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# Relationship Marketing in Tourism: Most valued relational bonds by the Iberian tourists and their presence in tourism regions web pages

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## Resumo

A proliferação do setor dos serviços levou a que o foco se demarcasse da perspetiva transacional ou tradicional do Marketing, focado essencialmente numa única transação, para uma perspetiva relacional em que o cliente é encarado como parte integrante do processo. Esta alteração de foco visa a fidelização de clientes como forma de prolongar a troca de valor entre clientes e empresas ao longo do tempo. Sendo o turismo um sector de serviços ao qual as estratégias de marketing relacional se podem aplicar e, simultaneamente, um sector estratégico no desenvolvimento de Portugal, este estudo procura identificar quais os laços relacionais mais valorizados pelo mercado ibérico, bem como, em que medida os organismos de promoção turística portugueses, definidos no PENT (2011), através das suas páginas on-line, os estão a fomentar. O estudo baseia-se num amostra de 208 inquiridos em Portugal e 178 inquiridos em Espanha e utiliza uma abordagem qualitativa e quantitativa. Os resultados mostram que os segmentos de turistas valorizam diferentes tipos de laços relacionais (financeiros, sociais e estruturais) e de forma diferenciada, que os laços sociais e estruturais são os que mais diferenciam os diferentes segmentos de clientes e que as páginas on-line de promoção do turismo em Portugal nem sempre fomentam a formação dos laços mais valorizados pelos turistas. Assim, Os resultados do estudo demonstram que apesar da identificação de estratégias de marketing relacional nas páginas de internet das regiões de turismo ainda há um longo trabalho a desenvolver tendo em conta as estratégias definidas no PENT (2011).

**Palavras – chave:** Marketing Relacional, Turismo, PENT, Laços relacionais, Regiões de Turismo

**Abstract**

The proliferation of the services sector led to a demarcation from the transactional or traditional perspective of marketing, which is essentially focused on a single transaction, to a relational perspective of marketing where the customer is seen as an integrant part of the process. This change of focus quests customer loyalty in order to extend the exchange of value between customers and the firms over time. Considering that tourism is part of the services sector – to which the relational marketing strategies can be applied – and being simultaneously a strategic sector for the development of Portugal, this study aims to identify the most valued relational bonds found in the Iberian tourism market as well as to understand how the organizations identified in PENT (2011) to promote tourism are fostering them through their websites. This study is based on a sample of 208 respondents from Portugal and 178 respondents from Spain which was analyzed through a qualitative and quantitative approach. The results showed that the segments of tourists value different types of relational bonds (financial, social and structural) and in a differential way, social and structural bonds are those that most differentiate the different customer segments. The study also shows that promotions through tourism websites in Portugal do not always foster information of the bonds most valued by tourists. Hence the results of this study demonstrate that despite the identification of relationship marketing strategies in the tourism region websites, there is still a long work to do considering the strategies defined in PENT (2011).

**Keywords:** Relationship Marketing, Tourism, PENT, Relational Bonds, Tourism Regions

## 1. Introduction

Berry (1995) considered relationship marketing as being an important part of modern marketing practice. According to this author this new paradigm of relationship marketing had great progress with advances in technology. Its main benefits were to preserve and improve relationships to the extent that it is more expensive to attract new customers than to retain the existing ones (Stavros, Pope and Winzar, 2008; Grönroos, 1997; Berry, 2002). In what refers to retention and customer loyalty, Berry and Parasuraman (1991) and Berry (1995) argued that relationship marketing could be established at multiple levels, depending on the type of bonds - which can be financial, social and structural - used to promote the customer loyalty. Also stated that the higher the number of bonds, the stronger the relationship and consequently more effective. Following

the same line of thought, Gordon (1998) identified seven types of bonds in order to promote the rising number of customers, from prospects to advocates in the bonding staircase. In addition, studies showed (Aladwani, 2001; Ching and Ellis, 2006) that with the proliferation of new information and communication technologies, relational marketing practices could be transferred to the e-commerce and, as such, should be exploited by managers.

Tourism constitutes part of the services sector and as such it is affected by the entire set of relational marketing strategies (Berry, 2000). In this aspect Campon, Hernandez and Alves (2010) consider that consumer's uncertainty inherent characteristics of tourist services such as intangibility and perishability make relational marketing potentially suitable, insofar as the client is prone to develop fidelity, as a way to minimize the risk

The "entity that aggregates all public administration organizations responsible for the promotion of tourism, from supply to demand" (Turismo de Portugal, IP, 2008) is the Tourism Institute of Portugal. Thus it is important to analyse if this organization takes, or not, into account these market changes through its regional offices and tries to retain tourists through loyalty bonds. In the same way the National Strategic Plan for Tourism (2011) (PENT) considered Spain as a priority market for tourism in Portugal. PENT (2011) introduced a strategy of offering tourist products, invested in promotion and distribution via the online channel and saw quality as a way to gain competitive advantage over price.

Considering the concept of relationship marketing, its scope boosted by new technologies and the strategy of products, promotion and distribution defined in PENT, and this article sought to identify the most valuable bonds (financial, social and structural) by the Iberian tourists. It had also the intention to verify if the regional tourism´s representations were focused on nurturing these bonds on their web pages.

This research aims to better understand the work that is being developed by the regions and offices of tourism and by the regional tourism boards of Madeira and Azores, regarding the use of their website pages when considering the relational marketing strategies.

## 2. Creating and Developing Relational Bonds

Studies showed the existence of different relational bonds which can be grouped into financial, social and structural bonds (Turnbull & Wilson, 1989; Berry & Parasuraman, 1991; Berry, 1995; Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996;

Peltier & Westfall, 2000; Strauss & Frost, 2001). The financial bonds are usually related to price function strategies and financial incentives (Berry, 1995). However Gummesson (2002:22) warned that this attraction through price could "disappear quickly if competitors also reduced prices". Hsieh, Chiu and Chiang (2005) reported that such bonds are good to strengthen relationships only for products with research characteristics which are not the case of tourism services (Ostrom & Iacobucci, 1995). On the other hand, social bonds involve personal interaction and relationship customization on a regular basis through various media and always addressing the customer by his first name (Berry, 1995; Strauss & Frost, 2001; Gwinner, Gremler and Bitner, 1998). With this bond, customers might be more tolerant towards a service failure.

At last, structural bonds arise when there is an adjustment between the parties such as the level of service; information sharing and solving customer problems, creating or offering services not yet available in the market or that are too expensive for competitors to imitate (Turnbull & Wilson, 1989). Gummesson (2002:22) added that at the structural level the parties "gather resources together and are, therefore, highly committed to making the relationship work". Examples are the development of specific software or the availability of specific computer equipment from a service provider to its agents and representatives (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991; Berry, 1995; Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). According to Berry (1995) and Lin, Weng and Hsieh (2003) structural bonds are the most effective to develop relationships and are the most suitable for services with

experience characteristics (Ostrom & Iacobucci, 1995), such as tourism.

Gordon (1998) also identified the concept of bonds as a way to enhance the position of customers in Bonding Staircase. He presented seven types of bonds that could be developed between the company and the client, namely: Structural Bonding, Brand Equity Bonding, Attitudinal Bonding, Personal Bonding, Information and Control Bonding, Value Bonding and Zero Option Bonding.

Despite Gordon (1998) having developed a model with a larger number of bonds, he followed the same line of thinking of the model presented by Berry and Parasuraman (1991), Berry (1995) and Zeithaml and Bitner (1996). All bonds presented are related to creating, developing and maintaining lasting relationships between customers and the company, in the most appropriate manner to their consumption profile.

Berry and Parasuraman (1991) also argued that depending on the number of bonds existing with clients it is possible to achieve different levels of relationship marketing and that the relationship levels will be more effective, lasting and profitable for the company if there are a larger number of bonds. In the same line Zeithaml and Bitner (1996) showed that at each level customers are slightly closer to the company thereby increasing the sustainable competitive advantage. In this aspect Berry (1995:240-241) concluded that when using structural bonds in conjunction with the financial bonds and social bonds "the foundation will be even more difficult for competitors to penetrate" hence creating a high potential for sustained competitive differentiation.

Having presented these two lines of thought regarding the levels of relationship marketing it is important to emphasize the existing symmetry between them. Berry and Parasuraman (1991), Berry (1995) and Zeithaml and Bitner (1996) concluded that the bonds will be more effective if the bonds developed with the client are also in higher number. For his part Gordon (1998) concluded through his model that the degree of effort and commitment increases with a more effective connection between the client and the comp any.

## 3. National Strategic Plan for Tourism (PENT)

According to Alcañiz, Aulet and Simó (2000) in almost all countries of the world there are touristic competences and so there must be also a Tourist Administration to regulate the market. Thus, in Portugal the Decree-
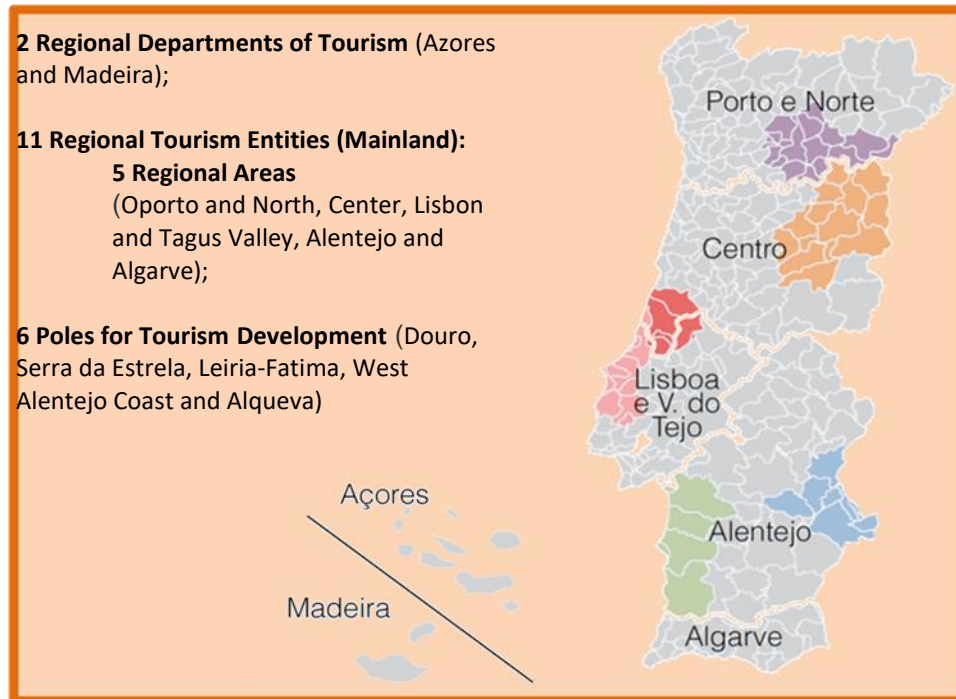
Law (DL) no. 141/2007 of 27 April is in accordance with "the determination to create a single public structure to continue the mission of promoting the value and sustainability of tourism activity nationally". It provides to the Tourism Institute of Portugal (or Turismo de Portugal, IP) "a wide field of intervention, which includes tasks of conceiving a strategic planning and a strong operational activity as well as the management of financial resources and systems of incentives available for investments with touristic interest " among others.

Regarding the need of a "regional cooperation as well as supporting the realization and implementation of a tourism policy" Turismo de Portugal IP, the DL no. 67/2008 defines five regional tourism areas, each one corresponding to a regional entity of tourism (paragraph 1 of Art. 3 of the DL n. No. 67/2008). It also identifies six

poles of tourism development (Article 4 of the DL. No. 67/2008) and two regional authorities of tourism (PENT, 2011), as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Regional Tourism Organization Posts 2008**



**2 Regional Departments of Tourism** (Azores and Madeira);

**11 Regional Tourism Entities (Mainland):**
    **5 Regional Areas**
    (Oporto and North, Center, Lisbon and Tagus Valley, Alentejo and Algarve);

**6 Poles for Tourism Development** (Douro, Serra da Estrela, Leiria-Fatima, West Alentejo Coast and Alqueva)

Source: Adapted from PENT (2011:18)

In 2007 the National Strategic Plan for Tourism (PENT) arose. It was defined as a "government initiative, responsibility of Ministry of Economy and Innovation, to underpin the implementation of the actions defined for their sustained growth of domestic tourism in the coming years and guide the activity of Turismo de Portugal 'Tourism in Portugal', IP, the central public entity of the sector" (PENT, 2007:5).

In 2011 PENT was revised and led to PENT - Proposals for Revision on the Horizon 2015 - Version 2.0, in compliance with the review process

foreseen at the Ministers' Council Resolution (RCM) no 53/2007 in order to assess "the progress and developments of the situation in this plan". Eleven lines of development were identified among which some stood out: the identification of outbound markets, product strategies, promotion and distribution and the quality of services as well as the human resources (HR) in order to enhance the "quality of Portuguese tourism along the moments of interaction with tourists"(PENT, 2011:10-11). Based on the analysis of the outbound markets, PENT (2011) set the Spanish market as a priority for external growth. The reasons presented were "the proximity, growth, high market share and contribution to national tourism" as well this market should be subject of "an effort to targeting the different regional realities and to develop specific offerings" (PENT, 2011:37). The characterization

made by the Dossier of Spanish market Folder (2012) published by Tourism of Portugal, IP demonstrated that this market has features that might be explored from the harnessing point of view.

Among them stands out the population of 46,754,784 inhabitants in 2011, the fact of being the sixth largest economy in Europe, assuming Portugal as the second preferred destination country (being France the first) and the geographical proximity. Complementing this last aspect, the Dossier of the Spanish market (2012) identified that more than half (55.7%) of the trips from Spain to Portugal in 2010 were done by car. Hence, due the freedom offered by this means of transportation, it is possible to visit interesting sights throughout the main trip. It should also be noted that in 2010 the Spanish market almost 47.2% of the trips made by Spanish people were

planned using the Internet and that they use the Internet for research and to gather information in 94.9% of cases (Dossier of the Spanish market, 2012). In addition to these strategies, according to the PENT (2011) a structured and systematic development to promote products' cross-selling both in the same region as well as between the regions offering each product was necessary. This goal should be achieved through complementary offerings and by the possibility of further customization and ease of choice by demand segments, with increasingly specific and differentiated needs. Indeed, segmentation represents the first step in developing an effective marketing strategy since it allows a better understanding of the needs and desires of consumers and their responses regarding certain potential or existing offers (Serra, 2005).

PENT´s (2011) strategic framework denoted consistency with some of the relational marketing strategies already presented the increasing customization and personalization of services, larger investments in new technologies and the online platforms as a way to be closer and more accessible to customers and by considering the human resources' (HR) quality of services as a way to gain competitive advantage over price. This idea has consistency with the concept defended by Grönroos (2000). It also suits the model with the three type of bonds advocated by Berry and Parasuraman (1991), which when properly developed and applied simultaneously increase sustained competitive differentiation. Moreover, Henning-Thurau, Gwinner and Gremler (2000) argued that different market segment value different relational bonds. It assumes, therefore, special relevance to identify which are the other

dimensions highly valued by customers, beyond price factor, in order to restore and maintain competitive advantage on markets.

## 4. Research Methodology

As already mentioned, the goal of this research was to understand the current state of relationship marketing on the Portuguese touristic online dimension. To achieve this goal it were established two specific objectives: (1) to identify the existing bonds in the Iberian tourism market, (2) to verify to what extent the online pages of tourism entities are fostering these bonds. Thus, it will be presented below the methodology used to achieve these two specific objectives.

### 4.1. Specific objective 1

#### 4.1.1. Sample.

In order to achieve the first goal we proceeded to a quantitative survey among tourists. Considering the strategic importance of Spain as a priority market to the domestic tourism (PENT, 2011) this research assumes an Iberian dimension to allow capturing potential differences in context between both countries, as proposed by Cho and Sung (2012). The selected sample was not probabilistic because we considered as respondents all of those 18 years old or above who were connected to Portuguese and Spanish universities (students, teachers and staff). However, despite not being random, this sample is objective since a study group which easily accesses the internet was chosen being therefore more receptive to the type of questionnaire used (Maroco, 2010). Thus, this group gathers the means and knowledge needed for the proposed study, which aims to test the effectiveness of online strategies of relationship marketing. Therefore, the sample of respondents in Portugal was

of 208 observations being composed by 68.75% of female respondents and 31.25% of male respondents at a young age, having 73.56% of the respondents thirty years of age or below. Regarding the educational qualifications of the respondents 41.35% were graduates and 23.6% had secondary education, Master and Doctoral degrees had a representativeness of 16.35% and 15.38%. The post graduates represented 3.36% of the sample and there was no observation at any other level of educational qualifications.

On the other hand Spain's surveys sample consisted of 178 observations, of which 21.91% of respondents were male and 78.09% were female. The age groups up to 30 years of age represented 79.77% of the recorded responses and the educational qualifications of the respondents were located primarily at the undergraduate, post graduate and masters level, which make up 90.45%. Table 1 shows the characteristics of respondents by country of response.

**Table 1: Profile of Respondents**

| Demographic Characteristics | Category | Portugal % | Spain % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Male | 31.25% | 21.91% |
| | Female | 68.75% | 78.09% |
| | **Total** | **100.00%** | **100.00%** |
| **Age** | Up to 20 years | 22.12% | 25.28% |
| | 21 - 30 years | 51.44% | 54.49% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 31 - 40 years | 14.90% | 12.92% |
| | 41 - 50 years | 7.69% | 5.06% |
| | 51 - 65 years | 3.85% | 2.25% |
| | **Total** | **100.00%** | **100.00%** |
| **Qualifications** | Primary Education | 0.00% | 1.69% |
| | Secondary Education | 23.56% | 3.37% |
| | Graduation | 41.35% | 39.33% |
| | Graduate | 3.36% | 35.95% |
| | Master | 16.35% | 15.17% |
| | PhD. | 15.38% | 4.49% |
| | **Total** | **100.00%** | **100.00%** |

### 4.1.2. Data collection

Data collection was made through an exploratory quantitative research, through electronic surveys created in Google Docs. The objective was to identify the presence or absence of tourist groups in the Iberian market that might be characterized by the type of bonds presented by Berry and Parasuraman (1991), Berry (1995) and Zeithaml and Bitner (1996). To achieve the goals we developed a survey in Portuguese and presented stimuli to measure each of the bonds presented above. Five points Likert type scales were used. The choice of this type of scale was due to its psychometric properties which acceptability was grounded in relation to its reliability, validity and unidimensionality, making it the measurement scale most used in studies of relationship marketing (Antunes and Rita, 2007 quoting Churchill, 1979; Morgan and Hunt,

1994; Kumar, Scheer and Steenkamp; To measure the bonds the questions

1995, Siguaw, Simpson and Baker; presented in table 2 were used.

1998, and Foster and Cadogan; 2000).

**Table 2: Variables used to measure relational bonds**

| Social Bonds |
| --- |
| I spent holidays in places where I know I'll find family and friends |
| Being with family and friends during the holidays improves the quality of my vacation |
| I spent holidays where I'm already known due to personal contacts that I developed in prior trips and / or stays |
| **Structural Bonds** |
| Receiving information about possible destinations and activities available in a place helps to plan my holidays (eg, newsletters, text messages, flyers, postcards, letters) |
| When I book my trips I prefer to work with service providers (hotels, restaurants, etc.) that have the safer and most intuitive IT systems. |
| I use mobile devices (mobile phone) to gather additional information for my trips (eg. iPhone apps) |
| I give great importance to service providers (agencies, hotels, restaurants) that have ensured quality and satisfaction (eg Quality Certificates, Book Claims and Insurance) |
| I follow internet forums about tourism products and services, through social networks and / or virtual communities. |
| **Financial Bonds** |

| |
|---|
| The price is the main factor that I have in mind when I think about going on holidays / trips |
| Considering two tourist offerings with similar features and prices I choose the one which has more benefits (eg discounts on Rent-a-Car, offering entries in sights) |
| The existence of tourist cards with discounts in a specific region leads me to go on holidays in this location (eg discounts on museums, hotels, restaurants) |
| I repeat previous travelling experiences when I have additional benefits for being a regular customer (eg lower prices or adding services only available in a higher price plan) |

A first pre-test collection of ten responses was applied, on paper, which denoted the need for some adjustments to the surveys. After adjusting the survey it was again applied in paper format to 10 respondents. They validated it for having reported full understanding of the questions and answered without difficulty. After the survey validation a translation to Spanish by a Portuguese-Spanish specialist was carried out. Both surveys were posted online, and were available between April, 16 and May, 20 2012.

We disseminated the surveys through the Communication and Image Office (GCI) of the University of Beira Interior (UBI). The aim of this dissemination was to provide the proposed study with higher reliability and authenticity, as well as access to the institutional mailing list. It was also sent to other universities in Portugal and Spain so they, too, should proceed to the dissemination of the survey through their institutional databases.

**4.2. Specific Objective 2**

### 4.2.1. Sample.

To achieve the specific goal number two we developed an exploratory qualitative research on the internet pages of institutional tourism regions.

Were considered the pages presented in the table 3, previously explained in PENT.

**Table 3: Qualitative Analysis of the Regional Tourism Internet pages**

| No. | Regional Tourism Organizations | Website |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Tourism of Oporto and North Portugal** | http://www.portoenorte.pt |
| 2 | **Tourism of Centro of Portugal** | http://www.turismodocentro.pt |
| 3 | **Tourism of Lisbon and Tagus Valley** | http://www.turismolisboavaledotejo.pt |
| 4 | **Tourism of Alentejo** | http://www.visitalentejo.pt/ |
| 5 | **Tourism of Algarve** | http://www.turismodoalgarve.pt |
| 6 | **Tourism of Douro** | http://www.douro-turismo.pt |
| 7 | **Tourism of Serra da Estrela** | http://www.rt-serradaestrela.pt |
| 8 | **Tourism of Leiria-Fátima** | http://www.rt-leiriafatima.pt |
| 9 | **Tourism of Oeste** | http://www.visitoeste.com |
| 10 | **Tourism of Terras do Grande Lago Alqueva** | http://www.turismoalqueva.pt |
| 11 | **Tourism of West Alentejo Coast** | http://www.alentejolitoral.pt |
| 12 | **Tourism of Madeira** | http://www.visitmadeira.pt |
| 13 | **Tourism of Azores** | http://www.visitazores.com |

### 4.2.2. Data collection.

A set of procedures that allowed the organization of the information in a

standardized format was undertaken in order to make possible the inferences about their characteristics and meaning (Albadvi and Saddad, 2012). An observational grid adapted from a study developed by Antunes and Rita (2007) for the Portuguese Hydrotherapy sector was used. This grid (see Table 4) seeks to analyse the following sub dimensions: interactive marketing, relationship with users, understanding the needs and customization. The aim of this grid was to objectively measure the presence or absence of these sub dimensions as performed by Albadvi and Saddad (2012) in a study applied to the Iranian web pages in the tourism sector. the financial dimensions and the availability of the site in Spanish language were also added.

**Table 4: Dimensions of Online Analysis**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Interactive Marketing** | The Tourism Region allows the subscription of newsletters on their website. |
| | The Tourism Region provides contact forms. |
| | The Tourism Region seeks to know my opinion about their website. |
| **Financial Incentives** | The tourist region offers monetary incentives, such as discounts, combined tickets, etc. |
| **Relationship with users** | The Tourism Region communicates with users of its website. |
| | The Tourism Region makes effort to strengthen relationships with users of its website. |
| | The Tourism Region provides a customer registration area. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Understanding the Needs** | The Tourism Region makes efforts to know what kind of tourism product I'm looking for. |
| | The Tourism Region displays catalogues and / or brochures on their website about the tourism destination. |
| **Personalization** | The Tourism Region seeks to know my name. |
| | The Tourism Region addresses me by my name. |
| | The Tourism Region allows me to create a tourism itinerary to my measure. |
| **Language** | The Tourism Region has available its internet site in Spanish |

To measure the sub dimensions a dichotomous scale as applied in a study performed by Cho and Sung (2012) was used, where 0 means "no" and 1 means "yes." The investigators took up the role of a tourism customer, as applied by Albadvi and Saddad (2012), browsing through selected pages and noting the sub dimensions found. Using the Google search engine, thirteen internet pages were identified, one for each of the RT's. During the analysis, whenever possible, newsletters / mailing lists were subscribed. On internet pages that do not have this option information and / or brochures were requested for the standardization of criteria which allow review without restrictions on specific objective 2 namely the sub dimension related to communication. For subscription of newsletters and communication with the RT's a new email was created for this study. We also used the contact form to request more information about the area or tourism pole to measure the sub dimension relationship, understanding of needs and customization. Brochures

and other promotional documentation and created records on sites that allow this functionality were also ordered.

### 4.3. Data processing

The data were processed using SPSS software, version 18. To reply to Objective 1 a Cluster or group analysis was performed. According to Maroco (2011) this is an exploratory technique that allows grouping subjects into homogeneous groups or variables relating to one or more common features. The objective of this analysis was to verify if the bonds presented by Berry and Parasuraman (1991), Berry (1995) and Zeithaml and Bitner (1996) were in fact present in the Iberian market of tourism. That is, we intend, through this technique, to identify clusters which may be characterized by financial bonds, social bonds or structural bonds. For the intended grouping a hierarchical cluster analysis

was used, by which the clusters are formed based on the closest pairs (Pestana and Gageiro, 2008). We used the Ward method, by which the clusters are formed to minimize the sum of squared errors (Maroco, 2011). Three variables (structural bonds, social and financial) resulting from mean variables used to measure each of the bonds were considered for this analysis.

### 5. Result Presentation
### 5.1. Most valued bonds by Iberian tourists

As mentioned above, to continue the specific objective 1 we proceeded to a cluster analysis. The selection of the number of clusters was based on the most advised methods (Moreira and Reis, 1993; Hair et al., 1998), namely the observation of Dendogram formed by cluster analysis and coefficient fusion. This resulted in 4 clusters, which

composition, means and standard deviations are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5: Cluster Analysis Results**

| | Cluster 1 n = 119 (30,83%) | | Cluster 2 n = 67 (17,36%) | | Cluster 3 n = 88 (22,80%) | | Cluster 4 n = 112 (29,02%) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | Std. Dv. | Mean | Std. Dv. | Mean | Std. Dv. | Mean | Std. Dv. |
| Social Bonds | **3,5294** | ,48209 | 3,6119 | ,49099 | 2,5909 | ,40661 | 2,3988 | ,42173 |
| Structural Bonds | 2,6824 | ,52167 | 3,7881 | ,45909 | **3,5886** | ,30529 | 2,5714 | ,38891 |
| Financial Bonds | **3,4307** | ,53769 | **4,1530** | ,39157 | **3,4830** | ,53979 | **3,0603** | ,66631 |

By the average values it seems that cluster 1 is more related to financial and social bonds; cluster 2 seems to be more related to financial bonds; Cluster 3 seems to be related to the structural and financial bonds, and cluster 4 seems to be more connected to financial bonds. Noting that despite the financial bonds being the most valued by cluster 2, they were present in all segments.

For testing potential differences in mean clustering, for each one of the used variables (factors) were conducted on analysis of variance "One-Way" (ANOVA). It tested the similarity of the null hypothesis in the averages of different groups. As independent variables the obtained _clusters_ were considered and as dependent variables the bonds used to form the groups of

clusters were considered. The values of F that are in Table 6 allowed us to reject the null hypothesis of equality of means between the groups, because the F values presented as significant at the 0.05 level for all bonds. Thus, it appeared that each bond when taken individually is significant to differentiate between the clusters.

**Table 6: Wilks'Lambda and F Test**

| Bonds | Wilks' Lambda | F | Significance |
|-------|--------------|-----|--------------|
| Social Bonds | ,146 | 186,820 | ,000 |
| Structural Bonds | ,438 | 186,301 | ,000 |
| Financial Bonds | ,986 | 53,798 | ,000 |

On the other hand, the value of Wilk's Lambda, suggested that social bonds were causing major difference between the means of clusters because it was the bond that had a lower value (Malhotra, 1993). Afterwards the structural bonds arose and only then did the financial bonds appear. Going against what was suggested by Gummesson (2002) that the financial bonds are valued but are not sufficient to differentiate the offer of a certain entity.

Once found the market segments based on the most valued bonds we attempted to characterize them based on variables such as the reason for travelling, age, gender and educational level. Yet, these variables were not statistically significant to characterize segments. Thus we proceeded to the verification of the second goal, to check

whether organisms of tourism foster or not these bonds through their web pages.

## 5.2. Fomentation of online bonds with tourists

To perform the online analysis an observation grid was elaborated, which was filled with dichotomous variables (0 = no, 1 = yes). Using the data collected the counting of dichotomous variables 0 and 1 were carried out, to conclude which are the most present. The observation grid after completion and counting, where N = Total (13 web pages analysed) assumes the summary configuration as shown in table 7.

**Table 7: Qualitative Analysis of Internet pages of Tourism Regions**

| Analysis of the TR Internet pages | | N | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | No | Yes |
| **Interactive Marketing** | The TR allows to subscribe the newsletter | 5 | 8 |
| | The TR provides contact forms | 9 | 4 |
| | The TR requests feedback from users about the web page | 12 | 1 |
| **Financial Incentives** | The TR provides monetary incentives, such as discounts, combined tickets, etc. | 10 | 3 |
| **Relationship with users** | The TR communicates with users | 9 | 4 |
| | The RT undertakes efforts to strengthen relationships with users | 10 | 3 |
| | The TR provides registration area | 10 | 3 |
| **Understanding** | The TR tries to find my kind of demand | 9 | 4 |

| the Needs | The TR provides online brochures | 2 | 11 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Personalization** | The TR seeks to know my name | 8 | 5 |
| | The TR addresses to me by my name | 11 | 2 |
| | The TR allows to create a road map as wanted by the user | 11 | 2 |
| **Language** | The TR webpage is available in Spanish | 9 | 4 |

Based on the analysis of Table 7 is possible to understand concerning the dimension "Interactive Marketing" that newsletters' subscriptions were available in eight websites, while five of them do not have this option. The contact forms were available in four cases and not available in nine. Only one page searched feedback from users through a survey, where possible answers were "Very Good", "Good" and "Average". During the analysis of this dimension newsletters of these pages were subscribed and brochures that provide contact forms were ordered. Analysing the dimension "Financial Incentives" only 3 of the 13 analysed pages had financial incentives of discounts for special events or combined tickets.

Concerning the dimension "Relationships with Users", the sub dimension communication was identified in four internet pages having the remaining nine established no contact with the user. Regarding the four websites communicating with users the method used by TR was the email. Those emails were sent after requests for brochures and registration in the websites. The following section intended to understand if the TR sought to deepen relationships with users, this concern was recognized in three pages

and not identified in ten. This item sought to mainly identify if organization undertook contacts to strengthen and maintain relationships with prospective users. The existence of the registration area in three of the TR's pages was identified.

Regarding the dimension "Understanding the Needs" four web pages were identified trying to understand the sort of offer sought by the user however this same initiative was not identified in the remaining nine. The sub dimension "The TR provides online Brochures" was the most identified among the websites of TR. Effectively the option of downloading brochures and other information regarding the touristic destination was not available in only two web pages, i. e. this feature was available in eleven of the thirteen web pages analysed.

Regarding the dimension "Personalization", the attempt to

discover user's name was identified in five pages during the process of subscribing newsletters while in the remaining eight this effort was not identified. The remaining sub dimensions examined, respectively if the page addressed to the customer by its own name and if it allowed creating a user's route. This was found in each sub dimension, two pages where these aspects were present but in the remaining eleven this options was not identified. Finally, through the analysis of the dimension "Language" it was identified that four websites provided their content in Spanish to its users. However, in one of the pages where it was possible to select this option it did not worked. As such a situation could derive from maintenance and / or updating of content we chose to consider this feature as being available.

By analysing Table 7 it possible to identify that the most present

dimensions present in TR websites are, in descending order, the availability of online brochures, subscription of newsletters and the attempt to know users' name. The features less present are related to communication and personalization. Addressing customers by its own names, possibility to create a specific roadmap and asking for feedback from the TR users only occurred in one of the cases examined.

Considering the TR's communications with customers it is important to distinguish the TR11 and 13 from the TR 5 and 12. This distinction is important due to the fact that TR 11 and 13 did not address customers in a personalized manner by using their own name. Although the TR 5 response doesn't address the customer by his own name, evidence show that the email was written by a TR's employee. The emails' content also clarified some information previously requested through the contact form. However, the additional information redirected us to a different web from those in which request was made. The response of TR 12 also showed that the email was written by an official of that TR and it was the only case observed with a genuine customized contact by addressing the customer by his own name. The TR 12 asked for an address to send further information which was received on June 8, 2012. The content of the envelope was a tourism destination postcard, two maps, guides for hotels and the destination and a conference hall brochure. Regarding the webpage's availability in Spanish, only four cases were considered and one was out of service. The remaining nine web pages were not available in Spanish.

This analysis revealed the existence of some relational marketing strategies already implemented in the TRs' web pages. Nevertheless these strategies

were not similarly implemented among them in the extent that not all of them had implemented the same analysis' dimensions. Even on pages offering similar dimensions, the processing of the collected information and the exploration of the internet's potentialities was not the same among them. Examples are the newsletters since in any of the signed pages did they receive any information and requested information also demonstrated that both automatic replies such as employees' answers had different ways of addressing the customer. In some other aspects as those concerning the type of offer sought by the customer through the registration on the website and creation of roadmaps there were no offers with appropriated or specific suggestions.

It is important to underline two final aspects. The first aspect refers to the RT who sent information by mail since no letter or form of contact accompanied the information sent to the touristic customer. Only a generalist card was received from the Tourism region. The second aspect concerns the webpage's availability in Spanish as this dimension of analysis is hardly present. Therefore the unavailability or inaccessibility of this feature may cause huge difficulties when trying to understand the website's content and potentiality of the tourist region.

PENT (2011) identified Spain as a priority market for external growth and focused the online dimension by considering the touristic costumer as being less dependent on a face to face relationship. PENT (2011) also identified the investment in human resources as a way to create sustained competitive advantage over price. Yet this study identified some webpages' weaknesses related to relationship marketing. The web pages quite rarely

communicated with the users, and when they did so, no strategies were used to fit the collected information to the users in order to settle a specific consumption profile. The creation of this specific profile would enable to target the offering towards the development of bonds, increasing the levels of relational marketing and leading to customers' most effective loyalty.

## 5.3. Discussion of Results

As presented by Berry and Parasuraman (1991) the cluster identification and way of grouping suggested three types of bonds that exist in the Iberian tourism market. Still the data collected through the survey did not suggest that they were one-dimensional but identified that those most present are financial bonds, following the structural bonds and finally the social bonds. This observation assumed a double meaning.

On one hand, as suggested in the literature used to develop this study (Berry and Parasuraman, 1991; Berry, 1995 and Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996) bonds will be more effective if there is a higher number of bonds being developed. Thereby this study concluded that "Financial Bonds" will have less effective customer loyalty because they are located at level one of the model proposed by Berry and Parasuraman (1991) and Berry (1995). According to these authors this level is characterized by a low degree service of customization and low potentiality for sustained competitive differentiation. The main marketing mix element characterizing financial bonds is the price and it is the bond most easily imitated by competitors, which "alone does not offer a sustainable competitive advantage" (Berry and Parasuraman, 1991).

Financial bonds were, generally, valued by all types of tourists and its segments (cluster 2 and 4) represented respectively, 17.4% and 29% of respondents. Since the respondents greatly valued that bond, it must be present in online pages. Effectively tourism customers valuing primarily financial bonds are more susceptible to be captured through strategies related to the price factor. Promotions or additional offerings associated to their consumption profile of tourism products are examples of these strategies. However, it was observed that the financial bonds are those least encouraged by organizations promoting tourism. However, the clusters characterized by "Financial Bonds" will not be the most likely to create the competitive advantage envisaged by PENT (2011). Being the element most valued by the client, price strategies become vulnerable when facing cheaper

offerings. Nevertheless, knowing this in advance, it is up to organizations to be able to capture the customers' interest by applying financial incentives and seeking to create repeated purchasing processes through financial bonds. The main aim is developing the remaining bonds in order to ascent in the relational marketing levels. Stated in numbers, this is the same as saying that nearly 46.38% of touristic customers (respondents) identified in this study are located at the level one of relational marketing as advocated by Berry and Parasuraman (1991). The remaining 53.62% survey respondents valued more than only one type of bond. Customers who most valued financial / social bonds will be more attentive to strategies such as personalization and individualization by adapting the offer specifically to their consumption profile. They will also pay particular attention to products and destinations'

suggest by relatives and friends because they are, very likely, to find them in these locations. This will enhance the touristic experience and the quality of their holidays. Therefore, "Financial / Social Bonds" are located at level two of Relationship Marketing and the Cluster characterised by them corresponds to approximately 30.83% of total respondents. According to Berry and Parasuraman (1991) the level two of Relationship Marketing emphasizes service personalization and the transformation of consumers into customers through personal communications. Level two of Relationship Marketing presents a medium potential for the sustained competitive differentiation. It gives organizations an opportunity to react against competitors when a failure in services occurs. As proposed by Berry and Parasuraman (1991) the Cluster with this feature will have medium

potentiality to create a sustainable competitive advantage.

The last Cluster valued the financial / structural bonds more and they are particularly concerned with the whole process related to technology (online booking and complementary applications for mobile devices, for example). They are also attentive to high standards of quality which are assured by the legal structures implemented in tourism sector and through human resource quality. So, as defined in PENT (2011) qualified human resources will be a central part in order to gain a sustainable competitive advantage over price and the emergence of new low-cost destinations. This segment represents nearly 22.8% of the survey's respondents. Price and structural issues are highly valued by this group, namely guarantee of quality service and the entire process of the touristic product

operational process based on the developed technology. According to Berry and Parasuraman (1991) and Lin, Weng and Hsieh (2003) structural bonds are often the way to solidify relationships. In addition to social and financial bonds they lead to the attainment of level three relationships characterized by a high potential for sustained competitive differentiation. The performed analysis, based on the Lickert scale, identified financial and structural bonds but did not identify social bonds. However the absence of social bonds is not considered as a limitation in the study. It is, otherwise, considered as being a possible future guideline of investigation to the extent that growing technologies and interactivity of markets are enabling the achievement of a tourism service with a minimal or even non-existent social contact. Effectively, as proposed by Berry and Parasuraman (1991),

structural bonds are widely based on technological resources and because of that loyalty arises, in many cases, from the high costs associated to potential technological changes. Also according to these authors the key to reach level three of Relationship Marketing is to add value to the services to services which are expensive or to be difficult to find elsewhere. Thus it is not possible to conclude that financial bonds / structural bonds are in level three of Relationship Marketing. It is possible, however, to conclude that this Cluster is sensitive to price and structural issues (technology and value-added to services). On this specific study regarding the tourism sector it must be noted that that by materializing the efforts on developing the online channel (that the previous point proved to be quite limited) as well as the quality of services and human resource training defined in PENT (2011).As for the

financial / structural bonds, they are appropriate as a way to gain a sustained competitive advantage.

## 6. Limitations and Future Research Lines

As limitations of this study, due to the sample selection criteria, we highlight the sample's homogeneity essentially concerning age and qualifications. A more heterogeneous population sample is suggested for future researches to ensure higher levels of representativeness.  The surveys' dissemination was not made directly by the investigators, which appealed to the Office of Communication and Image of the researchers' university for sending them to the databases of universities in Portugal and Spain. This method did not allow an effective control over possible return of emails, by the impossibility of dissemination through other institutional databases and / or wrong addresses. Another limitation of the study stems from the impossibility to characterize clusters. Through this research we concluded that different segments valued relational bonds differently. However the characterization of those segments to identify each of them was not made. Thus, it is suggested to perform the same study in future research in order to characterize the segments found.

Based on these results, we also suggest further studies in order to measure how the current economic environment affects customers' propensity to create bonds and in what way such bonds are present in different types of economies as well as in intercontinental cultural contexts, considering the model proposed by Berry and Parasuraman (1991). Another interesting research line is to identify how the current technological developments might affect the three

level model of Relationship Marketing as mentioned above. As well as to understand if the model of bonds proposed by Berry and Parasuraman (1991), Berry (1995) and Zeithaml and Bitner (1996) still prevail since that this study did not identify, through its quantitative analysis, the presence of a cluster embracing at the same time, financial, social and structural bonds.

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