, upon request and under conditions of confidentiality. This decision reflects an explicit consideration of axiological and ethical issues in qualitative research, balancing the need for transparency with the obligation to safeguard participants' privacy (Saunders et al., 2019). The sensitivity of the data further reinforced this choice: participants were associated with identifiable brands and, throughout the interviews, shared reflections on brand strategies, internal decision-making processes, and in some cases even disclosed future projects. Such information is not suitable for public release, as it could compromise both participants and the organizations they represent. As highlighted by Kaiser (2009), publishing full and detailed transcripts entails the risk of excessive exposure of participants, raising dilemmas between transparency and confidentiality. To address this, the methodological choice was to retain the complete transcripts securely, while incorporating illustrative excerpts throughout the Results and Discussion chapters when necessary, and including a summary table of each interview with key insights from each answer and supporting quotes (Appendices I to U, Table 11 to Table 23).

Finally, the well-being of participants was prioritized over research aims. Interviews were conducted in a calm and private online environment, according to participants' preferences, and the researcher actively sought to create a respectful and comfortable atmosphere. Strategies included brief informal introductions at the beginning of sessions, reassurance of confidentiality, and active listening cues, which helped foster trust and encourage participants to share their perspectives freely (Gray et al., 2020). Participants were also informed that they could decline to answer any question they found uncomfortable.

Overall, the study was conducted in strict accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Ethics Committee of the Universidade Católica Portuguesa (UCP, 2023), ensuring that participants' rights, dignity, and autonomy were safeguarded at every stage (Mirza et al., 2023; The British Psychological Society, 2021a).

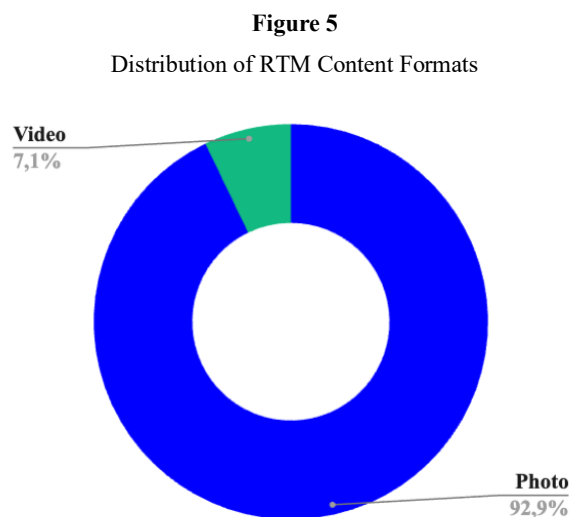
5. Results

5.1. Phase I

The data collected through the coding framework was subjected to a descriptive content analysis in order to identify patterns in the formats adopted, the tones of voice employed, and their relationship with engagement outcomes.

5.1.1. Formats Adopted

An initial examination of the dataset revealed a clear predominance of static formats. Out of the 140 RTM posts analyzed, 130 were photos or static carousels (92.9%), while only 10 were videos (7.1%) (see Figure 5). This imbalance indicates a strategic preference for static imagery, which is generally quicker and less resource-intensive to produce, thereby aligning with the immediacy required in real-time responses to unplanned events.

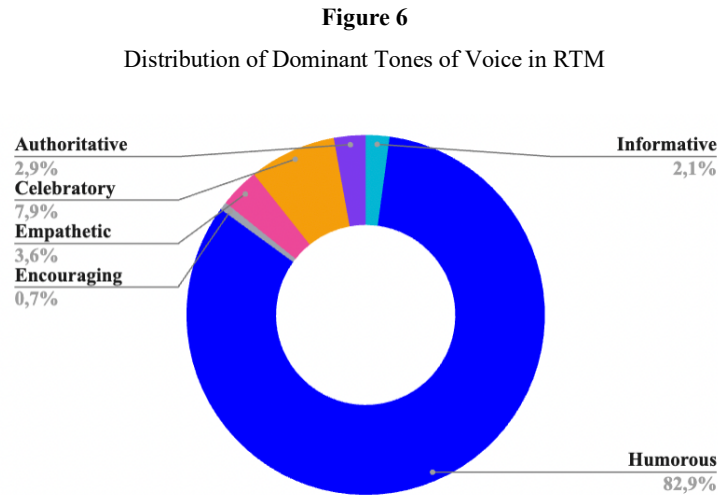


Note. Elaborated by the author based on data collected through the content analysis.

5.1.2. Dominant Tones of Voice

In terms of communication style, the analysis of dominant tones of voice showed a strong concentration in humor. Of the total posts, 82.9% were coded as primarily humorous, confirming its central role in RTM communication. The celebratory tone appeared as the second most frequent category, though with a considerably smaller share of 7.9%. Other tones, such as empathetic (3.6%), informative (2.1%), and authoritative (2.9%), were used only occasionally, suggesting that brands rarely rely on these approaches as the main framing of their creative strategies. The encouraging tone appeared in just one post (0.7%), meaning

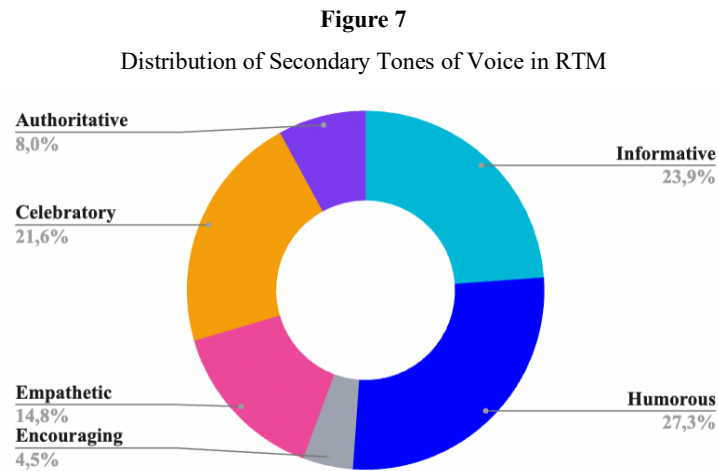
that it represents an isolated case within the dataset. This indicates that encouraging communication is not a relevant strategy in the RTM spectrum, and no substantive conclusions can be drawn about its effectiveness (see Figure 6).



Note. Elaborated by the author based on data collected through the content analysis

5.1.3. *Secondary Tones of Voice*

When secondary tones were considered, however, the distribution became much more balanced. Humor, while still the most frequent (27.3%), was often combined with other tones, particularly celebratory (21.6%) and informative (23.9%). Empathy also emerged more visibly in this layer (14.8%), indicating that although humor drives the dominant framing of most RTM content, brands frequently complement their messages with emotional or informative undertones that adapt to the specific context of each event (see Figure 7).

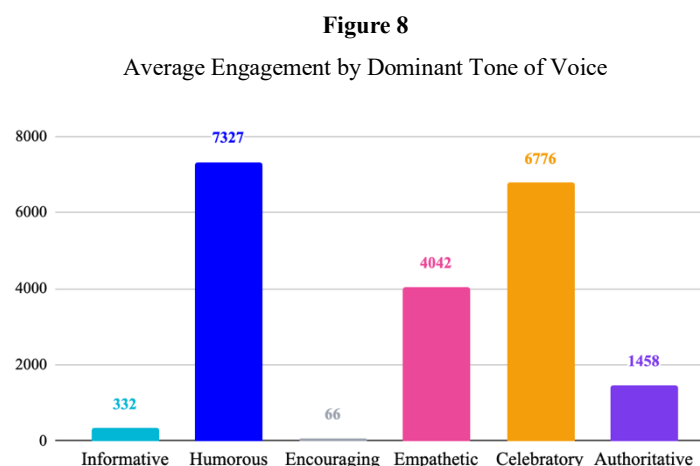


Note. Elaborated by the author based on data collected through the content analysis

5.1.4. Engagement Outcomes

The analysis of engagement metrics revealed further distinctions in audience response. Given the potential distortions caused by highly unequal follower bases across brands, a two-layered approach was applied: (i) absolute engagement, reflecting the overall volume of interactions generated, and (ii) engagement rate, reflecting the proportional effectiveness of each post relative to the brand's follower base. This twofold perspective ensured a more nuanced understanding of audience response.

When looking at raw engagement (average number of interactions per post), visible in Figure 8, humorous (7,327) and celebratory (6,776) tones were by far the most effective strategies, confirming that entertainment and shared joy tend to maximize interactions. Empathetic posts also performed relatively well (4,042), though they were very rare in the dataset. Informative (332), encouraging (66), and authoritative (1,458) tones showed much lower levels of interaction, suggesting that audiences are considerably less responsive to content that primarily aims to instruct or direct.

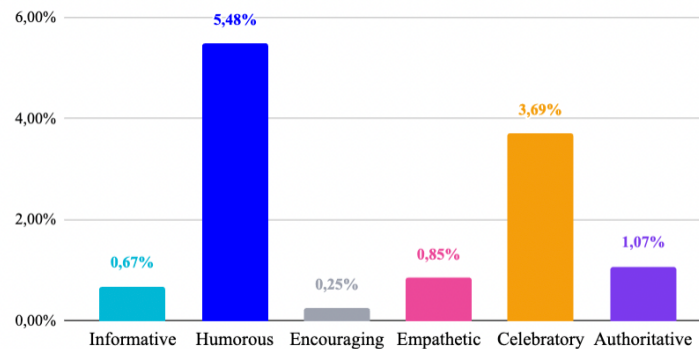


Note. Elaborated by the author based on data collected through the content analysis

However, while these averages of total engagement provide useful insights, they can be distorted by the varying follower bases of different brands. To refine the analysis, engagement rate was also calculated by normalizing interactions relative to the number of followers per brand. This additional measure reinforced the centrality of humor as the most effective strategy, as within this dataset humorous posts showed significantly higher engagement rates than any other tone (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

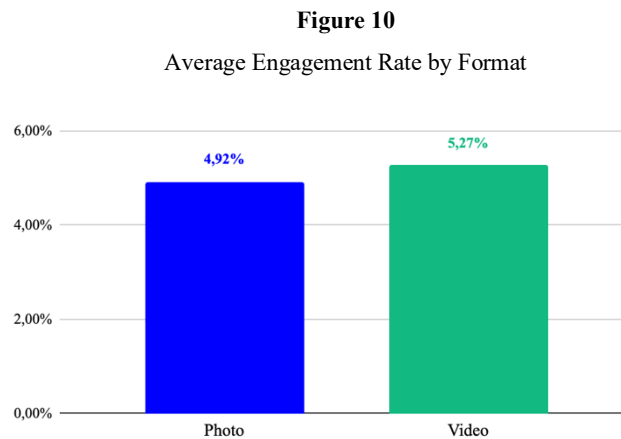
Average Engagement Rate by Dominant Tone of Voice



Note. Elaborated by the author based on data collected through the content analysis

Interestingly, the gap between humor and celebratory content widened in this perspective, confirming that humor not only dominates in frequency but also resonates more strongly relative to each brand's community size. At the same time, the recalibrated data further diminished the relative importance of the other tones, which, although visible in the averages of total engagement, proved far less impactful once brand follower bases were accounted for. This indicates that humor is not simply benefiting from a higher volume of posts, but genuinely represents the most efficient strategy for driving proportional audience response. Empathy remained marginal in practice, since only one brand used it as a dominant tone, making it impossible to derive solid conclusions about its relevance to RTM beyond the observation that it is not a commonly employed strategy.

A complementary comparison between formats was also conducted (see Figure 10). Results indicate that, on average, video posts generated slightly higher engagement rates (5.27%) than static formats (4.92%), suggesting that motion-based content may attract proportionally stronger responses from audiences. However, this finding must be interpreted with caution given the imbalance in the dataset: only 10 video posts were identified compared to 130 static posts. While the use of averages controls for differences in brand size, the small sample of video cases means that results are more vulnerable to distortion by individual outliers.



Note. Elaborated by the author based on data collected through the content analysis

Taken together, these findings demonstrate a clear hierarchy in both the adoption and effectiveness of tones of voice within RTM communications during unplanned events. Humor occupies a central and dominant role, while celebratory and empathetic tones emerge as important complements in specific contexts. At the same time, the overwhelming reliance on static formats underlines the importance of speed and simplicity in seizing fleeting opportunities for relevance, even if videos showed slightly higher average engagement rates in this dataset. Engagement outcomes confirm that the tones most frequently adopted, humor and celebration, are also those most strongly rewarded by audiences, while more informational or directive approaches show limited resonance.

5.1.5. Typology of Events

An additional layer of insight concerns the typology of unplanned events that prompted brand reactions. Although political controversies are frequent in the Portuguese media landscape, they appeared only occasionally in the dataset (e.g., the Operação Influencer, the legislative elections naming controversy, or the debate surrounding the government's new logo). This relative scarcity suggests that brands may strategically avoid highly divisive or ideologically charged topics, as these carry a higher reputational risk and are less likely to foster broad-based engagement.

By contrast, sports-related events represented a more recurrent trigger, though their focus was strongly national in scope. The majority of sports-related posts referred to Portugal's participation in international competitions, such as the national football team in Euro 2024 or Portuguese athletes in the Olympic Games. The only club-specific case identified was Sporting CP's national championship victory, which generated just two brand reactions in the sample. This stood out as an exception within a wider trend of privileging collective,

nationally unifying narratives. This suggests that brands tend to capitalize on shared pride and national identity rather than risk alienating audiences divided by club rivalries.

Despite 2024 being described as the year “(...) with more calamities and more frequent”⁹ (RTP, 2025), the only natural disaster event to which brands reacted was the earthquake in Portugal. Interestingly, while such situations would typically elicit more empathetic or informative tones, most brands chose to frame their response with humor, with only a few opting for more serious communication. This may be explained by the fact that, although the earthquake startled the population, it did not cause significant damage, creating a margin for playful interpretations without appearing insensitive. However, the majority of events analyzed fell into lighter, everyday categories, often revolving around cultural trends, viral phenomena, celebrity-related controversies, or humorous incidents (e.g., the Pineapple from Mercadona debate, the “very mindful, very demure” trend, or Sónia Tavares’ croquette controversy). These cases illustrate how brands predominantly engage with moments that are low in reputational risk, widely relatable, and conducive to humorous or playful framing.

5.2. Phase II

Building on these patterns, the interviews unpack the why and how behind them, tracing the motivations, selection filters, and organizational routines that guide RTM.

5.2.1. Motivations for RTM

Brands described a variety of motivations for engaging in real-time marketing (RTM), yet most accounts converged on the importance of proximity and relevance to consumers. Staples, for example, emphasized the role of RTM in positioning the brand as close to everyday life and attentive to social conversations (Interviewee A). For this interviewee, being attentive to cultural and social rhythms allows the brand to “actively participate in society, in people’s lives, and react to events in real time”¹⁰. In the same spirit of closeness, Paladin framed its RTM stance as being the attentive friend in the conversation, signalling a deliberately human, companionship-like posture (Interviewee M, Paladin). Humor and irreverence also emerged as strong drivers, with several interviewees noting that RTM makes brands appear younger, fresher, and more connected to audiences that otherwise avoid traditional advertising (Interviewee A, Staples; Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos;

⁹ Original texto in Portuguese: “O ano mais quente de sempre com mais calamidades e mais frequentes.”

¹⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) estarmos atentos ao que nos rodeia faz com que a marca participe ativamente na sociedade, na vida das pessoas e reaja aos eventos em real time, situando-se ao lado das pessoas.”

Interviewee C, Uniarea). This irreverent positioning was particularly valued as a way of reaching younger audiences and achieving virality. Uniarea's representative explained that, on one hand, RTM provides a channel for connection with youth, while, on the other, it serves as a gateway to going viral (Interviewee C, Uniarea).

Beyond tone, brands also understood RTM as a tool of reinvention, particularly for long-established companies that were not born in the digital era. For Staples, this was a way to refresh its positioning and gain visibility (Interviewee A, Staples). Similarly, both Super Bock and Sagres recognized that creative RTM could generate shareable moments, rivaling the impact of larger campaigns but at a fraction of the cost (Interviewee E, Sagres; Interviewee G, Super Bock). Era Portugal reinforced that fast and witty reactions have the power to drive significant spikes in engagement and sharing, underlining timeliness as an essential motivation (Interviewee I, Era Portugal). The golden rule, according to Lidl, was simple: be first or don't enter (Interviewee L). Reflecting the same time pressure, FOMO entered the picture, with Interviewee E, from Sagres, using Fear of Missing Out as their prime motivation to engage in RTM, and indicating that the brand sometimes reacts "just because [we] don't want not to do it"¹¹ (Interviewee E, Sagres).

5.2.2. Operational Routines and Selection Filters

At the operational level, several interviewees tied motivation to a constant readiness to pounce: in-house continuous monitoring, including nights and weekends (Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos; Interviewee K, MEO); agency-led scanning and rapid signalling of opportunities (Interviewee D, Vodafone; Interviewee G, Super Bock), in Vodafone's case, a small internal team and a young agency closely track platform trends (Interviewee D, Vodafone); and explicit pre-allocation of attention/time for RTM (Interviewee I, Era Portugal). Ideas were reported to originate both on the brand and the agency sides (Interviewee I, Era Portugal; Interviewee M, Paladin), or solely from the agency for the brand to approve (Interviewee J, Schweppes). In Paladin's case, X is often used to spot timely topics (Interviewee M, Paladin). Taken together, these accounts suggest that success hinges not only on monitoring but on cultivating culturally attentive teams prepared to act quickly (Interviewee I, Era Portugal).

¹¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Às vezes é um bocado FOMO fazer estes posts porque, é só porque, ah tipo, não quero não fazer, não é?"

Event selection criteria were consistent across brands, with timeliness emerging as the baseline requirement. “The topic must be current, relevant to people’s lives or the country, and exploitable from the brand’s perspective”,¹² explained Staples (Interviewee A, Staples). Interviewee A also noted that if a topic creates a promotional opportunity, it becomes even more salient (Interviewee A, Staples). Significance for Portuguese audiences was highlighted as particularly relevant for brands such as Sagres and Paladin, who often leaned into topics related to sports or national identity (Interviewee E, Sagres; Interviewee M, Paladin). At the same time, nearly every brand emphasized the need for a clear link to its territory. Vodafone pointed to music as its core space, Super Bock to friendship, Pingo Doce to food, and Era Portugal to home and living (Interviewee D, Vodafone; Interviewee G, Super Bock; Interviewee H, Pingo Doce; Interviewee I, Era Portugal). MEO added music, sports, and social-responsibility causes as brand territories (Interviewee K, MEO), and Paladin highlighted *Portugalidade* and wordplay (e.g., “*dar molho*”, “*pimenta na língua*”)¹³ as signature codes (Interviewee M, Paladin). This sense of ownability not only offered guidance but also operated as a protective filter, helping brands avoid entering spaces where their presence might appear forced.

The importance of shareability was also underscored, with Uniarea and Sagres recognizing that viral trends could justify engagement (Interviewee C, Uniarea; Interviewee E, Sagres). Interviewee B, at JCA Eletrodomésticos, also pointed to news-of-the-day dynamics as a selection cue. Nevertheless, as Vodafone’s interviewee reminded, sometimes “a good idea is always worth it”¹⁴, even if it does not perfectly align with strategy, so long as it is well reasoned (Interviewee D, Vodafone).

5.2.3. Exclusion Criteria and Guardrails

If inclusion criteria guided brand entry, exclusion criteria established red lines. No brand linkage was commonly a stop sign (Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos; Interviewee D, Vodafone). Polarizing topics, particularly politics, religion, and sports, were consistently avoided to protect a broad customer base (Interviewee A, Staples; Interviewee B, JCA

¹² Original quotation in Portuguese: “O tema deve ser atual, relevante para a vida das pessoas ou do país e explorável do ponto de vista da marca de alguma forma.”

¹³ *Portugalidade* refers to a sense of Portuguese cultural identity. The expression “*dar molho*” literally translates as “to give sauce” and is used colloquially both in its literal culinary sense and as slang for “to spice things up” or “make something more exciting”. “*Pimenta na língua*” (“pepper on the tongue”) is a playful idiom evoking the idea of adding flavour, sharpness or wit to a conversation. Paladin, as a food brand, uses these expressions to reinforce national identity through humour and wordplay.

¹⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) as boas ideias valem sempre a pena.”

Eletrodomésticos; Interviewee F, Portugalá). In Lidl's case, reality TV and overly populist subjects were also excluded (Interviewee L, Lidl). Super Bock added animal rights and juvenile issues to the negative filter (Interviewee G, Super Bock). Some brands stressed caution rather than outright prohibition: Uniarea, for instance, acknowledged that religion and politics were not automatically excluded, but required careful handling (Interviewee C, Uniarea). Across the board, the goal was to respect audiences' diversity and avoid accusations of opportunism. This was also why some brands avoided posthumous tributes or tragedies, unless addressed with extreme care (Interviewee G, Super Bock; Interviewee K, MEO). Vodafone further avoids natural disasters, given potential service impacts (Interviewee D, Vodafone), and Pingo Doce avoids joining themes where competitors hold stronger legitimacy (Interviewee H, Pingo Doce). Moreover, multiple interviewees warned against posting just to post (Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos; Interviewee C, Uniarea; Interviewee D, Vodafone).

Silence was sometimes considered more powerful than reaction. Pingo Doce openly admitted that in certain cases, refraining from posting outperformed joining the conversation (Interviewee H, Pingo Doce). Timing and rivalry also acted as exclusion triggers: if a competitor nailed it first or the hype had already peaked, teams often stood down (Interviewee D, Vodafone; Interviewee G, Super Bock; Interviewee H, Pingo Doce; Interviewee I, Era Portugal; Interviewee J, Schweppes; Interviewee L, Lidl; Interviewee M, Paladin). In short, while timeliness and relevance pulled brands toward RTM, respect for boundaries and brand territory often pushed them back.

5.2.4. Perceived Benefits and Outcomes

The perceived benefits of RTM were wide-ranging but clustered around engagement, visibility, and accessibility. Nearly all interviewees agreed that RTM consistently drives higher engagement than other content, often resulting in significant lifts in shares, comments, and organic reach (Interviewee D, Vodafone; Interviewee G, Super Bock; Interviewee K, MEO). Several also cited clear increases in shares/reach guiding subsequent paid amplification (Interviewee G, Super Bock). Lidl and Paladin associated RTM with follower growth (Interviewee L, Lidl; Interviewee M, Paladin), and Uniarea and Schweppes stressed access to new audiences (Interviewee C, Uniarea; Interviewee J, Schweppes). Interviewees from Pingo Doce and Schweppes noted talkability and buzz in dark-social spaces as relevant, albeit harder to track (Interviewee H, Pingo Doce; Interviewee J, Schweppes). Some brands also noted direct conversion effects, with Portugalá pointing to a concrete case where a real-

time collaboration with Uber Eats translated into a sales spike far above daily averages (Interviewee F, Portugália). Nevertheless, others, such as Schweppes, were more cautious, noting that sales impact is often difficult to trace (Interviewee J, Schweppes).

Engagement benefits were seen as particularly valuable for reaching younger audiences who avoid traditional media (Interviewee C, Uniarea; Interviewee G, Super Bock). For Lidl, RTM also worked as a low-cost tactic that leveled the playing field for smaller brands (Interviewee L, Lidl). Beyond measurable outcomes, brands described intangible advantages: positioning themselves as accessible and conversational (Interviewee A, Staples), becoming top of mind (Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos), and building relational bonds with audiences (Interviewee D, Vodafone). In some cases, RTM also served as ongoing creative training for teams (Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos) and as a gateway to recognition within the marketing community through awards and peer acknowledgment (Interviewee I, Era Portugal).

Still, not every brand was fully convinced. Sagres, for example, admitted that while RTM can at times be effective, planned activations often outperform spontaneous reactions (Interviewee E, Sagres). For this participant, the benefits were less about contextuality and more about content quality. In contrast, Pingo Doce observed that their RTM posts systematically overperformed compared to regular content, reinforcing the perception of strong value (Interviewee H, Pingo Doce).

Overall, the motivations, selection filters, and benefits articulated by the interviewees point to a practice that is both highly strategic and deeply embedded in day-to-day brand operations. Yet, these accounts also revealed tensions: between the rush to be first and the caution to avoid backlash, between hopes of virality and the need for brand coherence, and between the pursuit of engagement metrics and the difficulty of attributing direct sales.

5.2.5. Challenges of Execution

While the benefits were repeatedly stressed, interviewees also recognized a series of challenges inherent to RTM. Across accounts, the most pressing issue was timing. Participants from JCA Eletrodomésticos, Vodafone, Portugália, Super Bock, Pingo Doce, and Era Portugal all noted that acting quickly, while the topic is still fresh but not premature, is the defining difficulty (Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos; Interviewee D, Vodafone; Interviewee F, Portugália; Interviewee G, Super Bock; Interviewee H, Pingo Doce; Interviewee I, Era Portugal). For JCA Eletrodomésticos, a smaller brand, the strategy often

involved waiting for larger brands to react first, in order to assess audience readiness before intervening themselves (Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos). This illustrates a paradox: while speed is essential, a certain caution sometimes dictates a more calculated approach.

Beyond timing, organizational constraints surfaced as a recurrent theme. Crisis scenarios arising overnight or during weekends posed difficulties for brands that rely heavily on external agencies, since out-of-hours coordination is not always possible (Interviewee D, Vodafone). By contrast, in-house teams were considered more agile, and for instance, Interviewee J, from Schweppes, pointed to Lidl and Licor Beirão as benchmarks for reactivity, which, in their view, likely stems from having strong in-house resources (Interviewee J, Schweppes). Approvals also added complexity. In highly regulated categories such as alcoholic beverages, or when content touched upon sensitive themes, multiple approval layers, from corporate affairs to legal departments, could delay responses and ultimately render them irrelevant (Interviewee E, Sagres; Interviewee F, Portugália; Interviewee G, Super Bock). To overcome these bottlenecks, some brands resorted to informal mechanisms: Sagres described approving content through WhatsApp to circumvent bureaucracy (Interviewee E, Sagres), while Super Bock identified specific people responsible for providing rapid validation when needed (Interviewee G, Super Bock).

The role of creativity under time pressure was also emphasized. For MEO, the main challenge lay in maintaining a steady stream of creative quality under demanding timelines (Interviewee K, MEO). Lidl underscored the difficulty of being brave enough to pick the right topics while simultaneously managing approvals (Interviewee L, Lidl). Anticipating audience interpretations was considered equally vital, as missteps could quickly escalate into reputational risks (Interviewee C, Uniarea). Schweppes echoed this concern, warning against posting just to post and stressing that each decision required continuous assessment of fit and risk (Interviewee J, Schweppes).

Some brands highlighted solutions to these challenges. Portugália pointed to Control as a benchmark, noting that simple, templated production and likely in-house design facilitated agile responses (Interviewee F, Portugália). Similarly, Era Portugal described how strong creative guardrails and simplified approval chains, where multiple approvers were empowered to act swiftly, ensured timely content while safeguarding quality (Interviewee I, Era Portugal). Still, as Super Bock cautioned, RTM remained inherently high-risk, with even well-intentioned posts having the potential to spark crises (Interviewee G, Super Bock). For Pingo Doce, the challenge also involved reconciling conversational buzz with business

objectives: sometimes the topic that demanded attention was not the one aligned with the products meant to be promoted at that moment (Interviewee H, Pingo Doce).

Another challenge identified was the constant negotiation between external and internal resources. When relying on agencies managing multiple accounts, overnight approvals or quick adaptations became less feasible, limiting RTM's effectiveness (Interviewee J, Schweppes). On the other hand, smaller internal teams such as those at Staples or Uniarea described their size as an advantage, enabling faster decisions without excessive intermediaries (Interviewee A, Staples; Interviewee C, Uniarea).

5.2.6. Brand Coherence, Boldness and Pressure

This balance between speed and brand identity appeared as one of the central tensions in RTM practice. Most participants agreed that RTM must always align with brand DNA and values, even when reacting quickly (Interviewee A, Staples; Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos; Interviewee H, Pingo Doce). As Staples put it, "RTM codes must draw from the brand's DNA and values, with a touch of boldness and timeliness, without ever undermining that balance"¹⁵ (Interviewee A). If content felt off-territory or disconnected from brand coherence, it was considered better to avoid posting altogether (Interviewee E, Sagres; Interviewee G, Super Bock). Thus, selectivity, rather than sheer frequency, was seen as the safer path.

Vodafone and Lidl both underlined the importance of long-term relationships with creative agencies as a safeguard against going off-brand (Interviewee D, Vodafone; Interviewee L, Lidl). Uniarea, as an education brand, treated the balance as even more critical, given its need to preserve a minimum level of seriousness (Interviewee C, Uniarea). Failures to maintain coherence had concrete consequences: Schweppes recalled reacting quickly to the release of the film *Inside Out*, only to later delete the post for legal reasons after realizing they could not use the character's image (Interviewee J, Schweppes). For MEO, iterations on copy, visuals, and tone were often necessary before publishing, reflecting their struggle to combine fast reaction with brand fidelity (Interviewee K, MEO). Paladin, by contrast, emphasized the value of team discussions to ensure consistency of tone (Interviewee M, Paladin).

¹⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Os códigos de comunicação em RTM devem ir beber ao ADN do tom e valores da marca, com um toque de arrojo e atualidade, sem nunca colocar em causa esse equilíbrio."

From this tension arises the question of whether RTM is still bold or has become predictable. Interviewees provided divergent perspectives. While Staples recognized that RTM is bold in nature but increasingly common (Interviewee A, Staples), others, such as JCA Eletrodomésticos, Uniarea, Super Bock, and Lidl, argued that it has become expected due to the 24/7 nature of social media (Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos; Interviewee C, Uniarea; Interviewee G, Super Bock; Interviewee L, Lidl). Lidl's interviewee noted that RTM had shifted from surprise to conversation and that overuse risked diluting its magic (Interviewee L, Lidl). Uniarea added that, while once bold, RTM is now characterized by imitation and herd behavior (Interviewee C, Uniarea).

Other perspectives introduced nuance. Portugália admitted that although RTM has been somewhat banalized, its competitive environment has turned into a healthy race to be first, thereby retaining strategic value (Interviewee F, Portugália). Schweppes argued that pioneers were indeed bold, but today the practice had become predictable (Interviewee J, Schweppes). Still, some brands stressed authenticity as the decisive factor. Vodafone explained that without coherence, RTM becomes nothing (Interviewee D, Vodafone), while Sagres warned against brands with little ownability engaging in RTM merely to be noticed (Interviewee E, Sagres).

Marketers themselves might view RTM as banal, but consumers were said to continue valuing it when well executed, especially when humor and quality were present (Interviewee I, Era Portugal). Control was by far the most frequently cited reference point, named across interviews by Interviewee B (JCA Eletrodomésticos), Interviewee C (Uniarea), Interviewee D (Vodafone), Interviewee E (Sagres), Interviewee F (Portugália), Interviewee G (Super Bock), and Interviewee H (Pingo Doce), whereas other expected actors were mentioned more sporadically: Licor Beirão (Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos), Super Bock (Interviewee H, Pingo Doce), IKEA (Interviewee C, Uniarea; Interviewee I, Era Portugal), Pingo Doce (Interviewee G, Super Bock), and Lidl (Interviewee I, Era Portugal). As Pingo Doce summarized, "It would be strange if something happened today and in a few hours Control and Super Bock didn't say anything" (Interviewee H, Pingo Doce).

This interplay between boldness and expectation also shaped how interviewees described pressure to react. A first group stated they did not feel obliged to join every conversation, and that when they chose not to respond, the decision was deliberate (Interviewee A, Staples; Interviewee D, Vodafone).

A second group acknowledged that pressure exists and specified where it comes from. Audience demand and market buzz were common drivers (Interviewee L, Lidl; Interviewee G, Super Bock). Some linked pressure to commercial opportunity and potential sales (Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos; Interviewee F, Portugal). Uniarea pointed to dispersed audiences and declining organic reach as amplifiers (Interviewee C, Uniarea). Era Portugal added that pressure varies by positioning: youthful or friendly brands tend to feel it more, while institutional brands feel it less (Interviewee I, Era Portugal).

Even among those who recognized pressure, most emphasized management rather than submission. Pingo Doce withholds publication when a topic lacks business fit or value (Interviewee H, Pingo Doce). Super Bock highlighted that consistency provides the confidence to say no (Interviewee G, Super Bock). Paladin stressed selectivity and not entering just because others do (Interviewee M, Paladin). Sagres described dropping topics when they could not make them right in time (Interviewee E, Sagres). Lidl acknowledged audience/buzz pressure but chooses only relevant reactions (Interviewee L, Lidl). Portugal anchors decisions in a clear social strategy to avoid overreacting (Interviewee F, Portugal). And lastly, MEO noted a degree of positive pressure to appear attentive/bold while maintaining its line (Interviewee K, MEO).

Within this second group, only a few went as far as naming the feeling behind the pressure. Sagres openly described FOMO as part of the equation, noting that the brand sometimes reacts “just because [we] don’t want not to do it”¹⁶ (Interviewee E, Sagres).

Others took the opposite stance: Vodafone rejected FOMO as a driver, describing decisions as strategic and tactical rather than fear-driven (Interviewee D, Vodafone). Overall, most interviewees who discussed pressure did not label it as FOMO, instead they presented it as a background condition to be managed, not a motive that dictates action.

In sum, the accounts reveal an ecosystem where RTM is simultaneously bold and expected, desired and doubted, pressured yet optional. Brands constantly negotiate between urgency and strategy, with some giving in to FOMO while others consciously resist.

¹⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Às vezes é um bocado FOMO fazer estes posts porque, é só porque, ah tipo, não quero não fazer, não é?”

5.2.7. Tone, Format and Audience Reception

Tone emerged as a crucial dimension of RTM practice, with humor repeatedly emphasized as the most common and effective approach. Several brands described humor as a longstanding pillar of their communication, noting that it helps humanize the brand and create proximity with consumers (Interviewee A, Staples). For JCA Eletrodomésticos, humor even operated as a form of coping in sensitive moments, enabling audiences to accept messages more easily (Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos). Uniarea similarly highlighted that humor facilitated acceptance and broadened reach (Interviewee C, Uniarea). Taking the set as a whole, humor clearly stands out as the dominant and most comfortable tone for most brands when doing RTM, even if not every reaction must be a joke.

Still, humor was not treated as a free license and boundaries were carefully articulated. Staples insisted that humor should never appear as advertising and must remain light, inclusive, and guided by values such as respect and diversity (Interviewee A, Staples). Super Bock reinforced the importance of intelligent humor, accompanied by recognizable templates (e.g., product plus headline on a branded background), and warned against interpretations that could divide audiences (Interviewee G, Super Bock). Similarly, Pingo Doce and Sagres cautioned against humor in sensitive contexts, emphasizing the need to confirm gravity before making a joke (Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos; Interviewee E, Sagres; Interviewee H, Pingo Doce). As Super Bock explained, the limit was reached “when it could be misinterpreted by some segment of society”¹⁷ (Interviewee G, Super Bock).

Some brands admitted they were less comfortable with humor. For instance, MEO’s representative confessed that the company did not know how to be humorists and therefore preferred to use a sober or informational tone (Interviewee K, MEO). In this vein, Pingo Doce described situations where RTM was better served by an informational approach, for example when providing health tips during seasonal outbreaks (Interviewee H, Pingo Doce). Nevertheless, even for brands that embraced humor, the emphasis was on maintaining lightness, humanity, and inclusivity rather than forcing jokes. Lidl, for instance, stated that humor was its easiest and most consensual path, but stressed that it had to remain quick and unforced (Interviewee L, Lidl). Paladin adopted an informal and irreverent tone, positioning

¹⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “O limite que colocamos ao humor é quando sentimos que pode ser mal interpretado por alguma franja da sociedade (...).”

itself as a playful “person” whose wit was expected but not obligatory in every post (Interviewee M, Paladin).

Despite differences in tone, most brands reported overwhelmingly positive audience responses to RTM. Staples stated that consumers often asked for reactions when the brand stayed silent, demonstrating an expectation for RTM participation (Interviewee A, Staples). Across the sample, no significant backlash was recalled, with the notable exceptions of two isolated cases: Super Bock experienced criticism related to racism, while Era Portugal faced complaints of appropriation after a rugby-related post (Interviewee G, Super Bock; Interviewee I, Era Portugal). These episodes reinforced the importance of brand territory and careful sensitivity checks.

Telecommunications (telco) brands like Vodafone and MEO did, however, report that their RTM posts, like all their social content, inevitably attracted customer service complaints unrelated to the creative content itself (Interviewee D, Vodafone; Interviewee K, MEO). Even so, interviewees consistently described feedback as either positive or neutral, with no evidence of recurrent crises.

Preparedness for potential backlash nonetheless emerged as a non-negotiable aspect of RTM. Pingo Doce detailed its community management matrix, which included ceasing investment in content, issuing official explanations, or deleting and archiving posts when necessary (Interviewee H, Pingo Doce). Other brands also confirmed having crisis management processes in place (Interviewee A, Staples; Interviewee D, Vodafone; Interviewee G, Super Bock; Interviewee M, Paladin). Portugália summed up this stance by insisting that feedback should always guide future decisions (Interviewee F, Portugália).

5.2.8. Evolution and Future Perspectives

When reflecting on the evolution of RTM, interviewees pointed to a trajectory from experimentation to normalization, coupled with greater professionalism and caution. For Staples, RTM gradually became a strategic pillar of communication, leading to a more humanized and humorous tone (Interviewee A, Staples). JCA Eletrodomésticos also reported a shift toward more mediatic cases and high-profile events (Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos). Uniarea stressed that brands had become more careful and selective, given the heightened scrutiny of today’s environment (Interviewee C, Uniarea).

Paladin highlighted a refresh in visual identity, more humanized visuals, photography, and video, as part of its evolution (Interviewee M, Paladin). Super Bock described a move toward

faster, more professionalized operating models, enabled by agency monitoring, simple design templates, and rapid execution within two to three hours (Interviewee G, Super Bock). This evolution also included platform-specific adaptations, with TikTok raising both the pace and boldness of RTM (Interviewee G, Super Bock; Interviewee H, Pingo Doce; Interviewee I, Era Portugal). For MEO, the format evolution was evident in the shift from photos to videos (Interviewee K, MEO).

Several interviewees noted a trend toward intentional selectivity. Vodafone, Sagres, and Lidl all emphasized that RTM should not be pursued just because, but rather only when the brand could add genuine value (Interviewee D, Vodafone; Interviewee E, Sagres; Interviewee L, Lidl). Pingo Doce explained that by 2025 they had already reduced the frequency of RTM, focusing only on posts with clear value and expected outcomes (Interviewee H, Pingo Doce). Portugália likewise moved away from frequent RTM as part of a premium rebranding strategy, perceiving it as too noisy and trend-driven (Interviewee F, Portugália).

Interviewees also described shifts in competitive dynamics. Some noted that tit-for-tat interactions with competitors were now largely avoided (Interviewee E, Sagres). Others pointed to the expansion of RTM beyond social media into contextual digital out-of-home advertising, such as Super Bock's ability to display celebratory content on billboards shortly after Portugal's football victory (Interviewee G, Super Bock). Paladin mentioned that RTM reactions were no longer limited to posts but extended to joining conversations in threads and comments when relevant (Interviewee M, Paladin). Lidl also described a shift from only fun to a mix of fun and commercial, with greater tact around price or crisis sensitivities and pre-testing of jokes for potential offense (Interviewee L, Lidl).

For the future, brands predicted continuity rather than radical change. Staples foresaw RTM remaining integral, with greater emphasis on humanization, video, and potentially AI (Interviewee A, Staples). JCA Eletrodomésticos and Uniarea anticipated no drastic changes but expected RTM to remain embedded in brand strategies (Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos; Interviewee C, Uniarea). Vodafone envisioned heightened caution due to the polarized sociopolitical context, requiring more agnostic stances (Interviewee D, Vodafone). Schweppes emphasized a future of higher selectivity and quality over frequency (Interviewee J, Schweppes). Pingo Doce even suggested that the next stage might be brand-run entertainment beyond RTM itself (Interviewee H, Pingo Doce).

5.2.9. Synthesis

Overall, interviewees depicted RTM as a practice that has matured from novelty to routine. It has become more professionalized, selective, and cautious, yet continues to offer value when executed with creativity, authenticity, and alignment with brand identity. The trajectory suggests that while RTM may lose its aura of surprise, it is likely to remain an important element of brands' digital repertoires, evolving in form and tone as platforms and cultural contexts shift.

6. Discussion

6.1. Motivations for Brands' Engagement in RTM during Unpredictable Events

Across interviews, the most consistent driver behind RTM was proximity and social participation, a desire to be present where and when conversations unfold, in order to feel alongside people (Interviewee A, Staples) in their everyday life (Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos; Interviewee C, Uniarea). In practical terms, Interviewees described RTM as a way of showing up inside live cultural talk, that is, being part of the conversation that people are having and often getting to them before the nightly news cycle resets attention (Interviewee H, Pingo Doce), just like an attentive friend would do (Interviewee M, Paladin). This show up where attention already is logic is central in RTM theory (Kerns, 2014; Willemsen et al., 2018) and resonates with the broader literature on social listening and always-on responsiveness (Kalaigian et al., 2021; Saura, 2021). It can also be read in parallel with Uses and Gratifications theory (U&G) (Blumler & Katz, 1974), traditionally applied to explain consumer motivations. While U&G highlights how audiences actively seek participation in shared conversations, brands in this study appear to mirror this logic, strategically positioning themselves inside cultural talk as a way to foster connection and relevance.

A second cluster focused on brand positioning, especially humor and irreverence to signal youthfulness and cultural fluency (Interviewee A, Staples; Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos; Interviewee C, Uniarea). Actually, scholars highlight that brand positioning relies on points of differentiation, attributes that make a brand stand out from competitors in the marketplace (Kotler et al., 2015; Baynast et al., 2018). In the case of the interviewees, humor and irreverence were precisely framed as such differentiating attributes, signalling youthfulness and cultural fluency. This motivation also reflects what the literature suggests about the role of conversational and humorous tones in brand humanization,

positioning companies as closer, more relatable, and even cool to their audiences (Jeong et al., 2022; Barcelos et al., 2022). Moreover, for a long-established, non-digital-native brand like Staples, RTM was framed as a vehicle for reinvention (Interviewee A).

Visibility through timeliness was also identified as a motivation for brands to engage in RTM, since Interviewee C, from Uniares believes that this strategy is a way to gain visibility and virality and, along the same lines, engage in shareable moments (Interviewee E, Sagres). Borah et al.'s (2020) findings that timeliness and improvisation enhance virality further support these interviewees' beliefs. Moreover, the representative of the beer brand goes a step further and states that one strong creative RTM action can rival a big, expensive campaign in terms of visibility and success (Interviewee E, Sagres), an observation consistent with literature that describes RTM as a cost-effective strategy that can deliver significant impact with comparatively lower resource requirements (Sanchez Torres & Restrepo, 2015; Chae et al., 2025).

In line with the aspiration for virality, performance goals were also frequently highlighted. Engagement was the primary target, with RTM leading to higher shares and comments depending on how quickly the brand reacts (Interviewee I, Era Portugal). Interviewee F, from Portugália, also emphasized conversion as a motivation, noting that it can be achieved by strategically engaging in hot topics. This reflects the broader consensus that RTM is strongly linked to digital performance metrics, particularly engagement (De Veirman et al., 2017; Saura et al., 2020; Mavilinda et al., 2024).

Finally, pressure was also identified as a driver for RTM, although less frequently. Interviewee E, from Sagres, explicitly mentioned FOMO, bringing up the term right at the beginning of the interview, as at times the sole motivation for engaging in RTM. This reference already resonates with emerging literature that links RTM decisions to fear of missing out, describing how the urgency to be present in trending conversations can push brands toward reactive participation (Vila et al., 2016; Mendes, 2024; Almeida, 2024; Verma & Yadav, 2021). In a related vein, Interviewee L, from Lidl, emphasized the brand's internal rule of being first or not reacting at all. This principle, while framed by the interviewee as a strategic guideline, can also be understood as a response to competitive pressures inherent to the market dynamics, where timeliness is seen as crucial to avoid losing relevance (Borah et al., 2020; Willemsen et al., 2018; Mazerant et al., 2021; Chae et al., 2025).

Alongside these motivations, interviewees also reflected on how opportunities for RTM are generated and developed into concrete actions. A key element is an always-on posture, which

involves continuous monitoring of platforms and cultural conversations, even outside regular working hours such as nights and weekends (Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos; Interviewee K, MEO), mirroring the agility and social-listening capability the literature deems foundational to RTM's success (Kalaigian et al., 2021; Saura, 2021; Willemsen et al., 2018). In fact, Willemsen et al. (2018) argued that brands should act more like journalists or publishers: continuously monitoring social conversations, creating meaningful ad-hoc content, and preserving creativity under time pressure. This vigilance is often supported by a combination of internal brand teams and external agencies, frequently younger or more culturally plugged-in partners, whose attentiveness to cultural dynamics is seen as crucial to capturing and activating insights in real time (Interviewee D, Vodafone; Interviewee G, Super Bock; Interviewee I, Era Portugal). Interviewee I (Era Portugal) even emphasised that success depends on teams who deliberately pre-allocate time and attention to RTM and who actively consume culture and trends. Such practices align with guidance that effective RTM depends on pre-agreed processes and cross-functional teams (Mendes, 2024), and mirror the well-known real-time orchestration demonstrated seen in Oreo's Super Bowl case (Watercutter, 2013).

Within this process, the origin of ideas varied across organizations: in some cases, ideation was described as a collaborative effort between brand and agency (Interviewee I, Era Portugal; Interviewee M, Paladin), while in others the agency took the lead in proposing RTM content for brand approval (Interviewee J, Schweppes). This pattern reflects the broader dynamics identified in the literature, where agencies are not merely executors but active co-creators of value in social media strategies (Lone, 2021). At the same time, as Vejnovic, Purchase and Tarabashkina (2024) highlight, such partnerships can also be marked by tensions, since differences in priorities or perspectives shape how agencies and clients negotiate RTM decisions. This was particularly evident in the case of Era Portugal (Interviewee I), which is currently in the process of changing agencies due to a realignment of priorities, including a stronger emphasis on refining criteria for when it makes sense, or not, to react in real time.

X was also mentioned as a particularly useful tool for spotting timely topics that could be translated into RTM activations (Interviewee M, Paladin), in line with the platform's original purpose as key in moments of tension such as political events and natural disasters (O'Reilly & Milstein, 2011).

Extending from process to judgement, interviewees described not only the conditions that legitimise an RTM activation, but also the boundaries that prevent participation. A baseline criterion mentioned was timeliness: Interviewee A (Staples) emphasized that an activation is only considered legitimate if the topic is both current and culturally relevant, while also offering a clear angle that the brand can credibly exploit. As discussed earlier, timeliness is a recurrent criterion for RTM effectiveness, since activation depends on the topic being current and culturally relevant (Kerns, 2014; Borah et al., 2020; Willemsen et al., 2018; Saura, 2021). However, this same emphasis on speed also worked as a filter for abstention, since many brands stated they would step aside if a competitor reacted first or if the momentum had already peaked (Interviewees D, Vodafone; G, Super Bock; H, Pingo Doce; I, Era Portugal; J, Schweppes; L, Lidl; M, Paladin). This logic resonates with studies showing that time pressure may undermine appropriateness (Atal & Richey, 2020) and that late reactions risk negative reception or irrelevance (Ning et al., 2022).

Cultural and national salience was another frequently cited dimension. Portugal-related topics were generally seen as fertile ground for RTM activations (Interviewees A, Staples; E, Sagres; M, Paladin). For Sagres in particular, sports were considered a natural trigger for timely interventions, due to its importance in the Portuguese culture. Yet this same domain was framed very differently by many other brands, who identified football, specifically, as a red line due to the rivalries and polarising nature of the topic (Interviewees A, Staples; B, JCA Eletrodomésticos; D, Vodafone; G, Super Bock; H, Pingo Doce; J, Schweppes; L, Lidl). Taken together, these accounts indicate that the same cultural arena may function as both an opportunity and a constraint, reinforcing the idea that RTM effectiveness is mediated by brand positioning and strategic risk appetite, an interpretation consistent with research that highlights cultural alignment as a source of trust and relevance (Gonzalez, 2024; Saura, 2021; Kalaignanam et al., 2021) but also warns of reputational risks when engagement occurs in polarising contexts (Atal & Richey, 2020; Ning et al., 2022).

A more consistent pattern across almost all interviews was the requirement for a clear brand linkage or ownable angle. RTM was only considered legitimate if it could be anchored in the brand's established territory (Interviewees A, Staples; B, JCA; D, Vodafone; E, Sagres; F, Portugália; G, Super Bock; H, Pingo Doce; I, Era Portugal; J, Schweppes; K, MEO; L, Lidl; M, Paladin). This echoes foundational perspectives on positioning, which stress that differentiation relies on attributes strongly associated with the brand in the consumer's mind (Kotler et al., 2015; Baynast et al., 2018). Examples included Vodafone's association with

music, Super Bock with friendship, Pingo Doce with food, as Interviewee H explained, noting that they must be the first to speak on it, Era Portugal with home and living, MEO with music, sports and social responsibility, and Paladin with *Portugalidade* and playful word associations. From a brand personality perspective, such associations reflect the symbolic dimensions that anchor meaning and legitimacy (Aaker, 1997; Jun & Lee, 2024). In the context of RTM, this translates into the need to operate within the brand's established cultural and symbolic domains, since content that falls outside these territories risks being perceived as inauthentic or irrelevant (Gonzalez, 2024; Mazerant et al., 2021). Conversely, interviewees agreed that if no such brand linkage could be established, abstention was the only viable option (Interviewees B, JCA; D, Vodafone).

In agreement with what we observed previously in core motivations, spread potential and momentum were also described as important selection criteria, with brands drawn to widely shareable trends or dynamics that mimic the news-of-the-day logic (Interviewees C, Uniarea; E, Sagres; B, JCA). Yet, precisely because of this, several exclusion criteria were framed in terms of avoiding opportunism or polarization. Posthumous tributes (Interviewees G, Super Bock; K, MEO), natural disasters (Interviewee D, Vodafone), or conflicting partnerships (Interviewee A, Staples) were cited as contexts where abstention was necessary, alongside a broader set of polarising topics such as politics, religion, football and other socially controversial themes (Interviewees A, Staples; B, JCA Eletrodomésticos; D, Vodafone; E, Sagres; G, Super Bock; H, Pingo Doce; J, Schweppes; L, Lidl), as well as platform mismatches, since not all TikTok trends were deemed transferable to Instagram RTM (Interviewee E, Sagres). These red lines reflect concerns raised in the literature that RTM carries heightened reputational risks when brands intervene in polarising domains (Ning et al., 2022).

Strategic and commercial fit also emerged as a motivation. As we have observed, topics linked to the brand's core business or to socially relevant yet ownable themes were prioritized, but Interviewee A (Staples) noted that this relevance could be further amplified when a cultural moment could be leveraged as part of a promotional campaign, making these opportunities particularly valuable, since they allowed RTM to align visibility with immediate commercial objectives. This echoes Kallier (2017), who demonstrates that real-time campaigns offering immediate promotional benefits, such as personalized discounts, can directly influence consumer purchase behavior. Interviewee F (Portugália) similarly highlighted that RTM activations tied to promotional opportunities could even drive

conversion, reinforcing the commercial value of these practices. Such insights align with Kallier-Tar and Wiid's (2021) argument that brands approach RTM not only as a way of being present in cultural conversations, but also as part of the commercial and promotional mechanics of their campaigns. Moreover, as Santos et al. (2022) emphasize, engagement is maximized when there is brand-moment congruence, underscoring the commercial potential of RTM when cultural fit and promotional relevance intersect.

Finally, interviewees acknowledged that creativity and judgement sometimes override all other considerations. For some, a particularly strong idea could justify taking the risk, provided it was well reasoned and not entirely off-strategy (Interviewee D, Vodafone). Similarly, Interviewee I (Era Portugal) noted that higher-risk topics would only be considered if the idea was exceptional, citing IKEA's bookshelf campaign regarding *Operação Influencer* as a benchmark case. For others, silence was strategically preferable, as Interviewee H (Pingo Doce) suggested when emphasising that abstaining can at times be more powerful than joining the conversation. This strategic abstention reflects insights that hasty reactivity may undermine credibility (Verma & Yadav, 2021), while broader research in social media advertising suggests that although bold, risky campaigns can drive engagement and visibility, perceived risk factors such as authenticity, credibility and audience perception often mediate whether such risks pay off (Jabeen et al., 2024).

Answer to RQ1 - What drives brands to respond in real time to unpredictable events? What strategic, emotional, or contextual factors influence their decision?

Brands engage in RTM mainly to be present where conversations are happening now (proximity/social participation), to project or refresh positioning, especially through humor/irreverence and, for legacy brands, reinvention, and to capture short-lived attention peaks with timely, shareable reactions. Opportunities are created by always-on monitoring (brand plus agency efforts) and, in some cases, a be first or don't enter norm. Activation depends on three entry filters: timeliness; Portuguese/cultural salience; and a clearly ownable brand link, plus momentum/shareability cues and occasional promotional fit. Equally strong are no-entry guardrails: no brand linkage; polarizing or sensitive topics; platform mismatch; competitor pre-emption; or simply not having a good idea (where silence is preferred). A few acknowledge pressure/FOMO, but most frame RTM as a selective, strategic choice rather than a reflex.

6.2. *The Role of FOMO in RTM Decision-Making*

Only one interviewee named FOMO unprompted and acknowledged that it can sometimes push the brand to post “just because [we] don’t want not to do it”¹⁸ (Interviewee E, Sagres). Most others described pressure to react without using the term. They pointed to audience prompts (“people ask (...) why we didn’t react”¹⁹; Interviewee G, Super Bock), peer comparison with the usual suspects of RTM, and time-boxed attention spikes that make being late feel equivalent to being absent (Interviewees B, JCA; C, Uniarea; F, Portugal; G, Super Bock; H, Pingo Doce; J, Schweppes; L, Lidl; M, Paladin). This avoidance of the FOMO label can, thus, be interpreted in two different ways.

The first interpretation is that professionals may avoid using the term even when the dynamics are present. Literature shows that adults often downplay or reframe FOMO, since it is associated with childishness or with threats to professional autonomy and competence (Littman-Ovadia & Russo-Netzer, 2024; Zylinski & Davis, 2022). Some interviewees even framed pressure as healthy if managed (Interviewees G, Super Bock; H, Pingo Doce), while others highlighted award-seeking and visibility motives inside organizations (Interviewee I, Era Portugal; Interviewee L, Lidl). In occupational contexts, acknowledging FOMO conflicts with norms of strategic rationality and impression management (Dogan, 2019; Goldman et al., 2025). A minority rejected the idea outright, with Vodafone insisting decisions are tactical, not automatic, and Staples echoing that non-reaction is deliberate and justified (Interviewees D and A). In this reading, the interviews illustrate in the brand context the same pattern described in psychological and occupational studies: FOMO-like forces are present, but systematically euphemized (Littman-Ovadia & Russo-Netzer, 2024; Zylinski & Davis, 2022; Dogan, 2019; Goldman et al., 2025).

An alternative interpretation is that the pressure described may not actually be FOMO, but another manifestation of the broader need for belonging. Literature conceptualises FOMO as one form of manifestation of belongingness in the digital age (Mathes, 1981; Reer et al., 2019), which implies that other forms may exist. Earlier in the discussion (chapter 6.1. Motivations for Brands’ Engagement in RTM during Unpredictable Events), several interviewees identified social participation as a core motivation for engaging in RTM

¹⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Às vezes é um bocado FOMO fazer estes posts porque, é só porque, ah tipo, não quero não fazer, não é?”

¹⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Obviamente que também tivemos situações assim, em que as pessoas perguntam olha está aqui isto, porque é não fazemos nada?”

(Interviewees A, Staples; B, JCA Eletrodomésticos; C, Uniarea; H, Pingo Doce; M, Paladin), while only one explicitly mentioned FOMO (Interviewee E, Sagres). This asymmetry suggests that the underlying motivation behind the pressure may not be “I am afraid to be left out” but rather “I want to be a part of it”. In this sense, pressure may reflect a drive for positive engagement (belongingness-seeking) rather than fear-driven avoidance of exclusion.

The ambiguity of these interpretations becomes clearer when looking at the triggers identified by interviewees. Interviewee accounts converge on three classic FOMO or pressure triggers. First, temporal urgency, the now or never nature of attention spikes, was mentioned as a source of stress when posts risk becoming late and irrelevant (Interviewees E, Sagres; G, Super Bock; B, JCA; C, Uniarea). Second, social comparison emerged when brands evaluated their reactions against reference players. Interviewees repeatedly pointed to a small set of usual suspects of RTM, especially Control, which was mentioned across multiple organisations (Interviewees B, JCA; C, Uniarea; D, Vodafone; E, Sagres; F, Control; G, Super Bock; H, Pingo Doce). Other actors like Licor Beirão, IKEA, Super Bock, Pingo Doce and Lidl were also cited as benchmarks whose actions set expectations for the category. This mirrors individual-level social comparison on social media: people benchmark themselves against curated exemplars (Fardouly et al., 2017; Kotsonis & Dunne, 2024; Verduyn et al., 2020). In the same way, brands also engage in social comparison, as illustrated by interviewees (e.g. Interviewee F, Portugália) who explicitly evaluated their RTM practices against competitors such as Control. Third, audience surveillance and expectations were described as pressure, with people explicitly tagging or questioning why a brand had not reacted (Interviewees G, Super Bock; L, Lidl). These three drivers resonate with the FOMO mechanisms identified in the literature, temporal urgency, social comparison and surveillance, as documented by Przybylski et al. (2013) and Vanden Abeele (2021), and are intensified by the always-on, algorithmically amplified environment (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; Dijck et al., 2018; Bhandari & Bimo, 2022), which could explain why pressure is perceived bigger for brands whose positioning is youthful or RTM-oriented, such as Control and Super Bock, while more institutional brands are believed to feel it less (Interviewee I, Era Portugal). Pressure also rises with sales potential (Interviewee B, JCA) and declining organic reach (Interviewee C, Uniarea), conditions that echo broader accounts of performance pressures in social media marketing, where silence is often perceived as costly (De Veirman et al., 2017; Saura, 2020). Yet how these triggers are interpreted differs: while

one reading emphasises fear of exclusion, the prevalence of social participation as a declared motivator points instead to belongingness-seeking as the deeper mechanism.

Even where pressure was acknowledged, teams described guardrails that turn it into strategy. Rules such as Lidl's be first or don't enter (Interviewee L) together with a norm repeatedly mentioned across interviews, that once a competitor nails it or the peak passes, the best option is to stand down (Interviewees D, Vodafone; G, Super Bock; H, Pingo Doce; I, Era Portugal; J, Schweppes; L, Lidl; M, Paladin) recast urgency as an explicit no-go condition. Brand-territory filters (outlined in section 6.1., regarding selection and exclusion criteria) and the red lines discussed earlier (politics, religion, football, tragedies, etc.) play a similar role, setting boundaries that ensure ownability and prevent opportunism. Interviewees also stressed that quality must prevail over quantity, reiterating principles such as not posting just to post (Uniarea) or privileging quality over FOMO (Interviewee M, Paladin; also mentioned by Interviewees G, Super Bock; H, Pingo Doce). These practices echo cautions in the literature that speed may erode originality and clarity and increase misinterpretation risk when brands chase trends for their own sake (Vila, Bharadwaj & Chae, 2016; Mazerant et al., 2020; Verma & Yadav, 2021). In industry discourse, this slippage is articulated by João Carvalho Oliveira (Almeida, 2024) as Fear of (Missing) Marketing Out, a managerial anxiety to be everywhere that fuels performative one-upmanship rather than value (Mendes, 2024). It is telling that this definition itself is framed around the impulse to be everywhere rather than the fear of being left out, echoing the belongingness-oriented reading discussed above. Taken together, the interviews suggest that the filters, red lines and drop rules work precisely as safeguards to resist drifting into reactive pressure, whether framed as FOMO or as belongingness-seeking. It is also worth recalling what was discussed earlier regarding opportunity generation (section 6.1): teams with pre-agreed processes and cross-functional structures were shown to be better equipped to handle RTM decisions (Mendes, 2024; Kalaighnam et al., 2021; Saura, 2021; Willemsen et al., 2018). A similar logic may apply here, since those same organisational arrangements underpin the ability to transform pressure into strategy through clear guardrails and red lines.

Interviews repeatedly distinguished vigilance (constant monitoring, readiness and speed) from compulsion (posting simply because others did). Even brands that acknowledged pressure emphasised selectivity and frequent no-go calls (Interviewees E, Sagres; G, Super Bock; H, Pingo Doce; L, Lidl; M, Paladin). This distinction resonates with an alternative reading in the literature: what may appear as FOMO can also be interpreted as a rational

response to scarcity and timing in the attention economy, reflecting managerial agility rather than psychological weakness (Willemsen et al., 2018; Kalaighnam et al., 2021; Saura, 2021). Sagres' testimony is particularly revealing: while FOMO can tip close calls under conditions of tight timing and high visibility, the team still drops a topic if they cannot "make it right" within hours. In other words, FOMO is present, but it operates more as a situational amplifier than as a standing motive.

The literature further distinguishes between Personal FOMO and Public FOMO (Zhang et al., 2020). While the first concerns anxiety over missing personally meaningful experiences, the second refers to concerns about not being part of collective activities or conversations. In the brand context, interviewee accounts resonate more closely with this public dimension: what appears as pressure often reflects the worry of being absent from shared cultural talk. This reinforces the belongingness-seeking interpretation proposed earlier, as brands are less driven by an inward fear of exclusion and more by the outward need to remain part of collective, visible conversations.

Putting the pieces together, the interviews suggest a moderated-pressure model. Triggers (attention spikes, peer salience, audience prompts) create pressure that resembles FOMO on the surface, while moderators (brand positioning, institutional vs. youthful tone, revenue opportunity, reach dynamics) shape its intensity. Mediators (territory filters, red lines, drop rules, creative/approval processes), on the other hand, convert pressure into either action or abstention. However, given that most interviewees foregrounded social participation as a motivator and only one explicitly named FOMO, the pressures observed may be better understood as manifestations of a belongingness drive. Thus, while FOMO can operate as a contextual amplifier in rare cases, belongingness-seeking, the desire to be part of shared cultural talk, appears to be the more consistent underlying mechanism.

Answer to RQ2 - Are brands engaging in RTM because they want to, or because they feel they must, out of fear of missing out?

Based on this sample, we cannot conclude that FOMO is a primary driver of RTM. We do find a generalized pressure to react that superficially resembles FOMO in its triggers and social dynamics. One interpretation is that professionals avoid using the term due to impression-management concerns. Yet the interview data more strongly support an alternative explanation: that what underlies these pressures is not fear of exclusion, but belongingness-seeking. Social participation emerged repeatedly as a declared motivation,

while FOMO was explicitly named only once. Consequently, decisions appear more strategic than fear-driven in most cases, with brands entering RTM less to avoid being left out and more to fulfil the positive drive to be part of cultural conversations.

6.3. Challenges of Executing RTM under Time Pressure

Across interviews, timing emerged as the central constraint: brands must act quickly enough to remain relevant, yet not so quickly that judgment, fit, or legality are compromised (Interviewees B, JCA Eletrodomésticos; D, Vodafone; F, Portugal; G, Super Bock; H, Pingo Doce; I, Era Portugal). This tension reproduces what can be called speed window problem already highlighted in Chapter 6.1 on entry criteria, where timeliness was simultaneously described as a trigger for activation and as a filter for abstention (Kerns, 2014; Willemsen et al., 2018; Borah et al., 2020).

Teams illustrated this paradox vividly, with JCA (Interviewee B) admitting that the brand sometimes waits for larger players to react first, treating others' moves as a signal of audience readiness. This selective timing can be seen as a form of strategic agility under pressure, since by monitoring competitor actions before acting, the brand effectively manages the tension between speed and fit, a pattern consistent with a forward-looking perspective on RTM, highlighting how publisher-like agility can boost performance and virality (Willemsen et al., 2018). On the contrary, and more broadly, interviewees described a shared norm of standing down once a competitor had nailed it or once the hype had passed (Interviewees D, Vodafone; G, Super Bock; H, Pingo Doce; I, Era Portugal; J, Schweppes; L, Lidl; M, Paladin). In this sense, Pingo Doce (H) added that silence can outperform a late or ill-fitting entry, a position justified by literature showing that late or misaligned entries risk irrelevance or reputational costs (Atal & Richey, 2020; Ning et al., 2022). In line with this perspective, literature also highlights that accelerated timelines can erode originality and clarity, particularly under improvisation, emphasizing the strategic challenge of calibrating speed with judgment (Mazerant et al., 2021; Chae et al., 2025; Vila, Bharadwaj & Chae, 2016; Verma & Yadav, 2021).

By linking these insights back to the speed window that emerged from the literature, it becomes clear that navigating the tension between being first and being right is a strategic challenge rather than an instinctive choice, in which brands must continuously calibrate their timing to optimize both relevance and appropriateness.

Execution under time pressure also dictated how teams were structured and resourced. Vodafone (Interviewee D) noted that overnight or weekend crises were particularly difficult to cover when agencies carried the operational load, since out-of-hours coordination slowed reaction. By contrast, Schweppes (Interviewee J) pointed to Lidl and Licor Beirão as benchmarks of reactivity, largely because of their strong in-house teams. Across the dataset, proximity was consistently framed as enabling agility, while reliance on agencies introduced lag: a pattern that resonates with literature emphasising that agility depends not only on talent but also on organisational closeness and process design (Kalaighnam et al., 2021; Mendes, 2024).

This organisational divide echoes the always-on posture discussed in Chapter 6.1., where opportunity generation was shown to rely on teams (often younger or culturally plugged-in) who pre-allocate time to monitoring and can act outside normal working hours (Interviewees B, JCA Eletrodomésticos; K, MEO; I, Era Portugal). The same infrastructures that enabled vigilance at the motivational stage re-emerge here as decisive in execution, with pre-agreed authority matrices, cross-functional teams and streamlined approvals reducing variance in speed (Kalaighnam et al., 2021).

Importantly, these findings complicate the common claim that RTM is inherently cost-effective (Sanchez Torres & Restrepo, 2015). While brands may save on traditional media spending, these savings are often offset by investments in organisational readiness, from staffing models and duplicated creative capacity to on-call approval systems that sustain agility. In other words, RTM requires hidden costs that are less visible in financial reports but decisive in practice. Rather than inspiration in the moment, RTM capability emerges as a function of pre-invested resources and structural design, in line with both the selection and motivational criteria discussed in Chapters 6.1. and 6.2., and consistent with recent scholarship on structural enablers of marketing agility (Kalaighnam et al., 2021; Mendes, 2024).

More than simply executing RTM under time pressure, a second layer of difficulty concerned the ability to sustain creative quality under compressed timelines. MEO (Interviewee K) framed the central challenge as keeping content fresh and original while racing the clock, and Lidl (Interviewee L) emphasised the difficulty of being brave in topic selection while simultaneously managing approval bottlenecks. Uniarea (Interviewee C) warned of interpretive fragility, noting that humour or wordplay can easily be misread when

crafted under pressure. Schweppes (Interviewee J) was explicit: posting just to post is counterproductive, underscoring the need for continuous fit/risk assessment.

These concerns resonate with experimental findings that improvisation under time pressure often sacrifices originality and clarity, even when it boosts short-term attention (Mazerant et al., 2021; Chae et al., 2025). Whereas previously in this section these dynamics were discussed in relation to speed, here they appear as a challenge of sustaining creative quality. They also complicate the advice to be more responsive emphasised elsewhere in the RTM literature (Willemssen et al., 2018), a tension already visible in Chapter 6.2, where interviewees described pressure as present but often channelled into selective restraint rather than reactive FOMO.

At the same time, brand coherence was treated as non-negotiable. Despite the challenges, teams repeatedly stressed that RTM activations must remain anchored in brand DNA and values (Interviewees A, Staples; B, JCA; H, Pingo Doce), abstaining when a topic felt off-territory (Interviewees E, Sagres; G, Super Bock). This is consistent with Mendes' (2024) observation that identifying the moment is only the starting point, and that the real challenge is interpreting its emotional impact and turning it into a message that both reflects the brand's DNA and connects meaningfully with audiences. The Schweppes "Inside Out" incident, where a rapid post was later deleted due to intellectual property (IP) concerns, illustrates how speed can undermine both authenticity and factual accuracy. This brings back a point made in Chapter 6.1: brand congruence is not merely desirable but the ultimate safeguard under real-time conditions, the main mechanism of risk control (Fournier & Eckhardt, 2018; Deng et al., 2024).

Format and tone choices intersect closely with these challenges. Phase I results showed that the overwhelming majority of RTM posts relied on static formats such as photos or carousels, and humour was by far the dominant tone. Interviewees reinforced these findings: Lidl (Interviewee L) and Schweppes (Interviewee J) explained that static formats were easier to produce and approve under pressure, while Pingo Doce (Interviewee H) and Uniarea (Interviewee C) described humour as the default social currency in low-stakes cultural talk. Yet, as already highlighted in Chapter 6.2, humour under time pressure sits on a knife edge: without clear red lines and guardrails, the risk of misinterpretation escalates (Warren & McGraw, 2016; Atal & Richey, 2020). This is why the same drop rules and red lines described earlier, politics, religion, tragedies, or competitor pre-emption, reappear here as essential coping strategies that allow teams to balance speed with creative integrity.

Interviewees also stressed that even when execution was possible without the already discussed challenges, it was still not always desirable. Pingo Doce (Interviewee H) highlighted a commercial twist, in which the trending cultural moment is not necessarily the one that best serves current product or promotional priorities. This reframes the question from “Can we post in time?” to “Should we post right now, given business fit?”, a concern that brings back the commercial dimension already noted in Chapter 6.1, where interviewees emphasised the value of aligning RTM with promotional opportunities rather than treating it as pure cultural play. The risk here echoes literature that warns against superficial, visibility-driven reactions that lack deeper strategic alignment (Verma & Yadav, 2021).

Within the scope of these challenges, interviewees also highlighted aftercare as a critical difficulty. Several brands described community-management matrices and crisis playbooks (Interviewees A, Staples; D, Vodafone; G, Super Bock; H, Pingo Doce; M, Paladin). Given algorithmic volatility, where organic reach is unpredictable (Krasylnykova et al., 2024), the pressure to post quickly is amplified, but so too is the need to monitor, moderate, and respond once a post is live. This emphasis resonates with practitioner guidance that minutes matter when dealing with potential backlash or misinterpretation (Singh et al., 2023; Celestin & Sujatha, 2024). As already discussed in Chapter 6.2, pressure in RTM is not only about the decision to act, but also about sustaining vigilance afterwards. Aftercare is therefore an integral part of real-time risk management, completing the cycle from detection to execution and monitoring.

Answer to RQ3 - What difficulties do brands encounter when reacting quickly to unplanned events, particularly regarding creativity, authenticity, and timing?

In this study, brands face a compound challenge set: timing, hitting a narrow relevance window without sacrificing judgment; organisational frictions, including overnight coverage, agency dependencies, and approval drag; creative quality under pressure, maintaining originality, clarity, and contextual sensitivity; authenticity and brand coherence, staying within territory, DNA, values, and IP boundaries; format and tonal risk, with fast, static, humorous executions that can backfire if the benign boundary is misjudged; and business fit, reconciling cultural momentum with current commercial priorities. Teams mitigated these difficulties through in-house proximity, pre-agreed fast lanes, templated systems, clear red lines, and authority to abstain. The net result is a practice where speed is

necessary but not sufficient, with governance and guardrails emerging as decisive enablers of timely, creative, and authentic RTM.

6.4. Tone and Format in RTM Communications: Patterns, Engagement, and Audience Reception

Building on the previous chapter, where tone and format already appeared as critical constraints under time pressure, this section explores how these elements operate not only as challenges but also as strategic levers in RTM execution. What emerges is a clear set of patterns in how brands choose formats and tones, how audiences respond, and how these choices are ultimately anchored in brand territory.

As noted in the previous section, static formats were used in the overwhelming majority of posts in the dataset (because they are faster to produce, route and approve). Beyond these reasons, interviewees added that this choice is also about the ability to fit easily into pre-defined template systems. Interviewee G (Super Bock) highlighted the usefulness of the brand's recognizable RTM layouts (product plus headline on branded background), while Interviewee I (Era Portugal) underlined the visual guardrails that help ensure consistency and speed up internal validations. This operational logic aligns with Kerns (2014) and Lieb et al. (2013): in unplanned/opportunistic RTM, production and approval friction is a first-order constraint, and it also harmonizes with Chae et al. (2025), who show improvised messages gain from simplicity/clarity, and the static formats might help preserve comprehensibility when time compresses. At the same time, the results showed that video posts achieved slightly higher average engagement rates compared to photos, suggesting that richer formats can in fact resonate more strongly with audiences. Yet this advantage was not sufficient to offset the operational hurdles of video production under time pressure, explaining why static content remains dominant despite its comparatively lower engagement potential. However, this pattern complicates wider social-media claims that video wins by default, as regularly emphasized in platform reports (DataReportal, 2025a; Vogels et al., 2022) and in studies that highlight video's engagement advantages (Tafesse & Wien, 2018; Lou & Yuan, 2019). In the RTM context examined here, speed-to-publish and organizational feasibility outweighed any theoretical lift from motion, suggesting that within the narrow now or never RTM window, time-to-market prevails over production richness.

Tone choices follow a similar logic of pragmatism. Humor dominated the dataset and was described by interviewees as the most comfortable social currency for everyday, low-stakes

cultural talk (Interviewee A, Staples; Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos; Interviewee C, Uniarea; Interviewee L, Lidl), which goes along with literature linking humor to sharing and affinity in RTM (Yeo et al., 2021; Mazerant et al., 2021). At the same time, teams articulated clear red lines, as seen previously: avoid tragedies, politics, religion, or any topic off-territory (Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos; Interviewee E, Sagres; Interviewee H, Pingo Doce). This cautious pragmatism echoes the benign-violation framework, where humor works when a norm is playfully bent but still perceived as harmless (Warren & McGraw, 2016). The earthquake case illustrates this nuance: humor was deemed appropriate only because no major harm occurred, leaving room for lightness, whereas in more severe contexts the same approach would have been offensive, as noted by Interviewee B (JCA Eletrodomésticos) and Interviewee E (Sagres). Indeed, literature warns that if stakes rise, humor quickly shifts from benign to offensive (Atal & Richey, 2020).

Regarding secondary tones, a more layered picture emerges. According to the content analysis, informative and celebratory registers often accompanied humorous surface content, while empathy appeared more selectively. In line with this, Interviewee H (Pingo Doce) described how humorous activations were sometimes complemented with practical tips, and Interviewee K (MEO) stressed a preference for sober communication in more sensitive contexts. These practices illustrate how even humor-forward brands modulate their tone to preserve fit, adding information or empathy when context demands it. This layered modulation reflects broader guidance on conversational brand voice, where warmth and wit are encouraged but must be tempered with respect and clarity in sensitive situations (Moran, 2023; Jeong et al., 2022; Oh & Ki, 2025).

Engagement patterns reinforced humor's centrality, consistently outperforming other tones in relative terms, with celebratory content also resonating strongly. Empathetic posts suggested potential but appeared only rarely, while informative and authoritative tones attracted little traction. Interviewees repeatedly confirmed that smart, timely humor spikes shares and comments, which aligns with RTM studies linking originality and timeliness to virality (Willemsen et al., 2018; Mazerant et al., 2021). By contrast, the limited presence of empathy, information and authority in the dataset seems less a reflection of audience rejection and more a consequence of brand strategy: interviewees described avoiding sensitive contexts, and it is precisely in those situations that such tones would be more likely to appear. The low visibility of these tones therefore constrains strong conclusions about their engagement potential.

Audience reception was overwhelmingly positive, confirming that RTM is generally welcomed when brands act within their territory. This aligns with literature framing real-time participation as part of cultural relevance, with consumers increasingly expecting brands to join ongoing conversations (Willemsen et al., 2018; Mendes, 2024). Interviews showed that consumers sometimes ask for reactions and directly suggest topics when brands stay silent (Interviewee A, Staples; Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos). At the same time, reaction expectations are especially pronounced for established RTM players, with Control being the most cited brand as one audiences almost assume will react (Interviewee F, Portugália; Interviewee L, Lidl). Against this backdrop of high feedback and expectations, only two exceptions stand out, with Super Bock (Interviewee G) and Era Portugal (Interviewee I) reporting isolated RTM related criticism incidents. Such perceptions are only possible because brands actively listen to consumer insights, a practice that lies at the very core of social media management (Harsini & Snega, 2024). These rare incidents underscore that reputational risk, while uncommon, remains a constant possibility, and they reinforce the value of the aftercare mechanisms already highlighted in the challenges section as essential safeguards when sentiment shifts.

Answer to RQ4 - What tones and formats do brands tend to adopt in RTM during unpredictable events, and how are these received by audiences, in terms of engagement?

In this study, brands overwhelmingly adopted static formats as a deliberate response to production and approval frictions. Humor emerged as the dominant tone for low-risk, everyday moments, often layered with informative, celebratory or empathetic cues to refine contextual fit. Audience reception rewarded this mix, with positive responses being the norm and only rare incidents of criticism reported. The evidence suggests that the most effective RTM bundle under time pressure is static, humor-led, territory-aligned content, executed within explicit guardrails and supported by aftercare, a combination that balances speed, clarity, and authenticity with audience reward.

6.5. Perceived Benefits of RTM

Where Chapter 6.1 framed why brands enter RTM (proximity, positioning, and visibility), this section examines what they get in return, showing how those same motives map onto four benefit clusters: engagement/visibility, audience reach, salience/talkability (including circulation in dark social), and softer organisational dividends, such as creative learning and reputational credit among peers.

Vodafone, Super Bock and MEO (Interviewees D, G and K) reported that RTM typically outperformed regular posts in shares and organic reach, and this perception was reinforced in Phase I results, where humor and celebratory tones consistently delivered higher engagement rates. As already discussed in Chapters 6.3. and 6.4., Willemsen et al. (2018) and Mazerant et al. (2021) highlight the link between timeliness, originality and diffusion, and their insights are equally relevant here, since interviewees described engagement spikes as the clearest bonus of well-executed RTM.

The belongingness-seeking described in 6.2. also reappears here as an outcome, since audience growth and reach were also part of the perceived benefits. Lidl and Paladin (Interviewees L and M) associated RTM with follower gains, while Interviewees C and J, from Uniarea and Schweppes, stressed its role in accessing audiences beyond their usual core. Interviewees also connected these dynamics to the talkability dimension, with Pingo Doce and Schweppes (Interviewees H and J) pointing out that conversations often spread in private groups. This emphasis resonates with literature on brand salience and mental availability (Keller, 1993; Romaniuk & Sharp, 2004): being present at culturally salient moments sustains top-of-mind status. Yet here the Portuguese context adds nuance. In a small market like the Portuguese one (Interviewee G, Super Bock), this off-platform buzz becomes an even more significant benefit, as peer-to-peer circulation can strongly amplify content despite being difficult to measure (Interviewee H, Pingo Doce).

Beyond platform metrics, interviewees highlighted intangible, second-order gains. Several described RTM as making the brand feel closer and more human, strengthening top-of-mind availability in shared cultural moments; others pointed to internal dividends such as creative learning “under pressure” and reputational credit among peers and juries (Interviewee L, Lidl; Interviewee M, Paladin; Interviewee D, Vodafone; Interviewee K, MEO). These accounts align with brand-equity and humanisation perspectives in the literature, where repeated, identity-congruent participation supports salience and relational closeness that can enable downstream outcomes (Keller, 1993; Deng et al., 2024; Lourenço et al., 2023).

Consistent with the commercial-fit filter in 6.1. and the execution challenge in 6.3, the pathway from attention to sales, however, proved uneven. Portugália (Interviewee F) reported a concrete uplift through a real-time, and gave the Uber Eats collaboration as an example, while others stressed attribution limits, most explicitly Super Bock (Interviewee G) and Schweppes (Interviewee J). Sagres (Interviewee E) even argued that planned activations can outperform spontaneous posts when the creative idea is stronger, a view that

sits in tension with evidence in the literature that unplanned/improvised responses often drive greater social diffusion and sharing (e.g., Chae et al., 2025; Borah et al., 2020; Willemsen et al., 2018). Taken together, these findings suggest that, in this sample, commercial effects tend to materialize when RTM is explicitly wired to conversion mechanics, such as time-bound offers, partnerships (as in Portugália's Uber Eats case), or direct-response hooks, whereas in their absence teams largely treat engagement/visibility as the dependable outcome. This reinforces the earlier point that RTM works best as a visibility engine by default, and as a sales engine when deliberately tied to conversion mechanics.

Answer to RQ5 - What do brands see as the main advantages of engaging in RTM in the Portuguese context?

In this study, brands value RTM chiefly for attention and reach: timely, humor-led posts deliver consistent engagement uplifts, help brands access or grow audiences (often beyond the core), and generate talkability that extends into dark social. Practitioners also credit RTM with softer but meaningful gains: greater brand humanisation, top-of-mind reinforcement, team learning and reputational currency. Commercial impact can occur but is not guaranteed; some practitioners contend that stronger, planned ideas may outperform spontaneous ones. Overall, the most dependable benefits are attention, reach and relational proximity, returns that emerge, as established earlier, when brands act on-territory, with cultural fit and clear guardrails.

6.6. RTM as a Form of Strategic Differentiation and Boldness

Interviewees offered a split verdict on whether RTM differentiates or merely keeps a brand in the game. Staples (Interviewee A) still reads RTM as inherently bold, but notes it is increasingly commonplace. By contrast, JCA Eletrodomésticos, Uniarea, Super Bock, and Lidl (Interviewees B, C, G and L) framed it as expected, a 24/7 hygiene activity of social media. Lidl's phrasing, that RTM has shifted from surprise to conversation, captures a perceived commoditization of the tactic. Schweppes drew a historical line: pioneers were bold, but today the practice is predictable (Interviewee J). This consensus resonates with the paradox of abundance and content saturation debates in the literature, which describe how ever-growing volumes of social content collide with users' cognitive limits and algorithmic filtering, so more output does not reliably translate into more visibility, engagement, or impact (Dhir et al., 2019; Zheng & Ling, 2021; Lin et al., 2021; Ou et al., 2023). Taken together, this suggests that as more brands pile into near-real-time reactions, the incremental

attention each post can command shrinks: presence alone is unlikely to differentiate or cut through without ownable territory and superior execution.

Although RTM now feels commoditized, interviews pointed to three conditions for actual distinctiveness: territory fit/ownability; recognizable brand codes; and creative sharpness under time pressure, the same levers that surfaced earlier as entry filters (6.1), execution constraints (6.3), and tone/format modulation (6.4). Vodafone stressed that without coherence RTM becomes nothing, while Sagres warned against jumping in just to be noticed when ownability is weak (Interviewees D, E). This logic mirrors classic differentiation theory: uniqueness must be perceived and hard to copy (Porter, 1985; Kotler et al., 2015; Baynast et al., 2018). In practice, teams anchored reactions in stable territories so the work reads as theirs, not merely timely. That anchoring operates like distinctive brand assets and personality cues (Aaker, 1997; Jun & Lee, 2024) and connects to humanization research: a coherent conversational voice lifts trust and engagement more than an impersonal one, provided it stays tied to the brand's identity (Oh & Ki, 2025; Jeong et al., 2022; Pryor, 2024).

Speed was frequently cited as a differentiator, with Lidl's be first or don't enter being emblematic (Interviewee L), and Portugália describing a healthy race to be first (Interviewee F). Yet literature cautions that first-mover visibility decays quickly when everyone optimizes for speed and the advantage becomes situational and perishable (Verma & Yadav, 2021). The content analysis indirectly reflects this ceiling: with static images and humor dominating (92.9% static and 82.9% humorous), creative formats converge, which lowers signaling value of reacting fast. In other words, speed without ownable execution risks being just another meme in the scroll.

Boldness and differentiation was also consistently linked to intelligent humor and risk calibration in the interviews. Super Bock spoke of clear limits, and several brands described avoiding polarizing topics, tragedies, and sensitive themes unless there was unmistakable fit (Interviewees G, A, B, F, K). This maps onto benign-violation theory, according to which humor differentiates when it breaks a norm benignly, but once the line is crossed the signal flips to backlash (Warren & McGraw, 2016; Atal & Richey, 2020). The two backlash incidents recalled by Super Bock and Era Portugal show the knife-edge: boldness can separate you positively, but the same move can erase gains if misread.

A striking motif was the emergence of expected actors, brands whose silence would feel odd, with Control clearly the top-of-mind reference. Multiple teams named Control as the brand audiences almost assume will react (Interviewees B, JCA Eletrodomésticos; C,

Uniaarea; D, Vodafone; E, Sagres; G, Super Bock; H, Pingo Doce; L, Lidl). Pingo Doce summarized it memorably: it would be odd if Control (and sometimes Super Bock) didn't say anything (Interviewee H). This isn't differentiation by novelty, it is salience, being mentally available at culturally charged moments (Keller, 1993; Romaniuk & Sharp, 2004). In a crowded field, reliable presence can sustain top-of-mind status even if the tactic itself is no longer novel. The logic is consistent with brand salience/TOMA literature: repeated, identity-congruent appearances at shared moments maintain memory structures that aid choice later (Keller, 1993; Romaniuk & Sharp, 2004).

As several interviewees stressed (Vodafone, Sagres, Lidl, Pingo Doce), not reacting can also protect distinctiveness: it avoids off-territory posts that erode personality consistency and mitigates brand noise (Mir-Bernal & Sádaba, 2022; Atienza-Barthelemy et al., 2025). Selectivity also counters the herd behavior flagged by Uniaarea (Interviewee C). Taken with the literature on identity-based differentiation (Zwakala & Steenkamp, 2021) and coherence (Andrade et al., 2024), the strategic move is clear: fewer, sharper, on-brand interventions to preserve meaning, rather than high-frequency culture-jacking.

Answer to RQ6 - How do brands perceive RTM in the current digital landscape, as a bold, differentiating strategy, a standard practice, or something else?

In Portugal, practitioners largely perceive RTM as a necessary, often expected practice, a hygiene behavior of contemporary social media. Bold differentiation is not guaranteed by doing RTM and it emerges conditionally: when reactions are on-territory, coded with distinctive brand assets and voice, and creatively sharp within clear risk-bounds. In an environment of content abundance, first-mover gains are situational and perishable, and speed without ownable execution rarely stands out. RTM therefore tends to sustain salience more than create uniqueness, with Control as the clearest expected actor whose reliable presence keeps it top-of-mind. Consequently, many teams privilege selectivity over frequency, using RTM as a strategic signal of cultural fluency and brand personality only when the moment is theirs to own.

6.7. Brands' Future Perspectives on the Evolution of RTM

Across interviews, the modal forecast was evolution, not revolution: RTM remains integral but becomes more selective, better tooled, and video-heavier. Staples (Interviewee A) anticipates continued centrality, with stronger humanization and more video (and a watchful eye on AI). JCA Eletrodomésticos and Uniaarea (Interviewees B and C) expect no drastic

shifts, just further embedding of RTM in day-to-day work. Schweppes (Interviewee J) projects quality over frequency, and Pingo Doce (Interviewee H) goes further, imagining brand-run entertainment that subsumes RTM rather than replacing it. Vodafone foresees heightened caution amid polarization, favoring more agnostic stances (Interviewee D). On operations, Super Bock (Interviewee G) expects still-faster workflows, agency monitoring, templated craft, two-to-three-hour turnarounds.

Staples and MEO's expectation of a pivot to video cuts against the current, static-first pattern (see chapter 6.4), but it is directionally consistent with platform dynamics and prior work that flags video's engagement edge (DataReportal, 2025a; Vogels et al., 2022; Tafesse & Wien, 2018; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Interviewees G (Super Bock), H (Pingo Doce), and I (Era Portugal) explicitly connected this shift to TikTok, describing it as the platform that raised RTM's pace and boldness and now requires a platform-specific grammar. They pointed to the platform's characteristics that normalize creator-like aesthetics for brands. Super Bock (Interviewee G) further noted that the brand already adapts to these constraints, even within an organic-only environment, and expects TikTok-style creative to spill over into Instagram and other channels. This video-first horizon also makes strategic sense for RTM in light of the literature, given how TikTok is characterised as messy, chaotic, and authentic, drawing younger audiences and rewarding relatability, creativity, and the networking of opinions (Jerasa & Boffone, 2021). Those advantages align directly with the drivers identified in section 6.1 (proximity/social participation, youthful, humanised positioning, and visibility through shareable moments), making TikTok not only the technical driver of a video-first horizon, but also the cultural blueprint for how RTM can stay relatable and socially embedded.

Building on the current tendency toward selectivity discussed in 6.6, interviewees project this to become even more pronounced in the near future. Vodafone, Sagres, Lidl, and Pingo Doce (Interviewees D, E, L, and H) described future RTM as operating under stricter entry criteria, while Uniarea (Interviewee C) warned that such discipline is also needed to resist herd behavior. In other words, what is today a filter will tomorrow be the default posture: fewer activations, but each carrying more depth and strategic weight. Interviewees also emphasized that in a polarized climate, governance will be central to sustaining this selectivity. Vodafone (Interviewee D) anticipated greater agnosticism, pointing to brand-safety heuristics, no-go lists, and escalation protocols as necessary safeguards. This vision aligns with crisis-management literature that stresses the dual imperative of timeliness and

principled clarity (Singh et al., 2023; Celestin & Sujatha, 2024), and resonates with our findings on red lines (see 6.3 and 6.4). The result is not timidity, but risk-aware boldness: fewer interventions, sharper fits, and cleaner contact, reinforcing the strategic turn toward quality over quantity.

While one anticipated shift concerns the move from static to video formats, as discussed earlier, interviewees also pointed to a different trajectory: RTM moving into new formats beyond the feed. Super Bock (Interviewee G) highlighted rapid contextual DOOH as an emerging practice, signalling a migration of “real-timeness” into omnichannel activations. This perspective resonates with forward-looking work on orchestration and moment-led experiences (Haider et al., 2025), where distinctiveness comes not from adopting the format of the day, but from integrating speed, context and brand coherence across touchpoints.

Interviewees also anticipated further professionalization of RTM processes, where improvisation is increasingly scaffolded by preparation. Super Bock and Vodafone (Interviewees G and D) described codified guidelines such as creative templates, tone matrices, and approval maps, designed to compress cycle times without sacrificing brand coherence. Others, including MEO and Lidl (Interviewees K and L), emphasized pre-delegation of authority, crisis matrices, and “standing ingredients” files that enable same-day craft. Critically, such accounts respond to a recurring concern in the literature that improvisation alone cannot scale sustainably (Mazerant et al., 2021; Kalaignanam et al., 2021; Mendes, 2024). In practice, what appears as real-time is therefore increasingly the output of pre-planned inputs, reflecting a shift from ad-hoc reaction to routinized agility.

AI was also raised as a future factor, though interviewees treated it with cautious optimism rather than hype. Staples (Interviewee A) highlighted its potential for workflow acceleration (faster detection of trends, automatic content variants, and social listening at scale) but stressed that human oversight remains essential. Super Bock (Interviewee G) pointed to AI’s promise in streamlining monitoring and operational routines, while MEO (Interviewee K) emphasized its role in accelerating video and visual production. This ambivalence mirrors broader projections of hyper-personalized, context-aware engagement (Haider et al., 2025). Crucially, the literature agrees that automation shifts rather than replaces judgment: decisions about cultural fit, clarity, and benign-violation boundaries still demand human calibration (Chae et al., 2025; Warren & McGraw, 2016).

Interviewees’ future-facing comments also imply a move from vanity metrics to salience and memory structures, which is why expected actors (e.g., Control) matter even when the tactic

commoditizes. Literature on mental availability (Keller, 1993; Romaniuk & Sharp, 2004) suggests next-stage RTM evaluation will integrate reach, fit, and consistency, not just interaction counts, to capture whether moments reinforce brand memory rather than merely harvest attention.

By bringing interview evidence together with the literature, three interconnected trajectories emerge for RTM's future:

1. Normalization Path: RTM matures into a professionalized staple, with fewer posts, higher fit, more video, and tighter guardrails. Salience is maintained, but distinctiveness depends on craft.
2. Re-differentiation Path: Select brands reinvest in ownable voice, distinctive assets, and cross-channel stunts, regaining edge through executional sharpness and live, experiential RTM.
3. Automation Path: AI-assisted RTM scales rapidly, but with divergent outcomes. It can amplify craft by handling detection and operational tasks, freeing human teams to focus on voice, codes, and cultural reading. Or, conversely, it can collapse into automated sameness, where identical prompts produce homogenized "timely" content that erodes differentiation, a risk practitioners repeatedly flagged when stressing the need for selectivity.

Answer to RQ7 - How do marketing professionals anticipate that RTM will change in the near future, and what factors do they believe will shape its evolution?

Professionals expect continuity with refinement: RTM will remain integral but evolve toward greater selectivity, faster workflows, and a video-first orientation, supported by stronger governance and codified playbooks. They anticipate fewer but sharper activations, guided by clearer entry filters and reinforced by distinctive brand codes. Looking ahead, three plausible trajectories stand out. The Normalization Path sees RTM consolidate as a professionalized staple, where salience is maintained but distinctiveness hinges on executional craft. The Re-differentiation Path envisions select brands regaining edge through ownable voice, experiential formats, and cross-channel orchestration. Finally, the Automation Path highlights the role of AI: it can amplify craft by accelerating detection and operations while freeing humans to focus on cultural judgment, or it can lead to automated sameness, where homogenized outputs undermine differentiation. In short, the future of

RTM is not about doing more, but about doing fewer, better, and culturally sharper moments, anchored in human judgment, with AI and operations acting as accelerators rather than substitutes of strategic clarity.

6.8. Interdependencies Across Research Questions

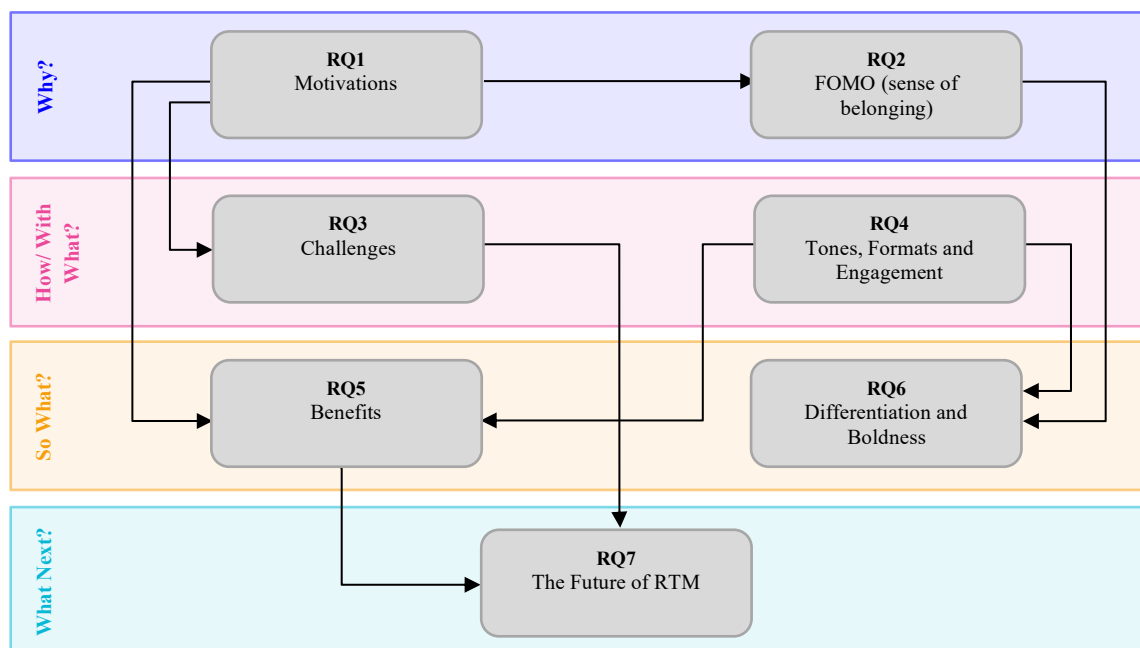
While the methodological chapter has already outlined the sequential logic of the research objectives, linking the why (O1-O2), the how/with what (O3-O4), the so what (O5-O6), and the what next (O7), the discussion highlights an additional layer of insight: the questions are also mutually dependent.

The findings show that motivations and guardrails (RQ1) are not only entry conditions, but also crucial in mitigating the challenges observed in RQ3. The social pressures captured in RQ2 further nuance this picture, as they operate simultaneously as a motivation to participate, complementing RQ1, and as an explanation for why RTM has become normalized as a hygiene activity, reinforcing RQ6. Likewise, the formats and tones examined in RQ4 directly shape both the benefits identified in RQ5 and the perceptions reframed in RQ6. These benefits, in turn, feed into expectations for the future (RQ7).

In short, the research questions should not be read as isolated inquiries, but as interconnected dimensions of Real-Time Marketing. Motivations, pressures, challenges, formats, benefits, and perceptions of differentiation function together as mutually reinforcing components, shaping both current practice and future outlooks. RTM thus emerges as a multidimensional construct: each dimension constrains and enables the others, while collectively forming a coherent analytical path from antecedents to future trajectories. This dual reading (sequential and networked) is illustrated in Figure 11.

Figure 11

Network of interdependencies across research questions



Note. Figure elaborated by the author. It is structured along the analytical path: “why”; “how/with what”; “so what”; “what next”). The use of background colors is intended solely to facilitate reading, highlight the analytical layers, and guide the reader’s eye across the diagram. It carries no interpretive meaning beyond visual organization.

6.9. Limitations of the Study

As with any study, some limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample is restricted to the Portuguese market, which narrows the scope of cultural and organizational diversity. The findings therefore reflect the specific dynamics of a small, culturally cohesive market, where proximity and shared cultural references play a strong role. Second, while the interviews provided rich and detailed insights, they inevitably carry the subjectivity of participants’ perspectives, including selective memory or impression management in how practices were described. Third, Phase I of the research analyzed only a defined set of activations, which, while systematic, does not encompass the full spectrum of RTM practices that may exist beyond the monitored timeframe. Fourth, both the content analysis and the interview analysis were conducted manually by the author, which, although ensuring depth and contextual sensitivity, may also introduce interpretive bias or coding inconsistencies. Finally, the study privileged the perspectives of brands, without incorporating consumer voices directly and, as such, conclusions about audience reception and societal impact

remain mediated through professional accounts and engagement metrics rather than grounded in consumer testimony.

Conclusion

This dissertation set out to answer a central question: why do brands engage in Real-Time Marketing during unpredictable events, and what benefits and challenges arise in the Portuguese market? The evidence shows that RTM is not a marginal tactic but a mainstream practice, used to remain culturally present, relatable, and visible in moments of collective attention. Yet it is not a guarantee of boldness or differentiation: by default it sustains salience, and distinctiveness only emerges when anchored in brand territory, supported by sharp creativity, and executed within clear guardrails.

At the motivational level (RQ1), RTM was framed as a way to join live cultural talk, refresh positioning, often through humor, and capture short-lived attention peaks. Timeliness and shareability triggered entry, but only when the moment could be tied to brand identity, which explains why abstention was often the strategic choice. The role of pressure and FOMO (RQ2) was more ambiguous. While few admitted to Fear of Missing Out, most described a surrounding pressure shaped by peer comparison, audience prompts, and the fleeting nature of attention. Still, the data suggests that participation is driven less by fear of exclusion than by a positive drive for belongingness, with brands wanting to be part of the cultural conversation, always moderated by filters and red lines. Execution challenges (RQ3) were central: acting within the narrow speed window without sacrificing judgment, navigating approval bottlenecks, and sustaining originality under pressure. These explain why static formats and humor dominate (RQ4), being faster to produce, easier to approve, and well received by audiences. Engagement was also consistently strong, while rare backlash reinforced the need for guardrails. The benefits (RQ5) were framed in terms of visibility and engagement, alongside softer gains such as humanization, learning, and reputational credit. Moreover, commercial returns occurred only when RTM was tied to promotions or partnerships. As for differentiation (RQ6), most saw RTM as a hygiene activity, expected rather than surprising, and distinctiveness emerged only when activations were culturally owned, tied to distinctive assets, and creatively sharp. Control was repeatedly cited as an expected actor within this strategy, sustaining salience and top-of-mind status. Looking ahead (RQ7), practitioners foresee continuity with refinement: fewer but sharper activations, guided by stricter criteria and stronger governance. The future is video-first, with TikTok

shaping grammar and pace, but also omnichannel, as real-timeness migrates to new formats like contextual Digital Out-Of-Home (DOOH). Processes are expected to become more professionalized, improvisation scaffolded by preparation, and AI to act as an accelerator rather than a substitute for human judgment. Thus, three plausible paths emerge: RTM as a normalized staple; as a re-differentiation tool for brands investing in distinctiveness; or as an automated practice risking sameness if not anchored in brand codes.

Additionally, this study aims to make a valuable contribution to academia, to professionals in the field of communication and marketing, and also to society and consumers, since it provides a clearer understanding of how Real-Time Marketing operates, what drives it, and what challenges and opportunities it entails.

At the academic level, the research advances knowledge by conceptualising RTM as a multidimensional construct. It brings together motivations, pressures, challenges, formats, benefits, and future trajectories as interconnected dimensions, captured both analytically (through the sequential RQs) and visually (through the interdependency diagram). This framing helps explain how each dimension constrains and enables the others, offering a richer understanding of the practice. It also refines ongoing debates: for example, it shows that belongingness-seeking, rather than fear of exclusion, is the more consistent driver of pressure, and that static formats, while less celebrated in platform discourse, continue to dominate under time pressure. By outlining three plausible scenarios for RTM's evolution (normalization, re-differentiation, and automation) the study also provides a conceptual tool for future research.

At the professional level, the dissertation contributes concrete insights into how RTM is practiced in the Portuguese market. It highlights the processes that sustain agility without eroding brand coherence, such as the use of templates, guardrails, delegated authority, and pre-defined red lines. Crucially, one interviewee explicitly noted that this research made them realize the value of isolating RTM from overall social media communication when evaluating impact. Until now, performance was assessed in aggregate, but the study suggests that analyzing real-time activations separately could reveal whether they produce distinct reputational or commercial outcomes. In this sense, the dissertation not only documents practices but also sparks new managerial approaches for evaluation.

At the societal level, the findings underscore how brands engage in live cultural talk to appear closer, more humorous, and more relatable, while simultaneously emphasizing responsibility and ethical caution. By highlighting abstention, red lines, and risk-aware

boldness, practitioners reveal a growing concern with avoiding opportunism and preventing harm. For consumers, this signals an environment where RTM is not only entertaining but also increasingly attentive to cultural sensitivity and social responsibility. At the same time, by unveiling the strategic nature of RTM, this research may also contribute to increasing consumer literacy about advertising practices, helping audiences to recognize that such communications are not innocent, but rather deliberate efforts to build relationships, foster loyalty, and sustain brand visibility. This awareness can, in turn, shape how consumers interact with and share these messages, making them more conscious participants in the phenomenon.

Building on the limitations identified earlier in the discussion, future research could explore several promising directions. A first line would be to conduct comparative studies across markets, particularly contrasting small, cohesive contexts such as Portugal with larger, more fragmented ones, to examine the role of cultural and institutional factors in shaping RTM practices. A second direction would be to integrate the consumer perspective, for instance through ethnographic observation, surveys, or reception studies, to assess how audiences interpret and respond to real-time activations beyond the visible engagement metrics. One promising methodological avenue here would be sentiment analysis of comments on RTM posts, which could provide a more granular understanding of consumers' reactions, capturing nuances of approval, humour, criticism or offence that engagement numbers alone cannot reveal. Another promising avenue is the isolation of RTM within broader communication strategies, an idea raised by one of the interviewees, so that its reputational and commercial impact can be evaluated separately, providing sharper managerial insights. Third, the implications of AI for RTM in practice could be studied: whether it will amplify creative distinctiveness by supporting human teams, or whether it will homogenize outputs and accelerate commoditization. Finally, future research could also explore more deeply the tension between FOMO and the broader need for belonging, testing whether pressures to react are best explained by fear of exclusion or by the positive drive for participation.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Overview of the 32 unplanned events analyzed

Table 4
Overview of the 32 unplanned events analyzed

Event Label	Brief Description	Reference(s)
“Beef” between youtubers Tiagovski and Os Primos	Public and viral disagreement between the portuguese content creator tiagovski and the channel “Os Primos”.	OS PRIMOS (2024)
Primor's Blue Monday campaign	On Blue Monday (January 2024), the perfumery and cosmetics brand Primor launched a provocative email marketing campaign with the slogan “send the blue monday to the f**k” ²⁰ . The explicit language, which appeared unedited, sparked widespread backlash across social media and consumer forums due to its offensive and inappropriate tone. Users expressed their disapproval on platforms such as the portal da queixa, prompting primor to remove the explicit wording from its digital communications, albeit without publicly explaining their decision.	Notícias ao Minuto (2024)
Diogo Ribeiro in the World Aquatics Championships Final	Historic achievement of portuguese swimmer Diogo Ribeiro, who became the first-ever world champion from portugal at the senior level by winning gold medals in both the 50-metre and 100-metre butterfly events at the 2024 world aquatics championships in doha.	Andrade (2024)

²⁰ Original text in Portuguese: “Manda para o cara*** o dia mais triste do ano”

Event Label	Brief Description	Reference(s)
Operação Influencer (reaction to IKEA's campaign)	Street-level advertising campaign by IKEA in January 2024 that referenced the “operation influencer” scandal with the tagline “good for storing books. Or €75,800.” ²¹ , alluding to the cash found in the prime minister’s chief of staff’s office. Although IKEA denied political intent, the humorous campaign went viral and sparked mixed reactions on social media.	Euronews (2024a); SIC Notícias (2024)
Prime Minister gets bucket of green paint thrown at him	In February 2024, a climate activist threw green paint over Luís Montenegro, leader of PSD (Social Democratic Party) and prime minister candidate at that time, as he arrived at the Lisbon International Fair (FIL).	Euronews (2024b)
Meta platforms global outage	On March 2024, meta-owned platforms Facebook and Instagram experienced a global outage that lasted over two hours.	Duffy (2024)
Legislative Elections: confusion between AD and ADN	During the March 2024 legislative elections in Portugal, voters reported confusion between two similarly named parties on the ballot: “ <i>Aliança Democrática</i> ” (AD) and “ <i>Alternativa Democrática Nacional</i> ” (ADN). The similarity led some voters to inadvertently mark the wrong option.	Dantas (2024a)
Dust from Africa affecting air quality in Portugal	In March 2024, a mass of dust from the Sahara desert began traversing mainland Portugal in march 2024, elevating pm10 particulate levels well above health-based limits and impacting air quality notably in Lisbon, Alentejo, Algarve, and interior central regions.	SIC Notícias and Lusa (2024)
Controversy surrounding the government's new logo	In April 2024, the newly elected portuguese government introduced a redesigned national logo, replacing traditional emblems with a simplified, modern graphic identity. The change immediately sparked public and media backlash, with critics arguing it stripped away historical symbols such as the armillary sphere and coat of arms, while others saw it as a partisan rebranding attempt.	Teixeira (2024)

²¹ Original text in Portuguese: “Boa para guardar livros. Ou 75.800€.”

Event Label	Brief Description	Reference(s)
Solar eclipse	On April 8, 2024, a total solar eclipse occurred, visible in full across North America. In Portugal, residents experienced a partial eclipse, particularly noticeable on Corvo island. The event captured public attention and served as a rare astronomical moment for local audiences.	RTP (2024)
Sporting CP clinched the Liga Portugal Betclic title	On May 5, 2024, Sporting CP was officially crowned champion of the Liga Portugal Betclic, ending the season as national league winners.	(Liga Portugal, 2024)
Kendrick Lamar vs Drake beef	In May 2024, Kendrick Lamar released multiple diss tracks, including “meet the grahams” and “not like us”, which went viral for their explosive accusations against Drake. Drake quickly responded with “the heart part 6”, escalating one of the most high-profile rap rivalries in recent years.	(Lamarre, 2025)
Northern Lights (aurora borealis) visible over mainland Portugal	On May 10, 2024, an exceptionally rare aurora borealis illuminated the skies across mainland Portugal, with multiple sightings reported throughout the country.	Expresso (2024)
Comet fragment illuminates sky over Portugal	On the night of May 18, 2024, a fragment of a comet raced across the skies over Portugal and Spain, visible for several seconds by residents from Porto to Lisbon. The object created a spectacular bright trail reminiscent of daylight and was captured on numerous videos.	Firmino and Pincha (2024)
The Eras Tour	A world tour celebrating the artist’s 17-year career, featuring concerts of around three hours. At each show, Taylor Swift performed a “surprise song”, adding an element of unpredictability that sparked speculation among fans in every country, including Portugal.	SIC Notícias (2024)
José Mourinho appointed manager of Fenerbahçe	In early June 2024, the esteemed portuguese coach José Mourinho was officially unveiled as the new head coach of turkish Super Lig Fenerbahçe, signing a two-year contract.	Lusa (2024)

Event Label	Brief Description	Reference(s)
Sónia Tavares expelled from Rock in Rio vip for eating a croquette	During a live broadcast assignment at Rock in Rio Lisbon on 16 June 2024, singer Sónia Tavares (from The Gift), working for SIC, was escorted out of the vip area after consuming a croquette and a drink, actions prohibited for staff despite not being warned of the rule.	Público (2024)
Portuguese team at the European Championship 2024	At the 2024 european championship, Portugal's journey captivated audiences with both on-field drama and public scrutiny. On June 18, Francisco Conceição's late goals helped rescue a shaky start, while goalkeeper Diogo Costa became a national hero by saving three penalties. Some brands also reacted to portugal's defeats and to the widespread dissatisfaction with coach Roberto Martínez.	Dantas (2024b); Silva and Sampaio (2024)
Global Windows outage	In July 2024, a defective software update from the cybersecurity firm crowdstrike triggered blue-screen crashes on approximately 8.5 million windows devices worldwide.	Globo (2024)
Gabriel Medina's gravity-defying olympic photo goes viral	During the Paris 2024 olympic games, brazilian surfer Gabriel Medina delivered an unforgettable moment as he emerged from a wave in tahiti, captured mid-air in a stunning freeze-frame by photographer Jérôme Brouillet. The image went viral, earning over 3.8 million likes on Medina's Instagram and widespread acclaim online for its surreal, gravity-defying aesthetics.	Kearns (2024)
Portugal's best olympic performance to date (paris 2024)	At the Paris 2024 summer olympics, Portugal achieved its most successful campaign ever, securing a total of four medals: one gold (men's madison - cycling), two silvers (men's omnium - cycling and men's triple jump), and one bronze (women's -78 kg judo).	Fundação do Desporto (2024)
Cristiano Ronaldo launches youtube channel	In August 2024, Cristiano Ronaldo unveiled his official Youtube channel, "UR Cristiano", posting 19 videos featuring himself and his family. The channel shattered the world record by achieving 1 million subscribers within just 90 minutes, making it the fastest-growing channel in Youtube history.	Garcia (2024)
Magnitude 5.3 earthquake in Portugal	On August 26, 2024, at 05:11 am, a magnitude 5.3 earthquake struck off the atlantic coast near Sines, being strongly felt in Lisbon, Setúbal, and surrounding regions. Although it caused no	Jesus et al. (2024)

Event Label	Brief Description	Reference(s)
	casualties or major damage, the tremor startled the population for its unusual intensity, given it was the most significant earthquake felt in Portugal since the great Lisbon earthquake of 1755.	
Pineapple at Mercadona dating trend	In late August 2024, a viral social media phenomenon emerged where single shoppers placed an upside-down pineapple in their trolley in the wine aisle at Mercadona supermarkets to signal romantic interest. Social media exploded with memes and brand reactions.	Ascensão (2024); Paiva (2024a)
"Cery mindful, very demure" Tiktok trend	In August 2024, the phrase “very mindful, very demure” went viral on Tiktok, coined by creator Jools Lebron as a satirical guide to modest behavior. She humorously advised followers on how to appear restrained and considerate in everyday situations. As the meme gained traction, major brands began reacting to it, and the trend eventually spread beyond Tiktok, reaching instagram and portugal.	Demopoulos (2024)
Premium Air trend	A joke that relied on provoking exaggerated reactions from people with basic knowledge of automobiles, who would find the idea of “premium air” for car tires absurd. Portuguese influencer Helena Coelho’s pranking her partner went viral, amassing over 4 million views in just a few hours. The challenge quickly spread across Tiktok and Instagram, with hundreds of users replicating it.	Gomes (2024)
Rafael Nadal retired from professional tennis	In October 2024, spanish tennis legend Rafael Nadal, winner of 22 grand slam titles, confirmed he would retire at the end of the season.	Rodríguez (2024)
Oreo’s “goodbye” campaign	In Portugal, Oreo sparked speculation with the teaser “Goodbye Portugal, your classic Oreo is ending” ²² . After generating buzz, the brand revealed it was introducing a new recipe with more cocoa, reframing the farewell as “Hello portugal, the most delicious Oreo ever has arrived” ²³ .	Paiva (2024b)

²² Original text in Portuguese: “Adeus Portugal, a tua OREO de sempre vai acabar”

²³ Original Text in Portuguese: “Olá Portugal, chegou a OREO mais deliciosa de sempre.”

Event Label	Brief Description	Reference(s)
Death of portuguese singer Marco Paulo	On October 24, 2024, renowned portuguese singer Marco Paulo passed away at the age of 79. His demise marked the end of an era in portuguese popular music.	Cardoso (2024)
Control chestnut post controversy	In November 2024, the condom brand Control published a social media post featuring a chestnut with the tagline “The worst is when you peel it and see there’s a worm” ²⁴ which was widely criticized as insensitive and transphobic. After the controversy escalated, several other brands reacted to the situation.	Ferreira (2024)
Maurizio Cattelan’s banana artwork auction	In November 2024, Maurizio Cattelan’s infamous artwork comedian, a banana taped to a wall, was sold for \$6.2 million, drawing attention for the striking contrast between its simplicity and its record price.	Small (2024)
“Chill guy” tiktok trend	The “chill guy” meme, featuring an anthropomorphic dog casually posed in jeans, sweater, and sneakers, emerged on social media and exploded in popularity on Tiktok, carrying tens of millions of views. After dominating internationally, the trend eventually reached Portugal.	Amazona (2025)

Note. Elaborated by the author.

²⁴ Original Text in Portuguese: “O pior é quando a descasca e vês minhoca.”

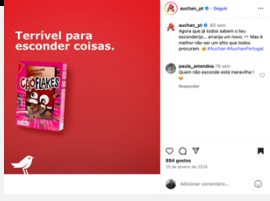
Appendix B - Content Analysis

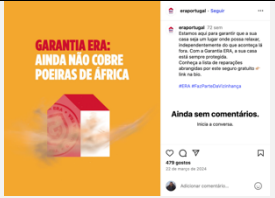
Table 5
Content Analysis

Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
1	Super Bock	175000	11.01.2024		“Beef” between youtubers Tiagovski and Os Primos	Humorous	N/A	Photo	11900	220	742	12862	7,3%
2	Paladin	12500	15.01.2024		Primor's Blue Monday Campaign	Humorous	N/A	Photo	1234	4	8	1246	10,0%
3	Staples	33000	17.01.2024		Diogo Ribeiro in the World Aquatics Championships Final	Celebratory	Humorous	Photo	2273	20	3	2296	7,0%
4	Smartlunch	7041	24.01.2024		Operação Influencer (reaction to IKEA's campaign)	Humorous	N/A	Photo	86	2	7	95	1,3%

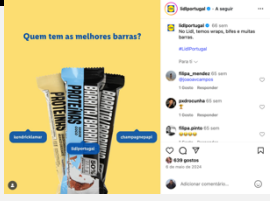
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	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
5	JLL Residential	17000	24.01.2024		Operação Influencer (reaction to IKEA's campaign)	Humorous	N/A	Photo	234	10	46	290	1,7%
6	Staples	33000	24.01.2024		Operação Influencer (reaction to IKEA's campaign)	Humorous	N/A	Photo	25000	1084	1404	27488	83,3%
7	Uniarrea	87800	24.01.2024		Operação Influencer (reaction to IKEA's campaign)	Humorous	N/A	Photo	2555	3	28	2586	2,9%
8	Aldi	122000	24.01.2024		Operação Influencer (reaction to IKEA's campaign)	Informative	Humorous	Photo	420	10	15	445	0,4%
9	Inokem	46000	24.01.2024		Operação Influencer (reaction to IKEA's campaign)	Humorous	N/A	Photo	353	14	0	367	0,8%

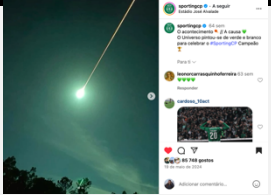
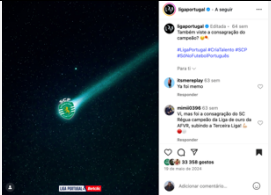
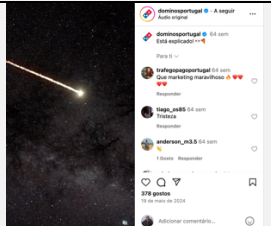
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	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)	Label	Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
10	Fnac	197000	24.01.2024		Operação Influencer (reaction to IKEA's campaign)	Humorous	N/A	Photo	2253	61	183	2497	1,3%
11	Penguin	55200	24.01.2024		Operação Influencer (reaction to IKEA's campaign)	Humorous	N/A	Photo	3258	203	207	3668	6,6%
12	Dominos	72100	25.01.2024		Operação Influencer (reaction to IKEA's campaign)	Humorous	N/A	Photo	125	3	1	129	0,2%
13	Uber Eats	20300	25.01.2024		Operação Influencer (reaction to IKEA's campaign)	Humorous	N/A	Photo	5448	63	31	5542	27,3%
14	Paladin	12500	25.01.2024		Operação Influencer (reaction to IKEA's campaign)	Humorous	N/A	Photo	1353	8	1	1362	10,9%

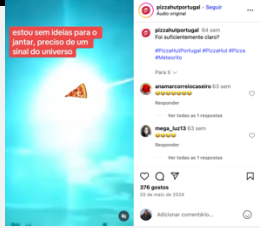
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	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)	Label	Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
15	Auchan	188000	25.01.2024		Operação Influencer (reaction to IKEA's campaign)	Humorous	N/A	Photo	893	2	0	895	0,5%
16	Portugália	19300	25.01.2024		Operação Influencer (reaction to IKEA's campaign)	Humorous	N/A	Photo	973	17	7	997	5,2%
17	EXS Seguros	432	25.01.2024		Operação Influencer (reaction to IKEA's campaign)	Humorous	N/A	Photo	21	1	6	28	6,5%
18	5asec	2687	28.02.2024		Prime Minister gets bucket of green paint thrown at him	Humorous	N/A	Photo	111	11	9	131	4,9%
19	Regina	26100	05.03.2024		Meta Platforms Global Outage	Humorous	N/A	Photo	62	0	0	62	0,2%

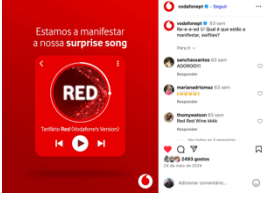
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	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
20	JCA Eletrodomésticos	640	12.03.2024		Legislative Elections: Confusion between AD and ADN	Authoritative	Humorous	Photo	1	0	0	1	0,2%
21	Era Portugal	18300	22.03.2024		Dust from Africa affecting air quality in Portugal	Humorous	Informative	Photo	479	0	58	537	2,9%
22	Ikea	520000	04.04.2024		Controversy surrounding the government's new logo	Empathetic	Informative, Authoritative	Photo	12400	274	1073	13747	2,6%
23	Inokem	46000	05.04.2024		Controversy surrounding the government's new logo	Empathetic	Informative, Humorous	Photo	119	9	3	131	0,3%
24	Paladin	12500	05.04.2024		Controversy surrounding the government's new logo	Humorous	Humorous	Photo	1849	6	1	1856	14,8%

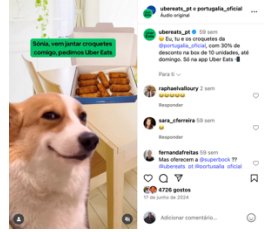
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	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)	Label	Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
25	Penguin	55200	05.04.2024		Controversy surrounding the government's new logo	Humorous	Humorous	Photo	212	2	10	224	0,4%
26	KuantoKusta	64400	05.04.2024		Controversy surrounding the government's new logo	Authoritative	Informative	Photo	45	0	17	62	0,1%
27	Regina	26100	08.04.2024		Solar Eclipse	Humorous	Humorous	Photo	73	4	1	78	0,3%
28	Control	520000	05.05.2024		Sporting CP clinched the Liga Portugal Betclic title	Celebratory	Humorous	Photo	29600	160	2941	32701	6,3%
29	Auchan	188000	06.05.2024		Sporting CP clinched the Liga Portugal Betclic title	Humorous	Empathetic, Celebratory	Photo	74	1	1	76	0,0%

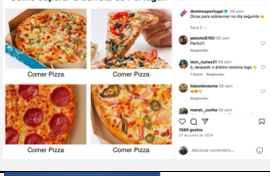
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	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
30	Lidl	532000	06.05.2024		Kendrick Lamar vs Drake Beef	Humorous	Humorous	Photo	639	21	52	712	0,1%
31	Control	520000	11.05.2024		Northern Lights (Aurora Borealis) Visible over Mainland Portugal	Humorous	Humorous	Photo	12900	116	366	13382	2,6%
32	Control	520000	19.05.2024		Comet Fragment Illuminates Sky over Portugal	Humorous	Humorous	Photo	30000	193	1503	31696	6,1%
33	Licor Beirão	64600	19.05.2024		Comet Fragment Illuminates Sky over Portugal	Humorous	Humorous	Photo	9052	70	80	9202	14,2%

Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
34	Sporting CP	2800000	19.05.2024		Comet Fragment Illuminates Sky over Portugal	Humorous	Celebratory	Photo	85700	377	1700	87777	3,1%
35	Liga Portugal	822000	19.05.2024		Comet Fragment Illuminates Sky over Portugal	Humorous	Celebratory	Photo	33300	383	1643	35326	4,3%
36	Dominos	72100	19.05.2024		Comet Fragment Illuminates Sky over Portugal	Humorous	N/A	Video	378	7	2	387	0,5%
37	MEO	340000	19.05.2024		Comet Fragment Illuminates Sky over Portugal	Authoritative	Humorous, Informative	Photo	5258	40	18	5316	1,6%

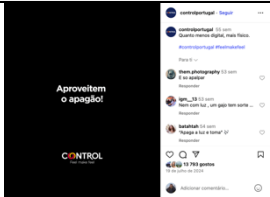
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	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
38	Pizza Hut	42400	20.05.2024		Comet Fragment Illuminates Sky over Portugal	Humorous	Humorous	Video	376	17	7	400	0,9%
39	Regina	26100	20.05.2024		Comet Fragment Illuminates Sky over Portugal	Humorous	Humorous	Photo	101	2	1	104	0,4%
40	Pingo Doce	488000	20.05.2024		Comet Fragment Illuminates Sky over Portugal	Humorous	Informative	Photo	2941	28	15	2984	0,6%
41	Lidl	532000	20.05.2024		Comet Fragment Illuminates Sky over Portugal	Humorous	Informative	Photo	4505	43	42	4590	0,9%

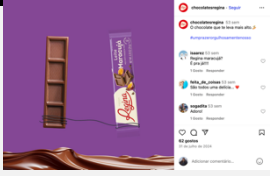
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	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
42	Era Portugal	18300	21.05.2024		Comet Fragment Illuminates Sky over Portugal	Humorous	N/A	Photo	439	0	52	491	2,7%
43	Vodafone	90600	24.05.2024		The Eras Tour	Humorous	Informative	Photo	2493	22	37	2552	2,8%
44	Uber Eats	20300	31.05.2024		José Mourinho Appointed Manager of Fenerbahçe	Celebratory	Humorous, Encouraging	Photo	2572	9	15	2596	12,8%
45	Lidl	532000	17.06.2024		Sónia Tavares expelled from Rock in Rio VIP for eating a croquette	Humorous	N/A	Photo	36000	1142	2207	39349	7,4%

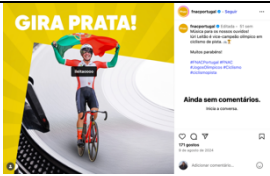
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	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
46	Licor Beirão	64600	17.06.2024		Sónia Tavares expelled from Rock in Rio VIP for eating a croquette	Humorous	Encouraging, Empathetic	Photo	24200	301	374	24875	38,5%
47	JCA Eletrodomésticos	640	17.06.2024		Sónia Tavares expelled from Rock in Rio VIP for eating a croquette	Humorous	N/A	Photo	3	0	0	3	0,5%
48	Uber Eats	20300	17.06.2024		Sónia Tavares expelled from Rock in Rio VIP for eating a croquette	Humorous	N/A	Video	4726	87	68	4881	24,0%
49	Licor Beirão	64600	19.06.2024		Portuguese Team at the European Championship 2024	Celebratory	Humorous	Photo	3514	12	14	3540	5,5%

Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
50	Pizza Hut	42400	20.06.2024		Sónia Tavares expelled from Rock in Rio VIP for eating a croquette	Humorous	N/A	Photo	327	36	4	367	0,9%
51	JCA Eletrodomésticos	640	26.06.2024		Portuguese Team at the European Championship 2024	Humorous	Celebratory	Photo	4	0	0	4	0,6%
52	Dominos	72100	27.06.2024		Portuguese Team at the European Championship 2024	Humorous	Empathetic	Photo	1068	10	8	1086	1,5%
53	Control	520000	01.07.2024		Portuguese Team at the European Championship 2024	Humorous	N/A	Photo	21800	136	1751	23687	4,6%
54	Super Bock	175000	01.07.2024		Portuguese Team at the European Championship 2024	Humorous	Celebratory	Photo	11000	126	362	11488	6,6%

Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
55	Era Portugal	18300	01.07.2024		Portuguese Team at the European Championship 2024	Authoritative	Celebratory	Photo	412	3	39	454	2,5%
56	Staples	33000	02.07.2024		Portuguese Team at the European Championship 2024	Humorous	Celebratory	Photo	566	1	0	567	1,7%
57	Leroy Merlin	201000	02.07.2024		Portuguese Team at the European Championship 2024	Celebratory	Informative, Encouraging	Photo	3831	6	3	3840	1,9%
58	Regina	26100	02.07.2024		Portuguese Team at the European Championship 2024	Celebratory	Humorous	Photo	1261	5	2	1268	4,9%
59	Dominos	72100	02.07.2024		Portuguese Team at the European Championship 2024	Celebratory	Humorous	Photo	134	0	2	136	0,2%

Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
60	Pizza Hut	42400	02.07.2024		Portuguese Team at the European Championship 2024	Humorous	Celebratory	Photo	71	2	0	73	0,2%
61	Ikea	520000	05.07.2024		Portuguese Team at the European Championship 2024	Empathetic	Celebratory	Photo	1589	27	124	1740	0,3%
62	Control	520000	20.07.2024		Global Windows Outage	Humorous	N/A	Photo	13700	110	493	14303	2,8%
63	JCA Eletrodomésticos	640	20.07.2024		Global Windows Outage	Humorous	Authoritative	Photo	1	0	0	1	0,2%
64	Lidl	532000	30.07.2024		Gabriel Medina's gravity-defying Olympic photo goes viral	Celebratory	Humorous, Informative	Photo	22500	689	216	23405	4,4%

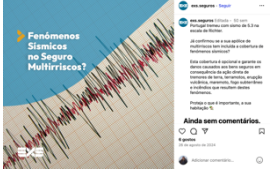
Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
65	Regina	26100	31.07.2024		Gabriel Medina's gravity-defying Olympic photo goes viral	Encouraging	Celebratory	Photo	62	3	1	66	0,3%
66	Pingo Doce	488000	01.08.2024		Portugal's Best Olympic Performance to Date (Paris 2024)	Celebratory	Humorous	Photo	1429	13	11	1453	0,3%
67	Sagres	108000	01.08.2024		Portugal's Best Olympic Performance to Date (Paris 2024)	Humorous	Celebratory	Photo	3326	5	7	3338	3,1%
68	5asec	2687	02.08.2024		Portugal's Best Olympic Performance to Date (Paris 2024)	Humorous	Celebratory	Photo	134	2	0	136	5,1%

Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
69	Paladin	12500	05.08.2024		Portugal's Best Olympic Performance to Date (Paris 2024)	Humorous	Celebratory	Photo	999	2	0	1001	8,0%
70	Super Bock	175000	08.08.2024		Portugal's Best Olympic Performance to Date (Paris 2024)	Humorous	Celebratory	Photo	9449	23	46	9518	5,4%
71	Fnac	197000	09.08.2024		Portugal's Best Olympic Performance to Date (Paris 2024)	Celebratory	Humorous	Photo	171	0	0	171	0,1%
72	Pingo Doce	488000	09.08.2024		Portugal's Best Olympic Performance to Date (Paris 2024)	Celebratory	Informative, Humorous	Photo	3079	44	5	3128	0,6%

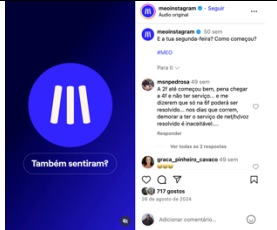
Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Label	Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement
73	Regina	26100	09.08.2024		Portugal's Best Olympic Performance to Date (Paris 2024)	Humorous	Celebratory	Photo	59	0	2	61	0,2%
74	Super Bock	175000	09.08.2024		Portugal's Best Olympic Performance to Date (Paris 2024)	Humorous	Celebratory	Photo	5714	13	28	5755	3,3%
75	Super Bock	175000	10.08.2024		Portugal's Best Olympic Performance to Date (Paris 2024)	Humorous	Celebratory	Photo	5861	11	26	5898	3,4%
76	Aldi	122000	12.08.2024		Portugal's Best Olympic Performance to Date (Paris 2024)	Humorous	Celebratory	Photo	52	4	0	56	0,0%

Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
77	Super Bock	175000	21.08.2024		Cristiano Ronaldo launches YouTube channel	Humorous	N/A	Photo	12900	61	21	12982	7,4%
78	Era Portugal	18300	22.08.2024		Cristiano Ronaldo launches YouTube channel	Humorous	Celebratory	Photo	332	2	5	339	1,9%
79	Aldi	122000	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	N/A	Video	89	2	0	91	0,1%
80	Auchan	188000	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	Empathetic	Photo	1941	13	0	1954	1,0%

Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
81	Control	520000	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	N/A	Photo	22300	199	6	22505	4,3%
82	Dominos	72100	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	N/A	Video	52	0	2	54	0,1%
83	Dr. Bayard	30100	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	Empathetic	Photo	476	31	0	507	1,7%
84	Durex	39100	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	N/A	Photo	244	2	2	248	0,6%

Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
85	Era Portugal	18300	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	N/A	Photo	345	2	0	347	1,9%
86	EXS Seguros	432	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Informative	Authoritative	Photo	6	0	0	6	1,4%
87	Grupo AGEAS	8566	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	Informative	Video	1369	15	72	1456	17,0%
88	Ikea	520000	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	Authoritative	Photo	3340	85	0	3425	0,7%

Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
89	JCA Eletrodomésticos	640	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	N/A	Photo	3	0	0	3	0,5%
90	Leroy Merlin	201000	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Informative	Authoritative, Empathetic	Photo	541	3	0	544	0,3%
91	Licor Beirão	64600	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	N/A	Photo	4970	52	0	5022	7,8%
92	Lidl	532000	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	Encouraging	Photo	4607	22	2	4631	0,9%

Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
93	Liga Portugal	822000	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	N/A	Video	5939	32	20	5991	0,7%
94	MEO	340000	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Empathetic	Humorous	Video	717	80	11	808	0,2%
95	Netflix Portugal	1000000	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	N/A	Photo	30200	232	18	30450	3,0%
96	Paladin	12500	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	Empathetic	Video	80	0	1	81	0,6%

Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
97	Penguin	55200	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	N/A	Photo	1936	33	6	1975	3,6%
98	Pingo Doce	488000	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	Informative, Empathetic	Photo	1883	11	0	1894	0,4%
99	RFM	907000	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	N/A	Video	69900	1614	4508	76022	8,4%
100	Sagres	108000	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	Empathetic	Photo	5417	34	0	5451	5,0%

Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
101	Sporting CP	2800000	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	Informative	Photo	14200	289	3	14492	0,5%
102	Staples	33000	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	Informative	Photo	3087	49	0	3136	9,5%
103	Super Bock	175000	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	N/A	Photo	14200	360	5	14565	8,3%
104	Uber Eats	20300	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	N/A	Photo	8391	68	0	8459	41,7%
105	Uniairea	87800	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	Informative	Photo	5699	6	1	5706	6,5%

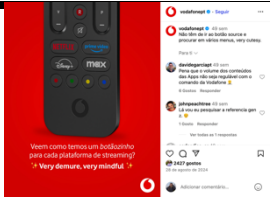
Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
106	Worten	216000	26.08.2024		Magnitude 5.3 Earthquake in Portugal	Humorous	Empathetic	Photo	1863	4	0	1867	0,9%
107	Lidl	532000	28.08.2024		Pineapple at Mercadona Dating Trend	Humorous	N/A	Photo	40900	1349	597	42846	8,1%
108	Control	520000	29.08.2024		Pineapple at Mercadona Dating Trend	Humorous	N/A	Photo	30400	314	414	31128	6,0%
109	Licor Beirão	64600	29.08.2024		Pineapple at Mercadona Dating Trend	Humorous	N/A	Photo	6908	74	37	7019	10,9%

Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
110	Sagres	108000	28.08.2025		Pineapple at Mercadona Dating Trend	Humorous	N/A	Photo	3076	46	41	3163	2,9%
111	JCA Eletrodomésticos	640	29.08.2024		Pineapple at Mercadona Dating Trend	Humorous	N/A	Photo	53	2	2	57	8,9%
112	Leroy Merlin	201000	29.08.2024		Pineapple at Mercadona Dating Trend	Humorous	N/A	Photo	8374	122	60	8556	4,3%
113	Auchan	188000	29.08.2024		Pineapple at Mercadona Dating Trend	Humorous	N/A	Photo	3039	76	51	3166	1,7%

Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
114	Aldi	122000	29.08.2024		Pineapple at Mercadona Dating Trend	Humorous	N/A	Photo	359	24	21	404	0,3%
115	Ginja Vila das Rainhas	4459	30.08.2024		Pineapple at Mercadona Dating Trend	Humorous	N/A	Photo	31	2	4	37	0,8%
116	Inokem	46000	30.08.2024		Pineapple at Mercadona Dating Trend	Humorous	Informative	Photo	165	12	5	182	0,4%
117	Bacalhau Caxamar	12800	29.08.2024		Pineapple at Mercadona Dating Trend	Humorous	N/A	Photo	0	6	0	6	0,0%

Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
118	Uniarea	87800	30.08.2024		Pineapple at Mercadona Dating Trend	Humorous	N/A	Photo	3837	6	38	3881	4,4%
119	Penguin	55200	29.08.2024		Pineapple at Mercadona Dating Trend	Humorous	N/A	Photo	2346	145	27	2518	4,6%
120	Era Portugal	18300	29.08.2024		Pineapple at Mercadona Dating Trend	Humorous	N/A	Photo	962	11	63	1036	5,7%
121	Dominos	72100	29.08.2024		Pineapple at Mercadona Dating Trend	Humorous	N/A	Photo	3020	31	25	3076	4,3%

Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
122	Pizza Hut	42400	29.08.2024		Pineapple at Mercadona Dating Trend	Humorous	N/A	Photo	109	6	1	116	0,3%
123	FC Paços Ferreira	60700	29.08.2024		Pineapple at Mercadona Dating Trend	Humorous	N/A	Photo	1107	17	5	1129	1,9%
124	Casal Garcia	27900	29.08.2024		Pineapple at Mercadona Dating Trend	Humorous	N/A	Photo	233	15	14	262	0,9%
125	KuantoKusta	64400	30.08.2024		Pineapple at Mercadona Dating Trend	Humorous	N/A	Photo	23	0	5	28	0,0%

Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
126	Vodafone	90600	28.08.2024		"Very mindful, very demure" TikTok Trend	Humorous	Informative	Photo	2427	67	9	2503	2,8%
127	EDP	46900	18.10.2024		Premium Air Trend	Humorous	Empathetic	Photo	16700	213	305	17218	36,7%
128	Leroy Merlin	201000	18.10.2024		Premium Air Trend	Humorous	N/A	Photo	6771	55	54	6880	3,4%
129	Sidul	78800	17.10.2024		Premium Air Trend	Humorous	Informative	Photo	1281	9	11	1301	1,7%

Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
130	Continental Pneus	81000	19.10.2024		Premium Air Trend	Humorous	N/A	Photo	511	8	22	541	0,7%
131	JCA Eletrodomésticos	640	20.10.2024		Premium Air Trend	Humorous	Authoritative	Photo	7	0	4	11	1,7%
132	Lidl	532000	10.10.2024		Rafael Nadal Announces Retirement from Professional Tennis	Humorous	Authoritative	Photo	6761	42	39	6842	1,3%
133	Ikea	520000	24.10.2024		Death of Portuguese Singer Marco Paulo	Humorous	Empathetic	Photo	3481	64	240	3785	0,7%
134	Control	520000	18.10.2024		Oreo's "Goodbye" campaign	Empathetic	Empathetic	Photo	15100	76	250	15426	3,0%

Nº	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
135	Inokem	46000	13.11.2024		Control Chestnut Post Controversy	Humorous	N/A	Photo	128	21	9	158	0,3%
136	Frutorra	6527	13.11.2024		Control Chestnut Post Controversy	Humorous	Informative	Photo	480	29	32	541	8,3%
137	Pingo Doce	488000	22.11.2024		Maurizio Cattelan's Banana Artwork Auction	Humorous	N/A	Photo	4844	294	57	5195	1,1%
138	Auchan	188000	22.11.2024		Maurizio Cattelan's Banana Artwork Auction	Humorous	N/A	Photo	304	7	8	319	0,2%

N°	Brand		Post Date	Visual	Event/Trigger	Tone of Voice		Main Format	Engagement Metrics				
	Name	Followers on IG				Label (Dominant)	Label (Secondary)		Likes	Comments	Shares	Total Engagement	Engagement Rate
139	Liga Portugal	822000	23.11.2024		"Chill Guy" TikTok Trend	Humorous	Informative	Photo	15100	66	223	15389	1,9%
140	Super Bock	175000	26.11.2024		"Chill Guy" TikTok Trend	Humorous	N/A	Photo	42800	229	3213	46242	26,4%

Note. Table elaborated by the author in Google Sheets and later adapted for this document. In the original version, instead of the column “Visual”, the author collected a hyperlink to the post as well as a link to the Google Drive folder containing the corresponding screenshot. For the purposes of this document, and to facilitate readability, only the screenshot is included, as it already contains both the image and the caption. In addition, the table was divided by events, with alternating white and grey rows, in order to guide the reader’s eye and make it easier to analyse posts within the same occurrence.

Appendix C - Coding Scheme for Content Analysis

Table 6
Coding Scheme for Content Analysis

Variable	Definition	Subcategories	Linked Research Question(s)
Tone*	Communicative style and emotional inflection conveyed in a brand’s message, shaping audience perceptions of authenticity, relatability, and competence.	Humorous: Content that elicits funniness, amusement, or laughter. Adapted from Warren & McGraw (2016), Jeong et al. (2022), Pias et al. (2024) and Moran (2023).	RQ3 and RQ6 ²⁵
		Informative: Provides useful information helping users make choices and learn about product alternatives. Adapted from Lee & Hong (2016), Pias et al. (2024) and Moran (2023).	
		Empathetic: Demonstrates understanding, care or compassion. Adapted from Pias et al. (2024) and Minkie (2025).	

²⁵ The variable “Tone” is linked to RQ3 because selecting an appropriate tone under time pressure might constitute a creative and strategic challenge; and to RQ6 because tone directly influences how audiences engage with and perceive RTM posts.

Variable	Definition	Subcategories	Linked Research Question(s)
		Encouraging: Motivates or inspires. Adapted from Minkie (2025) and Moran (2023). Authoritative: Conveys expertise and confidence. Adapted from Jeong et al. (2022) and Moran (2023). Celebratory: Expresses joy or recognition of achievements, milestones, or positive events. Adapted from Minkie (2025).	
Main Format	Primary mode of visual content presentation on Instagram.	Photo: A static visual image posted on Instagram, including single-image posts or a carousel. No moving elements are present in the main content. Adapted from Doney et al. (2020). Video: A moving visual posted on Instagram, including Reels or feed videos, where motion is an integral part of the content. Adapted from Doney et al. (2020).	RQ3 and RQ6 ²⁶

²⁶ The variable “Main Format” is linked to RQ3 because producing photo- versus video-based content under time constraints involves different creative and operational challenges; and to RQ6 because format can affect the level and type of audience engagement with RTM posts.

Variable	Definition	Subcategories	Linked Research Question(s)
Engagement Metrics	Publicly available indicators of user interaction on Instagram posts.	Likes, comments and shares (Gunina, 2023; Chae et al., 2025)	RQ4 and RQ5 ²⁷
		Total engagement (sum of the above)	
		Engagement rate (normalized by followers; De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017; Tafesse & Wien, 2018; Hill, 2025)**	

Note. Elaborated by the author.

* To ensure analytical clarity, the researcher distinguished between a dominant tone (the most salient communicative style in each post) and secondary tones (implicit or complementary undertones when applicable), a categorization introduced by the researcher. This distinction was deemed necessary because allowing multiple primary tones per post would increase complexity and hinder comparability, particularly in relation to engagement metrics. By focusing the main analysis on the dominant tone, consistency was preserved for cross-post and cross-brand comparisons. At the same time, recording secondary tones enabled the researcher to capture additional nuances in communicative style, thus enriching the interpretation of how brands employ layered strategies in RTM.

** To strengthen cross-brand comparability, engagement rate was included as a normalized metric. This measure is widely adopted in social media research as it accounts for differences in audience size, thus providing a more accurate assessment of content effectiveness (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017; Tafesse & Wien, 2018; Hill, 2025).

²⁷ The variable “Engagement Metrics” is linked to RQ5 because these indicators provide measurable indicators of the benefits of RTM; and to RQ4, as engagement outcomes reflect how different tones and content strategies are received by audiences, allowing for an assessment of their communicative effectiveness.

Appendix D - Full Contact Log of Interview Requests

Table 7

Full Contact Log of Interview Requests

Brand	Contact Channel(s)	First Contact	Second Contact	Third Contact
Sporting CP	Linkedin; Email	05.06.2025	13.06.2025	01.07.2025
Super Bock	Linkedin; Email	05.06.2025	17.06.2025	01.07.2025
IKEA	Linkedin	05.06.2025	14.06.2025	-
Staples	Linkedin	05.06.2025	-	-
JLL Residential	Linkedin	06.06.2025	17.06.2025	-
Licor Beirão	Linkedin; Email	06.06.2025	13.06.2025	01.07.2025
JCA Eletrodomésticos	Linkedin; Email	07.06.2025	13.06.2025	-
Lidl	Linkedin	07.06.2025	24.06.2025	23.07.2025
Portugália	Linkedin; Email	09.06.2025	13.06.2025	17.06.2025
MEO	Linkedin; Whatsapp (direct contact)	11.06.2025	17.06.2025	23.07.2025
Dominos	Linkedin	12.06.2025	18.06.2025	-
Liga Portugal	Linkedin; Email	12.06.2025	17.06.2025	-
Grupo AGEAS	Linkedin; Email	13.06.2025	17.06.2025	23.07.2025
Kuanto Kusta	Linkedin; Email	14.06.2025	23.07.2025	
Fnac	Linkedin; Email	14.06.2025	17.06.2025	24.06.2025
Aldi	Linkedin; Email	14.06.2025	01.07.2025	-
Sagres	Linkedin; Email	14.06.2025	17.06.2025	-
Uniarea	Email	14.06.2025	-	-

Brand	Contact Channel(s)	First Contact	Second Contact	Third Contact
Auchan	Linkedin; Email	15.06.2025	24.06.2025	07.07.2025
5asec	Website (Contact Form)	15.06.2025	-	-
Smart Lunch	Linkedin	15.06.2025	-	-
Penguin Random House	Email	17.06.2025	-	-
Schweppes	Linkedin	17.06.2025	24.06.2025	-
Vodafone	Email	18.06.2025	-	-
Era Portugal	Linkedin	18.06.2025	07.07.2025	-
Leroy Merlin	Linkedin	23.06.2025	-	-
Control	Email; Website (Contact Form)	27.06.2025	06.08.2025	09.08.2025
Pizza Hut	Linkedin	01.07.2025	-	-
Chocolates Regina	Phone Call; Email	01.07.2025	01.07.2025	-
Paladin	Linkedin; Email	01.07.2025	06.07.2025	23.07.2025
Pingo Doce	Email	03.07.2025	-	-
Uber Eats	Linkedin	23.07.2025	-	-
EDP	Linkedin	-	-	-
Bacalhau Caxamar	Linkedin	-	-	-
Casal Garcia	Linkedin	-	-	-
Inokem	Linkedin; Instagram; Email	24.07.2025	25.07.2025	-

Note. Elaborated by the author. “Contact Channel” refers to the medium used to reach out (e.g., Email, LinkedIn, Whatsapp). The table also includes the dates of the first three contact attempts made to each brand, always directed to different people. Follow-up or insistence attempts to the same person are not included. In cases where no further contacts were made, this was due to the author’s inability to access additional contacts (e.g., LinkedIn connection requests not accepted, lack of publicly available email, or absence of alternative contact channels). Colors indicate the outcome of the contact attempt: green = accepted, red = declined, yellow = responded initially but later discontinued response, and grey = never responded.

Appendix E - Industry sectors represented in the interview sample

Table 8

Industry sectors represented in the interview sample

Sector	Brand	Business Focus
Retail trade	Staples	Stationery, office supplies, and technology
	Pingo Doce	Grocery retail / Supermarkets
	Lidl	Grocery retail / Supermarkets
	JCA Eletrodomésticos	Home appliances and consumer electronics
Food and beverage service activities	Portugália	Restaurant business
Food manufacturing industry	Paladin	Sauces and condiments
Beverage manufacturing industry	Sagres	Beer
	Super Bock	Beer
	Schweppes	Non-alcoholic beverages / soft drinks
Telecommunications	Vodafone	Telecommunications
	MEO	Telecommunications
Real estate activities	Era Portugal	Real estate mediation
Education	Uniarea	Education / academic platform

Note. Elaborated by the author. Industry sectors were adapted from the *Classificação Portuguesa de Atividades Económicas, Revisão 3* (CAE Rev. 3), the Portuguese version of the NACE Rev. 2 classification, to reflect the study's focus on consumer-facing brands in Portugal.

Appendix F - Overview of Interview Durations

Table 9

Overview of Interview Durations

Brand	Duration Of The Interview (Minutes)
Staples	35
JCA Eletrodomésticos	45
Uniaarea	18
Vodafone	33
Sagres	21
Portugália	24
Super Bock	50
Pingo Doce	36
Era Portugal	37
Schweppes	20
MEO	22
Lidl	45
Paladin	33

Note. Elaborated by the author.

Appendix G - Interview Script

Appendix G1 - English translation

Part 1 // Introduction and Warm-up

Before we begin, thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this study. This interview is part of my master's dissertation, which examines how brands in Portugal engage in Real-Time Marketing (RTM) in response to unpredictable events, particularly on Instagram.

Your insights will be extremely valuable in understanding how RTM is practiced in the Portuguese market.

The interview will last approximately 20 to 30 minutes. With your consent, it will be audio recorded for transcription and analysis. All responses will be treated confidentially,

and while the brand name may be mentioned in the dissertation if authorized, the main goal is to understand practices, not to evaluate or judge.

Let's begin with some introductory questions.

Q1. Could you briefly introduce your role at [brand] and describe your connection to digital and social media communication?

Q2. Are you familiar with the concept of Real-Time Marketing in response to unpredictable events?

Part 2 // Core of the Interview

Q3. In 2024, [brand] responded to several unpredictable events [list of events]. Could you explain how these ideas usually emerge and what factors motivate the decision to respond in certain moments?

Q4. Can you identify patterns in the types of events your brand tends to respond to? What criteria make an event relevant or appropriate for an RTM action?

Q5. Do you think your brand's approach to RTM has evolved over time? What factors have influenced that evolution?

Q6. What benefits have you observed from these actions, whether in terms of performance or in strengthening brand positioning?

Q7. What are the main challenges you face in these actions, for example regarding timing, creativity, or internal approval processes?

Q8. How do you balance the need to respond quickly with maintaining brand identity and tone consistency?

Q9. In your perspective, is RTM in response to unpredictable events seen as a bold/differentiating practice, or as a common consumer expectation?

Q10. When deciding to respond in real time, is that decision usually strategic, or do you feel there can sometimes be external pressure (e.g., social media buzz or competitors' actions)?

Q11. Have there been situations where you chose not to respond to an event? What factors influenced that decision?

Part 3 // Personalized Section

Q12 (cluster: tone of communication).

- a) In several of your brand's posts, humor is present. Do you consider it possible to conduct effective RTM without always relying on explicit humor? How do you balance creativity and sobriety?
- b) Unlike other brands that tend to use humor in RTM, your brand adopted a more sober tone in 2024. Was this choice strategic? Do you consider it possible to conduct effective RTM without humor, even in contexts that might favor lighter approaches?
- c) In your RTM posts, humor often plays a central role. How do you define the boundaries of humor in such communications, and to what extent do you see RTM as an opportunity to integrate commercial promotions in a creative yet sensitive way?
- d) Other variations addressing the brand's communication tone more broadly.

Note: Depending on the brand's communication style, one or more of these prompts or similar variations were applied.

Part 4 // Conclusion

Q13. Do you recall any case where an RTM post generated negative feedback or controversy? How was that situation managed internally?

Q14. Although my study focuses on 2024, I would like to understand whether you identify any recent changes, or anticipate any future developments, in the way the brand approaches Real-Time Marketing.

Q15. Finally, is there any additional reflection, experience, or example you would like to share on this topic that could be relevant for this research?

Thank you very much for your time and contribution. Your input is extremely valuable and will help build a deeper understanding of RTM practices in Portugal.

Appendix G2 - Original version in Portuguese

Parte 1 // Introdução e Quebra-gelo

Antes de começarmos, muito obrigado por aceitar participar neste estudo. Esta entrevista faz parte da minha dissertação de mestrado, que analisa de que forma as marcas em Portugal recorrem ao Real-Time Marketing (RTM) em resposta a acontecimentos imprevisíveis, em particular no Instagram.

O seu testemunho será extremamente valioso para compreender como o RTM é praticado no mercado português.

A entrevista terá a duração aproximada de 20 a 30 minutos. Com o seu consentimento, será gravada em áudio para efeitos de transcrição e análise. Todas as respostas serão tratadas de forma confidencial e, embora o nome da marca possa ser mencionado na dissertação mediante autorização expressa, o objetivo principal é compreender práticas, e não avaliar ou julgar.

Começemos com algumas perguntas introdutórias.

Q1. Pode apresentar brevemente o seu papel na [marca] e a sua ligação à comunicação digital e às redes sociais?

Q2. Está familiarizado/a com o conceito de Real-Time Marketing em resposta a acontecimentos imprevisíveis?

Parte 2 // Núcleo da Entrevista

Q3. Em 2024, a [marca] respondeu a vários acontecimentos imprevisíveis [lista de eventos]. Pode explicar como costumam surgir estas ideias e que fatores motivam a decisão de reagir em determinados momentos?

Q4. Consegue identificar padrões nos tipos de acontecimentos a que a sua marca tende a responder? Que critérios tornam um evento relevante ou apropriado para uma ação de RTM?

Q5. Considera que a abordagem da sua marca ao RTM foi evoluindo ao longo do tempo? Que fatores influenciaram essa evolução?

Q6. Que benefícios têm observado com estas ações, seja em termos de performance (alcance, engagement, notoriedade), seja no reforço do posicionamento da marca?

Q7. Quais são os principais desafios que enfrentam neste tipo de ações, por exemplo ao nível do timing, da criatividade ou dos processos de aprovação interna?

Q8. Como equilibram a necessidade de reagir rapidamente com a manutenção da identidade e da consistência do tom da marca?

Q9. Na sua perspetiva, o RTM em resposta a acontecimentos imprevisíveis é visto como uma prática ousada/diferenciadora ou como uma expectativa comum dos consumidores?

Q10. Quando decidem reagir em tempo real, essa decisão é normalmente estratégica ou sente que pode, por vezes, resultar de pressões externas (por exemplo, buzz nas redes sociais ou ações dos concorrentes)?

Q11. Já houve situações em que optaram por não reagir a um acontecimento? Que fatores pesaram nessa decisão?

Parte 3 // Secção Personalizada

Q12. (cluster: tom de comunicação).

a) Em várias publicações da sua marca, o humor está presente. Considera possível realizar RTM eficaz sem recorrer sempre ao humor explícito? Como equilibram criatividade e sobriedade?

b) Ao contrário de outras marcas que recorrem frequentemente ao humor no RTM, a sua marca adotou um tom mais sóbrio em 2024. Esta escolha foi estratégica? Considera possível realizar RTM eficaz sem humor, mesmo em contextos que poderiam favorecer abordagens mais leves?

c) Nas publicações de RTM da sua marca, o humor tem muitas vezes um papel central. Como definem os limites do humor neste tipo de comunicação? E até que ponto veem o RTM como uma oportunidade para integrar promoções comerciais de forma criativa mas sensível?

d) Outras variações que abordam mais amplamente o tom de comunicação da marca.

Nota: Dependendo do estilo comunicativo da marca, foram aplicados um ou mais destes prompts ou variações semelhantes.

Parte 4 // Conclusão

Q13. Recorda-se de algum caso em que uma publicação de RTM tenha gerado feedback negativo ou alguma controvérsia? Como foi gerida essa situação internamente?

Q14. Embora o meu estudo se foque em 2024, gostaria de perceber se identifica mudanças recentes ou se antecipa desenvolvimentos futuros na forma como a marca encara o Real-Time Marketing.

Q15. Para terminar, há alguma reflexão, experiência ou exemplo adicional que gostaria de partilhar sobre este tema e que possa ser relevante para esta investigação?

Muito obrigado pelo seu tempo e contributo. A sua participação é extremamente valiosa e ajudará a construir uma compreensão mais aprofundada sobre as práticas de RTM em Portugal.

Appendix H - Interview Questions Mapped to Research Objectives and Literature

Table 10

Interview Questions Mapped to Research Objectives and Literature

Question	Interview Question*	Research Objective(s)	Author(s)
Q1	Could you briefly introduce your role at [brand] and describe your connection to digital and social media communication?	Intro only (not mapped)	
Q2	Are you familiar with the concept of Real-Time Marketing in response to unpredictable events?	Intro only (not mapped)	
Q3	In 2024, [brand] responded to several unpredictable events [list of events]. Could you explain how these ideas usually emerge and what factors motivate the decision to respond in certain moments?	RO1, RO2	Kerns (2014); Sanchez Torres & Restrepo (2015); Willemsen et al. (2018); Mazerant et al. (2021); Chae et al. (2025)
Q4	Can you identify patterns in the types of events your brand tends to respond to? What criteria make an event relevant or appropriate for an RTM action?	RO1	Lieb et al. (2013); Willemsen et al. (2018); Atal & Richey (2020); Ning et al. (2022); Chae et al. (2025)
Q5	Do you think your brand's approach to RTM has evolved over time? What factors have influenced that evolution?	RO7	Willemsen et al. (2018); Kalaignanam et al. (2021); Mazerant et al. (2021); Chae et al. (2025)
Q6	What benefits have you observed from these actions, whether in terms of performance or in strengthening brand positioning?	RO5	Willemsen et al. (2018); Borah et al. (2020); Mazerant et al. (2021); Chae et al. (2025)

Q7	What are the main challenges you face in these actions, for example regarding timing, creativity, or internal approval processes?	RO3	Lieb et al. (2013); Mazerant et al. (2020); Verma & Yadav (2021); Mendes (2024)
Q8	How do you balance the need to respond quickly with maintaining brand identity and tone consistency?	RO3	Lieb et al. (2013); Mazerant et al. (2020); Verma & Yadav (2021); Chae et al. (2025)
Q9	In your perspective, is RTM in response to unpredictable events seen as a bold/differentiating practice, or as a common consumer expectation?	RO6	Warren & McGraw (2016); Mazerant et al. (2021); Verma & Yadav (2021); Mendes (2024)
Q10	When deciding to respond in real time, is that decision usually strategic, or do you feel there can sometimes be external pressure (e.g., social media buzz or competitors' actions)?	RO1, RO2	Vila, Bharadwaj & Chae (2016); Verma & Yadav (2021); Almeida (2024); Mendes (2024)
Q11	Have there been situations where you chose not to respond to an event? What factors influenced that decision?	RO1	Lieb et al. (2013); Atal & Richey (2020); Mazerant et al. (2020); Ning et al. (2022); Chae et al. (2025)
Q12 (cluster: tone of communication)	a) In several of your brand's posts, humor is present. Do you consider it possible to conduct effective RTM without always relying on explicit humor? How do you balance creativity and sobriety? b) Unlike other brands that tend to use humor in RTM, your brand adopted a more sober tone in 2024. Was this choice strategic? Do you consider it possible to conduct effective RTM without humor, even in contexts that might favor lighter approaches?	RO4	Warren & McGraw (2016); Lee & Hong (2016); Yeo et al. (2021); Jeong et al. (2022); Moran (2023); Santos et al. (2023); Pias et al. (2024); Chae et al. (2025); Minkie (2025)

	c) In your RTM posts, humor often plays a central role. How do you define the boundaries of humor in such communications, and to what extent do you see RTM as an opportunity to integrate commercial promotions in a creative yet sensitive way? d) Other variations addressing the brand's communication tone more broadly. <i>Note: Depending on the brand's communication style, one or more of these prompts or similar variations were applied.</i>		
Q13	Do you recall any case where an RTM post generated negative feedback or controversy? How was that situation managed internally?	RO3, RO4	Celestin & Sujatha (2024)
Q14	Although my study focuses on 2024, I would like to understand whether you identify any recent changes, or anticipate any future developments, in the way the brand approaches Real-Time Marketing.	RO7	Mendes (2024); Chae et al. (2025); Haider et al. (2025)
Q15	Finally, is there any additional reflection, experience, or example you would like to share on this topic that could be relevant for this research?**	Exploratory (potentially RO1-RO7 depending on the answer)	

Note. Elaborated by the author.

*The original interview questions were asked in Portuguese. This table presents the translated English version. The original guide, in Portuguese, can be found in Appendix Gb.

**Question 15 was only added after the first interview, as the researcher felt the need to include a more open-ended prompt to allow professionals to share additional insights on the topic that might not have been addressed during the interview. Therefore, it was not asked to Interviewee A (Staples).

Appendix I - Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee A, Staples)

Table 11
Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee A, Staples)

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q1: Could you briefly introduce your role at Staples and your connection to the social media area?	- Marketing Director for 5 years, 15 years at Staples. - Responsible for omnichannel strategy (Retail, Online, Corporate). - Oversees brand awareness, positioning, and communication across all media.	
Q2: Are you familiar with the concept of Real-Time Marketing in response to unpredictable events?	- Staples has used RTM since 2022. - RTM is considered a complementary communication tool.	“(…) it is a tool the brand has used since 2022, as a complement to its message.” ²⁸
Q3: To contextualize, Staples was selected for this analysis for having reacted creatively to several unexpected events in 2024, such as Operation Influencer, Diogo Ribeiro’s performance at the Swimming World Championships Final, the Portuguese National Team at the European	- Motivation: proximity and relevance to consumers. - RTM reinforces brand participation in society and everyday life. - Key for long-established, non-digital-native brands to reinvent themselves.	“What moves consumers today is not only a good promotion, a wide product range, or excellent service. Being attentive to what surrounds us makes the brand actively participate in society, in

²⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) é uma ferramenta que a marca utiliza desde 2022, como complemento da sua mensagem.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Championship quarter-finals, and the earthquake. I would like to hear from you how these reactions came about and what motivated the decision to intervene in those moments.	- RTM positions Staples as close, engaging, and even humorous.	people's lives, and react to events in real time, placing itself alongside people.” ²⁹
Q4: Based on these examples, can you identify patterns in the types of events you usually react to or consider most relevant or appropriate for RTM actions? What factors make an event ‘relevant’ for a reaction from Staples?	- Relevance criteria: timeliness, significance for people/nation, potential link to brand. - Can connect to Staples’ core business (e.g., Ikea bookshelf case) or unrelated but socially relevant (e.g., earthquake). - Humor and promotional opportunities amplify relevance.	“The topic must be current, relevant to people’s lives or the country, and exploitable from the brand’s perspective.”³⁰ “It was sufficiently relevant and exploitable from a promotional perspective, associating it with a campaign that started that same day and that shook the country.”³¹
Q5: Do you consider that Staples’ approach to RTM has evolved over time and from one event to another? If so, what factors influenced this evolution?	- RTM became a strategic pillar. - Creation of monthly RTM segment (<i>Conversas de Secretária</i>). - RTM fosters identification, interaction, and emotional connection with users.	“We even created a monthly real-time marketing segment, called <i>Conversas de Secretária</i> , placing the brand alongside less obvious sectors, setting

²⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “O que move hoje em dia o consumidor não é apenas uma boa promoção, uma grande oferta de produtos ou um serviço de excelência, por isso estarmos atentos ao que nos rodeia faz com que a marca participe ativamente na sociedade, na vida das pessoas e reaja aos eventos em real time, situando-se ao lado das pessoas.”

³⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: “O tema deve ser atual, relevante para a vida das pessoas ou do país e explorável do ponto de vista da marca de alguma forma (...)”

³¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Foi suficientemente relevante e explorável do ponto de vista promocional, fazendo a associação a uma promoção que iniciava nesse mesmo dia e que fez o país tremer.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
		the tone, and enabling monthly conversations with other brands in the market.” ³²
Q6: And what benefits do you identify in these RTM actions, both in terms of performance and in terms of reinforcing Staples’ positioning on social media?	- RTM helps reach younger audiences who avoid traditional media. - Strengthens brand differentiation and consistency across audiences. - Makes Staples appear more accessible, organic, and conversational.	“RTM has helped to break through these barriers [reach younger audiences who avoid traditional media] and reach all people in a light and humorous way. The brand becomes more accessible, organic, and ready to converse.” ³³
Q7: What are the main challenges faced in these moments, for example in terms of timing, creativity, or internal approval?	- Small marketing team allows fast reactions, which is Staples’ case. - Close collaboration with social media agency. - Keys: attentiveness, relevance, timeliness, and avoiding too many intermediaries.	“At Staples, we are 3 people in Marketing, (...) so it's easy for us to talk to each other and react immediately.”³⁴ “The secret is to be attentive, identify relevance, act in a timely manner, and not have too many interlocutors in the process.”³⁵

³² Original quotation in Portuguese: “Criámos mesmo uma rubrica mensal de real-time marketing, chamada Conversas de Secretária nas redes sociais, colocando a marca junto de setores pouco óbvios, dando o mote e permitindo conversar mensalmente com outras marcas no mercado.”

³³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) o RTM tem ajudado a penetrar essas barreiras e a chegar a todas as pessoas, de uma forma leve e humorística. A marca torna-se mais acessível, orgânica e pronta a conversar.”

³⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Na Staples somos 3 pessoas no Marketing, (...) por isso é fácil falarmos entre nós e reagirmos de imediato.”

³⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “O segredo é estar atento, identificar a relevância, atuar em tempo útil e não ter muitos interlocutores pelo meio.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q8: Is there any difficult balance between reacting quickly and maintaining consistency with the brand's identity and tone?	- Balance is essential to maintain brand perception. - RTM must align with brand DNA and values. - Requires a touch of boldness without losing coherence.	"Maintaining balance is the main goal."³⁶ "RTM codes must draw from the brand's DNA and values, with a touch of boldness and timeliness, without ever undermining that balance."³⁷
Q9: Do you consider RTM in unpredictable events to be seen today as a bold practice on social media, or rather part of consumers' expectations regarding brands' digital strategies?	- RTM can be bold but is increasingly common. - Risk of forced advertising if not authentic. - Essential to evaluate whether and when RTM makes sense for each brand.	"It may be bold, but more and more brands are using it."³⁸ "Being present just for the sake of it is not a good strategy. In RTM we must convey truth in real time, and when that translates into just another forced advertisement, the effect can be the opposite."³⁹ "More than just being bold, it's important to evaluate whether this tool makes sense for all brands."⁴⁰

³⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Manter o equilíbrio é a meta principal."

³⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Os códigos de comunicação em RTM devem ir beber ao ADN do tom e valores da marca, com um toque de arrojo e atualidade, sem nunca colocar em causa esse equilíbrio."

³⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: "It may be bold, but more and more brands are using it."

³⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Estar por estar, fazer por fazer não é uma boa estratégia. No RTM temos que transmitir verdade em real time, e quando a tradução disso revela apenas mais uma publicidade forçada, o efeito pode ser contrário."

⁴⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Mais do que arrojo há que avaliar se esta ferramenta faz sentido para todas as marcas."

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q10: Do you consider RTM to always be a strategic brand decision, or do you feel there may sometimes be ‘pressure’ to react, whether due to social media buzz or because other brands are doing so?	- Staples is usually first to react, so not pressured by others. - Non-reactions are deliberate and justified.	“When we don’t react, we have a well-founded reason for it, and it is a conscious decision.” ⁴¹
Q11: Have there been situations in which you decided not to react, even while aware of the event? What factors weighed in that decision?	- Example: Mercadona pineapple → no reaction due to ongoing partnership with Pingo Doce. - Avoid politically, religiously, or socially controversial topics.	“We had several people asking us to react, (...) surprised by our silence (...).”⁴² “We simply did not go into play, as we had a partnership with another competitor, Pingo Doce, and it made no strategic sense to pollute the partnership or divert attention.”⁴³
QX1: Staples received last year the Lusophone Creativity Award in the category of Best Use of Real-Time Social Media. What impact did this recognition have on the team and the way you view RTM? Did it increase responsibility or	- Recognition boosted motivation to pursue RTM further. - Award legitimized RTM strategy. - Complementary to other awards in branded content and influencer collaborations.	“This award reinforced our motivation to follow this path (...).” ⁴⁴

⁴¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Quando não reagimos, temos uma razão fundamentada para não o fazer e é uma decisão consciente.”

⁴² Original quotation in Portuguese: “Tivemos várias pessoas a pedirem-nos para reagir, (...) surpreendidos pelo nosso silêncio (...).”

⁴³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Simplesmente não fomos a jogo, pois nessa altura estávamos com uma parceria com outro concorrente, o Pingo Doce, não fazendo sentido do ponto de vista estratégico poluir a parceria e desviar atenções.”

⁴⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Este prémio reforçou a nossa motivação em seguir este caminho (...).”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
motivation to continue innovating in this type of communication?		
Q12c: Your reactions to unpredictable events, such as Operation Influencer, the European Championship, and the earthquake, had a humorous tone, which seems to be a distinctive feature of your RTM communication. In the case of the earthquake post, for example, you took the opportunity to promote a discount campaign, using humor tied to the context. How do you define the boundaries of humor in your actions? And in this line, do you consider RTM to also be a good opportunity to integrate commercial promotions in a creative and effective way, without losing sensitivity in potentially delicate situations?	- Humor is a longstanding pillar of Staples' communication. - In RTM, humor helps integrate promotions naturally. - Humor must not appear as advertising, should remain light. - Boundaries guided by values: respect, diversity, moderation. - Aim to avoid taking political or ideological sides.	“Humor is a cornerstone of Staples’ communication for many years. Using it in digital and RTM is a natural and strategic evolution.”⁴⁵ “We try to ensure our boundaries are always based on respect for freedom, diversity, and moderation, avoiding taking sides (...).”⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “O humor é um alicerce de comunicação da Staples há muitos anos. Utilizá-lo em digital e em RTM, é uma evolução natural e estratégica.”

⁴⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Tentamos que as nossa balizas sejam sempre assente nos valores de respeito pela liberdade, diversidade e moderação, tentando não tomar partidos (...).”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q13: Do you recall any case where an RTM post generated negative feedback or controversy? How was that situation managed internally?	- Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. - Audience sometimes demands reactions when Staples stays silent. - No controversies reported.	“We have had very positive feedback, and people even ask us to react when we don’t.” ⁴⁷
Q14: Finally, although my study focuses on 2024, I would like to understand whether you identify any recent changes, or anticipate any future developments, in the way Staples approaches Real-Time Marketing.	- Changed digital agency in 2025. - Stronger focus on humanization, video, and AI. - RTM remains integral, with new examples already published.	“(…) we are betting on humanization of content and more videos and AI.”⁴⁸ “(…) RTM remains an integral part of our strategy.”⁴⁹

Note. Elaborated by the author.

⁴⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Temos tido feedback muito positivo e as pessoas já nos pedem para reagir, quando não o fazemos.”

⁴⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) estamos a apostar na humanização de conteúdos e recurso a mais vídeos e a IA.”

⁴⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) o RTM continua a fazer parte integrante da nossa estratégia.”

Appendix J - Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos)

Table 12
Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos)

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q1: Could you briefly introduce your role at JCA Eletrodomésticos and your connection to the social media area?	- Social Media Manager; also handles some offline comms, event graphics, sponsorships. - Broad experience in media and comms; works solo with external partners.	
Q2: Are you familiar with the concept of Real-Time Marketing in response to unpredictable events?	- Confirmed familiarity.	
Q3: To contextualize, JCA was selected for this analysis for having reacted creatively to several unexpected events in 2024, such as the confusion between the AD and ADN parties in the legislative elections, the ‘croquete’ controversy with Sónia Tavares at Rock in Rio, Portugal’s performance at the European Championship, the	- Ideas arise from high social salience and constant monitoring of platforms. - Motivation: participate in the conversation with humor and brand linkage even beyond core category.	“(…) when we see something with impact and already widely discussed (…) either the idea comes naturally (…) or I think a little and try to understand what you can join, look for an association we can make [with JCA].” ⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) quando vemos alguma coisa que parece que vai ter impacto e que notamos que já está a ser muito falado ou muito comentada (…) ou a ideia surge naturalmente (…) ou então penso um bocadinho e tento perceber em que é que se pode juntar, qual é a associação que conseguimos fazer [com a JCA].”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Windows outage, the earthquake, the Mercadona pineapple situation, and the ‘premium air’ trend. I would like to hear from you how these ideas usually emerge and what motivates the decision to react in those moments.		
Q4: From these examples and your experience, can you identify patterns in the types of events you usually react to or consider more relevant/appropriate for RTM actions? What factors make an event ‘relevant’ for an RTM action by JCA?	- Criteria: news-of-the-day; avoid harmful/sensitive topics. - Crisis awareness: consider downside risk if situation worsens. - Full creative freedom enables speed.	“If it’s something bad, we obviously don’t want to associate ourselves with a bad thing. If we can joke a bit, that’s fine.”⁵¹ “(…) we must always be careful to understand whether it is a sensitive topic or not.”⁵²
Q5: Do you consider that JCA’s approach to RTM has evolved over time and from one event to another? If so, what factors influenced this evolution?	- Shift to a closer tone (addressing customers by “tu”) and more visible humor; focus on high-profile events. - Some impact noticed (site visits/online sales).	“I thought (…) let’s change our approach a little, let’s start addressing customers by ‘tu’ (...).”⁵³ “We started fostering a different and more proximate image, with more humor (...) we started grabbing the more mediatic cases.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Se for uma coisa má, obviamente não nos queremos associar a uma coisa má. Se entendermos que dá para brincar um bocadinho, tudo bem, não há problema.”

⁵² Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) temos que ter sempre esse cuidado de perceber se é um tema sensível ou não.”

⁵³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Eu pensei (...) vamos mudar um bocadinho a nossa abordagem, vamos começar a tratar os clientes por tu (...).”

⁵⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Começamos a criar um tipo de imagem diferente, mais próxima, com mais humor (...) começamos a pegar realmente nestes casos nestes casos mais badalados, mais mediáticos.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q6: Beyond those benefits you just identified, are there any others you see coming from these actions? I know you've mentioned engagement, do you identify any additional benefits, both in terms of performance and in terms of reinforcing JCA's positioning on social media?	- Ultimate goal is sales; RTM supports top of mind and conversion.	"(...) of what is my responsibility, which is to leave the brand top of mind, okay, it seems to me that yes [the objective was achieved] without a doubt." ⁵⁵
Q7: You've touched on this already, but what are the main challenges you face in these actions, for example, timing, creativity, etc.? (I understand internal approval is not a difficulty.)	- Timing is critical: react while topic is salient but not too early. - Uses benchmark of other brands to gauge audience readiness. - There's an ongoing creativity training.	"We must be there when things happen, period." ⁵⁶ "(...) I'm going to see if the other big brands from whom I draw a lot of inspiration (...) have already reacted (...) and from there I'll post, no matter the time." ⁵⁷
Q8: There was something you already mentioned, managing and posting while maintaining tone and brand identity, which was precisely my next question. Is there any difficult balance between	- Yes: avoid reacting just to fill; ensure brand fit and relevance.	"(...) we must stay relevant, be there when we really have to, but also know when not to." ⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: "(...) daquilo que me compete que é deixar a marca top of mind, okay, parece-me que sim [o objectivo foi alcançado] sem dúvida alguma."

⁵⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Temos que estar lá quando as coisas acontecem, ponto."

⁵⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: "(...) vou ver se as outras grandes marcas a quem eu vou beber muita inspiração (...) já reagiram (...) e a partir daí publico, seja às horas que for."

⁵⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: "(...) temos de nos manter relevantes, temos que estar lá quando temos mesmo de estar lá, mas também saber não estar (...)."

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
reacting quickly and maintaining coherence with the brand's identity and tone?		
Q9: Now I'd like to ask whether, today, RTM around unpredictable events is seen as a bold practice on social media, or if it's part of consumer expectations regarding brands' digital strategies.	- Mixed: increasingly expected due to 24/7 media/social. - Control and Licor Beirão cited as reference brands people await. - Humor can operate as coping in sensitive moments.	"People are already expecting it a bit, so much so that you can see it in the news comments, for example, there are many people who say, oh, I'm already waiting for the post from Control or Beirão (...)" ⁵⁹
Q10: I'd also like to ask whether RTM is always a strategic brand decision, or whether you sometimes feel 'pressure' to react, either due to social media buzz or because other brands are doing it.	- Pressure often linked to sales opportunity; sometimes helpful, sometimes risky.	"This pressure to react is sometimes good (...) other times leaves us more exposed to error, doesn't it? Because we have to react fast." ⁶⁰
Q11: And have there been specific situations where you chose not to react, even while aware of what was happening? What factors weighed in that decision?	- Usually reacts, but avoids when no brand linkage or higher risk. - Rule of thumb: ensure at least a minimal connection and aim for a smile.	"I would be doing it just for the sake of doing it, and I don't want that (...) I want it to always have some connection, even minimal, so that people

⁵⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Acho sim que as pessoas já esperam um bocadinho, tanto que isso vê-se nos comentários das notícias por exemplo há muita gente que diz, ah até já estou à espera do post da Control ou do Beirão (...)."

⁶⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Esta pressão para reagir às vezes é boa (...) Outras vezes deixa-nos mais sujeitos ao erro, não é? Porque temos de reagir rápido."

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
		make the connection between one thing and another, and at least smile.” ⁶¹
Q12c: We already talked a bit about this, but all your RTM posts in 2024 used humor as the main tool, even in potentially sensitive contexts like the earthquake or political themes. How do you define the limits of humor in the brand’s communication? Is there any line you avoid crossing?	- Political neutrality; avoid taking sides. - Wait to confirm gravity before posting (e.g. earthquake). - Prepared to do crisis management if needed.	“We must be as neutral as possible in politics.” “I waited for some time, from the moment I saw that everything was under control I said, okay now it's safe, we can do something funny here, and we ended up publishing it.”⁶²
Q13: I think you mentioned earlier that you didn’t, but do you recall any case where one of your posts generated negative reactions or some kind of controversy, and how are such situations managed?	- None reported; associates this with the fact that the Instagram account has few followers.	“There has never been any controversy like that, also because, you see, on Instagram the page is relatively small (...).” ⁶³

⁶¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Ia estar a fazer só por fazer, e não quero isso (...) Quero que tenha sempre alguma ligação, por mínima que seja, que as pessoas façam a conexão entre uma coisa e outra, e que sorriam pelo menos.”

⁶² Original quotation in Portuguese: “Eu esperei algum tempo, a partir do momento em que vi que estava tudo controlado disse, pronto okay agora já é seguro, já podemos fazer aqui qualquer coisa engraçada, pronto e acabámos por publicar.”

⁶³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Nunca houve assim nenhuma polémica, também porque lá está, no Instagram a página é relativamente pequena (...).”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q14: Although my study focuses on 2024, I would like to understand whether you identify any recent changes, or anticipate any future developments, in the way JCA approaches Real-Time Marketing.	- Strategy unchanged; continue with memes to boost relatability and shares.	“The strategy will not change... we’ve been betting on memes, and people share them more with friends.” ⁶⁴
QX1: As you said, you manage social media for other brands. I just wanted to ask whether you use RTM with all of them, with any others, or only with JCA.	- Mostly not; other clients are more serious or event-bound, making RTM less suitable.	“(…) most brands I work with are more serious (….) RTM is too light [for serious brands] (…).” ⁶⁵
Q15: Finally, is there anything you would like to add on this topic that I haven’t asked about, anything that could be useful?	- Creativity fed by conversations and listening to people.	“(…) ideas can be anywhere, and sometimes a seemingly innocuous conversation can spark great ideas.” ⁶⁶

Note. Elaborated by the author.

⁶⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “A estratégia não vai mudar (...) até temos apostado em fazer memes e até notamos que as pessoas partilham mais para mandar para os amigos.”

⁶⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) a maior parte das marcas com quem trabalho são assim mais sérias (...) acho que o RTM é muito leve [para marcas sérias] (...).”

⁶⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) as ideias podem estar em qualquer lado, e às vezes numa conversa que pode parecer inócua, acabamos por ter ótimas ideias.”

Appendix K - Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee C, Uniarea)

Table 13

Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee C, Uniarea)

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q1: Could you briefly introduce your role at Uniarea and your connection to the social media area?	- Founder of Uniarea, directly manages all social media content. - Background in engineering but with strong interest in communication and education. - Project has dual nature: student support (public service role) + small communication agency working with major clients (Microsoft, Santander, EU institutions, etc.).	
Q2: Are you familiar with the concept of Real-Time Marketing in response to unpredictable events?	- Confirmed familiarity.	
Q3: To contextualize, Uniarea was selected for this analysis for having reacted creatively to several unexpected events in 2024, such as the ‘Operação Influencer’ at the beginning of the year, the earthquake, and the pineapple situation at Mercadona. I would like to hear from you how	- RTM is embedded in Uniarea’s DNA since its early days. - Strategy driven by irreverence and connection with young audiences. - RTM used to gain visibility and virality.	“Uniarea has done that since day one (...) I think it always had that slightly irreverent side, because we thot it had to do with the contact with the

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
these reactions emerged and what motivated the decision to intervene in those moments.	- Spin-off meme page <i>universitariostambemchora</i> also born from RTM culture.	young audience.” ⁶⁷ “On one hand, to connect with the younger side, to give the brand a more irreverent side [and] also to (...) go viral.” ⁶⁸
Q4: From these examples, can you identify patterns in the types of events you usually react to or consider more relevant or appropriate for RTM actions? What factors make an event ‘relevant’ for a Uniarea reaction?	- Avoids sensitive topics (religion, politics – with caution). - Emphasis on having a good idea before reacting (avoid “posting just for posting”)	“(…) we try to take risks in almost every topic we see.” ⁶⁹ “(…) if we don’t have a good idea, we don’t see the point of posting just for posting.” ⁷⁰
Q5: Do you consider that Uniarea’s approach to RTM has evolved over time and from one event to another? If so, what factors influenced this evolution?	- Evolution toward more caution. - Today’s environment demands careful consideration due to higher scrutiny from audiences. - Less impulsive than 5 years ago.	“I think nowadays you have to be much more careful about what you post on social media.” ⁷¹ “Five years ago we did things in a more relaxed way, without thinking (...) nowadays we think much more about what we do, publish (...) there are many things that happen and that we don’t

⁶⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “A Uniarea fez isso desde o dia um (...) acho que teve sempre esse lado um bocadinho de irreverência, porque achámos que tinha a ver com o contacto com o público jovem.”

⁶⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Por um lado conectar o lado mais jovem, o dar aqui um lado mais irreverente à marca [e] também para (...) viralizar.”

⁶⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) nós tentamos arriscar em quase todos os temas que vemos.”

⁷⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) se não tivermos uma boa ideia não fazemos questão de publicar só por publicar.”

⁷¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Acho que hoje em dia é preciso ter muito mais cuidado no que se publica nas redes sociais.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
		even get involved in because we think they might not go so well.” ⁷²
Q6: And what benefits do you identify in these RTM actions, both in terms of performance and in terms of reinforcing Uniarea’s positioning on social media?	- Main benefit: virality beyond core audience. - RTM helps reach new audiences and reinforces irreverent positioning with youth.	“The content tends to go viral (...) you reach many more people who otherwise wouldn't know your brand.”⁷³ “There were many articles published in various newspapers that made a compilation [of the reactions], and ours was there.”⁷⁴
Q7: What are the main challenges in these moments, for example in terms of timing, creativity, or internal approval?	- Internal process is simple (no long approval chain). - Main challenge is anticipating public interpretations and reputational risks. - Example: meme about politician’s invalid degree was risky but successful.	“The main difficulty is really having to think very carefully about the implications that content will have and how it will be perceived.”⁷⁵

⁷² Original quotation in Portuguese: “Há cinco anos atrás fazíamos de uma forma mais descontraída, sem pensar (...) hoje em dia pensamos muito mais no que é que fazemos, publicamos (...) há muitas coisas que acontecem e que nós nem entramos porque achamos que podem não correr assim tão bem.”

⁷³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “O conteúdo tende a viralizar (...) chegas a muito mais pessoas que de outra forma não iam conhecer a tua marca.”

⁷⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Houve muitos artigos publicados em vários jornais que fizeram uma compilação [das reações] e o nosso estava lá.”

⁷⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “A principal dificuldade é mesmo tu teres de pensar muito bem na implicação que aquele conteúdo vai ter e como é que leitura vai ter.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q8: Is there any difficult balance between reacting quickly and maintaining coherence with the brand's identity and tone?	- Balance required: Uniarea is an education brand, needs some seriousness. - Uses spin-off page (<i>universitariostambemchora</i>) to host riskier content.	“We are an education brand that must maintain a serious side. If you go too far into joking, it can create a contagion effect (...) people may not take seriously other content.” ⁷⁶
Q9: Do you consider that today RTM in response to unpredictable events is still seen as a bold practice on social media, or is it already part of consumer expectations regarding brands' digital strategies?	- RTM increasingly expected, less bold than before. - Many brands imitate (following the herd). - Mentions Control and IKEA as initiators of RTM culture in Portugal.	“In the Mercadona case it was a bit of following the herd (...) there are few brands that initiate this impulse. You have some brands with this in their DNA, like IKEA, or maybe Control on Instagram (...) but most brands just follow the others.” ⁷⁷
Q10: I would also like to ask whether you consider RTM is always a strategic brand decision, or whether you sometimes feel 'pressure' to react, either because of buzz on social media or because other brands are doing it.	- Confirms pressure exists due to dispersed audiences and declining organic reach. - Pressure leads to riskier content and need for virality. - Agencies professionalizing RTM also increase this pressure.	“There is indeed pressure to appear, and to appear you need to do riskier things and things that tend to be more viral.” ⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Somos uma marca de educação que tem de manter um lado sério. Se entrases muito no gozo, pode acontecer um efeito de contágio (...) as pessoas podem não levar muito a sério outras coisas que tu publicas.”

⁷⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “No caso do Mercadona foi um bocadinho “Maria vai com as outras” (...) há poucas marcas que dão início a esse impulso. Tens algumas marcas que têm isso no ADN, tens o IKEA, se calhar uma Control (...) tens é muitas marcas que seguem as outras.”

⁷⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Há uma pressão efetivamente para tu apareceres e para tu apareceres tens de fazer coisas mais arriscadas e coisas que tendem a ser mais virais.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q11: Have there been situations where you decided not to react, even while aware of the event? What factors weighed in that decision?	- Typically only skip when no interesting idea emerges.	“Typically when we don’t react it’s because we don’t have a very interesting idea to publish (...).” ⁷⁹
Q12c: As you mentioned, you use a lot of humor and memes, and in all your RTM reactions you used this tone, even in potentially sensitive topics such as politics (Operação Influencer) or the earthquake... How do you define the limits of humor in this type of communication? Is there any line you prefer not to cross despite your informal tone?	- No strict limits, but avoid direct offenses.	“Obviously we try not to enter into direct offenses with someone, but we don’t try to limit ourselves much in that sense.” ⁸⁰
Q12d: By communicating RTM in this meme format, you get very close to students, who are your target audience. Do you feel this tone makes your RTM reactions more easily accepted, even in sensitive contexts?	- Humor/meme style facilitates acceptance. - Provides students with relief from stress and serious information overload.	“What we tried to do was: create moments of humor that provide a break and a pause in [students’] daily life, which is already full of serious information.” ⁸¹

⁷⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Tipicamente quando nós não reagimos é porque não temos uma ideia muito interessante para publicar (...).”

⁸⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Obviamente tentamos não entrar aqui entrar em ofensas diretas com alguém mas não nos tentamos limitar muito nesse sentido.”

⁸¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “O que nós tentamos fazer é um pouco isso: tentar criar momentos de humor que façam uma quebra e uma pausa no que é o dia-a-dia [dos estudantes] que já é com muita informação séria.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q13: Do you recall how the public and followers reacted to these posts? Was there any negative feedback or any situation that made you reflect internally about future limits or approaches?	- Generally positive reception. - Occasional misinterpretations but rare.	“Typically (...) some people may interpret something wrongly, but overall the reactions are good.” ⁸²
Q14: Although my study focuses on 2024, I would like to know if you identify any recent or future changes in the way Uniarea approaches Real-Time Marketing.	- Strategy will remain relatively the same. - Slight shift toward more video content.	“More video, less image. Video takes longer to produce (...). The strategy is not very different compared to last year.” ⁸³
Q15: Finally, is there anything you would like to add on this topic that I have not asked, which could be useful?	- Nothing to add.	

Note. Elaborated by the author.

⁸² Original quotation in Portuguese: “Tipicamente (...) há pessoas que podem sempre interpretar alguma coisa mal, mas regra geral as reações são boas.”

⁸³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Mais vídeo, menos imagem. O vídeo é um conteúdo que demora mais a fazer (...). A estratégia não é muito diferente relativamente ao ano passado.”

Appendix L - Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee D, Vodafone)

Table 14
Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee D, Vodafone)

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q1: Could you briefly introduce your role at Vodafone and your connection to the social media area?	- Social Media team member for ~2 years; prior decade in agencies. - Social sits within Brand (Advertising) and Digital; in-house paid media + insights/research.	
Q2: Are you familiar with the concept of Real-Time Marketing in response to unpredictable events?	- Confirmed familiarity.	
Q3: To contextualize, Vodafone was selected for this analysis for reacting creatively to several unexpected events in 2024, such as the ‘very mindful, very demure’ trend from TikTok and the speculation around Taylor Swift’s surprise song in Portugal. How do these ideas usually emerge and	- Sources: small internal team + young agency closely tracking trends. - Data/traffic insights used to spot moments (concerts, festivals). - Adapt trends to Vodafone’s universe (brand fit first).	“Taylor was an obvious choice because we knew it would explode somewhere and we had to seize it.”⁸⁴ “(…) we try to bring it into our universe… adapt the idea to Vodafone’s reality (…).”⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “A Taylor era uma escolha óbvia porque sabíamos que eventualmente a coisa iria explodir para algum lado e nós tínhamos que aproveitar.”

⁸⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) tentamos trazer um bocadinho para o nosso universo e a nossa realidade neste caso Vodafone (…).”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
what motivates the decision to react in those moments?		
Q4: From these examples and your experience, can you identify patterns in the types of events you usually react to or consider more relevant or appropriate for RTM actions? What factors make an event ‘relevant’ for a Vodafone RTM action?	- Music is a prime territory (brand DNA: they’re present at Primavera Sound, Paredes de Coura, PLAY awards). - No fixed matrix; first spotter alerts the team; speed essential. - Close client–agency sync to deliver same-day assets.	“(…) music is a big part of our DNA, so we try to be as attentive as possible to these music topics (…).”⁸⁶ “There isn’t exactly a method, but the reaction, the timing, is essential, that is, the first person to notice immediately alerts the whole team, (...) stop what you’re doing right away.”⁸⁷
Q5: Do you think Vodafone’s approach to RTM has evolved over time and from one event to another? If so, what factors influenced this evolution?	- Selective approach; avoid “going just because”. - Tactical focus on spaces with higher fit (music; sometimes series/sports). - RTM is short-cycle and must happen fast.	“(…) there are many brands that go just because, because they have to go, (...) it’s something that makes no sense to me.”⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) a música faz muito parte do nosso ADN portanto esses tópicos de música nós tentamos estar o mais atentos possível (…).”

⁸⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Não há propriamente um método, mas a reação, o tempo, é essencial, ou seja, a primeira pessoa a perceber avisa logo a equipa toda, (...) parem logo o que estão a fazer.”

⁸⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) há muitas marcas que vão só porque sim, porque têm que ir, (...) é uma coisa que me faz muita confusão.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q6: Can you identify benefits of these RTM actions, both in performance terms and for reinforcing Vodafone's positioning on social media?	- Strong immediate metrics when content is on-point with audience affinities (music). - Builds relationship and goodwill; differentiates beyond price.	"(...) in terms of metrics, you feel it right away, (...) when you create content that people identify with, that is on point (...)." ⁸⁹ "Brands thrive a lot on the relationship you create (...) there will come a point where the price is more or less the same for everyone (...). The way you differentiate yourself is what you offer beyond that." ⁹⁰ "(...) it also brings good goodwill: look at how young, how fun, and what cool things they do!" ⁹¹
Q7: And what about the challenges, such as timing, creativity, internal approval, etc.?	- Timing and resources are the main constraints; trends are ephemeral. - Crisis scenarios require late-night coordination. - Big campaigns can reduce RTM capacity.	"Time, without a doubt. The planning, the always on (...) that takes up a lot of our time. The fact that we have to be very quick." ⁹² "(...) it happens that the trend suddenly starts on a Friday, and by Monday no one is talking about it anymore." ⁹³

⁸⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: "(...) a nível de métricas tu sentes logo, (...) quando tu fazes um conteúdo com que as pessoas se identifiquem, que está on point (...)."

⁹⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: "As marcas vivem muito da relação que tu crias (...) vai chegar a um ponto em que o preço está mais ou menos igual para todos (...). A forma de tu te diferenciases é aquilo que tu ofereces para além disso."

⁹¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: "(...) traz aqui também um bom goodwill: olha que jovens, que divertidos e que coisas tão giras que eles fazem!"

⁹² Original quotation in Portuguese: "O tempo, sem dúvida. O planeamento, o always on (...) que nos leva muito tempo. O facto de termos de ser muito rápidos."

⁹³ Original quotation in Portuguese: "(...) calha a trend de repente começar numa sexta, na segunda já ninguém está a falar sobre isso."

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
QX1: You said the social team is just two people; how does internal approval work for RTM?	- Depends on topic: product/network claims need more validation; cultural trends often just sense-check comprehension.	“For “very mindful, very demure” there was no need, (...) I only asked, If I post this, do you get it?” ⁹⁴ “(...) only if it's more at the product level, in terms of offerings, that we need to validate with other types of people” ⁹⁵
Q8: Is there a difficult balance between reacting quickly and maintaining coherence with brand identity and tone?	- Long-term agency partnership (20 years) safeguards brand identity and risk boundaries.	“(...) it is a great safeguard, they [the agency] already know what we need, they essentially know where we cannot go, and the risks we can take.” ⁹⁶
Q9: Do you consider RTM around unpredictable events to be seen as a bold practice on social media, or part of consumers’ expectations today?	- Some brands are native to RTM (e.g., Control); but RTM shouldn’t become routine. - Rejects “reacting for the sake of it”; must add brand value.	“(...) reacting just to react ends up not bringing value (...) you bet on what you know will go well or else (...) instead of being RTM, it's marketing, it becomes nothing. I think doing it, but doing it well (...) always bring it into the brand’s universe. (...).” ⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “O very mindful very demure não foi preciso, (...) as únicas pessoas a quem eu perguntei era tipo, se eu puser isto vocês percebem ou não?”

⁹⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) só se for a nível mais de produto, de oferta é que nós temos de validar com outro tipo de pessoas.”

⁹⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) é uma salvaguarda muito grande, eles [a agência] já sabem aquilo que nós precisamos, sabem essencialmente onde é que nós não podemos ir, e os riscos que nós podemos correr.”

⁹⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) reagir por reagir acaba por não trazer valor (...) tu apostas naquilo que tu sabes que vai correr bem ou então (...) em vez de ser RTM é marketing, torna-se nada. Eu acho que fazer, mas fazer bem (...) trazendo sempre para o universo das marcas (...).”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q10: Is RTM always a strategic brand decision, or is there sometimes 'pressure' to react due to buzz or other brands?	- Vodafone does not feel FOMO; no obligation to "appear". - Decision is strategy-first; if it doesn't fit, they skip.	"We don't feel obligated, nor do we feel pressure from any side for it to be that way. And I really think that, either it makes sense or it doesn't." ⁹⁸
Q11: Although you reacted to several moments, you did not join other major 2024 moments (e.g., the earthquake, Operação Influencer, meteorite). What factors weighed in the decision not to react?	- Avoid natural disasters (service impact risk; little to add). - Avoid politics/crime topics (not Vodafone's territory). - Non-reaction is often a strategic choice.	"For us, everything that is natural disasters is something that affects us a lot and can affect the service level, and we generally don't take many risks (...)."⁹⁹ "(...) it was too great of a risk, and what did we actually have to say about the earthquake? Maybe we really had nothing."¹⁰⁰ "(...) anything that is politics, (...) crimes (...) is not our territory."¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Não nos sentimos obrigados e nem sentimos pressão de lado nenhum para que assim seja. E eu acho mesmo que, ou faz sentido ou não faz."

⁹⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Para nós, tudo o que é catástrofes naturais é uma coisa que nos afeta muito e pode afetar a nível de serviço, e nós regra geral não nos arriscamos muito (...)."

¹⁰⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: "(...) era um risco demasiado grande, e o que é que nós tínhamos de facto para dizer sobre o sismo? Se calhar não tínhamos mesmo nada."

¹⁰¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: "(...) tudo o que seja política, (...) crimes (...) não é o nosso território."

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q13: Do you recall any case where an RTM post generated negative reactions or controversy, whether due to the reaction itself or just service complaints, and how are such situations managed?	- RTM content itself has not triggered backlash; service complaints appear under most posts (telco reality).	“Negative reaction to the post itself we have never had until today. (...) But in every post, guarantyd someone will complain about the service.” ¹⁰²
Q14: Although my study focuses on 2024, do you identify any recent or future changes in how Vodafone approaches RTM?	- RTM strategy essentially unchanged; current focus on new brand ambassador (Jessica Athayde) limits bandwidth. - Heightened caution due to polarized context; brands need broader, agnostic stance.	“I think what will mark the next few years a bit is that (...) all the brands will have to think very carefully about the things they are going to say because we take many risks.” ¹⁰³ “The world is what changed and we had to adapt a little bit to the world as well.” ¹⁰⁴
Q15: Finally, is there anything else you’d like to add that could be useful for this research?	- Bias toward action: if it fits strategy and is well-reasoned, take the risk.	“(…) unless it's something you know, this can go very wrong, it's always worth doing. If it's part of your strategy, (...) go for it.” ¹⁰⁵ “Good ideas are always worth it.” ¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Original quotation in Portuguese: “Reação pelo post em si negativa até hoje nunca tivemos. (...) Mas em cada post que nós temos, garantidamente que alguém se vai queixar de serviço.”

¹⁰³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Eu acho que o que vai marcar um bocadinho os próximos anos, é que (...) todas as macas vão ter de pensar muito bem nas coisas que vão dizer porque corremos muitos riscos.”

¹⁰⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “O mundo é que mudou e nós tivemos que nos adaptar um bocadinho também ao mundo.”

¹⁰⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) a não ser que seja uma coisa que tu sabes, isto pode correr muito mal, vale sempre a pena fazer. Se fizer parte da tua estratégia, (...) go for it.”

¹⁰⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “As boas ideias valem sempre a pena.”

Note. Elaborated by the author.

Appendix M - Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee E, Sagres)

Table 15

Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee E, Sagres)

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q1: Could you briefly introduce your role at Sagres and your connection to the social media area?	- Marketing Manager for Sagres; responsible for 360° brand comms via Brand Managers team. - Not in day-to-day social ops, but ultimately accountable for all communications.	
Q2: Are you familiar with the concept of Real-Time Marketing in response to unpredictable events?	- Yes; handled with their creative agency - Internally framed as Tactical/Contextual Content; social should mirror integrated comms.	“We call it Tactical Content, that is, Contextual (...) if something is happening in the country or the world that makes sense for us to create content around, we do it.” ¹⁰⁷
Q3: To contextualize, Sagres was selected for this analysis for having reacted creatively to several unexpected events in 2024: the earthquake, Portugal’s Olympic medals, and the Mercadona	- Clear red lines: avoid polarizing/controversial topics. - Operates under Heineken’s Responsible Marketing Code (no appeals to excess	“(…) we try not to address anything that is polarizing or too divisive. And since we are an alcoholic beverage, we have to be extremely careful in how we approach the topics.” ¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Nós chamamos-lhe Tactical Content, ou seja, ou Contextual (...) se alguma coisa que se está a passar no país ou no mundo que faça sentido nós fazermos algum conteúdo à volta, fazemo-lo.”

¹⁰⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) tentamos não abordar nada que seja polarizante ou que seja muito fracionante. E como somos uma bebida alcoólica, temos que ter imensos cuidados na forma como abordamos os temas.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
pineapple. How did these reactions emerge and what motivated the decision to intervene?	consumption; no minors; no causal promises of “better life”). - Prioritizes sports, Portugal-related pride moments, and widely viral/popular trends with shareability.	
Q4: Based on these examples, can you identify patterns in the types of events you usually react to or consider most relevant or appropriate for RTM actions? What factors make an event ‘relevant’ for a reaction from Sagres?	Answered in the previous question.	
Q5: Do you consider that Sagres’s approach to RTM has evolved over time and from one event to another? If so, what factors influenced this evolution?	- Became more intentional and selective; RTM space must be well justified. - Only react if there is an ownable Sagres angle; otherwise skip (no “just because”). - Mind channel fit (e.g., some TikTok trends don’t translate to Instagram).	“(…) the space for contextual content has to be well justified, it really has to be something that makes a lot of sense to go for. (...) many times, since we can't find the angle that would be ownable for us to tackle this topic, we prefer not to do it.” ¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) o espaço para conteúdo contextual tem que ser bem justificado, tem que ser mesmo uma coisa que faça muito sentido ir. (...) muitas vezes, como não conseguimos encontrar o ângulo que seria ownable para nós para pegar nesse tema, preferimos não o fazer.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q6: What benefits do you identify in these RTM actions (performance/positioning)?	- Benefits depend more on content quality than on being contextual per se. - Admits FOMO sometimes drives unplanned RTM posting rather than being motivated by the benefits of this strategy; but planned, on-brand opportunities often perform better.	“Sometimes it’s a bit of FOMO doing this posts, it’s just because, oh I don’t want not to do it, right?”¹¹⁰ “(…) what will dictate whether you can have good engagement rates is whether your content is good.”¹¹¹ “(…) it’s much more a matter of FOMO than, properly, of having better results.”¹¹²
Q7: What are the main challenges (timing, creativity, internal approval)?	- Multi-layer approvals (Brand, Corporate Affairs, Legal) due to alcohol category. - To keep timing, RTM often routed via WhatsApp ‘freestyle’ approvals outside normal process.	“Contextual posts, we usually manage via WhatsApp (…) a bit more freestyle, but it’s the only way to get everyone’s approval in a timely manner (...).¹¹³
Q8: Is there a difficult balance between reacting quickly and maintaining brand identity and tone?	- Yes; if it’s not part of the brand, don’t do it.	“Always if it’s not part [of the brand], we don’t do it.”¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Às vezes é um bocado FOMO fazer estes posts porque, é só porque, ah não quero não fazer, não é?”

¹¹¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) o que vai ditar se tu consegues, efetivamente, ter bons índices de engagement, é se o teu conteúdo é bom.”

¹¹² Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) é muito mais uma questão de FOMO do que, propriamente, de ter resultados melhores.”

¹¹³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Os contextuais, normalmente, gerimos por WhatsApp (…) um bocadinho mais freestyle, mas é a única forma de conseguirmos, em tempo útil, ter a aprovação de toda a gente (...).”

¹¹⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Sempre, se não faz parte, não fazemos.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q9: Do you consider RTM in unpredictable events to be a bold practice, or part of consumer expectations today?	- RTM now expected for some brands; “must-have” for those with RTM DNA. - Cites Control as a brand that “lives well” on RTM; warns against brands with low ownability doing it just because.	“(…) for some brands, it's no longer a nice to have, it's a must have, because otherwise, they lose a bit of their angle there.” ¹¹⁵
Q10: Is RTM always a strategic brand decision, or is there sometimes ‘pressure’ to react due to buzz or other brands?	- Acknowledges market pressure/FOMO, but Sagres aims not to yield to it. - If after hours they can’t make it right, they drop it; increasingly avoid tit-for-tat with competitor (Super Bock).	“(…) it's a lot of FOMO, I would say.” ¹¹⁶ “(…) if after a few hours we're not able to do it properly, then it's better to forget about it.” ¹¹⁷
Q12c: You used humor in RTM, including in delicate contexts (e.g., earthquake). How do you define the limits of humor? Any lines you avoid crossing?	- Beer tone: light/optimistic, wordplay; avoid harming or targeting groups. - Apply Responsible Code; humor around sensitive events only with weight and measure and if no harm occurred.	“(…) we use a tone with more humor or more fun, but always with the concern of not hurting.” ¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) para algumas marcas, já não é um nice to have, já é um must have, porque se não, perdem ali um bocado o seu ângulo.”

¹¹⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) é muito FOMO, eu diria.”

¹¹⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “se ao fim de umas horas não estamos a conseguir fazer aquilo como deve ser, então, mais vale esquecer.”

¹¹⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) we use a tone with more humor or more fun, but always with the concern of not hurting.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q13: Do you recall any case where an RTM post generated negative feedback or controversy? How was it managed?	- No significant negative feedback recalled for RTM.	"I don't recall people being offended by RTM content." ¹¹⁹
Q15: Finally, is there anything else you'd like to add about RTM that could be useful for this research?	- Sagres uses RTM tactically, constrained by alcohol-category rules and global group oversight. - One creative post can rival a big campaign's impact (refers to IKEA bookcase case for Operação Influencer).	"You spend two hundred, three hundred thousand euros producing a campaign, which sometimes doesn't have the same effect as a post, a burst of creativity someone had." ¹²⁰

Note. Elaborated by the author.

¹¹⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Não tenho assim memória de ter recebido más reações a conteúdos."

¹²⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Tanto gastas duzentos, trezentos mil euros a produzir uma campanha, que, às vezes, não tem o mesmo efeito do que tem um post, um rasgo de criatividade que alguém teve."

Appendix N - Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee F, Portugália)

Table 16

Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee F, Portugália)

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q1: Could you briefly introduce your role at Portugália and your connection to the social media area?	- Marketing Director for Grupo Portugália Restauração. - Ultimate owner of social media strategy and decisions; day-to-day ops handled by team members.	
Q2: Are you familiar with the concept of Real-Time Marketing in response to unpredictable events?	- Confirmed familiarity.	
Q3: To contextualize, Portugália was selected for this analysis for having reacted creatively to several unexpected events in 2024, such as the Operação Influencer early in the year and, later, the Rock in Rio ‘croquette’ controversy in partnership with Uber Eats, although, in the	- RTM must be a conscious, strategic decision; can increase engagement when aligned with hot topics. - Brand–event fit is critical (ownable link); croquette case was “on brand”. - When RTM can also drive conversion (e.g.,	“(…) those contents will be so much more relevant when there is an identification with the brand. For example, in our case, the croquettes were the perfect fit.”¹²¹ “(…) when you manage to add that third lever of the content being interesting, generating

¹²¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) esses conteúdos serão tão mais relevantes quando houver uma identificação com a marca. Por exemplo, no nosso caso, os croquetes foram na mouche.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
meantime, that post is no longer available on your feed, but, well, I saved it at the time. How did these reactions emerge and what motivated the decision to intervene?	Uber Eats promo), it hits a “magic balance”. - Strategic pivot (June 2024): rebranding led to a shift away from frequent RTM toward premium product storytelling (quality photography, prestige feed) to build brand equity long-term.	engagement, and also potentially leading to (...) a conversion (...) then I think you have a bit of the magic balance.” ¹²² “(...) to accompany a rebranding of the brand in June 2024, [we decided] to show what we know how to do and do well, with quality photography, with a more prestigious feed (...) not so noisy, not so chasing trends.” ¹²³
Q4: Based on these examples, can you identify patterns in the types of events you usually react to or consider most relevant or appropriate for RTM actions? What factors make an event ‘relevant’ for a reaction from Portugália?	Answered in the previous question.	
Q5: Before that change, did the approach evolve from event to event? What influenced that evolution (e.g., feedback)?	- Feedback should always guide decisions; social provides immediate, visceral signals.	“(...) I think everything should be guided by feedback (...) [we should] ensure that we stay true to our strategy, (...) analyze things calmly.” ¹²⁴

¹²² Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) quando tu consegues juntar ainda essa terceira alavanca de o conteúdo é interessante, gera engagement, e além disso pode gerar (...) uma conversão (...) aí acho que tens um bocado o equilíbrio mágico.”

¹²³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) a acompanhar um rebranding da marca em junho de 2024, [decidimos] mostrar o que é que sabemos fazer e bem feito, com fotografia de qualidade, com um feed mais de prestígio (...) não tão barulhenta, não tão, ir atrás das tendências.”

¹²⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) eu acho que tudo deve ser guiado por feedback (...) [devemos] garantir que somos fiéis à nossa estratégia, (...) analisar as coisas com calma.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
	- Weigh outliers versus critical mass; adjust while staying faithful to strategy.	
Q6: And what benefits do you identify in these RTM actions, both in terms of performance and in terms of reinforcing Portugal's positioning on social media?	Answered in Q3 (mentions increased engagement and conversion into sales).	
Q7: While you were doing RTM, what were the main challenges (timing, creativity, internal approval)?	- Speed is vital; need agile creative partners. - Example of Control as a benchmark: simple, templated production and likely in-house design enable rapid response. - Approval flows and regulated categories (e.g., prior pharma experience) make RTM harder; structure must be built for agility.	"(...) speed is the key."¹²⁵ "[Control] has a structure set up that allows them this efficiency. (...) all the posts are super simple (...) they are a background with an image, they don't have photographic production, they don't have video... And very possibly (...) they even have an in-house team of designers, which allows them to be even faster."¹²⁶
Q8: Is there any difficult balance between reacting quickly and maintaining consistency with the brand's identity and tone?	Answered in the previous question.	

¹²⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: "(...) a rapidez é a chave."

¹²⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: "[a Control] tem uma estrutura montada que lhes permite essa eficiência. (...) todos os posts são super simples (...) são um background com uma imagem, não têm produção fotográfica, não têm vídeo... E muito possivelmente (...) eles até têm uma equipa de designers in-house, que lhes permite serem ainda mais rápidos."

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q9: Do you consider RTM in unpredictable events to be seen today as a bold practice on social media, or rather part of consumers' expectations regarding brands' digital strategies?	- Increasingly commonplace (banalized) but still valuable; more brands now react, turning it into a "healthy race" to be first.	"I think brands realize that there is indeed sharing, there is viralization." ¹²⁷ "(...) it's almost a bit of a war between these companies more to see who catches it first, which is a healthy war (...)." ¹²⁸
Q10: Is RTM always a strategic brand decision, or do you feel there may sometimes be 'pressure' to react, whether due to social media buzz or because other brands are doing so?	- Pressure exists (external and internal); many people "have opinions" on marketing. - Antidote is a clear social strategy and defined territories; avoid "doing everything and being nothing".	"Oh, why didn't we make a post reacting like Control did? (...) that pressure will exist, whether from consumers or business, or even, sometimes, internally." ¹²⁹ "Brands that try to do everything end up being nothing." ¹³⁰
Q11: You reacted to Operação Influencer, but not to other 2024 topics (e.g., new government logo, meteor, solar eclipse). What factors weighed in the decision not to react?	- Avoid polarizing themes (politics, club football, religion) to respect a broad customer base; such topics don't build brand.	"We have a very large consumer base with different backgrounds, and it is mainly with the intention of respecting all of them that we try to avoid engaging in polarizing topics." ¹³¹

¹²⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Acho que as empresas apercebem-se que de facto há partilha, há viralização."

¹²⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: "(...) é quase um bocado uma guerra entre essas empresas mais para ver quem é que apanha primeiro, que é uma guerra saudável (...)."

¹²⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Ah, porque é que não fizemos um posto a reagir como fez a Control? (...) essa pressão vai haver, seja de consumidores ou de negócio, ou até, às vezes, interno."

¹³⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: "As marcas que tentam fazer de tudo, depois não são nada."

¹³¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Temos uma base de consumidores muito grande e diferentes backgrounds, e é mais com o intuito de respeitarmos todos eles que tentamos evitar entrar em temas polarizadores."

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q13: Do you recall any RTM case that generated negative feedback or controversy? How was it handled?	- None recalled.	
Q15: Any final reflections or examples useful for this research?	- Suggested exploring RTM → conversion pathways (orders, reservations) beyond engagement. - Case evidence: croquette RTM day saw above-normal sales via Uber Eats offer.	“That day we sold many more croquette boxes than on a normal day.”¹³² “[brands should realize] (...) that they can take advantage of Real-Time Marketing, not only to be on the crest of the wave and the topic of conversation and generate engagement, but also to understand how they can take the next step and convert that into a sale (...).”¹³³

Note. Elaborated by the author.

¹³² Original quotation in Portuguese: “Naquele dia vendemos muito mais boxes de croquetes do que vendemos num dia normal.”

¹³³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “[as marcas devem perceber] (...) que podem aproveitar o Real-Time Marketing, não só para estarem na crista da onda e no tema de conversa e gerar engagement, mas também perceberem como é que podem dar o passo a seguir e converter isso numa venda (...).”

Appendix O - Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee G, Super Bock)

Table 17
Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee G, Super Bock)

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q1: Could you briefly introduce your role at Super Bock and your connection to the social media area?	- Manages the Super Bock “mother brand” since 2022. - Social handled with a creative agency; digital focus since 2011.	
Q2: Are you familiar with the concept of Real-Time Marketing in response to unpredictable events?	- Confirmed familiarity.	
Q3: To contextualize, Super Bock was selected for this analysis for having reacted creatively to several unpredictable events in 2024... How did these reactions emerge and what motivated the decision to intervene?	- Agency monitors hot topics across platforms and signals opportunities. - Speed is decisive; some paths are pre-planned for foreseeable scenarios. - Use intelligent humor with a recognizable template (product + headline on red).	“The agency is already understanding which topics make the most sense to us, obviously we won't cover everything.”¹³⁴ “What ends up being more important is the speed with which you respond (...).”¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “A agência já vai compreendendo aqueles que são os tópicos que para nós fazem mais sentido, obviamente nós não vamos a tudo.”

¹³⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “O que acaba por ser mais importante é a rapidez com que das resposta (...).”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
		“(...) we always try to make it with intelligent humor, with a pun (...).” ¹³⁶
Q4: From these examples, can you identify patterns in the types of events you react to? What makes an event ‘relevant’ for a Super Bock reaction?	- Apply a negative filter: avoid politics, religion, animal rights, juvenile topics. - Only act when there is an ownable angle that fits brand territory.	““We usually do more in reverse (...) identify situations where we understand it doesn't make sense (...) there always has to be an angle that allows us to contextualize the brand in a relevant and appropriable way.”¹³⁷ “There are topics that we obviously try to avoid because they are usually divisive, such as politics, religion, animal rights.”¹³⁸
Q5: Has Super Bock’s approach to RTM evolved over time and from event to event? What influenced that evolution?	- Shift from early contextual creatives to a faster, professionalized pipeline. - TikTok introduction raises pace and requires platform-specific language.	“(...) nowadays RTM is truly real-time, we have to respond within a space of 2 hours, 3 hours.”¹³⁹ “We have a quick model that also simplifies with the red background, product, headline, and in a

¹³⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) tentamos sempre que seja com um humor inteligente, com um trocadilho (...).”

¹³⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Nós normalmente fazemos mais pelo inverso (...) identificar situações onde nós entendemos que não faça sentido (...) tem de haver sempre um ângulo que nos permita contextualizar a marca de uma forma relevante e apropriável.”

¹³⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Há temas que nós obviamente procuramos evitar porque normalmente são fraturantes, como a política, religião, direitos dos animais.”

¹³⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) hoje o RTM é mesmo real-time, temos de responder num espaço de 2 horas, 3 horas.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
		way, we already have a basic structure set up, obviously we will keep evolving.”¹⁴⁰ “At the beginning of the year, we joined TikTok, which is obviously another world, even in terms of graphic language (...).”¹⁴¹
Q6: What benefits do you identify in these RTM actions, both in performance terms and in strengthening Super Bock’s positioning on social media?	- Clear lifts in shares and reach; organic performance guides paid boost. - Brand equity growth with younger audiences; sales impact indirect.	“You don't share any content (...) when we start to see increases (...) in the sharing indicator, it's a sign that okay, this justifies us promoting (...).”¹⁴² “In terms of sales, it is always difficult to make a direct transposition.”¹⁴³ “(...) once observing growth in brand attributes, we believe it will translate into sales, because it will directly affect brand preference, brand consideration (...) not in a direct way (...).”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Temos um modelo rápido que também simplifica com o fundo vermelho, produto, headline e de certa forma já temos uma estrutura-base montada, obviamente vamos evoluindo.”

¹⁴¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “No início do ano entrámos no Tiktok, que é outro mundo como é óbvio, até a nível de linguagem gráfica (...).”

¹⁴² Original quotation in Portuguese: “Tu não partilhas qualquer conteúdo (...) quando começamos a ver ali subidas (...) no indicador de partilhas, é sinal que okay, isto justifica nós promovermos (...).”

¹⁴³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “A nível de vendas, é sempre difícil fazer a transposição direta.”

¹⁴⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) ao ver um crescimento a nível dos atributos de marca acreditamos que se vai traduzir em vendas, porque vai afetar diretamente a preferência da marca, a consideração da marca (...) não de uma forma direta (...).”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q7: What are the main challenges in these moments, e.g., timing, creativity, internal approval?	- Time and approvals: align org so quick sign-offs happen; riskier topics add layers. - Need crisis-ready processes.	“The main challenge is obviously time.”¹⁴⁵ “(…) we have identified people who know they need to provide a quick response in a short amount of time.”¹⁴⁶ “(…) as we feel that the risk of what we are doing is increasing, we will need more layers of approval.”¹⁴⁷
Q8: Is there a difficult balance between reacting quickly and maintaining coherence with the brand identity and tone?	- Selectivity over virality: skip when message is saturated or off-territory. - Avoid posthumous tributes or perceived opportunism; keep to friendship territory.	“(…) if there is context for the brand to be, in what is the territory of friendship and what makes sense within the category itself, we will be there, but if that is not the case... [we won't].”¹⁴⁸ “Talking about more sensitive topics but in a more comprehensive way without being oriented toward one pole or the other is better.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “O principal desafio é obviamente o tempo.”

¹⁴⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) temos pessoas identificadas que sabem que têm de dar uma resposta rápida num curto espaço de tempo.”

¹⁴⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) à medida que nós sentimos que o risco do que estamos a fazer vai aumentando, precisaremos de mais camadas de aprovação.”

¹⁴⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) se houver contexto para a marca estar, daquilo que é o território da amizade e daquilo que fizer sentido da própria categoria, estaremos lá, mas se não for o caso... [não fazemos].”

¹⁴⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Falar de temas mais sensíveis mas de forma mais abrangente sem estar orientada a um polo ou outro é melhor.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q9: Is RTM in unpredictable events seen as a bold practice, or part of consumers' expectations for brands' digital strategies?	- Now expected; should be integrated in strategy. - Expansion to contextual Digital Out-Of-Home (DOOH) is natural. - Mentions Control as a reference actor in the space.	"I think that nowadays it is starting to become something normalized (...) we are already associating it with many brands that are doing it [Control, Pingo Doce]." ¹⁵⁰ "An hour after Portugal won the European Championship, we were able to transport what we had on social media to the streets [through digital billboards]. I think brands need to know that this new premise (...) is evolving and becoming increasingly present." ¹⁵¹
Q10: Is RTM always a strategic decision of the brand, or is there sometimes 'pressure' to react due to buzz or what other brands are doing?	- Should be strategy-led; some pressure exists but they say no when misaligned. - Prefer to be first; otherwise may skip to avoid a thin, late message.	"Obviously, we also had situations where people ask, look, this is here, why aren't we doing anything? That is relatively normal and even healthy." ¹⁵² "(...) sometimes there is a bit of that pressure but fortunately, thanks to this consistency and the

¹⁵⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Eu acho que hoje em dia já começa ser algo normalizado, ou seja, já vamos associando a muitas marcas que o vão fazendo [Control, Pingo Doce]."

¹⁵¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Uma hora depois de Portugal ganhar ao Europeu pudemos transportar o que tínhamos nas redes sociais para as ruas [através de mupis digitais]. Eu acho que as marcas têm que saber que esta nova premissa (...) vai evoluindo e é cada vez mais presente."

¹⁵² Original quotation in Portuguese: "Obviamente que também tivemos situações em que as pessoas perguntam olha está aqui isto, porque é não fazemos nada? Isso é relativamente normal e até é saudável."

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
		results with the strategy we have been adopting, we have the confidence to say no.” ¹⁵³ “It hurts a lot when we are not the first.” ¹⁵⁴
Q11: Have there been situations in which you decided not to react, even while aware of the event? What factors weighed in that decision?	Answered in Q8 (criteria to skip; identity/territory coherence).	
Q12c: You use humor even in sensitive contexts (e.g., the earthquake). How do you define limits? Is there any line you avoid crossing?	- Long-standing inclusive, non-divisive ‘intelligent humor’; lift people up; avoid taking sides.	“[The limit is when] it could be misinterpreted by some segment of society, and therefore we try as much as possible to make it inclusive and not create divisions.” ¹⁵⁵ “Humor is something that characterizes us, (...) intelligent humor (...) it's not very literal humor, it's not the obvious joke (...).” ¹⁵⁶
Q13: Do you recall any RTM case that generated negative feedback or controversy? How was it handled?	- 2022 anti-racism RTM post (“what matters is the inside”) was misinterpreted and generated backlash.	“It is important to keep in mind the risk of RTM, a quick response, even well thought out, can go wrong, so having the teams prepared with one to

¹⁵³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) às vezes há um bocadinho essa pressão mas felizmente nós, fruto desta consistência e dos resultados com a estratégia que temos vindo a adotar temos segurança para dizer que não.”

¹⁵⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “A nós custa-nos muito quando não somos os primeiros.”

¹⁵⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “[O limite é quando] pode ser mal interpretado por alguma franja da sociedade e por isso procuramos ao máximo que seja abrangente e não crie divisões.”

¹⁵⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “O humor é algo que nos caracteriza, (...) humor inteligente (...) não é um humor muito literal, não é a piada óbvia (...).”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
	- Shows high risk of RTM: even well-intentioned posts can trigger crisis and require careful management. - Plan beyond the post: anticipate reactions and have crisis management aligned across teams.	then be able to handle any more negative comments that may arise.”¹⁵⁷ “(…) to be very aware that alongside RTM there is crisis management that must be well-oiled, with clear definitions of what responses should be given and in the event of an escalation of that crisis, which other areas of the company should be on pre-alert and be notified.”¹⁵⁸
Q14: Although my study focuses on 2024, do you foresee any recent or future evolution in how Super Bock approaches RTM?	- TikTok added in 2025; faster cycles and lo-fi formats (low production quality) when the platform demands.	“(…) the strategic change is indeed the introduction of TikTok this year.” ¹⁵⁹
Q15: Anything else to add that could be useful for this research?	- Nothing to add.	

Note. Elaborated by the author.

¹⁵⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “É importante ter presente o risco do RTM, a resposta rápida mesmo muito pensada pode correr mal, por isso ter as equipas preparadas com um para depois conseguir lidar comentário que possa surgir mais negativo.”

¹⁵⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) ter muito consciente que aliado ao RTM está uma gestão de crise que tem de estar bem oleada, com definições claras de que respostas devem ser dadas e no caso de agravamento dessa crise que outras áreas da empresa devem estar de pré-aviso e estarem avisadas.”

¹⁵⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) a alteração estratégica é mesmo a introdução do Tiktok este ano.”

Appendix P - Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee H, Pingo Doce)

Table 18
Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee H, Pingo Doce)

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q1: Could you briefly introduce your role at Pingo Doce and your connection to the social media area?	- Leads digital communication (paid + content); social sits within her team.	
Q2: Are you familiar with the concept of Real-Time Marketing in response to unpredictable events?	- Confirmed familiarity.	
Q3: To contextualize, Pingo Doce was selected for this analysis for reacting creatively to several unexpected events in 2024 (meteor, Olympic medals, earthquake, banana-on-wall artwork...). How did these reactions emerge and what motivated the decision to intervene?	- RTM is about joining the live conversation people are having; speed before the 8 p.m. news. - Decision filtered by brand values and “is it justifiable to enter?”.	“The ideas come up exactly there, it's being part of the conversation that people are having.” ¹⁶⁰ “(…) without forgetting our values, we assess if it's justifiable to enter a given conversation.” ¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: “As ideias surgem exatamente aí, é fazer parte da conversa que as pessoas estão a fazer.”
¹⁶¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) sem nos esquecermos dos nossos valores, perceber se é justificável entrar em determinada conversa.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q4: From these examples, can you identify patterns in the types of events you react to or consider most relevant/appropriate for RTM? What makes an event ‘relevant’ for Pingo Doce?	- Defines exclusion axes: religion, politics, sensitive socio-cultural topics; often also club football. - Authority/fit rule: speak first on food; avoid themes where competitors have more legitimacy.	“We have some axes (...) religion, (...) political, (...) a socio-cultural spectrum (...) football is maybe another axis.”¹⁶² “(...) this fourth axis [football] which is a topic where the competition has more authority to speak about it instead of us.”¹⁶³ “On food we should be the first to react (...) we have more authority than other brands.”¹⁶⁴
Q5: Has Pingo Doce’s RTM approach evolved over time and across events? If so, what drove that evolution?	- Platform shift (TikTok) forced faster, bolder RTM (e.g., 48-hour staff dance to “Bota um Funk”). - Process maturity improved agility (agency proposal → internal validation).	“From the moment we started with TikTok, we had to adapt to RTM (...) within 48 hours we had employees dancing.”¹⁶⁵ “(...) a process of submitting a creative proposal is one thing, internal validation is another. (...) There are these two phases.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Original quotation in Portuguese: “Temos alguns eixos (...) região, (...) político, (...) o espectro sociocultural (...) o futebol se calhar é um outro eixo.”

¹⁶³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) esse quarto eixo [futebol] que é um tema em que a concorrência que tem mais autoridade para falar disso ao invés de nós.”

¹⁶⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Nós sobre comida temos de ser os primeiros a reagir (...) temos mais autoridade para tal do que outras marcas.”

¹⁶⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “A partir do momento em que abrimos com o Tiktok agora tivemos de nos adaptar ao RTM (...) num espaço de quarenta e oito horas tínhamos colaboradores a dançar.”

¹⁶⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) um processo de um envio de uma proposta criativa é uma coisa, outra coisa é uma validação interna. (...) Tem essas duas fases.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q6: Can you identify more specific benefits of these posts (IG performance, reach, engagement; sales; brand positioning)?	- Tracks talkability/buzz (incl. dark social: private shares/WhatsApp/screenshots). - RTM posts overperform other content on visible metrics (comments, likes, mentions).	“Our most important metric, which is difficult to measure, is the buzz (...) I think the term is called dark social, that which is not measurable on social media.”¹⁶⁷ “It's a buzz that we feel exists, because the algorithm itself values this content and we notice that more people are coming back to it organically.”¹⁶⁸ “The secondary metrics (...) comments, likes, mentions, whenever we take an RTM action, we manage to stand out more compared to the other content we produce.”¹⁶⁹
Q7: What are the main challenges (timing, creativity, internal approval)?	- Aligning buzz with business (product timing/angle). - Timing race: if not among the first, they consciously drop the post.	“(...) to marry two opportunities, the one of chatter with the one of business. (...) Do I change the communication angle? Do I change the

¹⁶⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “A nossa métrica mais importante e que é difícil de medir é o falatório (...) acho que o termo se chama dark social, aquilo que não é mensurável nas redes sociais.”

¹⁶⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “É um falatório que nós sentimos que existe, porque o próprio algoritmo vai valorizando esse conteúdo e vamos percebendo que mais pessoas que vão voltando para ele, organicamente.”

¹⁶⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “As métricas secundárias (...) comentários, gostos, menções, sempre que fazemos uma ação de RTM conseguimos estar mais destacados em relação aos restantes conteúdos que produzimos.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
		product? Change service?” ¹⁷⁰ “The issue of timing. Not being the first to do (...) we made the conscious decision not to move the content forward.” ¹⁷¹
Q8: Is there a difficult balance between reacting quickly and keeping brand identity/tone coherent?	- Balance depends on positioning and having brand-fit templates/guardrails; some brands (e.g., Control) are more shielded by tone.	“There are brands that (...) I already have that have an easier path because humor allows it. An example is Control, which has a very specific positioning (...).” ¹⁷² “There has to be a balance between tone and coherence, the RTM has to be worked on beforehand, and this is something that is done daily.” ¹⁷³
Q9: Is RTM in unpredictable events seen as bold, or part of consumer expectations?	- In Portugal it’s become expected.	“I think that in Portugal, this culture has been created where brands are part of the RTM.” ¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) casar duas oportunidades, a do falatório com a do negócio. (...) Mudo de ângulo de comunicação? Mudo de produto? Mudo de serviço?”

¹⁷¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “A questão do timing. Não sendo os primeiros a fazer (...) tomamos a decisão consciente de não fazer avançar o conteúdo.”

¹⁷² Original quotation in Portuguese: “Há marcas que (...) já tenho têm o caminho facilitado porque o humor assim o permite. Um exemplo é a Control que tem um posicionamento muito específico (...).”

¹⁷³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Tem que existir um equilíbrio entre tom e coerência, o RTM tem de ser trabalhado antes e isso é algo que é feito de forma diária.”

¹⁷⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Acho que em Portugal se criou esta cultura das marcas fazerem parte do RTM.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
	- Predicts next shift to brand-run entertainment beyond basic RTM. - Doubts it will last much longer.	“It’s going to be basic to do RTM, and we’ll have to evolve into something like entertainment.”¹⁷⁵ “I have doubts about whether RTM will last much longer.”¹⁷⁶
QX1: You said RTM may not last much longer, why? Too many brands?	- RTM is cheap and organic, great for small brands; big brands will shift away as RTM becomes overused.	“RTM is very cheap (...) especially for small brands.”¹⁷⁷ “In big brands, that won't be the way, because it's too... it's already so overdone.”¹⁷⁸
Q10: Is RTM always a strategic decision, or is there sometimes ‘pressure’ to react (buzz/other brands)?	- Should be strategic with predefined templates/process; external pressure is higher for brands whose social spine is RTM (e.g., Control, Super Bock).	“The investment in RTM has and should be something strategic.”¹⁷⁹ “(…) there is more external pressure on brands where RTM is at the core of their social media positioning [Control and Super Bock].”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Vai ser básico fazer RTM e teremos que evoluir para algo como entretenimento.”

¹⁷⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Tenho dúvidas sobre se o RTM vai vingar por muito mais tempo.”

¹⁷⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “O RTM é barato (...) sobretudo para as marcas pequenas.”

¹⁷⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Nas grandes marcas isso não vai ser o caminho, porque é demasiado... já está tão visto.”

¹⁷⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “A aposta no RTM tem e deve ser algo estratégico.”

¹⁸⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) há mais uma pressão externa para as marcas em que o RTM está na espinha do seu posicionamento nas redes sociais [Control e Super Bock].”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
		“It would be strange if something happened today and in a few hours Control and Superbock didn't say anything.” ¹⁸¹
Q12c: You often use humor even in sensitive contexts (e.g., the earthquake). How do you define the limits of humor? Any line you avoid crossing?	- No cheap humor; witty/spirited tone but within brand essence and guardrails (avoid tragedies, politics).	“We don't do cheap humor.” ¹⁸² “(…) from the moment it is no longer within our limits of humor, then we no longer move forward.” ¹⁸³
Q12b: Is RTM without humor viable?	- Yes, informational RTM can work when aligned to category (e.g., health tips in seasonal outbreaks).	“RTM can be done without humor, depends on content and strategy.” ¹⁸⁴
Q11: You didn't join some widely discussed moments (e.g., Rock in Rio croquette controversy). Why?	- Timing & rivalry: if a competitor nails it first and hype peaks, they stand down; also a no 'reply-to-brands' policy in PT culture.	“It's the timing that makes all the difference.” ¹⁸⁵ “From the moment a competitor manages to surpass us for that reason (...) it didn't make sense for us to publish.” ¹⁸⁶

¹⁸¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Seria estranho se hoje acontecesse alguma coisa e daqui a algumas horas a Control e a Superbock não dissessem nada.”

¹⁸² Original quotation in Portuguese: “Nós não fazemos humor de graça.”

¹⁸³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) a partir do momento em que já não está nos nossos limites de humor então já não se avança.”

¹⁸⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “RTM dá para fazer sem humor, depende do próprio conteúdo e estratégia da marca.”

¹⁸⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “É o timing que faz toda a diferença.”

¹⁸⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “A partir do momento em que um concorrente consegue ultrapassar-nos (...) não nos fazia sentido publicar.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q13: Any RTM case that generated negative feedback or controversy? How did you handle it?	- None recalled; has community-management matrix (silence, statement, de-promote, delete/archive) and brand fans that defend the brand.	"I don't recall any [in RTM]." ¹⁸⁷ "(...) we have a community management matrix that protects us from these situations, we have that covered." ¹⁸⁸
Q14: Though my study focuses on 2024, did anything change in 2025 in how Pingo Doce sees RTM?	- Reduced frequency in 2025: only publish when value-adding; recent metrics showed less "stardom" vs. prior years.	"We have reduced (...) the volume of RTM content." ¹⁸⁹ "(...) it is no longer [our priority] because (...) if it doesn't add value, we don't do it just for the sake of doing it." ¹⁹⁰
Q15: Anything else to add that could help my research?	- Sometimes silence outperforms speaking; RTM should also keep fun/humanity alive.	"Sometimes it's smarter for the brand to stay silent, sometimes they gain more by saying nothing." ¹⁹¹ "RTM helps brands have fun, to be people." ¹⁹²

Note. Elaborated by the author.

¹⁸⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Não me lembro de nenhum [de RTM]."

¹⁸⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: "(...) nós temos uma matriz de gestão de comunidade que nos defende destas situações, temos isso acautelado."

¹⁸⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Nós temos reduzido (...) no volume de conteúdos de RTM."

¹⁹⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: "(...) deixou de ser [a nossa prioridade] porque (...) se não é de valor acrescentado não fazemos só por fazer."

¹⁹¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Por vezes é mais esperto a marca estar em silêncio, às vezes ganham mais em não dizer nada."

¹⁹² Original quotation in Portuguese: "RTM ajuda as marcas a divertirem-se, a serem pessoas."

Appendix Q - Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee I, Era Portugal)

Table 19

Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee I, Era Portugal)

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q1: Could you briefly introduce your role at ERA Portugal and your connection to social media?	- Marketing Director since 2021; oversees all marketing, internal/external comms, offline & online. - Social is executed by a creative agency, in transition, with monthly pre-approved plans; interviewer personally steps in for anything “off-plan” (e.g., RTM).	
Q2: Are you familiar with Real-Time Marketing in response to unpredictable events?	- Confirmed familiarity.	
Q3: ERA Portugal was selected for reacting creatively to several unexpected 2024 events... How do these ideas usually emerge and what motivates the decision to react?	- Primary motive: engagement, as it sharp spikes in shares/comments, especially when reacting fast. - Do not “enter just to enter”: must fit brand, tone and ongoing dialogue; only advance with a good	“What motivates us to react is clearly engagement (...) we really feel a huge spike when a post is successful and the engagement is higher the faster we react (...).”¹⁹³ “We don’t want to jump in just because everyone

¹⁹³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) o que nos motiva a reagir é claramente engagement (...) sentimos mesmo um pico muito grande quando um post é bem sucedido e que o engagement é maior quanto mais rápido nós reagirmos (...).”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
	idea that feels ownable. - Ideas come from both sides: brand flags opportunities; agency increasingly brings fully-formed proposals for quick approval.	is talking... either we have a good idea that fits the brand, or we drop it.” “Often the agency already presents a concrete implementation we approve (or not).”
Q4: From these examples, can you identify patterns in the types of events you tend to react to? What makes an event ‘relevant’ for ERA?	- Best fit: home/living–related situations (dust from Africa, blackout, etc.), which tie to ERA’s Garantia ERA proposition. - Some trends (e.g., Mercadona pineapple) were less obvious but justified by a strong creative angle.	“(…) everything that has more to do with our experience at home, naturally we will more easily get there (...).”¹⁹⁴ “(…) the Mercadona pineapple (...) wasn’t an obvious link for me (...) the creative approach justified our entry.”¹⁹⁵
Q5: Has your approach evolved over time / between events? What influenced that evolution?	- Moved from trial-and-error to a structured, guideline-driven practice. - Market saturation led to a “less is more” stance: enter only when it truly makes sense to protect coherence/identity.	“It started as trial and error (...). From then on, it really became part of our strategic guidelines and is done in an increasingly structured manner.”¹⁹⁶ “I think there was a very big trend of real-time (...) at this moment (...) [we] think twice about whether it makes sense to get in or not.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) tudo que tenha mais que ver com a nossa vivência em casa naturalmente nós vamos mais facilmente chegar lá (...).”

¹⁹⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) o Ananás da Mercadona (...) para mim não foi óbvia uma ligação (...) isso mas a abordagem criativa justificou a nossa entrada (...).”

¹⁹⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “No início, quando começámos, foi muito de tentativa e erro (...). A partir daí, entrou mesmo nas nossas guidelines estratégicas e é feito de uma forma cada vez mais estruturada.”

¹⁹⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Acho que houve uma moda muito grande do real-time (...) neste momento [nós gostamos de] pensar duas vezes se faz sentido entrar ou não.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q6: Beyond engagement, what other benefits do you see (metrics/positioning)?	- Strengthens brand attributes (younger, closer, relational). - Builds peer recognition/networking among brands and in the marketing community (awards, notoriety).	“(...) it helps a lot in working the brand as primarily younger, closer, more relational (...).”¹⁹⁸ “(...) gives some power within the marketing world (...) opens doors to awards, (...) doors of recognition among peers (...).”¹⁹⁹
Q7: Main challenges (timing, creativity, approvals)?	- Timing is everything; morning vs afternoon can decide traction. - Creative quality under time pressure; solved by strong creative guardrails and simple approval chains with multiple approvers empowered to act.	“Timing is everything (...) talking about something in the morning or in the afternoon is completely different.”²⁰⁰ “This challenge is solved with a very well-aligned creative strategy.”²⁰¹ “The second biggest challenge is the issue of approvals, if there is agility, a well-defined hierarchy, and a well-defined approval process, it is very simple.”²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) ajuda muito a trabalhar a marca como sobretudo mais jovem, mais próxima, mais relacional (...).”

¹⁹⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) dá aqui algum poder dentro do mundo do marketing (...) abre portas para prémios, (...) portas de reconhecimento entre os pares (...).”

²⁰⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) o timing é tudo (...) comunicar um tema de manhã ou à tarde já é completamente diferente (...).”

²⁰¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Este desafio resolve-se com uma estratégia criativa muito bem alinhada.”

²⁰² Original quotation in Portuguese: “O segundo maior desafio é a questão das aprovações, se houver uma agilidade, uma hierarquia bem definida e um processo de aprovações bem definido, é muito simples.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q8: Balancing speed with brand tone/identity, any difficulty?	- Yes; currently reinforcing coherence per channel during agency transition. - Agencies now pre-allocate RTM hours/processes; success requires teams who actively consume culture/trends and reflect the target's diversity.	“(…) we are clearly aiming to create even more coherence, a much more defined line in each network.”²⁰³ “(…) we went to pitch with the largest agencies in the market in Portugal (…) they all already have hours allocated, they already have a process allocated for RTM.”²⁰⁴
Q9: Is RTM in unpredictable events bold or already part of consumer expectations?	- Among marketers it's banalized; among consumers it's still valued when well done (quality & humor now required).	“(…) for marketers in Portugal, it is already super banalized (…) none of us look at this and think: how bold.”²⁰⁵ “When there is a good creative idea, it is very well received by the clients.”²⁰⁶
Q10: Is RTM always a strategic decision, or is there ‘pressure’ to react (buzz/other brands)?	- Pressure depends on positioning: youthful/friendly brands feel it more; institutional brands less so. Unexpected entrants can have outsized impact.	“(…) IKEA, Lidl, Worten (…) there will always be pressure because we are already waiting [for them to react].”²⁰⁷

²⁰³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) estamos claramente a querer criar ainda mais coerência, uma linha muito mais definida em cada rede.”

²⁰⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) nós fomos a pitch com as maiores agências do mercado em Portugal (…)

todas elas já têm horas alocadas, já têm um processo alocado para o RTM.”

²⁰⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) no panorama dos marketeers em Portugal já está super banalizado (…)

já nenhum de nós olha para isto e pensa: que arrojado.”

²⁰⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Quando há uma boa ideia criativa, é muito bem recebida pelos clientes.”

²⁰⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) uma IKEA, um Lidl, uma Worten (…)

aí haverá sempre pressão porque nós já estamos à espera [que eles reajam].”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
		“(…) a more institutional brand, where suddenly (….) there isn't as much pressure.”²⁰⁸ “I think it really depends on how the brand positions itself from the outset.”²⁰⁹
Q11: You chose not to react to some big 2024 topics (e.g., Operação Influencer). Why?	- Avoid political/religious arenas; housing is politically sensitive for ERA, humorous takes risk backlash. - Will consider exceptional ideas (e.g., IKEA's shelf) but risk/benefit must justify.	“(…) anything that is more in the political, religious field, is really something that doesn't make sense to us (….) it has more risk than benefit.”²¹⁰
Q12b: Can RTM be done without explicit humor? How do you keep a subtle tone?	- RTM implies lightness, not necessarily overt humor. - ERA opts for subtle humor consistent with a serious, high-stakes category like buying a house.	“RTM implies lightness”²¹¹ “(…) buying a house is serious (….) we never wanted to be too at ease (….)”²¹²
Q13: Any RTM case that triggered negative feedback? How was it handled?	- Rugby RTM post drew “appropriation” complaints (no sponsorship/territory misfit) → learning to respect territory relevance.	“For us, it was clearly an example of, did it make sense for us to get involved? (….) Sports is not a territory that Era usually talks about, and in fact,

²⁰⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) uma marca mais institucional, que de repente entre (….) não existe tanta pressão.”

²⁰⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Acho que depende muito da forma como a marca se posiciona à partida.”

²¹⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) tudo que seja mais campo político, religioso, é mesmo algo que para nós não faz sentido (….) tem mais risco do que benefício.”

²¹¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “O real-time implica leveza.

²¹² Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) comprar uma casa é uma coisa muito importante (….) nunca quisemos ser demasiado à vontade (….)”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
		we had no connection to that event (...) we were able to understand some negative comments (...).” ²¹³
Q14: Any recent/future evolution in how ERA approaches RTM?	- Greater TikTok focus since late-2024/2025; channel-specific adaptation and faster timing needed.	“We got more into Tiktok (...) it's a very different platform from the others (...) the real-time on Tiktok [is] completely different because timing is even more important.” ²¹⁴
Q15: Anything to add that could help my research?	- Key issue is often lack of strategy behind RTM; entering “just to be talked about” can misposition brands.	“(...) entering is not always better, sometimes it can also reposition a brand, it can seem desperate, negative.” ²¹⁵

Note. Elaborated by the author.

²¹³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Para nós foi claramente um exemplo de, será que fazia sentido entrarmos? (...) O desporto não é um território que a Era fale habitualmente e de facto não tivemos nenhuma ligação àquele evento (...) conseguimos entender alguns comentários negativos (...).”

²¹⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Entrámos mais no Tiktok (...) é uma plataforma muito diferente das restantes (...) o real-time no Tiktok [é] completamente diferente porque o timing é ainda mais importante.”

²¹⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) entrar nem sempre é melhor, às vezes também pode desposicionar uma marca, pode parecer desesperado, negativo.”

Appendix R - Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee J, Schweppes)

Table 20

Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee J, Schweppes)

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q1: Could you briefly introduce your role at Schweppes and your connection to social media?	- Marketing team in Portugal is very small (Iberia structure); J is Marketing Assistant managing multiple brands (Schweppes, Joy, Sunny, Trina, La Casera). - “Do-it-all” scope incl. social, campaigns, Nielsen data, events; several corporate functions run from Spain.	
Q2: Are you familiar with Real-Time Marketing in response to unpredictable events?	- Confirmed familiarity.	
Q3: Schweppes was selected for reacting (e.g., Mercadona pineapple). How do these reactions emerge and what motivates the decision to intervene?	- Instagram run by external agency with monthly plan; J approves. - Guidance to be agile and post in the moment, if there is brand fit and no controversy. Don’t “be in every front”.	“(…) what I told my agency at the time was: please be agile and when it's time, launch it at the moment it's happening.”²¹⁶ “(…) you have to analyze whether it makes sense for your brand or not (...) don't get into

²¹⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) o que eu disse à minha agência na altura é: por favor sejam ágeis e quando for para ser, lancem no momento em que está a acontecer.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
		controversies (...) it doesn't make sense to be on all fronts (...).” ²¹⁷
Q4: Patterns in events you react to / what makes something ‘relevant’?	Question not asked. Responded in Q3 (brand–event match as the primary filter; avoid polarising topics).	
QX1 (follow-up): Other reasons for reacting less in 2024?	- External vs. in-house matters: in-house brands (e.g., Lidl, Licor Beirão) are more active; an external agency handling many accounts is less agile.	“Sometimes we think it's easy to create this content in Real-Time, you know? (...) an external agency has several brands to manage, they can't have that much agility no matter how much I, as a brand, ask them (...).” ²¹⁸
Q5: Has your approach evolved over time?	Question not asked. Responded in Q14 (2025 shift to more cautious, quality-first cadence; RTM only with strong product/tonality match).	
Q6: Benefits (performance, sales, positioning)?	- Awareness & reach, shares/reshare, top-of-mind; not sales-driven.	“You don’t see anything in sales” ²¹⁹ “(…) it will create some buzz and people will reshare (...) you can reach many more people,

²¹⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: (...) tens de fazer análise para a tua marca se faz sentido ou não (...) não entrar em polémicas (...) não faz sentido estar em todas as frentes (...).”

²¹⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Às vezes nós achamos que é fácil fazer este conteúdo em Real-Time, sabes? (...) uma agência externa tem várias marcas para gerir, eles não conseguem ter assim tanta agilidade por mais que eu enquanto marca lhes peça (...).”

²¹⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “A nível de vendas tu não vês nada.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
		have some impact, and stay top of mind for the consumer.” ²²⁰
Q7: Main challenges (timing, creativity, approvals)?	- Agency agility (external) + tiny internal team → harder to approve “overnight”. - Ongoing fit/risk assessment to avoid “posting just to post”.	“(…) with an external agency is a bit hard because it’s difficult for them to have that agility.”²²¹ “(…) I’m also young, and I think well, this is really cool for my brand, but hold on (….) my brand has positioning, it has a target, and making a point just for the sake of making a point (….) is a challenging point.”²²²
Q8: Is there a difficult balance between reacting fast and staying on-brand?	- Yes; legal/IP risks can outweigh speed (e.g., Inside Out post pulled immediately due to Disney image rights).	“(…) we had to remove the post in a matter of seconds (….) otherwise Disney could sue us (….)”²²³ “Sometimes we can put ourselves in situations that are not worth it.”²²⁴

²²⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) vai dar algum buzz e as pessoas vão fazer reshare (….) consegues chegar a muito mais pessoas, ter algum impacto e ficar no topo de mente do consumidor.”

²²¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “com uma agência externa é um bocadinho difícil porque é difícil para eles terem essa agilidade.”

²²² Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) também sou jovem, e penso bem, isto é mesmo giro para a minha marca, mas calma (….) a minha marca tem posicionamento, tem target e marcar um ponto só por marcar (….) é um ponto desafiante.”

²²³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) tivemos de retirar o post em questão de segundos (….) senão a Disney poderia processar (….)”

²²⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Às vezes podemos colocar-nos em situações que não compensam.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q9: Is RTM bold or now expected by consumers?	- Pioneers were bold; now predictable. - For heavy-RTM brands, audiences expect it; for Schweppes it's not essential as it depends on identity/target.	"Two years ago when this started to be done a lot (...) it was bold. It was an interesting buzz. But nowadays it's predictable."²²⁵ "If you don't get on the boat as a brand, you even feel a bit excluded."²²⁶ "(...) currently, the consumer wants to consume this content in real-time so much that if you don't do it, you're afraid your consumer will think, so, they didn't do anything."²²⁷ "(...) in brands like mine, that doesn't happen (...)."²²⁸
Q10: Is RTM always strategic or is there pressure to react?	- Pressure exists, but must prioritise brand health and audience quality; avoid attracting the wrong community.	"A brand, no matter how pressured it feels, must first understand whether it makes sense for the brand or not (...)."²²⁹ "I'm going to start approaching or attracting people who are not from this community [that the

²²⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Há dois anos quando isto começou a ser muito feito (...) foi arrojado. Foi um buzz interessante. Mas hoje em dia é previsível."

²²⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Se não entras no barco enquanto marca até te sentes um bocado excluído."

²²⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: "(...) atualmente o consumidor quer tanto consumidor esse conteúdo em Real-Time que se tu não o fizeres tens medo que o teu consumidor ache, então mas, eles não fizeram nada."

²²⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: "(...) em marcas como a minha não acontece isso (...)."

²²⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Uma marca por mais que se sinta pressionada tem de perceber se primeiro faz sentido à marca ou não (...)."

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
		brand is seeking] and I won't be able to keep them on my page (...).” ²³⁰
Q12b: Can RTM live without humor?	- Possible and sometimes necessary; humor boosts engagement but Schweppes often uses subtle humor (e.g., pineapple).	“(…) it doesn't create as much engagement, but I think it's possible and necessary.” ²³¹ “In the pineapple post, we weren't that funny, we joined the trend, but it was a more subtle kind of humor.” ²³²
Q14: Any recent/future evolution in Schweppes’ approach to RTM?	- Future: more pondered; focus on quality content for the existing community; do RTM only with strong brand/product match.	“This year we are a bit more thoughtful to understand if it makes sense for the brand or not (...) we can't reach everything (...)” ²³³ “If something eventually comes up that makes sense for my brand and matches my tone [we'll get involved].” ²³⁴

²³⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Vou começar a aproximar-me ou atrair pessoas que não são essa comunidade [que a marca procura] e não vou conseguir manter na minha página (...)”

²³¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) não cria tanto engagement, mas acho que é possível e necessário.”

²³² Original quotation in Portuguese: “No post do ananás nem fomos assim tão engraçados, entramos na trend, mas foi um humor assim mais subtil.”

²³³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Este ano estamos um bocadinho mais ponderados para perceber se é algo que faz sentido para a marca ou não (...) não dá para chegar a tudo (...)”

²³⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Se eventualmente surgir algo que faça sentido para a minha marca e dê match com a minha tónica [entramos].”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q15: Anything to add that could help the research?	- Agency perspective would add value.	“(...) it would be interesting if you talked to someone from the agency side. I think you could get some interesting feedback (...).” ²³⁵

Note. Elaborated by the author.

²³⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) seria interessante se falasses com alguém do lado das agências. Acho que podias ter um feedback interessante (...).”

Appendix S - Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee K, MEO)

Table 21

Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee K, MEO)

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q1: Could you briefly introduce your role at MEO and your connection to social media?	- Director of Digital Marketing across multiple brands/segments (consumer, enterprise, youth, low-cost “B” brands). - Owns all digital communication (not only social).	
Q2: Are you familiar with Real-Time Marketing in response to unpredictable events?	- Confirmed familiarity.	
Q3: MEO reacted to the 2024 earthquake and meteor. How did these reactions emerge and what motivated the decision to intervene?	- Team monitors trends continuously (including nights/weekends). - React when fit with brand values and not political; goal is community engagement, not just product pushes.	“(…) whenever there is one [topic] that doesn't clash with politics, with values that are contrary to our brand, we tend to respond (…).”²³⁶ “(…) if there is a topic that is being discussed on social media at that moment, we try to be quick to respond.”²³⁷

²³⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) sempre que há um [tema] que não mexe com política, com valores que sejam contrários à nossa marca, nós temos tendência a responder (…).”

²³⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) se há um tema que está naquele momento a ser discutido em social media, nós tentamos ser célebres a responder.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q4: What makes an event ‘relevant’ for MEO?	- Guided by brand territories (music, sports, social responsibility/causes). - Avoid politics and deaths unless there’s a clear link (e.g., entertainment talent).	“We have a line that guides us (...) music, sport, social responsibility (...).”²³⁸ “(...) deaths (...) we have some reluctance to be present.”²³⁹
Q5: Has your RTM approach evolved over time? What influenced that?	- RTM is not new; main constraint is time-to-market vs creative quality (agency dependent). - Example: six hours to craft a respectful tribute (Pope) → may miss the moment.	“(...) [if it takes too long] the time to market is lost (...) what ends up happening is that sometimes we have pieces that don't even come out anymore.”²⁴⁰
Q6: What benefits do you see (performance, positioning)?	- RTM posts deliver high organic reach & shareability; brand-building/positioning effects. - Template with branding helps carry the brand in reshares.	“(...) these contents have a very large organic reach, very easily shareable (...).”²⁴¹ “Obviously, this builds brand (...).”²⁴²
Q7: Main challenges (timing, creativity, approvals)?	- Creativity is the biggest hurdle; also rights/IP constraints.	“Creativity is the biggest challenge (...).”²⁴³

²³⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Nós temos uma linha de comunicação que nos guia. (...) música, (...) desporto (...) responsabilidade social (...).”

²³⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) mortes (...) temos alguma relutância em estar presentes.”

²⁴⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) [se demorar muito tempo] o time to market perde-se (...) o que acaba por acontecer é que nós às vezes temos peças que depois já nem saem.”

²⁴¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) são conteúdos com um alcance orgânico muito grande, muito facilmente partilháveis (...).”

²⁴² Original quotation in Portuguese: “Obviamente que isto constrói marca (...).”

²⁴³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “A criatividade é o desafio maior (...).”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
		“(…) if there are rights involved, sometimes we cannot appropriate them, or themes, or situations.” ²⁴⁴
Q8: Balancing speed with brand coherence?	- Always a challenge; multiple iterations on copy/visual/tone to keep it positive and on-brand.	“(…) that’s the biggest challenge we have.” ²⁴⁵
Q9: Is RTM bold or now expected by consumers?	- Consumers don’t strongly expect it; brands are the ones pushing to avoid being intrusive and to create engagement.	“The consumer (…) is not so expectant (…) but [the RTM] is desirable for brands.” ²⁴⁶
Q10: Is RTM always strategic, or is there pressure to react?	- Some (positive) pressure exists to appear attentive/bold; teams proactively scout opportunities.	“I think there ends up being some pressure (…) being present in these moments also makes the brand bolder, more attentive, closer (...).” ²⁴⁷
Q11: Examples of topics you chose not to react to?	- Deaths and other sensitive moments often declined.	“Deaths, for sure.” ²⁴⁸
Q12d: On the earthquake post, your reaction was in a more empathetic tone, you opened up a bit the possibility of sharing experiences with the	- Using prompts/questions can increase authentic replies, but telcos face service-related negativity hijacking threads.	“(…) when you hand the mic to people, they like to react (…) telecommunications brands have a

²⁴⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) se há direitos envolvidos às vezes nós não podemos apropriar-nos deles, ou de temas, ou de situações.”

²⁴⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) esse é o desafio maior que nós temos.”

²⁴⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “O consumidor (…) não está tão expectante (…) mas [o RTM] é desejável pelas marcas.”

²⁴⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Eu acho que acaba por haver alguma pressão (…) estar presente nestes momentos também faz com que a marca seja mais ousada, mais atenta, mais próxima (...).”

²⁴⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Mortes, com certeza.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
question you posted. Did you notice any difference in the public's reaction?		quite negative weight, because everyone has had a negative experience.” ²⁴⁹
Q12c: Can RTM work without humor?	- Yes. Humor works, but MEO prefers a sober tone.	“(…) we don't have the capacity to be humorists (…) to do it badly, we prefer not to do it. That's why we maintain this admittedly serious tone.” ²⁵⁰
Q13: Any RTM that drew negative reactions to the reaction itself?	- None recalled.	
Q14: Any recent/future evolution in MEO's RTM?	- Core line remains, but formats evolve (photo → video)	“(…) you are permanently forced to evolve the format (…) you have to move from photo to video (…).” ²⁵¹
Q15: Anything to add that could help the research?	- Internally they don't isolate RTM in reporting; the interview gave K an insight to consider tracking RTM as a separate category/frequency.	“I had never thought about isolating these contents and maybe it makes sense and even thinking about our appropriate frequency (…).” ²⁵²

Note. Elaborated by the author.

²⁴⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) quando tu passas a palavra o público até gosta de reagir (…) as marcas de telecomunicações têm um peso bastante negativo, porque toda a gente já teve uma experiência negativa.”

²⁵⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) não temos capacidade de sermos humoristas (…) para fazermos mal nós preferimos não fazer. Por isso mantemos este tom assumidamente.”

²⁵¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) és obrigada permanentemente a evoluir o formato (…) tens que passar da foto para o vídeo (…).”

²⁵² Original quotation in Portuguese: “Eu nunca tinha pensado em isolar estes conteúdos e se calhar faz sentido e até pensar da nossa frequência adequada (…).”

Appendix T - Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee L, Lidl)

Table 22

Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee L, Lidl)

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q1: Could you briefly introduce your role at Lidl and your connection to social media?	- Social media team member; launched and runs Lidl's TikTok in real time; supports IG/FB, approvals, agency briefs.	
Q2: Are you familiar with Real-Time Marketing in response to unpredictable events?	- Confirmed familiarity.	
Q3: Lidl reacted to the 2024 earthquake and meteor. How did these reactions emerge and what motivated the decision to intervene?	- Golden rule: "be first or don't enter." If timing is lost or no Lidl angle, they pass. - Humorous, quick, not forced.	"Either we are the first to join the conversation or we don't join at all." ²⁵³ "Sometimes we can't find an angle and we don't enter because of that." ²⁵⁴
Q4: What makes an event 'relevant' for Lidl?	- Do-not-touch list: politics, religion, club football; avoid reality TV & overly populist topics.	"Religion and politics we don't touch, football is very difficult too." ²⁵⁵ "(...) a celebrity used something from Lidl? Then we have to engage." ²⁵⁶

²⁵³ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Ou somos os primeiros a entrar na conversa ou então não entramos."

²⁵⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Às vezes não conseguimos encontrar um ângulo e não entramos por causa disso."

²⁵⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Religião e política não tocamos, futebol é muito difícil também."

²⁵⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: "(...) alguma celebridade usou algo Lidl? Aí temos de dar de borla."

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
	- Enter when there's brand right-to-play (e.g., Nadal wearing Lidl gear; product/brand cues).	
Q5: Has your RTM approach evolved over time? What influenced that?	- More aligned & faster today; higher public scrutiny → more caution; pre-test jokes for sensitivity. - Selectivity over “going to everything” to avoid cancellations (e.g., contrast with Control's frequency).	“(…) in the past, we were less afraid as a brand (….) everyone is afraid of being canceled, and brands are no different.” ²⁵⁷
Q6: What benefits do you see (performance, positioning)?	- RTM delivers top engagement, follower growth, memory effects (audience waits for Lidl's take), and indirect impact on sales/notoriety.	“(…) what we gain is: a lot of engagement, the posts that we have the most engagement on are the reactions.” ²⁵⁸
Q7: Main challenges (timing, creativity, approvals)?	- Knowing what to pick + being brave. - Approvals. - Need agility and smart, intelligible humor.	“(…) curation defines whether you're cool or just another run-of-the-mill brand.” ²⁵⁹

²⁵⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) antigamente tínhamos menos medo como marca (….) toda a gente tem medo de ser cancelado e as marcas não são diferentes.”

²⁵⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) o que nós ganhamos é: muito engagement, dos posts que nós temos mais engagement é as reações.”

²⁵⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) curadoria define se és fixe ou se és uma marca maria vai com as outras.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q8: Balancing speed with brand coherence?	- Long-term agency partnership gives visual/brand consistency; tone flexes by platform (more goofy on TikTok). - Use common-sense gatekeeping: “Is this funny or going too far?”	“(…) we ourselves internally questioned it right away. Is this cool or are we going too far? Is this offensive, is it vile, low, or a joke?” ²⁶⁰
Q9: Is RTM bold or now expected by consumers?	- Now expected: from surprise → ongoing dialogue. - Overuse becomes too much; rarity = magic & brand personality must lead.	“I think RTM went from a surprise to a conversation.”²⁶¹ “Now it's more, something happens and someone is on a couch thinking, well, how many brands are going to react to this?”²⁶²
Q10: Is RTM always strategic, or is there pressure to react?	- High pressure (public & awards). - RTM is powerful for small budgets, but must fit brand personality & storytelling → avoid “cheap jokes.”	“(…) there is a lot of pressure and not just from the public, sometimes from the brands themselves who want to be in the spotlight, want to be talked about, want to win awards.” ²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) nós próprios internamente questionamos logo. Isto é fixe ou estamos a ir longe de mais? Será que isto é ofensivo, será que é reles, baixo, ou uma piada?”

²⁶¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Eu acho que o RTM passou de uma surpresa para uma conversa.”

²⁶² Original quotation in Portuguese: “Agora é mais, acontece alguma coisa e alguém está num sofá a pensar *ora bem, quantas marcas é que vão reagir a isto?*”

²⁶³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) há uma grande pressão e nem só do público, às vezes das próprias marcas que querem estar na berra, querem ser faladas, querem ganhar prémios.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
		“RTM is a very powerful tool for small brands because they don't need to invest much to have engagement.” ²⁶⁴
Q12c: Can RTM work without humor?	- Humor is the easiest, most consensual path. - Lidl's tone requires humor, but other brands (e.g., Patagonia) can react seriously/acidly if aligned with mission.	“I think humor is the most consensual and easy path (...) Lidl couldn't enter without humor, but that has to do with the type of communication.” ²⁶⁵
Q13: Any RTM that drew negative reactions to the reaction itself?	- AI backlash due to low public literacy; when AI is subtle (Coldplay look-alikes) no issue.	“(…) it's not exactly because of a RTM reaction (...) artificial intelligence has been a problem (...)” ²⁶⁶
Q14: Any recent/future evolution in Lidl's RTM?	- Shift from “only fun” to fun + commercial in a tougher macro context. - Greater tact on price/war-time sensitivities; constant adaptation.	“(…) now we share the two, half commercial, half engagement.”²⁶⁷ “(…) good communication regardless of the phase the world is going thru is a good team behind it

²⁶⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “RTM é uma ferramenta muito poderosa para marcas pequenas, porque não precisam de investir muito para terem engagement.”

²⁶⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Eu acho que o humor é o caminho mais consensual e fácil (...) o Lidl não conseguia entrar sem humor mas isso tem a ver com o tipo de comunicação.”

²⁶⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) não é bem uma reação de RTM (...) a inteligência artificial tem sido um problema (...)”

²⁶⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) agora partilhamos os dois, metade comercial, metade engagement.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
		that has awareness, common sense, and can see things from the consumer's perspective.” ²⁶⁸
Q15: Anything to add that could help the research?	- RTM is people + common sense; curiosity and cultural literacy are prerequisites.	“[RTM] is very much made of people and common sense, if you are not a person interested in what surrounds you, if you are not curious, you will not be successful.” ²⁶⁹

Note. Elaborated by the author.

²⁶⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) uma boa comunicação independente da fase do mundo que atravessamos é uma boa equipa por trás que tenha noção, bom senso e consiga ver como consumidor.”

²⁶⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “[O RTM] é muito feito de pessoas e bom senso, se não fores uma pessoa interessada pelo que te rodeia, se não fores curioso não vais ser bem sucedido.”

Appendix U - Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee M, Paladin)

Table 23

Summary of Interview Transcription (Interviewee M, Paladin)

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q1: Could you briefly introduce your role at Paladin and your connection to social media?	- Brand Manager for Paladin (sauces); overseeing brand transition and new campaign; social run with an external SM agency.	
Q2: Are you familiar with Real-Time Marketing in response to unpredictable events?	- Yes; Paladin has practiced opportunity-led reactions long before it became a trend.	
Q3: Paladin reacted to several unexpected events in 2024 (e.g., Primor's Blue Monday campaign, "Operação Influencer", the new government logo controversy, Olympic performances, and the earthquake). How did these reactions emerge and what motivated the decision to intervene?	- Triggers: agency or brand spots a hot topic (often via Twitter/X); proceed only if fast and "adds something" & fits tone/brand; drop if late or copycat. - Long RTM history (e.g., Rúben Vinagre takeover gag)	"(...) we work with an external social media agency and they immediately suggested a piece of content to us at that moment and we decided to go through with it (...)." ²⁷⁰ "If it's not in the moment, we've dropped it many times, considering that all the brands were already doing it." ²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: "(...) nós trabalhamos como agência externa de social media e propôs-nos logo nesse momento um conteúdo e nós demos seguimento (...)."

²⁷¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: "Se não for no momento, nós já deixámos cair muitas vezes, por acharmos que já todas as marcas estão a fazer."

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q4: What makes an event ‘relevant’ for Paladin?	- No fixed territory, but Portugalidade and brand wordplay (“dar molho”, “pimenta na língua”) create ownable angles. - Prefer light, non-critical topics; avoid overly sensitive debates.	“I think there isn't really a territory (...).”²⁷² “(…) in Paladin’s case, we try to adapt what makes sense in terms of communication and communication style (...).”²⁷³ “(…) we thought it would be fun to play with pepper on the tongue, which is a Portuguese expression, here the Portuguese identity, which is one of the brand's territories.”²⁷⁴
Q5: Has your RTM approach evolved over time? What influenced that?	- Evolution toward speed + new forms of reacting: not only posts, enter threads/comments where brand is relevant. - Goal: be the attentive ‘friend’ in the conversation.	“I would say that in terms of evolution (...) it's not just the fact that we create content, because I think Real-Time Marketing is not just about publishing, the reaction can take various forms.”²⁷⁵ “Evolution is trying to be faster and faster and, on the other hand, trying to find other ways to react in the moment (...) being that friend who will

²⁷² Original quotation in Portuguese: “Eu acho que não existe propriamente um território (...).”

²⁷³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) no caso da Paladin é tentar adaptar aquilo que faz sentido em termos de comunicação e de estilo de comunicação (...).”

²⁷⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) achámos que era giro brincar com pimenta na língua, que é uma expressão portuguesa, aqui a Portugalidade, que é um dos territórios da marca.”

²⁷⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Eu diria que em termos de evolução (...) não só o facto de fazermos um conteúdo, porque eu acho que o Real-Time Marketing não é só a questão de publicar, a reação pode ser de diversas formas.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
		comment on the photo and say, I heard this, I'm here (...). ²⁷⁶
Q6: What benefits do you see (performance, positioning)?	- Stronger positioning & recognition among partners and consumers; growth in followers & engagement.	“(...) our evolution on social media, in terms of followers, in terms of engagement.” ²⁷⁷
Q7: Main challenges (timing, creativity, approvals)?	- Sheer speed (minutes/hours) while keeping creative + visual brand fit. - Go / no-go calls on sensitive topics (e.g., earthquake → debated; blackout → decided not to post).	“(...) I would say that the concern and the challenge are always to be the fastest.” ²⁷⁸ “And on the other hand, sometimes it's a matter of, a theme arises and the difficulty is understanding whether we can go or not, whether it's our territory or not.” ²⁷⁹
Q8: Balancing speed with brand coherence?	- Shared market challenge: set brand “limits”; resolve via team discussion to preserve tone.	“(...) establish some limits on the brand's communication terms, which leads us to enter on time.” ²⁸⁰

²⁷⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “A evolução é tentarmos ser cada vez mais rápidos e por outro lado tentarmos arranjar outras formas de reagirmos no momento (...) sermos aquele amigo que vai comentar a foto e dizer assim, ouvi isto, estou aqui (...).”

²⁷⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) a nossa evolução em social media, a nível de seguidores, a nível de engagement.”

²⁷⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) eu diria que a preocupação sempre e o desafio é sermos os mais rápidos.”

²⁷⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “E por outro lado, às vezes é a questão de, surge um tema e a dificuldade é perceber se vamos conseguimos ir ou não, se é o nosso território ou não.”

²⁸⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(...) estabelecer aqui uns limites de termos de comunicação da marca, que nos levam a entrar no tempo.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q9: Is RTM bold or now expected by consumers?	- Consumers often expect reactions, but saturation can be tiring; only enter if adds value.	“People are already very much expecting brands to react.” ²⁸¹ “I, as a professional, think that what is most important here is, if it's not going to be with some sense of opportunity and with a style that will be irreverent to those who see it, it's not worth participating.” ²⁸²
Q10: Is RTM always strategic, or is there pressure to react?	- Pressure exists once a brand has played the RTM game; insist on quality over FOMO.	“Without a doubt, once the brand has entered that territory even once, there is a giant pressure of, everyone is going and we are being left out.” ²⁸³
Q12b/c: Is humor essential to RTM? What are the limits?	- Paladin’s tone = informal/irreverent; humor or playful lightness is expected, but not every post must be a joke. - Aim for inclusive, easy-to-read wit consistent with “Paladin as a person.”	“(…) if we are to engage with one of these current themes, in our communication style and the brand's tone of voice, it must always have humor.” ²⁸⁴

²⁸¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “As pessoas já estão muito à espera que as marcas reajam.”

²⁸² Original quotation in Portuguese: “Eu, enquanto profissional, acho que o que é mais importante aqui é, se não for para ser com algum sentido de oportunidade e com um estilo que vá ser irreverente para quem vê, não vale a pena participar.”

²⁸³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Sem dúvida que quando a marca já entrou nesse território uma vez, que seja, há uma pressão grande de, todos estão a ir e estamos a ficar de fora.”

²⁸⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) se for para entrar numa destas temáticas do momento, no nosso estilo de comunicação e no tom de voz da marca, tem de ter sempre o humor.”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
		“(…) we see Paladin as a young, laid-back person who says things, who has a critical spirit, who is irreverent, who talks about current issues, who participates in conversations, who has a large group of friends.” ²⁸⁵
Q13: Any RTM that drew negative reactions to the reaction itself?	- No major RTM crises recalled; general stance: preventive sensitivity and standard crisis playbook when needed.	“(…) brands are increasingly concerned that any topic can turn against them (…).” ²⁸⁶ “(…) we never had any issues, but if we did, (…) then it's a whole crisis management process.” ²⁸⁷
Q14: Any recent/future evolution in MEO's RTM?	- Brand refresh → more humanized visuals, photography, video. - SM strategy built on pillars, one is ‘irreverence’ which may channel RTM when relevant.	“(…) we changed our image, I would say we started having much more humanized content, we started using photography (…).” ²⁸⁸ “In terms of RTM, our new social media strategy is based on some communication pillars (…) one of them is irreverence (…).” ²⁸⁹

²⁸⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) nós interpretamos a Paladin como uma pessoa jovem, descontraída, que diz coisas, que tem espírito crítico, que é irreverente, que fala de temas de atualidade, que participa em conversas, que tem um grupo de amigos grande.”

²⁸⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) as marcas têm cada vez mais essa preocupação de que qualquer tema pode virar-se contra a marca (…).”

²⁸⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) nunca tivemos nenhuma questão, mas se tivéssemos, (…)
depois é todo um processo de gestão de crise.”

²⁸⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “(…) alterámos a imagem, diria que passámos a ter conteúdos muito mais humanizados, passámos a usar fotografia (…).”

²⁸⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Em termos de RTM, a nossa estratégia nova de social media é baseada em alguns pilares de comunicação (…)
um deles é a questão da irreverência (…).”

Question	Key Insights	Illustrative Quotes (if relevant)
Q15: Anything to add that could help the research?	- Crowded RTM space → relevance + timing + tone matter most; focus on consumer reaction on the other side of the screen.	“[It is] increasingly difficult for a brand to be relevant because there are many adopting this strategy (...).”²⁹⁰ “The goal is always to be relevant to those who receive our message and to try to create a reaction (...).”²⁹¹

Note. Elaborated by the author.

²⁹⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: “[É] cada vez mais difícil uma marca ser relevante porque há muitas a ter essa estratégia (...).”

²⁹¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “O objetivo é sempre ser relevantes para quem recebe a nossa mensagem e tentar criar uma reação (...).”

Appendix V - Codebook for Thematic Analysis of Interviews

Table 24

Codebook for Thematic Analysis of Interviews

Theme	Definition*	Example Quotes	Linked RQs	Interview Questions**
Motivations to engage in RTM	Factors that drive brands to engage in real-time marketing during unplanned events.	“When we talk about something that matters to people, we enter the dialogue that is being generated and contribute to a topic that is relevant and meaningful.” ²⁹² (Interviewee G, Super Bock)	RQ1, RQ6	Q3
Event selection and exclusion criteria	Criteria brands apply to decide whether or not to react to an unplanned event.	“The topic must be current, relevant to people’s lives or to the country, and exploitable from the brand’s perspective in some way.”²⁹³ (Interviewee A, Staples) “We have a very large consumer base with different backgrounds, and it is mainly with the intention of respecting all of them that we try to avoid engaging in polarizing topics.”²⁹⁴ (Interviewee F, Portugália)	RQ1, RQ3, RQ6	Q4, Q11

²⁹² Original quotation in Portuguese: “Quando falamos de algo relevante para as pessoas, entramos no diálogo que está a ser gerado e falamos sobre algo que é relevante e especial.”

²⁹³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “O tema deve ser atual, relevante para a vida das pessoas ou do país e explorável do ponto de vista da marca de alguma forma.”

²⁹⁴ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Temos uma base de consumidores muito grande e diferentes backgrounds, e é mais com o intuito de respeitarmos todos eles que tentamos evitar entrar em temas polarizadores.”

Theme	Definition*	Example Quotes	Linked RQs	Interview Questions**
Benefits of RTM	Perceived advantages of engaging in RTM.	“These contents usually achieve very large organic reach, very easily, and are very easily shareable.” ²⁹⁵ (Interviewee K, MEO)	RQ2	Q6
Challenges in RTM	Difficulties brands face in executing RTM under time pressure.	“The main concern is being the fastest... sometimes that is the biggest challenge, the speed with which we have to approve and deliver a piece of content.” ²⁹⁶ (Interviewee M, Paladin)	RQ3	Q7
Balance between speed and brand identity	Tensions between reacting quickly and staying consistent with brand identity.	“We need to maintain strong coherence and have a clear understanding of our objectives for being on social media.” ²⁹⁷ (Interviewee I, Era Portugal)	RQ3, RQ5	Q8
RTM as bold vs expected	Whether RTM is seen as risky/daring or as standard/expected.	“RTM has shifted from being a surprise to becoming a conversation.” ²⁹⁸ (Interviewee L, Lidl)	RQ4	Q9
Pressure to react	Perceived pressure from competition, trends, or FOMO to engage in RTM.	“Sometimes it’s kind of FOMO doing these posts, because it’s just like, oh, I don’t want to not do it, you know?” ²⁹⁹ (Interviewee E, Sagres)	RQ6	Q10

²⁹⁵ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Normalmente estes conteúdos são conteúdos com um alcance orgânico muito grande, muito facilmente, muito facilmente partilháveis.”

²⁹⁶ Original quotation in Portuguese: “A preocupação é sermos os mais rápidos... às vezes é esse o principal desafio, a rapidez com que temos de aprovar e concretizar um conteúdo.”

²⁹⁷ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Temos que ter uma coerência muito grande, perceber exatamente quais é que são os nossos objetivos de estar nas redes sociais.”

²⁹⁸ Original quotation in Portuguese: “O RTM passou de uma surpresa para uma conversa.”

²⁹⁹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Às vezes é um bocado FOMO fazer estes posts porque, é só porque, ah tipo, não quero não fazer, não é?”

Theme	Definition*	Example Quotes	Linked RQs	Interview Questions**
Humor and other tones in RTM	How brands use tone, particularly humor, and its impact on audiences.	“Real-time implies lightness. Not necessarily humor, but it does imply lightness.” ³⁰⁰ (Interviewee H, Pingo Doce)	RQ5	Q12
Feedback and audience response	How audiences react and engage with RTM posts.	“I’ve had people send me messages saying, look, this would be really cool for you to do.” ³⁰¹ (Interviewee B, JCA Eletrodomésticos)	RQ2, RQ5	Q13
Evolution and future of RTM	How brands perceive changes in their RTM practices over time and their expectations for the future.	“Five years ago we did things in a more relaxed way, without thinking twice (...) nowadays we think much more about what we do (...).” ³⁰² (Interviewee C, Uniares) “We are learning the angle and how to work with real-time on TikTok.” ³⁰³ (Interviewee I, Era Portugal)	RQ4, RQ7	Q5, Q14

Note. Elaborated by the author.

* The definitions result from the researcher’s interpretation of each theme, which in turn was derived from the corresponding interview questions.

** The related interview questions are detailed in Table 10, Appendix H.

³⁰⁰ Original quotation in Portuguese: “O real-time implica leveza. Não necessariamente o humor, mas implica leveza.”

³⁰¹ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Tenho pessoas que já me mandaram mensagens a dizer, olha isto era mesmo fixe para vocês fazerem.”

³⁰² Original quotation in Portuguese: “Há cinco anos atrás fazíamos de uma forma mais descontraída, sem pensar (...) hoje em dia pensamos muito mais no que é que fazemos, publicamos (...).”

³⁰³ Original quotation in Portuguese: “Estamos a aprender o ângulo e como é que se trabalha o real-time no TikTok.”

Appendix W - Informed Consent

Appendix W1 - English translation



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Consent to Participate in Study

Project Title	Do brands experience FOMO? From differentiation to obligation in real-time marketing reactions to unplanned events in the Portuguese market ³⁰⁴
Investigator	Ana Lúcia Carvalho Venes
Coordenadora	Professor Patrícia Dias
Universidade	Faculty of Human Sciences, Universidade Católica Portuguesa

This is a consent form for participation in a scientific study as a marketing professional and brand representative.

The study is conducted as part of a Master's dissertation in Communication Sciences, aiming to understand how brands in Portugal employ Real-Time Marketing (RTM) strategies in response to unpredictable events, with a particular focus on Instagram.

³⁰⁴ The project title indicated in this consent form ("FOMO nas Marcas? Da Diferenciação à Obrigação nas Estratégias de Real-Time Marketing face a Eventos Imprevisíveis no Mercado Português") corresponds to the initial version submitted when participants were invited to collaborate. During the research process, the title was refined to "Do Brands Experience FOMO? Navigating motivations, strategies, and challenges in real-time marketing in the Portuguese market", as it better reflected the scope and findings of the dissertation. This change does not imply any modification in the methodological procedures or in the data analysis carried out.

Your participation involves:

- Reading and signing this informed consent form;
- Taking part in an in-person or online interview, lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes, conducted at a mutually agreed location of your convenience;
- Allowing the name of the brand you represent and your professional role to be mentioned in the dissertation, with your explicit authorization.

No risks are anticipated in connection with your participation, and you have the right to interrupt or withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty or need for justification.

We sincerely thank you for your collaboration in this academic project.

Ethical procedures applicable to scientific research require that participants explicitly agree to take part and to the way the collected data will be used. This informed consent form ensures that you understand the purpose of your participation and agree to the following procedures:

- The interview will be **audio-recorded** and **transcribed** by the researcher;
- The transcript will be **analyzed exclusively for academic purposes** within the scope of the dissertation;
- Access to the transcripts will be **restricted to the researcher and her academic supervisor**;
- With your authorization, the **name of the brand** and **your professional role** may be mentioned in the dissertation;
- The audio recording will be **deleted after the dissertation defense**;
- The content of the interview may be **quoted verbatim or summarized**, always respecting the context and the information provided;
- Any change to the conditions above will require your renewed explicit consent.

I understand that my words may be quoted directly. I agree that the researcher may publish documents that include such quotations, identified through the brand I represent and my professional role.

Signature of the informed consent form

I have read (or have had read to me) this consent form and I am aware that I have been invited to participate in academic research. I had the opportunity to ask questions and received satisfactory answers. **I voluntarily authorize:**

- The **audio recording** of the interview;
- The **use of the name of the brand** I represent in the dissertation;
- The **identification of my professional role** in the final document.

I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time and that I do not waive any legal rights by signing this form. I will receive a copy of this document, if desired.

Name (in capital letters)

Job Title

Name of the brand represented

Signature

____ / ____ / ____
Date

Researcher

I explained the study procedures to the participant (or their representative) before requesting the above signature. There are no blank spaces in this document. A copy of this form was given to the participant or their representative.

**Name of the person who obtained the
consent (in capital letters)**

**Signature of the person who obtained
the consent**

____ / ____ / ____
Date



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PORTUGUESA

Consentimento para Participação em Estudo

Título do Projeto	FOMO nas Marcas? Da Diferenciação à Obrigação nas Estratégias de Real-Time Marketing face a Eventos Imprevisíveis no Mercado Português
Investigadora	Ana Lúcia Carvalho Venes
Coordenadora	Professora Patrícia Dias
Universidade	Faculdade de Ciências Humanas da Universidade Católica Portuguesa

Este é um formulário de consentimento para a participação num estudo científico na qualidade de profissional de marketing e representante de uma marca.

Trata-se de um estudo desenvolvido no âmbito de uma dissertação de mestrado em Ciências da Comunicação, cujo objetivo é compreender de que forma as marcas em Portugal utilizam estratégias de Real-Time Marketing (RTM) em resposta a eventos imprevisíveis, com foco na rede social Instagram.

A sua participação implica:

- A leitura e assinatura deste formulário de consentimento informado;
- A realização de uma entrevista presencial ou online, com duração estimada entre 30 a 45 minutos, conduzida no local previamente acordado e por si considerado mais conveniente;
- A possibilidade de o nome da marca que representa e o seu cargo profissional serem mencionados na dissertação, com a sua autorização expressa.

Não se antecipam quaisquer riscos associados à sua participação, e tem o direito de interromper ou desistir do estudo a qualquer momento, sem qualquer penalização ou necessidade de justificação.

Agradecemos imensamente a sua colaboração neste projeto académico.

Os procedimentos éticos aplicáveis à investigação científica exigem que os participantes expressem explicitamente a sua concordância com esta participação e com a forma como os dados recolhidos serão utilizados. Este formulário de consentimento tem como objetivo garantir que compreende o propósito da sua participação e que está de acordo com os seguintes procedimentos:

- A entrevista será **gravada em áudio e transcrita** pela investigadora responsável;
- A transcrição da entrevista será **analisada exclusivamente no âmbito académico** da dissertação;
- O acesso às transcrições será **limitado à investigadora e à sua orientadora académica**;
- Com a sua autorização, o **nome da marca** e o seu **cargo profissional** poderão ser mencionados na dissertação;
- A gravação será **eliminada após a dissertação ser defendida**;
- O conteúdo da entrevista poderá ser **citado de forma textual ou resumida**, sempre com respeito pelo contexto e pela informação partilhada;
- Qualquer alteração às condições acima requererá novamente o seu consentimento expresso.

Compreendo que as minhas palavras podem ser citadas diretamente. Concordo que a investigadora possa publicar documentos que incluam estas citações, identificadas através da marca para a qual trabalho e pelo meu cargo.

Assinatura do formulário de consentimento informado

Eu li (ou alguém me leu) este formulário de consentimento e estou ciente de que fui convidado(a) a participar numa investigação académica. Tive oportunidade de esclarecer dúvidas e obtive respostas satisfatórias. **Voluntariamente, autorizo:**

- A **gravação em áudio** da entrevista presencial;
- A **utilização do nome da marca** que represento na dissertação;

- A **identificação do meu cargo profissional** no documento final.

Compreendo que posso retirar o meu consentimento em qualquer momento, e que não abduco de nenhum direito legal ao assinar este formulário. Receberei uma cópia deste documento, caso deseje.

Nome (em maiúsculas)

Cargo Profissional

Nome da marca que representa

Assinatura

____ / ____ / ____
Data

Investigador

Expliquei os procedimentos do estudo ao participante ou a um seu representante antes de pedir a assinatura acima. Não há espaços em branco neste documento. Uma cópia deste formulário foi dada ao participante ou ao seu representante.

**Nome da pessoa que obteve o
consentimento (em maiúsculas)**

**Assinatura da pessoa que obteve o
consentimento:**

____ / ____ / ____
Data