

## **Dialogic Communication in Brazilian Websites: A Longitudinal Study**

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## 1. Introduction

Strategies and marketing operations have been transformed by the Internet and in many ways it will be more widely integrated with growing access to the worldwide web (Varadarajan & Yadav, 2009). For over a decade organizations have begun to consider the Internet an important media in their marketing communication mix (Nour & Fadlalla, 2000). Currently, about 2.5 billion people are connected (Davis, 2013) for creating and sharing knowledge, experiences, finding new friends and sharing contents like photos and videos (Kim, Jeong, & Lee, 2010). Among the various forms of web communication such as paid messages on websites, search engines and electronic mail, organizational and products websites stand out for their power to inform, persuade and remind about the company and their offerings to customers and prospects (Geissler, Zinkhan, & Watson, 2006). Consumer contact management would be one of the several activities of a marketing communication mix that aims to create synergy and unity among the communication tools (Hartley & Pickton, 1999). That is, to plan and to implement communications under the principles of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) (Kliatchko, 2005).

A broader definition considers IMC an audience driven business process of strategically managing stakeholders, content, channels, and results of brand communication programs (Kliatchko, 2008). In an approach guided by the principles of IMC, websites are a tool increasingly important to create and maintain relationships with customers (Watson, Zinkhan, & Pitt, 2000). IMC is the process of development and implementation of various forms of persuasive communication programs with real and potential customers over the time (Shimp, 2002). The Relationship Marketing Model (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998) based in communication illustrates how marketing theory has evolved, mainly because of technology advances, allowing the emergence of new media and the associated interactivity increase. In this model, emphasis on two-way communication, information sharing, timely feedback, listening and responding to customers, prospects and other stakeholders are key activities that would strengthen relationships. Communication, not persuasion, would be the basis to build them interactively on the Internet (Geissler, Zinkhan, & Watson, 2006). A more humanistic approach of relationship marketing - based on trust, commitment and information sharing, results in lasting relationships between organizations and consumers (Hutton, 1996).

In this regard, Internet offers unique opportunities for marketing communications, such as (Mohammed, Fischer, J., & Cahill, 2001): focus on target segment, easy monitoring of consumer behavior, customize messages, two-way interaction and interactive services. In specific level a wide variety of Dialogic Communication (DC) tools can contribute to create and maintain relationships. DC is any negotiated exchange of ideas and information between parties in a communication process (Kent & Taylor, 1998). DC on websites is propitiated for several dialogic tools. Research about the use of such kind a tool seems to be potentially useful and relevant to academic and professional fields. Are organizations creating websites offering useful information, generating return of visitors and facilitating iteration; thereby creating and maintaining relationships with customers? Outside of Brazilian context were located some studies (Kent & Taylor, 1998; Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001; Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003; Taylor & Kent, 2004; McAllister & Taylor, 2007; Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007; Park & Reber, 2008; Gordon & Berhow, 2009; McAllister-Spooner, 2009; Ingenhoff & Koelling, 2009; McAllister-Spooner & Kent, 2009; Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010; Kim, Nam, & Kang, 2010; Pettigrew & Reber, 2011; McAllister, 2012; Sommerfeldt, Kent, & Taylor, 2012; Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012; McCorkindale & Morgoch, 2013; Madichie & Hinson, 2013) inquiring about it. So, more research is needed covering different realities like Latin

America. In this sense, **the objective** here was **to analyze the use of dialogic tools on Brazilian websites**. For this, a search was planned and executed in two periods 2010 and 2011. This work is limited to the analysis of dialogic tools available on web sites. Determine how the tools available are used, remained outside the scope of this article.

## **2. Dialogic Communication**

Dialogic communication involves exchange of ideas and opinions. For Kent and Taylor (1998) the web is a great tool to provide useful information in a message intended to users. Internet facilitates direct contact, it allows to receive feedback and there is no a filter in communication (Oviatt, 1997). When a person browses the Internet is searching for some content. According to Kent and Taylor (2002), the sites are visited because they create any value for visitors. This concept of value is the contribution perceived by the client (Internet user) of a service or product (Woodruff, 1997).

The Internet, based on dialogic relationship, offers companies many opportunities to create value for its stakeholders. Kent and Taylor (1998) list basic principles necessary to dialogic communication be possible on the World Wide Web:

1. The Dialogic Loop. This principle allows publics to query organizations and it offers organizations the opportunity to respond to questions, concerns and problems.
2. The Usefulness of Information. Sites should make an effort to include information of general value to all publics. The sites are visited because they have something of on-going value to offer visitors.
3. The Generation of Return Visits. This principle implies provide tools to entice users to return, such as constant updates, chats, forum, events, space for opinions and discussions.
4. The Intuitiveness / Easy of Interface. Regarding this principle, users should find a web site easy to figure out and understand. This includes a balanced dose of graphics and text, menus easy to use, faster page loading and ease of finding information. Sites should be interesting, informative, and bring value to the customer.

Several researches and analyzes content from organizations websites show that most are not very dialogic (Sommerfeldt, Kent, & Taylor, 2012). There are no empirical data on how developers are using these dialogical tools in websites of Brazilian companies. Research in this regard could contribute to the generation of scientific knowledge on a subject poorly studied in Brazilian academy, the Internet as a tool to create and maintain relationships.

## **3. The potential of Internet**

When it comes to new technologies, the Internet provides a lot of opportunities, like interaction and customization, and can be used by consumers and organizations (Ivanov, 2012). Even with a very brief history, when compared to other media, it deserves attention for its breadth and growth never seen before, having become a strategic tool for organizational communication (Stuart & Jones, 2004). Today, it is difficult for a citizen imagine your life without this technology. This is because the Internet has become an increasingly relevant communication where social interactions exist in multiple forms (Munze & Kunz, 2014).

This revolution in how to design the system happens because of cyber technology to bring new experiences to the consumer (Aslanbay, Aslanbay, & Çobanoğlu, 2009). According to Castells (2003), its development involves a technical, technological trend with strong sociological, economic and political as well as a strong motivational power to maintain its evolutionary process. Interactivity is another powerful tool. Now, there is greater collaboration, understanding and interaction between the company and its target audience (Jo & Kim, 2003). This new form of communication has changed the way people interact. There are no geographic barriers in the virtual world. According to Ybarra (2004) to correspond with anyone long distance has become easy.

The Internet is a major channel of information about human knowledge, captured in various forms in digital formats: books, blogs, videos, podcast, pictures, lyrics, transcriptions of speeches and so on. Over time arose services indices, facilitating quick search of all this digital content and facilitating the interpretation to its users (Parastatidis, Viegas, & Hey, 2009). For (Rust, Zeithaml, & Lemon, 2001), the Internet offers an option for most companies showcase their products and services and also a source for consumers seeking information about them. That is, is a tool able to meet all market sectors, not just government or services. In Brazil, the Internet gained more and more space. A study conducted by Forrester Research (Moreira, 2012) reveals that computer has become the most used tool by Brazilians. The average time spent on the Internet is around 23.8 hours per week, higher than the time spent in front of TV: 6.2 hours. Another study shows that the computer to 78% is more important than the television (Deloitte, 2011) and 63 million Brazilians use at least two daily screens (TV + PC) (Grossmann, 2013). According to the studies, the Internet is one of the favorite Brazilians activities. So, captivate who attends a website is a big challenge for companies. Companies that deal with young people should deal with them in a different way. That is, taking advantage of the large quantity of possibilities to create and maintain direct and interactive relationships. Therefore, in this study, the focus is on companies or organizations that offer internships to undergraduate students.

#### **4. Method**

An exploratory research was conducted, using content analysis, oriented by the proposed objective “to analyze the use of dialogic tools on Brazilian web sites”. To choose the objects, internship organizations possessing websites were selected. We had three progressive sources to find them: two association of the sector, where was possible to consult a list of internship organizations, search engines on Internet (Google, Bing and Yahoo) and links at university web sites. The result was a final sample of 137 sites of internship organizations across the country. Because of the procedures followed, it is assumed that the representativeness of the sample is satisfactory, although it is not a statistically representative sample.

For the content analysis, an encoder was based on research into the use of dialogic tools in websites of American universities (Gordon & Berhow, 2009). This encoder is composed of items grouped into four dimensions of DC: Dialogic Loop, Usefulness of Information, Generation of Return Visits and Intuitiveness/Easy of Interface. The original coder was translated to Portuguese and adapted by three researchers. Each item was discussed with the group and accepted or not according to Brazilian reality and culture. Some were created, as the case of social networks, because new tools have emerged in recent years. In the final encoder, 47 items assessed the dialogic features of the websites.

Analyses were performed using Stata and Excel. To make comparisons between the various types of sites, the data had a statistical treatment with the application of chi-square tests. Four web sites were used for coder validation ([www.nube.com.br](http://www.nube.com.br), [www.ciee.com.br](http://www.ciee.com.br), [www.cocacola.com.br](http://www.cocacola.com.br) and [www.vw.com.br](http://www.vw.com.br)). Results showed a concordance rate of 97%.

Data collection took place in two stages with an interval of one year, in 2010 and 2011, with the intention of doing a longitudinal analysis. Those responsible for the analysis of the sites used the same type of browser (Internet Explorer 8.0) and Internet connection. The procedure was to evaluate the home page of each element of the sample.

#### **5. Results**

The longitudinal analysis was performed on the same population (137 websites) and repeating the same conditions encoder and after a year. To Malhotra (2006) this analysis provides a vivid illustration of the changes over time. For better presentation, the first analysis will be named "1A" and the second analysis, "2A". The content analysis of the websites determined

the percentage of each dialogic tool found. The data reveal a low utilization in the first period (1A) and a slight improvement in the second period (2A).

The only dialogic principle to have lower score was the Dialogic Loop. Have others had higher scores, especially Generation of Return Visits. The remaining virtually remained stable when comparing the two periods: Usefulness of Information and Intuitiveness/Easy of Interface (Appendix 1).

Regarding the Loop Dialogic tools, websites analyzed showed negative and positive swings. Personal Contacts 8% (1A) for only 1% (2A), Customer Testimonials been a considerable growth of 8% (1A) to 20% (2A). As for "Ease of Interface" there was stability and values have not changed substantially, with the exception of search options which increased from 25% to 31% in the sites. Have the time of page download sites worsened (88% x 78%), i.e., were more than 10 seconds; Index Site Map / Website (12% x9%) (Appendix 2).

Usefulness of the Information in there was a substantial improvement in FAQs when in 1A appeared in 24% of sites and 2A, at 32%. The same trend occurred with Login (54% x63%), History/About us (95% x97%). However, there was a decrease in the use of tools Online Application (91% x 85%), News (39% x31%).

In Return Visitors tools without score 1A, remained so in 2A. They are: Podcast, Delicious, Digg, Flickr, MySpace, and Yahoo Bookmark, Google Accounts. The tool Games left to be found, MSN Live has not changed. The remaining participation grew significantly, such as Facebook (1% x9%), Orkut (7% x10%). Youtube, Calendar of Events, RSS Feeds and Request Information by e-mail also advanced in the number of sites (Appendix 3).

Some dialogic tools disappeared: Audio Streaming, games, Virtual Tour, Press Releases. On the other hand, the dialogic tools used for the most part of organizations after the longitudinal analyze were: History/About the company, Contact information, Online registration, Login, News, Partnerships, Search options, FAQs, Twitter and Map/Localization (Appendix 4). The remaining did not exceed 20% of presence among total web sites analyzed.

The largest growth was Twitter. The microblog was found in 9% of the sites surveyed in 1A and reached 25% of sites in 2A. Still, the number is low. The upward trend also occurred with Facebook, from 1% to 9% and LinkedIn, not found in the first analysis, was found in 4% of the sample. The Youtube increased by one percentage point, from 2% to 3% (Appendix 5).

Between 137 websites analyzed, 117 were ".COM" (be used primarily for commercial businesses) and 20 ".ORG" (for nonprofit groups). No significant differences were found in the use of dialogic tools between the two groups. Mean tools used by ".COM" was 8.79 (1A) and increased to 9.15 (2A). To nonprofit ". ORG" was 9.05 (1A) and reached 10 (2A). However, a very low average because the maximum score would be 47 tools.

## **6. Discussion and conclusions**

This study analyzed what dialogic tools were being used by internship organizations. We found that there is still much to be done to these companies becoming attractive, optimize communication with students and gain a loyal audience. Results showed low use of dialogical tools. Studied organizations have not yet realized its importance to achieve young people. However, companies are far from one point considered regular. Of the 137 sites analyzed, 29 of them, or 21%, repeated the score of the first analysis (1A), demonstrating a total lack of knowledge regarding tools and dialogic no evolution in the second study period (2A).The situation is even worse for 47 organizations, or 34% of the total, because they decreased the dialogic tools. This was not expected. The expectation was an increase in the use and deployment of new tools to keep pace with a young audience that love to surf in internet and is always connected. As stated by Tapscott (1999), the new generation is more connected to the media, conducts many activities at the same time, access the world from your room through the Internet and interactivity is the strong point of your profile. Have 61 organizações

analyzed or 45% of the sample had developments in the use of dialogic tools. One cannot say that they are prepared to offer and maintain a good relationship through their organizational websites. But its leaders should be aware of this movement. After all, Gen Y (young consumers) internalizes the Internet, as opposed to other generations that have adopted it (Cole, Smith, & Lucas, 2002). That is, they are more connected and more use the Internet, valuing sites with good navigability, ease of use and with space to include your thoughts. However, these tools were hardly found in any of the two analyzes (1A e 2A).

Was surprising to note that Podcast, an important way to spread ideas through sound and images and promote dialogue with users (Primo, 2005), was not found in any web site. In general, the amount of tools used is low. As the Brazilian target audience of these organizations is 7 million of undergraduate students (Inep, 2013) and 8,3 million of high school students (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2013), a big public does not have options to interact and dialogue with these companies. In general could be perceived that studied organizations are more concerned with providing information than with maintaining an interaction with its prospects. According to Sommerfeldt, Kent e Taylor (2012), if businesses do not invest time in building online relationships, it will never flourish.

Considering the importance of communication for a company, is hard to believe that studied organizations still use old news, outdated articles and stale data. According to Kent and Taylor (1998), useful information is important to create value. Provide contact information, then, is something desirable by anyone surfing the Internet. In this research, 7% of sites had not that option. Another important point was the difficulty of navigability in some of the sites analyzed. There is lack of concern with user. In some cases, after you click a link and view a page, there is no way to return to the home page. Moreover, some websites are very slow by the excess of images and downloads. Whereas a generation of young super connected and who value speed, the slowness of website may prevent the acquisition of new customers. Finally, broken links that lead nowhere, is also a good way to lose visitors.

The websites analyzed were not built based in the four principles of dialogic communication of Kent and Taylor (1998, 2002). Therefore, keeping existing customers becomes increasingly expensive, making the web site a platform to announce internship positions available, and not a space for interaction, brand loyalty and service provided. The numbers of social networks justify that statement. Facebook currently has over 1,197 billion active users (<http://www.internetlivestats.com>, retrieved on 05 January, 2014), the second most visited site in the world (<http://www.alexa.com>, retrieved on 05 January, 2014). As stated by Bortree and Seltzer (2009), the social networking sites are a great space for organizations to implement dialogic communication; it is possible to interact with the public on issues of mutual interest.

The social networking sites are one of the strongest symbols of connection with young people. In Brazil, 92% of young people who go online use social networking sites. In fact, 78% of people who surf the Internet, use some sort of social networking site (Rocha, 2013). However, they are still little used by the companies in this study. The research of McAllister (2012) in universities (similar to that performed in this study) showed that there are flaws in dialogic communication, even when they had a Facebook page. This study analyzed the same companies after a year. However, despite the wide dissemination of the press on the growth of youth participation in social networking sites, the organizations surveyed showed no major changes to improve their communication with the public.

For future studies, we suggest a qualitative research to verify what is the reason of the manager of the company does not use some dialogical tools. Another possibility is determine how the tools available are in fact used, experimenting all possibilities of interaction with young.

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**Appendix 1: First (1A) and Second (2A) analysis - comparison of dialogical dimension**

(%)	1A	2A
Dialogic Loop	6,6	5,8
Usefulness of Information	29,2	29,8
Generation of Return Visits	3,7	5,1
Intuitiveness/Ease of Interface	35,2	36,1

Source: Authors

**Appendix 2: Comparison Dialogic Loop and Ease of Interface: 1A x 2A (%)**

Dialogic Loop	1A	2A	1A	2A	Ease of Interface
Comments and Opinions Space	2	1	12	9	Site Map/Site Index
Oportunity for Voting	13	17	73	71	Open Menu
Personal contacts	8	1	88	78	Page Downloading Time
Scheduling Visits	1	0	25	31	Search Options
Online Chats	7	9	100	100	Logo
Customer Testimonials	8	20	3	5	Breadcrumbs

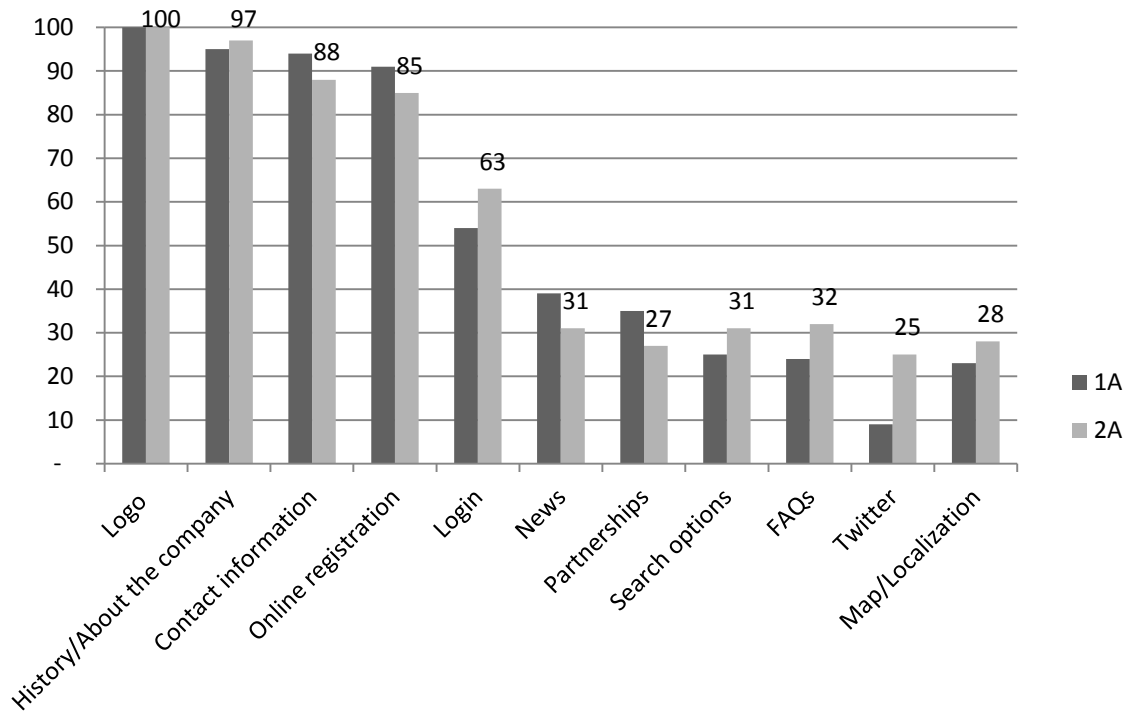
Source: Authors

**Appendix 3 - Comparison: Usefulness of Information and Return Visitor: 1A x 2A (%)**

<b>Usefulness of Information</b>	<b>1A</b>	<b>2A</b>	<b>1A</b>	<b>2A</b>	<b>Return Visitors</b>
History/About us	95	97	7	11	Calendar of Events
Online Registration	91	85	4	7	RSS Feed
Map	23	28	11	14	Request Information by email
Tour Virtual	1	0	4	9	Blogs
News	39	31	0	0	Podcast
Articles	15	14	0	0	Del.icio.us
Clipping	6	7	0	0	Digg
Press Release	3	0	1	9	Facebook
Streaming Vídeo	4	9	0	0	Flickr
Streaming Áudio	1	0	0	0	Google Accounts
Photo Album	7	14	0	4	Linkedin
Login	54	63	1	1	Live MSN
FAQs	24	32	0	0	MySpace
Contact Information	94	88	7	10	Orkut
Partnerships	35	27	9	25	Twitter
Cost Information	1	3	0	0	Yahoo Bookmark
Work with us	4	7	2	3	Youtube
			1	0	Games

Source: Authors

Appendix 4: The dialogic tools most commonly found in each period (1A) and (2A).



Appendix 5: Social networks in each period of analyze (%)

	1A	2A	
Twitter	9	25	Twitter
Orkut	7	10	Orkut
Youtube	2	9	Facebook
Facebook	1	4	Linkedin
Live MSN	1	3	Youtube
Linkedin	0	1	Live MSN

Source: Authors