

Reshaping traditional marketing mix to include social media participation: evidence from Italian firms

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Abstract.

Purpose- Due to the emergent use of social media for marketing purposes, and the limited number of studies focusing on the use of social media by firms, the purpose of this paper is to explore the inclusion of social networks in the traditional marketing mix models.

Methodology- A sample of 20 small and large Italian liquor producers was used and their Facebook profiles were content analyzed.

Findings-Results provide evidence about the emerging shift from the use of social media for communication purposes through static advertising (characterized by pictures and slogans), to its use as an interactive channel that can influence consumers' purchasing behaviour through multimedia tools (i.e. games and interactive applications able to solicit users' interest), by emphasizing the extent to which a higher level of participation by a firm involves a higher level of consumer interaction. Findings also suggest that the firm's participation should be considered as a new element of the traditional marketing mix model and as an additional tool for efficient market sizing and sensing.

Originality/Value- The study offers findings on actual usage of Facebook as part of marketing mix strategies based on large and small enterprises operating in the Food and Beverage sector, where a dearth of studies is observed. The study enhances and advances the social media and marketing literatures.

Keywords: social media management; marketing strategy; marketing communication; participation

Paper Type Research paper

Introduction

The marketing mix model usually defines the strategies and tools required to launch new products and services successfully (Danaher *et al.*, 2001; Hanssens, 1998; McCarthy, 1960; Naik *et al.*, 2005). Although it is traditionally based on the 4Ps (product, price, place and promotion) the application of this approach in the actual competitive scenario might have some limitations (Constantinides, 2002; Gordon, 2012). However, in the last decades three additional Ps, people, physical evidence, and process (Gronroos, 1997), have been added to the traditional marketing mix model resulting in 7Ps, with the aim to embrace also the interactive marketing dimensions (Gummesson, 1999). In fact, the traditional marketing mix is not able to totally address the needs of marketers in any sectors, with emphasis in the service one (Helm and Gritsch, 2014). The social media diffusion that has been boosting the power of consumers and the large diffusion of social networks like Facebook (which have more than 2 billion active users) have pushed marketers to reconsider their traditional models. Indeed, they dramatically changed the way individuals communicate to each other, by offering a free and usable virtual space where consumers are able to share knowledge and experiences (Choi and Thoeni, 2016; Kalampokis *et al.*, 2013; McCarthy *et al.*, 2014; Kane, 2017; Pantano *et al.*, 2017). They have fast become a sort of meeting point for collecting opinions and judgments about firms, products, services, etc., before making the effective purchase decision (Goh *et al.*, 2013; Lindsey-Mullikin and Borin, 2017; Pantano and Di Pietro, 2013; Wang and Chang, 2013). For instance, past studies have highlighted how social media is acquiring a key role as an information source for young people about intangible products, such as those related to tourism (Bronner and de Hoog, 2014; Di Pietro *et al.*, 2012; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010).

In this new context, the success of e-commerce is emerging from the full integration of online activities into company's physical ones, by extending (physical) marketing strategies (Constantinides, 2002; Lacey, 2004). Based on this, both scholars and practitioners proposed to extend the traditional marketing mix approach with new parameters that are also able to take into account the availability of on-line and mobile channels for shopping, the sense of community, on-line social interaction, and mobile apps as shopping assistants in order to make the model more reliable in the current competitive context (Demirkan and Spohrer, 2014; Gordon, 2012). In fact, preliminary research only considered the role of social media tools as an element of the promotional marketing mix and as an advertising tool, since social media give firms the ability to interact directly with clients, and consumers the ability to easily communicate with each other (Klaus, 2013; Lindsey-Mullikin and Borin, 2017; Mangold and Faulds, 2009). Because of the considerable benefits of social media, its inclusion cannot be limited to the promotional marketing mix (Hvass and Munar, 2012; Loda, 2014; Yousaf, 2016); thus, future research should focus on the extent to which firms can use this element as one of the components that characterizes modern marketing mix models. Furthermore, the free access to social networks means that firms do not have to invest much capital in order to use them (Derham *et al.*, 2011; Lindsey-Mullikin and Borin, 2017; Nobre and Silva, 2014; Pantano and Di Pietro, 2013). Therefore, firms with different financial resources might use this media to achieve different benefits.

Hence, a new question arises from this new competitive context: How can firms implement successful marketing strategies to exploit the new opportunities offered by social media? Accordingly, this work aims to explore how social networks such as Facebook could be included in the traditional marketing mix model based on the 4Ps. The purpose of the study is to investigate the inclusion of social networks in marketing mix models and particularly the

relationship between the extent of usage of these tools and the size of a firm. Specifically, this study aims to reply to the following research questions:

RQ1: To what extent do firms make use of social media as a marketing tool?

RQ2: To what extent does the inclusion of social media participation in marketing strategies effectively reward firms?

RQ3: Do the small and large enterprises behave differently when using social media as a tool to interact with consumers? To which social media might be included in the marketing mix model.

In relation to this, an example of a sector which is under investigated is the beverage industry, and in particular the liquor sector. In fact, the alcoholic beverage sector is mainly characterized by the presence of small enterprises, where innovation is mainly devoted to the manufacturing process rather than to the product, and where the large presence of patents to protect products limits potential competitors (Choudrie and Culkin, 2013; Healy *et al.*, 2014). Despite its importance in the European economy (Fassio, 2012), marketing strategies adopted in this sector have not achieved considerable attention from scholars. Due to the lower financial resources, small companies are forced to develop social media capabilities, to learn, adopt and gain competitive advantages from social media (Braojos-Gomez *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, we assume that liquor producers represent a context that can help us understand the extent efficient use of social media appears to be fundamental to the success of firms in the Food and Beverage sector, drawing from the comparison between SMEs and large enterprises.

The first part of the paper discusses the use of social networks for marketing purposes, and the traditional elements of the marketing mix model. The following part focuses on a qualitative analysis of actual Facebook usage by firms of different sizes as a marketing tool, and the possible inclusion of a new element emerging from this usage in the 4Ps and 7Ps model. In the final part, implications for both academics and practitioners are discussed.

Social media for marketing purposes

Firms are becoming aware of how particular features of social media can be used, these can be summarized as: (i) interactivity; (ii) a large amount of free user-generated content (the large availability of content developed directly by users, rather than by professionals such as representatives of firms); and (iii) a greater emphasis on contact and community rather than information *per se* (Lindsey-Mullikin and Borin, 2017; Pantano and Di Pietro, 2013). These three main aspects support knowledge sharing by strengthening the links between firms, stakeholders and customers, who may also be involved in many innovation activities (i.e. idea generation, designing, testing, etc.). Summarizing, social networks enable users to find information about preferred products and interact with other experienced consumers before making a buying decision (Pantano and Di Pietro, 2013; See-To and Ho, 2014; Hsu et al., 2015). Therefore, social networks are currently acknowledged by the literature (Cheng *et al.*, 2017; Hammick and Ju, 2016; Pantano and Di Pietro, 2013) to be a highly efficient instrument that can (i) reach millions of consumers, (ii) exploit consumers' word-of-mouth communication to spread information about products and services with limited investment, and (iii) influence consumers' decision-making processes by expanding the target audience. For these reasons, creating a page/profile on social media such as Facebook and Twitter has become a common practice for many brands (Azar *et al.*, 2016; Chang *et al.*, 2017; Hammick and Ju, 2016). However, the presence on the social networks does not imply the effectively usage as interactive tool for engaging consumers, while they are largely used with advertising purposes (Black and Veloutsou, 2017; Hsu *et al.*, 2015; Pantano and Di Pietro, 2013; Ruiz *et al.*, 2014).

As anticipated, web-based context allows information to be spread and collected in several formats (e.g. blogs, podcasts, social networks, wikis, instant pictures, etc.) (Karahasanovic *et al.*, 2009), most of these are user (consumer)-generated and refer to digital reviews created by customers, thus they involve limited inferences by firms and also provide a

measure of the *popularity* of each product/firm (De Vries *et al.*, 2012; He *et al.*, 2013; Zhang *et al.*, 2010). As a consequence of consumers' ability to freely share information and opinions online, companies have limited control over the judgments shared online, and the information includes both positive and negative statements that firms might consider when defining their customer-relationships management strategies. This could be done by tracking negative judgments and acting accordingly so as to interact with dissatisfied consumers. This serves to mitigate the impact of negative word-of-mouth communication, and/or to encourage the satisfied customers to share their positive opinions, thus generating more enthusiasm and loyalty to their products and services (He *et al.*, 2014; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Mostafa, 2013; Pantano and Di Pietro, 2013). In fact, negative feedback from customers has huge consequences if it discourages other consumers from making purchases. This is due to how consumers trust other consumers' opinions more than professional (editors') comments because they believe that online reviews can be manipulated by firms (Baumber-Sachse and Mangold, 2013; Zhang *et al.*, 2010). These virtual places offer also several tools that give firms the ability to deliver customers a more "social" purchasing experiences by operating directly with them within social media (Harris and Dennis, 2011). Thus, the interaction between organizations and customers allows the companies to harvest useful data related to the market where they operate (Tautila *et al.*, 2006), which could be used to launch and customize efficient marketing strategies that are able not just to widen their customer base but also to involve it in the development of innovative products and services.

Moreover, a superior web-based experience positively influences consumer perception of click-and-mortar firms (Constantinides, 2004), thus consumer participation in the firm's profile on social media leads to an increase in consumers' loyalty, purchases and communication with the firm (Rapp *et al.*, 2013; Rishika *et al.*, 2013). Despite the huge benefits for firms, current literature is mainly focused on consumer behaviour rather than on

firms' strategic perspective (Kalus, 2013). Therefore, the increasing diffusion of social media sheds light on new scenarios for business profitability that firms may exploit by developing new business models based on social interactions and mobile applications (Hoffman and Novak, 2012; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Since social media tools support typical marketing activities such as advertising, sales, customer relationship management, and new product development, (He *et al.*, 2013; Ickler and Baumol, 2012; Wang and Chang, 2013; Hajli *et al.*, 2017), they should be analysed by scholars and practitioners as a proactive element of the marketing mix model. Although previous studies have identified the importance of interacting with consumers as a new component for implementing successful marketing strategies, there are still few studies concerning the use of this media as a new integrative tool of the marketing mix model, while literature should also present common frameworks to take into account the online interactions within the marketing mix model.

Corporate behaviour and social media

Past studies have largely concentrated on the benefits of social media for marketing purposes, by mainly focusing on large firms (Belo *et al.*, 2013; Culnan *et al.*, 2010; Papachristos *et al.*, 2014), leaving aside some key benefits for small enterprises, such as creating value for the firm, in terms of brand recognition and awareness through new strategies that require minimal cost, low barriers to participation, and minimal information and technology skills to use (Derham *et al.*, 2011; Nobre and Silva, 2014).

While prior research on the adoption of social media has demonstrated that large firms are currently able to easily integrate e-commerce and on-line customer-services (such as collecting complaints) through the social networks thanks to their financial resources, (i.e. assigning to some employees tasks related to the participation to social networks or outsourcing

these activities to another firm specialized in this area) (Culnan *et al.*, 2010); other ones have provided evidence about the slow adoption process due to the negative perception of social media usefulness, unfamiliarity with the technology, difficulties in measuring the effect of these strategies on firm's performance, and the lack of resources devoted to the development of plans (both strategic and operational) based on social media (Belo *et al.*, 2013; Papachristos *et al.*, 2014).

Although current studies (Nobre and Silva, 2014; Braojos-Gomez *et al.*, 2015; Eggers *et al.*, 2017; Hitchen *et al.*, 2017) have been starting to recognize the importance of social media for small enterprises over the last few years, there is still a lack of research concerning the specific sectors where these companies operate, such as the Food and Beverage sector. Moreover, small enterprises are mainly managed according to family business models, in which the beliefs, attitudes, culture, skills and visions of the entrepreneurs influence the firm's strategies and would largely benefit from social media interactions (Bhaskaran, 2006; Hitchen *et al.*, 2017).

Research Methodology

Since, the inclusion of social media in the traditional marketing mix model has been partially investigated in the current literature and the majority of research on social media has been focused on quantitative measures involving the consumer standpoint, our study used an exploratory approach. Italian liquor producers market actual consists of more than 1,000 liquor producers of different size. In this scenario, 20 Italian liquor producers (Table 1) were analyzed to offer detailed and rich empirical evidence about the phenomenon from the firm's perspective. We chose to focus on these particular firms due to: (i) the peculiarity of this sector; (ii) the importance of the Food & Beverage sector as the primary manufacturing industry in Europe; (iii) the lack of attention from the literature to alcoholic drinks; (iv) the demand pull

pressure; (v) the environmental changes that characterize this sector: and (vi) the importance of Italian liquors producers within the ‘made in Italy’ context and the reputation of many firms in this sector (i.e. Campari, Amaretto di Saronno, etc.).

For the purpose of this study, companies’ Facebook websites were used since Facebook is the market leader among the social media (Galati *et al.*, 2017; Lindsey-Mullikin and Borin, 2017; Sharma *et al.*, 2017) and previous studies in various business contexts employed Facebook as a research method (e.g., Galati *et al.*, 2017; Kwok and Yu, 2013; Ozdora-Aksak, and Atakan-Duman, 2015; Sharma *et al.*, 2017; Wang, and Kim, 2017). In particular, the primary data-collection method was based on observation of each activity (or updates) that took place on the profile or page on Facebook over a period of three months (October to December 2015). The activities consisted of any change, such as addition of content (i.e. posts, pictures, games, etc.), comments on users’ pictures/posts (including replies to their posts), and ‘likes’ on users’ pictures or posts, etc. Content analysis has employed for data analysis purposes (Yang *et al.*, 2014; Shelton and Skalski, 2014) MXQda software was used for systematic coding to incorporate the category features of significance based on an analysis of: (i) how long they have been a Facebook user and the number of followers, (ii) research into the marketing uses of social networks, (iii) and the quantity of interaction with followers (consumers).

Sample

Table 1 shows the sample profile (considering company size based on sales per year), with the related number of followers on the ad hoc page on Facebook. Our sample consists of 11 large enterprises and 9 small ones. Few large firms have a huge number of followers (e.g. firm no. 12 has more than 2 million followers), whereas other ones have less followers than that of the small firms analysed; for instance, firm no. 20 (a large one) has only 693 followers, while no.19

(a small one) has more than 3,000. Similarly, there is no relationship between the year a page was created on Facebook and the number of followers, by way of illustration, firm n° 13 created the page in 2013 and has already more than 5,000 followers, while the firm n°16 created the page in 2008 and has only 3,681 followers. Hence, our heterogeneous sample offers a clear overview of the actual situation of the social network profiles of Italian firms.

[TABLE 1]

Content variables

Pages on Facebook allow administrators to post articles, links, videos, photos, status, comments, etc. Through Facebook Graphs API and Facebook FQL we collected public data about the firms. We created a data set which contained information about 1,883 activities (or updates), including status changes, posts, comments, photos, etc. Firstly, we organized this data into categories. From a pilot examination of Facebook content, we identified 11 content variables based on the category of content available on firms' pages or profiles on Facebook: pictures, posts, 'likes', events, comments, invitations to share, games, contests, videos, sharing of user's pictures, and links.

For instance, one of those brands invited fans to share their preference of "Christmas Carol" or "Trading places" as the best Christmas movie:

"Which is your favourite Christmas movie? Choose between "Christmas Carol" or "Trading places" and share your choice with us by commenting this post".

However, this post got only 20 likes and 0 comments. Similarly, another medium producer shared the pictures of the backstage of the new advertising campaign. Although it posted 10 pictures with the slogan "I'm a star", it didn't get any like from consumers.

Content variables (except size, longtime Facebook user and number of followers) were coded with “1” indicating presence, “0” otherwise, within the software for content analysis. Table 2 summarizes the variables, a brief description and the frequency value.

[TABLE 2]

Findings

As emerged from the preliminary analysis of the content variables frequency value, Facebook has been primarily used as a tool to promote products and brand(s) through visual tools (images or pictures). In fact, among the digital materials uploaded in the referring period, pictures were uploaded the most, consisting of 71% of the total uploads. This finding is in agreement with the findings of previous studies in the restaurant sector (e.g. Kwok, and Yu, 2013). Although firms recognized the possibility of also using this media as a channel to both promote direct marketing strategies and involve consumers in real time interaction (Azar *et al.*, 2016; Chang *et al.*, 2017; Hammick and Ju, 2016; Black and Veloutsou, 2017; Hsu *et al.*, 2015; Pantano and Di Pietro, 2013; Ruiz *et al.*, 2014), the effective usage, in this sense, is still limited.

For instance, a large company proposed a video with the comment “it just takes a dose of –name of the liquor- to make your cocktail unforgettable”. Two fans commented: “The night has not begun without bottle of –name of the liquor” and “It just takes two shots to make your night unforgettable”, the brand never replied.

Firms rarely “liked” consumers’ posts (frequency value 89, which indicates that firms performed this action 89 times), replied to consumers’ requests with a comment (frequency value 81), invited followers to share their experience/opinion/judgment on product and brand (frequency value 31), developed games (frequency value 23) or ad-hoc contests (frequency value 16), or shared a fan’s picture concerning the product usage (frequency value 12).

A subsequent analysis based on co-occurrences (consisting of an evaluation of certain associated structures between the variables emerging from the first investigation) allowed the relationships between the different Facebook usage and firms' features to be figured out. Due to the differing availability of financial resources, we firstly focused our attention on firms' sizes and analysed the five elements that described the use of Facebook as a direct channel for interacting with consumers, by emphasizing to what extent firms were focused on different activities at the same time according to the previously identified categories: *comments, I Like, invite to share, sharing fan's picture, games, and contests* (Table 3).

[TABLE 3]

Table 3 showed the limited number of firms that used social networks like Facebook as a direct way of interacting with consumers, and as a means of collecting and soliciting opinions and judgments in different ways. In fact, the maximum number of firms that used the more available tools is four (out of twenty). For instance, only four firms commented on users' posts and 'liked' fan's posts, and shared a fan's picture. Similarly, only four firms shared a fan's picture and created ad-hoc contests and games. Subsequently, we took into account the different strategies according to the firms' sizes and distinguished between large and small firms (Table 4).

[TABLE 4]

The analysis showed that small size firms used a high number of comments, which represents the first way of interacting with consumers (55%). For instance, one small producer posted the advertising of a sponsored local event, videos about the possibility to add one of the liquors to the coffee, the adaptation of a movie poster with the brand most representative liquor bottle, the adaptation of an international comic with the same bottle, the pictures of a past sponsored event, the articles from magazines mentioning the producers, new recipes, etc. Our

results reveal that while the first form adopted by large firms was focused on the development of ad-hoc contests and the sharing of pictures by followers (54% in both cases), and only 36% commented on consumers' posts. A justification may lie in the number of comments in the case of large firms, which is much higher compared to those of the small ones, thus requiring more effort to respond to all of them. Similarly, the small firms tend to provide more personalized customer care, while the large ones are more oriented to more impersonal mass communications strategies. Another relevant issue emerged from the provision of ad-hoc virtual games: no small firms developed (or promoted) games within their Facebook page; whereas 37% of the large firms developed (or promoted) games for their followers. Similarly, in the case of replying to comments, developing a virtual game requires more time and programming costs compared to commenting on consumers' posts, and their limited financial resources probably discourages small firms from adopting this strategy.

Finally, we focused on the different firms' awareness of Facebook tools according to their presence on the social network. We distinguished between firms that joined the social networks recently (a presence on the social network of no more than 2 years), which we named "*little experience*" on SN, and the experienced ones who had joined Facebook for more than 2 years, which we called "*large experience*" on SN. Table 5 illustrates firms' usage of Facebook as a direct channel according to their experience on the social network.

[TABLE 5]

The analysis revealed that comments and ad-hoc content were the first way that firms with little experience interacted with customers (this is true for 100% of both the small and large enterprises). In contrast, experienced firms preferred to share followers' pictures, (62% of updates by these enterprises concerned this). Moreover, our results showed that only 25%

of the experienced firms invited consumers to share a game or developed one. This noteworthy result summarizes the extent to which the experience with the social network does not influence the development of ad-hoc games or invitations to share comments.

Discussion

Although past studies highlighted the extent to which social networks are largely used for advertising purposes (Black and Veloutsou, 2017; Hsu *et al.*, 2015; Pantano and Di Pietro, 2013; Ruiz *et al.*, 2014), while soliciting towards new contributions on a more effective usage of these tools for more marketing and innovation purposes (Eggers *et al.*, 2017; Hitchen *et al.*, 2017) our research specifies to what extent firms might go beyond using social media for advertising purposes, by focusing on manufacturing (small sized) firms. In particular, three main issues emerged from the theoretical standpoint: (i) the current level of use by firms of the new tools provided by social media, (ii), the extent to which these tools are employed successfully, by comparing small and large enterprises, and (iii) the importance of firms' participation in online interactions, which should be considered as an additional feature of marketing mix tools.

Our results highlighted the way the firms use Facebook as a tool to interact directly with consumers. In particular, findings showed that Facebook was extensively used to upload pictures aimed at getting consumers' attention (1,338 over 1,883 updates), which represents the main advertising purpose; whereas only a limited number of firms adopted the tool to achieve quick feedback from consumers, in accordance with previous studies (He *et al.*, 2014; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Mostafa, 2013; Pantano and Di Pietro, 2013). Although our results showed the extent to which firms are aware of the tools to interact with consumers, they did not fully exploit social media as they mainly focused on the one-to-many advertising function when one-to-one communication would make the advertising more efficient.

In fact, they positively evaluated (“liked”) consumers’ posts 89 times within the reference period (4.7% of the total number of updates), commented on consumers’ post 81 times (4.3% of the total number of updates), invited followers to share opinions 31 times (by also replying to a specific question, or sharing their favourite products, etc.) (1.6% over the total amount of updates), proposed ad-hoc games 23 times (1.2% over the total amount of updates), provided contests 16 times (0.8% over the total amount of updates), and shared fan’s pictures 12 times (0.6% over the total amount of updates). This means that firms know how to interact directly with their consumers, even if they actually do not fully exploit all the possibilities. As a consequence, the results provided insight into the successful inclusion of *firm’s participation* in the consumers’ online social life, by extending past studies that identified a relationships between the use of social media and business-to-consumer (B2C) strategies (Arakji and Lang, 2007; Ickler and Baumol 2012; Pantano and Di Pietro, 2013), the building of relationships with consumers (Chan *et al.*, 2012), the reinforcement of brand image (McCarthy *et al.*, 2014), and firms’ profitability (Harris and Dennis 2011; Rishika *et al.*, 2013). Apart from the traditional variables of the marketing mix model describing the marketing strategies (Chan *et al.*, 2012; Danaher *et al.*, 2001; Gordon, 2012; Hanssens, 1998; McCarthy, 1960; Naik *et al.*, 2005), a new element concerning firms’ participation in online social life through social media might be added. This participation involves building and developing a one-to-one channel which is able to reinforce the effectiveness of advertising, through the enhancement of strong relationships with clients who could feel free to interact directly with firms to express their judgments, opinions and suggestions (either positive or negative ones), which could represent a more efficient use of social network tools.

In particular, Tables 4 and 5 provide insight into how consumers tend to interact with the firm when the latter solicits their interaction. In other words, if Facebook is used by firms only as an advertising space, consumers tend to share less content (and to provide less

information on their preferences); whereas when firms directly solicit consumers' opinions, they are more willing to share knowledge with them.

Although few studies have highlighted the fact that large firms integrate the use of social media into their activities more easily than SMEs (Culnan *et al.*, 2010), a more detailed analysis of the firm's size allowed investigation of the different behaviours undertaken. In particular, no more than 55% of both cases of SMEs used Facebook to interact directly with consumers. Small firms preferred commenting on users' posts (55%); in contrast, the large ones opted to propose content and share followers' pictures so as to encourage consumers to participate in their page's social life. In this way, followers may believe that firms are interested in their opinions and will deal with their requests. Hence, the main difference is related to the way of *participating*: small enterprises prefer commenting, while large enterprises prefer promoting online content.

Moreover, even if Facebook offers the possibility to add the "buy" button to the page and many Italian brands are actually exploiting this possibility to enhance online commerce (i.e. the producer of bags and accessories Piquadro), neither SMEs nor large enterprises devoted to the liquor production are actually exploiting this service.

Conclusions

The current study described the use of Facebook by Italian liquor producers, by revealing the extent to which most of them still lack any strong integration between their marketing strategies and their use of social media tools, despite the increasing use of spreading advertising. Our analyses showed the extent to which the participation of firms solicits consumers' participation, which consists of both constant feedback on firms' behaviour and the creation of an online (social) brand experience. An increasing amount of experience with the social network improves awareness of its tools for involving consumers, and is directly related to the amount

of interaction with consumers, with no relevant differences between small and large firms. Extensive use of social media such as Facebook allows firms to achieve (i) efficient market sizing and sensing, and (ii) enhancement of social shopping through social media.

(i) *Market sizing*. Marketers have the ability to use social platforms to spread a positive brand image and accomplish sophisticated analyses of market trends through opening social graphs such that online social networks (and Facebook particularly) offer. In fact, social media provides some metrics for measuring the number of users reached, the quantity and frequency of interaction, as well as the share of voice. This helps marketers to improve existing strategies and developing new customized ones, as well as to solicit consumer's awareness of brands/products and benefits emerging from the preference of a certain firm. To increase the effectiveness of data, firms may work with developers to create new tools and novel software which is able to extract the "useful" knowledge and avoid problems related to the excess or limitation of available information. New data mining and knowledge management systems will support this process. Analyses based on the simultaneous measurement of Facebook tools used to define marketing strategies would train marketers with knowledge about social media marketing in the emergent competitive scenario.

(ii) *Enhancement of social shopping through social media*. As anticipated, firms may use social media to interact with consumers, spread their corporate image, and influence the consumers' subsequent shopping behaviour. In fact, purchase decisions would be influenced by several elements which rely on the interaction between firms and other consumers. For instance, through Facebook consumers might access additional options provided by a firm's webpage, including the possibility of buying products. This can be seen as the new goal of on-line strategies, which start with gaining consumers' appreciation of certain products/initiatives (the "like" button included in Facebook), and continue with linking the available information to a local recommendation service (based on location-based services called "places") and

offering new ways of searching for information. A limited number of firms have already started integrating the possibility of making purchases directly within their Facebook page, by taking into account that if consumers engage with the firm on-line they would be more influenced to buy. Firms should further reflect on the fact that consumers would engage with the firms on-line if they have a reason to do so. Our analysis showed that firms preferred to post comments, while only a limited number of them developed ad-hoc applications, such as games, which have a higher potential to engage consumers than static pictures or comments posted on-line. Hence, they should wisely consider several modalities aimed at influencing their clients to share information, start discussions related to their products, and further provide new exciting (on-line) buying experiences, by developing (redesigning) the latter to create a new consumer-centric experience.

In other words, starting from the traditional elements of marketing mix and the attempts to reinforce the marketing mix model with 3 additional Ps to meet also the characteristics of service industry (Constantinides, 2002; Danaher *et al.*, 2001; Gordon, 2012; Gronroos, 1997; Gummesson, 1999; Hanssens, 1998; Helm and Gritsch, 2014; McCarthy, 1960; Naik *et al.*, 2005), our model pushes towards a new extension of the model to embrace also the challenges faced in the new interactive online context.

From a theoretical point of view, this study contributes to the body of literature on social media marketing and increases the understanding of the strategic consequences of the inclusion of social media networks in the traditional marketing mix models. The current study offers findings that help to bridge the gap related to the limited number of studies in the field (Ananda *et al.*, 2016; Galati *et al.*, 2017). The findings present evidence about the emerging shift from the use of social media for communication purposes through static advertising (i.e., pictures and slogans), to its use as an interactive channel that can influence consumers' purchasing behaviour through multimedia tools (i.e. games and interactive applications able to

solicit users' interest), by emphasizing that a higher level of participation by a firm involves a higher level of consumer interaction. They also advocate that the firm's participation should be recognized as a new element of the traditional marketing mix model and as an additional tool for efficient market sizing and sensing. Therefore, the current findings should be the focus of attention for both academics and practitioners.

From managerial perspective, the idea of participating must be extended to any other social network that has strong consumers' social involvement such as Twitter and Pinterest. In other words, the paper emphasizes the need of participate to online consumers social life, inviting to share comments and providing (positive) experiences with the brands, as well as inviting other consumers to do the same. This participation would result in an increase of the brand awareness, access to more information on consumers' preferences and needs and better exploitation of eWOM. Therefore, marketers should consider "participation" as new P of the marketing mix model in terms of i) social networks in which be present, ii) types of contents to be shared with consumers/users, and iii) virtual tools to engage more consumers (i.e. online contests).

For these reasons, we believe that a higher level of social media use by firms might add value to firms' marketing strategies by allowing them to gain more benefit. As a consequence, this on-line participation encourages firms to take into account the extent to which this element, participation, might become a powerful element to be added to the traditional marketing mix model, including the benefits emerging from active participation in the on-line social life. In this sense, firms could involve employees in the "consumer engagement". This would suggest that a new employee role which is focused on the firms' promotion through social media would need to be created. The others would occasionally participate in this goal with their experience, comparing their opinions with the consumers' ones, and contributing to the firm's on-line social life

Limitations and future works

Although this analysis offers an in-depth overview of a few samples, further quantitative analysis would be required to achieve more generalizable results, with particular attention on other sectors. Similarly, another limitation concerns the referring period, which was limited to three months. Therefore, a longer period would provide more generalizable statistics.

In addition, future research could investigate the relationship between the best marketing practices for adopting social media and the development of ad-hoc dynamic capabilities. Hence, future quantitative studies in this direction are encouraged. Finally, as this study has focused only on Facebook, ongoing research could incorporate more social media (e.g. twitter) as a part of the marketing strategy analysis in order to provide a more holistic picture.

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