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The "Hawkers" case study: a model of the strategic use of resources offered by digital environments

Estudio del caso de Hawkers: un modelo de aprovechamiento estratégico de los recursos que ofrecen los entornos digitales

Abstract

This study investigates the key to success of Hawkers, a Spanish company involved in the online marketing of sunglasses and a remarkable example of so-called start-ups. Starting up with a modest investment capital, this company, in becoming an internationally renowned brand, has quickly managed to achieve a high level of capitalization and an outstanding sales volume. To achieve this, Hawkers has developed an innovative management communication strategy on social media, adapting conventional marketing knowledge to online environments and reinterpreting traditional marketing practices in an original and effective manner. Furthermore, it has used an insightful sales strategy most effectively, turning customers into brand ambassadors with the aim of viralizing the brand content and developing growth partnerships with prominent companies and celebrities. The study is based on an analysis of key digital communication literature and insights provided by Hawkers, incorporating knowledge of new digital marketing techniques, observation and analysis of communication actions undertaken by the brand and measurement of its effectiveness through the available web metrics. The most important actions are detailed and the reason for their effectiveness explained through an analysis of communication mechanics applied with an emphasis on digital environments.

Resumen

Este artículo investiga las claves del éxito de la marca Hawkers, una empresa española dedicada a la comercialización online de gafas de sol y notable ejemplo de las denominadas startups. Partiendo de una inversión muy modesta, consiguió rápidamente un elevado nivel de capitalización y de ventas, construyendo una marca reconocida a nivel internacional. Para ello, Hawkers ha desarrollado una novedosa gestión de la estrategia de comunicación en las redes sociales, adaptando a los entornos online los conocimientos del marketing convencional, reinterpretándolos de manera original y eficaz. También ha sabido adoptar una estrategia comercial muy perspicaz, convirtiendo a su público en embajador de la marca para viralizar sus contenidos y estableciendo relaciones de colaboración con destacadas empresas y personalidades (celebrities). Para el artículo se ha realizado una lectura detallada de obras básicas de referencia en comunicación digital y de la información generada por Hawkers incorporando los conocimientos de las nuevas técnicas del marketing digital, la observación y análisis de las acciones de comunicación emprendidas por la marca y la medición de su eficacia utilizando las métricas web disponibles. También se describen las acciones más destacadas y se explica el motivo de su eficacia, examinando las mecánicas de comunicación utilizadas, especialmente en los entornos digitales.

Keywords
Digital Communication; Social Media strategy; Hawkers; Digital Marketing

Palabras clave
Comunicación digital; estrategia en redes sociales; Hawkers; marketing digital

1. Introduction

In the "Information Era", our global society has been built as a network society based on digital information and communication technologies that have facilitated the global interdependence of global activity (Castells, 2005). The development of a hyper-connected society has led to the creation and management of the largest volume of data available in the entire history of Mankind. This technological revolution – defined as Big Data or 'macro data'– is based on the processing of large volumes of information through sophisticated computer systems that facilitate the activity of both professionals and researchers in many different industries.

The business sector has been pioneer in terms of the use of new data processing tools. In fact, many research studies highlight the competitive advantage of companies and individuals who inform the decision-making process on the data available (McAfee & Brynjolfsson, 2012). However, start-ups – emerging companies that have sprung from the digital world and that are characterized by constant innovation (Román, 2016)– are the ones that are really taking advantage of the availability of Big Data.

Compared to traditional multinationals, start-ups have shown greater flexibility to adapt to modern 'liquid' societies characterised by change and a transitory nature (Bauman, 2000). On the contrary, large organizations stemming from industrial societies face tremendous challenges to adapt their heavy and hierarchical structures to a new information society which demands lighter structures and the capacity to adapt to a process of constant change, a clear sign of the application of the Darwinian concept of 'natural selection' in the business realm.

A perfect example of this is Hawkers, a Spanish sunglasses company created by four young people from Alicante. The company turned an initial investment capital of 300 euros into 70 million euros in turnover in less than 3 years (Uranga, 2016). Hawkers depicts one of the best examples of company growth and commercial success achieved through the ability to effectively leverage Big Data to draw consumer insights. The application of the scientific method is key for companies to correctly adapt to the market they operate in. A thorough analysis of the data provided by Sales, Human Resources, Communication, Marketing, etc., is key to optimize company processes and resources. Therefore, success is not only determined by the quality of data collected but also by its correct interpretation to translate this data into effective strategic company decisions.

Our research primary theory is the fact that Hawkers' success is based on the complete, consistent and ground-breaking use of digital environments and measurement tools as well as the adaptation of their expertise and knowledge of traditional marketing, communication and PR. These has allowed them to generate very effective communication and sales strategies.

The main objectives of our research are the following:

- Analyse the different ways Hawkers uses social media for sales and brand growth purposes.
- Understand the impact of growth hacking in the brand´s remarkable growth from a sales and brand image viewpoint.
- Unveil the strategies employed to improve brand´s awareness through both 1) the use of influencers or brand prescribers and 2) co-marketing, establishing partnerships with other brands or well-known companies.
- Analyse the use of advocacy marketing through the communities created in key social media
- Define the importance of transmedia narrative in the distribution of brand-related content.

Virtually no previous research has been carried out on Hawkers from a scientific point of view (we only know of Iribarren, 2017 and Murga, 2017), nor is it possible to find direct publications on which to base this article. The article is therefore of experimental nature. The company does not usually disclose figures or detailed data of its communication actions, which is why researchers have obtained and analysed the metrics that were available on the brand's web pages and through some of their activities.

2. Methodology

This research is based on the case study methodology employed to analyse the Hawkers case. It applies a mix methodology combining 1) Qualitative content research and incorporating 1a) contents of relevant communication activities delivered by the brand. 1b) the study of the strategy followed by these activities. 2) Quantitative research through the implementation of several web analytics methods applied to social media in order to study and measure the impact and virality of significant communication and sales activities carried out. We believe that this methodological approach can provide us with an improved overview enabling the analysis of underlying causes for the brand's success and the study of marketing and

communication mechanisms applied. Due to the exploratory nature of this study, a number of assumptions will be made based on the insights gained from the initial theoretical corpus (Martinez, 2006).

The information gathered from this piece of research has been collected through primary and secondary sources, from conferences, presentations and interviews with Hawkers owners and marketing managers. Moreover, an analysis of their campaign, messages and other types of branded content on social media has been conducted, especially on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. A comparison of the different strategies applied to social media have served as the bases to mainly analyse the actions that have generated greater interaction with their target. Also, the literature available in this specific area has been analysed, especially the main works of reference.

3. Analysis and outcome deliberation

3.1. Hawkers: a company of the 'online' era

Created in December 2013, Hawkers has become a reference in the world of start-ups in Spain. Their owners –Iñaki Soriano, Pablo Sánchez, Alejandro Moreno and David Moreno– entered the world of ecommerce with a Wallapop-like site which failed at the time. Later on, they started to market California-based Knockaround eyewear reinvesting the company´s profits into larger orders (Plaza, 2015). They successfully expanded this US brand in Spain thanks to social media. Due to their huge success, and after several disagreements with the US team, they decided to launch their own brand of eyewear: Hawkers.

These four young men from Alicante went ahead with an aggressive online strategy in search of greater visibility and brand awareness. In only three years, they were able to sell more than 4.5 million shades in more than 50 countries (Franco, 2017). The company´s revenues exponentially went up, as well as their investment in advertising and digital marketing to achieve greater conversion: registration, recommendations, sales, etc.

In 2016, the company received 50 million euros from external financial partners which allowed them to embark upon an international growth strategy in several European countries such as Italy, Germany or France to increase their ROI to more than 300 million euros that year (Fiter, 2016).

Lately, the company has opened offline outlets opening more than 30 stores in major European cities (Europa Press, 2018) and has also entered the market of prescription glasses (Méndez, 2018).

3.2. From traditional prescribers to 'influencers'

The connection between a brand and product with socially or professionally recognized people (celebrities) has systematically been used as a strategy by advertisers throughout the history of advertising and PR. With the advent of social media, the importance of this phenomenon has exponentially grown as individuals feel more empowered with the use of this new media.

Hawkers' success is two-fold. On the one hand, it has managed to continuously bond with key opinion leaders among the target, i.e. the brand has been tied to key influencers of the millennial generation. Table 1 presents some of the key prescribers used.

Table 1. List of celebrities used by Hawkers on social media

Name	Profession	Country	Year of birth	Followers on social media (in millions)
Lionel Messi	Football player	Argentina	1987	179.3
Luis Suárez	Football player	Uruguay	1987	60.6
Dani Alves	Football player	Brazil	1983	35.5
Jorge Lorenzo	Moto GP pilot	Spain	1987	7.3
Cristina Pedroche	TV presenter	Spain	1988	5.7
Melissa Satta	TV presenter	Italy	1986	5.5
Ricky Rubio	Basketball player	Spain	1990	4.4
David Bustamante	Singer	Spain	1982	3.3
Sergio Pérez	Formula 1 pilot	Mexico	1990	2.8
Paula Echevarría	Actress	Spain	1977	2.4
DJ Carnage	Musical producer	Guatemala	1991	2.3

Source: The authors. Data collected from their Facebook, Twitter and Instagram profiles (June 2018).

As shown on this table, these prescribers come from different countries and professional sectors. This cross-cutting approach allows the brand to reach out a target with very diverse preferences and interests such as millennials, projecting the brand beyond national borders as most of these influencers are internationally renowned. Despite their differences, they all have a similar age (around their 30s and 40s). Nonetheless, the interesting issue here is the reach of these celebrities on social media. Hawkers' creators –millennials themselves– put their trust on social media to develop attitudes and beliefs in their generation. Furthermore, they have tried to build their brand through a partnership with new digital prescribers who have millions of followers around the world facilitating Hawkers' international growth.

The 'hawkerian' concept has been coined to define and refer to the people who make up the Hawkers community on social media. Based on the prosumer figure –individuals who simultaneously consume and produce content (McLuhan & Nevitt, 1972; Toffler, 1997)– brand managers have focused on the identification of their target –digital natives– to turn them onto the brand's main prescribers. These followers create and share content with their contacts in their profiles driven by contests and promotions turning many of these campaigns into trends –trending topics– on social media (image 1). Thus, users share the brand image which goes viral thanks to these 'anonymous' ambassadors (table 2).

Image 1. Example of trending topic for the Hawkers and Xiaomi joined campaign

Source: Twitter (May 23, 2018).

Table 2. Number of Hawkers shared publications (retweets) in social media

Social network	2015	2016	2017	2018
Facebook	13 k	71 k	45 k	10 k
Twitter	114 k	177 k	89 k	43 k
Instagram	---	---	---	---

Source: The authors.

In her book "Marketing viral" (2008: 36), Silvia Sivera states that with new digital media, word of mouth recommendations have turned into 'word of mouse' recommendations. This is the reason why this Alicante-based company invests so many efforts in actions to keep their community active. Thanks to the reinvention of the word-of-mouth mechanism, their content and messages have gone viral using an investment that is significantly lower vs. traditional advertising.

3.3. Use of 'co-marketing'

Co-marketing is a technique in which two or more companies embark upon joint actions addressing a shared target to establish a partnership to focus on the image and positioning of both brands based on mutually-reinforcing values (Alcaide & Chávarri, 2010:8).

By using this strategy, Hawkers has drawn the attention of large multinationals in different economic sectors and has established win-win partnerships with several companies driven by the desire to generate trust among a critical, demanding and volatile target such as the millennials.

According to the last global survey conducted by Deloitte (2018:3), the traditional management of brick-and-mortar companies is not approved by millennials who tend to believe that business activities should focus more on the interests of their stakeholders rather than financial results only. Large multinationals have understood the influence of millennials who in a few years will represent the largest percentage of the world´s labour force and the main consumer segment. This is the reason why large multinationals and companies such as BBVA, Ford, Samsung, PlayStation or Los Angeles Lakers have made strategic alliances with companies such as Hawkers, as they are perfectly in line with the values of this generation (image 2).

Image 2. Examples of co-marketing carried out by Hawkers

Source: (March 18, 2019) https://bit.ly/2Y8K4ir; https://bit.ly/2W31Zow; https://bit.ly/2JjeM4V;

https://bit.ly/2HtKMSa; https://bit.ly/2Y9EgF0

Furthermore, this Alicante-based company has linked their name to several highly reputed brands within production sectors increasing product credibility. One of the main hurdles the brand initially faced was the lack of trust among some consumers who did not understand the concept of affordable high-quality eye-wear. For this reason, Hawkers´ brand managers decided to establish a partnership with prestigious brands that were in line with the brand´s message to overcome the credibility issues generated by the product´s low price.

Alcaide and Chávarri (2010:10), who coined a definition of the co-marketing concept, mentioned that these modern win-to-win partnerships have long existed throughout history. One example would be marriages of convenience arranged by different heads of states or the offspring of the noble or bourgeois class.

3.4. Change from 'mass media' to 'social media'

The digital environment has favoured the proliferation of start-ups in different production sectors. As a result of the arrival of digital environments, one of the barriers that have been overcome is access to mass communication media for new companies. Consequently, Hawkers immediately understood their growth should be based on the brand´s extension on social media as the main distribution channel for their products and messages which they have by and large attained. The benefits of this strategy are clear-cut:

- Cost reduction. Whilst advertising constitutes one of the most important revenue sources for social media, the cost companies have to pay in their online advertising campaigns is marginal

compared to traditional advertising. This is the reason why Hawkers managers decided to invest their limited initial capital in the advertising tools available on Facebook and Twitter.

Table 3: Number of publications made by Hawkers

Social network	2015	2016	2017	2018
Facebook	236	367	522	587
Twitter	4,7 k	8,5 k	3,5 k	1,7 k
Instagram	413	144	83	183

Source: The authors.

Table 4: Number of Hawkers' followers on social networks

Social network	2015	2016	2017	2018
Facebook	3,6 M	4,8 M	4 M	6,7 M
Twitter	155 k	177 k	201 k	205 k
Instagram	262 k	476 k	687 k	1,4 M

Source: The authors.

- Global reach. According to the "2018 Global Digital Report" (2018:7) there are 3.196 million users of social media –42% of the world population; a figure that is impossible to match by any other means of traditional mass communication.

- Measuring results. The new digital measurement tools linked to social media have the potential to collect very detailed information about the consumer. This information can be a determining factor for the potential success or failure of an advertising or PR campaign in real time. One example is the 2015 Twitter campaign (hashtag #MascotasHawkerianas) in which followers were encouraged to upload a picture with their dogs wearing the brand shades. The data collected through social media monitoring tools indicated a 20% of followers' growth. Then, the company decided to adopt a more aggressive position using the following statement: «if you do not like dogs, we do not like you» achieving an increase in the number of followers of more than 100%, as reported by brand managers.

- Message customization. Compared to traditional communication media, these tools enable the brand to generate a more sophisticated target segmentation. In traditional media, advertising messages are more scattered or tend to address segments who are not interested in the product or service advertised. Nevertheless, advertising tools linked to main social media give us the possibility to choose different indicators that have an impact in the selected target.

- Impact on the target. Whilst Hawkers managers prefer not to be very precise when specifying the target their products address in the conferences and interviews given, it is clear that their products primarily address millennials. As broadly known, the main features that characterize the 'millennial generation' are: high exposure to technology and information, heavy use of social media, multi-platform and multi-task behaviour and low permeability to traditional media. (Ruiz, 2017).

For all these reasons, it is clear that the Spanish company of eye-wear have decided to rely on a communication strategy based on social media. The purpose of this research is to probe on the way Hawkers uses the following media:

- Facebook.
- Twitter.
- Instagram.

3.4.1. Facebook strategy and use

The most widely used social media since the company inception. At the beginning of 2014, Hawkers was one of the first companies to see the potential of Facebook Ads. In the 2017 'Today is Marketing' congress, Francisco Pérez mentioned that back in that time marketing experts agreed that the Facebook platform did not effectively work. Despite this, Hawkers decided to invest in it, using a trial and error strategy which allowed them to monitor their metrics and generate conversations to spread their message.

Facebook Ads, the advertising tool of this social network that as it is widely known, has the largest number of users worldwide and has progressively gained support from other users thanks to companies such as

Hawkers who have seen the extraordinary potential it had to spread and measure their messages. Thanks to the continuous improvements made, this app has turned into an ideal user segmentation tool achieving highly accurate conversions at a much lower price for any company vs. the costly techniques of traditional advertising.

Hawkers' strategy on Facebook Ads is primarily based on the massive use of retargeting: having, once again, an impact on users who have previously interacted with the brand. When a user logs on their website, the user will automatically receive ads with increasingly appealing messages on their Facebook account. (Gamboa, 2016). Initial ads only remind the user of the product visited. Then, users are offered a light discount using codes in the purchase process. If the user does not make the purchase, he is offered a more aggressive discount. If the purchase does not take place, he is offered a very compelling promotion (image 3). Table 5 shows the brand most successful actions in this social network during the last years.

Image 3. Evolution of a Hawkers retargeting campaign on Facebook
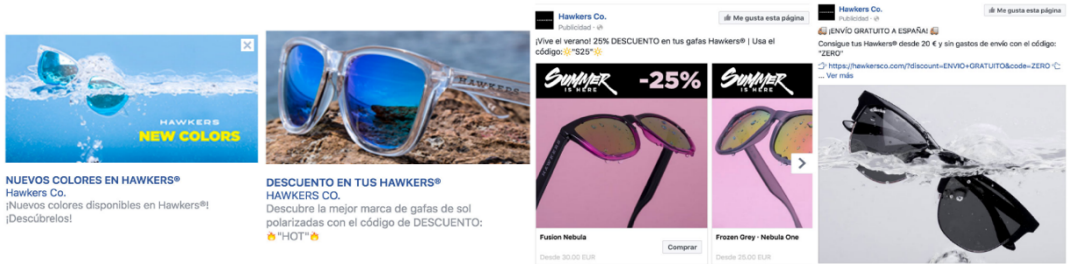
Source: robertogamboa.com (May 22, 2018).

Table 5. The five best Hawkers' publications on Facebook (2015-2018)

Date	Publication	Interactions Total
25/07/17 18:00	MESSI X HAWKERS. Limited edition. Very soon, the new sunglasses collection of the best footballer of all time. Find out about it before everyone else ⏩ hawke.rs/Messi ⏪	118 k
14/03/16 16:26	Join the revolution with Steve Aoki! Buy your Hawkers in Pull&Bear	109 k
27/07/16 16:30	Hawkers x Steve Aoki Limited Edition™. AVAILABLE NOW???? BUY NOW??	92 k
15/10/15 20:57	Be ready for the PRAMAC Australian Motorcycle Grand Prix. Shop Now -> www.hawkersco.com	86 k
08/11/15 12:27	Rocking last race! #GOFORIT @Rins42 #HawkersCo #MotoGP #ValenciaGP #Sunglasses	64 k

Source: The authors.

3.4.2. Twitter strategy and use

Hawkers is one of the brands that generates the largest number of trending topics worldwide (Marketing News, 2017). Since its genesis to the end of 2013, and besides creating a customer service channel, Twitter has been used as a vehicle to convey their messages and promotions by inviting followers to share their tweets or share brand hashtags through the use of gift incentives. In social media, this is known as 'the snow ball effect' through which content goes viral, which translates not only in an increase in brand followers but also an increase in brand awareness.

The hawkerian community has rapidly developed over time. This type of brand communication generates high loyalty among members (Muniz & O´Guin, 2001), as customers turn into brand advocates expanding its popularity.

In 2017, Hawkers became the first Spanish company that used this social media as a sales outlet by using a sophisticated artificial intelligence system with the capacity to interact with clients in real time providing guidance during the entire purchase process.

Table 6 shows the most successful brand actions in this social network.

Table 6. The five best Hawkers' publications on Twitter (2015-2018)

Date	Publication	Interactions Total
27/06/16 17:02	Today we raffle 1 of 10 packs among all those who RT and LIKE the tweet. We will do this for the next 10 days. Good luck!	5,4 k
22/08/17 16:12	If GoPro's daughter is my daughter's mother, then what am I to GoPro? Answer with #RiddleHawkers to win some?? Go go!	5 k
17/10/17 16:22	We raffle a pair of Hawkers. Do you know how to win? Very easy ?? Just RT + LIKE !!! Tomorrow	4,9 k
15/10/18 16:47	JACKPOT! # Happy26Hawky The piñata will have: 1?? @Honor_ES 8X 6 ??...	4,7 k
29/06/16 22:01	Today we raffle 2 packs among all those who RT and LIKE the tweet. There are 7 more packs to go, come on	4,5 k

Source: The authors.

3.4.3. Instagram strategy and use

In a survey conducted by Brandmanic (2018) with company managers from different sectors, 64.5% of participants mentioned that Instagram is the best communication channel to work with influencers, new prescribers that may drive the consumption of specific brands and products among their fan communities. Any popular brand such as Hawkers, knows that this social network has become one of the most effective tools to drive sales (Mau, 2018).

The Spanish company of eyewear has found in Instagram the ideal place to create their showroom or digital display and promote their new creations. Similar to a pre-test, the brand uses comments and likes as indicators of consumer's likes and preferences for their new designs.

Image 4. Example of Instagram posts

Source: Instagram; user: @HawkersCo (June 21, 2018).

Besides the use of the English language to contribute to the brand internationalization, followers attract future potential buyers through their posts. To achieve this, the Alicante-based company encourages followers to tag two friends ("tag two friends who would like this model") or simply tip them off on the visual ("tip off your friend"), a simple strategy that allows the brand to increase their database with potential buyers.

Table 7 shows the most successful brand actions in this social network.

Table 7. The five best Hawkers' publications on Instagram (2015-2018)

Date	Publication	Interactions Total
15/04/18 19:44	Keep Playing Coachella. Play Hawkers. #HawkersOneLifestyle #HawkersPlayingCoachella #PlayHawkers #Coachella2018	92 k
10/11/18 16:28	Shop the look now Available at hawkersco.com #NewCollection #Athleisure #Hawkers #PlayHawkers #Sunglasses #NewStyle #Fashion	89 k
09/11/18 17:03	Make them yours Available at hawkersco.com #NewCollection #Athleisure #Hawkers #PlayHawkers #Sunglasses #NewStyle #Fashion	87 k
15/03/2018 13:22	Look who's designed his own line of Hawkers sunglasses! @eljuanpazurita one of the biggest YouTube stars EVER! We think the designs are dope. You like them? #Hawkers #JuanpaZurita	86 k
22/11/18 22:40	From the hood to the stars. snoopdogg on Hollywood's #WalkofFame wearing #Hawkers shades. Really proud that you chose us on such a special day for you. Great combo hawkersco &	81 k

Source: The authors.

In summary, the use of each of these three social networks –both individually and combined, seeking to reinforce the brand presence from different perspectives– has been very satisfactory in terms of efficiency and performance, as evidenced by the significant number of sympathies that has awakened (see number of likes, table 8) and the high fidelity quotas (see table 9), as well as the high number of conversations aroused in digital environments (see table 10).

Table 8. Number of "likes" obtained by Hawkers

Social network	2015	2016	2017	2018
Facebook	881 k	1,5 M	1,1 M	182 k
Twitter	61 k	172 k	85 k	38 k
Instagram	1 M	577 k	2,2 M	6,1 M

Source: The authors.

Table 9. Hawkers' average annual engagement rates

Social Network	2015	2016	2017	2018
Facebook	0,083 %	0,12 %	0,068 %	0,010 %
Twitter	0,27 %	0,59 %	0,0015 %	0,11 %
Instagram	1,7 %	0,45 %	1 %	1,7 %

Source: The authors.

Table 10. Number of comments on Hawkers in social networks

Social network	2015	2016	2017	2018
Facebook	23 k	87 k	106 k	18 k
Twitter[1]	---	---	---	---
Instagram	23 k	7 k	20 k	354 k

Source: The authors.
(1) Twitter does not allow access to Hawkers accumulated data.

3.5. From traditional to 'Big Data' research

Traditionally, research has been used in marketing to collect concrete data, measure the target´s response to a product or brand, communication actions, etc. So the decision making process was based on previous research. Due to the limitations of this type of research, these studies were partially used (specific time frame) on a representative sample of subjects. In fact, some specialists advocate for the need to unify these research methods under a continuum to give greater consistency to the whole process. (Merino, 2001).

The arrival of digitalization and large data volume –Big Data–, opened up a new world of possibilities for communication and marketing professionals which facilitates the decision making process thanks to the various measures provided by the online environment: permanence time on a website, content interaction, user acquisition process, socio-demographic profile, etc., or KPIs (Key Performance Indicators).

Big Data implies managing large volumes of information and that needs to be done by professionals who are able to collect, store, manage and analyse this information (McKinsey Global Institute, 2011). This is one of Hawkers' key to success. Since their inception, the company´s low budget and their exclusive presence in digital environments prompted brand managers to turn to research to monitor the behaviour of users who interact in different digital environments with the aim of using this information in the decision-making process and optimize their different communication, marketing and PR strategies.

Thus, from the beginning, the company's strategies were based on the application of Growth Hacking knowledge. Growth Hacking is a discipline based on thorough knowledge of the target through the constant use of research based on the scientific method. To accomplish this, growth hackers –individuals with broad knowledge on programing and marketing– were responsible for the conduction of continuous experiments in different digital environments to draw conclusions that allowed them to develop exponential and innovative growth strategies. This constant analysis enabled Hawkers to identify the users that generated greater interaction. Many of them received free product samples in exchange for photographs or videos featuring their products on their social profiles. Also, this allowed the brand to understand the type of posts they need to generate greater interest, the type of web design preferred by the target, etc.

The 'MentionMapp' or mentioned map (image 5) illustrates the way data has to be used and managed to achieve optimum brand performance. The screenshot shows a still Twitter image. Starting with the hashtag analysed (#Hawkers), the main users who interact with the brand can be seen on different branches. This visual also shows the number of interactions generated and how these users serve as intermediaries between Hawkers and new potential clients. It also presents the hashtags that generate more interactions.

Image 5. #Hawkers MentionMapp
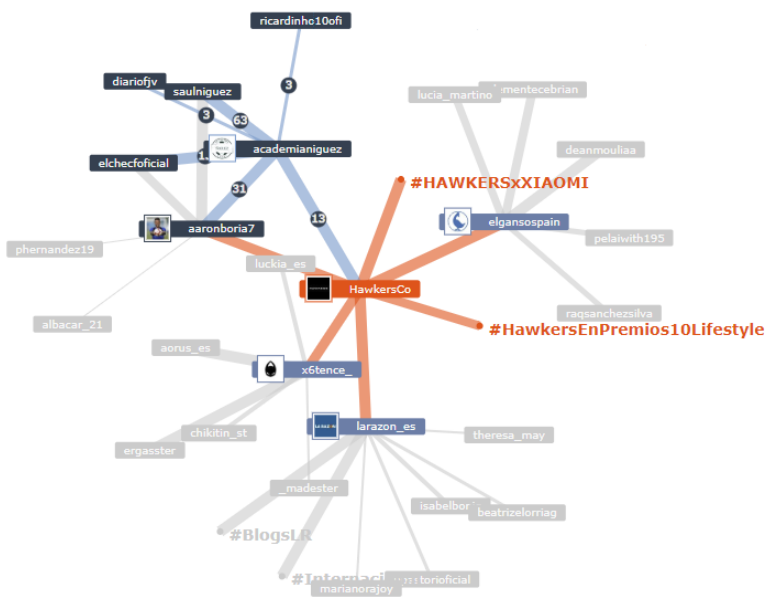
Source: Mentionmapp (July 14, 2018).

Growth Hacking also uses A/B tests[1]. In this technique a single variable within a data group from each message is altered while the others remain constant. Two options (random or not) are shown to the website users or followers on social networks using online tools in a random or not random manner. The variables used are analysed and the final strategy to be pursued is determined. Using the A/B tests, different hypothesis are tested as part of the efforts to optimize brand performance:

> **Use of accumulated data → Hypothesis Formulation → A/B Test Performance → Results Evaluation → Strategy choice to follow**

One of the most outstanding examples of Growth Hacking is the pet campaign launched by the brand previously mentioned (image 6). Hawkers managers have mentioned that once they discovered the topic

of cats and dogs generated interest in the public they decided to try different combinations: different breeds, pictures of animals alone, animals with a girl, a boy, etc. (eShow Madrid, 2016).

Each post generated numeric figures which were analysed and compared. In this case, an increase in engagement levels was observed and the average interaction of users with Hawkers on Facebook showed a 5-time increase.

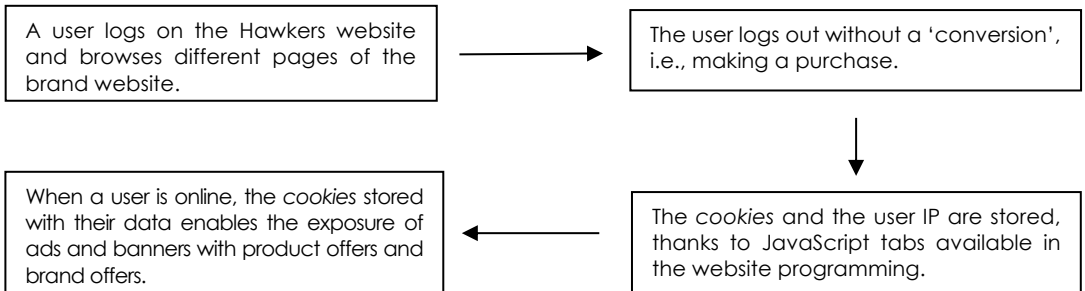**Image 6. Post based on data gathered from the Facebook analysis**
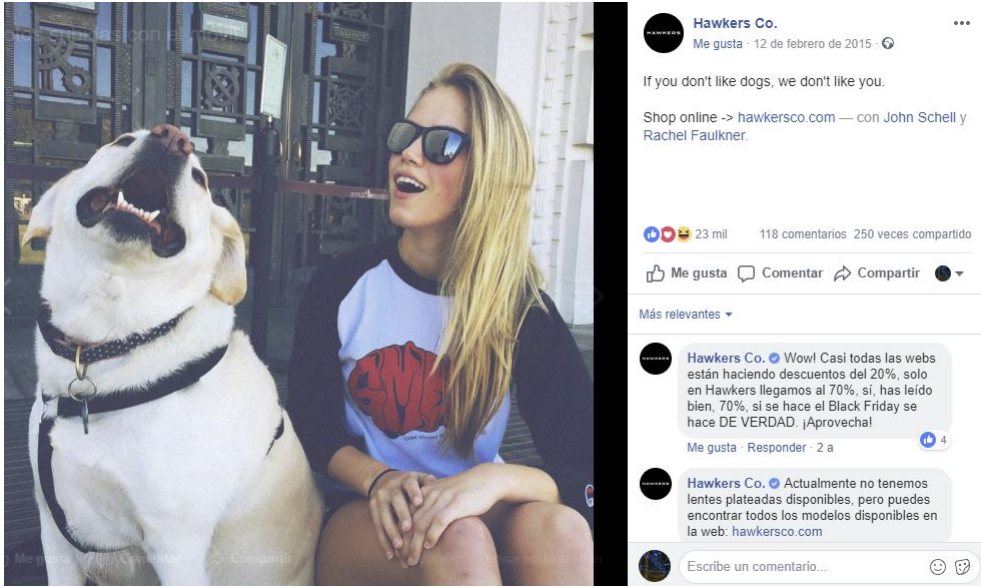
Source: Facebook, HakersCo's fan page (February 12, 2015).

3.6. From regular signage to retargeting

The use of outdoors advertising and signage –conventional media consistent with a popular brand such as Hawkers– can drive purchase among the target that views the product. However, this will not happen with those consumers who are not interested in the brand.

In an effort to improve efficiency and have an impact on the target at the lowest cost, Hawkers´ managers confirmed that retargeting could offer the same results than outdoor advertising and signage among potential buyers. The big difference here is that their ads are not fixed on a bus stop or billboard but they target users while they surf online or use social media through banners. Therefore, Hawkers only sends messages to a pure potential target without wasting efforts in a non-interested target. As shown on table 11, the brand carries out a thorough follow-up of each user who has had contact with the brand online until purchase takes place. The investment used to generate impact on potential buyers exclusively focuses on potential clients avoiding useless impacts.

Table 11. Retargeting mechanism

A user logs on the Hawkers website and browses different pages of the brand website.	The user logs out without a 'conversion', i.e., making a purchase.
When a user is online, the *cookies* stored with their data enables the exposure of ads and banners with product offers and brand offers.	The *cookies* and the user IP are stored, thanks to JavaScript tabs available in the website programming.

Source: The authors.

Retargeting (image 7) is possible due to the insertion of an online pixel. This term is not to be confused with the minimum unit of a digital image: in online analysis, a 'pixel' is understood as a Java Script code unit introduced on a website that is invisible for users. It is only through the insertion of a code that we can identify a user who logs on a specific domain or a conversion action. Thus, the user is 'marked' (or identified) so he can be monitored online.

Image 7. Instagram's retargeting campaign

Source: Instagram, user: hakersco (July 27, 2018).

The purpose of this tactic is to ensure a sale in a user who somehow had the intention to purchase the product or was simply curious.

The biggest issue here is that this tactic may generate tiredness among users if they feel bombarded by advertising. Therefore, it is important not to overuse this resource and limit the number of times the same ad is sent to the user.

3.7. Use of 'storytelling' and 'transmedia'

As it is widely known, storytelling consists of the use of a story that represents the brand or product values as a communication resource to be able to project them. Whilst it is on the rise, it is a resource that has been historically and frequently used in advertising and PR from the onset of these commercial activities (ADECEC, 2015).

In the new digital environment, in which young users are exposed to online advertising and social media (Sanagustín, 2009), different methods to draw consumer's attention have been used (Heath, 2012). Storytelling is a very suitable resource to gain greater awareness and diffusion. Also, viewers tend not to view storytelling as advertising but interesting and amusing content.

One example that may help illustrate this technique is the marketing campaign launched by Hawkers in the Aramon ski slopes, "Yeti is back". In his campaign, a video was posted (available at: https://bit.ly/2UIVdnE) in collaboration with Forocoches –the largest Spanish-speaking forum– generating a large number of comments and posts.

The video features a large white figure on a far-away and snowy landscape. The low quality of the video and the shivering visual were enough to convince users of its authenticity and generate online buzz. This buzz finally made it to the national and international press. After a few days, Hawkers and Aramon launched a video claiming authorship of the Yeti campaign (image 8).

Image 8. Screenshot of the "Yeti is hack" campaign

Source: YouTube, user Hawkers TV (February 10, 2016).

As illustrated by this case, storytelling does not put emphasis on the product which has a secondary presence in the story. However, consumers can still see the product and it is recalled and associated with the brand and the implicit values conveyed in the story.

The multi-screen cultural environment (Pérez-Tornero, 2008) is in line with the diffusion of transmedia stories in which each media contributes to the construction of a narrative world. These contributions vary depending on the media adapting the language used to the environment (Scolari, 2013).

In the case analysed, a transmedia strategy as such has not been applied as Hawkers does not post the same story on different media. Nevertheless, it has developed a story that has the potential to be shared in different environments, generating new content based on a video that may be shared, reproduced and expanded in different media.

It is therefore apparent that Hawkers applies the transmedia strategy going beyond the means employed and due to its featured capacity to generate interaction among the audience (Jenkins, 2006), not only reproducing specific content but generating engagement and new content.

4. Discussion and conclusions

From its inception, Hawkers has understood the need to develop a business model that required the application of constant scientific experimentation in their sales and communication resources to face the challenges of today´s uncertain environment. As advocated by Eric Ries, the creator of the "Lean Start-up" method, the fundamental activity of a start-up is to turn ideas into products, measure how customers respond, and then learn whether to pivot or persevere (Ries, 2012: 21).

The development of this scientific approach requires effective management of Big Data generated by a company. The effective selection and interpretation of the data collected leads to greater certainty of the strategic planning process and the decision making process. Effective data management leads to better target segmentation improving the accuracy of communication and marketing actions which translates into a larger conversion rate and, consequently, an increase in sales, as demonstrated by Hawkers.

The Alicante-based company has constantly monitored each of the actions carried out with the support of new tools that have emerged in the digital environment which, in turn, have enabled them to adapt

traditional communication and marketing strategies to the online environment. This switch has been seen in:

- The evolution of traditional prescription patterns of products or brands commonly led by opinion leaders. In the case of Hawkers, this process is led by influencers. In this new and complex eco-system made up by social media, influencers have become a fundamental piece for major brands thanks to their power of appeal and persuasion among different targets. Hawkers has used celebrities within their community of loyal followers on social media. Also, the brand has developed their own community of 'prosumers', followers who create and share content among their contacts turning into brand ambassadors.

- The use of co-marketing in online campaigns that generates a win-win relationship between Hawkers and large multinationals in different economic sectors. Hawkers has earned high credibility as it has been able to tie the brand with other brands with a long trajectory and international prestige. Also, these major brands have generated greater awareness among a young target who, in a few years will become the main labour and consumer force around the world.

- The use of social media as conventional media to reach a massive number of consumers. Hawkers was one of the first companies to predict the potential of social media if used as advertising media due to their global reach, low cost, consistent campaign monitoring and message personalization. Similar to traditional communication media –TV, press, radio, cinema, etc.– the company has been able to adapt their messages to the unique characteristics of each social network, generating a significant number of sympathies and high fidelity quotas, as well as awakening a high number of conversations in digital environments. Thus, they have used Facebook as a test site, Twitter as a customer service cannel and vehicle of their messages and Instagram as a product catalogue and showroom.

- The desire to proactively manage all the information accumulated in Big Data. Hawkers uses the Growth Hacking method to isolate significant variables and identity the elements that generate engagement among social media followers. This modality also applies to online ads applying A/B tests to identity the variables with the highest number of clicks vs. the number of impacts generated (CTR).

- The use of a pixel introduced in the code of the website to follow up and track users who have proactively approached the brand but who have not turned into conversions. The advertising economic investment focuses on consumers who have shown interest in the product, not consumers who will hardly buy the product.

- The use of storytelling as a vehicle to convey the brand identity. Hawkers offers an interesting audio-visual product in which the brand has an underlying presence across the board and a product that does not stand out. This content goes viral on social media due to the action of their communities. Sometimes, these communities generate so much noise that the campaign is present in other media turning into transmedia, as shown by the "Yeti is back" campaign.

To sum up, the marketing initiatives used in Hawkers' marketing strategy can be analysed as an adaptation of traditional action in the digital environment. Thanks to this strategy, the company has turned into a flexible and dynamic organization that is going through constant transformations based on their target demands. This has been achieved thanks to the development of strategic actions based on constant and real time application of the scientific method, thanks to the research based on the monitoring of users visiting their digital environment and finally, thanks to the sophisticated numerical tools that have been used since the company´s inception and have been the bases for strategic decision-making.

As described and demonstrated through this study, the approach introduced by Hawkers is innovative in the field of non-conventional means of communication. His method has become a benchmark for companies´ marketing and communication activity in this new era of digital interactivity determined by the precise knowledge of consumer reactions, together with fast and accurate responses based on Big Data. Although the information handled in this piece of research has been difficult to extract and scarcer than the authors would have liked, they hope that their contribution can help future researchers in the near future who wish to address the issues that have been the subject of this study.

5. Bibliography

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Acknowledgements

Note

[1] This research technique is also known as *céteris páribus* –"others are the same"– due to the need to keep the consistency of all the variables used, accept one: the variable analysed.