Is this the beginning of the end for retail websites? A professional perspective

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Title: Is this the beginning of the end for retail websites? A professional perspective.

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Abstract:

This paper expects to understand professionals’ opinion concerning the impact of the increasing use of Social Media (SM) and commercial Mobile Applications (MA) instead of retail websites in their online strategy. Unstructured interviews to Internet professionals were applied on LinkedIn professional SM platform and one hundred and twenty-seven professionals provided their perspective. Data was analyzed using a Text Mining approach and the outcome revealed professionals’ resilience to set SM in the center of the online strategy and highlighted the preference of users to use search engines that, in turn, will lead them to a retail website.

Keywords: retail website; social media; commercial mobile application; consumer behavior; text mining.
1. Introduction

The Internet is a place balanced by the variety of intentions of those who make use of it, changing according to users’ desires and trends, transforming it into a living organism. A new consumer behavioral pattern has been observed, influenced by the increasing use of SM and MA. Ninety percent of mobile time is spent on MA and ten percent browsing (Alliance, 2017). Forty percent of the global population has an account on a SM platform, where Facebook alone corresponds to over 2 billion monthly active users (Mashable, 2017), revealing a new trend and the fact that websites are no longer the place where most Internet experience happens (Ramos et al., 2019). Companies have acknowledged these changes that are taking place over the Internet and took measures to follow consumer interests (Aral et al., 2013). Some companies have set SM, such as obsessee.com, or a MA, like Uber, on the center of their online strategy. These companies understood this behavioral change and put all their efforts to be where consumers are and meet their needs and interests, eliminating from the start the possibility of working through a website or even set the website as a secondary place. A paradigmatic situation is happening with the MA WeChat from Tecent Holdings, the Chinese Internet giant that has a market capitalization of more than 500 billion dollars. WeChat is an ecosystem that acts like a hub gathering other platforms, permitting the access to a set of services such as booking a doctor appointment, pay traffic fines, or call a cab directly from the MA, making unnecessary to leave the MA to perform different tasks. However, others continue to set their retail website as the center of their online strategy.

This study aims to understand the professionals’ point of view towards the use of retail websites, SM and commercial MA in their online strategy, and what is influencing the increasing use of SM and commercial MA instead of retail websites. To achieve this goal, 127 Internet professionals were interviewed through the LinkedIn SM platform, which
provided the data for this paper. Data were analyzed using a Text Mining (TM) approach for a comprehensive assessment and search for hidden information and patterns (Moro et al., 2015). Through the created knowledge, this paper intends to unveil the positioning of professionals toward the identified behavioral change so that academia and other Internet professionals can understand what is influencing the users’ behavioral change that is taking place and that is shaping the current use of the Internet.

2. Framework

2.1. The role of Retail Website, SM and commercial MA

A retail website can be used for business communication, perform online transactions, and as a potential client contact. It can be defined as the sum of web pages under an Internet domain that is used to communicate with stakeholders and conduct business transactions (Aksakalli, 2012), where the manager has the power to control the platform and the content. Worldwide, there are 1.8 billion websites (Stats, 2018), that have the potential of changing the nature of the business itself by providing access and information to any customer 24 hours/day. A retail website facilitates the access to markets previously considered out of reach, it is a place where visitors find themselves comfortable to interact with the company, and it is usually powerful for online sales. The better the company website, the greater are the chances of success in the world wide web (Hernández et al., 2009).

The rapid dispersion of SM is leading to new opportunities for organizations to communicate and connect with customers and redefine commerce leading from a product-oriented environment to a social and customer-centered one (Fernandes et al., 2018).
2016). The participation of users is the core aspect that defines SM (Wehn and Evers, 2015). It influences the frequency of customer visits and is empowered when there are high levels of activity on the SM page (Hong et al., 2014). Interaction among users is allowed through the features of communication and sharing services, while the creation of communities is the consequence of the interaction between users (Laroche et al., 2012). The visualization of the characteristics such as photos, interests, dating preferences, friends and networks by other users increases engagement (Halpern and Gibbs, 2013), and several benefits can be withdrawn from the use of SM (Solem and Pedersen, 2016). Facing these characteristics, SM is an innovative tool that surpasses and exceeds the role of the traditional website (Nah and Saxton, 2013).

A commercial MA is a smartphone downloadable software, written in a native language (Franko and Tirrell, 2012), developed particularly for an organization. It takes the best of the native characteristics of the smartphone operating system and equipment (GPS, camera, geolocation, etc.), with the possibility to integrate wearables, allowing to add characteristics such as 3D or augmented reality. Moreover, the commercial MA is downloaded to the smartphone, which translates to reserve an own space in the device, permitting better access and to be independent of Internet connection. The possibility of being synchronized with SM improves content diffusion and brand exposure.

Organizations have been taking advantage of such platforms to have an online presence and develop activities with the aim of turning their businesses sustainable.

2.2. Organizational activities supported by Retail Website, SM and commercial MA

A retail website is the online front entrance of a company that, if properly designed and conducted by its manager, can decrease operating costs and increase competitive
advantage, representing a place that strengthens the bonds with suppliers, retailers, and distributors. For these reasons, the main objective of a company by creating a retail website is to improve organizational operations, reduce operational costs, and create benefits through the enhancement of the customer service quality (Hung et al., 2014).

A retail website plays a crucial role by promoting and developing information exchange (e.g., price-related information, pictures, and online customer service), creating and stimulating relationships, business transaction guidance, marketing purposes, promote brand image, and supporting various kinds of electronic business transactions. Therefore, improving the interactivity of the website and managing the information adequately is decisive.

Although a retail website is used mainly to shop, it also permits to achieve business strategic objectives and increases competitive advantage (Mathur, 2018). Nevertheless, to enhance the retail website visibility and exposure, it needs to be indexed at an online search engine (e.g., Google, Yahoo), and follow the best practices to be placed on the first search results according to the search engine optimization (SEO) algorithm (Killoran, 2013). SEO techniques have the goal of positioning a retail website on the first organic results in a search engine, aiming to generate more traffic and engagement into the website (Shih et al., 2013). This strategy is fundamental for the company to gain visibility in the virtual world, generating more clients and, consequently, more profit.

Quality of content is an important activity in the retail website transaction process and to develop a content strategy is fundamental to determine the retail website success. Related to content, there are marketing strategies associated with a retail website, such as inbound marketing, that consists in creating strategies to attract consumers with relevant content (video, stories, image) to reach and convert consumers into long-lasting relationships (Bleoju et al., 2016), and content marketing, that dwells in creating relevant and valuable
content with the purpose of creating a positive perception towards the brand (Holliman and Rowley, 2014). Retail websites are a great support for most marketing activities and considered to be one of the great motivations for a company to launch a retail website (Hung et al., 2012).

Given the widespread dissemination of SM, any organization may adopt SM to take advantage of the opportunities that emerge using such technology (Dwivedi et al., 2018). Taking the example of Facebook, business pages are free, offer a set of tools for data analysis, are optimized for the Internet, and are as easy to set up as a simple user profile page. The online investment from companies has been increasing over the years, to establish relationships and interact with their targets (De Vries et al., 2012). SM can be a persuasive marketing tool since customers tend to trust more on comments from other users than traditional marketing strategies (Dutta and Bhat, 2016). The use of SM for marketing purposes, enhances brand loyalty, that in turn leads to a customer higher level of identification with the brand (Moro et al., 2016; Pham and Gammoh, 2015), and increases engagement between the two parties (Sashi, 2012; Yoshida et al., 2014). The collection of users’ comments and engagement through SM can even lead to changes on a company strategy, services or products, promotions, prices, communication channels, and predict market trends (Schreiner et al., 2019).

The determinants that influence organizations to adopt SM are the existence of competitive pressures, to gain competitive advantages and the relevance given by top managers (Martins et al., 2016). In small businesses, the factors that affect the adoption
are the adopters SM perception and personal characteristics, social influence from peers and/or media, current business performance, and business purposes (He et al., 2017). At a business level, assorted qualities at low cost can be associated with SM (Table 1).

Table 1 about there

SM also enable the existence of social commerce (Cui et al., 2018). Social commerce is an evolution of e-commerce, aiming to engage with customers through such platforms (Lin et al., 2017), and integrates B2B and B2C business models to the SM format, taking advantage of its characteristics to enhance customer participation, promote customer and business relationships, increase revenues and influence customers to shop through the social channel (Huang and Benyoucef, 2013; Lu et al., 2016).

From the technological standpoint, MA contributes significantly to the way people communicate, keep informed, entertained, and consume, permitting information to flow with great efficiency, security, and accuracy (Natarajan et al., 2018). MA have attained such success that it is possible to find a MA for every moment of our lives (Xu et al., 2016).

Its technological improvement has created new market segments and business models, having Uber as the top example, making possible to companies to approach their customers anytime and anywhere, exceeding the role of websites on sales (He and Liu, 2017). In 2020, revenues via app stores and in-app advertising are expected to generate 188.9 billion U.S. dollars (Statista, 2017).
However, the aim of a company to develop a commercial MA is varied (Table 2).

A commercial MA is designed to collect information concerning the user behavior, such as access schedules, real-time location, preferences, recommendations or comments, and, with this knowledge, it is possible to develop specific campaigns for each user through push-notifications, increasing sales results (Jung et al., 2018).

3. Method

3.1. Data collection

LinkedIn is considered the biggest SM Platform focused on professional and business relationships with over 546 Million users’ in 200 countries (LinkedIn, 2018). It has been under the scrutiny of researchers in recent years (Caers and Castelyns, 2011; Dijek, 2013; Zide et al., 2014) and users use this platform to maintain a list of professional contacts and share their professional skills on their LinkedIn profile (Papacharissi, 2009). After the characterization of the problem, following a common procedure used in social sciences, a convenience sample was employed (Gravetter and Forzano, 2016). Data collected from this sample was used as an input to be modeled through TM to provide the searched knowledge. The sample was based on Internet professionals’ (Table 3), and this non-probabilistic sample (Zikmund and Babin, 2012) was contacted straightforwardly via the LinkedIn Professional platform to obtain their perspective towards the relevance of websites, commercial MA and SM platforms in their online strategy, and what are the aspects that make users choose one platform over the other.
Table 3 about here

LinkedIn groups (Table 4) were considered the best option to find Internet professionals’, since they gather a community of specialized members from the same line of work, making them easy to find and expecting that they would be willing to discuss subjects related to their expertise. Group members discuss general themes regarding Internet developments, such as hints, strategic plans, techniques, general questions, or digital marketing subjects. Unstructured interviews were conducted to professionals’ who posted articles related to the three dimensions of this study (retail website, SM, and MA) in the comment box of each post. The article editor usually encourages readers to use the comment box for feedback to boost the discussion, build loyalty and grow their community. The application of unstructured interviews is considered a valid way of collecting data (Corbin and Morse, 2003) and allows to develop a keen understanding and greater breadth of the point of view of each professional (Jamshed, 2014). The approach begun with a contextualization, providing statistical evidence of the increasing use of SM and commercial MA instead of retail websites, and then Internet professionals were invited to reply, revealing what is the professional use of such technologies from their perspective and what do they consider to be the main cause that motivate consumers to choose one platform over the other. According to their response, further questions were made to maintain the dialogue to get a more detailed opinion. The maintenance of a good rapport dialog was essential to keep the dialog flowing and to collect careful, pondering, and lengthy feedback.
A total of 127 Internet professionals provided their opinion towards the use of retail websites, SM and commercial MA in an online strategy, and what is influencing the identified behavioral change. The collection of extensive and detailed opinions provided a meaningful amount of data, justifying the use of TM for the analysis, in detriment of manual analysis, and eliminating the subjectivity associated to the latter analysis (Milovic and Milovic, 2012).

3.2. Data analysis

This study used a qualitative research approach since the objective was to gain a qualitative understanding of the perspective and underlying reasons of professionals regarding users’ behavior towards retail websites, SM and MA. Hence, data collection proceeded with an unstructured interview followed by non-statistical analysis. Considering the richness of obtained data, the advantages provided by TM were put to work and therefore used in content analysis.

TM approach enables analyzing large amounts of data by searching for hidden information, patterns or trends (Ngai et al., 2009). The experiments were conducted through the “R” statistical software (https://cran.r-project.org/). This open-source platform provides a solution with packages for data analysis and has the contribution of a vast online community used for support (Cortez, 2014).

The data collected from the 127 Internet professionals provided the corpus for analysis. From the corpus, several steps were conducted, namely, reducing all terms into lower
case, removing extra white spaces, applying the stemming technique, meaning reducing all words to their root (e.g., “customized” to “custom”), and eliminating “stopwords” (prepositions, common words, etc.). The final data set provided a total of 4,274 different terms, which aggregated, revealed a total of 20,311 terms.

Afterward, a document-term matrix (DTM) was created. DTM provides the frequency of a term and the number of opinions that appeared (Moro et al., 2015). To reduce the number of outliers, sparsity was conducted (Guerreiro and Moro, 2017).

From the package of the R software, the topic modeling package, specifically the latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) was applied to find a set of terms that often appear together on the collected data. Topic modeling provided a structure that organizes the collected data and permits a profound and deeper analysis, finding abstract topics that occur within the text of the interviews (Hu et al., 2014; Wang and Blei, 2011).

Having the document term matrix as input, LDA gathers data on the most relevant topics (Moro and Rita, 2018). LDA has been widely used and considered one of the most important probabilistic tools (Moro et al., 2015). Using beta (\(\beta\)) distribution from each term of a specific topic, it creates a structure that includes the topics and terms that define each topic (Calheiros et al., 2017). From this structure, it is possible to understand what topics professionals are giving more attention to. This structure encompasses topics, terms and the number of interviews used as sources of a given topic. The correlation between each topic and the respective term is observed by the \(\beta\) distribution (Calheiros et al., 2017). For a more accurate analysis, the eight most critical terms that represent each topic are presented.

3.3. Results
For the analysis of the interviews, two levels of analysis were conducted. For the first level, the recurrence of terms is exhibited in Figure 1, and for supplementary analysis of the results, packed bubbles were created to make a visual interpretation of the results.

The data analysis of the 127 respondents provided 4,274 different terms. The aggregated frequency of the 4,274 terms corresponded to 20,311 terms. Figure 1 details the absolute frequency of the 10 most pertinent terms. Through the analysis of this figure, “Website” is the most referred term with 582 matches, followed by “Social Media” with 517. In third place comes “Application” term with 310 matches. Combined, the 3 top terms aggregate 6.94% of the total. In the following positions are “Design” (308) and “Content” (233). From the sixth to tenth positions are “Facebook” (197), “Business” (179), “Time” (160), “Brand” (141) and “Search” (126). Combined, these last five positions correspond to 3.95% of the total.

The respective packed bubbles (Figure 2) provide an interesting visualization of the results. Clearly, “Website” and “Social Media” stand out from the others, and Facebook reveals its importance in the world of SM.
In the second level of analysis, the LDA outcome was scrutinized (Table 5). For each topic, a dominant term was revealed and the $\beta$ value shows how close the term is to the topic. A strong correlation between the topic is reflected by a $\beta$ value closer to zero.

From Table 5 it is possible to visualize the outcome from the LDA analysis. The number of topics was defined to nine, and the eight terms with greater correlation with the topic were considered for the analysis.

Table 5 about here
On the first topic, “Website”, “Business”, “Google”, “Search”, “Engage”, “Information”, “Social Media”, and “Strategy” are correlated with 15 Internet professional opinions. “Website” has a low β value (3.10), and “strategy” (4.98) has high β values. These results provide evidence that the connection between the terms and the topic is strong and suggests that Internet professionals indicate that from a business perspective, the center of an online strategy is their retail website because users will continue to use Google to search for information that, in turn, will lead them to a website. This result is supported by a web designer opinion: “People still search on Google and they still trust websites that are in the organic search result. (...). Having a website with proper SEO is always a Win-Win situation”.

For topic two, “Application” has a low β value (3.28), and the term with higher β value is “Content” (4.98). This topic reveals that professionals agree that users are increasingly accessing the Internet through SM and MA, due to the technological developments of smartphones. This is validated by a digital manager that stated: “Smartphones are an answer to change in user's behavior. People are getting comfortable with their phones, so they prefer everything on the phone. (...) All thanks to technology.” These platforms are considered to provide a service that saves time to users and the access to content is easier (Qin et al., 2017).

Analyzing topic number three, “Website” is the term of this topic with the β value (3.52) closer to the topic. From the analysis of the terms of this topic, Internet professionals understand that the success of the retail website and commercial MA in their business strategy is dependent on user-centered design and positive user experience. The opinion of a web designer stresses the result of this topic: “As vital as responsive web design is (not adopting it is committing digital suicide), it only guarantees that your user can view your page in a mobile device” and that there is “switch from web design to experience
Another professional highlight that if “you run a business or deliver value just by taking care of the web channel is naïve at best and harmful at worst” reinforcing that “the demand for user experience designers is still on the rise”. User-centered design is strongly recommended (Holzinger and Errath, 2007) since it can lead to an interface that suits the consumers’ expectations and to positive user experience.

Topic four has the highest number of professionals’ contributions (29). In this topic, “Website”, “Content” and “Channel” are the terms with the closer β values to the topic. This topic reveals that professionals have the opinion that users prefer a retail website due to the quality of content, that is found to be professional and updated, following the opinion of digital marketing strategist that stated that “what really matters is not how you arrange things on a page: it's the content, in terms of a specific user need”. When the content is perceived to have quality, users’ usually share it through other social channels (Holliman and Rowley, 2014).

“Social Media” has the closest correlation to topic five (3.00) while “Website” (3.36) and “Business” (4.05) have higher β values. The terms revealed by this topic follow the opinion of an online business expert: “The problem, though, with going for a ‘social only’ strategy is that you’re giving up your entire user base under the control of someone or something that you don’t have any power over”. Professionals relegate SM to a secondary place for business because their retail website is owned and controlled by them and provide continuity and clarity of message. They have no control over the SM platforms and every time the search algorithm is changed, it has an impact over their projects.

On the sixth topic, “Social Media”, “Website”, “Post” and “Customer” are the terms with the closest β values to the topic. From the analysis, it is possible to conclude that Internet professionals understand that SM are platforms to help interact quickly with customers and to help drive traffic to the retail website, adding that users on SM often look at a post
and move quickly onto the next post, and in this reality, the quality of the content is what influences the customer to open the post and engage with the company. Following this approach, in one of the collected opinions, copywriter highlighted the importance of having a “team of people to create valuable, relevant and high-quality contents consistently”. The same professional reinforced by mentioning that the “content on a website is used to fuel social media and other online profiles” and “can then be shared on social media platforms and mobile applications driving traffic to the website”.

Analyzing topic seven, “Social Media” is the term with the lowest $\beta$ value (3.24), while “Marketing” is the term with the highest $\beta$ value (4.88). The top eight terms of this topic reveal that SM is a perfect tool for online communication and marketing purposes and business can take the advantage of these tools and redirect the traffic towards their retail website through the creation of quality content, that they can control and make the brand stronger and visible. An Internet company CEO affirmed that “you should be on all the relevant social platforms, but in the end, likes don't pay the bills. Sales do. So, you need to convert them into your ecosystem so you can leverage that relationship on your terms”.

Topic eight, with nine opinions, has “Facebook” as the term with the lowest $\beta$ value, followed by “Social Media”, “Website” and “Strategy”. A technology journalist argued that “Due to the ever-increasing use of social media attention has drifted from websites”. The result of this topic reveals that the Internet professionals indicate that businesses should use SM to innovate their business strategy, such as using the Facebook professional page as their homepage, because users do not think about retail websites anymore and will only use them if a company does not have a commercial MA. A digital manager added that “Apps and social media have a natural way of connecting people in a way that makes life and taking action to seem easy. Relationships are key to develop and maintain if you are looking for someone to take action. From my observation, several
research touchpoints and personal engagements with businesses on their sales/marketing strategies, this is exactly the competitive advantage apps and social media have over websites. Deeper and faster connections and easier actions to take to obtain a result the user needs. Websites are simply a longer process.” concluding that “businesses must evolve and adapt to suit buyers’ preferred habits or sadly face extinction.”, confirming the results of topic eight.

Topic number nine highlights the terms “Website”, “Content”, “Project”, “Social Media” and “Share”. This is the topic with the lowest number of opinions and reveals that Internet professionals consider that a retail website should be the center of the project strategy and all the valuable content must be shared on all SM pages where the company has a presence, creating a hybrid-approach between social, dynamic content and static content. “Not having a website is like not having a physical address to the office. Nobody will be able to trust the brand without a website. (…). Without a website, it will be difficult for the brand to build trust with the customers”. In terms of content, a copywriter revealed that “social media platforms and mobile applications are always hungry for valuable and relevant content consistently to stay useful to their users”. Strategically, the use of SM is used to engage with their target, communicate relevant information and redirect traffic towards the company website (Culnan et al., 2010).

4. Discussion and conclusions

In this paper, 127 unstructured interviews were conducted with Internet professionals who provided their perspective on the relevance of retail websites, commercial MA and SM platforms in their online strategy, and what are the aspects that make users choose one platform over the other. TM and topic modeling were used to analyze such data and provided results of their perspective.
From the analyzed data, Internet professionals revealed that SM is being used to communicate and engage with their target, to conduct marketing activities, such as brand awareness, lead generation, customer acquisition, and customer retention, and to drive traffic to their website (e.g., “brands actually use social media instead of a website, others use it to reinforce their brand image and in fact build the community around their brand.”). According to Needles and Thompson (2013), the use of SM for communication purposes, lead to the creation of relationships, increases word of mouth and customer loyalty, while Holliman and Rowley (2014) argue that digital content marketing is an advantageous mechanism to attain a trusted brand status. Within the existent SM platforms, professionals’ outline Facebook as the most important of them all (e.g., “If a brand does not have a review section on their website – users know to expect that their brands’ Facebook most likely will.”). This understanding in line with user behavior since they are spending an excessive amount of time in this platform (Tang et al., 2016).

A deeper analysis from the nine most relevant terms per topic reveals six topics that show a point of view towards the use of a retail website, SM and commercial MA in an online strategy (topics 1, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9), and three topics revealing the opinion of professionals for the behavioral change (topics 2, 3 and 4). Topics number 1, 5, 6, 7 and 9 are characterized by the opinion of professionals that argue that the retail website must the center of the online strategy, while topic 8 conceals otherwise, meaning that the online strategy should be focused on a SM platform. This is an interesting finding, revealing that most of the topics related to the online strategy support the argument favoring the retail website at the center of the strategy.

Facing the statistical evidence that highlight the behavioral change, Internet professionals that reveal resilience to set SM as the center of the business strategy do it because they have no control over the SM platforms, meaning that every time the platforms’ algorithm
is changed, there is an impact over their business. Four out of nine topics (1, 5, 6, and 7) reveal the resilience of strategically transforming the online strategy by setting another platform than their retail website in the center, leading business from there. They also believe that the use of search engines to search for information will lead users to a website, highlighting their relevance. However, if the SEO strategy is not well delineated, it can fail to provide benefits (Aswani et al., 2018; Shih et al., 2013). As SM platforms have algorithm changes, so does search engines. SEO implies the use of techniques that influence the ranking of the website on the search engine webpage when an Internet search is conducted (Shih et al., 2013). Taking this into account, one must be aware that social commerce provides features that reveal retail websites no longer sufficient or satisfying for users (Huang and Benyoucef, 2015).

Despite not many having this opinion, only topic eight, corresponding to the opinion of nine professionals, some argue that business should innovate their online strategy by evolving and adapting to the identified behavioral change to suit customers’ preferred habits, or else, they will face extinction. They consider that MA and SM platforms are here to stay and consider these platforms as a natural way of connecting people in a way that makes life and taking action seem easy (e.g., “The more brands realize how powerful social media is, the more we will see forward-thinking companies bringing teenagers onto the payroll to manage content.”). Social commerce has revealed to be a new business model based on online communities by gathering features of web 2.0 technologies into the electronic business model (Zhao and Li, 2019), while MA provide characteristics that create a different dynamic when compared with other media forms, since they are context-aware, universal and ubiquitous (Gerlich et al., 2015), offer full control over users experience, leverage engagement and develop a positive attitude towards an organization (Qin et al., 2017; Wu, 2015).
Topics two, three and four reveal the opinion of professionals concerning the behavioral change. In their opinion, smartphones are responsible for the increasing use of SM and commercial MA due to the speed and easiness to access personalized content, instant updates, and to its user-centered design. Besides these characteristics, the commercial MA has the advantage of allowing the possibility of sharing content directly with other SM channels (Alnawas and Aburub, 2016; Kang, 2014).

Nevertheless, in the professionals’ opinion, users will continue to prefer retail websites due to the quality of content created by professionals (e.g., “networks like Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn are ‘wordstreams’ to be considered not so much as ‘websites’ but rather as ‘hangouts’. Places where we are provided with content, usually not by searching for it, but rather by simply letting ourselves stumble upon it.”). Quality of content, web design and structure influence customer perception and attitude towards the website quality, as well as satisfaction and willingness to use the website, revealing its importance to the companies’ long-term success (Hameed, 2017; Kim et al., 2015).

Considering the identified behavioral pattern, recommendations need to be addressed. Professionals should use SM and MA for social commerce and transactions, taking advantage of the actual dynamic that is occurring over the Internet to reach their objectives, and the requirement of letting go the of being in control by defining the retail website as the center of the online strategy, following the dynamic revealed by users, meeting their demands to achieve success. According to previous research, the most used SM platforms are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram and Trip Advisor (Salem and Čavlek, 2016).

Data also suggest that retail websites will continue to have relevance in the Professionals’ opinion. Following this point of view, professionals should consider retail websites as a hub and redirect consumers to where they like to be, meaning SM platforms and MA, or
as an alternative, to create conditions in the retail website similar to those that users find on SM and MA, allowing them to interact, collaborate, add value to the process (Huang and Benyoucef, 2015), and enhancing user experience to create a positive dynamic in the retail website, especially in the smartphone setting (Yu and Kong, 2016).

Understanding the user dynamics on the Internet and following their interests, will gather companies and users in the same place, increasing sales efficiency, improving product or service, and increasing their awareness and influence.

Overall, the contribution of this paper is expected to be significant. The collection of professionals’ opinions toward the place of retail websites, commercial MA and SM platforms in their online strategy and what are the aspects that make users choose one platform over the other make a conceptual addition to academia. Scholars can use this valuable knowledge as an immediate reference to conduct research, considering the opinion of Internet professionals of the use of technological platforms on their online strategy. In turn, Internet professionals can redirect their strategies toward the identified behavioral change to better target and communicate with their audience and market segments.

As in any research, limitations need to be addressed and be taken into consideration. Only Internet professionals from the LinkedIn groups took part in this study. Nonetheless, the revealed limitation does not put in jeopardy the purpose of demonstrating the professionals’ opinion toward their online strategy.

For future research, it would be interesting to conduct this study focusing on a particular area of business, product or service, adding an objective criterion, and compare results with these findings.
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### Table 1 - Advantages associated to SM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SM advantages</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to new customers, build relationships, increase customer loyalty,</td>
<td>Needles and Thompson (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>increase word of mouth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educate, empower people, inform</td>
<td>Thackeray et al. (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect clients and competitors’ data, build and manage reputation, engage</td>
<td>Verdeguer et al. (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with customers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement marketing campaigns, create brand awareness, increase customer</td>
<td>He et al. (2017)</td>
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<tr>
<td>satisfaction, increase sales and revenues</td>
<td></td>
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### Table 2 – Advantages associated to MA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MA advantages</th>
<th>References</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand engagement, communicate brand values, influence customer satisfaction,</td>
<td>Alnawas and Aburub (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improve brand image and awareness, marketing research, product innovation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility, available in an app store, increase sales</td>
<td>He and Liu (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to millennials market, creates revenue opportunities, enhance customer</td>
<td>Qin et al. (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loyalty, increase user engagement, improve operating efficiency, provide</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>control over customer experience, reduce distribution costs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3 - Professionals background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professionals background</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online marketing</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital manager</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web designer</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital marketing strategist</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web developer</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online consultant</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology journalist</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copywriter</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Software engineer</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead generation consultant</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online business expert</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>127</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Number of followers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Marketing: Social Media, Search, Mobile &amp; More</td>
<td>379,601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Marketing</td>
<td>1,756,062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Marketing 2.1</td>
<td>181,098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Search Engine Land</td>
<td>79,066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Centre of Expertise</td>
<td>605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Application Community</td>
<td>9,171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic #</td>
<td>1st term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1 - Most pertinent term recurrence

Figure 2 - Packed bubbles for professionals' perspective