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**The use of digital and social media in the speck
sector**

Supervisor

Ch. Prof. Vladi Finotto

Assistant supervisor

Ch. Prof. Michele Tamma

Graduand

Giorgio De Stefani

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ABSTRACT

The society we are living in is becoming increasingly related to social media and their impact on business activities is more and more relevant. The purpose of this thesis is to study and to understand the role of digital within the speck sector: in particular, to investigate the importance of social media and website use in this specific agri-food sector, the one of speck, in order to improve their performance. So, this study first describes what social media are and how they were born, then it deepens the main performance indicators to be used in order to measure the impact of social media on business activities.

An overview about the made-in-Italy food industry comes next, expanding more and more on the speck sector, with a focus on the Trentino Alto Adige region. At the end, thanks to a qualitative and a quantitative analysis, it tries to understand social media strategies of the concerned speck companies and their related impact on business, by identifying strengths and weaknesses.

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Introduction

Nowadays it is increasingly well known how important the use of digital is for companies. The online presence is something that no enterprise can do without and thus more and more companies, even the smallest ones, are gearing up to land online and to exploit the related advantages.

This thesis comes from the desire to explore the digital presence and the digital maturity of the Italian agri-food small and medium enterprises. Particularly, it aims to investigate the use of the main digital marketing tools, specifically website and social media, among the Italian speck producers in Trentino-Alto Adige. This research is part of the Agri-food Management & Innovation Lab, the new research lab implemented by the Ca' Foscari University's Management department. It consisted of collecting data on the use of website and social media by agri-food SMEs in Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Trentino-Alto Adige, in order to analyse their digital maturity.

In particular, the focus of this thesis is on Trentino-Alto Adige, specifically on speck. Indeed, after having analysed several SMEs belonging to different agri-food sectors therein, it emerged that the most representative and important product of the region is precisely speck. In addition, this product perfectly embodies the features of the "Made in Italy" label: high quality, know-how and tradition. Lastly, literature hardly offered insightful research on this specific food sector and thus the related findings mean greater value.

The thesis is divided into 3 main chapters: specifically, the first one outlines the use of digital nowadays, the importance and the application of main digital marketing tools by companies such as website and social media. Then, it deepens the most used social media one-by-one, by explaining their main features, how they can improve the business performance, and which are the main performance metrics to be used to measure their effectiveness.

The second chapter gives an overview about the Italian agri-food industry by introducing its structure and its most important food sectors. It then explores the agri-food economy of Trentino-Alto Adige in-depth, with the purpose of outlining its main representative products, such as speck. Later, the chapter moves on with an insight on the use of digital marketing, in particular the use of social media, within the Italian agri-food industry to give an overview about how much these companies keep pace from this perspective. Finally, the chapter ends with a paragraph entirely dedicated to the "Speck Alto Adige IGP"

through an explanation about both its processing and importance in terms of economic and production value.

The third and final chapter represents the focus of this dissertation: an in-depth analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, on the use of social media and website by speck producers located in Trentino-Alto Adige. The objective is to understand if and how much they exploit the potential of these digital tools, and whether this can improve their business performance.

1. Theoretical background

1.1 Internet and social media overview

1.1.1 Use of digital worldwide

The era we live in is characterized by the increasing diffusion, accessibility and availability of Internet all over the world. This has generated a network where everyone can easily get and share information, ability and knowledge. The role of digital, mobile and social media in our everyday life is becoming increasingly important, they are getting more and more essential within our lives and everyone can no longer do without. It became clear that more people spend more time doing more things online thanks to the data published by We Are Social, one of the most important global digital marketing agency, that conducted a study on the use of digital in 2020 by titling it “Digital 2020: global digital overview” (Kemp, 2020). In particular, what emerged from the report is that 4,54 billion people out of 7,75 regularly use internet (almost two-third of the global population) and, in the past 12 months only, from January 2019 to January 2020, there was an increase of 7% corresponding to 298 million users more. It is an incredibly high figure if you consider that it is equal to 950,000 new users each day. Additionally, the average growth annual rate of connected people since 2015 is more than 8% and year-by-year such growth is higher, especially as regards to developing countries. Moreover, also active social media users continue to increase worldwide as they have reached 3,8 billion people and have grown of more than 9% since last year, corresponding to 321 million users more. Then, more than 5 billion people use mobile phones and they have increased by 2,4% since last year (Kemp, 2020).

The same report also provides an overview about the number of internet users by region all over the world. Figure 1.1 represents in fact the internet penetration for both continent and regions within the continents throughout the world: the penetration rate is expressed by percentage and it corresponds to the number of internet users in each region compared to total population, regardless of age. Looking at the data represented, it immediately stands out how Europe and North America are the regions with more connected people, with an average of almost 90% of users in both the continents. Africa, on the contrary, is the less connected country with only 39% of online users. Regarding the other continents, it is noted that both Southern America and Oceania present a percentage share of more or less 70% of users while throughout Asia the online presence

is lower than 60%, probably because of the huge population number compared to the real users (Kemp, 2020).

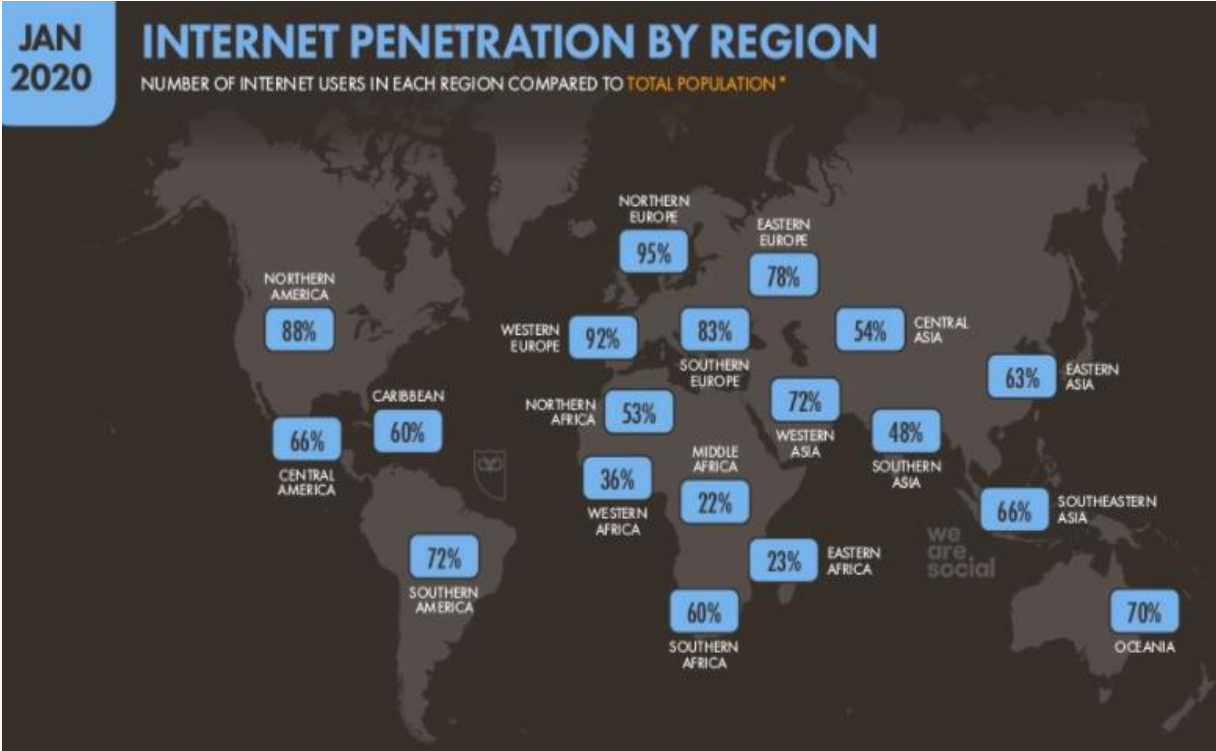


Figure 1.1 Internet penetration by region (Kemp, 2020)

As far as Africa is concerned, within its poorest countries it seems that almost nothing has changed since the development of internet. For example, in Eritrea, Somalia, Guinea-Bissau, the Central African Republic, Niger, and Madagascar the percentage share of connected users is less than 5%, whereas in Southern Africa the networking population represents the 60% of the total one. This is a perfect example proving how the spread of the use of digital among people is strictly correlated to the economic situation of the country. But this is not the only reason that can affect the number of users in a country and a clear proof of that is represented by North Korea. In fact, within this region there is a very low number of online users but this is due to its regime that does not allow the access to anyone but a very small elite. Here, government obliges people to use the local intranet *Kwangmyong* by imposing a real ban. Therefore, from these two examples, it is easy to understand how the use of internet in a country can be strictly related either to its economic status or political situation. That said, these specific examples apart, the main trend throughout the world remains always the same: the number of online users grows steadily (Roser, Ritchie, Ortiz Ospina, 2015).

At present, the time spent online by an average internet user is 6 hours and 43 minutes each day which means more than 100 days of connected time each user per year. Moreover, the cumulative time spent online by internet users worldwide will be 1.25 billion years in 2020 and only the use of social media represents more than one-third of that time. Also, it is interesting to see how the time people spend online varies according to their country of origin.

From Figure 1.2, representing a survey delivered on users aged from 16 to 64 showing the time spent online each day by country in the third quarter of 2019, we learn that users from Philippines are those spending more time online, with an average of 9 hours and 45 minutes per day. Japanese users, on the contrary, spend less time than everyone else, with 4 hours and 22 minutes per day. As far as Italy is concerned, people spend on average 6 hours per day of which one-third only on social media, 1 hour and 57 minutes in particular, and the remaining time in watching television, listening to music and playing with games console (Starri, 2020).

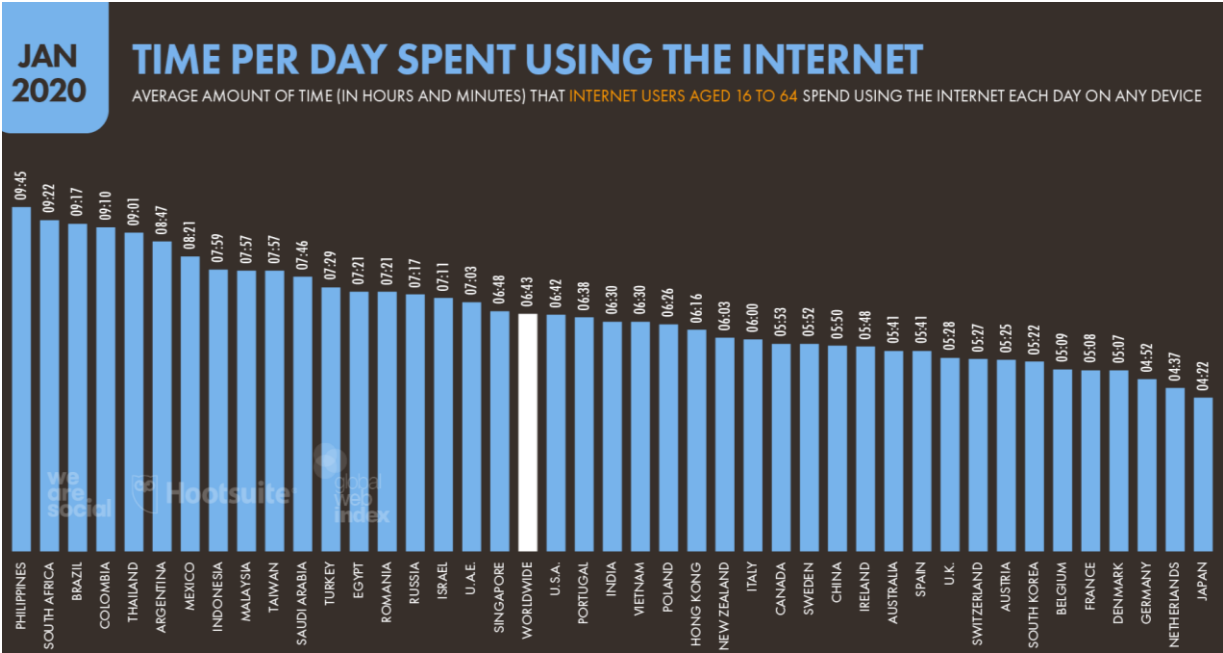


Figure 1.2 – Time per day spent using the internet in hours (Kemp, 2020)

Research data also consider gender to be a critical factor in determining levels of internet access, in particular the use of social media is pretty apparel. It is less likely that women are connected compared to men. Specifically, as reported in Figure 1.3, the global average female share is 45% while the male one is 55%. Looking at the figure it is immediately clear how there is a small gap in developed countries and a large gap in developing ones.

As an example, Southern Asia is the region with the biggest gap where women (24%) are three times less likely to use social media compared to men (76%) and, what's more, in India most women are not even aware of the existence of Internet. Africa presents a pretty great gap too, as male share is about 60-65% compared to the 35-40% of female one. Only Southern Africa, probably given the more advanced social and economic status, presents a well-balanced situation with both the shares at 50%. About Europe, North and South America, instead, there is much more balance with a relative share of more or less 50% and this is probably due to better gender equality condition (Kemp, 2020).

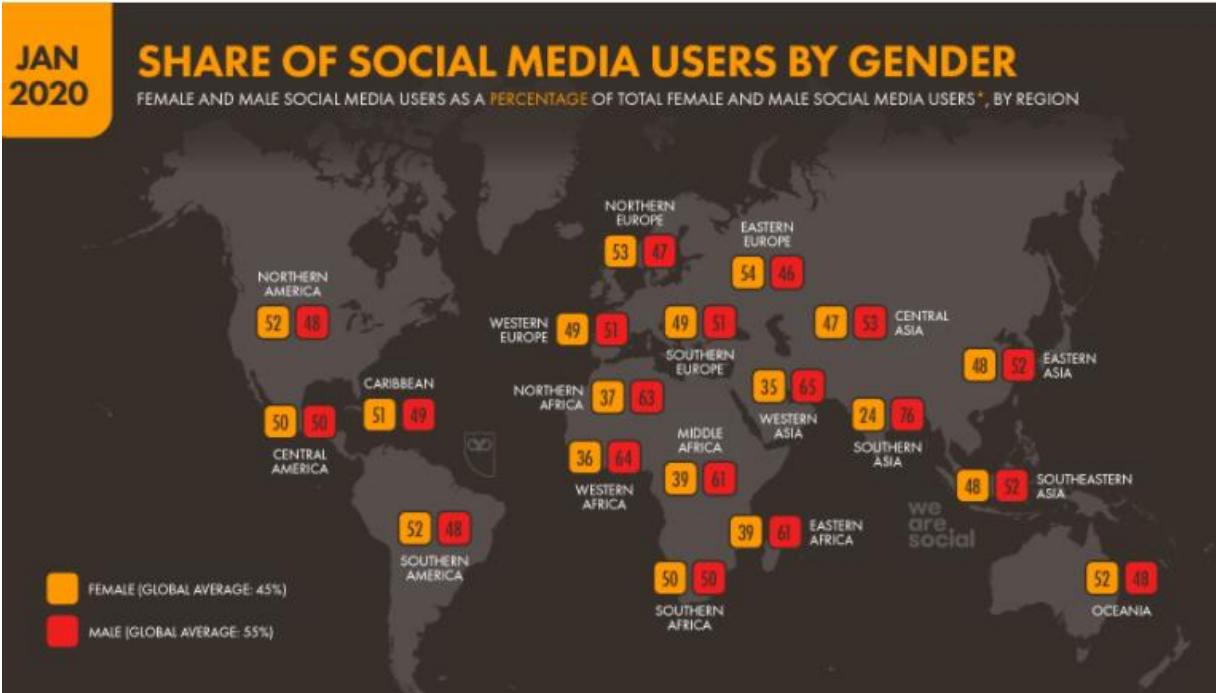


Figure 1.3 – Share of social media users by gender (Kemp, 2020)

Another insight that shows how much time users spend online is related to the device people rely on to go online. In fact, from the figure 1.4, illustrating the daily time users aged 16 to 64 spend using internet via mobile devices, we learn they rely more and more on mobile devices. They do it so much so that, from 2014 to 2019, the mobile's share of total internet time increased from 33% to 50,1 and this means that more than a half of the daily time spent online is spent through mobile phones. In particular, over the past six years, the mobile's share of total internet time increased at an average rate of 8,92% without stopping. From this unstoppable growth we can infer how many people connect at any time of the day, whenever they like and wherever they are during the whole day. People is spending more and more time online and it is getting something they cannot help it. (Kemp, 2020).

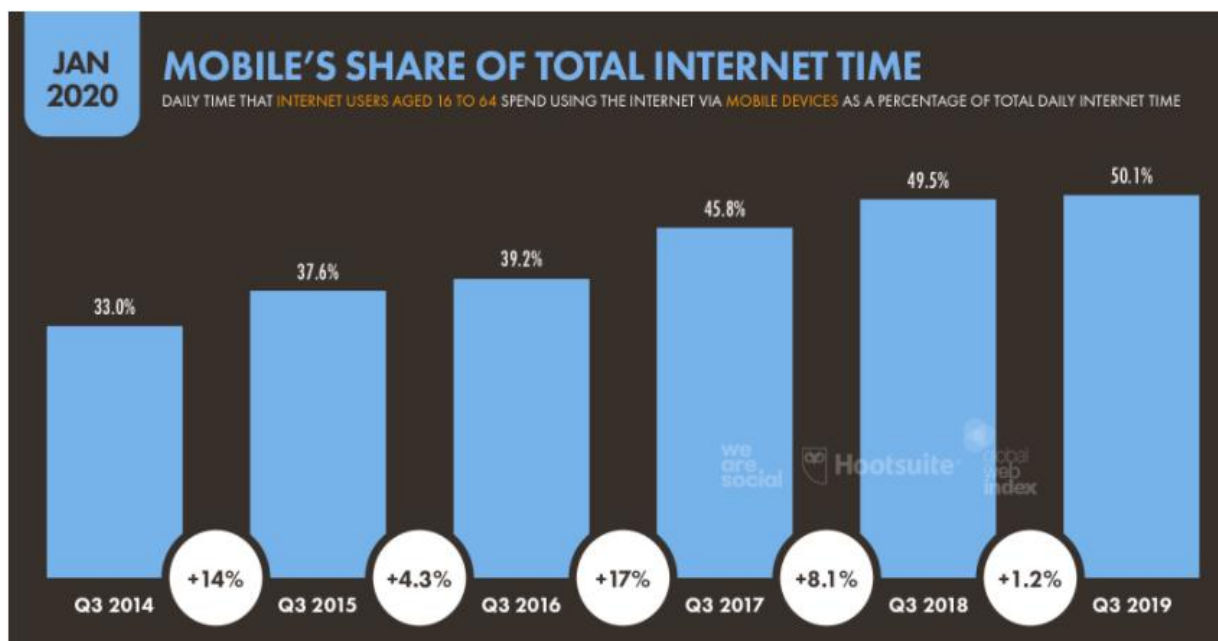


Figure 1.4 – Mobile's share of total internet time (Kemp, 2020)

1.1.2 Social media today

As far as social media users are concerned, as mentioned above, it is quite evident that they continue to increase and to be part of everyday people's lives. Their number has reached 3,8 billion people and, over the past year only, it grew of more than 9%. GlobalWebIndex, of the most important market research company focused on delivering consumer insights, published a report in 2018 listing the main 10 reasons in order of importance encouraging so many people to use social media. The following reasons emerged: to stay in touch with what their friends are doing, to stay up to date with news and current events, to fill up spare time, to find funny or entertaining content, to create a general networking with other people, a lot of their friends are on social media, to share photos or videos with others, to share their opinion, to find products to buy and, as last reason, to meet new people. The first ones show how important it is for people to know the lives of others, to know what they do and to constantly keep in touch with each other. It is also evident how social media value increases with the growth of their users: of course, the more people use them, the more users can satisfy their needs, by being more updated on others and by discovering more events and news (Valentine, 2018). In terms of data, this results in the average spending of 2 hours and 24 minutes per person each day using social media (Kemp, 2020). Moreover, data presented in Figure 1.5, processed by Statista that is a leading provider of market and consumer data, show the evolution path in the use of social media worldwide from 2012 to 2019 during which people rose

their usage time by 60%, specifically from 1 hour and 30 minutes to more than 2 hours per day (Clement, 2020).

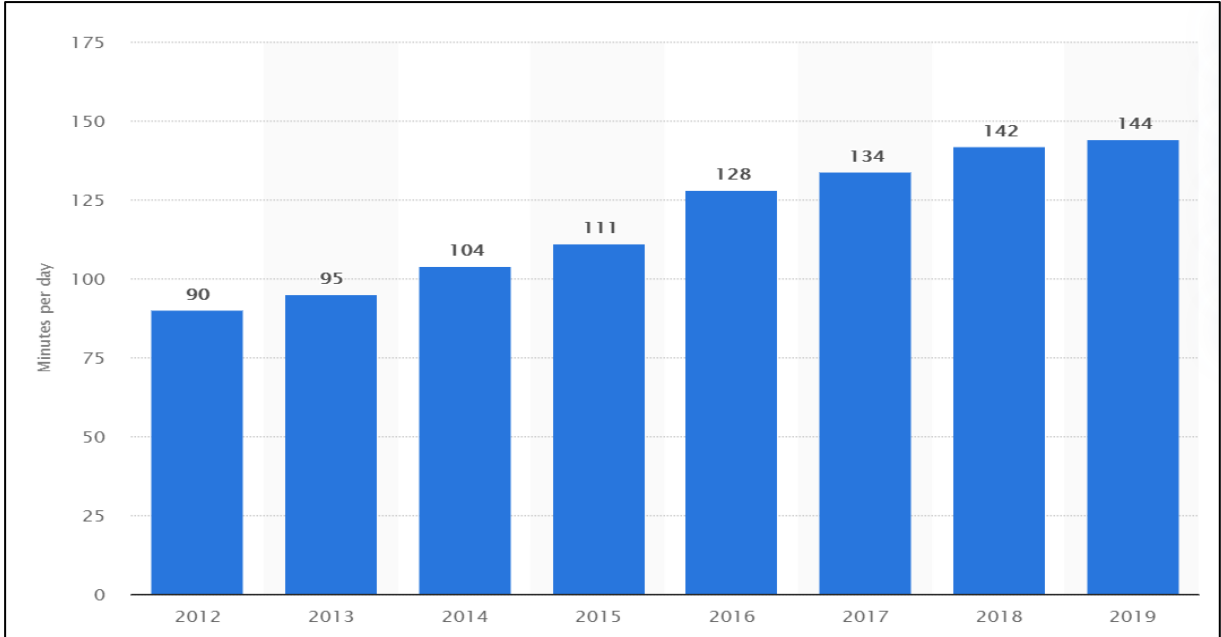


Figure 1.5 - Daily social media usage worldwide 2012-2019 in minutes (Clement, 2020)

Moreover, Statista shows how the increasing use of social media is not something related only to the past years but also to the coming ones. In fact, the following chart in Figure 1.6 tells us the number of social network users worldwide from 2017 to 2025 is going to increase by more than 50%, from 2,86 to 4,41 billion people.

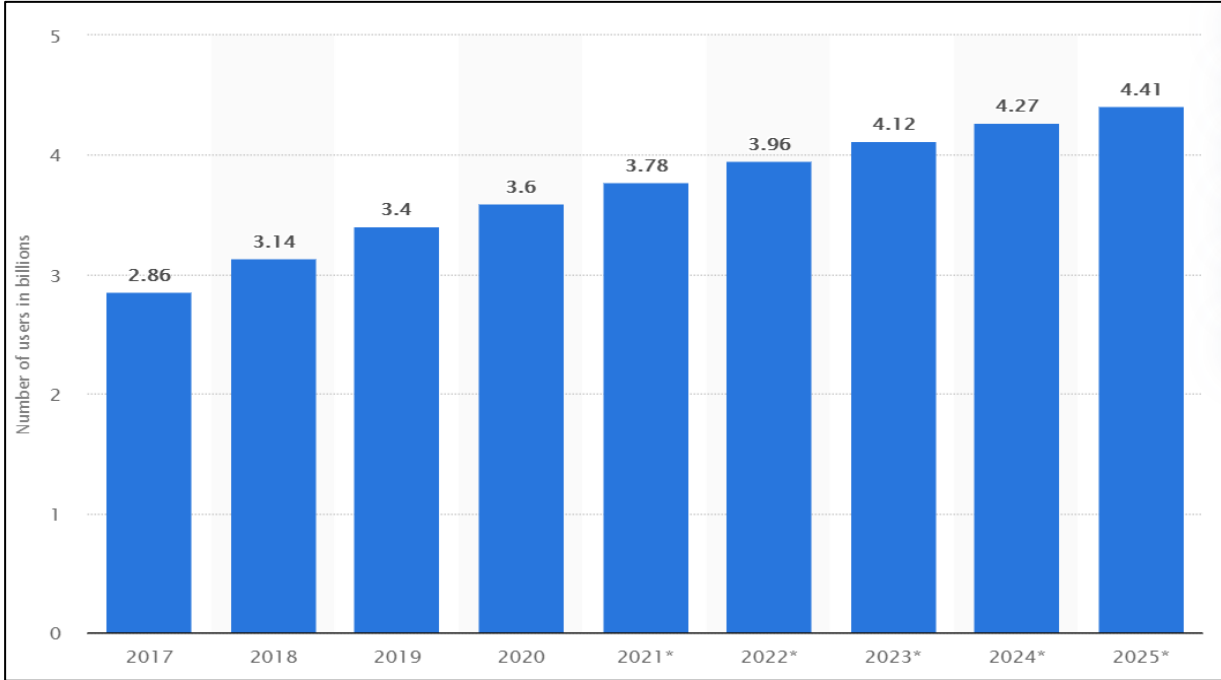


Figure 1.6 - Number of social network users worldwide from 2017 to 2025 (Clement, 2020)

Currently the most popular social media platform worldwide is Facebook that, among others, was also the first platform to surpass 1 billion registered accounts and now it counts more than 2.7 billion monthly active users. The second and third place are respectively taken by YouTube and WhatsApp, both with 2 billion monthly active users. Instagram takes the 6th place with 1,1 billion users while Pinterest takes the fifteenth and Twitter the sixteenth one, with respectively 416 and 353 million users (Clement, 2020). The following Figure 1.7 illustrates the entire classification of the most popular social media platform in terms of number of active users (in million).

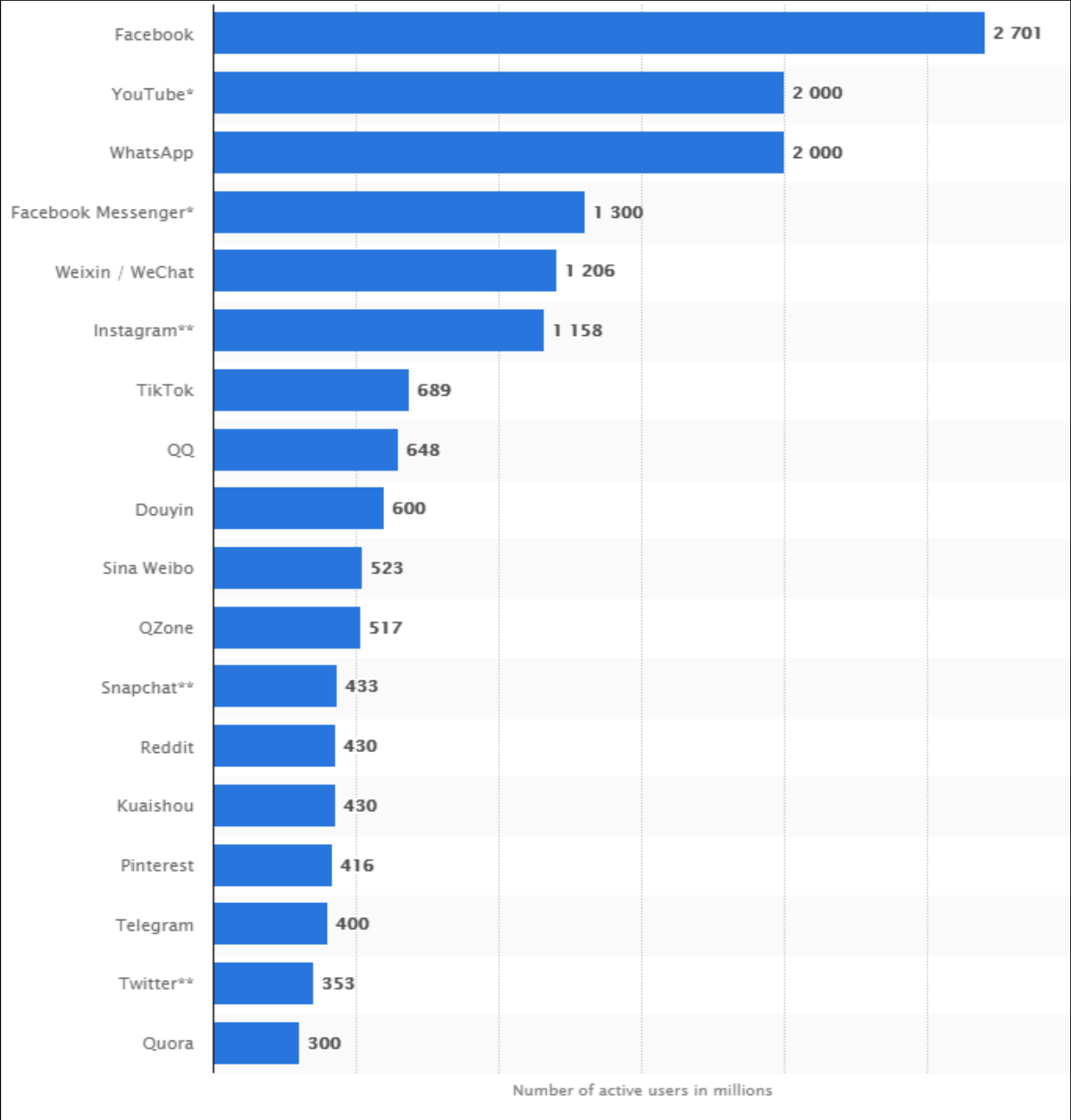


Figure 1.7 – Most popular social networks worldwide as of July 2020, ranked by number of active users in million (Clement, 2020)

Despite some challenges over the past few years, shown by the figure, Facebook is still at the top of the ranking when it comes to social. To give an idea of its huge potential, it just needs to look at Facebook advertising audience overview: the number of people that can be reached with adverts on this platform is 2,09 billion people and the percentage share of population aged 13+ is 35% (Kemp, 2020). Another interested data is represented by the figure regarding Tik Tok users: this company was founded only in 2018 and in two years has already reached 689 million users, by beating in the classification some popular and older platforms as Twitter, Pinterest and Snapchat.

1.1.3 Use of digital in Italy

As far as Italy is concerned, it may be said there is some awareness in the use of internet and social media. Data extracted from We Are Social tell us that the 82% of Italian people use internet and, compared to the past year, the number increased by 2,4%: this means that 50 million people out of 60 are connected to internet and do things online. As regards social media, the penetration rate is 58%: that results in the fact that 35.00 million people out of 60 use social media in January 2020 and, compared to 2019, the number increased by 6,4%. What is more, the average daily time Italian users aged 16 to 64 spend on internet is 6 hours, of which one-third is related only to social media. As mentioned for the global overview, also in Italy most people connect to internet via smartphones, specifically is the 92% for internet users and 98% for the social media ones (Starri, 2020). What's more, a recent survey explained that seven out of ten Italian users are not willing to reduce their time spent on social media during 2020. Most of them are likely to have an account on Facebook, Instagram and many other ones that will be explained later. In 2019, a poll also revealed that eight of ten social media users used Facebook or Instagram every day. About the latest social media platforms, Tik Tok increased its users a lot between the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020: it now counts more than four million active users each month. In addition, among social media users, one of the most-recurring activity is sending private messages: about that, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger are the most popular social networking apps. As far as Covid-19 emergency is concerned, it encouraged the social media usage in Italy, in particular there was an increase in consumption among young users between 16 and 30 years. Moreover, social media have been also a source of content as regards coronavirus because a lot of news and information related to it were broadcasted through social media. At the beginning of 2020, Youtube and Twitter recorded the highest coverage of this topic, with YouTube that even

increased its share of contents during the lockdown (Statista, 2020).

By going into the detail, the Figure 1.8 illustrates the most used social media platforms in Italy, expressed as percentage of internet users aged 16 to 64 who report using each platform in the past month. YouTube takes the top of the ranking with 88% of users, just followed by WhatsApp and Facebook respectively counting 83% and 80%. After the top three platforms, the fourth place belongs to Instagram with 64% of users and the fifth one to Fb Messenger with 57%. This confirms what happened for the global scenario: the platforms belonging to the company Facebook are confirmed to be in the top five of the ranking this year too. In particular, Instagram is the platform to record the highest growth among all social media compared to the past year, increasing the percentage share of users from 55% to 64%. Further down in the ranking there are respectively Twitter, LinkedIn, and Pinterest: respectively 34%, 31% and 29% of users. Among these, even if Pinterest is the last one, it is the platform with highest growth. In fact, it increased from 24% to 29% and, also in Italy, it confirms to experience a real development as it happened in the global scenario, thanks to some improvements made to the platform in terms of sponsorship.

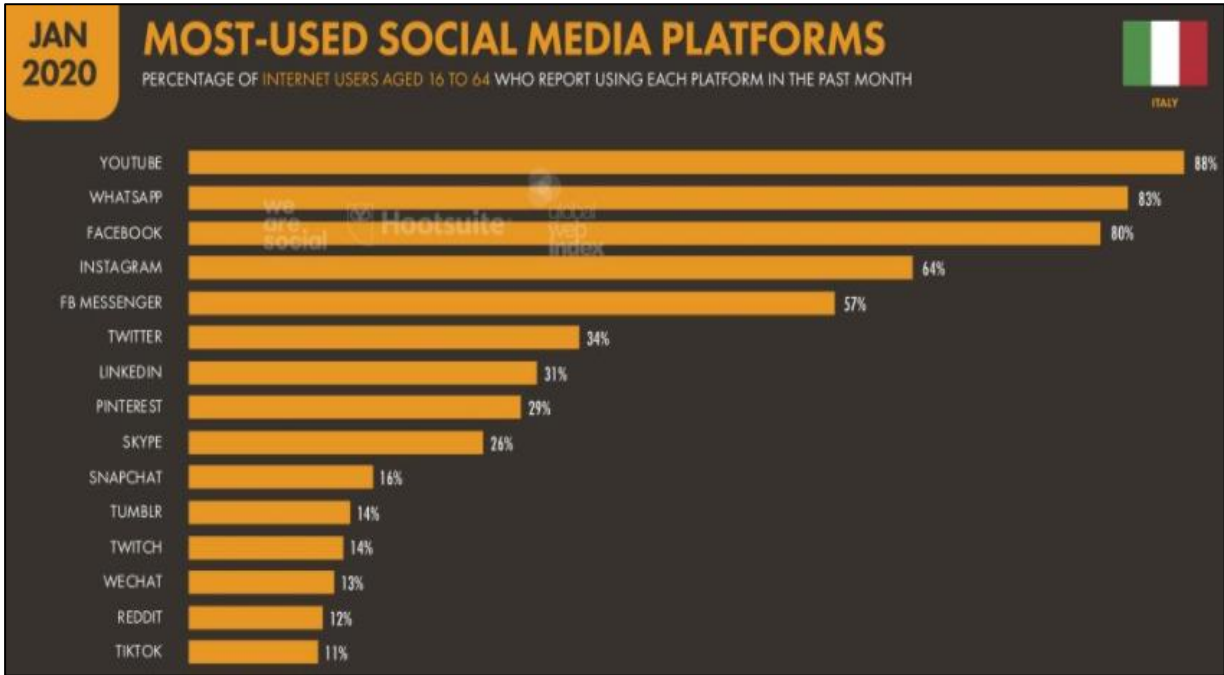


Figure 1.8 – Most-used social media platforms in Italy (Starri, 2020)

1.2 Social media: definition, birth, and evolution

1.2.1 Definition of social media

Social media have transformed the communication and interaction of individuals all over the world, impacting a lot of aspects of human communication, business in the first place. The term “social media” is consisted of the word “media”, that generally refers to advertising and communication of information through channels, and the word “social” recalling the interaction of individuals within a community. The overall expression “social media” refers to communication platforms created and sustained by interaction of individuals through specific tools. They are considered one of the best opportunities available to a brand for connecting with prospective consumers since they are able to win the trust of consumers themselves by getting in touch with them at a deeper level. Trust and goodwill are the basis of social networking, and by marketing in the realm of social media these fundamental notions need to be adhered. It is probably the only marketing platform that encourages fool proof communication and accountability among sellers as well as consumers. The explosion of this phenomenon is really mind boggling and is increasing at a frantic pace. Multinational companies have realised how social media marketing can be an effective potential marketing platform, specifically as regards the advertising campaign (Neti, 2011). Before explaining how social media were born and developed over time, it needs to define them by giving more precise definitions and to illustrate the most popular ones.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, social media are technically “forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content (as videos)”. The dictionary defines networking as “the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions; specifically: the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business” (Seymour, Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson, 2011). The aim of social media is to transmit, communicate and share information with a broad audience and they can be considered as a strategy and an outlet to be used for broadcasting.

In Investopedia’s opinion, the website created in 1999 in order to simplify complex financial information and decisions for its readers, a social media is a computer-based technology that allows the sharing of thoughts and ideas through the creation of virtual networks. They make users interact with friends and family and the shared content can

include personal information, videos, documents, photos and messages (Dollarhide, 2020).

A report published by the Michigan University states that even if the concept of social media is difficult to define since these technologies increasingly change with use, they can be defined as any digital technology allowing users to connect with other users and/or with user-generated content (Greenhow, Chapman, Marich, Shirin Askari, 2017). The report goes on by classifying social media in:

- *social network sites* (as Facebook and LinkedIn)
- *micro-blogging services* (as Twitter)
- *video-sharing services* (as YouTube)
- *photo-sharing services* (as Pinterest and Flickr)
- *wikis* (as Wikipedia)
- *blogs* (as Blogger)

Each kind of social media has its own peculiarities although sometimes there can be similarities and features in common between different social media.

Social networks are social media sites where users connect with family, friends, colleagues, clients, or customers. Social networks usually have a social purpose, like Facebook, or a business purpose, like LinkedIn but sometimes they can have both. Year by year, it is getting clearer that both LinkedIn and Facebook have both the purposes, in particular Facebook is being exploited also by companies to do business. But purpose aside, what is perfectly clear is that social networks have become an important and significant base for marketers seeking to engage customers (Kenton, 2020).

Microblogging services recall those blogs appeared in the late 1990s where people could write anything they wanted and post it for people to read or comment on. Anyway, if blogs could take any form and there was no length limit for the posts, microblogging services allow users to make truly short posts only. For example, Twitter limits posts to 140 characters and this kind of rule creates an environment that is a little bit different from blogging because it is easier for people to read hundreds of posts in a short amount of time. This kind of social media is often used from politicians with the purpose of telling something to the citizens in a very concise way (Golbeck, 2015).

Video-sharing services are social media based on a hosting system that allow users to upload, share and watch video freely. One of the most popular is Youtube, among the first ones that allowed people to upload video very easily and did not require any technical

knowledge. Moreover, to understand the concept of sharing which characterized this social media company, it just to note its slogan that even today says: “Broadcast yourself”. In addition, this service had very intuitive interface and allowed to copy a HTML code to be embedded elsewhere, for example in the blogs that had great success (Doria, 2011). Photo-sharing services are websites where users can store, share, and organise their photo collections. People can also edit the picture before posting, add explanatory information and “tag” something or someone’s profile. A lot of businesses are now exploiting more and more this kind of service as part of their marketing strategy. Through this channel it is possible to show product or service to the customers, increase brand awareness, retain, and build strong relationships with clients and rise the traffic of the website. The most popular services are Flickr, Instagram, and Pinterest (Queensland Government, 2020).

Wikis are websites where users can collaboratively publish content of hyperlinks: it consists of a series of pages that can always be modified and to which people can add other information. That is possible thanks to the use of a collaborative software, or “groupware”, allowing to integrate in the same project different works made by different persons at different times. Therefore, Wikis can be considered a collaborative and cooperative tool allowing to create discussion pages among different authors. That creates a highly effective teamwork within which each member or author is on the same footing of others (Bedini, Balò, 2008).

Blogs are a kind of social media where people are engaged by being part of a conversation. It starts with an article published by a person and then the readers give their comments on it. Usually, it combines people’s personal life and the particular topic they would like to provide information on. The more comments and persons are engaged in an article, the more success a blog has (Thevenot, 2007). The blog channel is awfully close to the micro-blog one, like Twitter, because both are aimed at broadcast something and boost a discussion among readers. At the same time, they are different since bloggers usually write long article to express their thoughts while micro-bloggers post very few sentences in order say something.

Now that different kind of social media have been illustrated and explained, it is important to know how they were born and gradually developed over time in order to fully understand their importance and usefulness within our society.

1.2.2 How social media were born and developed over time

As far as birth and evolution are concerned, all could be traced back in the 1960s, when people saw the advent of email, even if internet was not available to everyone yet until 1991. The purpose of email was just to exchange messages from a specific computer to another one. Almost thirty years later, in 1978, two students at the University of Chicago launched in the market BBS, a system facilitating the exchange of files and messages among students. Standing for “bulletin board system”, it allowed users to upload and download software, exchange messages with others and read news. In the 1980s public saw the advent of some new virtual communities through which users could chat and text with each other. Among the main popular there was IRC, standing for Internet Relay Chat, consisting on a real-time chat allowing group conversation, data transfers and private messages too (Seymour, Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson, 2011).

At the beginning of 1990s, what in hindsight we would have called web 1.0 was being born: internet started to disclose all over the world by becoming increasingly a mass service, and a lot of web companies were emerging. They started delivering more and more online experiences to the public through online platform and communities where users could make their own profile and discuss each other. It was the time in which social networks and blogging services started developing. The first online platform that could look like a social media, specifically a social network, was SixDegrees.com. Active from 1997 to 2001, it offered different options to its users: creating a personal profile, building a network of friends, messaging with them, posting status, visiting friends’ profile, and consulting the network. Along with other social media, SixDegrees constituted at that time the pioneer of the most important and popular social network like Friendster, MySpace, LinkedIn and Facebook (Massarotto, 2011). About blogging services instead, the main popular was Epinions, consisting on a site through which consumers left their feedback about a certain product and read other customer opinions (Seymour, Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson, 2011).

In the first years of XXI century a lot of social networking sites sprang up and the social media industry received a great boost transforming the interaction of individuals and organizations. Users bound by the same interests, passions, hobbies, and age discussed online about any kind of field. They started sharing information about music, movies, education, sports and whatever they wanted to talk about. The first social network of the coming century was Friendster that, founded in California in 2002, had the same purpose

of SixDegrees. It was aimed at connecting as much people as possible and creating the largest world community and it quickly achieved success reaching 3 million users. Unfortunately, in 2015 it closed because users were required to pay in order to subscribe. In 2003 was developed LinkedIn, a professional social network focused only on connecting workers with companies and working colleagues with each other (Massarotto, 2011). In the same year was founded MySpace, a social networking website standing out from the others as users could customize their profile giving detailed information about themselves and explaining their interests and hobbies. It also offered musical artists the ability to download their music into mp3 songs thanks to special profile (Seymour, Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson, 2011). What is remarkably interesting of social networks is how they became more and more detailed over time, more complete and multitasking, by increasing functionalities and abilities for users. In 2004 there was the advent of Facebook, a social networking website founded by Mark Zuckerberg during his studies at Harvard University. Initially only its students could access and use it, then it was granted to high school students and sometime later to all who were 13 years old or older. What made it unique, compared to all the other social media, is that it presented some new functionalities like the ability for users to receive automatic notifications and to join groups according to specific common interest or criteria. For example, it offers the possibility to join a group by workplace, high school, university, college, sport team and many other categories. Especially at the beginning, it was very appreciated by students because they could schedule their university life thanks to the Facebook groups. They could create study groups for classes, plan clubs meeting and post comments about parties. They could see which students attended a specific class and decide to do the same or not. In addition, this new social network was completely free, and users were not required to pay anything. Then, another feature making Facebook exclusive and more appreciated compared to the other social networks was the introduction of privacy controls: users were allowed to decide exactly who could read their information and their profile, by limiting it only to the students they wanted to connect to, like classmates or students living in their residential house. Thus, users could easily control their privacy by selecting preferred friends and this new functionality was something that made Facebook fundamentally different from any other form of social media. All these features made this social media grow so fast that, by January 2009, it became the most used social network all over the world. Even, in 2010 Google stated that people used Facebook more than any

other existent website. (Kirkpatrick, 2010). In the following year was launched Youtube, the online video community today known as the first entertainment website in the world that allow millions of users to discover, share and watch originally created videos. It is also offered a forum where people can connect, discuss, and inspire others across the world (Seymour, Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson, 2011).

Year by year many other social media were created and launched in the market: Twitter in 2006, Instagram and Pinterest in 2010 and so on. People were assisting at a constant growth of social media both in terms of quantity and category. In 2010, according to “Wave5”, the annual research on social media conducted by Universal McCann that is one of the most popular media and advertising agency all over the world, more than 70% of respondents used a social network while three years before were less than 50%. And in addition, respondents that decided to open a blog rose from 30% to 50% in two years only while those that watched online video were 30% in 2005 and five years later were almost 90% (Massarotto, 2011). Why did this phenomenon spread so fast? A study conducted by the George Washington University School of Business tried to explain it by saying that people are so attracted to social media mainly for the goals they can reach through them. In particular, social media enable individuals to do four main activities: to connect, to create, to consume and to control. Specifically, social media ease and boost interactions that connect people. Through web- or mobile-based applications, people can create, by posting and uploading something. They also can consume as they read, watch and listen to the content. Finally, applications of social media allow individuals to manage their image and reputation as well as to monitor the applications, like page layout, rating and tagging, and general “settings” as privacy options and profile. These social media general capabilities easily explain their popularity and why there are so many users spending so much time on them (Hoffman, Novak, 2012). What’s more, individuals are more likely to create their own social media profile if that social media is popular among their network of friends. Then, from a consumer’s point of view, relying on information communication technologies and in particular on social media provides a number of benefits, that will be better illustrated later, in terms of efficiency, convenience, participative and richer information (Tiago, Veríssimo, 2014). All this being said, it is clear that people and companies will rely more and more on digital, both on social media and online tools in general.

1.3 Digital marketing: how companies do marketing online

1.3.1 What is digital marketing?

During the last 25 years marketing landscape has changed very quickly. Since the spread of the use of information and communication technology all over the world, multinational corporations started considering to be more and more important the need to be present on internet and, in particular, the creation of a “digital relationship” with customers. What’s more, digital technologies and tools as smartphones, IoT and artificial intelligence all promise significant transformations within consumers' lives in the near future. Also quantitative data can confirm that rising and growing use of internet worldwide: in 2019 the 43% of global shoppers research products online via social networks, which means that almost one in every two people around the world rely on social networks in order to discover and buy products. Then, sales derived from mobile devices have grown at a very high pace, between 22% and 27% of all online sales (Kannan, Li, 2017). As regards U.S., in 2015 online sales corresponded to 7.4% of overall retail spending and that was the highest percentage since tracking began in 1999. Five years later the same figure has grown up to 11% and, even if it could feel small when you consider the huge size of the topic of ecommerce, it is an indication of good health since the share of e-commerce sales continues to increase in the retail industry. Therefore, it is normal to expect this percentage to exponentially increase in the next years (Estay, 2020). In short, it is getting more and more evident that sales channels are moving toward the online environment and marketing is required to do the same accordingly. That is the reason why nowadays digital marketing can be considered as a strategic asset for every company. One can refer to the term “digital marketing” also as “online marketing”, “internet marketing” or “web marketing”. In the USA, for example, it is studied as online marketing, in Italy it is called web marketing while UK and most of the world call it digital marketing (Sathya, 2017). Having said that, the term “digital marketing” has evolved over time by assuming multiple meanings, from a more specific term regarding the marketing of products and services by relying on digital channels to a broader term referring to the process of using digital technologies in order to acquire customers, retain them, build customer preferences, increase sales and promote brands. According to the American Marketing Association, digital marketing is a set of activities, institutions, and processes that, eased by digital technologies, aims to create, communicate and deliver value for customers and other stakeholders. A more inclusive definition considers digital marketing as “an adaptive,

technology-enabled process by which firms collaborate with customers and partners to jointly create, communicate, deliver, and sustain value for all stakeholders” (Kannan, Li, 2017). Dave Chaffey, a marketing expert, and author of the book “Digital marketing: strategy, implementation and practice”, defines it as “the application of digital media, data and technology integrated with traditional communications to achieve marketing objectives”. In particular, it focuses on the coordination of different forms of online company presence, as websites and social media company pages, combined with online communication techniques such as social media marketing, search engine marketing, email marketing, online advertising and partnerships created with other websites (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Common to all these definitions is the single goal of digital marketing: to help the business to acquire new customers and provide services to the existing ones, by building with them strong and long-term relationships.

1.3.2 Digital marketing advantages and disadvantages

If a company’s goal is to develop an effective digital marketing strategy, it needs to be aware of all the advantages and disadvantages that digital marketing carries within itself. Thus, management will be able to identify to what extent and which tools of digital marketing are best suited to their business. In general, the main key benefits and advantages brought out by digital marketing are (Veleva, Tsvetanova, 2019):

- a) *High level of interactivity* – it facilitates and boosts an interactive communication with consumers and online users by making the company more responsive to the customer needs and expectations for seeking information. This also increases the engagement rate and customer loyalty.
- b) *Overcoming geographical barriers in marketing activities* – digital communication helps businesses to effectively communicate with their customers in real time anywhere in the world.
- c) *Higher profitability* – digital marketing activities require less investment than traditional channels by allowing management to reach and acquire more customers with the same spent efforts. Activities performed online are a very low-cost method of collecting marketing information and research, in particular as regards customer perceptions about products and services (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

- d) *More convenience for consumers* – thanks to the use of digital technologies, consumers receive much more, better, and more precise information on products and services, and buy them directly at home by saving a lot of time.
- e) *Reaching a broader pool of customers* – it allows businesses to reach a huge number of users and to potentially make high sales volume through online platforms such as blog and social networks.
- f) *Increasing brand awareness* – thanks to qualitative online advertisement and well-managed social network campaigns, businesses can increase the traffic to their websites and the knowledge consumers have about their brand
- g) *High degree of measurability of the achieved marketing results* – results deriving from digital marketing campaigns are available in real time and more accurately measurable compared to the traditional ones thanks to the use of modern statistical tools.
- h) *High degree of personalization of advertising messages* - thanks to interactive communication and to the collected online information on consumers, companies can create individual offers perfectly targeted and customized by responding to their needs and desires in a very precise way. Thus, they can increase the consumer satisfaction too.
- i) *Better tracking and analysis of competitors* – since competitors operate online and implement digital marketing strategy as well, it is possible to monitor which digital tools they use and how they use them in order to compare their activities with yours.

Having said that, it results that companies must exploit both digital marketing tools and channels because of the several benefits and positive reasons listed above. At the same time, they have to consider the disadvantages hiding in digital strategy application. The potential negative aspects of digital marketing are (Veleva, Tsvetanova, 2019):

- a) *Business organizations become a kind of “open book” for competitors* - this is one of the most important disadvantages, as digital campaigns can be quickly copied by their competitors. For example, trademarks, logos and corporate identities can be imitated and copied by competitors with the view of misleading consumers in order to gain more market share.

- b) *Digital reputation can be destroyed by negative feedback* – it could happen that consumers leave negative comments and feedback on products and services. Being online implies that potentially everyone reads and sees those comments, which risks to seriously damage the image and the reputation of a brand and to bring to customer outflow.
- c) *Overload of internet space with online advertising messages* – when there are too many online advertising messages in form of banners, consumers can irritate and this is likely to affect their attitude and opinion towards the company.
- d) *Digital marketing is not perfectly suitable for all types of businesses* – in fact there are several products and services whose related client segment cannot be reached by the tools offered by digital marketing. This can happen for several reasons, for example when users never connect to internet or don't trust the information they could obtain online.
- e) *Mismatch between digital marketing strategy and overall marketing strategy* – companies always need to keep aligned the content on both online and offline environment otherwise it risks not to achieve the targeted results and to be less efficient by misusing invested funds.

Although digital marketing presents some disadvantages, it provides a huge range of opportunities for a more effective customer relationship management and for gaining competitive advantage. It encourages the activities of marketing professionals and shortens the time needed to run marketing campaigns. What is essential for management within a company is to exploit these opportunities to the greatest possible extent according to their own business, by selecting the digital tools that better suit to them. But in doing so, it is important to evaluate the potential negative effects for each implemented digital activity and to try to avoid them. Then, in order to work effectively and efficiently, digital marketing strategy must not be considered on their own but always as dependent on the overall marketing development strategy of the company. In this way only, management will be able to exploit the most of the full potential of digital environment and available technologies with the view of achieving higher economic results and competitiveness. In the next paragraph the main digital marketing tools will be illustrated and described.

1.3.3 Digital marketing tools

To develop a digital strategy, there are three main types of media channels to be considered and companies need to choose the most suitable according to their core business. Obviously, by exploiting all the channels, it is more likely to acquire new customers. It depends on the company size, on the available financial and human resources and on the industry which they operate in. Anyway, what is certain is that today business entities must deal with a more competitive and complex buying environment than ever before, within which customer journeys involve several ways to be present online. If the purpose is to influence and reach customers online, then marketers should refer to the following three channels which will be described and analysed below:

- 1) owned media
- 2) paid media
- 3) earned media

The category of owned media refers to all forms of online media owned and controlled by a company. The main ones are website, blog, social media, email list and mobile apps. Usually, this kind of digital marketing tools are the first ones that companies use and rely on because at least in the beginning they are completely free. They can manage all these tools by themselves without paying anything to external collaborator. Obviously if they want to make them more structured, they will have to pay someone specialized in that tool or to increase their competences. They are normally the most common media and especially nowadays almost every company has at least one of them, in particular the website. It could be said it would be very strange and rare to find a business entity without a website.

As far as paid media are concerned, also known as bought media, they include those marketing activities requiring at least an investment to be paid in order to gain visitors, reach or conversions through pay per click, display ads networks, influencers or affiliate marketing. Basically, companies must incur a cost to implement these activities and exploit this type of channel. The third and last channel is represented by earned media, consisting of a set of activities born as a result of social media marketing: they are worth of mouth, conversations among customers in the social networks and the sharing of marketing content by customers within blog and online communities such as mentions, shares, reposts and reviews. Customers become the channel (Chaffey, Ellis-Chadwick,

2019).

Figure 1.9 below sums up the three different types of media channels by highlighting their main features and characteristics and showing how they can be integrated with each other. It will be better described later in this chapter, but some insights are pointed out hereafter. An effective and comprehensive content strategy cannot include only one media channel. A company should consider a healthy mix of them: earned, owned, and paid media. Only then it will be able to build a coherent and professional digital marketing strategy that will be more likely to yield some results in the future.

As regards earned media, they are a pretty much special and different kind of media channel compared to the other ones. That is why its content and activities are not performed by company but by users navigating online. These activities directly come from the owned and paid media's activities but are not under the control of the company: they are just a consequence of what that business did before. Earned media concern activities such as shares, reposts, and reviews and everyone can make them. At the same time, once the traffic of earned media starts increasing, also owned and paid media will be affected by the earned ones.

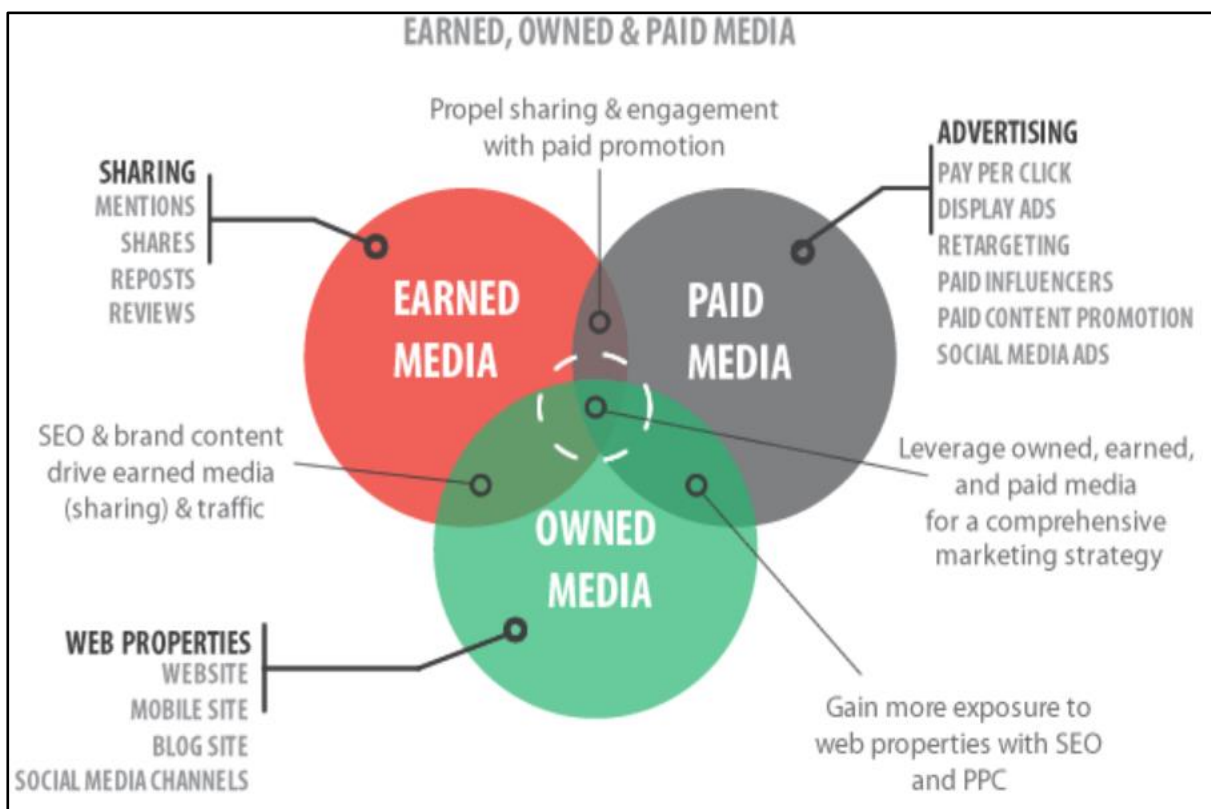


Figure 1.9 – Digital marketing trifecta: earned, owned, and paid media (Andrews, 2019)

1.3.4 Owned media

Owned media include digital marketing channels over which a company exercises complete control. The main popular and used owned media are website, e-mail direct marketing, mobile sites, app, and social media. The first four will be analysed below while social media, being the main focus of this research, will be explored later in a separate chapter. Owned media represent the building block for online marketing activities for several reasons such as the control of the company over the content, the longevity and versatility of what is published through the channels and the cost efficiency because they can be freely used (BigCommerce, 2020).

1.3.4.1 Website

The first owned media to be analysed is the website of a company. A website represents a must-have tool among digital marketing channels since it is the platform devoted to educating audiences about brand, products, and services. This tool represents the first image and expression of the brand and it is responsible for the first consumer's opinion. It is the first touchpoint users have with the brand. This implies to have a solid understanding of target audience and an effective content marketing strategy. Regardless the size of the company, a website gives the business the online presence needed to communicate and to sell to prospects. Whether business is just an e-commerce or it is something focused more on service rather than products, be it B2C or B2B, it must invest in a website. Through posting announcements on the website, the brand provides existing and potential customers with valuable and relevant content to help them to solve their doubts and pain points. Since websites present several functionalities, it is also possible to distribute different types of content such as articles, infographics, and video. Due to these reasons, if a brand wants to implement a digital marketing strategy, it should start from creating a website that is clear as much as possible for customers navigating on it (Aguila, 2019). As far as website performance is concerned, there are several indicators cited in literature and used by companies to understand how effective their website is. What is more, it is important to know there is not always the "perfect performance indicator". Since each company is different from the other and since every business has its own goal, metrics can vary accordingly as well. Probably some metrics will be suitable for certain companies, while other metrics will be appropriate for other companies. Therefore, when management and marketing executive wonder which are the best performance indicators to be used to measure the quality of the website and digital

marketing activities, it is appropriate to remind them that it depends on the business. Anyway, it is possible to identify the main popular and used indicators. An interesting study published in the “Expert Systems With Applications”, an international journal studying the exchange of information regarding expert and intelligent systems applied in industry, government, and universities worldwide, describes the main important performance indicators to be considered in order evaluate the effectiveness of a website (Schafer, Kummer, 2013). This research integrates the goal underlying the website, the web strategy, and the related web metric. The first goal is commerce: it focuses on getting customers who visit the site to purchase goods or services directly from the website. Here, the related strategy is the building of brand equity since it addresses customer loyalty in repeated purchases. The related web metric is the conversion rate indicating the percentage of users visiting the site who take the desired action that is usually a purchase. The second goal is the creation of content and media focused on drawing in visitors and immersing them through the site and the strategy is the relationship between the brand’s values and its customers. The best web metric here is the engagement rate, such as a high number of visit actions or long time spent by visiting the website that could indicate a high degree of engagement. The last goal is support and self-service that help users to find the answers for solving specific problems. The related strategy is based on customer satisfaction that strongly depends on the the provision of the searched information. The web metric allowing to evaluate customer satisfaction is the page depth that is the average number of pages visited by a user within a browser session: it means the number of clicks needed to reach a specific page from the homepage using the shortage path. In fact, a low page depth indicates a good level of architecture and support of the website to find the searched information because you spend few times to reach the page you are looking for. If you need to click more than 3 times to reach a page, that page will perform poorly as search engines will find it difficult to crawl it compared to a page available in one click (Schafer, Kummer, 2013). Figure 1.10 below sums up the three cited performance indicators: conversion rate, engagement rate and page depth.

Website function	Related relationship marketing strategy	Focus of web metric
Commerce	Brand equity	Conversion
Content/media	Relationship maintenance	Visit depth, engagement
Support/self-service	Customer Satisfaction	Page depth, fact-finding

Figure 1.10 - Website functions, RMS, and metrics

Beyond those metrics, there many other ones that are worth mentioning. Firstly, the bounce rate, which provides information on how well the website is engaging visitors. It measures the percentage of single-page site visits out of the total ones. In fact, to bounce from a website means to leave it before doing some activities on it such as writing a comment or visiting another page on the website. This is a particularly useful metric to be considered because it could mean a bad online user experience or a too much poor or irrelevant content (Nichols, 2018). Another important metric is the number of unique website visitors. They are first time visitors to your site in a short period of time. Even if they navigated on your site before, they are counted only once. To determine the number, it considers the users' IP address combined with a cookie on the browser visitors are using. Thus, if an individual visits a website 50 times today, he will still be counted as one unique user unless he enters the site through another device. Unique visitors indirectly give a huge contribution to the company because it is possible to understand the web traffic over time. That is important also because it can analyse potential spikes and lags in the numbers of visitors and understand the cause (Mod Girl Marketing, 2017). Of course, also the total number of website's visitors is very important to understand how many potential leads turn into customers. Like conversion rate, the website traffic-lead ratio is essential too because it gives company the full picture of its website quality and performance. Leads are visitors that have expressed an interest while navigating on the website through a request or a comment. The metric measures how many website visitors convert to leads and it is particularly important for those companies whose core business is the online commerce. It is useful to know how targeted the traffic is and eventually adapt the better marketing strategy (Klipfolio, 2020).

1.3.4.2 E-mail direct marketing

The second digital marketing tool almost every company relies on is the e-mail direct marketing. This is a form of direct marketing using electronic mail to communicate commercial messages to the target audience: it basically consists of promoting products and services via email. The reasons why this tool is so popular within companies' digital strategy are many: firstly, it allows to distribute information to a huge range of specific potential customers with a low investment and in a truly short delivery time. Then, advertiser can "push" the message to the target audience by easily tracking the sent messages. Moreover, this tool boosts and rises internet traffic which in turn increases brand awareness. Anyway, as a first step, to conduct an email marketing campaign, a

company must create its own mailing list which is the list of email addresses to which it sends the message. In this way, company knows exactly how and where it has collected the email addresses. As a second step, once the mailing list is prepared, it can start sending them the newsletter. (Vasudevan, 2013). Another advantage of e-mail direct marketing is the possibility to personalize and customize the content of the messages without hurting marketing budget (Aguila, 2019). As regards performance indicators, the Digital Marketing Institute describes them by premising that whatever is the company's goal, email marketing could always assist the success of the business. The first indicator to be considered is the "Click Through Rate", which measures the number of users that visit the website through the email. It can be considered somehow as more valuable than open rate, which indicates the number of users opening the email. In order to evaluate how recipients are interacting and engaging with email company sent and whether or not they are converting, the right metric to be used is click through rate, even if open rate is a good metric to compare the performance of newsletter on a weekly basis. Also, it can really help company to understand how to adjust and optimise email marketing efforts (Digital Marketing Institute, 2017). Another important metric is "Conversion Rate", measuring how many users do that specific action or reach that specific goal that emails want to achieve. Goals can vary from capturing leads to soliciting a response or to completing a purchase. The first thing to do is to define this goal. Then it needs to determine the base that best makes sense for the company, for example deciding if basing conversion rate on all sent emails or just on emails that resulted in a click through. Finally, business must calculate the rate by dividing the total conversions by the identified base (Serrano, 2020). The last important metric is the "Subscriber list activity": it consists of tracking both the growth and decline of the subscriber list. A growth in the list is a good signal because company reach and maximises the likelihood of subscribers that engage with emails and maybe convert. On the opposite, a list decay is usually inevitable because, in Marketing Sherpas' opinion, email marketing databases naturally decrease by 22,5% each year. In case of growth over time, company should try to analyse this success and understand if recipients are particularly sensitive to the content type or the topic, or whether this increasing in the list is correlated with marketing activity carried out through other channels (Digital Marketing Institute, 2017).

1.3.4.3 Mobile app

As far as mobile app is concerned, it is a digital marketing tool that developed and spread so much over the last years because of the increasing number of mobile phone users. According to a study conducted by Yahoo, the 90% of time these users spent online is dedicated to the use of apps and games. So, serving promotional content to mobile users is getting more and more useful for companies. Also, thanks to geo-targeting strategies, companies can recommend products or services more conveniently according to the customer's location. Moreover, mobile application collects customer data used by company to map out an effective mobile marketing strategy (Aguila, 2019). Another advantage is represented by the expansion of audiences since people are more likely to connect to the business and to interact with it. Companies can make their own brand available around the world and not only for a niche. Also, through app they push notifications to users by reminding them of some potential updates about products and services (Nathaly, 2020). As regards the most used metrics, the first to be considered is "Retention Rate" that indicates the percentage of customers company retention. Usually, companies calculate the number of people using the app within a set period of time out of the number of people using app within a previously set time. In this way you are able to calculate the retention rate. At the same time, it is possible to calculate "Churn Rate", that measures the percentage of users ditching the app. The last two important metrics are "Daily Active Users" and "Monthly Active Users": the first one tells company how many people use the app each day and this is useful to understand how indispensable that app is for users that installed it. The second one tells the same kind of information calculated every month and not every day (Kearl, 2016). All marketers have to keep in mind to use at least these metrics in order to understand how effective their mobile marketing content are. In addition, they should remember how important investments in mobile app are for the overall digital marketing strategy and to keep the activities in different digital channels aligned.

Said that, the other owned media channels are represented by social media and blog sites. While the latter are less and less used, social media are probably the most used owned media all over the world. That is why they will be explored and deepened in a unique paragraph later. Meanwhile the text continues by illustrating the main important paid and earned media.

1.3.5 Paid media

Paid media concerns all the external marketing activities involving a paid placement. They might seem far from traditional marketing, but it is not true. In fact, as traditional marketing, companies must pay a third party to broadcast the message to other individuals. The main used and known forms of paid media are “pay-per-click” advertising, search engine marketing (SEM), display advertising, paid influencers, retargeting, and paid content promotion. All of these are an essential component of revenue growth and brand awareness for online businesses. Nowadays every company cannot help it (BigCommerce, 2020).

1.3.5.1 Pay per click and SEM

Pay-per-click, or PPC, is an online advertising digital marketing technique according to which advertisers pay each time a user clicks on one of their online ads. There are different types of PPC but one of the most common and used by companies is the paid search advertising. These ads usually appear when people search for things online through a search engine like Google, when they have to make a purchase, or to buy something. In this kind of advertising, as said above, companies are charged only when a user clicks, hence the name is “pay-per-click”. In order to make ads appear with the results on a search engine, they must be subject to what is known as the Ad Auction, the automated process used by Google and other important search engines to identify the relevance and validity of advertisements appearing on their result pages. The more valid and relevant the ads are, the more likely they appear in the first positions. That automated process consists on a bidding system such that advertisers must bid on the words they want to display or trigger their ads. These words are known as “keywords” and are essential for determining the ads appearance order. For example, in the case of Google, when the user starts his research by submitting the words, it performs a complex algorithmic calculation that the Ad Auction is based upon and determines which ads are displayed and seen by the user, which is the order of appearance and which is the advertiser. Also, as company pays for each click on its ads, it is essential to bid only on keywords that are relevant to its business so to earn a return from its ads spend. This explains the frequent use of PPC technique. In this way, the investment that company does for each user click is offset by at least a visit on its website (WorldStream, 2020).

Search engine marketing, or SEM, is another paid digital tool consisting on the promotion of websites by increasing their visibility in search engine results pages. Before defining SEM, it is worth introducing another digital marketing tool which search engine marketing is based upon and that is the search engine optimization (SEO). This tool aims to make a company's website more visible on the search engines by considering and evaluating the keywords submitted by prospects during their research. Keywords are phrases or words users write to find online content that companies can then utilize to connect with users looking for services and products. In order to be relevant, keywords must be as specific as possible and must be consistent with the content within the website. Moreover, the exact words have to be contained within the website. The more specific, consistent and relevant keywords are, the more the website visibility increases (Digital Marketing Institute, 2020). This is SEO and its main advantage is that companies do not have to pay for it because it is completely free. Regarding SEM, it is a digital marketing tool allowing to adjust or rewrite website content for achieving a better or higher position in the results pages of a search engine. It relies on a mixture of paid advertising and search engine-optimized website design as just explained above. Basically, the main difference between SEM and SEO is that SEM is not free. Brands must pay a price to make their ads visible in the first position. Moreover, even though businesses are aware of the significance and value of SEO, SEM is more effective. It promotes the business or website to online customers but also sends a more targeted traffic to the website, whereas SEO provides only better organic search results. In a way, SEO could be considered as a subset of SEM. In other words, that search engine marketing puts the focus on purchasing ads appearing on the results pages of search engine like Google and Yahoo. If anyone is willing to pay higher fee for an advertisement, then the ads will appear in higher positions. That is what represents search engine marketing. In the last years, the growth of this tool has been unbelievable. The 61% of internet users all over the world look for products online and 44% of internet shoppers use a search engine. Also, 130 billion searches conducted per month on the web worldwide have been recorded. Thanks to many internet users utilizing search as their first option for finding or buying something, search engine marketing has become one of the most effective digital marketing techniques, allowing to improve the ranking of a company on search engines as well as to increase its brand awareness and visibility and to find more suitable customers. (Ranga, Ranga, 2014).

1.3.5.2 Display advertising

Display advertising is a form of online advertising according to which marketers use banner ads and other visual advertisement formats to promote their product on websites, apps or social media. With digital advertising global spends that will probably cross USD 333 billion this year, it will be more and more essential for brands to understand the display advertising tool. Display ads represent a lucrative way of advertising for marketers whose purpose is to reach and acquire customers. They use a lot of visual media such as texts, images as well as videos in order to catch people's attention. Brands usually put display ads in specific corners of webpages but also in social media platforms, and they are nearly always showcased in the form of a banner ad, with a text or a graphic. And all campaigns that range from the ones using text to those relying on attractive videos can be considered under display advertising. The most successful display ads promotions rely on a combination of visual media and not only on one of them. In this way company is more likely to stand out on the internet. As every single digital media channel, it is important to measure its effectiveness and how it is working out. Below they will be illustrated some of the most important key performance indicators.

The first one is "reach": it measures how many users see the advertisement and, in particular, it indicates the unique number of views on the display ad. Therefore, the newer viewers are, the higher the reach is. If these ads do not reach the targeted and expected audience, it means that the targeted parameters should be modified. The second KPI to focus on is "impressions". This metric counts the number of times the ad is displayed to a user on a website. Once a company has determined that, it can evaluate the ad performance against the conversion rates. For example, if the impressions are growing but conversion rate is not, then business may need to rethink the way it manages its display ad. The third important KPI is "click-through rate", already cited in the previous paragraphs, that represents how much users are engaged with the brand, as it counts the number of people who clicked on the advertisement. If this indicator is low, it might be necessary to adopt a different display ad plan, in particular on how the content is displayed. The last crucial indicator is "conversion rate", the most important one because it is the main objective to be reached by running ads. It refers to the number of people who clicked on the ad by reaching the landing page and performed a definitive action like buying a product (BasuMallick, 2020).

1.3.5.3 Paid influencers

Web influencers are another important and increasing form of paid media. The influencer marketing industry is set to grow to \$9.7B by the end of 2020 while in 2019 about 380 agencies and platforms focused on influencer marketing were born. An influencer is someone who has two essential features: first the ability to affect the purchasing decisions of other people thanks to his authority, position, knowledge and relationship with his audience, then a following in a niche, with whom he actively engages. Social media influencers have built a great reputation thanks to their knowledge and expertise on a specific topic or field. They are used to make posts regularly on that specific field through their preferred social media channels and to earn large followings of all the engaged and enthusiastic people who paid a lot of attention to their views. Brands must exploit social media influencers as they have the power to create trends and encourage the followers to buy the products they promote (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2020). The five essential KPIs to focus on are conversion rates, engagement, referral traffic, reach and awareness, and audience growth. All these metrics will help companies to track their progress, to measure success in achieving their goals, and to stay on track with their marketing campaign. Among them, “engagement” the most important because it provides a deeper view of how the campaign is received. Moreover, it is a good indicator of how strong the relationship is with company audience, how relevant brand is and how loyal their customers will be. Also, engagement can be expressed by different actions taken by the audience such as likes, reactions, shares, comments, clicks, votes, pins and many other ones (Digital Marketing Institute, 2020).

1.3.5.4 Retargeting and paid content promotion

The last two important paid media to be considered are respectively retargeting and paid content promotion. As far as retargeting is concerned, also known as remarketing, it consists on a form of digital advertising helping companies to keep their brand in front of bounced traffic after they left their website. For most of them, only 2% of online users converts after the first visit and retargeting tries to help companies reach the 98% of users who do not convert. This is probably the best way to re-engage customers who previously interacted with the brand on internet. By this channel, companies serve advertisements to a customer on external websites or on social media related to the information previously viewed by the customer on the firm's own website (Edmondson, 2020). Technically speaking, retargeting is a cookie-based technology using simple Javascript

code in order to “follow” the company audience all over the Web completely anonymously. Companies place a small and unobtrusive piece of code on their website that is unnoticeable to their website visitors and will not affect their website’s performance. Whenever a new online visitor comes to a site, this code drops an anonymous browser cookie and, when that specific visitor surfs on the Web, the cookie will let company retargeting provider know when to serve ads and to ensure that company ads are provided only to people who have previously surfed on the company website. In this way, retargeting focuses the ad investment only on people who are already familiar with that specific brand and have demonstrated an interest. That’s why a lot of marketers using this marketing channel see a higher ROI than those using other ones (Retargeter, 2020).

As regards paid content promotion, it is getting more and more evident that businesses continue to invest in content marketing. In order to generate more leads and traffic, a lot of brands are now paying to promote their content. This form of digital marketing allows companies to increase the visibility of their content online, to grow their audience and to see a financial return in a faster way. In addition, paid content promotion is more targeted as it is performed on pages that consumers are already interested in and therefore, they are more likely to trust the content. Another strength of this digital marketing activity is the impact on search engine rankings: in fact, the more people see, share, and link the promoted content, the more organic rankings increase. The most known and used paid content promotion opportunity is “native advertising”. This kind activity allows businesses to display their content on specific third-party sites and even if there are several forms of native advertising, the content is usually displayed on social media platforms or news sites, blending with the content of the other site. It appears in-line with other posts or below articles and nearly always it is usually labelled “sponsored” or promoted. The main social media platforms promoted content is displayed in are Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Snapchat. They can guarantee to brands a large visibility and a potential higher reach. Moreover, even if this is not a social media platform, most promoted content is displayed on Google as well, given its popularity. Obviously, on all of these platforms, companies must pay a fee in order to increase the reach of their content, either on a pay-per-click or a cost-per-impression basis (Justesen, 2019).

1.3.6 Earned media

Earned media regard all the content and conversation around a company brand or product, created by other people outside the company such as existing and potential customers, social media followers, fans of the brand or any kind of online user somewhere other than company owned channels. Earned media can be considered as the result and the consequence of company's efforts in paid and owned media. Somehow, it can be thought as the amplification of business activity because news sites and social media users boost brand's campaign and help to spread the word. Earned media cover several digital actions performed by external people online. The main actions are press coverage, shares, conversations, mentions and reposts on social media platforms, as well as product reviews and comments about the brand and finally the blog posts managed outside the company. All these activities are forms of word-of-mouth. Obviously, they will grow with the increasing of visibility and reach of the content through social media engagement. That is why effectively investing on owned and paid media, which both generate a high engagement rate, can easily bring the company to exploit an equally effective and intensive earned media. Through social media the customer voice becomes the pulsing heart of the marketing strategy and this is much valuable because it is more likely to be trusted and credible (Smith, 2016). But all these advantages of earned media require time to set up. As already told, earned media represent the result of other marketing efforts but these efforts mean that companies must design, create, and publish the content first. This kind of activity takes time and requires good planning skills, as well as constant updates to make sure the content stays relevant. As for planning and content creation, measuring the effects of earned media takes time too, from a few weeks to a few months. Management can check social metrics, such as likes and shares, nearly immediately, but monitoring impressions, clicks, and the qualitative side of all comments and reviews takes more time. Moreover, there are other disadvantages related to earned media such as the risk of negative publicity and the difficulty of measuring with 100% accuracy. In fact, it is not easy to exactly estimate how much effort is needed to generate word of mouth. Finally, it is almost impossible to determine if an increase in traffic or sales comes only from earned media. Despite these disadvantages, most companies think it is well worth it because it guarantees an authentic trust and loyalty for the brand (Mosley, 2020).

1.3.7. A focus on digital marketing within SMEs

As far as digital marketing implementation, in particular social media, is concerned, it is evident from several studies that the majority of small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are not exploiting the full potential of these new digital tools.

SMEs represent a significant part of the world economy: in Europe the 99% of enterprises are SMEs - of which 92% are micro-enterprises - and these companies generate more than 75% of private sector jobs (Taiminen, Karjaluoto, 2014). Italy counts 99.4% of small business, of which 95.2% micro-enterprises. Because of that, the importance of SMEs cannot be ignored.

The main issue is that they seem not to be keeping pace with digital marketing developments, mainly due to the lack of related knowledge and skills. There are several case studies in literature underlining this issue: according to Cesaroni and Consoli, who analysed a sample of 48 Italian SMEs, even if social media are commonly utilized, SMEs are not always able to exploit them in a truly profitable way. The results say that social media are introduced just because people consider them "fashionable", because their competitors use them and, thus, companies feel forced to do the same. In addition, the analysis found out some reasons why SMEs have trouble implementing and exploiting social media: they are not part of a comprehensive strategic plan, the owner usually has both low technological skills and little awareness of the potential of 2.0 technologies. In addition, having scarce financial resources plays an important role too: in fact, SMEs often cannot afford to hire people with high technological skills, which are crucial to manage and exploit social media (Cesaroni, Consoli, 2015).

A study focused on the norther Italy SMEs was conducted from a broader perspective, namely the industry 4.0., and the reasons why SMEs are still lagging are the lack of a top management's commitment and clear strategic objectives. The lack of a digital strategy, a vision and an action plan. Management should provide the necessary resources and support to the digital implementation phases because only the management itself has the budgeting power to give resources (Pirola, Cimini, Pinto, 2019).

A survey of 268 Swiss SMEs shows that only 35% of them uses social media for business purposes as most executives are influenced by the expectancy of low returns and high perceived related risks (Beier, Wagner, 2016). Another research states that SMEs are not able to exploit social media effectively and to derive benefit from them because they usually launch social business projects without clear goals, and they are reluctant to

invest resources, including both time and money. Also, they always hope to gain too much too fast in term of financial returns (Verheyden, Goeman, 2013).

In addition, Taiminen and Karjaluo define SMEs' marketing activities as informal and spontaneous, by stating that their main focus is always more on sales than marketing. Their initiatives in this area are often disorganized and unplanned, even if some SMEs engage in standard marketing practices like marketing planning. The authors also conducted a research on SMEs in Central Finland revealing that half of the interviewed SMEs utilize digital marketing poorly or extremely poorly and only the 7% referred to their current digital marketing as very good. As for social media like Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube and discussion forums, 50% of the companies did not utilize them at all and only the 13% used them actively (Taiminen, Karjaluo, 2014).

Although a study made by the International Data Corporation showed a growing acceptance of social media in SMEs, it is still evident a substantial difference regarding the use of social media between small and large companies. The results showed by Verheyden and Goeman explain that SMEs are still catching up and lack knowledge, resources and skill,s in order to fill the gap between them and large companies. The latters, in fact, revealed a higher adoption rate of different social media platforms, specifically for internal social networks which are used for internal communication purposes. Moreover, they are likely to use social media more intensively compared to SMEs (Verheyden, Goeman, 2013).

1.4 Social media as digital marketing tool

Social media can really be considered as a digital marketing channel and, nowadays, also a strategic asset for a company, especially at the beginning of its lifecycle during which it needs to promote itself as no-one is aware of its existence. When they were born, in the early 2000s, social media were simply a digital tool used by people to establish personal connections. Over time, they have become something bigger and better than what they were originally envisioned to be, and they have started being exploited more and more by marketers and companies. In particular, according to “Statista”, which has conducted a worldwide survey on more than 5000 companies, as of January 2020 the most used social media platforms are respectively Facebook (94% of respondents), Instagram (76%), LinkedIn (59%), Twitter (53%), YouTube (53%) and Pinterest (25%). It is possible to see how Facebook, counting almost 2,7 billion active users, also remains the most important social media platform among companies both on B2B and B2C industry (Guttmann, 2020). Before explaining them one by one in details, it is appropriate to illustrate the main reasons why a brand should exploit social media within its marketing strategy:

- a) *Getting to tell their story* – having an online presence on any of the social media such as Facebook, Instagram or other ones allows brands to tell their own story to all the followers by inspiring them through their success or past failures. Thus, customers can know better a company and relate to its stories in a more personal level.
- b) *Growing an audience with a small budget* – advertising on social media is one of the least expensive ways of marketing a business online. In fact, a brand can grow as a page on social media platforms by simply staying consistent and posting interesting content for its audience. In this way it can increase its followers without spending too much.
- c) *Promoting products and services* – it is getting much easier to promote products for brands in this digital world because they can put up professional images of product with their details and the audience can freely engage with them under these albums.
- d) *Learning about competitors* – having a social media page allows brands to know their competitors better. Looking at their comments and seeing how they engage with audience can help a business to learn.

- e) *Increasing their overall ROI* – social media marketing can help brands to increase their return on investment. In fact, the cost of advertising on these social media platforms is usually less than the return, giving business more revenue. By social media, companies reach hundreds and thousands of people by targeting ads and by reducing their advertisement costs.
- f) *Building relationship with their target customers* – social media increase not only consumers' trust against a product but also the knowledge they have about the business on a much deeper level. They like when they are being heard as they feel more important if their service providers “take care” of them (Henderson, 2020).

In addition, a lot of research regarding the social media impact on the financial and business performance has been conducted over the past years. A plenty of studies confirm their positive influence and not just in one industry but within several ones such as the food and beverage, the luxury fashion, the hospitality industry and many others. An article published on the “Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management” demonstrated how the social media engagement rate can positively influence the level of sales of new products in a food and beverage company. In particular, the research study subject was Monin Inc., the global supplier of flavoring products for cocktails, coffee and culinary. After calculating a regression between its engagement rate of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram (expressed as the number of comments, likes and shares of the posts on the total number of followers) and the monthly online bottle sales, it resulted that there was a positive correlation between these two variables. Specifically, each month the engagement rate indicated an increase of 61.35 in monthly bottle sales, this means that the effect of the social media engagement rate on the monthly bottle sales is 61.35 percent (Yost, Zhang, Qi, 2020). Again with regard to food and beverage industry, the wine one in particular, it was conducted a survey on 321 German wineries to understand if their use of Facebook had an impact on sales: it resulted that Facebook fans purchased 40 per cent more wine than did non-fans directly from wineries. Moreover, a famous Californian-based winery, La Crema, stated that after their social media marketing campaign they increased ecommerce sales by 134% over the previous year, generating a revenue growth of 12%. In addition, it was conducted a survey on 375 US wineries in order to analyse the social media impact on business performance: the 87% of these wineries have perceived an impact on wine sales thank to social media campaigns and the 18% of these attributed an increase in wine sales of 30% due to social media. The results of this analysis also

demonstrated that wineries using more than two social media platforms experience a greater impact on sales compared to the wineries that use just one social platform. Among them, Facebook appeared to be the most effective and beneficial (Thach, Lease, Barton, 2016).

As far as fashion industry is concerned, a study published in 2012 on the “Journal of Global Fashion Marketing” focused on the impacts of luxury fashion brand’s social media marketing on purchase intention revealed that the activities of creating entertaining posts, interacting with customers and the word of mouth all have a positive influence on purchase intention. Among them, the most effective is to create entertaining posts, in fact an increase of this social activity generates an increase of 31% in consumer purchase intention. Consumers seemed highly sensitive to this activity and, thus, luxury fashion brands should heavily focus on it (Kim, Ko, 2012).

As for hospitality industry, it was demonstrated that the bed and breakfast (B&B) business segment is positively influenced by social media activities. After gathering data from 144 B&B proprietors located in the US, it resulted that YouTube, Twitter and Facebook were some of the most social media used for generating online sales. In particular, an increase of one unit in social media outreach efforts, expressed as experience about social media, hours a week spent on them and making decision based on social media feedback, online sales increase of 51% (Momany, Alshboul, 2016).

In the financial industry, literature revealed that 5,000 additional Facebook likes per day generated a 1% increase in the share price of a company traded on the Spanish stock exchange. Whereas regarding Twitter, to reach the same goal (a 1% increase in the share price), these companies need 1,000 additional followers per day. These are just some of the several benefits Facebook can offer to the companies using it within their digital marketing strategy (Paniagua, Sapena, 2014).

As for gaming and movie industries, a study demonstrated that a 1% increase in blogs casting positive opinion on a specific movie generated a growth in the number of daily movie viewer (in sales) of 0.01%. Comments and opinion left by consumers are particularly important for other potential customers (Yao, et al., 2018). This simply means to exploit the interaction and word of mouth which social media like blogs and social network offer to the companies.

Below, the most popular social media platforms will be outlined and analysed in depth with their functionalities, technical features and related performance indicators.

1.4.1 Facebook

Launched in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and other Harvard University students, Facebook is today the most popular social media, or social network, designed to put students, workers and all kinds of people in touch with one another, to share their photos and to meet new people. Nowadays it counts about 2,7 billion active users and its advertising audience, which is the potential number of people that marketers can reach using advertisements on Facebook, is 2,09 billion. This means that 35% of population aged 13+ is potentially reached by Facebook ads (Kemp, 2020). These data alone are enough to prove why more and more companies are exploiting Facebook for their marketing strategies, with the purpose of reaching as many people as possible. In addition, several studies confirmed that exploiting Facebook within a digital marketing strategy can improve business performance. The University of Miami discovered that user comments on company Facebook posts positively influence company revenue: in fact, after gathering data about 346 out of S&P 500 companies, it resulted that an increase of 1% in the number of comments yields about a 0.0063% increase in revenue and that the more comments a company receives, the more revenue the company makes. It also found that a 1% increase in the valence of digital engagement, which refers to the positive comments written by users, raises revenue by about .0004%. This means that positive comments on a company Facebook posts have a positive impact on revenue (Yoon, et al., 2018). Another study conducted by the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology about the relationship between Facebook “likes” and social commerce sales confirmed a positive correlation. In particular, the study subject was Groupon, which is leader in social commerce by offering daily discounted deals on multiple commodities and service goods and the study sample size was represented by 1327 deals per day. They discovered that an increase of 1% in the number of likes generates an increase up to 0,37% in sales and that the impact of Facebook “likes” is greater for experience goods than for search ones. This is probably due to the fact that people are more likely to trust an experience good only after someone else has tried and approved it (Lee, Lee, Oh, 2015). An academic research conducted by the University of Lisbon in 2014 compared fans and non-fans of the Zara brand on Facebook in terms of customer satisfaction and loyalty level. It found that Zara fans showed a higher customer satisfaction level of 9.7% and, as for loyalty, the level related to fans was higher compared to that of non-fans by 13.9%. These findings mean that Facebook has a positive effect on achieving customer satisfaction and loyalty

(Gamboa, Goncalves, 2014).

Before explaining the advantages that this social media offers, it is useful to know how it works. Once a user registers for the first time, he creates his own profile which is technically the webpage other members will see when they look him up. Profile tells who he is and what are his interests. Thus, as the main purpose of Facebook is to create a dense network of contacts by finding old and new friends, this social media gathers information about that user, so that members can meet old classmates or co-workers on Facebook. By going into details, a profile allows to have a picture of the member, a friends section showing the pictures of users that have befriended on Facebook and personal information such as birthday, education, work history and main interests. When visiting other member's profile, a user can also send a private message or add that member as a Facebook friend. In the latter case, the next time the other member logs in, he will see this friend request and can decide to accept, reject or ignore it. Then, there is a status update section showing several notices such as messages a user receives, invitations to events or invitation to join specific Facebook groups too, where users can discuss with each other about a particular topic (Strickland, 2019). One of the main features Facebook is based upon is that each user can share posts, photos, video or any thought on a section named "home page". Another feature is the ability for users to put a so called "like", if he appreciates it, to a specific post, photo or video. Users can also leave other types of feedback such as "Love", "Ahah", "Wow", "Sigh" and "Grr" according to what they think about it. They also can leave a comment or re-share that post. All these actions are always aimed at boosting interaction and encouraging a dense network of contacts. While the purpose of users is to meet old and new friends, the goal of business owners, artists and public figure is to increase brand awareness and consumer's engagement thanks to the visibility and popularity Facebook offers. About that, there are several ways businesses use Facebook for their digital marketing strategies and campaigns. Firstly, creating their own Facebook page represents a great free marketing tool for companies to identify themselves and to develop their brand identity, not just through listing product offerings but also by posting images, video and links on a customizable page. The performance indicators to be tracked are both the number of followers and the number of "like" left by users on the website page. Moreover, thanks to Facebook Insights, a section available on the page, companies can check important performance information regarding other users such as actions performed on page, views, likes, post reach, post engagement,

recommendations, and orders (Enfroy, 2020). Finally, companies can list their products, along with related prices, on the profile page and those users clicking on the product are usually reported to the online shop. Facebook also provides its own form of advertising through Facebook Ads, appearing in the side columns of the website. This kind of ads includes a headline with copy, an image and a click-through link to the Facebook page or the outside website. Through Facebook ads, it is possible to target by Facebook user data, such as age, location, and education. There is then the possibility of setting ad budgets and the ability of testing ad, which means to run multiple ad versions simultaneously in order to evaluate and compare design and setup. Finally, with Facebook ads companies can rely on performance measurement tools and advertise for a particular area, which is great for local businesses. Having said that, this kind of technique is greatly beneficial because once a user likes the website page, he automatically becomes a follower and company's posts will appear on its Facebook news feed. This usually turns in more users interacting with the brand and in relationships that could end up translating to conversions in the future. The advertising cost is not fixed, it varies a lot and it depends on the targeting options set and competition. Another marketing technique that Facebook offers to businesses is "Facebook Promoted Posts". This tool let official page owners pay a flat rate to have their posts reach a higher number of users, increasing both reach and impressions. The advantage of this technique is that when a fan looks at his news feed and meanwhile a brand has shared a post, the fan is likely to see that post even if his news feed is swamped by other posts. Thus, the advantage is that there are more chances that the post is seen. Moreover, with this tool there is the option to reach not only existing fans but also friends of them (Marss, 2020). Another type of Facebook ad are the "Sponsored stories", based on showing the interaction of a user's friends, such as a "like", to the user himself. These sponsored stories seek to capitalize on the "word of mouth" marketing concept. For example, if a user sees that his friends put a like on a certain page, he will be more inclined to pay attention and to put like to that page too. The underlying goal is to make a user take the same action as their friends. Marketers can choose to show "likes" in order to gain more page likes but also to show friends who have "claimed this offer" if they want to increase this specific action. In addition, sponsored stories represent the only ad format that works on mobile devices.

All these tools are what Facebook offers to marketers and businesses to increase their brand awareness and brand equity. Of course, each brand has to track the effectiveness of

these tools through some specific performance metrics. The first one is “engagement”, that measures the number of times someone took action on a brand’s post (Jackson, 2020). It means sharing the post, clicking a link, making a reaction or leaving a comment. The engagement rate can be calculated as percentage of people who saw the post and then left a like, comment, share or click. This is one of the most important Facebook metrics to be tracked since it is a real sign that people actually like that content (Datapine, 2020). The second indicator is “reach”, representing the number of people that saw the content on Facebook. This can happen through either paid or organic efforts. The third one is “impressions”, showing the number of times that post was seen. Compared to reach, which tells how many people saw the post, impressions indicate the number of times and include also if one post was seen multiple times by a single user. This metrics is important because it gives a good idea of how viral the post is. Then there is the “referral traffic” metric: it is the number of people visiting brand’s website from Facebook. It includes users clicking links in the Facebook posts and visitors that clicked on company’s profile link. Since the final purpose of a business is to make users visit the website, and hopefully to make a purchase, in order to measure the success of content shared on Facebook it is necessary to check the referral traffic. This metric means that people felt so engaged by the post that they took the time to click through and read it. Another important metric is “page likes and follows” and it is worth considering it because users following and liking a company’s page want to be able to have its posts show up in their feed. In addition, the number of likes and followers both indicate the audience size a business has on Facebook. If they don’t grow over time, the company should revisit its content planning. The last crucial metric is CTR, standing for “click-through rate”. It is the percentage of people that see a brand’s Facebook ad and click through to its landing page. If it is low, it means users see the ad but do not take any action. If it is below average, it might need to change the ad copy and image to make it more relevant for the company’s target audience. It is important to track this performance indicator because it directly affects the relevance score of business ad (Jackson, 2020). These are the most important metrics businesses should consider when measuring Facebook performance as a digital marketing tool. It is not necessary to consider them all but only those relevant and crucial for the company itself.

1.4.2 Instagram

Launched in 2010 by Kevin Systrom, a 27-year-old Stanford University graduate, Instagram is a photo and video-sharing social media application counting in 2020 more than 1,1 billion monthly active users. It is also the second-most used social media platform by companies, after Facebook, for their digital marketing strategies and in 2018 it was the second-most downloaded free app on the Apple store, after YouTube. Most of total Instagram users is aged between 25 and 34 years, precisely the 33,1%. The second largest age range is 18-24 years at 29,6%. Thus, almost two thirds of total Instagram audiences are aged less than 34 years, and this makes Instagram particularly attractive for brands (Clement, 2020). Its main focus has always been to feature photographs, in particular those taken on mobile devices. Each user can create a free account to upload both photos and videos, edit them with filters, add location information and hashtag. Hashtag is a word preceded by a hash sign used particularly on social media platforms like Instagram, which allows to identify posts about a specific topic, and it is one of the most distinctive features of this social media. There is also the possibility to include multiple images or videos within the same post and to choose whether to have a public or private profile. With the public one, everything a user posts are seen by every other Instagram user, whereas, with a private one, individuals can approve who can view their posts. As Facebook, Instagram users can interact with other user's posts by clicking on a specific button to "like" a post, to write a comment or to share the post itself. Also, a user can start "following" another one which means it will see that user's photos and videos in his feed (Blyston, 2020). Then, users can send private messages and chat with their Instagram friends. Today, among the most Instagram popular features there is "Instagram Stories", introduced few years ago. This functionality allows to post photos or videos only for 24 hours after the original posting, after that they disappear. It has been so successful that during this year about 500 million people have used Instagram Stories every day. Another innovation added few years ago regards "Instagram Highlights": it is about groups of "stories" that a user can create as folder sections on his Instagram profiles and that, unlike Instagram stories, do not disappear (Bojkov, 2020). Another recent feature is "IGTV", which allows users to share high-quality videos up to 60-minutes long (Hotmart, 2020). The content of IGTV usually consists of cooking videos, tutorials, interviews with celebrities and product reviews. All these features and new functionalities have made Instagram so popular and so much appreciated all over the world that from 2013 to 2018 users increased from 90

million to 1 billion (Iqbal, 2020). Then, to give an idea about the power and visibility it can offer to businesses, just look at its advertising audience, the number of people reached through Instagram advertisements: it is 1,08 billion users (Kemp, 2020). Moreover, statistics tell us that 90% of Instagram users follow at least one business account and the 60% of people usually discover new products on this platform. A study from the literature reveals that Instagram is one of the best platforms to advertise on, because the engagement with brands on social media is 10 times higher compared Facebook, 54 times higher than Pinterest, and 84 times higher than Twitter (Abed, 2018). A research conducted from the Bentley University, located in Massachusetts, has demonstrated a positive relationship between the size of Instagram audience, expressed by the number of Instagram followers, and revenues within the retail-food industry. The study reveals that an Instagram followers' increase of 1% generates an increase of 0,651% in sales revenues in a specific annual quarter. This means that gaining more followers could generate more revenues (Chang, Peng, Berger, 2018). Moreover, Instagram has proved to have a positive effect in the sportswear industry too. As an example, the Adidas' CEO Kasper Rorsted largely attributes to Instagram the 40% increase of online sales in the first three months of 2019, by defining this social media as "the most important thing for our online sales" (Joseph, 2019). These are some data explaining why doing marketing on Instagram is likely to be an effective investment and management decision. Practically speaking, there are some ways to do it: first of all, optimizing your profile, especially the picture which is the first impression new visitors have about the brand. Because of that, it must be consistent with brand's values. Then, making "Instagram bio" as effective as possible. Instagram bio is a 150-character maximum text through which a brand describes itself just below the picture. It is very important for companies because it allows to tell who they are and why people should follow them (Decker, 2017). After setting profile and beyond the posted content, there are some very essential marketing paid techniques. The first one is "Instagram advertising": companies pay to post sponsored content, which usually are photo or video since they are more attractive and more likely to engage online users. Through this technique, companies reach a larger and more targeted audience, grow their website traffic, generate new leads, and move the current ones down the funnel with the hope they convert to buyers. It can be especially powerful if the business works within a visual or creative industry like the restaurant industry or craft marketing. It already incredibly worked, in fact during March 2017 more than 120 million Instagram

users visited a website, got called, emailed and direct messaged to know better a business based on an Instagram ad. As far as cost is concerned, the model is based on CPC, cost-per-click, and CPM, cost per impressions. Prices depend on Instagram's ad auction and usually cost a little bit more than Facebook ads. In particular, since the ads are so much targeted, companies could end up paying \$5 a CPM (Whitney, 2020). The second advertising technique that businesses can exploit is "Influencer marketing". About that, Instagram is by far the best performing platform for reaching new audiences quickly. In fact, it counts an average engagement rate of 3,21% compared to 1.5% across all social networks. The main strength of this technique is that there are no barriers like in traditional advertising as customers know the brand through a trusted source represented by the influencer and when a product or service is recommended by an influencer, it is like receiving a recommendation from a friend. It is an incredible advantage for brands because they have direct access to target markets by spending less than what they would pay for traditional advertising. As for the cost, it depends on the influencer's audience and the size of the project, anyway an influencer usually can cost up to 10.000 dollars per sponsored post (Chacon, 2019).

To see if their Instagram marketing strategy has delivered results, companies should consider the following metrics. The first one is "follower growth rate": rather than a high follower number, it is more relevant for evaluating the performance of a campaign to consider the growth rate, as it gives an idea of whether business is expanding its reach and catching new people's attention. Therefore, the way company's follower number changes is usually more important than its current number of followers. The second one is "engagement per follower", measuring how interested followers are. It is always important to compare likes and comments with the size of the audience. It can be calculated on a monthly or weekly basis, by dividing the total number of likes and comments during a specific time period by the number of followers counted during that time period. "Website traffic" is another important metric to be considered: beyond inserting the link of the website in bio, companies can add it also in their Instagram Stories, increasing the traffic to their site. They can measure all website traffic using Google Analytics, segmenting traffic into default channel groupings, and one of which is related to social. The fourth metric is "Comments Per Post": receiving a like is a good signal but comments are worth. In fact, writing a comment requires more time and thought than leaving a simple like and thus, when someone writes a comment, it means he is extremely

interested about the brand. Usually, it should consider the average and see if the number increases or decreases. The next metric is “Instagram Stories Engagement”. It tells number of views and number of exits. Views tell how many unique viewers see the story while exits tell which slide people were on when they exited your story. The latter allows to understand what holds audience’s interest and what does not. The last performance metric to be tracked is “Reach”, measuring the total number of people who saw the post (Kindness, 2020).

1.4.3 LinkedIn

Launched in 2003, LinkedIn is the most popular social network focused on bringing together professionals worldwide, on finding jobs, collaborators or potential employees. Currently it counts 766 million total users and 310 monthly active users. The 50% of internet users having at least a college degree use LinkedIn and this explains how important for graduates it is in order to look for a job position. Statistics say that every second 55 job application are submitted (Aslam, 2020). Moreover, the 60% of total users is aged between 25-34 years old, the 20% is aged 18-24, the 16% is 35-54 and the remaining share of 3% regard the over-55s (Iqbal, 2020). Also these data make us understand that people using LinkedIn most are those who have completed their studies and they are now looking for a job position.

As for its functionalities and structure, it is quite similar to any other social media because each user has its own profile and feed where he sees other user’s content. Profile tells the audience user’s previous and current studies and working experiences as well as interests and potential achieved awards. It represents the user’s resume, which is possible to upload as well. Regarding the content shared in the feed, users can engage with it by writing a comment, sharing the post, liking it or adding any other type of feedback, such as “Celebrate”, “Support”, “Love”, “Insightful” or “Curious”. What makes LinkedIn unique is the section “Jobs”, allowing its users to see the available job opportunities which they can apply to. The jobs each user sees are determined through an algorithm according to his preferences and previously chosen parameters on the profile. By filling in the profile with these data, it is more likely for companies and recruiters to find those users. An advantage of LinkedIn is the ability for users to be recommended by current and previous employer. This can give them an advantage over someone they are competing with during a recruitment process. All these features brought LinkedIn to be the most important and popular social network for professionals. Given its audience, it has become a great

opportunity for businesses to boost their digital marketing, specifically to build brand awareness, to increase visibility and to engage their customers. In fact, the primary goal of LinkedIn as digital marketing tool is exactly brand awareness and leads generation. In particular, in order to enhance its brand on LinkedIn, a company must keep its clients informed by posting relevant and timely information about what is going on and happening within itself. It is important that brands share their website posts into their LinkedIn profile in order to provide followers with deep information on products and services. Also, companies should post LinkedIn events for informing customers of speaking engagements and opportunities for personal one-on-one contact (Emma, 2019). To reach their audience and be more effective, there is the possibility to exploit LinkedIn Ads, including sponsored content, sponsored InMail and Text Ads. The first one simply promotes content through special links with the purpose of increasing brand awareness and getting people talking about the brand. Sponsored InMail allows to send personalized messages to a specific number of users using LinkedIn Messaging. This is very useful when a brand wants to offer specialized content that could result in leads and maybe conversions. Text Ads aims at creating an attractive text ad to bring members of their target market to their website (Cyberclick, 2020). There are several real case studies proving the effectiveness of LinkedIn's impact on company awareness and performance. For example, Philips aimed at being seen as an innovative leader within its industry and, thus, they wanted to increase credibility and awareness with key audiences about health and lighting. They then created two LinkedIn groups related to these two topics gaining 38,000 and 27,000 members respectively, thanks to display ads, InMail and word of mouth. Another example is represented by Chevron, an American oil company whose goal was to bring together all the people passionate about energy-related issues into one place and to rise their own reputation. In order to do that, they exploited LinkedIn Ads and personal messages and they were able to reach industry professionals, policy makers and the media. In particular, they grew more than 41% compared to the target growth goals they had and they also doubled the number of members. Vistage International, an ideas and strategy provider to business leader and chief executives based in California, wanted to increase its membership and to reach as many people as possible. Thus, they started to target their audience through LinkedIn Ads increasing lead volume by 114% month by month and decreasing the cost per lead by 26%. This LinkedIn campaign allowed them to generate 89% more leads than the same campaign on any other leading ad network. These

examples are just few of the many case studies that prove the effectiveness of LinkedIn, in particular its advertising power allowing to reach new customers and a greater brand awareness (Carter, 2013).

The most important metrics which companies should consider in order to evaluate the effectiveness of LinkedIn as digital marketing tool are the following. First of all, the performance of the post, including impressions, likes and comments, and clicks. The second metric is related to “Visitors Demographics” which helps company to identify the types of visitors surfing on the company page. It tells whether they are other company’s owners, managers, or entry levels. The third one is the number of followers, giving an idea about how much that brand is known and also how much it is able to influence its targeted audience (Mahajan, 2017). Overall, LinkedIn is a great platform able to offer the best lead generation and specifically a B2B online interaction. By relying on an effective online marketing strategy, brands are likely to increase conversion rates and turn their business in a popular and well-known brand. Even if Facebook is still the most used and famous social media platform overall, with regard to a more specialised approach LinkedIn is always more and more effective.

1.4.4 Twitter

Officially launched in the market in July 2006, Twitter is the most popular real-time microblogging platform whose main feature is the tight limit about the length of each post, which is known as a ‘tweet’. At the beginning the limit was 140 characters, then this figure increased up to 280 in 2017. Like other social media, users can follow other users and see tweets of those users they follow, but unlike them, there is no need to be accepted by another user to see his tweet. In addition, posted tweet can be seen by everyone, even by those that don’t have an account (Iqbal, 2020). Users can also retweet information previously tweeted by others – it means that information can be shared quickly with a large audience - or write a comment as well as like a tweet. The main reasons making people use Twitter are promoting their research about news items, following other expert’s work in their field and building relationships with them. Twitter is getting more and more popular among students, policymakers, politicians and the general public. A lot of people still wonder what Twitter is and how they can use it but it has become the social media platform of choice for many (UKRI, 2020). It is one of the most viral social media and it is not accident that individuals like prime ministers, heads of state, famous entrepreneurs and other important figures like these choose Twitter to communicate

with the audience. It currently counts 340 million users and 500 total number of tweets sent per day. Nearly two third of users say they rely on Twitter to get their news. As regards brands, more than 80% of small and medium business rely on Twitter in order to provide customer service, while 93% of Twitter members are willing to brands getting involved if it is performed so in the right way (Omnicores, 2020). With that size of users, it is not difficult to understand why companies keep using Twitter to market their business and increase visibility. Moreover, there are real examples showing how the use of Twitter can positively impact a business or an industry performance. For example, in the US it has been proved a positive correlation between Twitter word-of-mouth (WOM) and sales in movie industry: the research analysed both revenues of 63 movies released in 2009/2010 and all the tweets talking about those movies. The study revealed that an increase of 1% of the tweets made by users with more than 400 followers in the previous week generated a \$76,349 increase in movie revenue for the current week. This explains how Twitter WOM on the movie industry can benefit the related revenues (Rui, Liu, Whinston, 2013). Another case study is highlighted by Rose Associates, an 80 year old real estate marketing and management company located in New York which started using Twitter in 2009 with the aim of searching for users who post messages about apartment searching troubles. Although at first the company only had more or less 200 followers, it was able to generate 100 leads per month thanks to Twitter, by sending targeted replies to users every day. The marketing director said that half of those leads converted to real rentals and that was very beneficial to the business as using Twitter to acquire new customers costed them nothing. This social media has proved to be beneficial for business performance in the food industry as well. In fact, Kogi Korean BBQ, which is a start-up based in Los Angeles operating four food carts that are always on the go, relies on Twitter to tell customers the place where its trucks are. This helped Kogi to grow so quickly that during its first year it increased its employees from 4 to 60 and its sales from 30 pounds of meat per day to 1,000. It is quite evident how much visibility Twitter can offer to a company by allowing it to increase its customer base and brand awareness (Oyalabu, 2012).

Practically speaking, the first step companies should follow to effectively exploit Twitter as a digital marketing tool is to audit their own account to find out which tweets are performing the best. In this way, they will have an idea of the type of content their audience is most interested in. They should look at Twitter Analytics by considering impressions and engagement rate and they always should remember to use hashtags

within in the tweets because they increase the engagement a lot and expose brand to new audiences. Moreover, it is possible to exploit Twitter Ads by paying a price to reach audience more quickly. The last step that brand should take into account is to engage with their followers by responding to the users that previously interacted with their tweets, so that they provide for customer service both to existing and potential customers. The most important metrics are the same as the previously discussed social media: the number of impressions, the engagement rate and the number of clicks to the company's website (Sproutsocial, 2020).

1.4.5 YouTube

Since it was launched in 2005 and acquired by Google a year later, YouTube has grown from a repository of videos into the largest online video platform worldwide. It now counts 2 billion monthly active users and, second only to Facebook, it is the most popular social media. A lot of other video sharing platforms were born and have gone, but YouTube has outlasted them all by becoming the most visited video service online. Every minute an average of 500 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube by users across 88 countries around the world (Digital Marketing Institute, 2018). It allow users to do several activities: watching, sharing, liking, commenting other user's videos as well as uploading their videos in their channel. In fact, users can create their personal own channel which is like having a profile in any other social media. The difference is that, within your profile, the post you upload only consists of videos. Then users can create playlists to organize videos and group them together as well as subscribe or follow other YouTube channels. This platform is usually used to watch videos of music, recipes, any type of tutorial, comedy shows, and many others. Young users in particular use the platform to follow their favourite vloggers or celebrities they are interested in (Webwise, 2020). Thanks to its audience, with a 2 billion of monthly active users and 30 million per day, YouTube can offer companies a great visibility and a larger brand awareness. According to Omnicore, a digital marketing agency, the 62% of businesses relies on Youtube as digital marketing tool (Omnicore, 2020). In addition, the 80 percent of people aged 18–49 watch YouTube, and this makes the platform more likely to be used by more and more businesses. A lot of marketers have proved the YouTube's positive impact on the business performance. William Painter, an online sunglasses retailer, started relying on YouTube to bridge the gap for a product normally purchased in person. It exploited YouTube Ads to deliver an authentic storytelling to potential customers by showcasing its products on a global scale.

This turned on a 1,500% increase in website visitors and on both a 1,300% growth in conversations and sales revenue year-over-year (YouTube Advertising, 2019). Big Apple Pet Supply, a retailer and manufacturer of high-quality reptiles and supplies based in New York City, has decided to rely on YouTube to explain and educate the customers about the products they buy. In particular, when a visitor clicks on an item, there is a video right there which informs him about the product he is going to buy. This way of free training and education is very useful for potential customers and very effective for the company, in fact they saw a 300% to 400% increase in sales on the products that had YouTube videos attached to them. This make us understand how YouTube can also be used both to instruct and clarify the features of products (McCue, 2011).

To implement an effective marketing strategy on YouTube, brands should follow some steps. The first one focuses on the creation of videos: they should have a good lighting, a clear sound and be more or less 3 to 4 minutes long. If they are even shorter, it works best. The second step is represented by keywords: this is particularly important because they are related to what video is about. They should be as close as possible to the topic of the video so that when people search for them they will be more likely to find them. Another essential step is to exploit “Call to actions”: it means to attract viewers by making them take some sort of action that gets them closer to being their customer. This is very useful for generating leads. For example, by including a link to the website company or a landing page. Brands should also ask viewers to rate videos, to subscribe to their YouTube channel and to follow them on other social media like Facebook, Twitter, and the other ones. Also, they should encourage people to post the video on their social media. Another important tip is to have a presence on YouTube as active as possible. For example, when a viewer writes a comment on a video, company should answer and interact with him as soon as possible. Also, a company should comment on other people’s videos to make those people come to check out company’s channel. Moreover, companies can exploit YouTube Ads. The last step they should remember is to promote both videos and YouTube channel on the website and other social media (Edmondson, 2019). As for YouTube performance indicators, the main important ones are “Total watch time”, which assists companies in monitoring the quantitative evolution of their video performance, in particular the content of the video. Time can be calculated as aggregated or for individual videos. Another metric is “Total amount of video views”, that helps to identify the most popular videos. Then, “Viewer Retention” monitors if the videos are captivating viewers. “Video

Engagement” is important as well because it analyses viewers’ reaction to videos according to the feedback left by viewers themselves: likes, dislikes, comments and shares. The last KPI is the “Number of subscribers” telling the company how many users are following its channel regularly (Datapine, 2020).

1.4.6 Pinterest

Pinterest is one of the most effective social platforms focused on product knowledge and shopping inspiration. It best fits to companies working in certain industries such as fashion and beauty, home decor and design, or food, because it focuses on collecting and sharing images which users can look and search for. It is an image centrally oriented social platform where users can also discover new interests by looking at the photo collections of other Pinterest users. If someone is particularly interested in a subject such as cooking or decorating, he can find images about that subject and then save those images to his Pinterest bulletin board. Also, users can create multiple bulletin boards to group and organize their interests. Images are called “Pins” and like in any other social media, users can like a post - here this feedback action is called “Pin” - as well as share it or comment it (Moreau, 2020). The company was launched in 2010 by Ben Silbermann, who previously worked in the online advertising group at Google, and his friends Evan Sharp and Paul Sciarra. Silbermann has defined Pinterest as a “catalogue of ideas,” a kind of box where people can get inspired (Havro, 2019). It now counts 416 million monthly active where the 73% are female only. This platform caught on so much that it quickly became one of the 10-biggest social sites in 2011 and the launch of its app on the iPhone, in that year, contributed significantly to a fast Pinterest user growth. A year later an Android Pinterest app was launched, and this fostered a further growth by making users number grow from 49 million in February 2013 to more than 400 million today. Given this audience, Pinterest marketing has quickly become a key channel for businesses, in particular through Pinterest for business accounts, more and more exploited by companies that promote their brand through the sponsored “Pins”. According to eMarketer, the proportion of marketers from US that uses Pinterest is going to increase from 34% to 36% compared to the last year. Thanks to Pinterest for business, brands can boost their brand awareness through promoted pins as well as promoted video pins and carousels. The technique of promoted pins is absolutely effective for brands relying on Pinterest for business, in fact the 61% of users have made a purchase after seeing a promoted pin in their feed. Over time, Pinterest marketing has established itself as a great

tool for marketers and advertisers, thanks to its capacity of engagement with users during purchasing journey. Moreover, according to data published by Pinterest in 2017, marketers make \$2 profit for every \$1 spent on Pinterest marketing. As for shopping, a study from Cowen tells that 48% of US users exploits this platform specifically to shop, compared to 14% for Facebook, 10% for Instagram and 7% for Twitter. Finally, 70% of users discover new products through the platform while 41% of users do shopping in store while continuing to use the Pinterest app (Iqbal, 2020).

As far as performance indicators are concerned, each business account has a Pinterest Analytics tool providing an overview about brand's performance in order to get a pulse on what is working and what is not. The main important metrics are: "Link clicks", indicating the number of clicks on each pin giving the brand an insight on which content is converting pinners to its website and into real customers. "Impressions", telling how many times users saw a specific pin. "Closeups", indicating the number of users that tap on a specific pin, which means they either want to see it up close or view the description. It also measures how much a specific pin captures attention. "Saves" tell the number of users that save a pin in one of their own boards, explaining which of brand's pins are resonating most with its target audience. The last KPI is "Engagement rate", measured by $(\text{link clicks} + \text{comments} + \text{close ups} + \text{saves}) / (\text{impressions})$. It is particularly useful because it tells which pins evoke audience action (Iqbal, 2020).

2. The “Made in Italy” food industry and the potential of social media marketing

2.1 An introduction to “Made in Italy” and the agri-food sector

“Made in Italy” can be defined as a concept that usually refers to the traditional productive sectors whose products’ value is highly superior. These sectors are mainly food, fashion, furniture and design, automation and mechanics, whose products have acquired overtime a certain singularity associated with the image of Italy. The “made in Italy” brand recalls high production competences, high-quality products, excellent artisanship, prestige and artistry: a mix of features that made it internationally recognizable and popular. In fact, information about the origin of these products usually has a greater impact than those related to other product categories. “Made in Italy” is a country-of-origin label evoking more than simple information about the place where the product is created. These products have an appeal all over the world, which is rooted in art, history, architecture, landscapes, along with culture, charisma and elegance (Buziol, 2018).

Since the end of World War II, “Made in Italy” has always confirmed itself as a label that grants authenticity, high quality, and an internationally praised sense of style. The worth of “Made in Italy” has brought a lot of prosperity to many products in the market and even if the Italian economy was undermined by financial and consequent debt crisis, the businesses of this country have been able to keep their head role in Europe during the entire crisis, even if the productivity fell and the growth rate was fixed at 1% in decades (Girardi, 2019).

The agri-food industry has always confirmed to be one of the most important and representative within both Italy and Europe: in fact, during the period 1999-2018 Italy has been the 5th food exporter by generating almost 400 billion of euros, corresponding to the 7% of total exports (Piglowski, 2021). Even if it is the 5th food exporter in terms of export value, Italy is the 1st European country for number of PDO (Protected Designation of Origin), PGI (Protected Geographical Indication), and TSG (Traditional Speciality Guaranteed) products, claiming more than 800 of them, ahead of France, Spain, Germany and Netherlands (Buziol, 2018). The main characteristic of these products is that they strictly depend on their geographical production area and on the unique transformation and processing processes carried out in that particular area. This results in a unique and inimitable flavour, taste and colour of the product for each production area (ITA, 2016).

Moreover, with an added value from agriculture of 31.8 billion euros, in 2019 Italy ranked first in Europe by generating almost a fifth of the entire EU added value: in particular, out of an estimated total of 188.7 billion euros during that year, Italy contributed 16.8%, France 16.6%, Spain 14.1% and Germany 11.2% (Istat, 2020). Last but not least, it ranked 2nd, after France, in terms of number of food companies, and 3rd, after France and Germany, in terms of number of employees (Caroli, Brunetta, Valentino, 2019). These data simply show us how Italy has always been competitive in the food industry against other European countries, and it is no coincidence that most of the products in which Italy is the world export leader belong to the agri-food industry, such as pasta, wine, apples and others, as highlighted in red in the Figure 2.1 (Varrella, 2021).

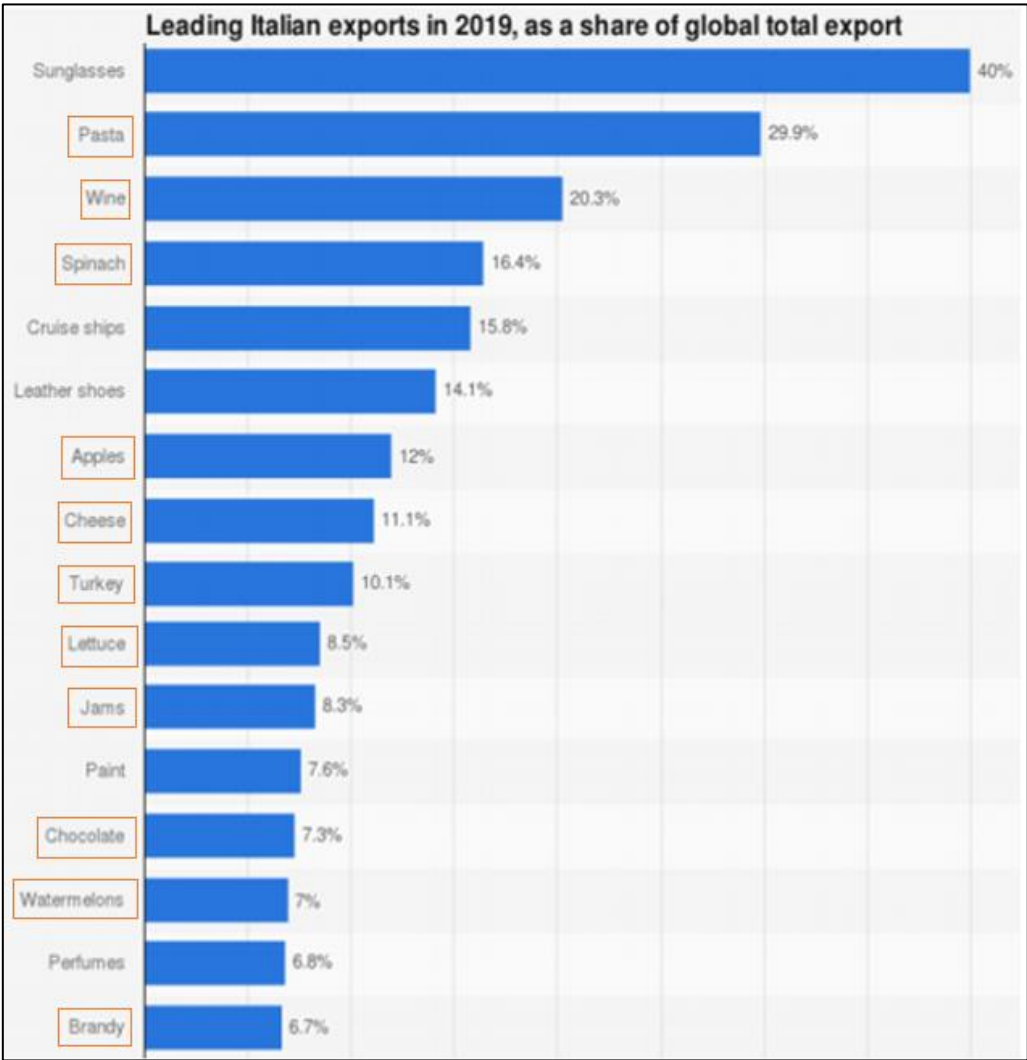


Fig. 2.1 - Italian export products as a share of global export 2019 (Varrella, 2021)

Within Italian economy this sector has always had an important role as well. In fact, as for exports, in 2019 agri-food was the 4th largest export category in terms of value with 43

billion of euros, corresponding to the 10% of total exports, only behind the machine, chemical and transportation industry (OEC, 2019).

Furthermore, the Italian agri-food industry is worth 205 billion and accounts for 12% of GDP, this is what emerged at the first Forum focused on agri-food organised by Filiera Italia and Coldiretti. With 1,3 million of employees, +33.3% in the last 5 years and an export increase of 47.8% since 2008, this important sector is likely to grow more and more (Brizzo, 2019). According to ISTAT data, export growth in 2019 has been +2.3% and one of the sectors driving this growth is the food, beverages and tobacco industry with an increase of 6,6% (Istat, 2020). Also, the value added for agri-food industry as a whole - including agriculture, fishing and the food industry - increased by 0,2% and accounted for 4.1% of the whole Italian economy value added. Therefore, there is no doubt that the agri-food business managed to consolidate its weight within the national economic framework and that it will continue to be protagonist in the future (Istat, 2020).

As an example, in a study conducted by Cappelli et al., 315 Italian consumers were asked to identify the main three brands coming to mind and representing “Made in Italy” products. They discovered that the most common products belonged to two sectors, food and automotive, which involve Italy’s highest exports around the world: the best-known brands are Ferrari, Barilla and Fiat, followed by Ferrero and others.

Moreover, considering the other brands indicated by respondents, the “Made in Italy” industries coming to the fore for customers are: “Food & Beverage” (40%), “Fashion & Accessories” (30%) and “Mechanical & Technology” (30%). This is a clear example that shows how important the food sector is for Italy and Italians.

The research also asked respondents to identify the premium price they would pay for these products with the purpose of understanding if they are willing to pay for a “Made in Italy” product and how much more. As for Food & Beverage, the 41% of the sample would pay an additional price from 10% to 30%, the 34% would be willing to pay a premium price between 30% and 50%, the 13% would pay an additional price of more than 50% and the remaining 12% of respondents would pay a premium price less than 10% (Cappelli, et al., 2019). These findings highlight the willingness to pay for a Made in Italy product by Italian people and that all of them are willing to pay an additional price.

After learning all these data explaining the relevance of agri-food industry within Italian economy and culture, the next paragraph will outline the main features and peculiarities of this unique and important sector in details.

2.2 The Italian agri-food industry: features and data

The Italian agri-food industry consists of a wide and varied range of industries involved in food processing where the raw material, derived directly from agriculture, is processed into products for more or less immediate consumption or for preservation. According to the degree of processing achieved, food industries are divided into first processing industries, as the oil extraction, sugar and milling ones, and second processing industries, which use the semi-finished products of first processing industries to produce something new, such as the confectionery and the brewing industry (Treccani.it).

Agri-food represents for Italy an excellence in terms of quality, food safety, sustainability, biodiversity and respect for tradition. One of Italy's peculiarities is indeed its great territorial and climatic diversity, which has brought to the birth of exceptionally varied and unique cultures, histories, traditions and, above all, to a large number of small companies, very often family-run, which, faced with the impossibility of competing on foreign markets in terms of price reduction, have focused their efforts on enhancing the uniqueness of their products. That is the reason why the winning factors of the Italian agri-food industry are a wide range of high-quality products, certified products at the top of international markets, a strong link with the territory and the Italian cultural heritage and, finally, extremely high safety standards. Italy is indeed the first European country in terms of PDO, PGI and TSG, with 300 certified food products and 524 certified wines (ITA, 2016). In addition, Italy counts 5155 traditional regional declared products along the entire Peninsula, over 60.000 organic farms and it is a leader in biodiversity. For example, as explains Coldiretti, on the national territory there are 504 varieties registered in the vine register, against the 278 French ones, and 533 varieties of olives, against the 70 Spanish ones (Coldiretti, 2019).

According to ISTAT data, the agri-food Italian industry is made up of 56.750 companies, of which 53.360 belong to the food division and 3.390 to the beverage one. Figure 2.2 illustrates the size distribution of these companies that sees a clear dominance of micro and small enterprises, which in 2016 together accounted for more than 98% of the total. The top of the figure shows the number of companies in absolute value while the bottom shows the number in terms of percentage incidence on the total. Specifically, micro enterprises are those with less than 10 employees and a turnover no more than 2 million while the small ones have fewer than 49 employees and a less than 10 million turnover. Small enterprises showed a positive trend of around 3% between 2012 and 2016 while,

on the opposite, micro enterprises showed a decrease of 3%.

Regarding medium-sized enterprises, which count 249 employees and a turnover less than 50 million, they represented in 2017 about 1.3% of the total and they were the ones that have grown the most, by 13%, between 2012 and 2016.

As for large companies, counting more than 250 employees and with a turnover of more than 50 million, they represented only the 0.2% of the 56.750 companies with an increase of 11% between 2012 and 2016.

On the whole, it is clear how the Italian agri-food industry is still characterized mostly by the presence of very small companies which actually are small-scale producers. The high quality of Italian agri-food products is probably due also to this large presence of small companies that are able to keep high standards and high level of craftsmanship. However, an increase in average size can be observed in recent years thanks to a relative increase in the number of relatively larger companies, in particular the medium-sized ones that have grown from 764 to 862 in five years only (Caroli, Brunetta, Valentino, 2016).

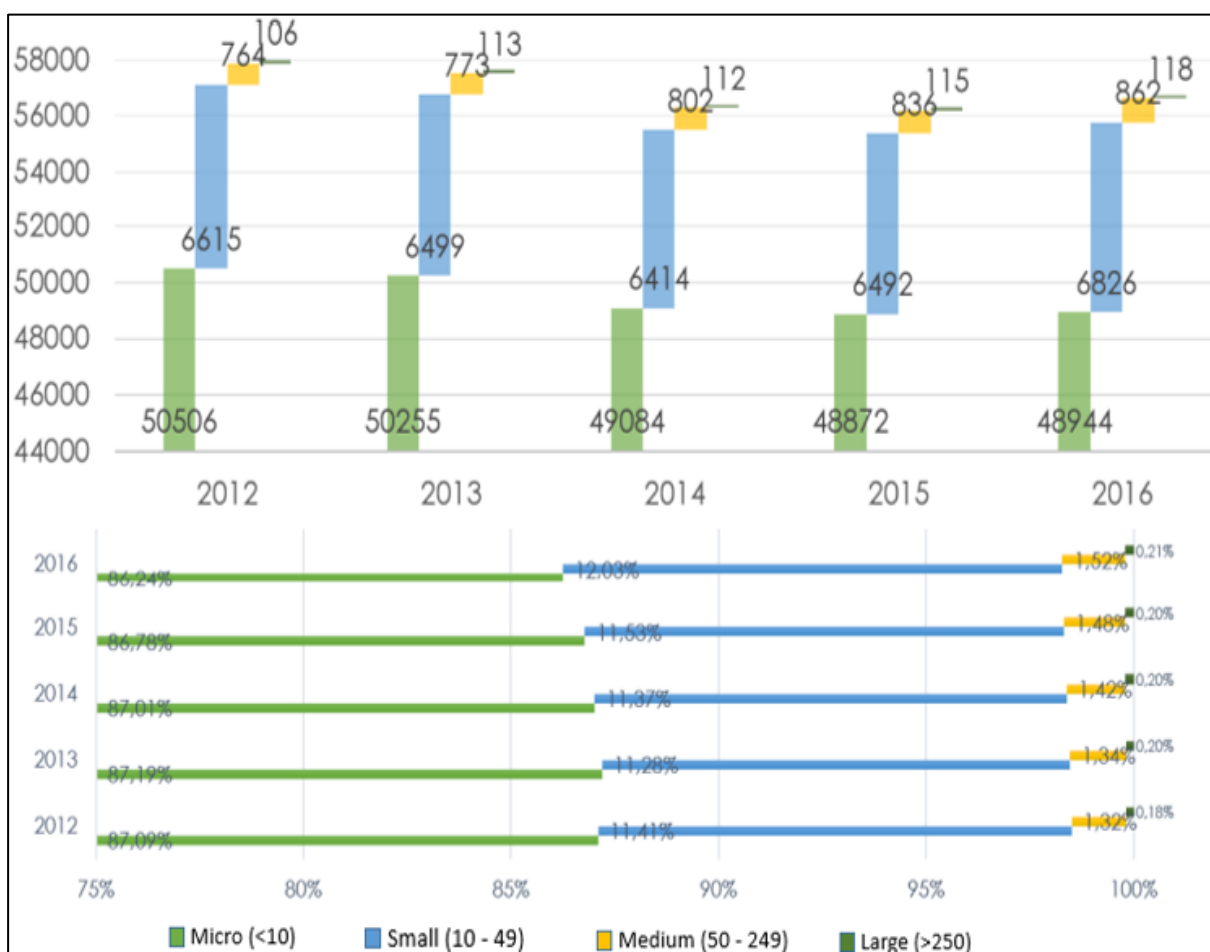


Fig. 2.2 – Size distribution of Italian agri-food companies, for n° of employees, in absolute value and in percentage on the total (Caroli, Brunetta, Valentino, 2016)

As for food enterprises, Figure 2.3 clearly shows how widely distributed these companies are across the whole country, even if more concentrated (about 50% of the total) in 5 regions: Sicily (12,6%), Lombardy (10,6%), Campania (10,3%), Apulia (8,7%) and Emilia-Romagna (8,6%). The production of bakery and flour products prevails in all of these regions as for number of companies. However, Sicily follows for number of enterprises focused on producing vegetable and animal oils and fats, as well as other food products. Lombardy stands for agricultural crops and production of animal products while Campania and Emilia-Romagna focus mostly on dairy products and other food products. As for Apulia, it is mainly focused on producing olive oil.

Beside these few standing regions, the capillarity of Italian territory is highlighted in the picture which shows how every region offers a relevant share of companies, except for Valle D'Aosta counting only the 0,2% of the total.



Fig. 2.3 - Distribution of food industry enterprises by region (Caroli, Brunetta, Valentino, 2016)

As far as beverage industry is concerned, companies are fairly concentrated in few regions, namely Puglia (11,8%) Veneto (10,7%), Sicily (10%), Piedmont (9,8%) and Campania (8,8%). They together represent the 50% of the total companies in this sector and they mainly produce wines, beer, mineral water and fruit juice.

Both food and beverage industries present a geographically homogeneous distribution: in fact, the North, the Center and the South all offer a decent share of number of companies too, except for Valle D'Aosta counting only the 0,2% of the total. If we want to be precise, the Center of Italy is a little bit less concentrated compared to the North and the South, within which there the top regions as seen above (Caroli, Brunetta, Valentino, 2016).

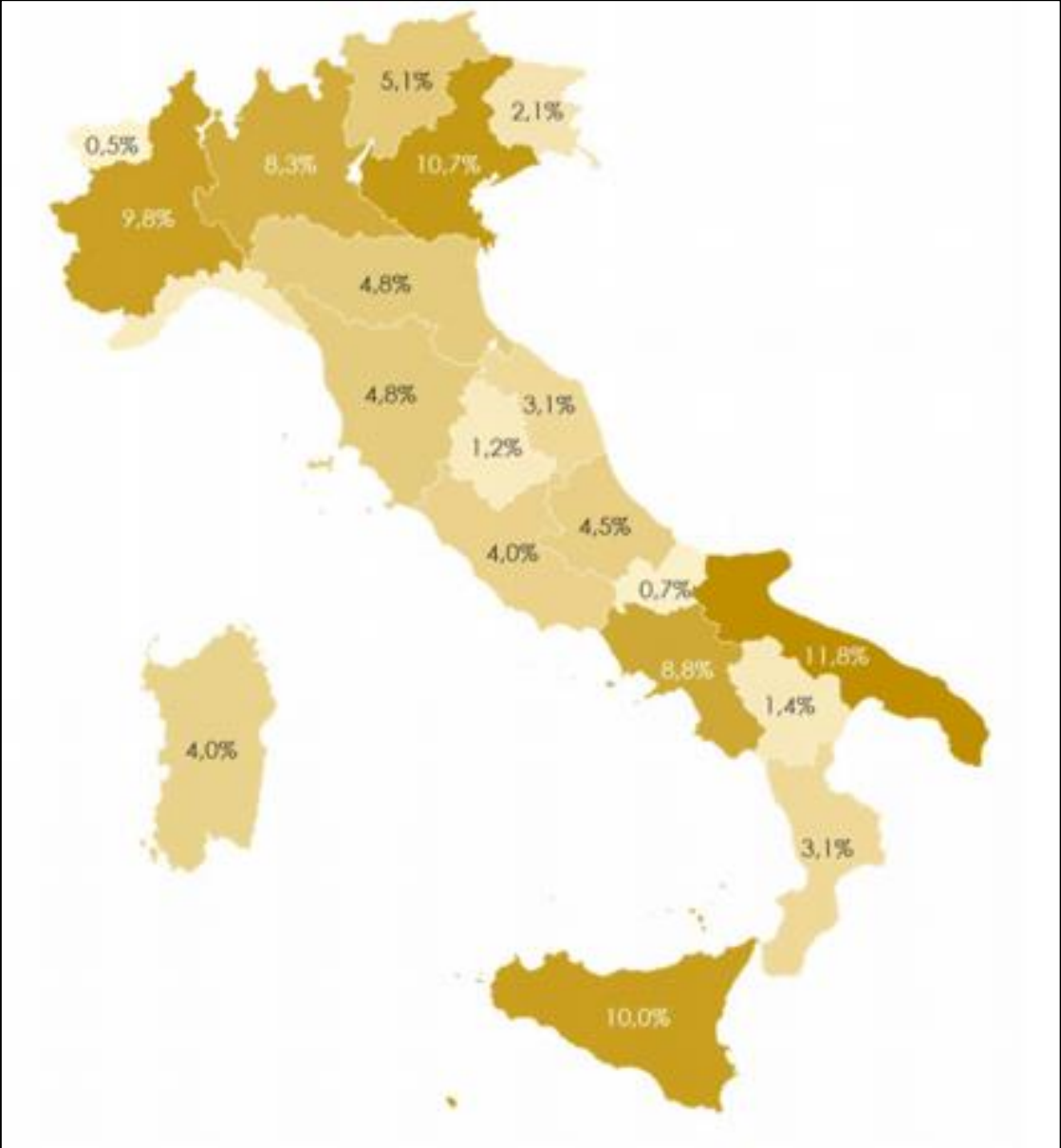


Fig. 2.4 - Distribution of beverage industry enterprises by region (Caroli, Brunetta, Valentino, 2016)

Now that the size distribution of enterprises has been explained, it will be outlined the economic impact of the top Italian regions on the whole agri-food industry, in terms of exports. Right after, the most important agri-food products in terms of exports as well will be discussed in order to learn which sectors contribute most for the Italian agri-food trade balance.

As explained above, Figure 2.5 illustrates the 2019 exports (in terms of million euros) of the top five Italian regions, their percentage variation compared to 2018 and their percentage share of incidence on the total Italian agri-food exports. Out of a total export of 43 billion euros, of which 22% is represented by beverage industry only, the leading exporter region is Veneto with more the 7 billion and a percentage share of 16,9% mainly driven by wine: Prosecco from the Valdobbiadene DOP zone, close to Treviso, and red wine from Valpolicella, close to Verona. Veneto is then followed by Lombardia (16,6%), Emilia-Romagna (16,3%), Piemonte (15,4%) and Campania (8%). The one that increased most from 2018 to 2019 was Piedmont, with an increase of 8% probably due to its chocolate and wine industry (Largo consumo, 2020).

Top regioni/aree	2019 (Milioni di euro)	Var. 2019 vs 2018 (%)	% totale Italia (%)
Veneto	7.097,6	1,6%	16,9%
Lombardia	6.956,3	6,3%	16,6%
Emilia Romagna	6.842,2	4,7%	16,3%
Piemonte	6.458,8	8,0%	15,4%
Campania	3.368,7	4,5%	8,0%

Fig. 2.5 – Agri-food exports of top five Italian regions (Largo consumo, 2020)

As regards the most exported agri-food products, Figure 2.6 shows how the wine industry, including both sparkling and still wines, is the leader in terms of export value. It indeed yielded more than 6 billion euros in 2019 by almost doubling the second ranked sector, the one of processed fruit and vegetables which counts more than 3,5 billion, of which 1.6 billion are due to tomato preserves only. It follows fresh fruit, cheese and dairy products, pasta, chocolate, cured meat, coffee and olive oil. Among them, the products that have grown most in 2019 and that significantly boosted the exports are cheese and dairy products, in particular “pecorino cheese” (+24,2%), Grana Padano and Parmigiano Reggiano (+14,4%). Other remarkable growths are those of pasta (+7%), chocolate and

coffee (+6%) and tomato preserves (+5,5%).

As for cured meat, which will be deepened later dealing with and focusing on the region of Trentino Alto Adige, they increased of 1,4% from 1.717 to 1.741 billion euros (Largo consumo, 2020).

Prodotti	2018 (Milioni €)	2019 (Milioni €)	Variazione 2019 vs 2018 (%)
Vino	6.180,5	6.391,3	3,4%
di cui:			
- Spumanti	1.514,8	1.582,8	4,5%
- Fermi & Frizzanti confezionati fino a 2 litri	4.259,6	4.421,1	3,8%
Ortofrutta trasformata	3.590,9	3.670,3	2,2%
di cui			
- Conserve di pomodoro	1.579,2	1.666,7	5,5%
Frutta fresca	3.408,3	3.326,4	-2,4%
Formaggi e latticini	2.824,2	3.140,0	11,2%
di cui (non grattugiati):			
- Grana Padano e Parmigiano Reggiano	944,7	1.080,7	14,4%
- Pecorino	127,1	157,9	24,2%
Pasta	2.425,7	2.599,1	7,1%
Cioccolato e caramelle	2.037,4	2.160,7	6,1%
Salumi e carni trasformate	1.717,8	1.741,1	1,4%
Caffè e tè	1.502,3	1.594,4	6,1%
Ortaggi freschi	1.524,3	1.559,6	2,3%
Olio d'oliva	1.495,4	1.372,4	-8,2%

Fig. 2.6 – Most exported agri-food products, in terms of millions (Largo consumo, 2020)

2.2.1 Food consumption in Italy

As far as Italian food consumption is concerned, according to the Nielsen consumer report published in 2018, five new shopping styles of Italian families emerged, as seen from the Figure 2.6 below: “Traditional” (4 million), “Mainstream” (6,3 million), “Low Price” (4,3 million), “Silver” (5,9 million) and “Golden” (4,3 million). The first three categories are those with below-average spending power. The “Traditional” consist of 4 million mature households, mainly concentrated in the South, that focus their shopping on basic and fresh ingredients. The “Mainstream”, which represent the largest share, are households with

young children that usually consume more greedy products. The “Low Price” are below average in age and they usually buy 50% of their groceries on discount supermarkets. As regards “Silver” and “Golden” households, they share a higher income: while the former are mature households located in the North, the latter group is made up of 40% singles or childless households. Moreover, the “Silver” buy mostly very fresh products, fruit and vegetables, and healthy ones. The “Golden” buy healthy products too, but also ethnic and high service content products.



Fig. 2.6 – Different shopping styles for Italian families (Piccoli, 2018)

Despite these differences, what has emerged is a migration between one category and another, leading to an increasing polarisation of consumption habits. In fact, the two shopping styles with the highest growth rates over the last two years (2015-2017) are the extreme ones: “Golden” and “Low Price” have risen from 12% and 14.9% to 17.4% respectively. In absolute terms, it is a shift towards these two styles by 2 million

households and 6,6 billion euro in spending, which confirms a phenomenon of thinning of the Italian middle class already reported by ISTAT. This has led so far to favour both specialised shops and the most dynamic brands that are able to adapt their offerings to the changes taking place, both in terms of the demand for convenience, such as the success of discount stores, and in terms of added value on services (Piccoli, 2018). This suggests that, on the one hand, Italians prefer eating good and safety food, if they can afford it. On the other hand, they prefer to spend less for food by exploiting attractive prices and eating lower quality products.

According to ISTAT data, households in 2019 spent on average 464 euros per month on food and non-alcoholic beverages, which accounted for 18,1% of total expenditure. There are no substantial differences compared to 462 euros of 2018. If the average spending weights 18,1%, this share of expenditure weighs most in the South (23,3%) and in the Islands (21,4%), where financial resources are generally lower, while it stops at 15.9% in the North-East. The South confirms to be the most spending zone in absolute value too, with a monthly expenditure of 482,3 euros, followed by the Center of Italy with 475,6, the North-West with 464,8, the North-East with 443,7 and the Islands with 442,6 euros. As regards specific products, the most consumed ones per household regard the sector of meat, accounting for 3,8% of the total, followed by bread and cereals (3%), and finally vegetables, which represent the 2.5% of total expenditure (ISTAT, 2020).

Moreover, according to the ISMEA report about the Italian food consumption in 2019, out of an overall grocery shopping of 81.078 million euros by Italian households, the most consumed agri-food products are cereal products, such as pasta, rice and bread, which count 11.419 million and represent 14,1% of the total. The category of “other food products”, including packaged products, follows in the ranking and it accounts for 14%. The third place went to the milk and dairy products which weight the 13,6%, followed by beverages, fruit and vegetables, fish and meat products and finally vegetables oils and fats (Parmigiani, 2020).

2.3 An overview of Trentino-Alto Adige

The Trentino-Alto Adige region, located in the North-East of Italy, is the focus of the case study that will be illustrated in the third chapter through the “Alto Adige PGI Speck” product. Now, however, the region will be outlined by analysing its overall agri-food sector, highlighting the main characteristics from both a quantitative and qualitative point of view.

The agri-food industry of Trentino-Alto Adige plays a significant role within the whole economy of the region: in fact, out of 58.454 enterprises, 16.707 (the 28%) operate in the agricultural sector and the 8% of the total workforce is devoted to this industry. In addition, at the end of 2019 the most important category in terms of export, after the machinery one, was represented by food and beverage, which accounted for the 17% of total exports of Trentino-Alto Adige, reaching the figure of 850 million euros. The main five partners were respectively Germany (32,9%), Austria (9,8%), USA (9,3%), Asia (6,7%) and France (5,4%) (Alto Adige, 2020).

The agri-food industry is important in terms of consumption too, as the households of this region spent on average the 15% of their total expenditure for food and beverage items, after housing and rental expenditures. Specifically, they spent 512 euros monthly out of a total of 3417 euros (IRE, 2019).

As far as size companies is concerned, especially in the agriculture and hotel sector, an average of 4.6 people is employed in the South Tyrolean companies and this reflects an entrepreneurial structure characterised by small enterprises, just like the Italian one. This is probably one of the reasons explaining the high-quality standards of food and beverage items in this region, along with the wide presence of 28 certified food and wine products, of which 17 are classified as “PDO”, 9 as “PGI” and 2 “STG” products. Besides them, Trentino-Alto Adige also counts 21.327 PDO and PGI agriculture operators that include both producers and processors: 11.430 are devoted to food and 9.897 to wine. Also, Trentino-Alto Adige proved to be the only Italian region, with Sardegna and Toscana, to overcome the threshold of 10.000 food operators. They account for the 13,9% of the total food operators and this clearly gives the idea of how much attention is given to these regional excellent products.

Figure 2.7 truly explains and outlines the importance of Trentino-Alto Adige within Italian agri-food context: out of 21 regions, it is 7th in terms of production value with 867 million euros generated during 2018 (right column of the image). It accounted for the 5,4% of the

Italian total production value presenting a rich wine industry that is worth 560 million euros and, thanks to this, it placed 5th within the Italian wine ranking (central column). As regards food, on the left column, it generated 307 million euros and it placed 6th in the food ranking (Ismea-Qualivita, 2019).

REGIONE	FOOD		WINE		TOTALE		
	2017 (min €)	2018 (min €)	2017 (min €)	2018 (min €)	2017 (min €)	2018 (min €)	VAR. 18/17
1 ^a Veneto	370	397	3.234	3.501	3.604	3.898	+8,2%
2 ^a Emilia-Romagna	3.021	3.020	313	394	3.334	3.414	+2,4%
3 ^a Lombardia	1.531	1.543	343	416	1.874	1.958	+4,5%
4 ^a Piemonte	284	307	1.009	921	1.292	1.228	-5,0%
5 ^a Toscana	130	144	969	961	1.098	1.106	+0,7%
6 ^a Friuli-Venezia Giulia	327	332	524	560	851	892	+4,9%
7 ^a Trentino-Alto Adige	324	307	550	560	874	867	-0,9%
8 ^a Campania	507	605	94	100	601	705	+17,4%
9 ^a Sicilia	55	61	424	522	479	583	+21,7%
10 ^a Sardegna	191	271	116	137	308	408	+32,5%
11 ^a Puglia	30	35	222	359	252	394	+56,3%
12 ^a Abruzzo	12	15	222	231	234	246	+5,2%
13 ^a Marche	24	24	78	97	102	120	+18,3%
14 ^a Lazio	58	63	56	55	114	118	+3,8%
15 ^a Umbria	49	54	64	56	113	110	-2,9%
16 ^a Calabria	16	20	18	19	34	39	+13,7%
17 ^a Valle d'Aosta	32	30	12	8	43	38	-13,2%
18 ^a Liguria	14	18	22	20	35	37	+4,9%
19 ^a Basilicata	1,2	1,4	9,3	12	11	13	+25,1%
20 ^a Molise	1,7	1,0	6,4	4,1	8,1	5,1	-36,9%

Fig. 2.7 - Ranking of regions by economic impact of PDO, PGI and TSG products (Food and Wine)
(Ismea-Qualivita, 2019)

As far as food is concerned, Trentino-Alto Adige stands out both in the fruits and vegetables and cured meats sector. Another important product belongs to the cheese sector with its variety of Grana Padano DOP.

As regards wine, their most relevant products are Trentino DOP, Alto Adige DOP and Vigneti delle Dolomiti IGP (Figure 2.8).

With regards to food, Trentino-Alto Adige is absolute leader in Italy in the apples production: in 2018, in fact, it generated a value of production of 114 million euros with “Mela Alto Adige IGP” and 28 million euros with “Mela Val di Non DOP”. These two products are respectively the first and the third product in the fruits and vegetables Italian ranking, not only in terms of production value but also in terms of exports (respectively 192 and 8 million euros), consumption value (191 and 71 million euros) and quantity produced. In fact, during 2018 Trentino-Alto Adige was able to produce 175.011 tons of “Mela Alto Adige IGP”, close to the province of Bolzano, and 47.497 tons of “Mela Val di

Non DOP”, in the province of Trento. Moreover, these two cities, Trento and Bolzano, have been classified as the two provinces with the most relevant economic impact in Italy as regards fruits and vegetables industry.

Furthermore, Trentino-Alto Adige is proudly the speck sector leader owning the “Speck Alto Adige IGP”. This product is the focus of this research study and it will be analysed at the end of this chapter to understand how important it is within the Italian cured meat sector. Whereas in the third chapter of the thesis, digital marketing initiatives undertaken by speck producers will be discussed and analysed (Ismea-Qualivita, 2019).

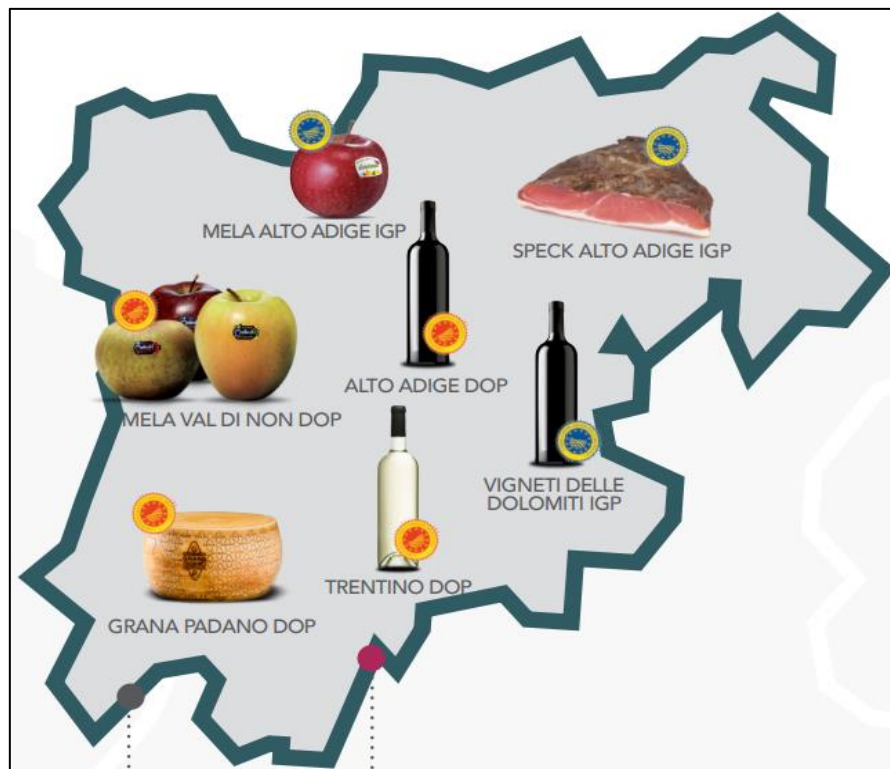


Fig. 2.8 – Most relevant agri-food products of Trentino-Alto Adige (Ismea-Qualivita, 2019)

Before moving to the next paragraph, which will illustrate how the use of digital marketing and ecommerce can help Italian agri-food companies, it is important to underline how South Tyrolean enterprises of many industries are trying to invest in digitalization. In fact, more than 86% of them (with at least 10 employees) uses an official own website and 60% of them utilizes at least one social media such as Facebook, Instagram Twitter and YouTube. That’s because they understood the importance and support that these communication channels can give to the overall company performance (IRE, 2019).

2.4 The use of Internet and digital marketing in the Italian food industry

As explained in the first chapter, whatever the industry, no brand can no longer do without internet and without exploiting the benefits that digital marketing tools offer today. From the website to social media, from ecommerce to email marketing: they are all used in order to increase customer engagement and brand reputation.

The Italian agri-food industry is one of those sectors with the highest growth potential in terms of exploiting digital marketing and ecommerce activities because food is among the simplest topics to communicate online. It is very “sensual” as food images and videos somehow remind us of flavours, evoke taste and pleasure. It strikes straight to the heart and so it is extremely easy to convey. Small food and wine “Made in Italy’s” producers, who have trouble promoting themselves, should take that into account.

In addition, nowadays consumers are relying on internet and are increasingly using ecommerce to purchase food. In fact, according to data presented at Netcomm Focus Food, as regards online purchases, the food sector is now worth 1,6 billion euros and it is the industry which grows fastest in 2019, increasing by 42% compared to 2017. Italy counts 9 million people making online food purchases so far, and even if this value is one of the lowest among European countries, the number of people is growing more and more, and the increase really appears to be unstoppable (Varpi, 2019).

Figure 2.9 clearly shows this improvement: from 0.83 billion euros in 2017, Italy moved up to 1.14 billion in 2018 and 1.59 billion in 2019. A growth of 39% compared to the previous year that shows how food e-commerce is among the most emerging sectors as regards online industries (Webeing.net, 2020).

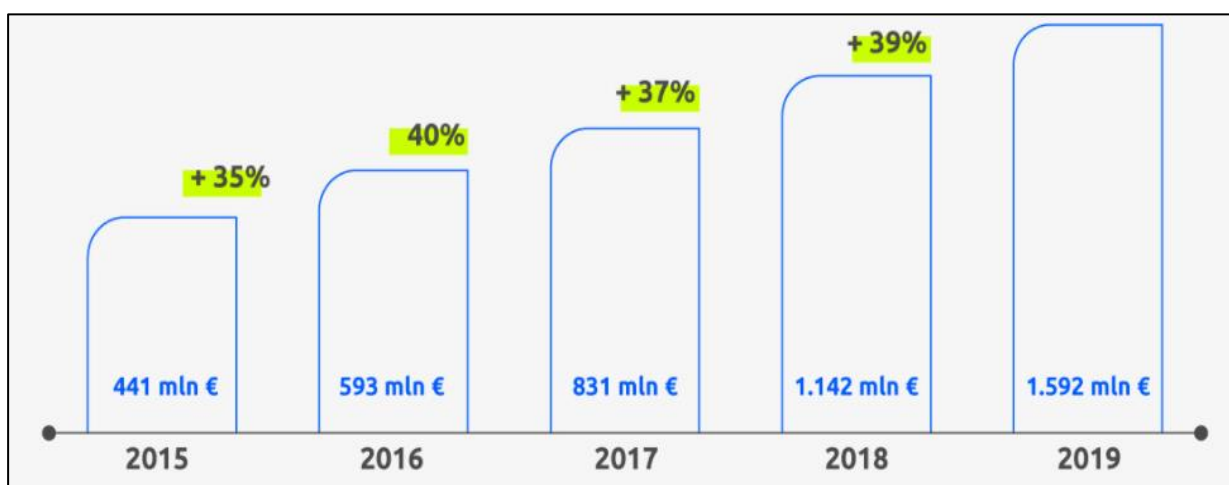


Fig. 2.9 – E-commerce purchases value in Italian Food&Grocery industry (Webeing.net, 2020)

However, despite its dynamism, it still has a low incidence in Italy, amounting to 5% of the total Italian B2C eCommerce, which is worth 31.6 billion euros. That's why, given the untapped potential of digital in this specific industry, Italian agri-food companies should invest in it to grow. Online transactions of food and beverage products are still at an early stage compared to other sectors like health & wellness, which registered +39% in 2017 with respect to 2016, and fashion, which recorded an increase of 28% (Finotto, Mauracher, Procidano, 2020). But certainly, the customer is moving more and more in this direction and the opportunity to access the online store from mobile, at any time of the day, to choose products and services, is the new shopping experience of this industry. It is also necessary for the customer to fully adopt this habit and to get rid of traditional 'touch and feel' prejudices. In addition, not to be underestimated is the customer's demand for an ethical commitment to the environment. In fact, nowadays, customer is willing to pay more to choose 'green' products, both for quality and social commitment. These features should also be carried and communicated online, resulting in an ecommerce structure that combines speed and convenience with quality and transparency (Cattivelli, 2020).

Given that, it is also true that many Italian food companies are already pushing the accelerator for ecommerce as well as digital communication.

Regarding the latter, Italian food enterprises are relying more and more often on specialists and they are investing part of their budget, more or less consistent, in this field to make their brand and individual products known. A wide-ranging analysis of how much and how food companies are betting on online communication emerges from the survey developed in 2019 by Soluzione Group, in collaboration with Mark Up and Gdoweeek (Soluzione Group, 2019).

The survey involved more than 150 Italian companies in the agri-food sector, from meat and cured meat industry to dairy products and cheese, to fruit and vegetable and wine, with a combined turnover of 10 billion euros. In particular, the most common sector is that of meat and cured meat (13%), followed by pasta and flour (11%), wine (10%), bakery products (9%), oil and vinegar (8%), alcoholic beverages (7%), desserts and pastries (6%), dairy products (6%) and fruit and vegetables (3%).

Firstly, what emerged is that for 67% of companies the use of digital tools is the result of ongoing strategic work, which therefore involves them daily, while for 33% of respondents it is limited to individual campaigns to support products or events.

Moreover, to define the plan of action, the 60% relies on Marketing Manager, the 20% relies on sales manager or on the owner, while only 8% of companies has a digital marketing specialist. This clearly means that digital marketing and communication has not yet so much importance within the overall company strategy and it is still considered as a marginal or secondary activity.

In addition, we found that collaborating with external agencies which are specialised in web and social media marketing, is an action that is growing more and more among the respondents: in fact, the 60% followed this approach, the 20% worked with freelance, while only 10% chose to manage everything internally. This is an important insight too, as it explains how companies have not yet developed the right competences in digital marketing field and, thus, they preferred to rely on someone qualified to achieve the desired visibility.

With regards to the budget invested in communication, more than 50% of respondents spent an amount between 1 and 10% on digital communication, 26% of companies spent less than 1%, while only the 15% invested more than 10% of their communication budget in this area. In addition, the research explained that the more the budget invested, the more digital communication is the result of ongoing strategic work. In terms of individual sectors, companies producing meat and cure meat spent the most: about 1/5 of them invested more than 10% of their communication budget on digital.

Pasta and flour, and wine industries, are respectively the second and the third most spending food sectors with regards to digital communication: in fact, about 16% of them invested more than 10%. Whereas most dairy and cheese companies invested truly little, namely an amount between 1 and 3% of their budget. The least spending agri-food category is the snack industry, where companies that invest in online communication and exploit digital are only the 2% of them and these few enterprises spend a little amount between 1 and 3%. At this point, although many companies seemed not to understand the potential of digital marketing, the reassuring sign is that almost 80% of them invested in digital communication according to specific objectives set. This implies, at least, that they knew exactly what to reach. In particular, the most important goals which the respondents want to achieve were brand reputation and brand awareness, followed by engagement and sales. Whereas listening and advocacy appeared to be the least relevant goals for food companies. If 80% of them invested according to these specific goals, 17% did it according to the results achieved the previous year. As regards the remainder, their

investment was based on competitor’s expenses on digital communication. This small share is probably represented by companies that are a little bit more inexperienced compared to the others and this is a good sign too.

More important, the survey has identified the most used digital communication channels, illustrated in the Figure 2.10. The most common channel among respondents is the website or the company blog, used by 95% of companies. The other widely used digital tool is represented by social network, exploited by 93% of them. They are followed by SEO (48%) and direct marketing activities such as the use of newsletters (42%).

As regards social advertising and paid influencers, which would be well suited to the nature of food products, they are used by only 30% of companies. Whereas the less used channels are those practices aiming to interact with the customer like “call to action” and contest online, as well as “drive to store”, social listening, social selling, augmented reality, podcast and chatbot activities. The latter represent the most innovative digital marketing tools which Italian agri-food companies do not use so much yet. On the contrary, website and social network are the oldest and the most known digital tools and, thus, are the most used. In addition, the research revealed that the more the digital communication budget increases, the more the company adopts a multi-channel approach. For example, companies which spend more than 10% of their communication budget on digital communication not only adopt standard channels like website and social network but they also rely on augmented reality, chatbot and drive to store activities.

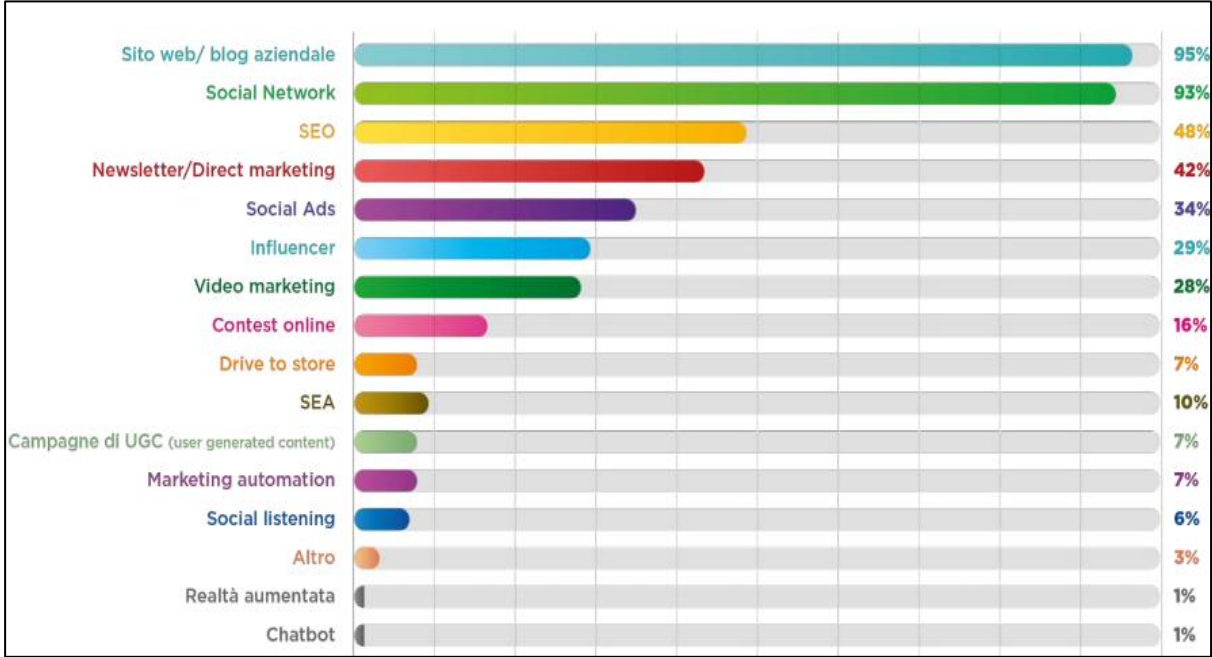


Fig. 2.10 – Most used digital communication channels (Soluzione Group, 2019)

As regards social media, or social network, Figure 2.11 shows that almost all companies (92%) use Facebook. This is also the third most common social media among Italian users aged from 16 to 64 years old, and that is probably one of the reasons why food companies decided to invest on it: they aim at exploiting its popularity and this huge share of Facebook users in Italy.

Instagram is widespread too as over 70% of companies decided to use it. In addition, according to a study conducted by Accenture, the main discussed topic on Instagram is exactly the food and beverage with more than 380 million posts with the hashtag “#food” and with more than 280 million posts with hashtag “#foodporn”.

As far as YouTube is concerned, nowadays it is used only by one company out of two. LinkedIn involves the 33% of companies and Twitter follows with 24% of businesses that chose to use it. Pinterest is far behind because only 10% use it within their digital marketing strategy while Snapchat, Google Plus and others are the less used (Soluzione Group, 2019).

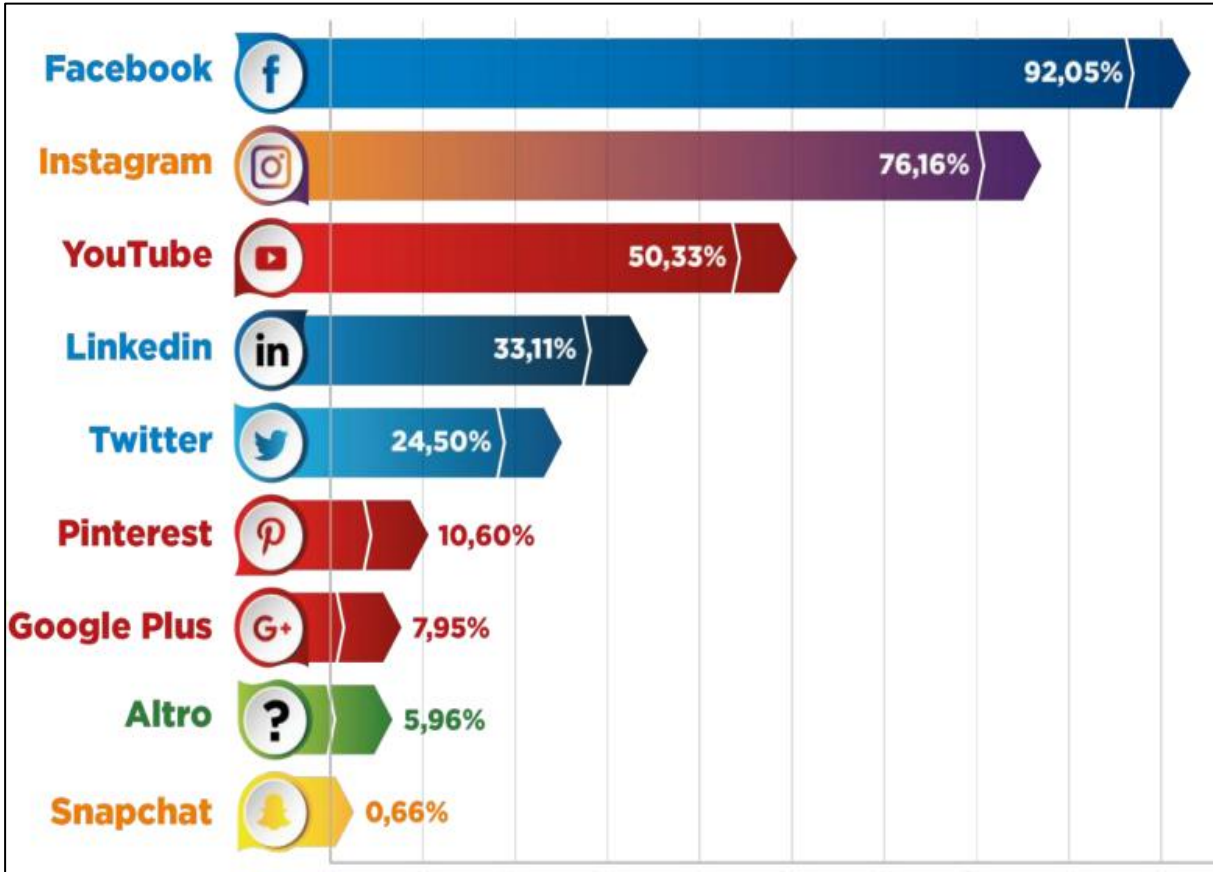


Fig. 2.11 – Most used social media within digital strategy (Soluzione Group, 2019)

From the survey, information about the content promoted by companies emerged as well. Almost all companies (96%) promote their products as the main content, through photos and videos. Another “topic” which is frequently promoted and posted on social network is represented by company’s values and brand image, in fact the 87% of food companies usually publish this type of content.

Less frequent, the 66% of them publish information of events and recipes while just some agri-food businesses promote content about ingredients and food chain. Whereas the less promoted content type is about wellness and price promotion.

Overall, the research placed Italian food companies in the so called “Neanderthal era”. In fact, what Soluzione Group has done is to mark out the timeline of digital adoption in different eras, from web 1.0 in the 1990s to the more recent applications of virtual and augmented reality. Then, it tried to place the different product industries in the timeline and the food sector, even when it invests in digital communication, remains confined to a so called “Neanderthal era” where processes are still too structured and old. In addition, they take too long compared to the speed of smart digital communication. This means that although they are focusing on digital communication, they don’t use it yet enough and, above all, they still rely only on the traditional digital tools. In fact, according to the analysis, they should invest also in the more advanced ones like, for example, artificial intelligence. At this point, some food companies present in the round table that took place after the survey’s presentation, pointed out that the most innovative tools are not always so useful to companies in the sector. Probably a mixture of these tools could represent the most effective solution.

As regards the way food companies should organise their digital marketing strategy, Nicoletta Polliotto, food marketing expert and co-author of "Digital Marketing Ingredients for restaurant industry", explains how to promote online Italian agri-food brands. She recommends social media to be at the forefront of a food marketing strategy. Specifically, Facebook should be the first one to be used, absolutely followed by Pinterest and Instagram, precisely because visual storytelling and visual marketing generate the strongest impact on people.

In terms of content to be promoted, companies should firstly publish photos of their high-quality products as well as they should remind to tell not only the product itself but also the story behind it. Moreover, they should regularly submit the offer of the day and take the customers updated on the projects and events to which the company participates: by

doing so, they would be able to strengthen the customer relationship. Another smart digital marketing practice which food companies should consider within their strategy is to make news-jacking, which consists of taking advantage of current events or stories in such a way as to advertise their products or brand. For example, a lot of companies tend to associate their product to one famous event that occurred recently. Furthermore, companies should also create price promotion, invent competitions and quiz for their customer base. Then, they should also make gifts to them with the aim of building customer loyalty. Finally, companies must not forget to remind their correct location data such as e-mail and telephone address, plus the map, in order to be always available and contactable (Minchenok, 2016).

Other studies on “Made in Italy” agri-food companies suggest exploiting word of mouth on the net (e-WOM) as it acted very effectively. Related to this, also social commerce, which is based on communication, is among the main effective elements that should be included within a social media marketing strategy as it proved crucial for Italian agri-food products’ sales (Scuderi, Sturiale, 2015).

Overall, from literature it has emerged that the most used digital marketing tools by agri-food Italian companies are website and social networks. Among the latter, Facebook and Instagram are the most important one, followed by YouTube. Whereas the agri-food sectors spending most in digital communication are the meat and cured meat one, followed by pasta and flour, and wine industries. To conclude this topic, it may be said that agri-food Italian companies are not yet exploiting digital marketing tools enough and those who rely on them are still too little. In addition, almost all companies are still far behind from using the most innovative digital tools.

The following paragraph will outline the “Speck Alto Adige IGP”, one of the most representative products of the Trentino-Alto Adige region, through an overview of its importance and economic value. This will be crucial in order to understand the main focus of the dissertation, explored in the third chapter, which will explain how producers of “Speck Alto Adige IGP” exploit the potential of digital marketing tools and techniques.

2.5 A focus on “Speck Alto Adige IGP”

Speck Alto Adige IGP (“Indicazione Geografica Protetta” which means “Protected Geographical Indication”) is a typical product of the South Tyrolean gastronomic tradition. It consists of a particular raw ham which owes its unmistakable taste to the combination between two processes: a light smoking and a maturing phase in the fresh mountain air. Furthermore, another product’s peculiarity is given by its spiciness made of rosemary, juniper, bay leaf, salt and pepper. The IGP certification has characterized this unique product since 1996, ensuring that producers use hams which are produced only in South Tyrol from pork legs according to traditional methods. In Trentino-Alto Adige there are exactly 28 producers entitled to produce the Speck Alto Adige IGP. As Figure 2.12 shows, they are all located in the North of the region, namely the “Alto Adige”, close to Bolzano and above the province of Trento.



Fig. 2.12 – Where producers of Speck Alto Adige IGP are located (Speck Alto Adige IGP, 2020)

Specifically, the production of Speck Alto Adige IGP is based on five distinct phases: the selection of raw material, the salting process, the smoking and the seasoning phase, and finally the quality control step. As regards the first phase, producers pay particular attention on using only lean and firm pork legs from farms that are suited to the species and, in addition, neither imported livestock nor frozen cuts of meat can be used. In the

salting process, lasting 3 weeks, the pork legs are carefully sprinkled with salt and spices, and it is precisely in the spicing phase that each producer adds his personal touch to his speck. Then, it is the turn of the smoking phase during which the hams are smoked and air-dried and the smoking temperature must not exceed 20°C. In this way, Speck Alto Adige PGI acquires its inimitable delicate flavour. Then, during the seasoning process hams are matured in well-ventilated places pervaded by the fresh, pure air of the South Tyrolean mountains for 22 weeks by making hams acquire their typical delicate and balanced flavour. Once this phase is over, a control system verifies compliance with all quality criteria at every stage of the ham production process: from the selection of the meat to the finished product. Only smoked ham that meets all the quality criteria and which has passed all the tests is branded in several places on the rind and the brand “Speck Alto Adige PGI” proves the high quality and authenticity (Speck Alto Adige IGP, 2020).

Given its uniqueness and high quality, it has always had an important role within the Italian cured meat sector as well as within the agri-food economy of Trentino-Alto Adige. In fact, as Figure 2.13 shows, during 2018 it classified as the 5th Italian cured meat in terms of production value with 109 million euros after Prosciutto di Parma DOP, Prosciutto di San Daniele DOP, Mortadella Bologna IGP and Bresaola della Valtellina IGP.

With regards to exports, it was the 4th cured meat with a generated value of 43 million euros. Exports accounted for the 39% of the total and the destination countries that contributed most to reach this large share were Germany (28,2%), USA (2%), France (1,5%), Austria (0,8%) and Switzerland (0,4%). Germany has confirmed to be a frequent and regular consumer of Italian products, particularly of the Trentino-Alto Adige food and wine items, also due to the geographical proximity (Ansa, 2019).

Furthermore, both in terms of production, export and consumption value, during 2018 the Speck Alto Adige IGP's performance improved compared to the previous year 2017. In particular, the value of production increased of 0,3%, exports increased of 6,2% and the consumption value increased of 1,3%. This means that both local and foreign market went well.

Then, within this specific food sector, thanks to this unique product, Trentino-Alto Adige was classified the 4th Italian region for economic impact while the province of Bolzano placed 4th in the Italian most impactful city ranking. This makes us reflect about the relevance and importance which this product has in the Trentino-Alto Adige agri-food

economy: suffice it to say that 35% of total food production value is given by Speck Alto Adige IGP only (Ismea-Qualivita, 2019).

DENOMINAZIONE	VALORE ALLA PRODUZIONE (milioni di euro)				VALORE AL CONSUMO (milioni di euro)				VALORE ALL'EXPORT (milioni di euro)			
	2017	2018	Peso %	Var.18/17	2017	2018	Peso %	Var.18/17	2017	2018	Peso %	Var.18/17
Prosciutto di Parma DOP	850	824	40,8%	-3,0%	2.227	2.349	48,8%	+5,5%	280	266	46,8%	-5,0%
Prosciutto di San Daniele DOP	304	307	15,2%	+1,1%	787	796	16,5%	+1,2%	87	70	12,3%	-19,5%
Mortadella Bologna IGP	304	296	14,6%	-2,6%	437	396	8,2%	-9,4%	96	105	18,4%	+9,4%
Bresaola della Valtellina IGP	225	232	11,5%	+3,1%	454	469	9,8%	+3,3%	24	24	4,2%	+0,6%
Speck Alto Adige IGP	109	109	5,4%	+0,3%	259	262	5,5%	+1,3%	41	43	7,6%	+6,2%
Prosciutto di Norcia IGP	32	37	1,9%	+15,5%	75	90	1,9%	+20,1%	0	0	0,0%	-
Prosciutto Toscano DOP	33	35	1,7%	+5,1%	94	97	2,0%	+3,8%	10,3	11	1,9%	+2,6%
Salame Felino IGP	30	30	1,5%	-2,6%	68	63	1,3%	-7,4%	9	14	2,5%	+58,5%
Salamini Italiani alla Cacciatora DOP	25	23	1,1%	-10,2%	35	31	0,6%	-11,5%	13	12	2,1%	-4,7%
Coppa di Parma IGP	13	16	0,8%	+22,9%	28	34	0,7%	+22,9%	3	8	1,3%	+134,7%

Fig. 2.13 – Certified production and value of PDO PGI meat products (Ismea-Qualivita, 2019)

As far as sales channels are concerned, in the Italian market the most common channel is represented by large-scale distribution accounting for 65% of the total. The remainder is divided between discount (18,7%), wholesalers and gastronomies (both 5,4%) and local retailers (5,3%). As for Trentino-Alto Adige's local market, the most common sales channel is represented by local retailer, which account for the 60% of the total (Italia a Tavola, 2020).

Now that the product of Speck Alto Adige IGP and its performance have been outlined, the third chapter will illustrate the application of digital marketing activities on the small South Tyrolean producers of "Speck Alto Adige IGP". The aim is to analyse the online presence of these companies, including the use of both website and social media. The analysis will try to understand how much these activities are used and exploited and if they can improve the performance and increase the visibility of these speck producers.

3. The application of digital marketing tools on the Speck Alto Adige IGP's companies

As explained above, this chapter is dedicated to the case study conducted by the author about the SMEs' digital presence in the sector of speck in Trentino-Alto Adige.

The chapter is organised as follows: firstly, the research goal will be outlined in order to understand what the analysis aims to, and who are the members participating to this research project. In addition, the author will explain the reasons of exploring and deepening this specific product.

Secondly, the chapter moves on illustrating the working method and the sample of companies analysed.

Thirdly, a quantitative analysis will be conducted and explored in depth, with the purpose of understanding how much these companies are exploiting the official website and social media as digital marketing tools.

Finally, the chapter will offer a qualitative analysis about five specific companies among those analysed, through some in-depth interviews. At the end, quantitative and qualitative results will be discussed.

3.1 Research goal

The aim of the research conducted in this dissertation is to analyse the digital maturity and digital marketing activities performed by Trentino-Alto Adige's SMEs in the sector of speck. As most of them produce "Speck Alto Adige IGP", the focus of the research will be on this specific product.

The analysis is part of the activity carried out by the AgriFood Management & Innovation Lab. This lab consists in a new research center created by the Management Department of Ca' Foscari University of Venice whose goal is to investigate fields such as digitalization, consumer behaviour and business model evolution in the made in Italy agri-food industry. The research discussed in this thesis regards the field of digitalization and involved professors, researchers, and students to study the digital presence of agri-food companies located in Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto (the author of this thesis was assigned to Trentino-Alto Adige). Firstly, they collected and analysed data by themselves about the use of social media and website made by companies. Secondly, they submitted to them specific questionnaires and qualitative interviews.

Finally, thanks to the collected data, students developed their research thesis exploring

and deepening a specific food sector among those they analysed.

As mentioned above, the author of this thesis chose to analyse the sector of speck, in particular the “Speck Alto Adige IGP”, among all the food sectors of Trentino-Alto Adige. The decision to take this product as the case study object is due to several reasons.

First of all, it is the most important agri-food product of this region, after apples, in terms of both production and export value. They are worth respectively 109 and 43 million euros and, in addition, its value of production accounts for almost the 40% of the total region’s food production value. It is then easy to understand how important it is within the agri-food economy of Trentino-Alto Adige.

Secondly, it fully embodies the concept of “made in Italy” product: it is the result of a long-handcrafted process, it is strictly certified and, consequently, it is of the highest quality. Finally, another reason that justified the choice of this product is that literature does not offer much information about the digital maturity of companies belonging this food sector, particularly as regards the use of social media marketing activities.

3.2 Working method

In order to study and explore the digital presence in the agri-food Italian SMEs, the research lab started collecting a dataset made up of 536 companies, of which 71 in Trentino-Alto Adige, 65 in Friuli Venezia Giulia and 400 in Veneto among different food industries. Obviously, since they are small and medium enterprises, they all have less than 250 employees and less than 50 million euros of annual sales revenues.

As far as the food industries are concerned, identified by specific ATECO codes, they involve the following sectors: the processing and preservation of meat and meat-based products (10.1), of fish, crustaceans and molluscs (10.2), of fruit and vegetables (10.3), of vegetable and animal oils and fats (10.4), the dairy industry (10.5), the grain processing, the production of starches and starch products (10.6), the production of bakery and flour products (10.7) and, finally, the production of other food products (10.8).

In addition, the initial dataset included, for each company, some general data such as the home province, revenues from sales of the last available year, number of employees, tax code, number of CCIAA, legal address, phone number and finally the possible website link. Starting from these data, the author of this thesis analysed the digital communication channels of Trentino-Alto Adige’s companies only. In particular, for each of them, it has been analysed the official website and six social media: Facebook, Instagram, YouTube,

LinkedIn, Twitter and Pinterest. As the focus of the dissertation is on “Speck Alto Adige IGP”, below the reported analysis will concern only the companies which produce it and which belong to the sector of meat-based products, identified by the ATECO code 10.1., which technically involve the processing and preservation of meat and meat-based products. Therefore, the sample of the analysis is made up of 16 companies, distributed among Trentino-Alto Adige.

It is important to remind that the time period considered for the analysis is the second semester of 2019: therefore, each collected data refers to the period July-December of 2019. Moreover, it should be noted that the whole analysis was conducted before Covid-19 and indeed, the gathered information have not been influenced by the outbreak.

Before starting with the analysis, it is necessary to outline the main variables that the author has studied for each digital marketing channel. It must be underlined that the social media Pinterest, compared to the others, will not be analysed as none of the 16 companies of the sample own a Pinterest account.

WEBSITE: date of creation, date of last website update, frequency of content publication in the considered semester (July 2019-December 2019), available languages, available social media icons, presence of ecommerce, presence of anomalies and contact information.

FACEBOOK: registration name, date of creation, link to the official website, profile picture, presence of ecommerce, number of times the profile’s name has changed, number of people managing profile in Italy and number of countries where there are people managing profile, number of likes to the page, number of followers, number of page’s recommendation, average review score, number of total reviews, number of posts, share, comments, like and other type of reactions¹ monthly, number of events organized by the company and number of fan attending the event, number of answers to fan’s comments, number of call for action (CFA).

INSTAGRAM: registration name, date of creation, link to the official website, profile picture, number of posts, number of followers and following, number of IGTV and number of stories, number of times company is tagged, number

¹ Other types of “Facebook reactions” to a post are: Love, Laughter, Wow, Sigh, Opposite

of answers to fan's comments, number of like and comments monthly, presence of ecommerce.

YOUTUBE: registration name, date of creation, link to the official website, number of subscribers, number of posts/videos, number of views, number of answers to fan's comments.

LINKEDIN: registration name, link to the official website, profile picture, number of followers, number of posts and reactions² monthly.

TWITTER: registration name, date of creation, link to the official website, profile picture, number of followers and following, number of posts, like and share monthly, number of answers to fan's comments.

These are the main variables analysed by the authors, along with others not reported here such as the social media account's officiality, the number of most active fans on Facebook and how the company talks about itself on the profile description.

² LinkedIn reactions to a post are: Like, Celebrate, Love, Insightful, Curious

3.3 A quantitative analysis on the use of digital marketing tools

The sample of companies analysed is reported in Table 3.1, showing for each one the home province, the annual sales revenues of 2018 and the number of employees.

Company name	Province	Annual sales revenues in thousands EUR (2018)	N° of employees
SEGATA S.P.A.	Trento	49.061	130
MOSER SRL	Bolzano	39.454	100
MERANO SPECK SRL	Bolzano	24.276	45
G. PFITSCHER SRL	Bolzano	20.035	65
CHRISTANELL G.M.B.H. S.R.L.	Bolzano	17.960	76
SALUMIFICIO VAL RENDENA S.P.A.	Trento	11.990	22
BOME' S.R.L.	Trento	11.494	25
MENDELSPECK S.R.L.	Bolzano	11.267	26
TROCKNER SEBASTIAN S.R.L.	Bolzano	7.690	18
MARTIN SPECK S.R.L.	Bolzano	7.549	24
VONTAVON SRL	Bolzano	7.521	22
MACELLERIA KIEM SRL	Bolzano	6.967	16
SALUMIFICIO TRENTO S.R.L.	Trento	6.204	18
FILIERA AGROALIMENTARE TRENTO S.R.L.	Trento	5.163	11
CARPANO SPECK S.R.L.	Trento	4.787	23
WINDEGGER GUENTHER SRL	Bolzano	824	14

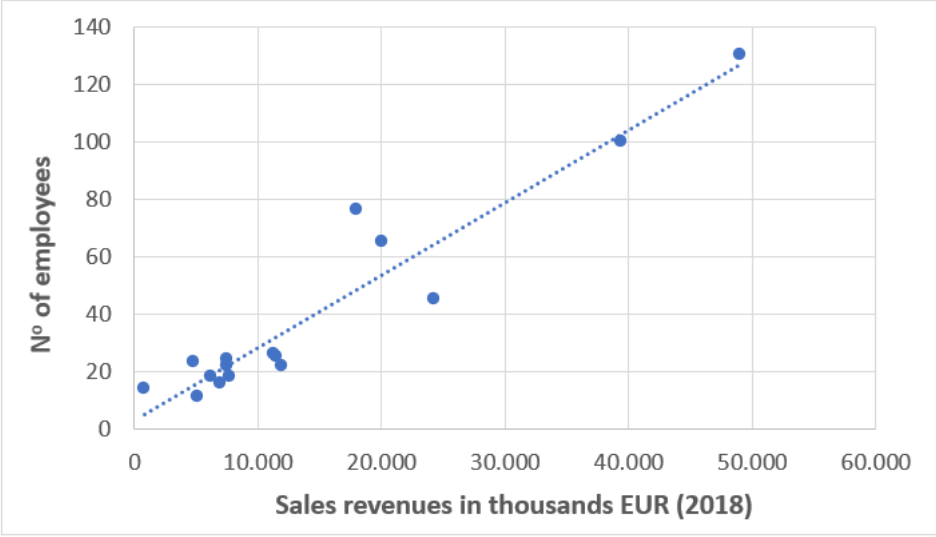
Table 3.1 – List of companies analysed in the case study (Source: personal elaboration³)

In addition, Table 3.1 shows how 63% of the companies (10 out of 16) are located in Alto-Adige, in the province of Bolzano. The remainder, which represent the 37%, belong to the province of Trento. Companies producing speck are therefore widely distributed in Trentino-Alto Adige. As regards those who produce Speck Alto Adige IGP, they are all located in Bolzano, and they represent the majority.

Whereas from Graph 3.1 it emerges that the higher company's sales revenues, the higher the number of employees. It seems that these two variables are directly proportional and, thus, companies with more employees are more likely to generate more revenues and vice-versa. In addition, 75% generated less than 20 million euros and almost 70% of them have less than 40 employees. Only two companies, Segata Spa and Moser Srl, exceed the

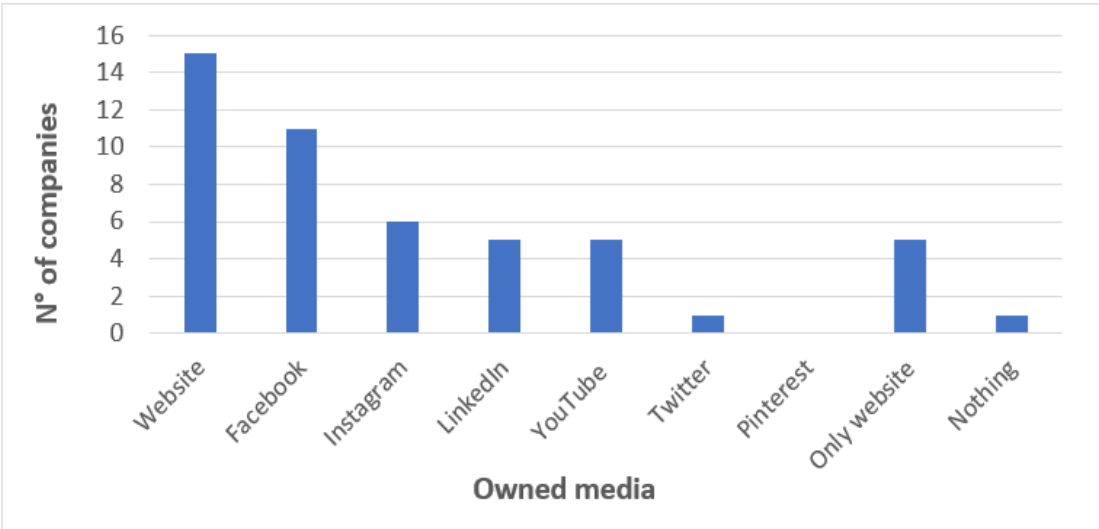
³ From now on, every table, chart and/or graph is the result of personal elaboration

threshold of 39 million euros counting respectively 49.061 and 39.454 million euros. All the others are pretty far behind, suffice it to say that the third one, in terms of revenues, counts 24.276.



Graph 3.1 – Relation between sales revenues and n° of employees

An overview about digital maturity of these companies is explained by the Graph 3.2: it emerged the 93%, 15 companies out of 16, have an official website, except for Macelleria Kiem Srl, which does not even have any social media. The 68% has a Facebook profile, the 37,5% has Instagram, the 31% has LinkedIn and YouTube, the 6% has Twitter (only one company), while none of them have a Pinterest profile. It is also interesting to note that 5 companies have only the website. Whereas for those who have also social media, the most used is Facebook while the others are pretty far behind.



Graph 3.2 – How many owned media companies have?

3.3.1 Official website

Out of the 16 companies belonging to the sample, only one of them doesn't have an official website, namely Macelleria Kiem Srl. Some external websites talk about this company but there is no existence of its official website. That could be explained because of its limited resources, but if we analyse some smaller companies, in terms of revenues and employees, we learn that they have an official website and that two of them manage also a social media.

As regards the website's date of creation, the author was able to collect this information from 14 companies out of 16. It emerges that all of them created their website over the past 20 years: in particular 4 companies, which represent the 29%, did it in 2015 and 2016. The remaining 71% has used their official website for about 15 years. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that the oldest websites are owned by those companies which generate more revenues and count more employees. This is probably due to the fact that this type of companies usually has more financial and human resources to invest in digital marketing, such as the website.

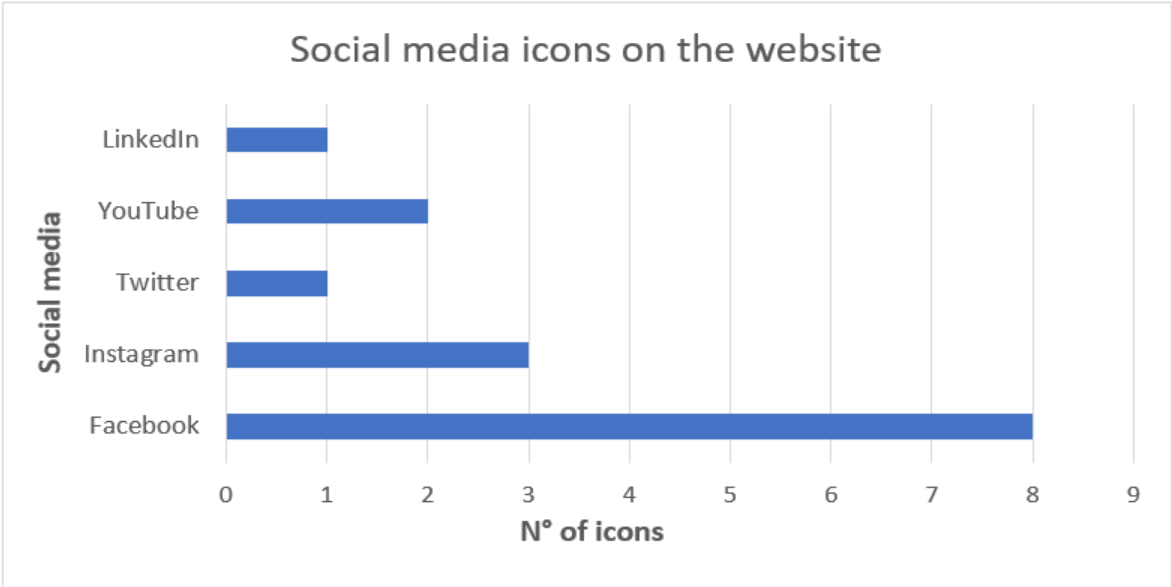
As for how often companies publish contents, it was difficult to collect this data, because a lot of them publish articles without the date. Therefore, the author considered only content which showed the posting date. Within the 15 companies with a website, only 3 of them publish something in the considered time period (July-December 2019). They are Segata Spa, G. Pfitscher Srl and Carpano Speck Srl and they all publish only one article, respectively on November, September and December. This testifies how rarely they communicate and try to interact with their customers. In the previous chapters the importance of keeping the customer base updated through content and news has been underlined many times. Thus, from this perspective, it is clear that these three companies are still far behind. As regards the others, as they do not write the posting date, it is not possible to understand how much active they are online. However, the choice of not writing the posting date risks to be wrong because they don't look active at customer's eyes and, moreover, they are not clear in communicating their content.

In addition, another insight showing how they are not yet exploiting their website enough, is that less than 50% of them updated the website in general. This could mean that they don't consider the website as an important tool within their digital marketing strategy. Moving on with the website analysis, the author tried to understand whether companies of the sample add their social media icons on the website. This digital marketing "action"

is very important as website visitors can link to social media company's profile, and brands are able to strength their customer relationship. As shown by Graph 3.3, the most common social media icon among our companies is Facebook, which is used by 8 companies out of 11 owning a Facebook account. This means that the 72% of companies which are on Facebook decided to put the icon on their website. The second most common icon is Instagram: 3 companies (out of the 6 that are active on Instagram) use the icon, and they only represent the 50%, which is still a pretty low percentage. In fact, using Instagram and Facebook's icons would allow companies to increase their followers and visibility on both these social media. YouTube's icon is used by 2 companies out of 5, Segata Spa and Moser Srl, accounting for the 40%. As regards LinkedIn, the icon is used only by 1 company out of 5, namely Segata Spa, representing only the 20%. The last one is Twitter, whose icon is used only by Segata Spa again, but it must be underlined that this company is the only one to own a Twitter account.

Overall, what emerges is that only the 36% of them (4 out of 11) add all their social media icons, and they are Segata Spa, Vontavon Srl, Carpano Speck Srl and Windegger Guenther Srl. Whereas among those who have at least one social media, the 27% don't add any icon (3 out of 11).

However, a lot still needs to be achieved: in fact, as the previous chapters explained, each company should have a combined and integrated digital marketing strategy, starting with making its channels integrated. To reach this goal, they should start by showing social media icons on their official website.



Graph 3.3 – Presence of social media icons on the website

As far as ecommerce is concerned, another interesting data is that the 33% of companies working in the speck sector have a completely integrated ecommerce (5 out of 15). Nowadays, everyone knows how essential it is to market products online, and considering that many of these companies have never been very technologically advanced, this percentage is not so discouraging. Obviously, all of them should aim at creating its own ecommerce even if the speck has always been a product sold in the shops. What is more surprising is that the few companies among the sample using ecommerce are widely distributed among the revenue ranking. For example, Carpano Speck Srl, which is the second-to-last company in terms of sales revenues, relies on an advanced ecommerce, while many other larger enterprises, such as Segata Spa, do not sell their products online yet. This seems strange, because a larger company, with more financial resources, usually is more likely to own this kind of selling tool. Probably it is only a matter of time before these companies start using an ecommerce. By the way, a deepening about Segata Spa will be later given through a qualitative interview, to understand better their digital marketing and selling strategy.

Another advantage offered by website consists of contact tools that company makes available to customers in order to answer their questions. Among our sample, all companies offer a telephone number and an email, while only half of them offer a form to fill out. This type of consumers often asks for questions and information about speck products, so the form to fill out is an extremely useful tool. Thus, 50% is still too low as a percentage. Finally, only the 13% uses WhatsApp, and only the 6% relies on newsletters which, as discussed in the previous chapters, are highly effective marketing tools.



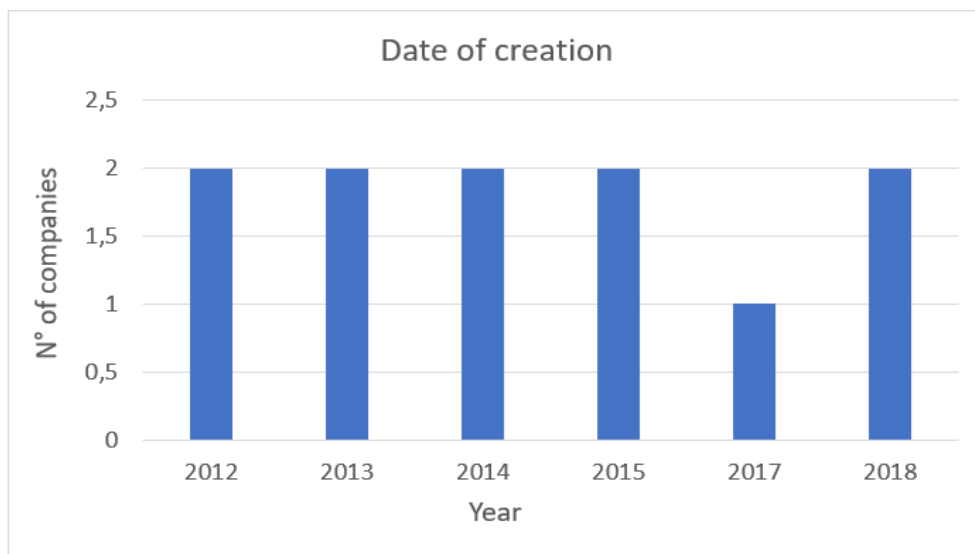
Graph 3.4 – Company contact tools (on the website) available to users

3.3.2 Facebook

Among the 16 companies representing our sample, the 68% has a Facebook profile, namely 11 out of 16. From now on, while analysing Facebook, the sample will consist of 11 companies.

It immediately emerges that the 100% of them offer a link which automatically brings the Facebook users to the official website and this is a good sign of integrated channels. This way, in fact, a user discovering the Facebook page by accident is also able to find out more information about the company clicking through to the website. However, as shown above, the reverse is not true: some websites don't show the Facebook icon.

All the Facebook profiles have been created from 2012 onwards, and the 2018 was the last year a profile was born. They are widely distributed over the past years. Only the 36% of them, which are 4 out of 11, changed their profile name once until now, while the others never changed it.



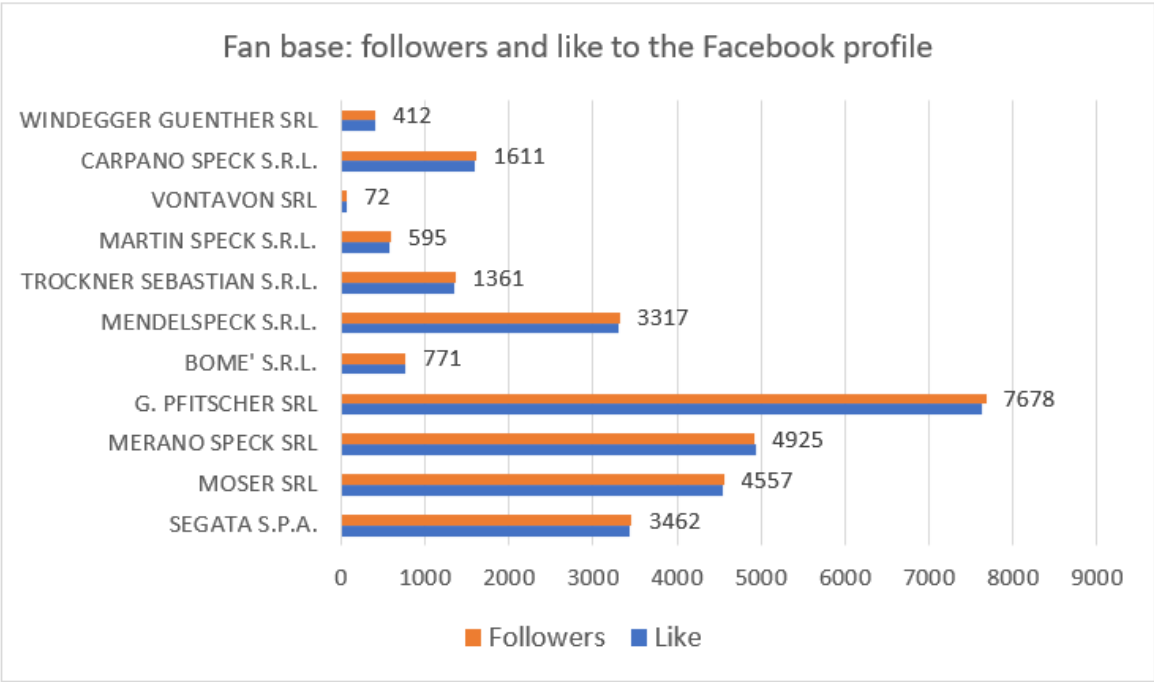
Graph 3.5 - Number of Facebook profile's creation by year

In addition, all of them kept the name of the brand as profile name, this is a good sign too because they are more recognizable. The same thing occurred for profile picture: every company used their brand logo as profile picture, probably for the same reason.

Only the 20% of those who have an ecommerce, which are 1 out of 5, allows users to shop their products directly on Facebook. This is a strategic digital marketing action which also other companies should follow. Probably they consider Facebook only as a promotional tool through which increasing visibility.

As far as the Facebook’s customer base is concerned, Graph 3.6 shows the fan base of our companies through the number of both followers and likes left by users to the Facebook profile. They both have pretty the same level in every company. Just to be precise, from now on, as “fan base” we will consider only the number of followers because they closely reflect the intent of a fan, namely, supporting and following a brand. In fact, in the graph below it is reported only the number of followers close to the orange row.

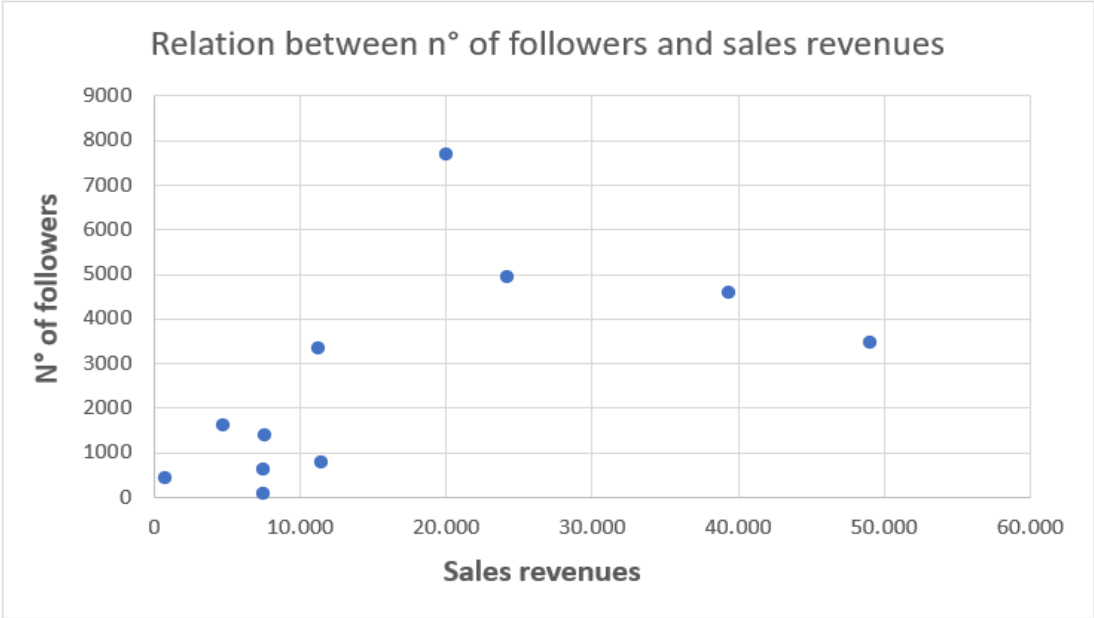
The most followed company is G. Pfitscher Srl, with 7678 fans, standing out by far compared to the others. Indeed, the second most appreciated company is Merano Speck Srl with 4925 fans, followed by Moser Srl, Segata Spa and Mendelspeck Srl, which respectively have 4557, 3462 and 3317 fans. Vontavon Srl is the less appreciated as it counts only 72 fans, while the average number among companies is 2614. In addition, from the graph and it is possible to see how, except for few companies, there is much variability among them in terms of fans gained.



Graph 3.6 – Comparison between the n° of followers and n° of likes to the Facebook profile

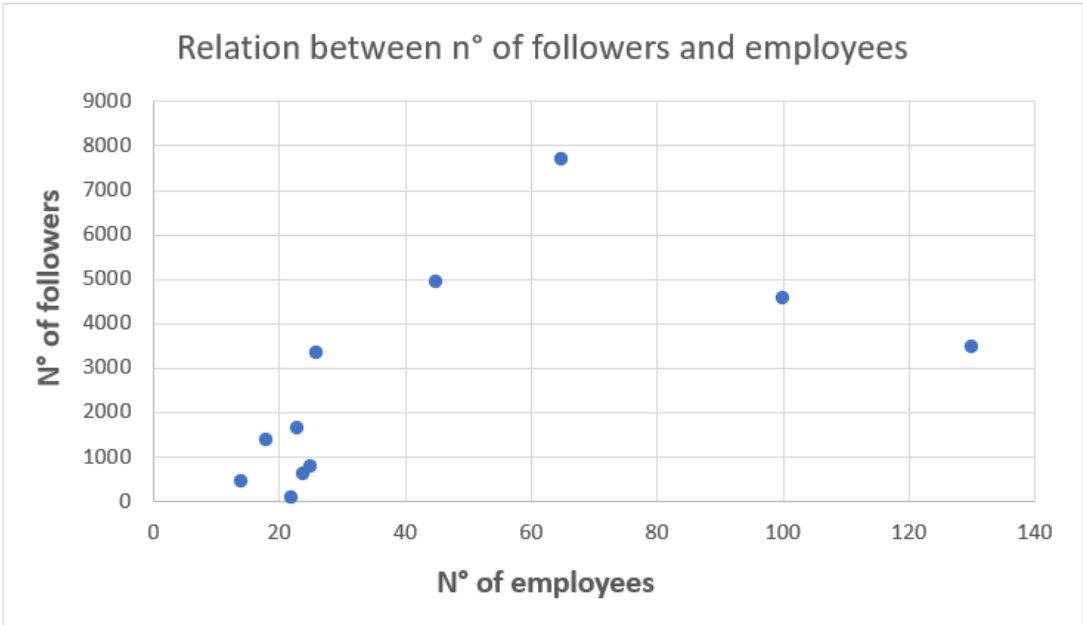
Now the analysis moves on by trying to understand whether there is correlation between the followers and the company size, expressed firstly in terms of sales revenues and secondly in terms of number of employees. This is very useful to know as it tells if companies with more financial or human resources have a greater visibility on Facebook. Graph 3.7 shows that there is a sort of small correlation between sales revenues and number of followers. In particular, the correlation coefficient between these two

variables, calculated with Excel formulas, is 0,6, which indicates a moderate correlation. This could mean that companies with more available resources could invest and focus more than others on social media such as Facebook.



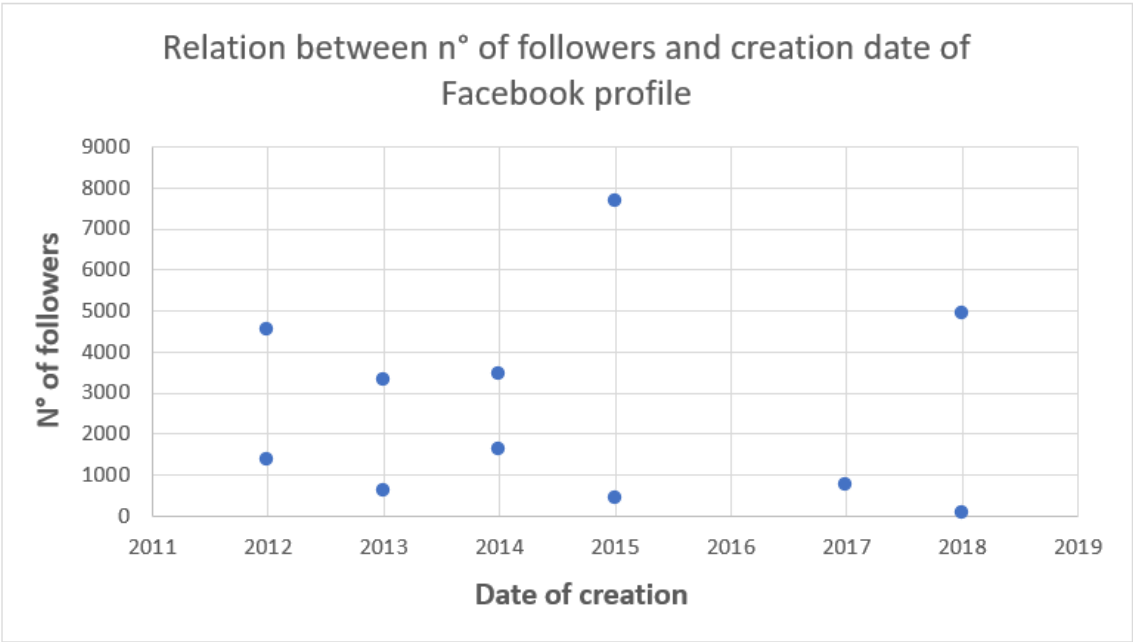
Graph 3.7 – Relation between the n° of Facebook followers and sales revenues (thousands EUR)

In the graph 3.8 the author analysed the possible correlation between n° of followers and number of employees: it emerged that the correlation coefficient equals to 0,6, as the previous coefficient. Thus, it is possible to say that, particularly until the level of 65 employees, this variable positively influences the visibility on Facebook of company.



Graph 3.8 – Relation between the n° of Facebook followers and n° of employees

More interesting is the Graph 3.9 about the correlation between the number of followers and creation date of Facebook profile. Everyone can see that there isn't any correlation between these two variables: in fact, the correlation coefficient equals to -0,06. However, it is an interesting insight as it means that, in order to increase visibility, no matter since how many years a company owns a Facebook account. It matters how the account is exploited and managed. For example, the most appreciated company is G. Pfitscher Srl which created its Facebook profile in 2015 and it was among the youngest companies to do it. Whereas Trockner Sebastian Srl, which has had a Facebook profile for 10 years, it is among the less appreciated.



Graph 3.9 – Relation between the n° of Facebook followers and n° of followers

Beyond the number of followers and likes left to the official Facebook page, another interesting data which explains how fans consider a company and how much they are satisfied with it, is the review score they leave. In fact, Facebook fans can leave a review on the company profile to express how much they like the company itself and its products. Among our sample, the 72% received a review by an average number of 15 fans. The score goes from 1 (minimum value) to 5 (maximum value) and the average score review is 4,8 out of 5. It means that the products have been appreciated and the customers decided to point it out on the Facebook page.

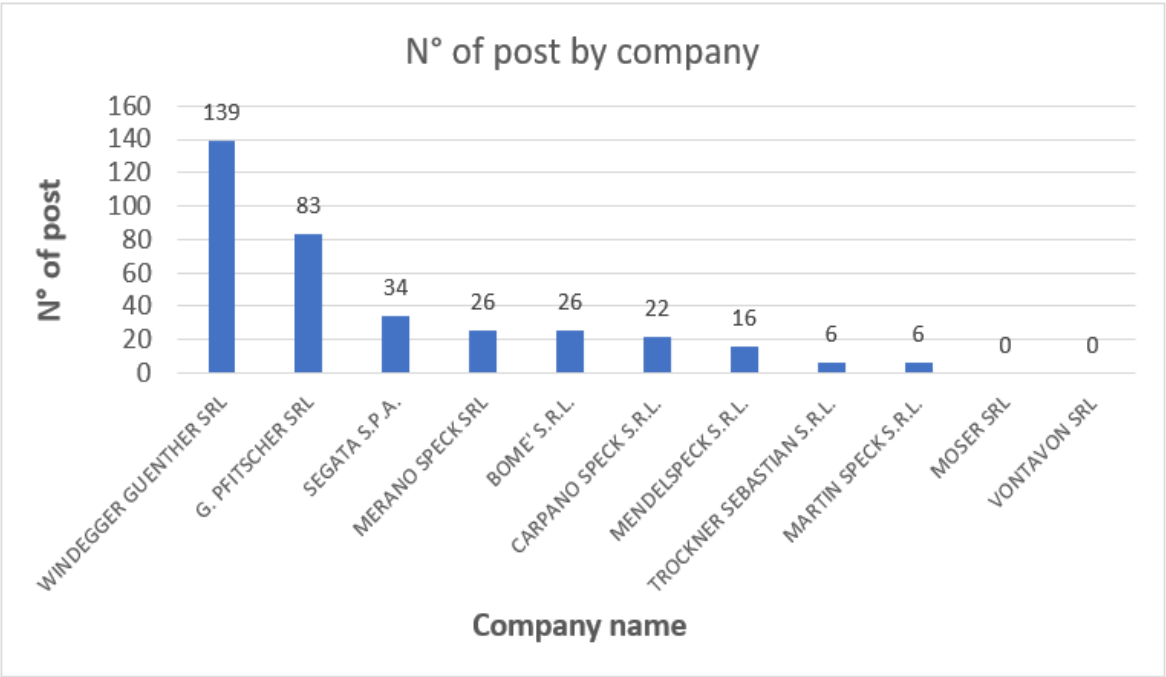
As discussed in the previous chapters, the number of followers as well as the number of likes left to the Facebook profile by users are not enough to explain the social visibility

and social success of a brand. In fact, what is becoming more and more important is how much the brand interacts with its fan base and vice-versa. Therefore, the author analysed firstly how much companies are active on Facebook, measuring the quantity of content published and if this variable can influence the number of followers.

Graph 3.10 shows that the most active company in terms of post is Windegger Guenther Sr, which published 139 posts in the period considered. The second one is G. Pfitscher Srl, with 83 posts, while the others are still far behind. Moser Srl and Vontavon Srl never published anything. Moreover, it is interesting to note how Moser Srl, which is among the most followed companies, decided not to publish anything.

In addition, over the considered semester companies published on average 33 posts, which means almost six posts per month and more than one post per week.

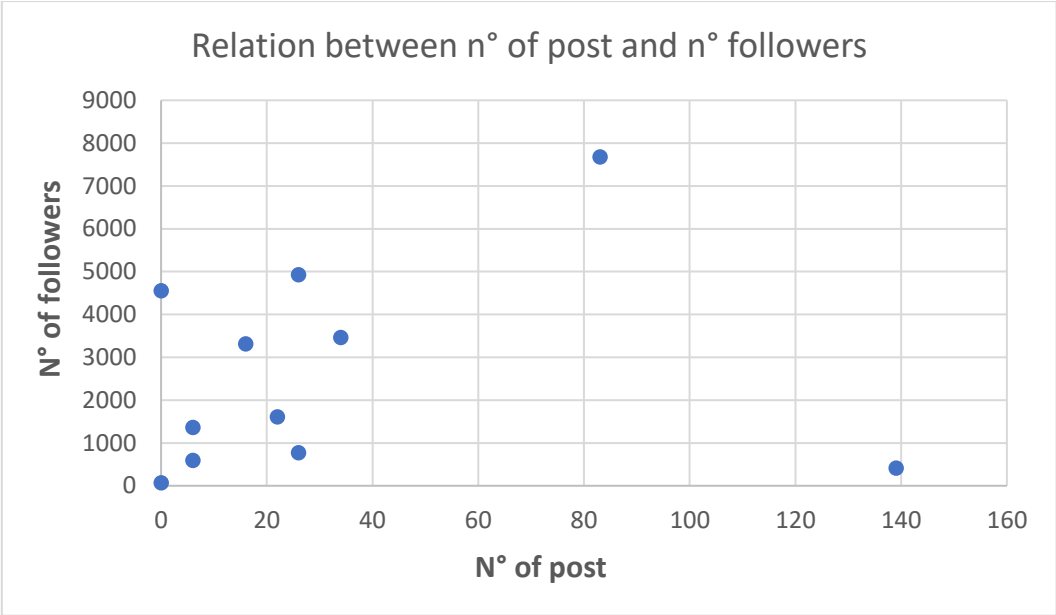
Later, the author will analyse the engagement rate in order to understand whether the more published posts, the higher the engagement with fans.



Graph 3.10 – Number of post by company

Once the number of published posts has been showed, it is interesting to check whether there is correlation with the number of followers. The purpose is to understand if a company publishing a lot of posts is more likely to increase its fan base. Graph 3.11 shows how publishing up to 40 posts helps to increase the number of followers, then there is no correlation anymore. In fact, the correlation coefficient is almost inexistent, being equal

to 0,12. Suffice it see that Windegger Guenther Srl, which is the most active company in terms of posts, is among the less followed profiles.



Graph 3.11 – Relation between n° of post and n° of followers

In addition, it has been analysed the month during which companies publish most in order to understand if a specific time period of the year influences the willingness of brands to publish content. From the analysis it emerges that December is the month where posts are most frequent, probably because of the Christmas festivities. In fact, the average number of posts in December is 8, while during other months companies publish on average less than 5 posts.

As explained above, after studying the quantity of content posted by companies, the research focused on analysing the engagement they were able to generate with their own fan base. In fact, the quality of content is becoming more and more important compared to the quantity. Thus, in order to know if they are exploiting Facebook effectively, they should look not only at their number of followers but also at what followers think of them. They should analyse how the fan base reacts to their post. That’s why the author collected data about the number of followers’ reactions, comments and shares, all related to the posts. The reactions are Facebook’s functions through which users can express their opinion about the content published by company and they include “Like”, “Love”, “Wow”, “Grr”, “Lauther”, “Sigh” and “Grr”. All these reactions, along with shares and comments, represent a form of interaction between followers and brand and they can help companies to evaluate if they are engaging their fan base enough.

Thanks to these data, the author analysed the engagement rate per post for every company. The formula used to calculate this rate is showed below and it expresses the percentage of followers who saw the post and who decided to interact with it through a like, a comment or a share.

$$ER\% = \left\{ \left[\frac{(\text{Reactions} + \text{Comments} + \text{Shares})}{(\text{Total Posts})} \right] / \left[\text{N}^\circ \text{ of followers} \right] \right\} \times 100$$

As explained in literature, when a company has an ER above 1%, it means it is working well and it is engaging their fan base. When the ER is between 0,5% and 0,99%, company is working in the right direction, but it can do better. Finally, if the ER is below 0,5%, it means that it is not engaging enough its fan base, probably due to their content used within the post. Table 3.2 outlines the data used to calculate the engagement rate for every company and, in the last column, it shows the engagement rates themselves.

Company	Followers	Post	Reactions	Comments	Share	ER%
BOME' S.R.L.	771	26	1351	128	18	7,47%
G. PFITSCHER SRL	7678	83	17672	1553	2407	3,39%
CARPANO SPECK S.R.L.	1611	22	840	81	119	2,93%
MERANO SPECK SRL	4925	26	2785	91	263	2,45%
TROCKNER SEBASTIAN S.R.L.	1361	6	143	11	11	2,02%
MENDELSPECK S.R.L.	3317	16	659	10	81	1,41%
MARTIN SPECK S.R.L.	595	6	32	1	12	1,26%
WINDEGGER GUENTHER SRL	412	139	277	7	43	0,57%
SEGATA S.P.A.	3462	34	447	19	67	0,45%
MOSER SRL	4557	0	0	0	0	0
VONTAVON SRL	72	0	0	0	0	0

Table 3.2 – Facebook's engagement rate per post (%)

It emerges that the most attractive posts are those published by Bomè Srl (7,47%), which means that for every 100 followers there are more than 7 interactions to a single post. The second company is G. Pfitscher, with an ER of 3,39%. Then, Carpano Speck Srl, Merano Speck Srl and Trckner Sebastian Srl follow in the ranking with respectively 2,93%, 2,45% and 2,02%.

It is pretty surprising that Segata Spa, which is the largest company in terms of sales revenues and employees, has the lowest ER (0,45%). This is the proof that being more structured and organized and, above all, having a lot of followers, doesn't lead actually to a good engagement ability. Whereas as regards the two companies which didn't publish any post, obviously they have an ER equal to 0.

Overall, considering the parameters explained above, almost all companies are doing very well as most of them have an ER above 1%. The average engagement rate 1,99%, which means they are posting content that followers consider attractive and with which followers want to interact. In particular, the most successful Facebook profile, with an ER of 7,47%, stands out compared to the others even if it doesn't have so many followers and, above all, it isn't one of the most publishing companies. This is the proof that quality matters more than quantity.

Moreover, the author tried to understand which interaction was more frequent among reactions, comments and shares. The purpose is to know whether followers are more likely to leave a simple and fast opinion, rather than to express a comment to speak with the company or share their post to make other Facebook's friends see that post. These two actions, commenting and sharing, require more time than reactions and thus, they give an idea about how much time followers are willing to spend for the company. The three rates were calculated for every company and then the author has calculated the average among the sample. Below it is showed the formulas and the final rate:

$$\text{Average applause rate (\%)} = [(\text{Tot. Reactions}/N^{\circ} \text{ of posts}) / N^{\circ} \text{ of followers}] \times 100 = 1,71\%$$

$$\text{Average amplification rate (\%)} = [(\text{Tot. Shares}/N^{\circ} \text{ of posts}) / N^{\circ} \text{ of followers}] \times 100 = 0,16\%$$

$$\text{Average conversation rate (\%)} = [(\text{Tot. comments}/N^{\circ} \text{ of posts}) / N^{\circ} \text{ of followers}] \times 100 = 0,13\%$$

The average applause rate is the highest and this is a demonstration that Facebook fan base prefers to leave a like or reaction rather than a comment or share. In particular, on average for every 100 followers almost 2 reactions per post are left, while regarding comments and shares, they occur less than once per post.

Another interesting metric that the author analysed is the response rate to the comments, which measures how much company answers to their followers and how much it wants to interact with them. Out of the 11 Facebook profiles, only 9 of them received comments in the period considered. That's why the sample taken to calculate the response rate is made up of 9 companies. The formula is expressed below, and it measures for every Facebook page how many times the company answers to their followers' comments in terms of percentage. Table 3.3 follows by showing the final results.

$$\text{Response rate (\%)} = (\text{Comments} / N^{\circ} \text{ of responses}) \times 100$$

Company	Comments	N° of responses	Response rate
BOME' S.R.L.	128	118	92,19%
MERANO SPECK SRL	91	62	68,13%
WINDEGGER GUENTHER SRL	7	4	57,14%
MENDELSPECK S.R.L.	10	4	40,00%
G. PFITSCHER SRL	1553	556	35,80%
CARPANO SPECK S.R.L.	81	25	30,86%
TROCKNER SEBASTIAN S.R.L.	11	2	18,18%
SEGATA S.P.A.	19	1	5,26%
MARTIN SPECK S.R.L.	1	0	0,00%

Table 3.3. – Company's response rate (%) to the followers' comments

From the table it emerges how Bomè Srl, which has also the highest engagement rate, is the most interacting company in terms of answering followers' comments. In fact, it answers to almost all the comments received with a rate of 92,19%. Other companies answer as well, such as Merano Speck Srl and Windegger Guenther Srl, but less frequently. The remainder are not so active, in fact they all answer to less than 50% of comments. Obviously, when making assumptions, it is necessary to consider the number of comments received because, for example, G. Pfitscher Srl answered much more times than Bomè Srl, but its response rate is lower because it received more comments.

Overall, the average response rate is 38%, which is still too low to be considered acceptable. Companies should answer more to the comments and interact more frequently. There is not so much interaction yet. In fact, if we also look at the Facebook wall, which is the space where followers can write something to the company of their own free will, it is empty in every Facebook profile.

In addition, none of them organized or published events on Facebook. This is smart digital marketing action too offered by Facebook which companies of this specific sector never exploited.

To conclude, the "Call for Action" tool was rarely used too. As explained in the previous chapters, companies often exploit their posts to ask followers to do a specific action like posting a photo as well as write something special. In general, this tool is used in order to create engagement and interaction. Among our sample, only G. Pfitscher Srl and Carpano Speck Srl include this type of content within their post. The former published only 4 CfA out of 83 posts, asking to post a photo and to guess the right answer. The latter published 2 CfA out of 22 posts, asking to guess the right answer as well.

3.3.3 Instagram

Out of the 16 companies representing our sample, only 6 of them have an Instagram account (37,5%). All the companies with an Instagram account have also a Facebook profile but the reverse is not true. Of these six companies, which are illustrated below in the Table 3.4, the 66% shows their website link on the profile (4 out of 6). Obviously, all companies should add the link because having an integrated digital marketing strategy make companies more popular, but 66% is not bad by the way.

They all created their official account between 2015 and 2019, thus the profiles are pretty young. In addition, all of them use their brand logo as Instagram official profile picture and this makes companies more recognizable by users. As regards ecommerce, none of the profiles which have both an Instagram account and an ecommerce offer Instagram users the possibility to buy online directly on this social media. Specifically, neither Martin Speck Srl nor Carpano Speck Srl Instagram profiles, although they have an ecommerce, exploited this function yet.

Table 3.4 illustrates the Instagram profiles for every company by number of followers, following and number of posts.

Company name	Followers	Following	Post	IGTV	Stories
SEGATA S.P.A.	681	2749	410	0	6
BOME' S.R.L.	570	860	71	0	6
MENDELSPECK S.R.L.	562	421	78	1	4
G. PFITSCHER SRL	391	16	84	0	1
CARPANO SPECK S.R.L.	286	50	48	0	0
MARTIN SPECK S.R.L.	265	268	28	0	0

Table 3.4 – Instagram accounts by followers, following and posts

What appears is that Segata Spa is the most followed company with 681 followers. It is also the company publishing most in the semester considered, counting 410 posts. Probably this is not a coincidence if we consider that this company is the first in terms of size, both as sales revenues and number of employees, and the first to create its Instagram profile. In addition, the correlation coefficient between sales revenues and number of followers calculated by the author is 0,7, which could mean that the more sales revenues, the more popular the company is on Instagram.

Other accounts follow in the ranking with respectively 570, 562, 391, 286 and 265 followers, in fact they are widely distributed. The average number of followers is 459,

which is much less than the average number recorded for Facebook (2614 followers). This proves that these companies are more popular and known on Facebook than Instagram. As regards the number of posts, compared to Segata Spa all the others publish much less frequently. While from a general perspective, companies publish on average 119 posts, which means almost 20 posts per month and 5 posts per week. This data is interesting and surprising at the same time because it is much more compared to Facebook, which has 33 posts per semester and 5 posts per month. It means that these companies are much more popular but much less active on Facebook.

Another surprising data is that the speck producer G. Pfitscher Srl, which is the most followed on Facebook, placed 4th in the ranking of Instagram with only 391 followers. Probably it considers the latter less important than Facebook so far, even if it has to be underlined that this company owns the Instagram account just since 2019.

Another emerged insight is that the number of followers and number of posts are not always directly proportional. For example, G. Pfitscher Srl is 4th in terms of followers but it is 2nd in terms of content published, with 84 posts.

About the number of “following”, which are those Instagram accounts followed by companies, they are often different compared to the number of followers. Half of them count more followers than following, while the others count more following than followers. For example, Segata Spa and Bomè Srl have respectively 681 and 570 followers, while they follow 2749 and 860 Instagram profiles.

As regards other types of content, only one company, Mendelspeck Srl, published one IGTV, which a 60 second video used to show something longer than a simple video. While more companies exploited the tool of “Stories” in order to talk about themselves. In particular, 4 out 6 companies: Segata Spa, Bomè Srl and Mendelspeck Srl, which published respectively 6, 6 and 4 stories, and G. Pfitscher Srl which published only one story.

In order to understand if the content published by companies is appreciated by their fan base, it must be analysed what fan base think about content through reactions, expressed as “like”, comments, engagement rate and also through the number of times the company is tagged on Instagram. As regards the number of shares, it is not considered because Instagram does not offer the possibility to share a post on the profile.

The author calculated the engagement rate with the same formula used for Facebook, which is showed below. The formula represents the percentage of people who saw the post and interacted with it by adding a like or simply by writing a comment. After the

formula, Table 3.5 shows both the engagement rate related to every company and the data used to calculate it, namely the number of followers, posts, reactions, and comments.

$$ER\% = \left\{ \left[\frac{(\text{Reactions} + \text{Comments})}{(\text{Total Posts})} \right] / \left[\text{N}^\circ \text{ of followers} \right] \right\} \times 100$$

Company name	Followers	Post	Reactions	Comments	ER%
G. PFITSCHER SRL	391	84	25.420	84	77,65%
CARPANO SPECK S.R.L.	286	48	399	4	2,94%
MENDELSPECK S.R.L.	562	78	1.023	12	2,36%
BOME' S.R.L.	570	71	780	25	1,99%
MARTIN SPECK S.R.L.	265	28	63	0	0,85%
SEGATA S.P.A.	681	410	607	4	0,22%

Table 3.5 – Instagram’s engagement rate per post (%)

What immediately stands out from the table is the engagement rate of G. Pfitscher, equal to 77,65%. Compared to the others, it is incredibly high, and it means that for every 100 followers seeing a post, there are almost 80 interactions which can be like or comments. As explained for Facebook, an ER% above 1% means the company is working well, thus 77,65% is absolutely a good sign for G. Pfitscher Srl. It is able to engage followers very well and it makes them interact frequently. In particular, this high value is given by the number of reactions, or like, which are 25.420: the content of G. Pfitscher Srl is particularly appreciated by fans. In addition, followers wrote 84 comments out of 84 posts: it means that on average every post receives a comment.

All the other companies have a much lower ER%: three of them have a ER% higher than 1%, which still indicates a good engagement, while the two remaining profiles have an ER% respectively equal to 0,85% for Martin Speck Srl, and 0,22% for Segata Spa. The latter should improve their ability to communicate because it is not engaging their audience enough. The same occurs on Facebook: Segata Spa has the lowest engagement rate and this is the proof that the size company, both in terms of number of employees and sales revenues, is not the reason of a social media campaign’s success.

Furthermore, compared to the average Facebook ER% which is 1,99%, the one of Instagram is 14,33%. It may be said that the content published on Instagram is more appreciated than that published on Facebook, but it also should be underlined that this high value is influenced by the huge ER% of G. Pfitscher.

Moreover, to know how this content is more appreciated, the author calculated the

average applause rate and the average conversation rate with the same formulas used for Facebook. It is clear that, as the former is equal to 14,27% and the latter is equal to 0,06%, Instagram fan base is more used to leave a simple like rather than to write a comment. Thus, from this perspective, Facebook and Instagram are aligned.

Moreover, another metric helping to understand how much followers interact with the company is the number of tags, which indicates the number of times a company is tagged, or cited, on their followers' posts. Table 3.6 illustrates this metric for every company.

Company name	N° of tag
G. PFITSCHER SRL	36
MENDELSPECK S.R.L.	15
BOME' S.R.L.	7
SEGATA S.P.A.	4
CARPANO SPECK S.R.L.	1
MARTIN SPECK S.R.L.	1

Table 3.6 – N° of tag by company

As the table shows, there is much difference among these companies: G. Pfitscher Srl is the most tagged profile, with 36 tags. This company still confirms to be the most engaging on Instagram. Mendelspeck Srl counts 15 tags, while the others are far behind. The average number in the semester considered is 11 tags, which means almost 2 tags per month, still a too low level.

Moreover, as calculated for Facebook, the response rate to the followers' comments is another interesting metric as well, which helps to understand how much the company interact and engages its fan base. The sample is made up of only 5 companies as Martin Speck Srl did not receive any comment in the semester considered.

As Table 3.7 shows below, Bomè Srl has the higher response rate, with the 68% of responses to its followers' comments: in particular, out of 25 comments received, it answered 17 times. Thus, Bomè Srl still confirms the most interactive company from this perspective because also its Facebook response rate is the highest (92%). G. Pfitscher Srl and Mendelspeck Srl follow in the ranking respectively with a response rate of 39% and 16%. Even if G. Pfitscher placed 2nd, it should be noted that this company wrote more comments than any other company in absolute terms. In fact, it answered 33 times to the comments received while Bomè Srl, as just explained above, answered only 17 times. Anyway, G. Pfitscher Srl and Mendelspeck Srl, from this perspective are quite active on

Facebook too, recording a response rate of 35% and 40%. As regards Carpano Speck Srl and Segata Spa, they both received only 4 comments, but they never answered to them, in fact they recorded a response rate of equal to 0%.

Whereas on Facebook the former has a response rate of 30%, while the rate of Segata Spa is equal to 5% only. Again, it is evident how larger companies are not necessarily more performing than the smaller ones. Segata Spa, which is the most structured company among the sample, has both the lowest engagement rate and response rate. It should interact more with its fan base and, at the same time, it probably should change the content published.

Company name	Comments	N° of responses	Response rate
BOME' S.R.L.	25	17	68,00%
G. PFITSCHER SRL	84	33	39,29%
MENDELSPECK S.R.L.	12	2	16,67%
CARPANO SPECK S.R.L.	4	0	0,00%
SEGATA S.P.A.	4	0	0,00%

Table 3.7 – Company's response rate (%) to the followers' comments

Furthermore, Table 3.8 illustrates an engagement rate's comparison between Instagram and Facebook, by showing their related number of followers and ER% per post.

Firstly, it emerges that the Facebook followers are much more than those of Instagram, in fact every company of the sample with both the accounts have more followers on Facebook than Instagram. Therefore, the former is more likely to give a higher popularity and visibility's degree than the latter, probably because Facebook is still the most known social media. Whereas as regards the engagement rates, it resulted that 50% of the companies has a higher ER% on Instagram, while the other 50% is more appreciated on Facebook. Thus, it is not possible to state whether one is better than the other, also because the sample is made up of only 6 companies.

Company name	Followers FB	Followers IG	ER% FB	ER% IG
G. PFITSCHER SRL	7678	391	3,39%	77,65%
CARPANO SPECK S.R.L.	1611	286	2,93%	2,94%
MENDELSPECK S.R.L.	3317	562	1,41%	2,36%
BOME' S.R.L.	771	570	7,47%	1,99%
MARTIN SPECK S.R.L.	595	265	1,26%	0,85%
SEGATA S.P.A.	3462	681	0,45%	0,22%

Table 3.8 – Facebook vs Instagram: comparison between n° of followers and ER%

3.3.4 LinkedIn

LinkedIn is exploited by 5 companies of the sample only. They represent the 31% of the total, a little less than Instagram. As explained by the literature, this specific social media is not often used by agri-food companies, therefore 31% is an expected and predictable data. However, all companies should exploit it in order to enlarge their own network. From the analysis, it emerges that all the companies with a LinkedIn account also have Facebook but the reverse, as in the case of Instagram, is not true. In addition, only 3 of these 5 companies have both Instagram and YouTube. One has only YouTube and Facebook, while the other one has only Facebook. Moreover, all of them show the official website link on their LinkedIn profile, sign that they also keep this social media aligned and integrated with the website. In addition, all of them use their brand logo as LinkedIn official profile picture and their company name as official profile name: this is another marketing element which makes companies more recognizable by users.

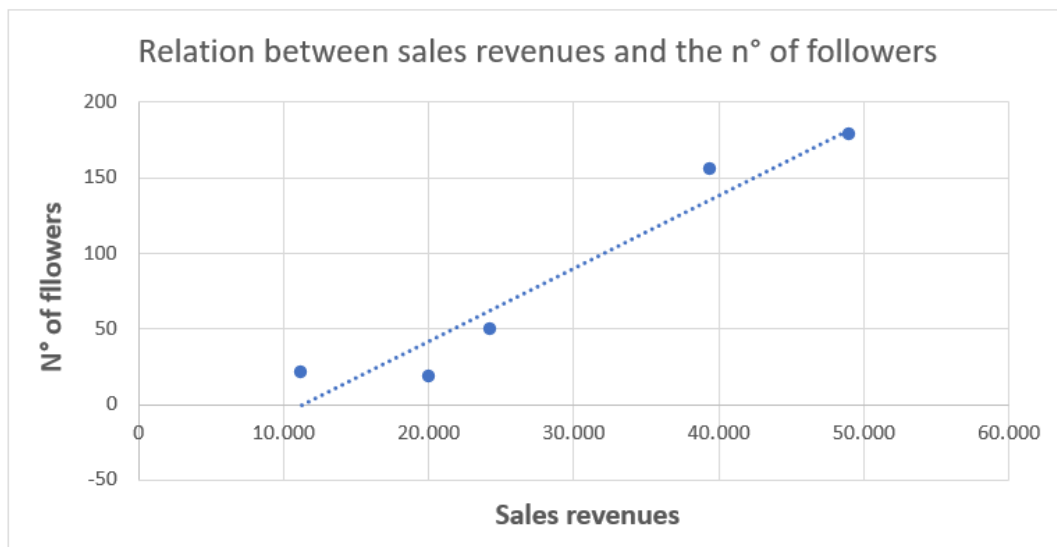
Table 3.9 illustrates the five LinkedIn profiles by number of followers and posts. In terms of visibility, Segata Spa is the most followed company counting 178 followers, but it published only 3 posts, another sign that this company is more popular than others, but it is not active or well performing enough. Then, follows Moserl Srl, with 155 followers. These two companies stand out compared to the others which count from 49 to 18 followers only. Whereas the most active LinkedIn profile is Merano Speck Srl with 21 posts published and widely distributed over the six months of the semester considered. Beyond Merano Speck Srl and Segata Spa, other three companies never published anything.

Company name	Followers	Post
SEGATA S.P.A.	178	3
MOSER S.R.L.	155	0
MERANO SPECK S.R.L.	49	21
MENDELSPECK S.R.L.	21	0
G. PFITSCHER S.R.L.	18	0

Table 3.9 – LinkedIn accounts by n° of followers and n° of post

In terms of engagement, the 3 posts of Segata Spa totally received 2 likes, while the 21 posts of Merano Speck Srl received 19 likes. The engagement rates per post are respectively 0,3% and 1,8%. Considering the number of followers, Segata Spa still must improve a lot while Merano Speck Srl performs much better.

The author also analysed whether there is correlation between the company size, in terms of revenues, and the number of followers, to understand if having more financial resources and being more structured can make the company more visible on a professional social media such as LinkedIn. The correlation coefficient of 0,95 indicates a strong correlation between the two variables. In fact, the more sales revenues, the more the number of followers. However, it should be underlined that this sample is made up of 5 companies only, and therefore this relation on large scale could be different.



Graph 3.12 – Relation between sales revenues and n° of followers

3.3.5 YouTube

Within the 16 companies representing our sample, only 5 of them have a YouTube account (31%). All the companies with a YouTube account also have Facebook but the reverse, as in the case of Instagram, is not true. In fact, there are many Facebook profiles of companies which decided not to exploit YouTube. Beyond Facebook, 4 out of these 5 companies also have Instagram. Moreover, only 3 out 5 show their official website link on the YouTube profile, in order to keep all their social media aligned and integrated with the website. As regards the account's date of creation, only one was created in 2012, one in 2013 and three were created in 2014. They are pretty old but despite that they have never been exploited so much. In fact, none of them published anything in the semester considered. Although from the literature it emerged that YouTube is the third most exploited social media by food companies, within our sample only five use it, and none of them ever posted

a video. Table 3.10 illustrates the number of subscribers for each company, and, in the last column, their inactivity is highlighted.

Company name	Subscribers	Videos
BOME' S.R.L.	59	0
MOSER S.R.L.	21	0
SEGATA S.P.A.	19	0
G. PFITSCHER S.R.L.	10	0
MENDELSPECK S.R.L.	5	0

Table 3.10 – YouTube’s subscribers by company

Whatever the number of subscribers is, all of them never exploited YouTube. This must be a sign of encouragement in starting to exploit this social media which can give companies a lot of visibility and make the content more attractive. However, Bomè Srl stands out compared to the others in terms of visibility: in fact, it is the most followed YouTube channel with 59 subscribers, followed by Moser Srl and Segata Spa which respectively count 21 and 19 subscribers. Finally, G. Pfitscher Srl and Mendelspeck Srl have a lower audience made up of 10 and 5 subscribers.

As companies never published anything, the author couldn’t analyse the performance of these companies, in particular the engagement rate, because there are no reactions, comments, or answers to these comments by the company. Finally, the correlation coefficient between sales revenues and the number of subscribers was calculated to understand if the former affected the latter, but the author didn’t find out any correlation.

3.3.6 Twitter

The only company which has a Twitter account is Segata Spa, which is also the company with more social media owned. It represents only the 6% of the sample. Except for Pinterest, which is not used by anyone, Twitter is the least used social media and this perfectly reflects what was explained by the literature in the previous chapters: compared to Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube, this digital marketing channel is not so popular within agri-food companies, specifically in the sector of speck and cured meat products.

As regards Segata Spa, from the analysis it emerged that it uses its brand logo as official account picture, and their official company name as Twitter profile name. In addition, it

shows its official website link on the Twitter profile. Again, this is a smart digital marketing action because it makes company more recognizable by users, and it makes social media and website aligned and integrated.

In terms of visibility, it counts 214 followers, while the number of following is 770. This means that many of the Twitter accounts followed by Segata Spa are not fan of Segata Spa itself. This comparison should be analysed and deepened.

During the semester considered the company published 30 posts, namely 5 posts per month and more than one post per week. Considering that Twitter is among the least used social media, this data is not so discouraging. As far as interactions are concerned, the post count 3 reactions only: therefore, the engagement rate without taking into account followers is 10%, which is not so bad considering the engagement rates of Facebook and Instagram. Whereas considering the number of followers, it would be less than 0,1%, which indicates an extremely low interaction with followers.

Once again, Segata Spa confirms to be very popular and visible on social media, given its fan base size, but the engagement with them is almost always pretty low.

Regarding Pinterest, as explained at the beginning of this chapter, the author didn't report anything because none of the 16 companies analysed has a Pinterest account. This information is consistent with what literature stated, namely that this social media is currently one of the least used within the agri-food companies, although it is the social media with the highest performance potential thanks to its technical features.

3.4 A qualitative analysis: interviews with five speck producers

As explained at the beginning of this chapter, five qualitative interviews with five speck producers of Trentino-Alto Adige will be outlined. They will concern the use and exploitation of digital marketing tools within their business and marketing strategy. Within the interviews there are also answers related to the situation influenced by Covid-19 as the interviews were submitted during the pandemic. The companies surveyed are Segata Spa, G. Pfitscher Srl, Mendelspeck Srl, Martin Speck Srl and Carpano Speck Srl. The author decided to interview those specific companies among the 16 of the whole sample because they are all different from one another in terms of size, expressed both as sales revenues and number of employees. They will be explained in descending order, starting from Segata Spa, which recorded 49.061 million euros and 130 employees in 2018, and concluding with Carpano Speck Srl, with 4.787 million euros and 23 employees in the same year.

3.4.1 Segata Spa

Segata Spa is the largest company of the sample with 49.061 million euros of sales revenues and with 130 employees in 2018. Only the 5% of sales revenues comes from export. Their main sales channels are large-scale distribution and horeca, as well as direct sale at the firm. The author interviewed Stefania Segata, which is the marketing and communication manager of its large family business.

As regards the use of digital, Stefania said that the company created its own official website in the early 2000s while the firsts social media were created in 2014 and 2015. They don't have an ecommerce, in fact to sell products online they rely on a third-party ecommerce. Stefania also underlined that they are planning to implement it and, due to the Covid-19, this action has been accelerated further.

Another point she highlighted is that their website has all the social media icons as they strongly believe in an integrated digital marketing strategy.

As regards the latter, it has strongly been encouraged by the owners, who decided to assign the whole digital marketing activity to her. Once she was in charge of that, she completely outsourced it to an external communication agency and her role is to coordinate the activities by approving or disapproving the proposals made by the agency, also involving in this decision the sales manager and another marketing employee. Indeed, the marketing team is made up of these 3 persons. They usually have both short-

and long-term period objectives, respectively of one and five years.

The main reason that brought Segata to implement a digital marketing strategy is because a lot of their competitors already exploited social media and ecommerce, and they too started recognizing the importance of these tools. In fact, they invest the 70% of their total marketing budget in digital marketing, but only the 0,1% of their total turnover. In other words, they invest almost 50.000 euros in digital marketing every year.

The main digital marketing activities concern the update of website, with new photos and videos, the management of social media, advertising campaigns and search, and finally the management of newsletters and the relationships with influencers. Among these activities, the 90% is related to owned activities while the 10% to the paid ones.

Specifically, Stefania said that, as regards social media, they use Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn. Facebook is the most used and the most important one because it allows them to become more popular, thanks to the word of mouth, and to build long-term relationships with customers. Also, they exploit it as a customer service tool. In addition, Stefania decided to usually publish one post per week by trying to be as constant as possible. Also, when publishing a post, they try to communicate their product by associating one of them with an artwork or an Italian city to be creative and to convey their message better.

She also added that, thanks to Facebook, they increased sales transactions by 5% and both number of clients and profitability by 10%. To measure social media and website performance, she looks at a specific report provided for by the communication agency every 2 months. After analysing the report and the included data, she takes decisions consequently, she updates the sales manager and finally along with the external agency they change or keep the same strategy. Specifically, as for social media, what she focuses on is the number of likes, shares and comments. According to Stefania, the latter is the most important index as comments represent how much the users are interested in their posts. Whereas as for website, what she analyses most is the number of visitors, the time they spend visiting the website, which pages they visit most, which social media views come from and finally the geographical origin of visitors.

To conclude, Stefania said that Facebook is the most important social media among those used so far. Although their market share and sales volume remained stable, she is pretty sure that Facebook helped the company to increase the number of clients, sales transactions and profitability as well as the brand image and its popularity.

3.4.2 G. Pfitscher Srl

G. Pfitscher Srl is the fourth largest company out of the 16 concerned for the quantitative analysis, with 20.035 million euros generated and 65 employees in 2018. Exports account for the 30% of their sales revenues and they sell their products in more than 30 countries. The main sales channels they rely on are large-scale distribution and horeca, while online selling is almost nil.

The author interviewed Lukas Pfitscher, general manager of G. Pfitscher Srl. Among the several activities, he focuses most on sales and marketing, while his brother is in charge of the operation and production department. Lukas said they created their official website in 2003 while social media profiles in 2015, even if they really started exploiting the latter for a few years only.

About the website, particularly the ecommerce, Lukas explained that for the moment they sell products online only through the ecommerce of their customers. In fact, he says they have not created their own ecommerce yet because they have grown so rapidly that, for the moment, they don't need it. In addition, according to him, the online market is more suitable for the B2C market, but their prevalent one is the B2B as they sell to large-scale distribution and horeca. Despite this consideration, they are thinking to implement it in the coming months, also because they are selling more and more directly to the final consumers. Lukas said that firstly they will start selling online through a third-party platform as the one of Facebook, and then they will create their own ecommerce.

As far as digital marketing strategy is concerned, the ownership pushed for implementing and making these kinds of activities and, thus, Lukas and his brother are the first promoters and ambassadors of digital marketing within G. Pfitscher Srl. He decided to completely outsource this activity to an external communication agency which periodically makes its digital marketing proposes, and then Lukas approves or disapproves them. He took this decision because he wants this activity is performed by qualified and professional people. The only activity he has to do as regards digital marketing is to choose the related budget. Specifically, they invest 50% of their marketing budget in digital marketing and, compared to the total sales revenues, they invest the 0,25%. Lukas said that they don't have specific KPIs to reach yet, at least for the moment. About the website, Lukas himself manages and updates the list of products while the communication agency is mainly in charge of updating social media accounts and creating advertising campaigns.

As social media they use Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube, even if the latter is rarely used because it is too late. The most important and used among these social media is Facebook, which they exploit with the purpose of increasing visibility and building a strong customers loyalty. In addition, they use it in order to promote products, exploit the word of mouth, communicate with customers and receive feedbacks by them. They show a lot of videos, while on Instagram they use more photos because they think they are more suitable.

Whereas they don't use it for making customer service yet and, moreover, they are not yet able to measure if Facebook helped them to reduce the costs of communication and advertising. Furthermore, as they have more B2B customers, Facebook and Instagram are not even essential according to Lukas and, above all, he says that the business of this product has always been successful even without social media and the online market. To conclude, he believes that the use of digital will be more and more important, but for now their business is doing well even if they don't use them so much.

3.4.3 Mendelspeck Srl

Mendelspeck Srl is the third company interviewed by the author and it represents the 8th largest company among the sample. It generated 11.267 million euros and it counted 26 employees. In fact, it is much smaller than the two companies surveyed above.

However, it sells their products abroad too, particularly in six European countries, from which it gains about 20% of their total sales revenues. Their main sales channels are horeca, owned retails and large-scale distribution, even if the latter represents a ridiculously small share.

The interviewed employee is the daughter of the founder, who is in charge of the marketing and export department. After graduating from university and attending a course about social media marketing, she has started working within the family business for five years. Her team is made up of 3 persons only, included her. They started to have an online presence some years ago, more or less from 2010 onwards, but they really started using them only two years ago, both the website and social media.

They don't have an official ecommerce yet, for now they sell online only through the ecommerce of their customers, but they are planning to implement it as they strongly believe that it is an essential asset.

As regards the digital marketing strategy, it has been encouraged by her, and the general manager agreed too on this decision. She strongly believes that using photos and videos in the online communication is essential nowadays, in particular she considers videos as more effective tools because they convey the message better.

As explained above, she is in charge of marketing together with other two persons: a graphic designer and another marketing specialist. Until 2019 all the digital marketing activities were outsourced to an external communication agency located in Trento, then she decided to make them internally. She usually takes the decisions by herself after collecting and analysing previous data and information. In particular, the activities regard updating the website with new photos and videos, managing social media, making advertising and search campaigns, and finally creating the list of products. As regards marketing influencers, for now they haven't exploited them yet but they think they will rely on them too. About the objectives, she usually identifies long-term objectives, and they try to reach them by following a precise weekly plan. In addition, she said that they don't have specific KPIs yet.

Furthermore, the main reason that brought Mendelspeck Srl to exploit social media is that both more and more of their customers and competitors used these digital communication tools, and they didn't want to lag behind.

As social media, they use Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn. YouTube and LinkedIn are the least used while Instagram and Facebook are considered more important. Between these two social media, the most used and the most important is Instagram because their goal is to attract new customers, in particular to attract young customers, as their current ones are all adults, and these are more used to have Facebook. Thus, as the target of Instagram is represented mostly by young people, they decided to exploit more this social media.

Moreover, Instagram allows Mendelspeck to increase brand visibility, to promote their products and to exploit the word of mouth. Indeed, during the interview, the sales manager said that thanks to Instagram they reached new customers that they would never have reached by flyers. Then, they use it also to make market research, communicate with customers and try to build long-term relationships with them. They reduced a lot the cost of advertising and communication by also cutting down paper waste. As the previous company, they don't use social media as customer service tool. As for website, a great advantage they exploited has been to improve the performance at

international level, as through this tool they reached new foreign customers.

As far as the impact on the business is concerned, the use of Instagram and Facebook allowed to increase a lot the sales requests by customers. In fact, a lot of them ask questions about products through these two social media. Whereas it is still difficult to say if the number of sales transactions, the number of customers and profitability increased thanks to Instagram and Facebook. For the moment, to measure the performance, she analyses the previous performance data by google analytics in collaboration with the Consortium of speck. Specifically, as for website she analyses the number of visitors, as for social media she focuses on the number of followers, reactions, shares and comments to the post as well as the engagement rate and the cost per engagement.

To conclude, if she had to rate the usefulness and effectiveness of social media, she would attribute to them a mark of 8 out of 10 because even though she recognizes the importance of digital, she believes they will never abandon the offline communication.

3.4.4 Martin Speck Srl

Martin Speck Srl, with 7.549 million euros of sales revenues and 24 employees in 2018, it has almost the same number of employees as Mendelspeck Srl but its sales revenues are much less, namely almost the half. As all the other companies described above, it sells their products abroad too. In particular, they sell in Austria, Germany and Switzerland through another company and their export value is worth the 5% of total revenues. The author interviewed the sales and marketing manager, who is also in charge of buying raw materials.

As regards marketing activities, he works along with the daughter of the owner. He explained that their main sales channels are the local retails in Trentino-Alto Adige, which account for the 60% of total sales revenues, as well as large-scale distribution, and just a small share through their official ecommerce. He said that customers who usually buy their products online are those people that previously made a purchase physically in a local retail, and when they come back home, they buy online the products again. Finally, another small share is represented by the horeca channel.

The first time they started using internet for business is when they created their first official website 10 years ago, and just last year they created a new website again because

the former was too old. As for social media, they were created about five years ago.

This company is among the few ones of the sample which sell online by their own ecommerce, even if it is among the smallest in terms of revenues and employees. They started selling online in 2020 but for the moment this channel is still a small share of the total revenues. In 2019 they didn't want to implement it as it required too hard work, however they did it and they now count on average three shippings per day. As just explained, the online market is not their core sales channel. Indeed, during the interview, the sales manager explained that what they have always aimed to is to make customer come physically into the shops and buy the products there. He also added that the speck is a high-quality product and, in order to really appreciate it, customers should buy it physically.

As regards the digital marketing strategy, it has been supported and planned by the sales manager and the owner completely agreed from the beginning. The owner coordinates the operation and production department because he is expert only about the product. They call him "the man of the speck". Whereas the marketing team is made up of the sales manager along with the daughter of the owner. They are in charge of all the marketing activities, both digital and traditional, and they are also assisted by an external agency at the same time. They invest the 2% of the total sales revenues in digital marketing every year, which means they invest about 15.000 euros on a total turnover of 6 million euros. Whereas out of the overall marketing budget they invest the 20% on digital marketing, while the remaining 80% is invested in traditional marketing activities. If the latter consist of advertising newspaper and some sponsorships for soccer and hockey teams, as digital marketing activities they update the website with new photos and videos and the social media official pages by publishing new posts. The decision to implement this kind of activities is mostly due to the need of increasing visibility.

In particular, the daughter of the owner is in charge of updating the social media every day. They use Instagram and Facebook: at the beginning Facebook was the most used, now Instagram is more exploited than Facebook because it better promotes their products, it gives them more visibility and it allows them to communicate more with customers. In addition, it allows to reach more potential consumers and the word of mouth of Instagram is more effective than Facebook. In fact, according to the sales manager, thanks to its photos and videos Instagram is considered more suitable for their products. In addition, among the Instagram activities, they are also trying to exploit

marketing influencers.

In order to measure the performance, they usually analyse the number of followers and sometimes the number of likes and comments, however the truth is that they don't consider social media so important yet and thus they don't pay much attention in measuring the performance.

Despite this consideration, they recognized a positive impact of using Instagram on the business performance: the brand image improved a lot and visibility increase. The advertising cost is now much lower and communicating with customers is much easier.

3.4.5 Carpano Speck Srl

Carpano Speck Srl is the smallest company of the sample, after Windegger Guenther Srl. It generated 4.787 million euros in 2018, with still no exports, and it counts 23 employees. As sales channels, they rely mostly on direct sale to butchers or other local retails, which then sell the product to the final consumer. Large-scale distribution and horeca are exploited very little. Their volumes are not high enough and so for the moment they prefer selling to local retails. In addition, they also sell through their own official ecommerce. The author interviewed Davide, who is in charge of managing and coordinating all the business areas and all the activities, in particular he is the sales manager as well as production and accounting manager at the same time. He does everything, supported by other employees. Thus, he is also in charge of marketing, but he decided to outsource the whole marketing activity to an external communication agency located in Belluno.

As regards the use of internet and digital marketing tools, Davide explained that in 2014 they created their official website and Facebook at the same time, while in 2019 they also started using Instagram. In addition, recently they started using the newsletter too.

When they created the website, they also implemented the ecommerce and Davide underlined as at the beginning they sold very few products online. Now it is going better, and it has grown a lot. In fact, in 2017 the percentage share of online sales out of the total sales revenues was 1,2-2%, while in 2020 this share has tripled also thanks to the Facebook and Instagram advertising about their ecommerce and to the newsletters. The digital marketing strategy has been encouraged by the owners of the company which assigned the whole activity to Davide, but they never attend meetings about marketing. There was not a particular reason why they encouraged the implementation of a digital

marketing strategy, probably they realized that it is becoming more and more important. Davide said that they are among the best companies as for the ecommerce, while as for social media they are falling behind.

He coordinates this activity and decides everything. Over the past years the use of photos and videos has increased a lot within their communication and marketing activities and he also recognizes the importance of online communication. In fact every year they invest the 0,5% of the total revenues in digital marketing, while out of the overall marketing budget they invest only the 30%. The remaining 70% is spent on advertising trade magazines.

As digital marketing activities, the external communication agency updates the website and social media with new photos, videos and posts. For the moment they don't exploit influencers or brand ambassador. The only activity performed by Davide is to update the lists of products on the ecommerce, as he is the only one to know which products available and which ones are not. About social media, they have Facebook and Instagram. The most used is the former, even if they want Instagram to be the most adopted because they strongly believe it is more effective than Facebook. Anyway, they use them with the purpose of building customer loyalty and satisfaction. They prefer to have few followers who are loyal than to have many followers who are not interested and engaged. In addition, they exploit them to promote products and increase the brand visibility, to communicate with customers and to receive feedback from them. They don't use them yet for making customer service and they haven't been able yet to evaluate if the use of social media reduced the cost of communication and advertising.

In order to take decisions, Davide analyses a report provided for by the external agency every month which include the open rate of newsletter, the most clicked products on the website, the number of followers, likes and post. He focuses mostly on these performance metrics. Whereas he doesn't consider the number of comments and shares as he thinks they are not so important for the moment. He also focuses on the time spent on website by visitors and on their geographical origin. Moreover, he takes decisions based on six-monthly targets and for now they don't yet use KPIs.

To conclude, Davide said that nowadays Facebook is the most important as it has more followers and thus visibility, but they are going to invest more on Instagram because the speck is a product which is communicated better through photos and videos. Therefore, Instagram is more suitable.

3.5 Findings

Now that both quantitative and qualitative analysis have been outlined and illustrated, it is interesting to discuss them and try to understand which are the main insights. Within the discussion, there will be often analysed variables and features which explain that the company size does not necessarily matter when dealing with digital communication progress. In fact, with regards to some variables, the largest companies offer less digital and online solutions.

Firstly, it emerged that all the companies, except for only one, present an official website, and even if nowadays having a website seems obvious, for these old-style small and medium enterprises it is a good starting point. In fact, suffice it to say that the owners of these companies are often in charge of managing and coordinating all the activities, from sales and marketing, to accounting and operation. They have been always used to focus on the product, on its production but probably rarely on making advertising and on promoting the product itself. This is because the speck is a very niche product, and it has always been successful thanks to its high-quality and complex processing. Therefore, online visibility is a very recent priority for these companies, and even if many of them created their website 15 years ago, they started to consider it important very recently. In fact, they explained that they created the website at the beginning just because everyone did the same and not for their own free will. Now they are starting to understand the importance of online communication and online visibility that the website can offer, but it is not still essential for them. It is a good support, but it is not fundamental. And this applies also to social media.

Despite this consideration, it is clear they are not exploiting the website as they could. In fact, they publish very few news and updates, while those publishing more content never add the publication date, which whereas would help to keep customers engaged. In addition, more than half doesn't have a completely integrated social media strategy as they never add all the social media icons on the website and, above all, only few companies have their own ecommerce. This is pretty surprising because some of the largest companies, such as Segata Spa and Merano Speck Srl, don't have an ecommerce, while other smaller companies such as Carpano Speck Srl exploit this effective tool. Moreover, those companies deciding to implement an ecommerce have quickly recognized its great potential. For example, as regards Carpano Speck, from 2017 to 2020 the percentage share of online sales out of total tripled, from 2% to 6%. As for Martin Speck, it increased

the daily number of sales orders in just one year, and also the other three companies recorded an increase in the online market. This is a sign of high potential and great prospects for the future.

Also with regards to the contact information they still lag behind because the majority of them offers only the email and the telephone number, while only few companies exploit also the form to be filled in or the WhatsApp number.

Secondly, another important insight that emerged from both the analyses regards the use of social media. Facebook is the most adopted one, with 11 companies using it, followed by Instagram, which counts 6 companies, then LinkedIn and YouTube, both counting 5 companies, and finally Twitter which is used by only one company. As regards Pinterest, no company uses this social media probably because it is the least popular and the least known in general. The most used and the most exploited ones are Facebook and Instagram, indeed these findings will focus more on these two social media.

All the companies, whatever the number of social media and the intensity of use, have an integrated social media marketing strategy: in fact, in every social media official page all of them add the website link, sign that they want to make customers visit the website to buy products. In addition, they always keep their company name as official profile name, and the same goes for the official picture as they keep their brand logo.

Furthermore, from the analysis it emerged that companies which have social media always have Facebook. Therefore, this social platform seems to be the starting point for these companies when implementing a social media strategy. Those which have not Facebook, have not any other social media.

In fact, it confirmed to be the most adopted because it is the most famous, and probably since it is the oldest and the first one to be born. Moreover, it is the platform that gives more visibility and brand awareness to companies: its average number of followers is 5 times the average number of Instagram followers. It is no coincidence that the main reasons pushing most of the owners to use Facebook are the increase of brand exposure, the exploitation of word of mouth and the product promotion.

Despite it is the most famous and known by customers, the analysis revealed that the companies which have also Instagram are more active on the latter. In fact, comparing these two social media, it resulted that companies publish more posts on Instagram than on Facebook. With respect to that point, during the interviews some owners explained that Instagram is better than Facebook to promote their products, both because it is more

suitable for photos and videos, and because Facebook nowadays is used mostly by adult public, and they want to promote their products also to younger people.

Thirdly, Instagram can be considered as more effective than Facebook because its average engagement rate is higher than the one of Facebook. In fact, on average the posts on Instagram receive more reactions, comments and shares than Facebook. Whereas considering the individual engagement rate of each company, and not considering the average, it results that 50% of companies perform better on Facebook and 50% performs better on Instagram.

In addition, although Instagram is more effective than Facebook about the average engagement rate, as regards the response rate it resulted the opposite. In fact, companies on Facebook are more likely to answer to the follower's comments than on Instagram. Therefore, what may be inferred is that companies publish more posts on Instagram and the related content is also more appreciated, but regarding Facebook, companies are more visible and they also answer to the followers' comments more than on Instagram. Furthermore, from the interviews it also emerged that both Facebook and Instagram are useful to increase visibility, build customer loyalty and communicate with customers, but it is still difficult for these small companies to calculate if using these social media helps to increase sales revenues and the number of customers. The owners said they are not yet able to evaluate this effect. However, the only exception is Segata Spa, which said it increased sales transactions by 5% and the customer base by 10% thanks to Facebook. As already explained at the beginning of this paragraph, another insight regards the correlation between the company size and their digital marketing expertise. Indeed, Segata Spa, which is the largest company of the sample, is the company with the lowest engagement rates, both for Facebook and Instagram. This is an interesting insight which proves that being more organized and having more resources don't necessarily lead to be more effective and more performing on social media. Carpano Speck Srl is among the smallest companies but it has one of the highest engagement rates. What is useful to learn from this example is that having more followers and more visibility don't necessarily lead to be more engaging and to build a greater customer loyalty.

Despite this consideration, the analysis revealed that the companies which have almost all the social media, are among the largest ones. This probably mean that the more structured companies are more aware of the available digital communication and marketing tools, even if they don't exploit them so much. Often, it happens that companies

create their official profiles just as showcase without really using it. It is a way of showing customers they have also that specific social media, but actually they don't exploit it. In fact, both LinkedIn and YouTube are much less used. Their followers are considerably less than those of Facebook and Instagram. In addition, as regards LinkedIn, some companies publish few posts while others never publish anything. As regards YouTube, none of them ever published anything. This perfectly reflects what literature said in the previous chapters: LinkedIn and YouTube are less used as digital marketing tools in the agri-food sector compared Facebook and Instagram.

Twitter is used only by one company, sign that this social media is even less important as digital marketing channel, even if this company published more posts than those published on LinkedIn. Finally, as regards Pinterest, no analysis was performed as none of the companies use this social media.

As for Twitter and Pinterest, they both confirm the literature's analysis too: they represent the least used social media in the agri-food sector.

To conclude the discussion, it may be said that the companies operating in the speck sector should invest and use more social media and the digital tools, in particular the website and the ecommerce. They still consider digital marketing as a marginal and not essential activity for their business, and therefore most of them prefer to outsource the whole activity to an external communication and digital marketing agency than to manage it internally.

Conclusion

The importance and relevance of being online for any companies is clear to everyone. Nowadays no company, whatever the industry or the size is, can do without digital, in particular without being present online through its own website and social media. Literature offers a lot of material from this perspective: specifically, more and more companies are adopting these channels as digital marketing tools, since more and more consumers are using and relying on internet to visit a brand and buy a product. Being visible on internet has become the new priority, and this priority is becoming increasingly important also for the Italian agri-food companies.

However, according to literature the Italian agri-food industry is still one of the most backward from this perspective: too few companies working in this sector invest in digital marketing. They should invest and exploit more the potential of these tools, and those which invest on this activity are not spending enough. Indeed, Italian agri-food companies still lag behind those of other industries. That is one of the reasons why this research focused on analysing the digital presence and digital maturity of the Italian SMEs producing speck in Trentino-Alto Adige. The purpose was to find out if and how much these traditional and old-style companies exploit social media and website, which are among the most used digital marketing channels.

Overall, what is emerged is that they currently do not consider the use of digital as an essential activity. It is not a so much important priority for them, at least for now. Almost all of these companies have a website, and more than half uses at least one social media, but these tools still represent a marginal asset only. Some companies are more active, others are not; on average, organizations implemented both the website and social media channels just because many did the same, as emerged from the analysis. Obviously, they are aware of the digital future potential given by website, social media and online market. Indeed, some of them recognize a performance improvement thanks to the use of their e-commerce as well as to the exploitation of Facebook and Instagram, in terms of visibility and customer base. Above all, those speck producers who exploited social media more seriously have seen a higher return in terms of visibility and brand reputation.

However, as long as they are successful without investing too much on digital marketing, they still keep considering it as a marginal asset. That is the main reason why they have never invested lot of time and money, and most of them have always preferred to outsource the entire activity.

Therefore, the findings reflect precisely what literature said in the previous chapter: there is still a great deal more to do for agri-food companies, in particular for those working in this niche food sector. These companies should invest more on digital, especially in the use of digital marketing tools such as social media and website, because these tools have a high growth potential.

The research could be further investigated and deepened by considering more than just 16 companies, in order to have a more truthful scenario and a clearer view of the speck sector in Trentino-Alto Adige. Moreover, it could go deeper when analysing the digital maturity by considering other variables such as, for example, the type of posted content. Finally, it would be interesting also to compare the digital presence of the speck sector with other Italian cured meat categories.

Appendix

Interviews' questions:

1. What is your role within the company?
2. In which countries is the company selling its products (Italy included)?
3. Since when did your company start selling abroad?
4. What is the percentage of turnover of export sales?
5. Since when did your company start being active online? (website, social media etc.)
6. Which distribution channels do you use?
7. Which channels are used to sell online?
8. Regarding online communication, how important do you think pictures and video are?
9. Who proposed to adopt a marketing strategy? The ownership or the management? What does the ownership think about it?
10. Did the company hire any digital marketing specialists?
11. What is the percentage of turnover of the investment in digital marketing?
12. What is the percentage of marketing budget of the investment in digital marketing?
13. Which kind of activities does your digital marketing strategy rely on?
14. Why did you decide to implement a digital marketing strategy? How do you make decisions within the company?
15. How did the digital marketing investment vary after the COVID-19 Pandemic?
16. Which kind of activities and areas decreased or increased in terms of use and investment after the COVID-19 Pandemic?
17. How do you evaluate the company performance of last two years (2018-2019) in terms of revenue, market share and sales volume?
18. Considering the Italian market, what is the most used social network in your company?
19. Do you think that the adoption of social media and of a digital marketing strategy had an impact on your company's performance?
20. What is your role in the digital marketing performance measurement? Do you think adopting a digital strategy is effective for a company of your sector?
21. What are your KPIs regarding the social networks used?

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