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Master Thesis in Marketing Management

Social Media Consumer Engagement: a Study on the Most Popular Fashion Brands' Fan Pages.

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Introduction

The evolution of digital communication and the enormous potential offered by Web 2.0 favored the global affirmation of new Social Media.

Social Media are new innovative tools that collects millions of users all around the globe and they offer several possibilities and opportunities to companies that want to develop communication and marketing strategies while gaining competitive advantage on their competitors.

The latest developments in the field of marketing, communication and information are leading to new innovative business and consumption models, in which users are gaining a leading role and are increasingly important.

Thanks to the higher degree of interactivity possessed by new technologies and social media, companies interact with customers, treat them as organizational assets, learn about them and develop a level of intimacy with them, in order to build long lasting and profitable relationships. This ability of marketing to engage and endear consumers is an important factor contributing to product adoption, thereby driving sales and brand loyalty.

Consumer engagement becomes so the most important concept and the central point of this study.

The final aim of this research work is to carry out an empirical study on a sample of Facebook posts, created by several different fashion brands and placed on their fan pages. The work consists in conducting a content analysis in order to relate the characteristics of the posts to users' engagement.

In the first Chapter we will introduce new technologies and Social Media, giving some definitions of them and describing their evolution. Then we will provide a Social Media classification and we'll explain in a better way, one by one, each

category. In the last part of the Chapter, we will focus on description of the most popular social networking sites, which is the category we are interesting in for the purpose of this study, and we will provide a brief comparison between them.

In Chapter 2 we will introduce the idea of consumer engagement, that is the main concept of this thesis, and we will proceed with the literature review on this subject. We will talk about consumer online brand-related activities, which have important consequences for products and brands, and about consumer engagement value. We will then give definitions of viral marketing and word of mouth, and we will continue describing all the communication tools (social network, blogs, forum, podcast) that can be used by companies to generate conversations with users and to implement marketing strategies. At the end we will focus on Facebook, that is the most relevant social network for our analysis, and we'll talk about fan pages, its characteristics and best strategies for effective wall post, with particular attention to the use of emotions and the testimonial presence.

In the last Chapter we will show the results of our research work on a sample of 523 posts, created by the most popular fashion brands and published on their fan pages. Results of the analysis will be divided in two part: a simpler preliminary frequency analysis and a more specific analysis with the use of ANOVA. We will explain the methodology we used and the objectives of the study, specifying some research questions. We will describe dependent variables and independent variables, and we will show the results for each one of the most interesting factor variables and their relationship with final measures of user engagement such as number of likes, comments and shares. In the last part of the chapter we will present the final findings, giving answer to our research questions, and we will discuss them and the related implications for companies' marketing and communication strategies.

Chapter 1

Social Media

1.1 The evolution of Media and Internet

The development of our society throughout the whole 1900's, has been based on mass media, in association with it's main common tools as radio, press and television, whose flow of communication between broadcasters and the public was characterized by the use of only one type of media (analogic message that doesn't allow the simultaneous viewing, listening and that can't be modified by the receiver) and one-way messages (top-down kind, managed by a "broadcaster" and transmitted to a target audience according to a general criterion). The recipients could so only receive the message, without any opportunity to participate in the creation of the content.

With the creation and use of the new media and the advent of Web 2.0, communication is transformed from a unidirectional way to a multidirectional one.[1] New technologies and transition from analogical to digital tools, mean that the message can be edited, stored and re-produced by anyone at any time, making the position of the receiving person more active and involved. The content becomes multimedial and interactive, one same file can include text, images, videos, audio and give the user the opportunity, thanks to interactive links, to expand their

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[1] For a depth examination see Thackeray R. & Neiger B. L., "*A multidirectional Communication Model: Implications for Social Marketing Practice*", Health Promotion Practice, 10(2), 171-175, 2009.

exploring possibilities to engage and share their contents with other users and to recover them thanks to the use of search engines.

In the '80s, television was the most followed medium by the public and businesses used to invest heavily in communication, whereas in the new millennium, the channel that undergoes the largest audience is represented by the Internet, the tools available to users and the applications that these can develop. It has been estimated that the Web has achieved the fastest rate of diffusion in history compared to any other medium.

The important role that the Internet phenomenon plays in business, is emphasized from what is known as Metcalfe's Law, that asserts that the value of a telecommunications network is proportional to the square of the number of connected users of the system. Such law notes that the value of new network technologies is closely linked to the number of its users.[2] Metcalfe's Law can be applied, within the most recent context, to the diffusion of contents on the web and to the corresponding value that social networks are to assume in the management of business in firms.

The changes that the Internet brought to the communication process and, more generally, in society are enormous. It is now considered the most powerful business tool, aimed at establishing relationships with the world through a fruitful and continuous exchange of information. This change is related to some key features of the Web:

 - Reduction of space-time barriers: nowadays with this instrument it's possible to do anything, anytime, in any place you are;

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[2] "Metcalfe hypothesized that while the cost of the network grew linearly with the number of connections, the value was proportional to the square of the number of users. For example, given n users of ethernet cards, the number of possible connections that can be made is n(n-1)=O(n^2). Metcalfe's law has been used to explain the growth of many technologies ranging from phones, cell phones, and faxes to web applications and social networks, especially online social networks. The intuition clearly holds that as the number of people in the network grows, the connectivity increases, and if people can link to each other's content, the value grows at an enormous rate." (Hendler J. & Golbeck J., 2008)

- Demolition of costs: Internet allows to provide services and advertising at costs tending almost to zero.

- Distribution: the distribution of the information has become global;

- Sharing: data- through websites, sharing data is simple and accessible to all; between people- users can share content, text, audio and video independently and interactively;

- Dialogue: the opportunity for dialogue between people and between businesses and consumers has allowed the establishment of mutual relations.

- Customization: we have moved from the standardization of products for the mass to the ability to customize products and services according to the preferences of consumers;

 - Free: The concept is at the basis of use of the Internet, the attitude of the market's operators has changed, for which 99% of the offer has become free and the customer pays for a better product or service.

1.2 Web 2.0

Web 2.0 is a term used to indicate the status of evolution of the Internet in these recent years. The concept of "Web 2.0" took its start with a brainstorming session, during a conference between O'Reilly and MediaLive International.[3] Dale Dougherty, web pioneer and O'Reilly's vice president, pointed out that , after a period of crisis, the network was more important than ever, with new interesting applications and websites that were born with amazing regularity. The Web 2.0 has several definitions: it is considered by some as a new vision of the Web that changes

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[3] Tim O'Reilly Conference *"What is Web 2.0"*, 30th of September 2005.
(http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html)

the ways of interaction between websites and users, by others as an open source[4] product that enables the development of a participatory culture, online collaboration and sharing of information between users, from others it is labeled as a platform that allows users to use applications that run freely within the browser without having to download the corresponding software on your computer.

More specifically, Web 2.0 can be defined as a knowledge-oriented "environment where human interactions generate contents that are published, managed and used through network applications in a service-oriented architecture",[5] i.e. the set of all the online applications that allow a strong level of interaction between users and websites (blog, forum, websites such as Wikipedia, Youtube, Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, Gmail, Wordpress, Tripadvisor, etc..). Web 2.0 is a "term used to describe a new way in which software developers and end-users started to utilize the World Wide Web; that is, as a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individual, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion" (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

From the technological point of view, Web 2.0 is fully equivalent to the Web 1.0, as the network infrastructure still remain the same and the hypertext is still the basic concept of relationships between the contents. The difference, more than anything else, is in the approach by which users are turning to the Net, which basically goes from a simple consultation, to the possibility of contributing to the virtual with his contents.

To describe the characteristics of Web 2.0, often we proceeds by comparison with Web 1.0, through a non completely technical manner but anyways rather effective to understand the evolution, examining three main steps:

- From stickiness to syndication: the techniques used until a few years ago to keep visitors on a website are leaving space to syndication technologies (for example

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[4] Under Perens' definition, open source describes a broad general type of software license that makes source code available to the general public with relaxed or non-existent copyright restrictions that allows users to study, change and improve it in a public and collaborative manner (Perens B., *"Open Sources: Voices from the Open Source Revolution"*, 1999).

[5] Dario de Judicibus, *"World 2.0"*, 2008.

RSS) so that content can be enjoyed in different ways and times defined by the users through content aggregation systems. Examples of these new channels are the feed, namely lists of elements with a title (e.g. reports of a newspaper, a newsgroup thread), which allow the connection to the information content. These contents can be updated and consulted frequently with special programs or even through browsers that allow you to always be aware of new content posted on multiple sites without having to visit them directly.

- From personal websites to blogs: if previously the construction of a website required the mastery of elements of HTML and programming knowledge, now with blogs everyone is able to publish their own content, as well as providing them with attractive graphics, without needing to possess any special technical skills.

- From content management systems to the wiki: the wiki[6] technology, which Wikipedia is its most famous application, is the culmination of the content management. It has gone from a multitude of computer applications for managing the life cycle of information, to the use of an only technology that supports the entire process, allowing the use of the information in the same environment in which it was born.

In the Web 2.0 the quality of interaction improves and the message becomes clearer and more direct, allowing the establishment of a more personalized relationship between people, services and businesses. Thanks to new paradigms, methods and contact details, key words become: involvement, collaboration, participation, trust, speed.

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[6] "A wiki is a website which allows its users to add, modify, or delete its content via a web browser usually using a simplified mark-up language or a rich-text editor" (Scott M., 2008)

1.3 What is Social Media?

The enormous potential offered by Web 2.0 and the evolution of digital communication, favored the global affirmation of Social Media. Social Media is a phrase being tossed around a lot these days, but it can sometimes be difficult to answer the question of what is social media. There seems to be confusion even among managers and academic researchers on what exactly should be included under this term.

The origin of the term dates back to 1995 when Darrell Berry used it to describe software systems that facilitated the construction of community and allowed you to create a shared space between electronic media,[7] and Tina Sharkey to refer to a form of "primordial" community that could create content. However, the massive use of the term started in July 2004, when Chris Shipley held the BlogOn conference, in which for the first time he spoke of "Business of Social Media".[8] The conference was the opportunity to treat a theme that would become of great interest in the following years: Chris spoke of the advent of tools such as blogs, wikis, social networks and their related technologies, about how they represented a new form of participation and what revolutionary effect they would have brought.

A first general definition given by Carton (2009) claims that: "Social Media are Internet-based technologies that facilitate conversations". It includes web- and mobile-based technologies which are used to turn communication into interactive dialogue among organizations, communities, and individuals. Social Media is the future of communication, a countless array of internet based tools and platforms that increase and enhance the sharing of information. This new form of media makes the transfer of text, photos, audio, video, and information in general increasingly fluid among Internet users. Another way to define social media is to break it down. Media

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[7] In 2010, Forbes magazine acknowledged that the Darrel Berry's one was possibly the earliest usage of the concept of social media.

[8] "At Guidewire Group, Shipley was instrumental in creating the first social media conference, BlogOn, held at University of California at Berkeley in 2005. She is widely acknowledged for coining the term social media." (Israell S., 2009)

is an instrument on communication, like a newspaper or a radio, so social media would be a social instrument of communication.

However, the most used and popular definition is the one that defines Social Media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan A. and Haenlein M., 2010).

- Web 2.0, as already seen in the previous section, does not refer to any specific technical update of the World Wide Web,[9] but is a term that was first used in 2004 to describe a new way in which software developers and end-users started to utilize the World Wide Web, namely, as a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative way. In Web 2.0 terms, that we can consider the platform for the evolution of Social Media, a website doesn't just give you information, but interacts with you while giving you that information. A regular media can be considered as a one-way street where you can read a newspaper or listen to a report on television, but having a very limited ability to give your opinions on the matter, while social media, on the contrary, is a two-way street that gives you the ability to communicate too. This interaction can be simple as asking for your comments, or it can be more complex as receiving automatic movies recommendations based on the ratings of other people with similar interests.

- "When Web 2.0 represents the ideological and technological foundation, User Generated Content can be seen as the sum of all ways in which people make use of

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[9] "Although Web 2.0 does not refer to any specific technical update of the World Wide Web, there are some functionalities that are necessary for its functioning, like for example: Adobe Flash, a popular method for adding animation and interactivity to web pages; RSS, Really Simple Syndication, a web feed formats used to publish frequently updated contents, especially for blogs; and AJAX, Asynchronous Java Script, a technique to retrieve data from web servers asynchronously, allowing the update of web content without interfering with the display and the behaviour of the whole page." (Kaplan A. and Haenlein M., 2010, pag. 61)

Social Media" (Kaplan A. and Haenlein M., 2010). We will explain it better in the next section.

Social media are characterized by many different factors, one of which is the almost total absence of financial investment for the publishing and access to the content, that is allowed to everyone, anytime, through the use of low cost instruments, compared to those used for traditional media; the message is not subject to economical or political "limitations", it doesn't need to respond to audience metrics or state restrictions, and there is no need of professionals sources to create compelling content. We may include some parameters that highlight the differences and similarities between social media and mass media:[10]

- **Service area**: both social and mass media allow the possibility of obtaining a global audience;
- **Accessibility**: while mass media's production tools are generally private or of the state, social media tools are available to anyone at either really reduced cost or for free. Obviously access to these last ones is possible only through the connection to the network that involves a cost;
- **Usability**: as regards to the mass media, the creation of the content requires expert training and knowledge, on the other hand for social media this is not strictly necessary;
- **Speed**: time is a fundamental key, since social media often have an instantaneous reaction and, thanks to widespread participation, information can reach any part of the world in real time;
- **Permanence**: editing time (think of a newspaper article) are much longer than ones in a social media, where the content can be modified at any time with comments and corrections.

The main innovation from a communication point of view, is the ease in the using of blogs, forums, social networks and podcasts, combined with the socialization

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[10] Benkler Y., *"La ricchezza della rete. La produzione sociale trasforma il mercato e aumenta le libertà"*, Università Bocconi, 2007.

process between individuals thanks to the new media, which has allowed the emerging of a new type of people: active, critical or simply engaged in the use and personal production of content.

1.4 User Generated Content (UGC)

The flow of communication between businesses and consumers, which has always been originated from the higher levels (top-down), now tends to be always more originated from the lower ones, through the direct participation of each member to the network. Consumer Generated Media (CGM) or User Generated Content (CGC), are terms used since 2005 to refer to the various forms of content that are publicly available and created by end-users and in order to be considered as such, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, it requires: to be published on a publicly accessible website or on a social networking site, to show a certain amount of creative effort, and to have been created outside of professional routines and practices (OECD, 2007).[11] It is of particularly importance the requirement of the publication on a website accessible to all or at least to a specific target, excluding tools such as e-mail or chat. There must be a creative effort, even if minimum, depending on the context in which you are: copying a video or "tagging" a photo cannot be considered as UGC. Furthermore, the creation of the content must occur outside of professional routines and practices, which means that normally you are not acting institutional or commercial market context and above all, there cannot be on the creator's side an expectation of profit making.

We can define three main features in order to describe this new way of communication through the UGCs:

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[11] OECD, *"Participative Web and User-Created Content Web 2.0, Wikis and Social Networking"*, 2007.

1. Anyone who has an Internet connection, can create content, regardless of other socio-economic parameters (age, occupation, income, etc).

2. The generated content can be shared and cataloged through a system of spontaneous indexing that starts "from the bottom", defined as folksonomy.[12]

3. Anyone can answer to the content with simple written comments or other multimedia content (such as videos, files or audio files) or assigning a grade rating to it.

The easiness in the use of services and interfaces on the Web has allowed the user generate contents to grow to the point of becoming a mass phenomenon, so anyone who has the ability, can produce, upload and share different content on the net, from photos to video movies, from reviews to simple comments on articles, from music to games. An example is YouTube, the greatest showcase to the world in terms of video files, that thanks to its incredible success has become the recipient of countless commercial adds for the largest multinational companies, and it has so increased its economic value enough to be purchased by Google for the incredible amount of 1.65 billion dollars.

The main types of UGC are:[13]

- Text: original writings or expansion of other texts, novels, poems;
- Photos/Pictures: digital photographs took by users and published online, created or modified images;
- Music/Audio files: recorded or created audio, published and distributed in a digital format;
- Video/Film: recorded or crated video files, edited and published online, including remixes of existing files, amateur content and a combination of the two;

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[12] "A folksonomy is a system of classification derived from the practice and method of collaboratively creating and managing tags to annotate and categorize content" (Peters I., 2009)

[13] OECD study *"Participative Web: User-created content"*, 12th of April 2007.

- Citizen journalism: news about current events reported by ordinary users, everyday life stories, blog posts, photos and video of events;
- Educational content: content created in schools, universities or anyways used for educational use; Mobile content: content created for mobile phones or any other equipment that uses wireless technology, usually sent via MMS (Media Messaging Service), e-mail or uploaded to the Internet; Virtual content: content created in an online virtual environment or integrated to it, online games, virtual worlds.

1.5 Classification of social media

While studies examining various aspects of social media have proliferated in recent years, very few have attempted to formally categorize them. Fraser and Dutta (2008) were the first to classify social media and define five broad categories:[14]

- Egocentric sites: allow users to build profiles of themselves, leading to a virtual identity construction and facilitating connections. Examples are Facebook.com, Myspace.com.

- Community sites: replicate in the virtual world those communities found in the physical world, allowing groups to form around like beliefs. Examples are BigWaveDave.com, BlackPlanet.com, Dogster.com.

- Opportunistic sites: allow for different social organization of users and facilitate business connections. Examples are LinkedIn.com, Academia.edu.

- Passion-centric sites: allow users to connect based on interest and hobbies, and aggregate fans. Examples are TheSamba.com, Chatterbirds.com.

- Media Sharing sites: allow users to share rich media content (image, audio, video) with each other. Examples are Flickr.com, YouTube.com, Slideshare.com.

A classification can also be done according the social media primary function:[15]

- Social interaction: these networks primarily involve social interaction.

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[14] Parent M., Plangger K. & Bal A., *"The new WTP: Willingness to participate",* Kelley Business of School, Indiana University, 2011, 54, 219-229.

[15] The emphasisi on a single function is mainly reasons of exponential simplicity; many of the better know network perform multiple functions. For a depth examination see Goyan S., *"Social Networks on the Web"*, 2011.

Individuals users share information about themselves and their friends via the site. Well known examples include Friendster, MySpace, Orkut and Facebook.

- File sharing: these sites primarily enable individuals to share content of different kinds, e.g., music, video, and photographs. Examples of such are Flickr, YouTube and Gnutella

- Messaging and communication: these sites enable communication among very large numbers of interested users. Examples of such sites include Twitter, Plurk, Jaiku, and Friendfeed.

- Professional networking: these sites enable users to access information on business and work opportunities and contact individuals who may help them realize these opportunities. Examples of such sites include LinkedIn, Viadeo and Xing.

Figure 1.1: Social Media landscape.

(*Source: http://www.fredcavazza.net/2008/06/09/social-media-landscape/*)

But the most used and popular classification is indeed the Kaplan an Haenlein one. They created a systematic classification scheme, taking into account applications that may be forthcoming since new sites appears every day, based on the two key elements of social media and the theories behind them.[16]

The first element is the media research, composed by:

- Social Presence: the social presence theory (Short,Wiliams, Christie, 1976) states that we can distinguish social media according the degree of social presence they allow between two users, namely the acoustic, visual, and physical contact that can be achieved. It depends on intimacy of the medium, interpersonal (face-to-face discussion) vs. mediated (telephone conversation), and on immediacy of the medium, asynchronous (e-mail) vs. synchronous (live chat) communications. If the social presence is relatively high, the communication partners will have a large influence on each other's behaviour.
- Media richness: Media richness theory (Daft, Lengel, 1986) states that media possess a different degree of richness, amount of information they allow to be transmitted in a given time interval, and for this reason some media are more effective than others in resolving ambiguity and uncertainty.

The second element is represented by social processes which are:

- Self-Presentation: the concept of self-presentation states that in any type of social interaction people have the desire to control the impressions other people form of them (Goffman, 1959), and they wish to create an image that is consistent with one's personal identity.
- Self-Disclosure: conscious or unconscious revelation of personal information (thoughts, feelings, likes) consistent with the image one would like to give.

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[16] Kaplan A.M. & Haenlein M., *"Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunirties of Social Media",* Kelley Business of School, Indiana University, Business Horizons, 2010, 53, 59-68.

Media Research

Social Presence
(Short, Williams & Christie, 1976)

Media Richness
(Daft & Lengel, 1986)

Intimacy of the medium

Immediacy of the medium

Interpersonal

Mediated

Synchronous

Asynchronous

Social processes

Self-presentation

Self-disclosure
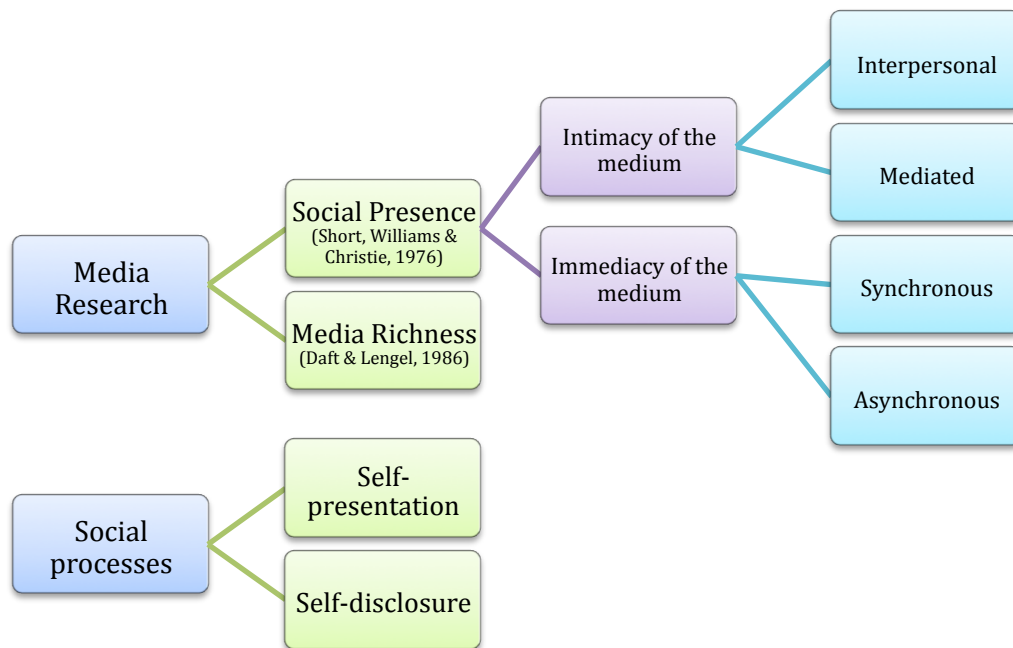
Figure 1.2: The two key elements of Social Media. (*Source: Personal adaptation*)

The combination of the two dimensions leads to the classification in table 1.1. For what regards the social presence and media richness social media as collaborative projects and blogs score lowest since they are often only text-based, whereas at the highest level there are virtual worlds as they try to replicate all dimensions of face-to-face interactions in a virtual environment. Instead for self-presentation and self-disclosure blogs, social networking sites and virtual social worlds usually score higher than collaborative projects, content communities and virtual game worlds because the former focuses on the persons behind the content and requires more self-disclosure.

		Social presence/ Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure	High	**Blogs**	**Social networking sites** (e.g. Facebook)	**Virtual social worlds** (e.g., Second life)
	Low	**Collaborative projects** (e.g., Wikipedia)	**Content communities** (e.g., YouTube)	**Virtual game worlds** (e.g., World of Warcraft)

Table 1.1: Classification of social media by social presence/media richness and self-presentation/self-disclosure. (*Source: Kaplan M., Haenlein M., 2010*)

1.5.1 Collaborative projects

"Collaborative projects enable the joint and simultaneous creation of content by many end-users and are, in this sense, probably the most democratic manifestation of UGC" (Kaplan A. and Haenlein M., 2010). The category includes wikis, websites which allow users to add, remove, and change text-based content, and social bookmarking applications, which allows users to collect, save and rate Internet links that they want to remember or share. The main idea of collaborative projects is that the joint effort of many actors might lead to a better outcome than any actor could achieve individually. The most important example within this category is the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, a wiki currently available in more than 230 different languages.

Wikipedia is a free, open content online encyclopedia created through the collaborative effort of a community of users known as "Wikipedians". Its 22 million articles (over 4 million in English alone) have been written collaboratively by volunteers around the world. Almost all of its articles can be edited by anyone with access to the site, and it has about 100,000 regularly active contributors. It has become the largest and most popular general reference work on the Internet, ranking sixth globally among all websites on Alexa.[17] Wikipedia was launched in January 2001 by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger, who coined the name from the combination of "wiki" and "encyclopedia".

Articles in Wikipedia are loosely organized according to their development status and subject matter. A new article often starts as a "stub", a very short page consisting of definitions and some links. On the other extreme, the most developed articles may be nominated for "Featured article" status. The open nature of Wikipedia has led to various concerns, such as the quality of writing, vandalism and the accuracy of information.[18] Some articles might contain unverified or inconsistent information, advertising language, personal opinions, or other types of spam, but

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[17] www.alexa.com

[18] "However, a 2005 investigation in Nature showed that the science articles they compared came close to the level of accuracy of Encyclopedia Britannica and had a similar rate of 'serious errors'" (Giles J., 2005)

fortunately vandalism is generally easy to remove from wiki articles and in practice, the median time to detect and fix vandalism is a few minutes.

In addition to the encyclopedia, the non-profit Wikipedia foundation oversees several other open-content projects, including:

- Wiktionary, a dictionary and thesaurus
- Wikibooks, a collection of free texts and other books
- Wikiquote, a collection of quotations
- Wikisource, a collection of free source documents
- Wikiversity, a collection of free learning materials
- Wikispecies, a directory of species
- Meta-Wiki, which coordinates all the other projects.

1.5.2 Blogs

Blogs, which represents the earliest form of Social Media, are special types of websites that usually display date-stamped entries in reverse chronological order (OECD, 2007). The term 'blog' was coined by Peter Merholz, who jokingly broke the word weblog into the phrase 'we blog' in the sidebar of his blog Peterme.com in April or May 1999.[19] Other terms derived from it are: "blogging", the act of writing a post for a blog; "blogger", a person who writes content for a blog; "blogosphere", the online community of blogs and bloggers.

The earliest blogs started in the late 1990s as online diaries. Individuals posted information on a daily basis about their lives and opinions. The daily posts were listed in reverse date order, so readers viewed the most recent post first and scrolled through previous posts.[20] The emergence and growth of blogs in the late 1990s coincided with the advent of web publishing tools that facilitated the posting of content by non-technical users. Until 2009 blogs were usually managed by a single

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[19] *"It's the links, stupid",* The economist, 20-4-2006

[20] Gunelius S., *"What is a blog?"* (http://weblogs.about.com/od/startingablog/p/WhatIsABlog.htm)

individual but, as blogs evolved, interactive features were added to create a two-way conversation. Readers took advantage of features that allowed them to leave comments on blog posts or link to posts on other blogs and websites to further the dialogue. More recently, also "multi-author blogs" (MABs) have developed, with posts written by large numbers of authors and professionally edited. Multi-author blogs from newspapers, other media outlets, universities, think tanks, interest groups and similar institutions account for an increasing proportion of blog traffic.

Today, there are over 150 million blogs with more entering the blogosphere everyday. Blogs have become more than online diaries. Blogging has become an important part of the online and offline worlds with popular bloggers impacting the worlds of politics, business and society with their words.

There are many different types of blogs, differing not only in the type of content, but also in the way that content is delivered or written:[21]

- Personal blog: is the traditional most common blog, an ongoing diary or commentary by an individual.
- Corporate and organizational blogs: are blogs used internally to enhance the communication and culture in a corporation or externally for marketing, branding or public relations purposes.
- By genre: Some blogs focus on a particular subject, such as political blogs, health blogs, travel blogs, gardening blogs, house blogs, fashion blogs, education blogs, music blogs, quizzing blogs and legal blogs.
- By media type: a blog comprising videos is called a vlog, one comprising links is called a linklog, a site containing a portfolio of sketches is called a sketchblog or one comprising photos is called a photoblog.
- Reverse blog: is composed by its users rather than a single blogger.

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[21] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog

1.5.3 Content communities

The main objective of content communities is the sharing of media content between users. After registering for an account, individuals upload their materials, describe them, and make them publicly available. Visitors search the content communities by keyword, subscribe to individual users, and provide feedback on the content. Content communities exist for a wide range of different media contents: text, audio, video. The most popular content communities are:

- YouTube for videos: It is the world's largest video sharing service and it was launched in February 2005. You can create channels of your favourite videos or upload your amazing video stuff. YouTube allows users to upload, share and view videos. Anyone can watch any of the uploaded videos, but only registered users can upload videos on to the web site, other than rate and comment them. In July 2012, ALEXA ranked YouTube as the 3rd most popular web site on the Internet.[22] Over 800 million unique users visit YouTube each month, over 4 billion hours of video are watched each month and 72 hours of video are uploaded every minute.[23] YouTube was bought in November 2006 by Google at a price of USD 1.65 billion.[24]

- Flickr for sharing photos: it is an image hosting, video hosting website, and online community created by Ludicorp in 2004 and acquired by Yahoo! in 2005. In addition to being a popular website for users to share and embed personal photographs, the service is widely used by bloggers to host images that they embed in blogs and social media. Photos and videos can be accessed from Flickr without the need to register an account but an account must be made in order to upload content onto the website. Registering an account also allows users to create a profile page containing photos and videos that the user has uploaded and also grants the ability to add another Flickr user as a contact. In June 2011 the

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[22] www.alexa.com

[23] http://www.youtube.com/t/press_statistics

[24] Arrington M., *"Google has acquired YouTube"*, 9-10-2006. (http://techcrunch.com/2006/10/09/google-has-acquired-youtube/)

site reported that it had a total of 51 million registered members and that it was hosting more than 6 billion images.

- Slideshare for PowerPoint presentations: it is a Web 2.0 based slide hosting service, launched in 2006. Users can upload files privately or publicly in the following file formats: PowerPoint, PDF, Keynote or OpenOffice presentations. Slide decks can then be viewed on the site itself, on hand held devices or embedded on other sites. The website was originally meant to be used for businesses to share slides among employees more easily, but it has since expanded to also become a host of a large number of slides which are uploaded merely to entertain.[25] Slideshare has 60 million unique visitors a month and 3 billion slides viewed per month, numbers that are steady growing.[26]

1.5.4 Social networking sites

There are many different definitions to describe social networking sites. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), "Social networking sites are applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other. These personal profiles can include any type of information, including photos, video, audio files, and blogs". Weber (2009) defines social networks as "places where people with a common interest or concern come together to meet people with similar interest, express themselves and vent", while Boyd and Ellison (2007) define the concept of social network as: "Web based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and

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[25] O'Brien C., *"The rise of slideshare and how corporate presentations became entertainment"*, (http://www.siliconbeat.com/2009/10/06/the-rise-of-slideshare-and-how-corporate-presentations-became-entertainment/)

[26] Empson R., *"SlideShare details its own exponential growth in… an Infographic"*, (http://techcrunch.com/2011/11/28/slideshare-ironically-details-its-own-exponential-growth-in-an-infographic/)

(3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system".

Social networking sites allow us to digitally represent our connections with other users and to model our network of social relationships by requesting and accepting "friends".[27] In the past few years, social networking sites have become integrated into the daily practices of million of users, especially young people but usage is rapidly spreading to older people as well, and several companies have started using them to support the creation of brand communities.[28]

Among the social networking websites, the largest and most popular one is Facebook, and according to Zarrella (2010) it possesses the most valuable features that can be useful for the social media marketer.

Founded in 2004, membership has grown very rapidly and now Facebook has over 900 million active users, more than half of them using Facebook on a mobile device. According to Experian Hitwise, the term "facebook" was the top search term in the US for third straight year in 2011 with "facebook login" and "facebook.com" being the third and fifth respectively, and the most visited website.[29]

Users can register and create a personal profile with photos, contact and personal information. Everyone can add other users as friends through an accept invitation, communicate and exchange messages, including automatic notifications when they update their profile. Additionally, users can also create and join common-interest groups, "like pages" and categorize their friends into different lists. Facebook is an

[27] "In our everyday lives, we frequently encounter people with whom we may want to reconnect at some point in the future, but the social or logistical barriers to do so are insurmountable. It may feel creepy to ask for a phone number; there may be no easy way to share contact information; email addresses may be misplaced. When we meet these potential acquaintances at parties or parks or post offices, each step of the process is fraught with potential pitfalls that can prevent individuals from reconnecting in the future. […] Social network sites can help eliminate these barriers." (Ellison, Lampe & Steinfield, 2009)

[28] Ellison N.B., Lampe C., & Steinfield C., *"Social Network sites and society: current trends and future possibilities"*, Interactions Magazine (16) 1, 2009.

[29] Experian.com (http://www.experian.com/hitwise/press-release-facebook-was-the-top-search-term-for-2011.html)

incredible and valuable tool not only for people, but also for companies thanks to its many different uses for businesses, especially for marketing and communication purposes.
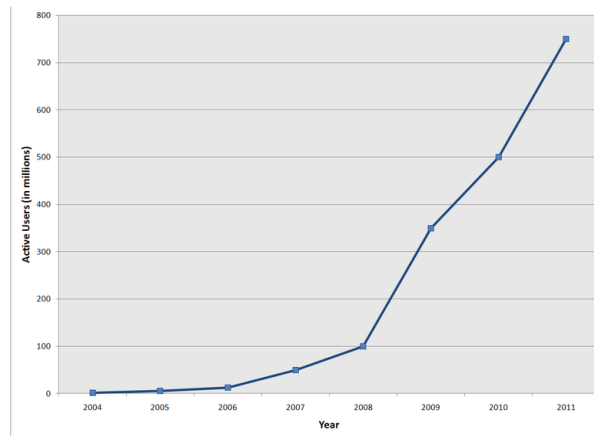

Figure1.3: Facebook popularity.
(*Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Facebook_popularity.PNG*)

1.5.5 Virtual game/social worlds

"Virtual worlds are platforms that replicate a three dimensional environment in which users can appear in the form of personalized avatars[30] and interact with each other as they would in real life. In this sense, virtual worlds are probably the ultimate manifestation of Social Media, as they provide the highest level of social presence and media richness of all applications discussed thus far" (Kaplan A. and Haenlein M., 2010). They can help to create online communities that take the form of computer-based simulated environments, in which users can manipulate elements of the modeled world. Such modeled worlds and their rules may draw from the reality or fantasy worlds. Example rules are gravity, topography, locomotion, real-time actions, and communication. Communication between users can range from text, graphical icons, visual gesture, sound, and rarely, forms using touch, voice command, and balance senses. Most accepted definitions of virtual worlds require that it be persistent; in other words, the world must continue to exist even after a user exits the world, and user-made changes to the world should be preserved.

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[30] "These avatars usually appear as textual, two-dimensional, or three-dimensional representations, although other forms are possible, for example auditory and touch sensations" (Begault D., 1994)

According to Mark W. Bell at Indiana University, a virtual world is a synchronous, persistent network of people, represented as avatars, facilitated by networked computers[31]. While the interaction with other participants is done in real-time, time consistency is not always maintained in online virtual worlds.

The number of people using virtual worlds is continuously increasing every month and this growth does not appear to be stopping or slowing down anytime soon.
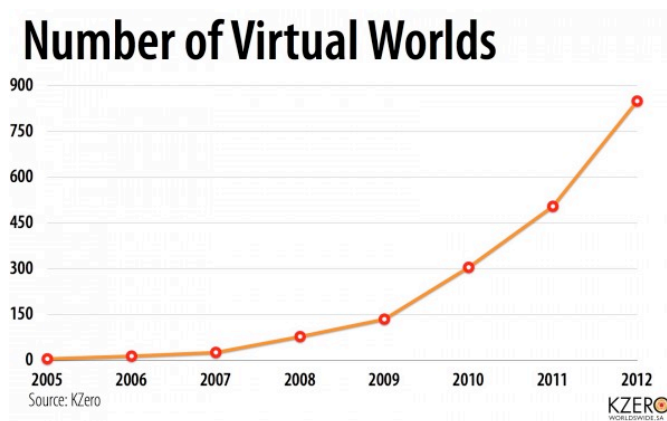
Figure 1.4: Number of virtual worlds.
(*Source: http://www.kzero.co.uk/blog/growth-forecasts-for-the-virtual-worlds-sector/*)

Virtual worlds are not limited to games but, depending on the degree of immediacy presented, can encompass computer conferencing and text based chat-rooms. Sometimes, emoticons or "smiles" are available, to show feeling or facial expression.

As virtual world is a fairly vague and inclusive term, it can generally be divided along a spectrum ranging from massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPG) and massively multiplayer online real-life games (MMORLG).

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[31] *"Virtual Worlds Research: Past, Present & Future"*. Retrieved 2012-07-29.

1- **Virtual game worlds**, where the user playing a specific character is a main feature of the game, require their users to behave according to strict rules in the context of a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG).

These applications have gained popularity in recent years, as standard game consoles now allow simultaneous play among a multitude of users around the globe. Massively multiplayer online games depict a wide range of worlds, including those based on fantasy, science fiction, the real world, super heroes, sports, horror, and historical milieus. The most common form of such games are fantasy worlds, whereas those based on the real world are relatively rare. Many MMORPGs have real time actions and communication. Players create a character who travels between buildings, towns, and worlds to carry out business or leisure activities. Communication is usually textual, but real time voice communication is also possible. The form of communication used can substantially affect the experience of players in the game.

Examples of virtual game worlds include the cod medieval World of Warcraft which counts around 9.1 million subscribers[32] who explore the virtual planet of Azeroth in the form of humans, dwarves, orcs, or night elves, to fight monsters or to search for treasure. Players control a character avatar within a game world in third- or first-person view, exploring the landscape, fighting various monsters, completing quests, and interacting with non-player characters or other player. As characters become more developed, they gain various talents and skills, requiring the player to further define the abilities of that character. Characters may also form and join guilds, allowing characters within the guild access to the guild's chat channel, the guild name and optionally allowing other features, including a guild tabard, guild bank, and dues.

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[32] "With 9.1 million subscribers as of August 2012, World of Warcraft is currently the world's most subscribed MMORPG, and holds the Guinness World Record for the most popular MMORPG by subscribers" (Blake S., 2007)

2- **Virtual social worlds** allows inhabitants to choose their behaviour more freely and essentially live a virtual life similar to their real life.

As in virtual game worlds, virtual social world users appear in the form of avatars and interact in a three-dimensional virtual environment; however, in this realm, there are no rules restricting the range of possible interactions, allowing them to play a more dynamic role or multiple roles, that allows for an unlimited range of self presentation strategies[33].

Arguably, the most prominent example of virtual social worlds is the Second Life application, founded and managed by the San Francisco-based company Linden Research Inc. Second Life[34] is a three-dimensional virtual community created entirely by its membership. Members assume an identity and take up residence in Second Life, creating a customized avatar or personage to represent themselves. The avatar moves about in the virtual world using mouse control and intuitive keyboard buttons. Besides doing everything that is possible in real life (e.g., speaking to other avatars, taking a walk, enjoying the virtual sunshine), Second Life also allows users to create content (e.g., to design virtual clothing or furniture items) and to sell this content to others in exchange for Linden Dollars, a virtual currency traded against the U.S. Dollar on the Second Life Exchange.

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[33] "It has been shown that with increasing usage intensity and consumption experience, users of virtual social worlds show behavior that more and more closely mirrors the one observed in real life settings" (Haenlein M. & Kaplan A., 2009; Kaplan A. & Haenlein M., 2009a, 2009b)

[34] "Second Life is a 3D world where everyone you see is a real person and every place you visit is built by people just like you. Enter a world with infinite possibilities and live a life without boundaries, guided only by your imagination" (Second Life.com)

1.6 Most popular social networking sites

For the relevance of our study, the most important category on the social media classification scheme is the one of social networking sites, and in the chapter 3 we will see that our attention will focus only on Facebook, the most popular and largest by users number. For this reason at this point we focus on which are the most popular and famous social networking sites and we show some numbers and statistics to better understand the role of each site within the society and the individual daily life of each user.
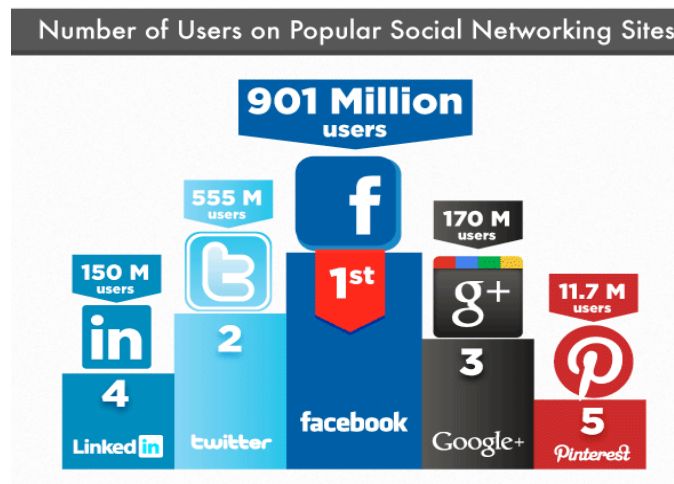
Figure 1.5: Number of users on most popular social networking sites. (2012)

(*Source: Infographic by Go-gulf.com. http://ijustdid.org/2012/06/social-media-users-comparison/*)

1.6.1 Facebook

Facebook is a social networking service and website launched in February 2004, owned and operated by Facebook, Inc. Membership has grown very rapidly and now Facebook has over 900 million active users (from 100 million in 2008), more than half of them using Facebook on a mobile device. Users must register before using the site, after which they may create a personal profile with photos, contact and personal information. Everyone can add other users as friends through an accept invitation, communicate and exchange messages, including automatic notifications when they update their profile. Additionally, users can also create and join common-

interest groups (organized by workplace, school or college), "like pages" and categorize their friends into different lists.

The name of the service stems from the colloquial name for the book given to students at the start of the academic year by some university administrations in the United States to help students get to know each other.

Facebook was founded by Mark Zuckerberg with his college roommates and fellow students. The website's membership was initially limited by the founders to Harvard students, but was expanded to other colleges in the Boston area, the Ivy League, and Stanford University.[35] It gradually added support for students at various other universities before opening to high school students, and eventually to anyone aged 13 and over.

In July 2010, ALEXA (the Web information company) ranked Facebook as the second most popular site on the internet, after Google.[36] According to Social Media Today, in April 2010 an estimated 41.6% of the U.S. population had a Facebook account. Nowadays is the leading and most popular social networking site based on number of users and monthly unique visitors, having overtaken main competitor MySpace in April 2008. Facebook earns revenue through credits and banner advertising, and since its launch revenues have grown steadily.

Facebook has affected the social life and activity of people in various ways. With its availability on many mobile devices, Facebook allows users to continuously stay in touch with friends, relatives and other acquaintances wherever they are in the world, as long as there is access to the Internet. It can also unite people with common interests and/or beliefs through groups and other pages, and has been known to reunite lost family members and friends because of the widespread reach of its network.

One of the main feature, as already said, is the "like" button that allows users to like content such as status updates, comments, photos, links shared by friends, and

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[35] Boyd D.M. & Ellison N.B., *"Social network sites: definition, history, and scolarship"*, Journal of computer-mediated communication, 2007.

[36] www.alexa.com

advertisements. Facebook describes liking as a way for users to "give positive feedback and connect with things they care about".

However, what makes Facebook an incredible valuable tool, are the many different uses for businesses (we will explain them in a better and deeper way in Chapter 2): Facebook can be used as a tool for companies to increase the awareness of their brand and to promote their products or services; a brand's fanpage is a efficient way to establish long lasting relationships with consumers and increase brand loyalty; the use of the social network can provide and help to extract data for insights on what products are selling, what consumers are talking about and what they are buying from your company and your competitors; people are increasingly turning to Facebook when they have a complaint or question, making it an useful tool also for online customer service, and companies are dedicating resources to stay on top of online commentary and to provide fast responses to their customers.

1.6.2 Twitter

Twitter is an online social networking service and microblogging service that enables its users to send and read text-based messages of up to 140 characters, known as "tweets". It was founded by Jack Dorsey and launched in 2006. The service rapidly gained worldwide popularity, with over 500 million active users as of 2012, generating over 340 million tweets daily and handling over 1.6 billion search queries per day.[37] Since its launch, Twitter has become one of the top 10 most visited websites on the Internet and at the moment it's the eighth most popular site in the world according to the three-month Alexa traffic rankings.[38]

Twitter requires initial registration, using name and e-mail address. Once created the account, users may personalize their profiles using onsite design tools, connect with other users already using the service, utilize their existing email contact lists for Twitter members and start writing messages, that are publicly visible by default.

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[37] "Twitter to surpass 500 million registered users on wednesday",

(http://www.mediabistro.com/alltwitter/500-million-registered-users_b18842)

[38] www.alexa.com

Users can search for other twitterers by using the search box or browse other Twitter users and choose to "follow" their tweets if they wish (that's all what Twitter is about - following others and getting others to follow you). The users can also check the people who are un-subscribing them on Twitter better known as unfollowing via various services. Tweets can be made private or public and even send messages direct to other twitterers, as opposed to publicly posting yours.[39] It's also possible to repost a message from another twitter user, and share it with one's own followers, through the retweet function. Posts can be grouped together by topic or type by use of hashtags, words or phrases prefixed with a "#" sign. Similarly, the "@" sign followed by a username is used for mentioning or replying to other users.

There are many different uses for Twitter. Some of the most common are instant updates and news. Twitter has been instrumental in organizing civil protests and events all over the world, most notably in countries that have limited access to the Internet. Breaking news and emergency communication are well-suited for Twitter's instant, real-time structure and it's also used as a communication channel alongside more traditional media services, such as newspapers, television, magazines.[40] Twitter has become an extremely popular way to share content, communicate, and broadcast information.

1.6.3 Google+

Google+ is a multilingual social networking and identity service, owned and operated by Google Inc. It was launched on June 28, 2011 and, at the time, it has a total of 170 million active users.[41] Sources such as The New York Times have declared it Google's biggest attempt to rival the social network Facebook. One of the main differences is related to privacy issues, since Facebook's users have often complained that the privacy settings were too obtuse and instructions on how to

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[39] *"What is twitter and how does it work"*

(http://gnoted.com/what-is-twitter-and-how-does-it-workbeginners-guide/)

[40] Boswell W., *"Twitter: what is it?"* (websearch.about.com).

[41] www.google.com/+

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protect their accounts were confusing. G+ removed the confusion by introducing a better privacy management system.

Regarding the social network's structure, each Google+ profile centres around the Stream, which is essentially the same thing as Facebook's news feed - where all of your information and friend's updates are rounded up and constantly updated. The Stream is joined by three new core services, called Circles, Hangouts, and Sparks, that are the starting block for future developments.

- "Circles" enable users to organize people into groups to share different things with different people, keeping separate conversations.[42] This system replaces the typical friends list function used by websites such as Facebook and its organization is done through a drag-and-drop interface. Another function of Circles is to control the content of one's Stream. A user may click on a Circle on the left side of the page and the Stream portion of the page will contain only posts shared by users in that Circle.

- "Hangouts" are places used to facilitate group video chats. As the name suggests, this feature is all about hanging out with your buddies, virtually, or course. You can choose specific friends, or circles, to invite in a face-to-face video chat and anyone in the Hangout can invite others to join as well.[43] The biggest innovation turn out to be the possibility to include more than two people, with a maximum of 10, to a single Hangout at any point in time.

- "Sparks" enable users to identify topics they might be interested in sharing with others. You can add your field of interest to sparks lists and get so a constant feed of things that you're really into. "Featured interests" sparks are also available, based on topics others globally are finding interesting. Sparks is accessed as a pull-down from search results and helps to keep users informed of the latest updates on the topics of their interest.

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[42] Kovach S., *"Everything You Need To Know About Google+"*
(http://www.businessinsider.com/what-is-google-plus-2011-6?op=1)

[43] Plummer L., *"What is Google+?"*
(http://www.pocket-lint.com/news/40785/what-is-google-android-iphone-apps)

Google+ allows its users to recommend items across the web to their friends and contacts, through the "+1" button, the Facebook's "like" button rival. The Google +1 button is available and works on Google's search results, Google ads and on companies' web pages.[44] When you do a research when logged into Google, any results that you've "+1′d", or which have been +1′d by those in your network, will be enhanced. The idea makes a lot of sense, since if you're searching, it's nice to see if there are any answers that are recommended by your friends. So the button makes it even easier for you to recommend content to your friends and contacts, and make search results even more helpful and relevant. This is one, among the other possibilities, that makes Google+ another interesting tool not only for people, but even for companies, in order to increase their presence on the Web and help their business grow.

1.6.4 LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a social networking website for people in professional occupations. It was founded by Reid Hoffman and founding team members from PayPal and Socialnet.com in December 2002 and launched on May 5, 2003. It is mainly used for professional networking and it reports more than 160 million registered users in more than 200 countries and territories.[45]

One purpose of the site is to allow users to maintain a list of contact details of people with whom they have some level of relationship, called "Connections". Users can find past and present colleagues and classmates quickly, and they can invite anyone to become a connection. Everyone's contact network is built up consisting of connections at three different levels: users' direct connections, connections of each of their connections (second-degree connections) and also connections of second-degree connections (third-degree connections). In this way the contact network facilitate the possibility for users to gain an introduction to someone they wish to know through a mutual contact.

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[44] http://www.google.com/+1/button/

[45] http://press.linkedin.com/about

LinkedIn allows users to create a personal profile and standardizes the information into predefined "Profile Headline", "Summary", "Education", "Company", etc. categories. It can also be considered the easiest way to create a professional identity online, as a LinkedIn profile appears among the first results when your name is googled. And with the option to add files, presentations and updates, your profile can become a more dynamic version of your curriculum vitae.[46] In addition to this huge database of information, the platform also provides an awesome search tool to allow you to pinpoint the person you are looking for depending on a number of very specific factors. It can then be used to find jobs, people and business opportunities recommended by someone in one's contact network. Employers can list jobs and search for potential candidates, while job seekers can follow different companies, getting notification about the new available offers, and they can review the profile of hiring managers and discover which of their existing contacts can introduce them.

The network is full of industry experts willing to share advice and the service "LinkedIn Answers", similar to "Yahoo! Answers", allows users to ask questions for the community to answer. This feature is free, and the main difference from the latter is that questions are potentially more business-oriented, and the identity of the people asking and answering questions is known.

Another LinkedIn feature that helps to acquire and share expertise are the groups, that everyone can join, and characterized by a discussions board, news board, and jobs postings.

The final basic idea, whether you are looking for a job or are already employed, is that the network should be your insurance for your future career growth. Companies are organic entities whose needs change and cannot promise you a guarantee that your job will be there forever in the future.[47] For this reason having a profile on

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[46] Whitmell C., *"LinkedIn and how to use it: a graduate job seeker's guide"*
(http://careers.guardian.co.uk/linkedin-how-use-graduate-guide)

[47] Shaffer N., *"What is linkedIn and why should you join?"*
(http://windmillnetworking.com/2009/08/26/what-is-linkedin-and-why-should-you-join/)

LinkedIn can be very useful, so that you can both find potential companies and recruiters as well as be found by them anytime.

1.6.5 Pinterest

Pinterest, founded by Ben Silbermann, Paul Sciarra and Evan Sharp, is a pinboard-style social photo sharing website that allows users to create and manage theme-based image collections such as events, interests, hobbies and more. Users can browse other pinboards for inspiration, 're-pin' images to their own collections and/or 'like' photos.[48] Pinterest's mission is to "connect everyone in the world through the 'things' they find interesting" via a global platform of inspiration and idea sharing.[49]

Pinterest was launched in 2010 and, in short time, has reached great achievements: in August 2011, Time magazine listed Pinterest in its "50 Best Websites of 2011" article, in December the company was named the best new startup of 2011 by TechCrunch, and in January 2012 comScore reported the site had 11.7 million unique U.S. visitors, making it the fastest site ever to break through the 10 million unique visitor mark. comScore recorded a unique users moving average growth of 85% from mid-January to mid-February and a 17% growth from mid-February to mid-March. The site has been popular with American women and, in 2012, it was reported that 83% of the U.S. users were women, between 35 and 44 years old.

It allows users to "pin" images and video to a virtual bulletin board they create. They can be photos they took and uploaded, images found on other websites (uploaded through the "Pin It" button, which can be downloaded to the bookmark bar on a web browser), videos they find online or videos they have created themselves. The uploaded images can be organized and categorized on different themed collections, known as pinboards, that are so easily reachable by other users.

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[48] "Pinterest is a virtual pinboard. Pinterest allows you to organize and share all the beautiful things you find on the web. You can browse pinboards created by other people to discover new things and get inspiration from people who share your interests." (Pinterest.com)

[49] Pinterest.com/about

Popular categories are travel, cars, film, humour, home design, sports, fashion, and art. The members can then share the images with their friends, who can like, save or repin their favourite ones to their own boards using the "Pin It" button.

There is also the possibility to follow other users' boards if they have similar tastes. On the main Pinterest page, a "pin feed" appears, displaying the chronological activity from the pinterest boards that a user follows.

When browsing for new boards and relevant pins, users can visit a "Tastemakers" page that recommend pinboards with content similar to previous pins saved by a user. For both guests and Pinterest users, there are currently four main sections to browse: everything, videos, popular and gifts.

At the moment Pinterest has limited uses for businesses. It doesn't offer any advertising or paid placements like other services do, but companies, especially fashion brands, can use it as a virtual storefront for driving customers to their website.[50] The objective is to get other Pinterest users to see their images and like or repin them, because Pinterest notes which website the images came from (and provides a hyperlink), encouraging users to visit their site and to learn more about their product or service.

The number of orders generated from pins is double the ones generated from Facebook and even the amount of money spent on it is higher.[51] Users spent less time on the company's Website, choosing instead to browse from the company's pinboard. Many brands and small businesses are using Pinterest, following best practices to get traffic on their websites and buzz around their products.

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[50] Webb J., *"What is Pinterest and how to use it for marketing your business"*
(http://www.jeffbullas.com/2012/03/21/what-is-pinterest-and-how-to-use-it-for-marketing-your-business/)

[51] *"Pinterest driving more sales than any other network"*
(http://www.nowmedia.it/wpcontent/uploads/2012/05/pinterest_driving_more_sales_than_any_other_network.jpg)

Right now the Pinterest community is built on users finding interesting images and videos to share with their friends, but the full possibilities of Pinterest have yet to be realized, so now is just a great opportunity for the companies to get in on the ground floor, be creative, be innovative, and see how they can utilize this social network to help their business grow.

1.6.5 A brief comparison

In previous sections, we have described the most popular and famous social networking sites separately, explaining their main characteristics and business uses.

Now we want to focus on a brief comparison between them and we present some numbers and statistics on the user activity, in order to better understand the role of each site within the society and the individual daily life of each user.[52]

- According to the number of users Facebook is the first Social Network with its 900 million active users. At the second position we find Twitter with 555 million users and right after ranks the Facebook's rival Google+ with 170 million users.

In forth position there is LinkedIn with over 150 million professional registered users, while at the last place we find Pinterest with 12 million users (that have now

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[52] All the images of this section are taken from:

Infographic *"User activity: comparison of social networking sites"* by Go-Gulf.com (May, 2012), (*http://www.nowmedia.it/2012/05/21/lo-stato-dell-arte-social-media-social-network-statistiche-a-confronto-2012-classifica-social-network/*), and Infographic *"How Pinterest drives online sales"* by Shopify (June, 2012),(*http://www.nowmedia.it/2012/06/06/pinterest-genera-piu-vendite-di-qualsiasi-altro-social-network/*).

become 18 M) that, despite it may appear to have a very low number of users compared to the others, it has been the fastest site ever to break through the 10 million unique visitor mark (comScore).

- Facebook and Twitter remain at the first two positions also for the number of monthly visits, with respectively 7012 and 182 million visitors per month. Pinterest with 104 million visitors gains the third position overtaking LinkedIn (85 M) and Google+ (61)
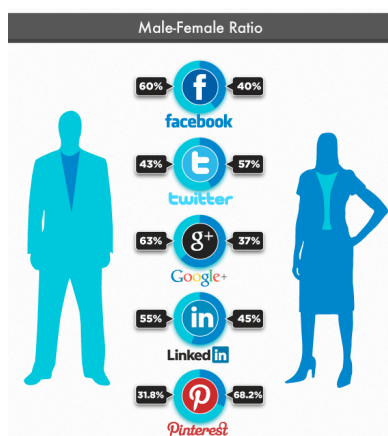
- Regarding the male-female ratio of users, social networking sites with a higher number of males than females are in order Google+ (63%), Facebook (60%) and LinkedIn (55%). Pinterest and Twitter have instead more female users than male users with respectively 68% and 57% of registered females.

Moreover, we can observe that the majority of Facebook users are aged between 18 and 25 years old, while for all the other social networking sites the main category of age is the one between 26 and 34 years old.

In particular Twitter and Pinterest have a good percentage of users also in the two subsequent categories, between 26 and 34 years old and between 35-44 years old. Pinterest is the least used social networking site for those under 26 years old and its percentage of users is almost insignificant compared to the other social network.
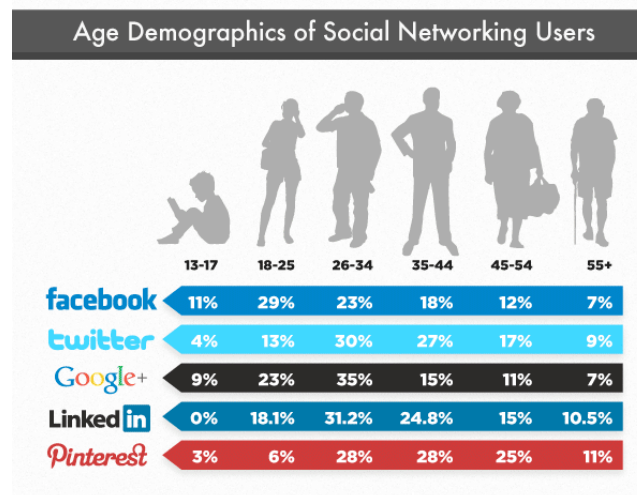
- The time spend by an average social networking user per month on Facebook is 405 minutes, while Pinterest is at the second position with 89 minutes.

These numbers are significantly higher compared to the other three social networking sites. The time spent on Twitter is of 21 minutes, 17 minutes on LinkedIn and only 3 minutes per month on Google+.

- Facebook and Twitter's users have the higher estimated worth, respectively 118 $ and 71$, compared to the other three.
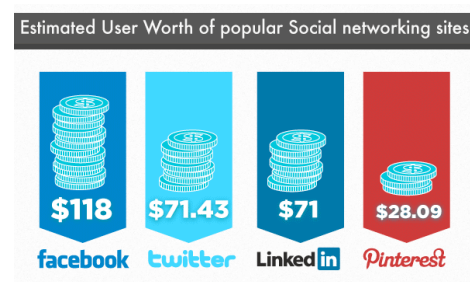
However, the most important statistics for business are the ones referred to the buying behaviour of consumers such as number of orders generated by a specific social media and average money spent per order.

In this field Pinterest is rapidly gaining a leader position. According to an Infographic based on Shopify's data, Pinterest has contributed to the 17% of all revenues generated through the use of social media in the first quarter of 2012 and referral traffic from Pinterest to Shopify stores is now competing with Twitter, second only to Facebook.

Referral traffic from Pinterest to Shopify stores is now competing with Twitter.

Pinterest pins with prices get 36% more likes than those without.

Moreover, Pinterest pins with prices get 36% more likes than those without, reports suggest buyers referred from Pinterest are 10% more likely to buy and average order from Pinterest (80$) is double the one from Facebook (40$).
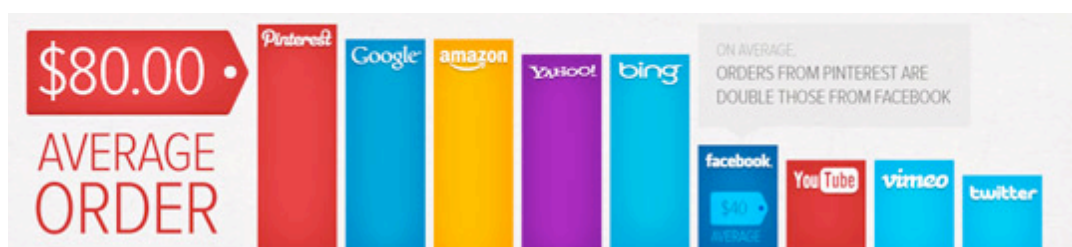
Chapter 2

Consumer Engagement and Social Media Marketing

2.1 Enterprise 2.0

Social Media are always more popular in the world wide web, not only because they are the new innovative tool that collects millions of users all around the globe, but even for their ability to attract the attention of the companies that want to develop communication and marketing strategies while gaining competitive advantage on their competitors.[53] The latest developments in the field of marketing, communication and information are leading to the innovation of business and consumption models, that are causing significant consequences both on businesses and consumers. Always more often you hear talking about mass collaboration, referring to this new era in which goods and services are being invented, produced, promoted and distributed throughout the world in new different ways; a time where companies cannot longer rely on their internal capabilities to satisfy the external needs, but need to develop a chain of dynamic and co-creative relationships with all stakeholders: partners, competitors, trainers, public administration and especially their customers. In the past a lot of people were confined to secondary roles made of limited participation opportunities, these were passive consumers of mass market products or employees that were trapped by bureaucracy and forced to exclusively follow the orders imposed from above.

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[53] Mangold W. & Faulds D., "*Social Media: The new hibrid element of the promotion mix*", Kelley School of Business of Indiana University, 2009, p. 357-365.

Today the situation has completely changed thanks to the increasing availability of new low-cost information technologies, easily reachable for millions of people, that provide the tools that are necessary to create, collaborate, or, at the same time, compete. This allows people to participate and be part of the creation and innovation of wealth, in all sectors of the economy, as never before. This new ability to innovate and co-create is defined "peer production",[54] i.e. a way of producing goods and services that relies on self-organizing communities of individuals Don Tapscott calls this new art/science Wikinomics, term that has already gained a great success and has entered the business lingo. Wikinomics is based on four new and highly effective concepts: openness, peering, sharing, and global action.[55]

This phenomenon affects every sector of society and every management aspect. A new type of enterprise is emerging: it's allowing the everybody's participation to innovation, it shares resources that previously were kept secret and does not behave as a multinational company, but as a global entity. Andrew McAfee, professor at Harvard Business School (in the Technology and Operations Management Unit) has gathered these principles, tools and technologies, under the term Enterprise 2.0, indicating "the emerging use of social software platforms within companies or between companies and their partners and customers".[56] Taken individually, the components of this definition, help understand the key points on which the American professor focused: "social software" are a series of technologies that allow people to connect, exchange information and collaborate thanks to the use of computer; and "Platform" are digital environments in which contributions and interactions are made available at any moment over time.

The development of new platforms that use social technologies based on content sharing, typical of Web 2.0, has allowed the creation of new companies and is

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[54] "Peer production is a term used to describe what happens when a group of individuals and businesses cooperates in order to promote the innovation and growth in all sectors through an open approach" (Tapscott D. & Williams A., 2008).

[55] For a depth examination see Tapscott D. & Williams A.D., *"Wikinomics 2.0"*, Etas Libri, Milano, 2008.

[56] McAfee A., *"Enterprise 2.0: New Collaborative Tools for Your Organization's Toughest Challenges"*, Harvard Business Press, Boston, 2009.

attracting with strong interest the already existing ones, which often either acquire or create themselves, tools capable of highlighting their employees' capabilities and efficiency.

For many years businesses have believed that the introduction of tools and platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, wikis and Delicious in their structure, would have been dangerous and foolish, probably due to a strong scepticism towards a new class of unfamiliar objects. In the last years the attitude towards social media has changed, given the large benefits that these technologies can bring to the sharing and organizing of knowledge within professional workplaces.

The main feature in the use of social media, lies in the opportunity given to users to manage information exchange network through direct, quick and collaborative participation, in a way that common platforms, with their rigid and centralized control of each process, high management costs, and limited possibilities of communication, don't allow. The main advantage of this new commonly used practice, is that corporate performance increases as does user participation: more contributions and more people mean a higher number of relations and higher capacity to reach each individual with the information he needs at the right time.

We are not talking about a pre-packaged software to buy and install, but of a way of thinking, working and conceiving the company. Managers must give up part of the control that they once had over their subordinates in order to obtain in exchange passion, creativity, innovation and flexibility capacity nowadays necessary to face market challenges.

The enterprise 2.0 wants to overcome the limits imposed by traditional management, introducing innovative tools, first of all within the company itself, able to improve the every day information and knowledge retrieval; these are represented by simple and free publishing platforms such as blogs, wikis, photo and video sharing systems, social bookmarking, social networks, which can all be updated frequently by a large number of individuals and give to these the opportunity to share resources and express themselves, with little or no technical knowledge.

One of the main used internal tools is the blog, that aims to provide a valuable and simple tool to employees, with which they can share ideas, skills and discuss their work. Internal blogs increase the strength in relationships both with internal and external colleagues, nowadays always more convenient because of the growing trend of working from home and because of the need of easy contact with possible overseas colleagues. Moreover blogs allow everyone to have same access opportunity, that reduces the gap between the company's hierarchic levels.

Another innovative tool is certainly the wiki, iterative tool that allows anyone to edit others people work. The main innovation lies in the change of the traditional vertical enterprise structure, allowing employees to share their knowledge and to gain more autonomy in the management of business processes. The Enterprise Wiki represent an alternative way to allow groups, or communities of people, to elaborate, edit and publish collectively various types of documents and contents thanks to one simple click on a browser. These characteristics imply a change in the corporate culture, fostering the spirit of collaboration between colleagues and external actors, other than improving trust and transparency in business processes; they even make the wiki an ideal tool to answer to professionals needs thanks to their simplicity, flexibility and lack of control.

Enterprise 2.0 holds more collaboration platforms other than mentioned blogs and wikis, even though these represent the ones in which firms tend to invest more time and money.

Other platforms are the internal social networks, very similar to the most popular global social networks. Their main utility is their help in the search of information through the research and direct contact with the right people. In fact, in the corporate social network, every employee has the opportunity to display his own skills and business department, customer and supplier knowledge, as well as his professional work experiences and progress in the form of a kind of curriculum. On the one hand the presence of social network makes finding qualified people needed for a particular reason, easier and immediate, on the other it allows the management to get to know its own workforce and to follow every employee's progress, in order to hand out possible promotions and career opportunities.

In addition to social networks, we can even find social bookmarks, podcasts, company webtvs, and other less used ones.

2.2 Consumer engagement and CGC

Customer Relationship Management (CRM), is an enterprise-wide initiative that belongs to all areas of an organization and it comprises processes used by organizations to manage consumer relationships, which also include collecting, storing and analysing data, and is often termed as data-driven marketing. Companies interact with customers, treat them as organizational assets, learn about them and through the process of incorporating feedback and co-creation, develop a level of intimacy with them. An important CRM goal is to build long term and profitable relationships with chosen customers and further get closer to those customers with the use of IT and every point of contact with them. The higher degree of interactivity possessed by new technologies and social media allows companies to engage in dialogue, organize consumer repairs, solicit feedback, respond to controversies and establish and sustain long-term customer relationships with its customers.[57] The ability of marketing to engage and endear consumers will ultimately determine whether a user eventually enters into a greater relationship with a brand or organization.

Customer Engagement becomes so the most important concept, that needs to be studied, analyzed and measured. Customer engagement is considered as a behavioral manifestation toward the brand or firm that goes beyond transactions (Verhoef et al., 2010). Hollebeeck (2011) conceptualises engagement as consisting of three dimensions: immersion, passion and activation.[58] Immersion is the customers'

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[57] Ahuja V. & Medury Y., *"Corporate blogs as e-CRM tools – Building consumer engagement through content management"*, Journal of Database Marketing & Customer Strategy Management 2010.

[58] Hollebeek L., *"Exploring customer brand engagement: definition and themes"*, Journal of Strategic Marketing, 2011, 19(7), 555-573.

brand-related concentration and is associated with the individuals' cognitive attention to the brand interaction. Passion refers to the individuals' emotional investment in the brand, while the final dimension Activation represents the "customer's level of energy, effort and time spent on a brand in particular brand interactions" (Hollebeek, 2011). Examples of customer engagement behaviours include: talking about the brand to friends and family, word-of-mouth activity, recommendations, helping other customers, blogging and writing reviews (van Doorn et al., 2010). All these activities are non- transactional in nature, implying that engagement behaviours are about customer-brand interactions rather than purchase specific situations.[59] The level of user engagement achieved by interaction between organization and consumer is an important factor contributing to product adoption, thereby driving sales and brand loyalty.

The most important articles and literature on customer engagement can be summarized in a conceptual model shown in Figure 2.1:[60]
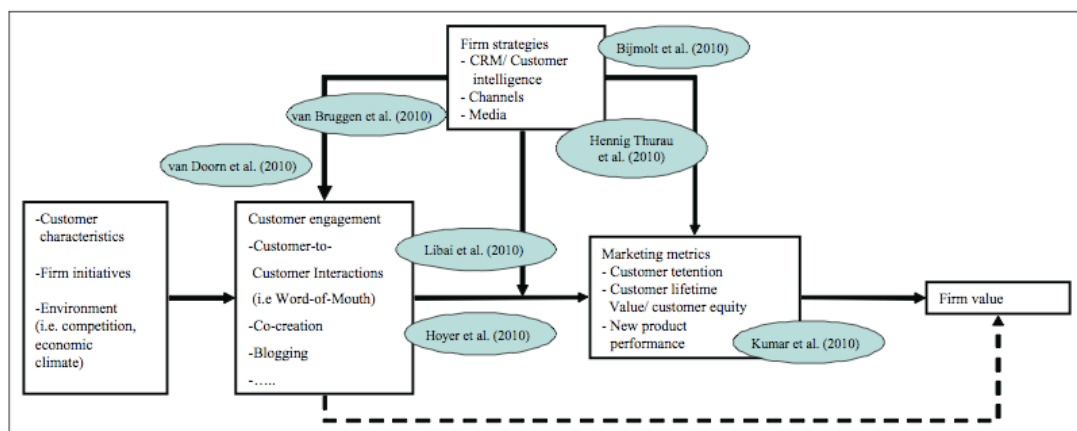
Figure 2.1: Conceptual model of customer engagement. (*Source: Verhof P, Reinartz W. and Krafft M., 2010*)

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[59] Van Doorn et al. (2010) explicitly state that "customer engagement behaviors go beyond transactions, and may be specifically defined as a customer's behavioural manifestations that have a brand or firm focus, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers".

[60] Verhof P, Reinartz W. and Krafft M., *"Customer engagement as a new perspective in customer management"*, Journal of Service Research, 13(3), 2010.

Van Doorn et al. (2010) first develop and discuss the concept of customer engagement behavior (CEB) and their multiple dimensions, including valence, form, modality and customers' purposes. They propose also that customer engagement can be affected by customer characteristics, firm initiatives and the environment.

Since we know that customer engagement can take different forms, other articles focus on this aspect. In particular there are two contributions on this issue: Libai et al. (2010) discuss the different dimensions of customer to customer interactions, looking at four areas (C2C dimensions; C2c social systems; C2C context issues including product, channel and market characteristics; and the identification and assessment of business outcomes of C2C interactions) and underline the important role of networks and structures; Hoyer et al (2010) instead discuss another form of customer engagement which is the customer cocreation in new product development, and they state that there are different degree of cocreation that bring many advantages: products that perfectly fit with consumer needs, increased efficiency (by cost savings) and improved effectiveness (enhancement of products value).

All these forms of customer engagement bring value to companies represented, according to Kuman et al. (2010), by the Customer engagement value, a metric that includes both value from transactions and value from non-transactional behavior (we will explain it in a better way in section 2.2.2).

Finally, the last part of the proposed conceptual model consider three impediments of customer engagement: media strategies, channel strategies and customer intelligence strategies. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2010) identify ten new media characteristics affecting marketing instruments and they discuss in their articles how each phenomenon affects consumer behavior, the successful management of customer interactions, and measuring customers' activities and relationship outcomes. They demonstrate that new media threaten long established business models and, since they are disruptive for the management of relationships with customers, they require a shift in marketing thinking. The last contribution in the proposed model comes from Bijmolt et al. (2010) that in their article "Analytics for customer engagement" propose an overview of the data available for customer

analytics and an overview of models for customer engagement, that can be generated in the three different stages of the customer life cycle: customer acquisition, customer development and customer retention. Moreover, they provide an interesting discussion on the main barriers for using customer data effectively within the firm (data quality and size of databases; data ownership; complexity of the models; ownership of the modelling tools; usability of the results; integration in company processes) and they provide potential solutions to these barriers.

Once reviewed the main general literature on customer engagement through the conceptual model, we can move on to describe role and characteristics of consumer engagement more specifically in our context of Web 2.0, new social media and online marketing and communication strategies.

In the Web 2.0 context, consumer engagement is visible through the means of publishing, posting comments, subscribing, bookmarking, emailing, distributing and networking. When measuring engagement, the level of user interaction is an obvious and important component, and each of the users' action indicate a different level of engagement (Ahuja V. & Medury Y., 2010). A user who comments on an organizational post on a corporate blog is at a higher level of engagement than one who simply reads the post. Similarly, a user who creates content about an organizational initiative, that is, shares content about the organization on his personal blog is more engaged than both the above stated ones. While user actions in the direction of "adoption", like adding to a group, may be indicative of low engagement, rating, commenting, voting, endorsing and favouring signal medium engagement. Further, content-creation activities like blogging or participation in a fan community are indicators of a high degree of engagement.

For this reason consumer engagement is also strictly related to the concept of Consumer Generated Content, since the creation of content from users, and more specific from consumers, is considered the expression of the highest level of involvement and engagement. Consumers, especially those who are members of active communities, are capable, skillful and proficient, in the creation of high-quality consumer generated content, with high resonance among other Internet users.

The growth of UGC has been astounding and commercial firms have been quick to seize upon UGC as a new way to promote and create engagement with their brands.[61]

A first simple type of UGC is represented by online product ratings and reviews, on which Moe W. and Schweidel D. (2012) provide an interesting contribution. They have studied how previously posted ratings may affect an individual's posting behavior in terms of whether to contribute and what to contribute, reaching interesting findings: according to their empirical study positive environments increase posting incidence, whereas negative environments discourage posting; and less frequent posters are more positive and exhibit bandwagon behaviour, whereas more active posters are more negative and exhibit differentiation behavior.[62] UGC can be created both by single individuals and groups of individuals working collectively (Examples are websites like Wikipedia, virtual worlds like World of Warcraft and open-source softwares like Linux). The value of collaborative UGC is a function of the direct efforts of its contributors and of its embeddedness in the content contributor network that creates it.[63]

There is a multitude of marketing actions and efforts for companies to attract UGC and to encourage UGC contributions. Companies may engage in advertising, price promotions, or public relations to attract more visitors and influence purchase or creation of content. Additionally, content creators, besides populating the platform with materials, serve as marketing agents by advertising their own content or generating referrals and links to uploaded content in other websites.[64]

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[61] Fader P. & Winer R., *"Introduction to the Special Issue on the Emergence and Impact of User-Generated Content"*, Marketing Science, 2012, 31(3), 369-371.

[62] For a depth examination on the evolution of online ratings over time and sequence see Ghose A., Ipeirotis P., Beibei L., *"Designing Ranking Systems for Hotels on Travel Search Engines by Mining User-Generated and Crowdsourced Content"*, Marketing Science, 2012, 31(3), 493-520.

[63] Ransbotham S., Kane G., Lurie N*., "Network Characteristics and the Value of Collaborative User-Generated Content",* Marketing Science, 2012, 31(3), 387-405.

[64] Albuquerque P., Pavlidis P., Chatow U., Chen K., Jamal Z., *"Evaluating Promotional Activities in an Online Two-Sided Market of User-Generated Content"*, Marketing Science, 2012, 31(3), 406-432.

However, content contributors are only a side of the market, since a UGC website can be seen as a two sided marketplace, in which the second side is represented by the content consumers. For this reason, the financial success of UGC website depends critically on its ability to actively manage and grow content contributors in addition to content consumers. Their acquisition and retention become very important for companies as well as the possibility to measure their financial value. Zhang K. et al. (2012), through their autoregressive model, found out that contributor acquisition has the largest financial value because of their strong network effects on content consumers and other contributors, followed by the content consumers acquisition, and placing so the retention only in second place.

According to Muñiz and Schau (2011), there are some ideas that can help marketers to foster collaborative CGC, in brand communities and other consumption-oriented collectives:

- Create an environment where company's fans can congregate. The company should offer a place where users feel comfortable interacting, empathizing, and sharing their experiences and ideas.

- Encourage consumers to collaboratively create the brand meaning. The company should relies upon its community of loyal users for the creation of branding content, from product innovations to packaging, promotions and advertising.

- Provide parameters that encourage and enable collaboration. In order to encourage a lot of user participation, the company need to set up some kind of governing architecture. Members will need to know the behavioural expectations in the community and need to have clear participation guidelines.

- Create evangelizing opportunities. Members want to be able to attract other people to the fold and this also explains why so many brand devotees create their own ads for the brand.

- Provide justifying norms. Brand community members devote a lot of effort to activities that serve to reinforce their engagement with the brand and they like to justify their devotion to those outside the fold. Thus, members develop and share rationales for the time and effort they devote to the brand.

- Encourage members to stake their domains. Members are going to vary in their levels and types of devotion and engagement and these variances can be used to the firm's advantage, as they offer members a chance to distinguish themselves.

- Embed celebratory occasions. Many brands with devoted followings offer their users a series of seminal events. The company and its consumers educate new participants regarding appropriate uses and important use scenarios. This education often takes the form of collaborative CGC, whereby consumers share their milestone celebrations and reveal the manner in which these celebrations can be enacted.

- Create symbols via a practice called "badging". These may be virtual badges, in the form of an image on a Facebook page or in an email signature line; or physical badges, in the form of a decal, sticker, or medallion glued to the hood of a car.

- Document everything. Most people like a good story, and members of brand communities are no exception. Within these communities, participants enjoy detailing the brand experience in a narrative way. These stories are collaborative, as they are passed along with people adding onto them as they evolve and they are widely distributed within the consumer collective to inspire breadth and depth of consumer engagement.

- Allow for brand and product customizing. Brand devotees are never short of ideas regarding ways the product could be improved. Many times, these improvements focus on customization. Users want the product brand tailored to their particular preferences and circumstances.

- Cleanliness is next to godliness: Solicit and distribute grooming tips. Members of brand communities typically develop their own product care and 'grooming' procedures. Sometimes they develop specific combinations of cleaning and polishing substances, in effort to create an alchemic solution that far exceeds the manufacturer's recommendations. Those that receive community support can become normative solutions.

- Study the communities. All such communities need to be studied, fairly extensively, before any of these actions can be taken. Each brand community is different and has its own priorities, values, symbols, and rules. A little data can go a long way toward identifying opportunities for marketer intervention and involvement.

It is clear that consumers can mimic the conventions of advertising, and produce consumer-generated ads comparable to those turned out by professionals. They can easily create promotional content that rivals that which is produced professionally. Moreover, via the Internet, such creations can be quickly and inexpensively shared with a multitude of others. Consumers, especially those who are members of brand communities and active consumer collectives, are more than able to be skillful, proficient, and prolific in the creation of advertising content, even when collaborating with relatively unknown others for no compensation or distinct credit. Collaborative CGC is valuable, as it is a multivocal marketing communication with resonance to and among other highly engaged consumers who participate in consumer collectives.

2.2.1 Consumer online brand-related activities

We've already seen that new technologies and social media tools provide many opportunities for Internet users to interact, express, share and create user-generated content about anything, including brands. So, consumers are no longer dependent on the information companies provide, but increasingly depend on each other for information on companies, brands and products. "Watching brand-related video, talking about brands online and uploading brand-related pictures are examples of

consumers' online brand-related activities (COBRAs)" (Muntinga D.G, Moorman M. & Smit E.G., 2011). COBRAs include all behaviours related to brands and brand-related content in online environments, and have important consequences for firms, products and brands. Their impact on consumer behaviour is much stronger than that of traditional forms of marketing and advertising (Arnhold & Burmann, 2009). COBRAs can influence brand awareness, information processing, purchase behaviour and post-purchase evaluations, brand credibility, service value perceptions and customer loyalty.

User generated contents, that become Consumer generated content when the content is created by active consumers of a particular brand's products or services, are the consumer brand-related activity with the highest level of engagement, but are not the only one. There are different types of consumer brand-related activities and each one implies a different level of involvement. COBRAs can be ranged on a continuum from high to low activity, and brand-related behaviours can be categorized into three dimensions that correspond to a path of gradual involvement with brand-related content on social media: consuming, contributing and creating. Each of these COBRA types covers several brand-related activities (see Table 2.1 for several examples):[65]

- The consuming COBRA type represents a minimum level of online brand-related activeness. It denotes watching, reading and viewing the content that others upload, that is, participating without actively contributing to or creating content.

- The contributing COBRA type represents the middle level of online brand-related activeness. It denotes ranking content, posting comments, reacting to other people's contributions, and sharing or forwarding content, that is, both user-to-content and user-to-user interactions.

- The creating COBRA type represents the ultimate level of online brand-related activeness. It denotes actively producing and publishing the brand-

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[65] Muntinga D.G, Moorman M. & Smit E.G.,*"Introducing COBRAs: exploring motivations for brand-related social media use"*, International Journal of Advertising, 2011, 30(1), 13-46.

related content that others consume and contribute to. People who create, write branded blogs, post product reviews, produce and upload branded videos, music and pictures, or write articles on brands.

COBRA type	Examples of brand related social media use
Level of brand related activeness ↓ Consuming	• Viewing brand related video • Listening to brand related audio • Watching brand related pictures • Following threads on online brand community forums • Reading comments on brand profiles on social network sites • Reading product reviews • Playing branded online videogames • Downloading branded widgets • Sending branded virtual gifts/cards
Contributing	• Rating products and/or brands • Joining a brand profile on a social network site • Engaging in branded conversations, e.g. on online brand community forums or social network sites • Commenting on brand related weblogs, video, audio, pictures, etc.
Creating	• Publishing a brand related weblog • Uploading brand related video, audio, pictures or images • Writing brand related articles • Writing product reviews

Table 2.1: COBRA typology as a continuum of three usage types: consuming, contributing, and creating. (*Source: Muntinga D.G, Moorman M. & Smit E.G, 2011*)

It is also very important to understand people's motivations to consume, contribute to and create brand-related content on social media. Motivations are:

• **Information**: people go online to search for the technical specifications of a product, read about other people's experiences, or check what events and parties a company is organizing. Information covers four sub-motivations: surveillance, knowledge, pre-purchase information and inspiration.

• **Entertainment**: it covers the motivations enjoyment, relaxation and pastime.

- **Remuneration**: brand-related online activities may be partly driven by prospects of money, job-related benefits or other rewards.

- **Personal identity**: personal identity involves several self-related and identity-related motivations, like self-presentation, self-expression. The self-presentation motivation refers to people contributing to brand-related content in order to provide others with an image of their personality, while the self-expression refers to the case when a brand is used to express and shape one's identity and personality.

- **Integration and social interaction**: social interaction as a motivation denotes people contributing to brand-related social media platforms in order to meet like-minded others and interact and talk with them about a particular brand.

- **Empowerment**: people who display their enthusiasm for a brand, usually enjoy convincing others that the brand is worth using or purchasing.

Understanding consumer online brand-related activities' motivations can help marketers and brand managers to anticipate, effectively deal with and ultimately benefit from consumers' online brand-related activities, since the customer engagement given by COBRAs and consumer generated content has a big value for the firm.

2.2.2 Customer engagement value

Customer value measurement and management has traditionally focused on customer acquisition and retention, and increasing customers' spending with a company over time. Customers, however, can generate value to the firm through more ways than only their purchase behaviour, like for example word of mouth or new products ideas. Firms are now recognizing the imminent need to focus on building personal two-way relationships with customers that foster interactions. In this emerging approach, engagement refers to the creation of a deeper, more

meaningful connection between the company and the customer, and one that endures over time.[66]

Thus, firms should focus on customer engagement value (CEV), rather than evaluate customers solely by their purchase behaviour, since the CEV offers a more complete evaluation of how much an individual customer is contributing to the firm in multiple ways.[67]

According to Kumar et al. (2010) the value of customer engagement is comprised of four core dimensions:
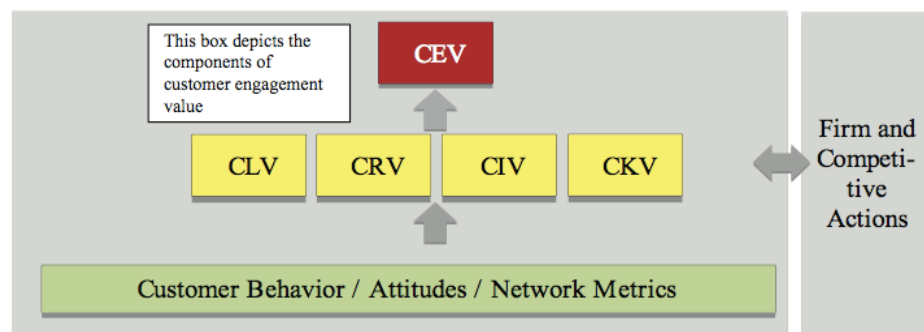
Figure 2.2: Conceptualizing and measuring CEV. Four core dimensions. (*Source: Kumar et al., 2010*)

1- Customer purchasing behaviour, corresponding to customer lifetime value (CLV), whether it be repeat purchases or additional purchases through up-selling and cross-selling. CLV is defined as the present value of future profits generated from a customer over his or her life of business with the firm. It takes into account the total financial contribution of transactions of a customer over his or her entire lifetime with the company and therefore reflects the future profitability of the customer.

2) Customer referral behaviour, corresponding to customer referral value (CRV), as it relates to the acquisition of new customers through a firm initiated and

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[66] "*The economist Intelligence Unit*", 2007.

[67] Kumar V., Aksoy L., Donkers B., Venkatesan R., Wiesel T., and Tillmanns S., *"Undervalued or Overvalued Customers: Capturing Total Customer Engagement Value"*, Journal of Service Research, 2010, 13(3) 297-310.

incentivized formal referral programs. Referrals are crucial as they have the potential to reduce acquisition costs for the firm and bring in future revenue.

3) Customer influencer behaviour, corresponding to customer influencer value (CIV), through customers' influence on other acquired customers as well as on prospects (e.g., WOM activity that persuades and converts prospects to customers, minimizes buyer remorse to reduce defections, encourages increased share-of-wallet of existing customers). In many product categories, information sharing, WOM, interaction, and assistance from other customers post acquisition can significantly affect others' behaviour through: increased persuasion and conversion of others to customers, the recipient customer's continued usage of a product, changes in their share-of-wallet.

4) Customer knowledge behaviour, corresponding to customer knowledge value (CKV), via feedback provided to the firm for ideas for innovations and improvements, and contributing to knowledge development. Customers can add value to the company by helping understand customer preferences and participating in the knowledge development process.

As a result, the total value from a customer's engagement (CEV) can be thought of arising from the aggregation of CLV, CRV, CIV, and CKV of that customer. Furthermore, the four components of CEV can influence one another.

Executives believe that high customer engagement is necessary for future growth, but most firms do not know exactly what a customer engagement strategy entails primarily because they do not know how to measure it. In the table 2.2 we provide a set of metrics for customer engagement value components. The proposed behavioural, attitudinal, and network metrics can, therefore, serve as leading indicators of changes in the components of CEV and connect firm and competitive actions to CEV.[68]

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[68] Kumar V., Aksoy L., Donkers B., Venkatesan R., Wiesel T., and Tillmanns S., *"Undervalued or Overvalued Customers: Capturing Total Customer Engagement Value"*, Journal of Service Research, 2010, 13(3) 297-310.

	CLV	CRV	CIV	CKV
Behavioral	Acquisition rate, retention rate, acquisition channel, share of wallet, retention cost, tenure, purchase frequency, cross-buying, value of purchases, variance in spending, cost of win-back	CLV of customers acquired from referrals, number of referrals	CLV of customers acquired from influence, number of reviews, product or service expertise, emotional valence of the \reviews and interactions opinion leadership, tendency to recommend, and use social media and blogs	CLV, product or service expertise
Attitudinal	Satisfaction, purchase intent, brand value or equity, relationship commitment, shopping channel preferences, firm understanding of customer needs, communication channel preference, complaint resolution, reason for leaving	Likelihood to recommend, likelihood of being an opinion leader, tendency to use social media and blogs		Likelihood to provide feedback
Network	Not Applicable	Number of connections and level of interaction with prospects, tendency to be hub versus a weak link across hubs	Number of connections and level of interaction with customers, tendency to be hub versus a weak link across hubs	Number of connections and level of interaction with customers, and prospects, tendency to be hub versus a weak link across hubs

Table 2.2: Metrics for customer engagement value components. (*Source: Kumar et al., 2010*)

Given that CEV has the potential to increase a company's bottom line, it becomes crucial to explore ways in which CEV can be maximized. At the most basic level, a customer's CEV can be maximized when each of its four components (CLV, CRV, CIV, and CKV) is individually maximized. Companies can increase the CLV and CRV of their customers by enhancing customer satisfaction and creating incentives for customers to exhibit the specific behaviours. They can also invest in encouraging social networks that tie customers together to increase the CIV, since virtual communities are one way for customers to communicate with one another and hence influence each other. Finally, Internet can also be an excellent means by which to maximize CKV and firms should, therefore, take advantage of the Internet creating initiatives to encourage customer feedback.

Although creating an environment where customers are more engaged with the company may require initial investment, it has the potential to generate higher profits in the long run through the creation of CEV. As a result, firms need to adapt customer management strategies and create opportunities to increase CEV, the metric that provides them a new and more complete way of assessing their customers and allows for firms to create better and more effective marketing strategies to target, acquire, and retain their best customer.

2.3 Viral Marketing and Word of Mouth

The technological innovation of the last decade has changed the way in which companies and people communicate, but it also have changed the ways in which people interact with each other. Marketing and advertising have been the first to be influenced by this change and over the years have developed new communication forms, moving from mass communication to an individual one, in order to meet the needs of a type of users more active and willing to participate in the designing and diffusion of products and corporate brands. Nowadays, companies that want to penetrate the market must be able to develop a type of marketing that is defined "evangelic" by Kawasaki (2004), according which companies need to focus on the development of strategic actions able to encourage loyal customers to advertise and recommend the use of its products, avoiding unnecessary and useless big advertisement campaigns.[69] It is necessary that organizations begin to develop non-conventional marketing strategies, relying on tools offered by the Web 2.0 and the ease of connection, relationship and distribution of content, making the brand acquire a viral aspect that will be able to stimulate the word of mouth. The largest sphere of non-conventional marketing is defined "Connected Marketing" by Justin Kirby and Paul Marsden (2006), and it tries to explain how companies can take advantage of the connectivity between consumers to follow the demand and, in this way, improve their offer.[70] What differentiates the connected marketing from the traditional one is the different logic of communication that takes place between businesses and consumers.

The non-conventional marketing is a new phenomenon, in development and with a great potential, especially in relation to the connected marketing, and all the related concepts of non-conventional forms of viral marketing, word of mouth, and use of social media as new communication tools.

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[69] Kawasaky G., *"The art of the start"*, Pinguin Group Inc., New York, 2004.

[70] For a further examination see Kirby J., Marsden P., *"Connected Marketing"*, Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford, 2006.

First of all, it is necessary to clearly define what viral marketing stands for and how it links to related concepts, such as word-of-mouth and social media (Figure 2.3).

The transfer of information that spontaneously takes place between people, such as friend's advices or recommendations for example on products or services, can influence the purchasing behaviour more than any advertisement. Word-of-mouth (WoM) is a topic that has been of interest to marketing researchers for more than five decades. It can be defined as a "consumer-dominated channel of marketing communication where the sender is independent of the market" (Brown J, Broderick A. and Lee N, 2007), namely it is the sharing of information about products, services or promotions between a consumer and a friend or colleague. What makes the word-of-mouth a fundamental concept for online marketing and communications strategies is the possibility of sharing and spreading contents through social media in a easily way and the richness of content that can be produced and exchanged. WoM has been shown to substantially influence consumer attitudes and behaviours, and it offers advantages to the sender as well to the receiver. For senders, WoM is an opportunity to help others and to improve their self-confidence in doing so, while for receivers, it reduces decision-making time as well as risk, as friends tend to be perceived as unbiased sources of information.[71]

Due to the development of information and communication technologies, consumers' communication environment has been changed and enriched, increasing the interest and importance of the electronic word of mouth (also called word of mouse),[72] rather than the traditional one. In comparison to traditional WoM, electronic WoM has two main advantages. The first lies in its higher diffusion speed for new pieces of information. When WoM is exchanged using traditional face-to-face communication, diffusion is limited by the size of the social network each individual maintains, whereas, in contrast, electronic WoM can reach a much larger group of customers. Second, electronic WoM is substantially easier to monitor than

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[71] Kaplan A.M. & Haenlein M., *"Two hearts in three-quarter time: How to waltz the social media/viral marketing dance"*, Kelley School of Business, Indiana University, 2011.

[72] Goldenberg J., Libai B. & Muller E., *"Talk of the network: a complex systems look at the underlying process of word-of-mouth"*, Marketing Letters, 2001, 12(3), 211-223.

traditional WoM, this allows for better analysis of the impact of WoM on tangible business outcomes (e.g., sales, profits) and, ultimately, the calculation of return-on-marketing measures.
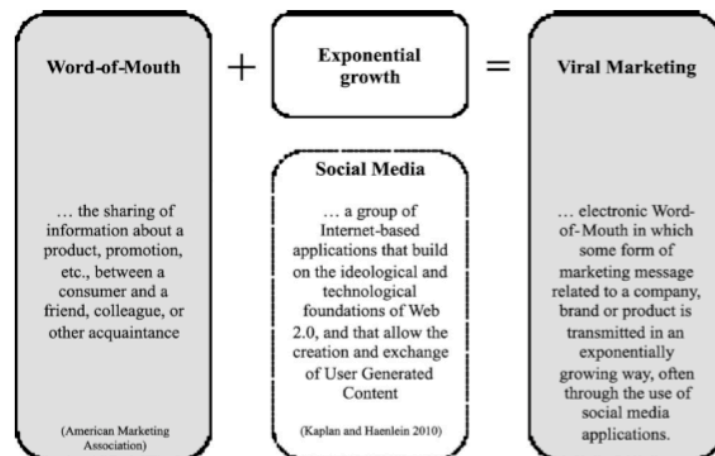
Figure 2.3: Relationship between word-of-mouth and viral marketing. (*Source: Kaplan A.M. & Haenlein M, 2011*)

We can consider that the interaction between word of mouth and the exponential growth of the social media leads to the viral marketing. Viral marketing can be defined as "electronic word of mouth whereby some form of marketing message related to a company, brand, or product is transmitted in an exponentially growing way, often through the use of social media applications" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2011). The concept of viral marketing has been discussed in the literature for over 15 years, since Jeffrey Rayport, professor at the Harvard Business School, first introduced the term in 1996. His article "The Virus of Marketing" makes reference to the exponential growth pattern inherent in viral marketing by comparing diffusion of the marketing message with the spread of a virus. According to the e-commerce expert Ralph Wilson, "Viral marketing describes any strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message's exposure and influence. Like viruses, such strategies take advantage of rapid multiplication to explode the message to thousands, to

millions".[73] Another definition is given by Justin Kirby, who states that Viral Marketing is "the promotion of a company or its products and services through a persuasive message designed to spread, tipically online, from person to person".[74]

Viral marketing has two defining elements. The first is a growth, or reproduction, rate greater than one; this implies that each receiver passes the message to more than one other person. The second characteristic is the association of viral marketing with the use of social media applications. Social media applications are particularly suited for viral marketing, as the community element embedded in them makes it convenient to transmit the marketing message to a large group of people. The aim of viral marketing, even if in a reductive view, is in fact the creation of a message containing odd, funny, mysterious and impertinent components, with unique qualities able to make it attractive and relevant to people, in order to facilitate the diffusion.

The viral agency GoViral, has developed a classification of the characteristics a message should have to be viral, based on seven criteria:[75]

- Outstanding story: the story should be fun, provocative, irreverent, subversive, "crazy", in order to capture users' attention;
- Stickiness: the content needs to be new and "fresh", something that users have not yet seen or that is different from others;
- Relevance: the association with the brand needs to be thin, without too explicit references to the brand;
- Portability: users should have the possibility to easily share the content within their network of contacts.
- Shareability: the content needs to offer insights and subjects to enable conversations between people;

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[73] Wilson R.F., "*The Six Simple Principles of Viral Marketing",* 1th February 2000 (www.wilsonweb.com).

[74] Kirby J. & Marsden P., "*Connected Marketing",* Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford, 2006.

[75] www.goviral.com

- Timing/Actuality: given that the average life of a story is very short, references must be used with punctuality and needs to be related to current events;
- Seeding hook: the final result of the message must be quickly available, since time is money, and consumers do not want to waste other people's time.

According to the WOMMA (Word Of Mouth Marketing Association), the most important international association of non-conventional marketing, the creation process of a message, that want to become viral, is based on four key components:[76]

1. Concept: develop an idea with intrinsic viral characteristics, able to be used on the Internet and achieve rapid success.

2. Seeding: it is like planting seeds that will sprout fruits one day. The message needs to be distributed in different places and at specific times to achieve the higher possible visibility, through "seeders" that know the network and are able to identify the best websites and opinion leaders the make possible the viral effect.

3. Tracking: measure the results and the success of the viral campaign, analyzing and evaluating variables such as number of visits to a site, number of views or comments.

4. Buzz: companies should be able to generate conversations, "buzz marketing" around the viral campaign so that it will be able to continue the spreading, even once finished the seeding and tracking steps.

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[76] Kirby J. & Marsden P., "*Connected Marketing*", Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford, 2006.

2.4 Marketing and communication through Social Media

Web 2.0 offers a variety of communication tools that can be used by companies to generate conversations with users and to implement marketing strategies. The actions that can be done online, in addition to a corporate website, necessary to provide a physical presence of the company in the Internet, include also the use of tools such as social networks, blogs, forums, podcasts. Thanks to these tools, the company is able to develop a relationship with its stakeholders based on conversations, which contents are constantly exchanged and enriched by all users. This will form a bond of trust between group members and the company itself, whose business proposals can be discussed and be useful to spread the brand image and product value, influencing purchasing decisions. Consumers, in fact, if involved, are more likely to express their own opinions and experiences about a product or brand and this generates a fruitful exchange of information.

Social media have great potential but, at the same time, hide many risks related to a superficial use of the tool or to a lack of attention to the context we are referring to. Member blogs can spread bad news very quickly: information available on Wikipedia, while describing a brand or a product, may contain information or references to cases that affect negatively the image and reputation of the company; in Youtube we can find videos related to problems of specific products.[77]Nowadays companies must be able to satisfy at the same time both their commercial needs, as much as the ones expressed by those users that generate flows of participatory communication, sharing between them "user-generated content". To meet both needs, a firm should:

- Distribute free services: the Enterprise 2.0 must abandon advertising commercials and give space to the creation of content and services that offer benefits to the consumers in term of utility;

- Concentrate to new online format: it should try to foster the use of new tools such

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[77] Prunesti A., "*Social Media e comunicazione di marketing*", Franco Angeli, 2009.

as podcasts, offering contents that attract consumers that are so encouraged to listen and spread the word about them;

- Interact: the enterprise must continuously develop initiatives that encourage consumers to interact with its own brand;

- Become viral: it is necessary for the company to create messages able to self-spread between the social media, thanks to the sharing done by blog users and social networks;

- Be both local and global: big company's brands need to have a global identity and to position themselves on a world wide level, but at the same time be able to adapt themselves to local cultural and linguistic contexts;

- Be multimedia: company messages need to be able to adapt to individual characteristics of each social media, in order to be valuable for each utilize tool;

- Develop loyalty: the company must abandon one shot campaigns, in order to build long lasting communication projects that follow the clients lives day by day, for example updating them on last-minute news through the use of RSS feed or short Twitter and Facebook messages;

- Surprise the consumer: the company needs to offer contents and message that are able to surprise, entertain its clients, in order to push them to share their thoughts and emotions with the people in their network.

2.4.1 Social Networking: building a relationship with users

Social networks are the most significant representation of Social Media both for the high level of diffusion that they have had in these last years, than for the high usage that users make of them. Such an important tool is so close to people, that it can not become nothing but the best way to establish a conversation with customers and potential consumers, in order to build fan groups around the company's brand and take advantage of the relationships between individuals, to spread messages and viral content. What makes social networks more attractive than other media, other

than the huge diffusion, is given by the curiosity factor, by which millions of people are moved to connect every day to get to know the latest news and contents published by their "friends".[78] The reasons that bring companies to enter Social Networks, are generally represented by the opportunity to participate in an environment where many users are present in large numbers and to communicate and interact with them, developing marketing and innovative communication strategies, compatible with the dynamic relationships that rule the virtual environment. Being present in this environment can turn into the perfect chance for the company to make itself easily reachable by those who are interested in its products and services; at the same time users can become valuable allies, while advertising the company with messages and information spread through the word of mouth. The brand is another aspect that can benefit from an appropriate approach to the media, since the company can enhance its credibility, customer loyalty and build its own brand, by sharing knowledge in their field while meeting user requests. The possibility of joining the conversation is essential to answer questions and provide useful last-minute news and update on the products.[79] Social networks have the big advantage to have a large membership base, but with specific characteristics. This can allow the company that is using social media, to define initiatives capable of attracting and involving people relying on the individuals' membership function. This function indicates the intensity with which each member belongs to the social network and it is measured by quantitative indicators: times of the access in the network, frequency and duration of visits, value of active participation (link exchange, publication and sharing of photos and video, tagging, etc..). The greater the membership function is, larger is the possibility for the company to spread a message or viral content. A big mistake in which companies often fall in, is the one of using social networks as an advertising platform, since the actual concept is not only advertising as much as socializing with users that belong to it. To be taken seriously, a company that wants to adopt communication and marketing strategies, needs to first of all establish a relationship with its users by creating an online profile, participating or creating groups and developing applications or games, in

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[78] Castells M., "*The theory of the network society",* Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2006.

[79] Evans D., "*Social Media Marketing: An hour a day",* Wiley Publishing Inc., Indianapolis, 2008.

order to establish a long lasting relationship based on trust.

In the social network the one who actually owns the communicative power is the user: he is the one who decides what to share with their friends, creating so a viral form of communication. This is why being the closest possible to each individual user becomes crucial for any company, so that doing so it can directly communicate its initiatives, but most of all get to know the expectations on its brand. Other important factors that characterize the approach to a social network are patience and persistence. According to Weber (2009), what we learn from MySpace, Facebook or Twitter is that you need to create an environment that attracts people and convinces them to form a community and, for that to happen, a company must invite people to participate to it, converse with them, provide valuable content, include links to other sites, talk of the products and share experiences.[80]

The approach to social networks needs to turn into a continuous and constant occupation over time, for this reason it is important to form a team of employees that can devote time and resources to the platform and in order to establish profitable and long-term relationships. One of the aspects that allows the creation of this community is the possibility to create groups of people that gather around similar interests or that are simply driven by curiosity for the new, that can contribute to the development of communications and marketing initiatives, through sharing opinions on brands, products or events. A company that wants to persuade its users to talk about their products, services or brand, can create a new group or join an existing one. Groups can be based on different types of content, and the people who enter them do it to be part of a community in which is possible to share contents, participate to discussion and establish relationships. When the company becomes part of a group that has developed thanks to some users who have gathered to celebrate the brand or specific product, it is very important for it to make itself visible to participate in discussions, in an honest way. Instead, in the case the company is the one creating the group, it is essential for it to promote and spread the knowledge of its presence to the highest number users possible. This can be done either by participating actively in the social network, or by offering to the group new

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[80] Weber L., "*Marketing to the social web"*, John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2009.

and interesting content object of conversation.[81] So that the users of social networks agree to participate in the communication activities promoted by a company, it is necessary for the firm to use an approach that avoids advertising techniques in the presentation of their products, but that involves the members with participative high quality contents, so that they can be considered useful, interesting, informative and therefore suitable to be shared with friends. An initiative which can generate relational opportunities and, at the same time, a good word of mouth between users, can start through some general actions:[82]

- Identify precisely the shared values in relation to the brand or the product: in fact these are the main factor to persuade people to join the group;

- Create a presentation page for the group: it needs to present the values of the brand and of the product in a sincere and appealing way;

- Select those contacts that appear to be the closest to the expressed values, in order for them to pass on the message to other users.

- Invite people to join the group promising a series of interesting and attractive activities and discussions;

- Encourage users to upload their own content and to enrich the page with the publication of links, photos and videos;

- Participate actively in discussions and create new ones;

- Often updating the status;

- Use accessory applications available on the social network (chat, quizzes, games) to entertain and amuse the fans.

Social networks are becoming very important also for small and medium-sized enterprises and sellers, since, unable to invest huge resources in advertising, they can find in these tools a useful way to implement marketing 2.0 plans and, at the

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[81] Borges B., "*Marketing 2.0",* Wheatmark, Tucson (USA), 2009.

[82] For a depth examination see Scott D.M., "*World Wide Rave",* John Wiley & Sons Inc., Hoboken (USA), 2009.

same time, get known while creating small communities, even at a local level. Many are the advantages: low cost, target segmentation, possibility to create new collaborations throughout the world and to strengthen relationships with suppliers, customers and employees, to improve the corporate image. Having a profile on Facebook or MySpace, allows even small businesses such as a pub, a drug store or a supermarket, to make known their reality, also organizing specific events for the community. It may also be useful to join already existing groups in the same field to exploit new commercial relationships, get to know the competitors and always be updated on the one's own business.

2.4.2 Communicating through the blog

When it comes to interact with stakeholders and create long lasting relationships, especially with customers-users in the net, in addition to social networks, there are several other tools that allow to establish a direct dialogue.

On top of the list we find blogs, that are the most common participative communication instruments among social media and that are used daily by millions of people around the planet. They are an innovative tool in the communication between companies and their public and are the basis of creating a marketing relationship based on conversation. We have already discussed the performance of this instrument (Chapter 1, section 1.6.2), but it is important to understand how this tool could represents an added value for a company that uses social media to connects with its customers.

The steps that precede the opening of a corporate blog, are not very different from those associated with the launch of a product, that expect preliminary research on the supply of similar goods, and on their strengths and weaknesses. Following the same procedure used for products, the company must study other company blogs that are already strongly present in the same sector. The search for success factors in these other blogs should also focus on the personality, as a good business blog should reflect the personality of the company or blogger, and on a careful reading of the conversations that take place between the company and its customers with

particular attention to published posts, user feedback and the company's reactions to them. Another approach to consider has to do with the possibility to listen to its customers and create a blog that reflects their needs.

An enterprise that wants to communicate on the web should conceive the blog as an innovative editorial tool, open to everyone's contribution. The reputation that a company can build around a blog is a valuable asset, and it is therefore necessary to assign the blog's management to someone who can write well and is a skilled communicator, as well as an able publisher of strong interesting content that drives the readers to mention it and, doing so, contribute to its spread. For the blog to be viral and generate traffic around itself, it must give others the opportunity to participate in it while the company must be prepared to answer them with further details that enrich the conversation. So that the contents of the blog reach a high level of diffusion, it is necessary follow simple rules:[83]

- Publish as frequently as possible.
- Pay attention to the headlines (blog post titles).
- Send email to your list when you have a great blog post you want to share.
- Add a link in your email signature.
- Include multiple subscription options on your blog.
- Comment on blogs in your industry.
- Conduct surveys and polls.
- Submit your blog to directories.
- Allow users to share blog content on Twitter, Facebook, Digg, Delicious, etc.. through the use of the buttons plug-ins and add-ons.

There could be several benefits, but also risks, associated with implementing a communication strategy through the blog, according to the type of company and its market positioning. One major benefit is the ability to keep an open and continuous conversation with existing customers, because often companies are too interested in developing new businesses that tend to overlook the high value of the already

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[83] Wakeman D., "*19 Tips for driving traffic to your blog",* 8th april 2010.
(www.socialmediaexaminer.com)

established relationships with customers that are faithful to the brand. It is so possible to build a community of followers, among which knowledge and experiences are shared, allowing free dialogue between customers or between customers and company's employees. This allows both to strengthen the brand image and loyalty for already established clients, as well as to expand brand awareness to new potential customers and increase popularity. Another advantage is the low cost usage of the blog, that makes it the best solution to spend less and avoid losing touch with markets and customers, especially during periods of economic crisis. A corporate blog also allows the company to develop public relations and stay in contact with the media, since journalists and writers are often interested in its content, that inspires their articles.

As seen, a corporate blog can bring many advantages to the company, but the risks connected to lack of experience or the possibility of not being able to face negative events or feedback, can bring many problems both to company's image and reputation.[84]

The main risk of a corporate blog is connected to the temptation to use it to promote and advertise a product or company brand: this attitude can be invasive and can lead to loss of users. Another risk has to do with the inability to cope with possible negative messages left by users. There are several ways for the company to deal with these issues, that if handled with the right strategies, can instead be turned into reasons of positive advantage. A common and effective approach to negative comments lies in a prompt and professional response, with the company's commitment to solve the issues. In cases where these negative comments are unjustified or not directly connected to the company, it is useless to answer them, since the blog community is aware of the unfounded reason behind the comments. The problem can be partially solved using moderators, whose job is to check the content of the comments before they are published.

Many are the attempts to classify and schematize the phenomenon of corporate blogs. One possible classification is the one provided by the public relations agency

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[84] Borges B., "*Marketing 2.0*," Wheatmark, Tucson (USA), 2009, p. 174.

Lewis PR (2007)[85], that is based on two basic aspects: focus and authors. We get 4 types of true corporate blog: (CEO Blog, Company Blog, Expert blog, Topic blog) and 2 types of non-company-branded blog (Guru blog and Industry blog):

- A CEO blog is written by the company's CEO or by high level managers.

- A Company blog is written by the company's employees, enthusiastic volunteers who are given a lot of freedom on how and what to write.

- An Expert blog is often written by a single employee, usually an expert in a particular area or topic.

- A Topic blog is primarly addressed to a specific topic, but followed by multiple employees.

- A Guru blog is essentially a not branded Expert blog. These blogs can arise when employees begin blogging on their own before the company has planned a corporate blogging strategy.

- An Industry blog is similar to a Topic blog, but is handled by people from different companies and environments (freelancers, members of non-profit organizations, journalists, writers, etc..). Even in this case the goal is to become a reference to a given sector, but unlike the Topic Blog, does not have a purely commercial purpose.

		Author	
		One person	Multiple people
Focus	Company driven	**CEO blog**	**Company blog**
	Subject driven	**Expert blog**	**Topic blog**
	Vendor neutral	**Guru blog**	**Industry blog**

Table 2.3: Types of corporate blogs, by author and focus. (*Source: Lewis PR, 2007*)

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[85] www.lewispr.com

2.4.3 Communicating through other instruments: forum, podcast, videos, photos.

- Another very popular tool that allows companies to open a direct dialogue with their stakeholders and that can be used as to develop viral campaigns is the **forum**, that consist in a virtual space where users that want to form a community can gather and discuss over different topics.

Although there are no specific guidelines for companies on the use of forums, because of their sectorial nature, they are usually used during the seeding phase to infect a specific target. After searching the forums that better suit the business of the company, created an account and a profile with the company's information, it is necessary to be participative in the forum and avoid any seeding action before having gained high credibility and reputation throughout the community, to escape the risk of being invasive and so banned. Being active consist in promptly answering users' questions on products that have to do with the company's business, in order to demonstrate experience and become a trustworthy reference for the community. Once gained the respect of the members, you can start more aggressive marketing campaigns, including alternative techniques such as special discounts, free samples and contests for the community. It is also important to get forum moderator's permission and to not exaggerate with posting links, images and video, since being removed from a community is much easier than entering it.[86]

Other multinational companies have decided instead to develop themselves virtual spaces, where customers can exchange opinions, information, and ask questions on different brand's products and services. This approach has given companies the opportunity both to provide more direct support to its customers, and to benefit from a source of new useful ideas to improve their products and services. Creating a community through the opening of a forum, however, involves a large initial effort and a continuous presence on the company's side, in order to foster discussions and maintain high the members' interest. To do so it needs to, at least at the beginning, strongly invest in human resources, involved in the forum maintenance.

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[86] Go G., "*How to market your business using online forums*", 2010. (onlinebusiness.about.com)

With the passing of time, the forum becomes the spot where customers talk about all sorts of things: not only about the products, how to use them and how to solve problems, but even about pricing, competitors, the development of new products up to the performance of shares listed in the stock market. A forum significantly makes companies save on costs related to customer service: when they need help, instead of contacting customer service, they can look up the information they need in the forum in previous discussion. Many companies have found that the forum is a useful platform to enhance the knowledge on its products and customers' brand loyalty. This is why the companies develop these virtual realities, in which they try to encourage users to participate to the ideational process of their products, so that they can better satisfy the needs and expectations of their audience. The companies are the ones raising questions on how to develop or improve the products, building a direct dialogue with the users, whose proposals are stored in the forum and classified according to their interest, but most importantly are submitted to the community's judgment, through a voting system that rewards the most ingenious and original ideas.

An example of a business case that has been very successful thanks to the use of the forum is Starbucks, that has built MyStarbucksIdea, a community of more than 80,000 ideas. The message that the company presents to who enters the website is very powerful and impressive: "You know better than anyone else what you want from Starbucks. So tell us. What's your Starbucks Idea? Revolutionary or simple - we want to hear it. Share your ideas, tell us what you think of other people's ideas and join the discussion. We're here, and we're ready to make ideas happen. Let's get started".[87]The members' suggestions and the discussions that come from them, not only involve the food and beverage products sold in Starbucks, but also pricing policies, ordering system, payment, service quality, the arrangement of the location, type of atmosphere, up to social responsibility. This forum allowed the American company to benefit from a huge low cost source of ideas that, at the same time, helped to strengthen its image and customers' loyalty.

- **Podcasts** represent another tool that is still not widely used, especially in Italy, but

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[87] www.mystarbucksidea.com

that is in gradual and steady growth, even for marketing communication purposes. "A podcast is a type of digital media consisting of an episodic series of audio, video, or pdf, you can subscribe to and download through web syndication" (Wikipedia). The update process can be automated so that new files are automatically downloaded. From a marketing point of view, those who use podcasts, podcasters, search and download only the content that they find interesting and to which they have subscribed through RSS feeds, and they know exactly what content they want to hear, avoiding the communication flow of traditional broadcasting.[88]

For this reason, podcasts can be a great tool for marketing communications directed to a specific target of people with determined characteristics and habits. A company should try to provide an interesting, attractive but, at the same time, differentiated content, to persuade the users to take the company in consideration, and to be open to business proposals.[89]The possibility to be downloaded automatically, allows the user to not go back on the company's website several times to obtain the updates on products and services, but to receive them automatically by connecting his device to a computer, once new contents have been created. This feature makes it a unique tool for marketing and communication. It is almost impossible, in fact, to understand a customer's loyalty when he visits the company's website, while it is much easier to know his preferences and interests, after he has subscribed to a specific content of podcasting. This allows to provide a tailored service and to include in the podcast promotional adds targeted to the specific interests of the user.

- Other communicating instruments are **videos** and **photos**. The development of new technologies and Web 2.0 platforms allow anyone to create simple and fun videos and photos, with the possibility to then upload them on Internet through simple steps. The major advantage for enterprise 2.0 is related to the high level of sharing and spreading that a video or photo, if object of interest, can have among the users, in a viral and spontaneous way. Photos and video can be, in fact, uploaded to blogs,

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[88] Evans D., "*Social Media Marketing: An hour a day",* Wiley Publishing Inc., Indianapolis, 2008.

[89] Borges B., "*Marketing 2.0",* Wheatmark, Tucson (USA), 2009.

social networks, video and photo sharing sites and linked to social bookmarks. In any case, to have this kind of positive effect the company needs to design an original and creative video or photo gallery, in order for its brand to be positively related to the content.

The category of video is in continuous expansion, and the most popular video sharing platform is YouTube, with more than 4 billion video views and hundreds of thousands of uploads every day, even though there are many other existing ones.[90]A company can benefit of YouTube's marketing communication power, first of all opening a channel (to which users can sign up) creating so a personal page, with the name and logo of the company, which allows to gather its contents in a single place and create playlist of videos divided by category. The second step for the company will be to create a valuable video, to attract the attention of the members, for which there is no need of high investments. Once completed, the video can be published on YouTube and linked to other social media, as well as on the company's website, in order to stimulate the viral spread.[91] The community of followers of a product or brand needs to acknowledge it, so that the company can test the interest of the target audience and ask them for feedback. The possibility for the video to be welcomed by the users and to develop a viral word of mouth cannot be given for granted, however it is important to respect certain requirements:[92] create a short video, try to attract the attention (possibly in the first 10 seconds of video) through humour, satire, emotions and other elements that may generate interest, be direct in the content, do not be boring, introduce an element that recalls the brand (for example, asking the viewer to visit the company website).

Another possibility is to exploit the UGC. Amateur videos produced by users are usually more appreciated by ordinary people, since they reflect their reality. So companies can collect and invite users to produce videos (perhaps through competitions) and benefit of the creativity of people outside the company.

Even photos can be a useful tool for the diffusion of the brand image, products or

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[90] www.youtube.com/press_room

[91] Prunesti A., "*Social Media e comunicazione di marketing",* Franco Angeli, 2009.

[92] Borges B., "*Marketing 2.0",* Wheatmark, Tucson (USA), 2009.

services. The most famous and popular website for photo sharing is Flickr. It acts as a social network, since it's possible to upload photos, organize them, find friends, manage contacts and share these images with everyone in our contact list. It's important to present the brand in different ways, not only use the tool for advertising purposes as often happens. For example it can be useful to upload photos related to events, fairs or exhibitions, as much as company's parties or vacation ones can be appreciated. When photos get uploaded on Flickr, you need to personalize them, tag them with keywords and comment them, to make them easily findable and stimulate conversations. In this way the photos can be shared between the member's community and generate a viral spread.

2.5 Communicating and promoting through Facebook

Born as a virtual environment where you could follow and trace the relationships established with classmates throughout schools and American universities, Facebook is now the busiest and most visited Social Network both in Italy and in the world. Composed of more than 900 million users, it's the ideal platform for professionals in communication and marketing, to build a relationship with the public similar to the one established with traditional media, with the advantage of being able to activate a dialogue that other media do not allow.

Facebook grows and changes month after month, introducing successful and continuous improvements, often copied from other social networks because of the high competition. The word of mouth on and offline is the generator of Facebook's success and exponential growth, that has made it the most active virtual platform existing today. This is the reason why the companies that want to better plan their investments in advertising and marketing on the Internet, need to allocate time, energy and part of the budget to an active presence and management of Facebook. In social networks, companies are considered always more similar to people and this facilitates the possibility of interaction between the users of the platform. In addition to build a relationship with the user, Facebook also allows you to do advertising, in a

much more focused and less expensive way than if done with other tools offered by the Web.

Facebook's potential, in communication and marketing field, is high and if exploited in the right way, can provide a great advantage for the companies. This potential depends on an effective use of the different tools and services provided by Facebook such as the possibility to create fan pages, groups, events, advertising, applications. For the relevance of our study, we will study and analyze in particular characteristics and functions of the fan page, that is the most popular and used Facebook's tool by companies to promote their products and brands.

2.5.1 Facebook Fan Page

The fan page is the main reference for a brand, being the center of any activity in the network. Unlike profiles and groups, for which the interested user needs to register to in order to participate in them, the fan page does not require registration, but a simple click on the "Like" icon, thus expressing their interest in the subject and acquiring the right to receive updates. Until April 2010, you had to click on the icon "Become a fan", that then Facebook decided to change to "I like". This variation has the precise purpose to increase the number of users (still fans even if not called so anymore) who like the content of a specific page. Facebook developers noticed, in fact, that clicking "Like" was considered less engaging for users; they came up with this linguistic artifice that lightened the idea of participating to a community page, even if not completely aware of its content. This is because in the real world, being something's fan, means to particularly love a specific brand, whereas if the topic is only reason of simple interest, we are most likely to only admit we "like" it.

Let's see how the fan page works and why it is a great tool for businesses. The page was introduced in 2007 to give public figures and individuals the opportunity to add to their "private and personal" profile, a "public" one, so that they could promote their activities, exceed the threshold of 5,000 contacts and be accessible to all the users interested to see and share their content. Among these we find companies, consumer products, small businesses, movies, television channels, actors,

politicians, singers, newspapers and non-profit organizations. Facebook has made the fan page very similar to the personal profile, so that the owner can update his personal status with a message visible to all members, share files (links, photos, videos, applications) and communicate with his own contacts fans.

When a user clicks on the "like" button, the news is published on the homepage, so that all friends can see it. This aspect is very important for its viral effect, and contributes to the spread of all the contents published on a page. From the company's point of view this is a big advantage, as it is the user the one that, impressed by the content, promotes it spontaneously and becomes active part of the communication process. Another advantage is that public profile is visible and accessible both to Facebook members and to people that do not have a profile on the social network; in fact, search engines easily index the page link, enhancing the company's positioning strategy on Internet. If it is, instead, the company that wants to promote and spread its own home page, it can do so by purchasing advertising spaces, which refers to specific contents of the page.

When you create a public profile, you have six options: local business; company, organization or institution; brand or product; artist, band or public figure; entertainment; cause or community.[93]

A fan page is like a corporate website internal to the Social Network: companies have an "official" channel, so it requires, to be created, an authorization by the company and documents attesting the willingness of the brand owner. Otherwise, the company can require the cancellation or the acquisition of the page, since there is a violation of the registration terms.[94]

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[93] www.facebook.com

[94] However, the violation of the registration terms can result in the creation of an unofficial page, that may also be a positive factor for the brand. This is the case of Coca Cola, whose page now has more than 48 million contacts, and that was not really created by the American brand, but by two fans, Dusty and Michael. The company, given the big success in terms of community and richness and high quality of contents, decided to come in contact with the two fans, in order to participate in the page management and strengthen the credibility of the promotion actions. See J. Smith, *"How do you treat a fan who owns your Facebook Page?"*, March 18, 2009. (www.insidefacebook.com)

Public profiles allows administrators to:

- Edit every section of the page;

- Promote with ads: build paid mini banners to run within the network;

- Add administrators;

- Recommend to friends

- Use Insights: monitor statistics related to the page.

Facebook Insights, the free metrics dashboard and analytics tool for Facebook pages, provides page administrators with visibility into how their posts and content are engaging fans. It also allows companies to get to know the characteristics of their audience, so that they can define more targeted communication strategies. Insights will allow companies to:[95]

1. Track and analyze new and lifetime likes for their pages.

2. Monitor their page's active users.

3. Measure their page's engagement and viral reach, through number of comments and shares.

4. Measure the amount of discussion topics.

5. View the user demographics for their page, including gender, age and location.

6. See which page posts receive the most engagement.

7. Gauge the numbers of users unsubscribing from their page (and take appropriate action).

Data are updated every 24 hours. It is also possible to see data concerning the demographic profile of contacts, divided by sex and age, that can be exported in Excel, in order to be analyzed and stored. Settings allow administrators to direct promotion activities both to all contacts or to a single users category, reducing so not desired messages. Pages can be customized with ad-hoc applications, in order to entertain and provide support the audience.

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[95] *"Facebook Insights Metrics Dashboard for Page Managers"*,

 (http://gold.insidenetwork.com/facebook-marketing-bible/category/facebook-pages/insights/)

A fan page is composed by several sections. A bulletin board, which gives the possibility to write messages both to companies and users, so that they can maintain a relationship. A section that contains all the information about the brand and the company website link. Sections where both administrators and fans can post and share audios, videos and pictures and comment them. A discussion section divided by subject that works as a forum. A section in which are reported all the events organized or attended by the company. Other sections as you like depending on the aims of the page.

If a user wants to search a specific page, all he has to do is enter some keywords in the search space, thanks to which all references to that word will appear. Once in the page, he can click on the "like" button and from that moment, the administrator will have access to the name and the picture of the user profile and will be able to send him communications. It is possible, however, to deactivate the messages reception at any time or report them as spam.

Sometimes companies create their own pages but they do not do anything to promote them in a proper way and this passive attitude doesn't stimulate the spread of the page. For this reason, when managing a brand fan page it may be useful to follow some tips:

- Promote the page through an icon that allows people to directly access to Facebook, for example, from the company website.

- Try to fully customize the page, making it similar to a mini web site.

- Create contests able to encourage the members participation, asking their opinions and testing their knowledge through simple tests, in order to keep them on the page and expose them to the brand as long as possible.

 - Use business applications already present on Facebook or create your own ones, in order to engage users and encourage them to return.

- Create value for users through new ideas and try to strengthen the brand-user relationship.

- Offer promotions, discounts, gifts and gadgets to the members of the page. These activities are a great incentive to participation, sharing with friends and involvement.

Fan pages have now become a very flexible tool, with several possible different uses for different subjects. Everyone can create a public profile in order to promote every kind of product or service and to expand its network of potential customers. The key to success in the creation and management of a page, remain anyhow the ability to produce original and high quality content and posts.

We will see now some general strategies for effective Facebook wall posts and then, since our study in Chapter 3 consists in a content analysis of a certain number of posts and is based on some specific characteristics, we will review some literature on two basic issues for our study, which are the use of emotions and the use of testimonials in content advertising.

2.5.2 Strategies for effective Facebook wall posts

As already said, it is very important for companies, when managing the fan pages and the brand's Facebook presence, to create high quality contents and to exactly know when they should post, how often, when is possible to reach the higher user engagement, if there are specific words able to generate a great response and other questions like these. We present some general strategies and tips for effective Facebook wall posts:[96]

- Keep the post short and sweet: There is a strong negative correlation between post length and engagement, indicating the longer the post length, the less engaging fans find it. The traditional best practice states that concise copy increase readability and consumption.

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[96] BuddyMedia, Data report *"Strategies for effective Facebook wall posts: a statistical review"*, 2011.

- Post when people are listening: User engagement is higher when brands post outside of business hours. This reflects the importance of having a post appear at the top of fans' new feeds during the times of day they are more likely checking their Facebook pages. For this reason by posting within business hours, brands miss the critical opportunity to get the visibility they need for maximum engagement.

- Determine the best day to post: Studies revealed that the best time of the week to post is towards the end of the week (engagement rates on Thursday and Friday are 18% higher than other days of the week), but the engagement rates vary also by industry. Since in our study we have taken into consideration posts of all the most popular fashion brands, it's interesting to observe that the engagement peaks in fashion industry are on Thursday.

- Use Instructions: Outright requests work most effectively. To drive comments ask a direct question and ask for the response. Ask fans to "post", "comment" or "tell" something in a direct way. Fans will listen and respond by commenting.

- Use "softer sell" keywords: When running a contest or other promotional offer, "softer sell" keywords resonate better with users as opposed to more direct or aggressive language like "contest", "promotion", "lottery". For example using the only word "win/winning" give fans something to get excited about rather then feeling they are being sold to.

- Ask questions at the end: Given the desired outcome of a question post is to invoke a response, placing it at the end of the post ensures that any additional information in the post doesn't distract the fan from providing a response.

Companies that want to reach the higher level of user engagement possible, when developing their Facebook publishing strategies, need to know what drives engagement and they need to keep things simple and in line with their fans' needs.
We will discuss other two key elements that can characterize the content of a post and that can have a fundamental role in generating user engagement. They are the use of emotions in posts and the use of endorsers or testimonials.

2.5.3 Use of emotions in posts

One of the main characteristics of facebook posts is the possibility to use emotions in their content and this is a relevant aspect for our empirical study.

After a long period in which consumers were assumed to make largely rational decisions based on utilitarian product attributes and benefits, in the last two decades, marketing scholars have started to study emotions evoked by marketing stimuli, products and brands.[97] An emotion is "a mental state of readiness that arises from cognitive appraisals of events or thoughts; has a phenomenological tone; is accompanied by physiological processes; is often expressed physically (e.g., in gestures, posture, facial features); and may result in specific actions to affirm or cope with the emotion, depending on its nature and meaning for the person having it" (Bagozzi R. et al., 1999). We can also define an emotion simply as a valenced affective reaction to perceptions of situations. Emotions are often conceptualized as general dimensions, like positive and negative affect, but there has also been an interest in more specific emotions.

Some scholars have attempted to order the universe of emotions by identifying a set of basic or fundamental emotions, although there is no widespread agreement concerning the number or the nature of basic emotions.

Several studies focused on the emotional responses to advertising. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) developed their PAD scale that is composed by 18 semantic differential items, six for each one of the three dimensions: pleasure, arousal and dominance. Holbrook and Batra (1987) describe a scale with 34 emotions descriptors that assess 12 types of affective responses to advertising, while Edell and Burke (1987) found that the feelings elicited by ads could be summarized by three factors: upbeat feelings, negative feelings and warm feelings.

One of the most popular study on this subject is the Richins' one (1997), who identified an appropriate set of consumption emotion descriptors (the CES), and who compared the usefulness of this descriptor set with the usefulness of other

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[97] Laros F. & Steenkamp J., *"Emotions in consumer behavior: a hierarchical approach"*, Journal of Business Research, 2005, 58 1437-1445.

measures in assessing consumption related emotion, obtaining good results and demonstrating the superiority of the CES.[98] The consumption emotion set is shown in Table 2.4:

The Consumption Emotions Set (CES)	
Anger	Frustrated, angry, irritated
Discontent	Unfulfilled, discontented
Worry	Nervous, worried, tense
Sadness	Depressed, sad, miserable
Fear	Scared, afraid, panicky
Shame	Embarrassed, ashamed, humiliated
Envy	Envious, jealous
Loneliness	Lonely, homesick
Romantic love	Sexy, romantic, passionate
Love	Loving, sentimental, warm hearted
Peacefulness	Calm, peaceful
Contentment	Contented, fulfilled
Optimism	Optimistic, encouraged, hopeful
Joy	Happy, pleased, joyful
Excitement	Excited, thrilled, enthusiastic
Surprise	Surprised, amazed, astonished
Other items	Guilty, proud, eager, relieved

Table 2.4: The Consumption Emotion Set. (*Source: Richins M., 1997*)

All these studies use different scale to measure emotions and focus on different emotions, but among these, the classification of emotions in positive and negative affect appears to be the most popular conceptualization. Advantages of the division in positive and negative affect are that the model can be kept simple and the combination of a person's positive and negative affect is indicative of his attitude.

Laros F. (2002) developed a hierarchy of consumer emotions that distinguishes between positive and negative affect, and composed by three levels: the superordinate level with positive and negative affect, the basic level with four positive (contentment, happiness, love, and pride) and four negative emotions (sadness, fear, anger, and shame), and the subordinate level with 42 specific emotions based on Richins' (1997) CES.

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[98] However, as claimed by Richins M. (1997), "the CES described in this article is not intended to be a definitive assessment tool. Rather it should be considered as the starting point in determining the proper assessment of consumption related emotions".

The final model, that we decided to use also in our empirical study in chapter 3, can be seen in Figure 2.4:
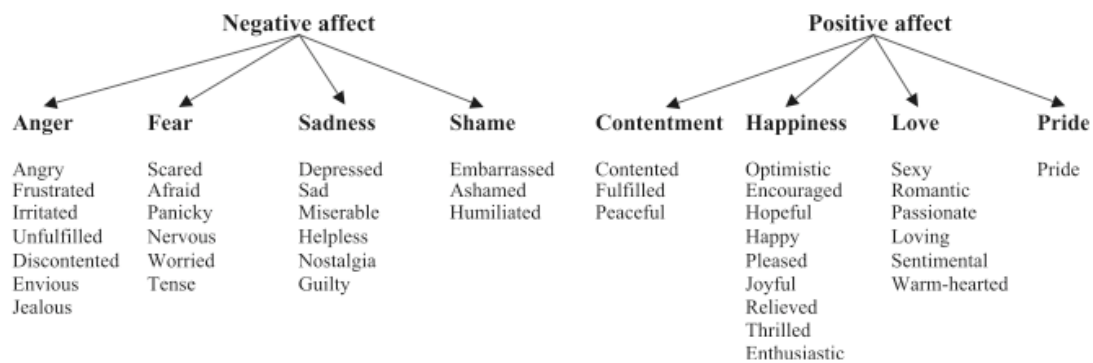
Figure 2.4: Hierarchy of consumer emotions. (*Source: Laros F. & Steenkamp J., 2002*)

2.5.4 Use of endorsers in posts

Another relevant characteristic for our study is the possibility to use endorsers/testimonials in facebook posts.

"The sponsoring company is the underlying source of any advertising message, but the individual models depicted in the advertisement serve as the more visible communicator in many cases" (Atkin C. & Block M., 1983). The main indicator of source quality is credibility. Research conducted over the past 30 years demonstrates that a source perceived as highly credible is more persuasive than a low credibility sender (Hovland and Weiss, 1951; McGuire, 1969). For this reason, the sources that companies use to present their advertising message typically attempt to project a credible image in terms of competence, trustworthiness, or dynamism.

There are different types of endorsers but companies usually tend to use a celebrity endorser, "a person widely known to the public for his or her achievements in areas other than that of the product class endorsed" (Friedman, Termini and Washington, 1977). The most used celebrity endorsers are sports figures, actors or other types of

entertainers. Celebrity endorsers are considered to be highly dynamic, with attractive and engaging personal qualities and, in some cases, they may even be perceived as competent to discuss the product.[99] They are also seen as trustworthy because of apparent lack of self-interest, thanks to the widespread attribution that major stars do not really work for the endorsement fee, but are motivated by a genuine affection for the product (Kamen et al., 1975).

To further explain source effects, if we consider also variables such as audience members' knowledge of and involvement with the product, according to Dholakia and Sternthal (1977), messages involving highly credible sources are more effective when consumers have no prior knowledge or experience on which to rely, whereas low-credibility sources are more effective when people rely on their own experiences.

Another important study demonstrates that the type of endorser may interact with the type of product being advertised. Friedman and Friedman (1979) states that that are two other types of endorsers besides celebrity: the professional expert, who is an individual possessing superior knowledge regarding the product class endorsed as a result of experience, study or training; and the typical consumer, who is an ordinary person who is expected to have no special knowledge of the product class endorsed except that acquired by normal use of the product. According their study celebrity would be more effective for products with high psychological or social risk, involving such elements as good taste, self-image, and opinions of others. The expert endorser should be more appropriate and effective for products associated with high financial, performance or physical risk or for complex and expensive products requiring expert advice. Finally, typical consumer endorsers should be more effective in the endorsement of everyday, low risk products.[100]

Atkin and Block (1983) recently studied the effects of three celebrities and three non-celebrities spokespersons on consumer attitudes toward the advertisement, the

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[99] Atkin C. & Block M., *"Effectiveness of celebrities endorsers"*, Journal of Advertising Research, 1983, 23(1) 57-61.

[100] Friedman H. & Friedman L., *"Endorser effectiveness by product type"*, Journal of Advertising Research, 1979, 19(5) 63-71.

character, and the product image for three alcoholic beverages. They found that the use of famous persons to endorse products is highly effective with teenagers, while the impact the impact on older persons is limited. For teenagers, the impact of the celebrity on the source credibility ratings extends to the message and the product, while adults are only slightly influenced by the famous sources. This finding suggests us that the effectiveness of the use of a celebrity endorser depends also on the audience we are referring to and its characteristics.

Anyhow, the influence a celebrity or expert endorser can have on audience is given by two processes of social influence that cause individuals to adopt the attitude advocated by an influencing agent: identification and internalization (Kelman, 1961).

- Identification occurs when individuals conform to the attitude or behavior advocated by another person because these individuals derive satisfaction from the belief that they are like that person.

- Internalization occurs when individuals conform to the attitude or behavior advocated by another person because they believe in the substance of the new attitude or behavior.

We have seen that the use of one of the different types of endorsers or testimonials can be more or less effective depending on different factors such as the type of product and the type of audience. In general, also if there is not strong evidence and further research is needed, research about the effects of endorsers in advertising have demonstrated that advertisements featuring celebrities produce consistently more favourable impact than the non-celebrities advertisements.

In our analysis in chapter 3, we will see if these findings hold also in social media advertising and if the use of celebrities in facebook posts can generate a higher level of consumer engagement.

Chapter 3

Facebook Posts Analysis

3.1 Method and objectives

The aim of this research work was to carry out an empirical study on a sample of posts, created by several different fashion brands and placed on their fan pages. The work consists in conducting a content analysis in order to relate the characteristics of the posts to users' engagement.

An advertising content analysis is a quantitative research technique that helps us better understand advertisers' practices, specific brand's advertising strategies, and the effects of advertising. It provides a detailed picture of advertising's characteristics and uses and it can be an analysis on several different aspects like for example an examination of racial and gender roles in advertising, the use of different types of selling propositions, international differences in advertising tone and content, etc. In this context, content analysis helps increase our understanding of the relationship between advertising characteristics and advertising effects on consumer engagement. This understanding provides direction for advertisers to improve the effectiveness and efficacy of posts on a fan page, exploiting so the social media potentialities in the best way possible.

An advertising content analysis is systematic, objective, and quantitative.

- **Systematic**: advertising content analysis must be systematic, since the degree to which one has confidence in the outcome of a content analysis is directly related to the extent to which the analysis is conducted in a systematic, planned manner. This

means that the sampling and selection of the advertising examined in the content analysis proceeds in accordance with explicit and defensible rules and that the advertising is treated and examined in exactly the same way throughout the content analysis.

- **Objective:** advertising content analysis must be objective. The validity of conclusions drawn from a content analysis is greatly reduced if personal biases are allowed to influence the selection and examination of the advertising. Objectivity in content analysis is enhanced when there are clear and objective rules for advertising selection and examination, coding categories are well-defined, coders are well-trained and work independently of each other, data analysis is appropriate to the measurement level of data collected.

- **Quantitative:** advertising content analysis is a quantitative endeavor. Quantification is important because it increases precision in conclusions drawn and permits a more accurate description of results and the relationships between themes and elements observed in the advertising. Finally, the quantification of findings allows researchers to use statistical techniques to summarize and investigate the findings, increasing the potential for uncovering underlying relationships in the data.

Specifically, the content analysis will be conducted on a sample of 523 posts, created by popular and famous fashion brands such as Bulgari, Gucci, H&M, Zara, Ralph Lauren, Gap, Guess, United Colors of Benetton, Sisley (etc.). The sample contained messages posted between January 2011 and May 2012 in the brand's official Facebook fan pages.

The main purpose, as already said, is to evaluate and study the relationship between different types and characteristics of posts and the degree of user engagement they generate. To do so we need to proceed, first of all, with the identification of categories that represent the universe of information that will be extracted during the content analysis, we need to identify specific dimensions for each category, and finally we need to relate and test the effect of each factor on the dependent variables.

3.2 Advertising content codification

The first step in the content analysis is the classification of the advertising content into different categories able to characterize and distinguish the components of each factor. We have identified and labeled different categories, each one composed of specific dimensions. There are enough dimensions so that meaningful differences across dimensions can be maintained. The categories and the relative dimensions are:

- Post type: that allows us to make a first classification of all the posts based on the type and on what they refer to. The possible dimensions are product, internal event, external event, service, position statement.

- Category of product/service: (only if the post type is product or service) that can be apparel or other.

- Endorser/Testimonial: that refers to the possible presence in the posts of unknown people or an individual who is known to the public (actor, sports figure, etc.) for his achievements in areas other than that of the product class endorsed. The possible dimensions are: celebrity, ordinary person, official/company representative, blogger, other, none.

- Type of appeal: that can be informative or emotional and refers to the use of emotions in the post content.

- Valence of emotional appeal: positive emotion or negative emotion.

- Type of emotion considered: based on Laros (2002) hierarchy of consumer emotions. Negative emotions are: anger, fear, sadness, shame. Positive emotions are: contentment, happiness, love, pride, surprise.

- Type of informational appeal: that can refers to tangible attributes or intangibles

attributes.

- Type of post: that refers to the main purpose of the post and to the user response it want to induce. Dimensions are: informational, persuasive, conative.

- Conative post: call to action can be related to the post or to the brand.

- General valence of the post: it can be positive or negative.

- Post length: that refers to the number of characters used in the post.

- Presence of images: whether an image is present or not.

- Presence of video: whether a video/animation is present or not.

- Day of the week: it refers to the day of publication of posts.

- Hour of the day: it refers to the hour of publication.

- Presence of link: whether a link is present or not.

- Type of link: it can be an internal link to the facebook fan page or to an official website or blog; an external link to an external website; or both internal and external.

3.3 Performance variables

Once classified the advertising content and all the collected data, the second step is to test the effect of each factor on the dependent variables, in order to study the degree of user engagement based on different types and characteristics of posts. The dependent variables, or final variables, that measures the user involvement and that we have used are:

- Number of comments: When someone comments on your post or replies to your comment, this is a signal of his involvement. Comments are made for conversation and they create the impression of an active audience. A large number of comments demonstrate that the website is active, popular and full of energy. This may play a role in further encouraging more comments.

- Number of shares: One of the main purposes for companies, when posting something on their fan pages, is to stimulate users to highly share each piece of content. Users share a brand's post when they are interested and they feel involved in it. When companies publish their fan page updates in a manner that naturally inspires fans and their friends and visitors to their page to share with their networks, they set in motion ripples of viral visibility. So basically, free additional exposure.

- Number of likes: Whenever users "like" a post which has its privacy set to "public", it appears on their timeline as a publicly visible activity. Users come across posts that appear in their feed because their friend liked it, and in case they find them interesting, there is a high probability they will visit that particular page to see what else it has to offer, and they might also like that page. So "liked" posts help in attracting more likes for a fan page and they are an effective measure of user engagement.

- Acceleration (mins): The acceleration indicates the number of minutes elapsed between the moment in which the post has been published on the brand's fan page and the moment in which the 80% of traffic (comments and shares) has been reached. Namely it represents the duration of the brand's campaign, carried out from the company through the use of a post.

- Virality Rate: It is an indicator of the degree of virality the post has reached on the Social Network and, as the previous variables, it is also related to the degree of user involvement. We have computed it as: number of shares divided by the sum of shares, likes and comments, all multiplied by 100:

    Virality Rate = [N. Shares / (N. Shares + N. Likes + N. Comments)] * 100

3.4 Results and findings

Once extracted all the needed information through the classification of the advertising content in the different categories and dimensions, there have been two steps of analysis: a preliminary analysis and a more in depth final analysis.

The first step was a preliminary analysis on the composition of variables based on frequency and percentage of the dimensions of each category found during the classification of posts. This analysis has produced several interesting insights and points to be studied and further investigated.

First of all, the post type with the higher frequency is the one of position statement and so we can deduce that most companies of our sample use social media with the aim of communicating their values and beliefs, in order to create and strengthen their brand image. Other companies, since we have taken into consideration all fashion brands, have developed advertising campaigns of products and in particular in the apparel and accessories sector. Only a residual percentage has represented the promotion of internal and external events.

In 45% of posts companies have not used endorser or testimonial figure. The most used endorsers in the sample have been ordinary persons in 31% of posts, while only in 8.2% of cases has been used a celebrity to promote the product. We can deduce that companies believes that the most efficient type of endorser, for online advertising campaigns through facebook fan pages, is represented by the ordinary person, maybe because it is the most attractive and credible for consumers.

A high percentage of posts has an informational appeal (88.5%), while only the remaining part has an emotional appeal (11.3%). The type of informational appeal is almost equally divided between intangible attributes and tangible attributes, with a small prevalence of the intangible category. Moreover, it's very important to observe that almost all the emotional posts contains a positive emotion (the most used are love, excitement and happiness) and companies tend to not use negative emotions, except for rare cases.

The preliminary analysis indicates that almost all the posts have a positive valence

and the 43% of the sample has a conative goal, the 31% a persuasive goal and the 25% an informational goal. The type of call to action is an important characteristic of conative posts and can be related to the post (67%) or to the brand (32%). We can deduce that companies in the social network environment, in particular on their facebook fan pages, are more interested in stimulating users to share and comment the advertising content rather than stimulating them in buying products, that is only a consequence and the final result of the communication and promotion process.

Other important aspect to be considered is the presence of images or videos. Facebook posts of our sample do not contain a direct image and only the 26% contain a video, but this is probably to be ascribed to a 100% presence of link that usually refer to a website internal to the company (the official website, facebook fan page or blog) or can also refer exactly to photo albums or videos.

Finally, the majority of posts are published by companies on Thursday (20%) and Friday (19%), according with the most recent scholars studies that found engagement rates to be higher in these days, compared to the others (see Chapter 2.5.2). Moreover the specific engagement peaks in fashion industry were found to be exactly on Thursday.

The preliminary analysis, focused only on the independent variables, has produced some interesting insights and has helped us to better understand companies' behavior when using Social Media for marketing and communication.

The second part of the analysis, more detailed and specific, is focused on both independent variables and dependent variables. The main purpose of this part is to study the relationship between the two different types of variables and to evaluate the effects of different characteristics of posts on the final user engagement that they are able to generate. We will use other tools such as the ANOVA (analysis of variance), essential to relate the results of the preliminary analysis of each factor with the final measures of engagement of our database.

ANOVA is a collection of statistical techniques that can be used to test the hypothesis that the means among two or more groups are equal. It is a test of the hypothesis that the variation of a dependent variable in an experiment is no greater than that due to normal variation of individuals' characteristics and error in their measurement.[101] In the typical application of ANOVA, the null hypothesis is that all groups are simply random samples of the same population. This implies that all treatments have the same effect.

The total variation in the test can be divided in two components: the variance within groups and the variance between groups. The whole idea behind the analysis of variance is to compare the ratio of between group variance to within group variance. If the variance between groups is larger than the variance within groups, then there is a significant effect of the grouping variable (also known as treatment variable or factor) on the dependent variable..

The study has produced different results not all equally statistical significant. The relation between some factor variables and the dependent variables in some cases has led to no significant effect, and for this reason we have decided to omit them in the presentation of results. For the relevance of this study, we have preferred to focus our attention only on the variables that has led to more significant effects, investigating them and reaching more interesting final findings both in terms of results and in terms of implications for companies in the marketing and communication use of Social Media.

The factor variables we have decided to focus on are the use of testimonials, the valence of emotional appeal, the type of informational appeal and the type of call to action.

According to these variables we have also been able to identify our objective in a more appropriate and better way.

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[101] http://www.itl.nist.gov/div898/handbook/prc/section4/prc43.htm

In order to make the objectives of this study more specific and easily understandable, we have specified some research questions:

1. Does the testimonial presence have some kind of effect on consumer behavior and is it able to increase the results of the dependent variables such as number of likes, comments and shares? And what is the type of testimonial who generates the highest level of user engagement?

2. Is the use of emotions in posts able to influence consumers? Are positive emotions more effective than negative emotions, for the purposes of the promotional campaign?

3. Does the type of informational appeal impact on consumers' behavioral reactions? Which is the type of posts, among the informative ones, that consumers are more motivated to like, comment and share?

4. Companies are strongly used to create and publish posts with a conative goal, but which type of call to action receive more attention among users and results more effective in terms of engagement and virality?

In next sections we will show and discuss the results of the analysis one by one for each factor variable trying to better understand the relationship and the effects between them and the final measures of user engagement such as number of likes, comments, shares, acceleration and virality rate. Doing so we'll try to give answer to our research questions, reaching different important findings, and we'll try to better understand companies' behavioral dynamics when planning a social media promotional campaign.

3.4.1 Testimonial presence

One of the main factor variables we have focused on is the presence of endorsers/ testimonials. The analysis of this variable has led to a first interesting finding.

As already seen in the presentation of the preliminary analysis, there is an high prevalence of posts characterized by the absence of a testimonial. The frequency of each dimension is shown in table 3.1:

	Endorser/Testimonial	
	Frequency	Valid Percent
None	240	45,9
Ordinary person	164	31,4
Celebrity	43	8,2
Official/Company representative	41	7,8
Blogger	20	3,8
Other	15	2,9
Total	523	100,0

Table 3.1: Preliminary frequency analysis of "Endorser/Testimonial".

In 240 posts, corresponding to the 45% of the sample, there is no presence of testimonials. Although this is the dimension with the higher frequency, we have to consider that the sum of all the other categories, except "other", corresponds to the frequency of use of a testimonial, even if different kinds of it. For this reason the remaining 51,2% means that the number of companies that use testimonials in their posts is higher than the one of those that do not use them.

Furthermore, between companies that use testimonials, the most used category is the one of ordinary person with the 31% of posts, while the use of a celebrity corresponds to only 8,2% of cases. This choice can be explained by the higher cost of using a celebrity and the companies' belief that an ordinary person is closer and more similar to the average Internet's user and consumer, who has the possibility in this way to recognize itself in the testimonial figure and its needs.

We can say that the different frequencies of the dimensions of this first variable, namely the use of a testimonial or the use of a different type of testimonial, are the result of a companies' voluntary decision, evaluating risks and benefits related to it.

The next step is the analysis of the ANOVA and the effect that the use of testimonial has on final engagement measures. The statistical results are shown in Tables 3.2 and 3.3:

		Descriptives		
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
No.Comments	Celebrity	43	39,42	32,516
	Ordinary person	164	40,38	109,339
	Company repres.	41	33,63	35,925
	Other	15	5,27	2,764
	None	240	21,88	36,008
	Blogger	20	10,9	13,27
	Total	523	29,15	67,976
No.Shares	Celebrity	43	126400,21	827350,019
	Ordinary person	164	415,37	2193,475
	Company repres.	41	264,8	441,443
	Other	15	22,07	8,146
	None	240	138,78	454,42
	Blogger	20	72,15	270,746
	Total	523	10610,45	237234,821
No.Likes	Celebrity	43	236109,37	1538402,323
	Ordinary person	164	1283,95	2481,288
	Company repres.	41	1494,94	1815,799
	Other	15	138,27	96,157
	None	240	8594,05	100367,76
	Blogger	20	289,4	405,047
	Total	523	23890,97	446197,434
Acceleration (mins)	Celebrity	43	94,2463	261,16442
	Ordinary person	164	175,7996	926,80609
	Company repres.	41	370,704	1918,60812
	Other	15	29,0856	33,97418
	None	240	180,0816	848,17291
	Blogger	20	219,1049	782,54045
	Total	523	183,7869	954,80339

VR computed as ((Shares)/(Shares+Likes+Comments))x100				
	Celebrity	43	15,6961	18,52203
	Ordinary person	164	17,8689	17,26617
	Company repres.	41	17,4766	14,68802
	Other	15	23,969	23,55041
	None	240	18,8059	19,4004
	Blogger	20	12,3635	16,24292
	Total	523	18,0539	18,35838

Table 3.2: "Endorser/Testimonial" descriptives.

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
No.Comments	Between Groups	53946,824	5	10789,365	2,366	,039
	Within Groups	2358050,243	517	4561,026		
	Total	2411997,067	522			
No.Shares	Between Groups	6,282E11	5	1,256E11	2,259	,047
	Within Groups	2,875E13	517	5,561E10		
	Total	2,938E13	522			
No.Likes	Between Groups	2,117E12	5	4,233E11	2,150	,058
	Within Groups	1,018E14	517	1,969E11		
	Total	1,039E14	522			
Acceleration (mins)	Between Groups	2174903,834	5	434980,767	,475	,795
	Within Groups	4,737E8	517	916259,456		
	Total	4,759E8	522			
VR computed as ((Shares)/(Shares+Likes+Comments))x100	Between Groups	1566,497	5	313,299	,929	,462
	Within Groups	174363,262	517	337,260		
	Total	175929,760	522			

Table 3.3: "Endorser/Testimonial" ANOVA.

The analysis shows that when the endorser/testimonial used in the advertising campaign is a celebrity, his presence strongly influence the engagement measures. In particular this strong effect, due to the celebrity presence, is clearly visible on number of likes and number of shares, with a general increase of users'

involvement.

Celebrities, widely known to the public for their achievements in areas other than that of the product class endorsed, have attractive and engaging personal qualities and for this reason they have a strong influence on users. They are sports figures, actors or other types of entertainers with already a lot of fans and, since they are usually considered credible and trustworthy, it's not a surprise that their use in brand's fan pages is able to increase the number of likes and shares from users and their level of engagement.

Although only half of companies of our sample have used endorsers in their posts, and only a small percentage have used celebrities, our conclusion is that their presence can strongly influence final user engagement. We think so that companies should decide to widely use endorsers or testimonials in their advertising campaigns through their fan pages, in order for their posts to receive more likes and shares, that will mean a higher level of user involvement.

3.4.2 Valence of emotional appeal

The second studied factor variable that has shown significant effect is the valence of emotional appeal.

First of all, for the sake of discussion, it is necessary to have a look again to the preliminary analysis of the type of appeal, which precedes the valence of the emotional appeal, in order to divide our sample in posts with emotional appeal and posts with informative appeal. In this way we are able to clearly know how many posts belong to the category we are analyzing. The preliminary analysis of the type of appeal is shown in Table 3.4:

Type of Appeal		
	Frequency	Valid Percent
Informative	463	88,5
Emotional	59	11,3
Missing System	1	,2
Total	523	100,0

Table 3.4: Preliminary frequency analysis of "Type of Appeal".

Posts from our sample that have an informative appeal are 463, corresponding to the 88,5%, whereas only 59 posts, 11,3 %, have an emotional appeal. According to these numbers, companies prefer to use informative posts, relying on emotions only in some cases, maybe because of the risks and the uncertain result of this choice.

Having said that, we can now go ahead with the analysis of the valence of emotional appeal, the factor variable we are interested in. Results of the preliminary analysis are shown in table 3.5:

Valence Emotional Appeal		
	Frequency	Valid Percent
Positive emotion	54	91,5
Negative emotion	5	8,5
Total Valid	59	100,0
Missing System	464	
Total	523	

Table 3.5: Preliminary analysis of "Valence of Emotional Appeal".

It is not a surprise that companies in their emotional posts tend to use positive emotions rather than negative emotions. The 91,5% of posts contains a positive emotion and in particular the most used are love, excitement and happiness. The remaining 8,5% of posts contain, instead, a negative emotion.

In general we can say that companies usually prefer to communicate positive emotions in their posts because they want to create a positive, strong and reliable brand image. At the contrary negative emotions are rarely used even though they are sometimes more successful in capturing users' attention.

After the preliminary analysis, we can see the relationship of the valence of the emotional appeal with the final variables of engagement and the results of the ANOVA in the following tables 3.6 and 3.7:

		Descriptives		
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
No.Comments	Negative emotion	5	88,80	112,092
	Positive emotion	54	18,31	25,405
	Total	59	24,29	42,992
No.Shares	Negative emotion	5	206,60	202,452
	Positive emotion	54	672,76	3769,471
	Total	59	633,25	3606,103
No.Likes	Negative emotion	5	2142,60	2182,916
	Positive emotion	54	1028,67	3455,958
	Total	59	1123,07	3367,574
Acceleration (mins)	Negative emotion	5	37,8972	41,92301
	Positive emotion	54	88,4330	187,71568
	Total	59	84,1503	180,33913
VR computed as ((Shares)/(Shares+Likes+Comments))x100	Negative emotion	5	14,4475	15,25950
	Positive emotion	54	19,9964	19,00107
	Total	59	19,5262	18,66560

Table 3.6: "Valence of Emotional Appeal" descriptives.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
		ANOVA				
No.Comments	Between Groups	22735,654	1	22735,654	15,343	,000
	Within Groups	84464,448	57	1481,832		
	Total	107200,102	58			
No.Shares	Between Groups	994444,116	1	994444,116	,075	,785
	Within Groups	7,532E8	57	1,321E7		
	Total	7,542E8	58			
No.Likes	Between Groups	5678454,529	1	5678454,529	,496	,484
	Within Groups	6,521E8	57	1,144E7		
	Total	6,578E8	58			
Acceleration (mins)	Between Groups	11687,181	1	11687,181	,355	,553
	Within Groups	1874600,540	57	32887,729		
	Total	1886287,722	58			
VR computed as ((Shares)/(Shares+ Likes+Comments))x10 0	Between Groups	140,904	1	140,904	,400	,529
	Within Groups	20066,562	57	352,045		
	Total	20207,466	58			

Table 3.7: "Valence of Emotional Appeal" ANOVA.

Results of the ANOVA show that negative emotional appeals generate more comments and likes than positive ones, but positive emotional appeals generate more shares. So, in general, negative emotions have had strong influence on users, generating more involvement and engagement compared to positive ones. However, it is important to note that unfortunately we only have a low number of posts with negative emotional appeal and even though this can represent a limit for our analysis, it might be the starting point for further investigation.

Our final finding is that negative emotions, consistently with some recent literature, generate more behavioral reactions in terms of comments and likes, leading to an higher degree of users' engagement. Nevertheless, we have seen that only few companies use negative emotions and this is maybe due to a low awareness of the connected advantages. Communication through negative emotional appeal, besides positive emotional appeal, should be revalued both by authors, since further research

is needed, and companies that should make greater use of posts with negative emotions in order to capture users' attention.

3.4.3 Type of informational appeal

Another of the main factor variables we have focused on is the type of informative appeal, which has produced significant effects and another interesting finding.

In the first part of the previous section we have seen, analyzing the factor variable "type of appeal", that posts with informative appeal are 463 (88,5%), the majority in our sample. We deduce that in general companies prefer to use informative appeal rather than emotional appeal, which are maybe more risky and have an uncertain result.

Focusing on this 88,5% of posts with informative appeal, we can now analyze and study the type of informative appeal. The preliminary frequency analysis is shown in table 3.8:

Type of Informative Appeal		
	Frequency	Valid Percent
Intangible attributes	170	55,7
Tangible attributes	135	44,3
Total Valid	305	100,0
Missing System	218	
Total	523	

Table 3.8: Preliminary frequency analysis of "Type of Informative Appeal".

Type of informational appeal is almost equally divided between intangible attributes and tangible attributes, with a small prevalence of the intangible category. The valid percentage of posts based on intangible attributes is, in fact, the 55,7% whereas the one of posts that contains descriptions of tangible attributes is the 44,3%.

From these numbers we deduce that companies in their Facebook fan pages are used to publish posts relying on promotion of both intangible and tangible attributes. This

simultaneous presence of both type of attributes is also due to the specific fashion industry. When consumers are buying something, fashion industry is in fact characterized by the evaluation of tangible attributes such as fabric, shape, color of products, and intangible attributes such as fashion trends, quality or price.

That said, we can continue the study and see which is the effect of this attributes on number of comments, likes, shares and in general on virality rate. The statistical results of the ANOVA are shown in tables 3.9 and 3.10:

		Descriptives		
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
No.Comments	Tangible attributes	135	34,66	40,628
	Intangible attributes	170	28,87	35,087
	Total	305	31,43	37,687
No.Shares	Tangible attributes	135	242,37	401,954
	Intangible attributes	170	32101,15	416104,754
	Total	305	17999,72	310652,910
No.Likes	Tangible attributes	135	1456,85	2057,114
	Intangible attributes	170	60401,22	773748,257
	Total	305	34311,09	577654,058
Acceleration (mins)	Tangible attributes	135	114,4298	392,42138
	Intangible attributes	170	289,1780	1522,70358
	Total	305	211,8304	1168,07995
VR computed as ((Shares)/(Shares+ Likes+Comments))x100	Tangible attributes	135	19,5564	17,45017
	Intangible attributes	170	15,9197	15,43736
	Total	305	17,5294	16,43109

Table 3.9: "Type of Informative Appeal" descriptives.

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
No.Comments	Between Groups	2521,393	1	2521,393	1,780	,183
	Within Groups	429243,479	303	1416,645		
	Total	431764,872	304			
No.Shares	Between Groups	7,637E10	1	7,637E10	,791	,375
	Within Groups	2,926E13	303	9,657E10		
	Total	2,934E13	304			
No.Likes	Between Groups	2,614E11	1	2,614E11	,783	,377
	Within Groups	1,012E14	303	3,339E11		
	Total	1,014E14	304			
Acceleration (mins)	Between Groups	2297781,347	1	2297781,347	1,688	,195
	Within Groups	4,125E8	303	1361330,342		
	Total	4,148E8	304			
VR computed as ((Shares)/(Shares + Likes+Comments)) x100	Between Groups	995,207	1	995,207	3,719	,055
	Within Groups	81078,894	303	267,587		
	Total	82074,100	304			

Table 3.10: "Type of Informative Appeal" ANOVA.

Results of the analysis shows that intangible attributes generate many more likes and shares, compared to tangible attributes, which have however a higher virality rate. Posts that rely on intangible attributes are able to have a great impact and strongly influence consumers, which are motivated to like or share them, generating so a higher level of engagement. This is not a surprise since fashion industry is a particular sector in which usually intangible attributes such as quality and brand reputation (that usually lead to an increase of the price) are considered very important, while tangible attributes often take second place. These values and beliefs on quality of products, fashion trends, brand reputation and notoriety have strong impact on consumers not only in the purchase phase but also at the moment of sharing and spread the content of the promotion campaign on Social Media.

Our conclusion is that, for the fashion industry we are analyzing, intangible

attributes generate more engagement and involvement in terms of likes and shares than tangible attributes. Companies seem to already know that, but they should improve their decision process on shared beliefs and values they want to communicate to their customers, taking into account that this values can influence also the users' propensity to share and like a content, affecting in turn the final success of the promotion campaign.

3.4.4 Type of conative post

The last factor variable that has produced interesting results and we have analyzed is the type of conative post.

First of all, we have to know how many posts of our sample have a conative goal and for that, we need to have a look to the preliminary frequency analysis of "post goals type" that precedes the type of conative post. It is shown in Table 3.11:

	Post goals type	
	Frequency	Valid Percent
Conative	226	43,2
Persuasive	164	31,4
Informational	132	25,2
Missing System	1	,2
Total	523	100,0

Table 3.11: Preliminary frequency analysis of "Post goals type".

From the table we can see that posts with a conative goal are the majority in the sample with the 43,2%. Companies in general prefer to use this kind of posts since they are expected to generate faster and clearly visible users' responses, compared to posts with other type of goals. These other types are represented by posts with persuasive goal, which are the 31,4%, and posts with an informational goal, which are the 25,2%.

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So the category of conative posts, on which we are focusing, is the main category of the sample with 229 posts. Let's see how these conative posts are divided between the two dimensions of call to action related to the post and call to action related to the brand in table 3.12:

	Type of Conative Post	
	Frequency	Valid Percent
Call to action related to the post	155	67,7
Call to action related to the brand	74	32,3
Total Valid	229	100,0
Missing System	294	
Total	523	

Table 3.12: Preliminary frequency analysis of "Type of Conative Post".

The preliminary analysis of type of conative posts shows that 67,7% of the 229 posts has a call to action related to the post, while 32,3% of posts has a call to action related to the brand.

From these numbers we can deduce that posts that stimulate an action referred to the post itself such as like, comment or share it, are preferred by companies to posts that suggest an action referred to the brand, such as try or buy a product or services. The main reason is that an action referred to the post is actually easier and less demanding for users. Moreover the action of buying a product can be considered only a consequence and the final result of a promoting campaign that has different intermediate goal before that.

We can now observe which is the impact of different types of call to action on the final user engagement and relate independent variables to dependent variables in tables 3.13 and 3.14:

		Descriptives		
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
No.Comments	Call to action related to the post	155	35,92	112,423
	Call to action related to the brand	74	27,86	30,770
	Total	229	33,32	94,097
No.Shares	Call to action related to the post	155	192,68	506,334
	Call to action related to the brand	74	94,77	151,323
	Total	229	161,04	427,320
No.Likes	Call to action related to the post	155	907,37	1411,402
	Call to action related to the brand	74	25728,86	180366,274
	Total	229	8928,29	102726,032
Acceleration (mins)	Call to action related to the post	155	169,1177	612,79697
	Call to action related to the brand	74	87,4406	222,20668
	Total	229	142,7242	520,49518
VR computed as ((Shares)/(Shares+Likes+Comments))x100	Call to action related to the post	155	17,1701	16,25870
	Call to action related to the brand	74	18,2964	21,75588
	Total	229	17,5340	18,17616

Table 3.13: "Type of Conative Post" descriptives.

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
No.Comments	Between Groups	3252,010	1	3252,010	,366	,546
	Within Groups	2015521,720	227	8878,950		
	Total	2018773,729	228			
No.Shares	Between Groups	480127,681	1	480127,681	2,648	,105
	Within Groups	4,115E7	227	181291,634		
	Total	4,163E7	228			
No.Likes	Between Groups	3,086E10	1	3,086E10	2,949	,087
	Within Groups	2,375E12	227	1,046E10		
	Total	2,406E12	228			
Acceleration (mins)	Between Groups	334139,842	1	334139,842	1,235	,268
	Within Groups	6,143E7	227	270636,714		
	Total	6,177E7	228			
Virality rate (as given)	Between Groups	3203,083	1	3203,083	5,921	,017
	Within Groups	58970,559	109	541,014		
	Total	62173,642	110			
VR computed as ((Shares)/(Shares+ Likes+Comments))x100	Between Groups	63,544	1	63,544	,192	,662
	Within Groups	75261,418	227	331,548		
	Total	75324,962	228			

Table 3.14: "Type of Conative Post" ANOVA.

Results of the ANOVA shows some significant effects. A call to action related to the post produce more comments and shares, resulting more engaging, while a call to action related to the brand produce a higher number of likes and tend to be more viral (see virality rate).

We have to consider that conative posts in general have the goal to involve and stimulate consumers to do something and take action, requiring for their specific nature at least a minimum level of engagement. Posts with a call to action related to the post itself tend to be more engaging per se and for this reason it is not a surprise that they are able to increase the number of users' comments and shares. On the other hand we can say that posts with a call to action related to the brand, even if

they do not require any direct action on the published content and on the social media, are well received from the audience and are more easily liked.

The final finding is that conative posts have a strong impact on users engagement, in particular a call to action related to the post, preferred by companies, generate more comments and shares, tending to be more engaging, while a call to action related to the brand generate more likes.

3.5 Discussion

At the beginning of this chapter we have explained the method we have used in our study and the different elements of the analysis. First we have defined the independent variables, explaining categories and dimensions of the advertising content codification, and the dependent variables, number of likes, comment, shares, acceleration and virality rate. Then we have explained the composition of our sample and the objectives of the study, defining four specific research questions about the most significant factor variables.

The aim of the study and in particular of this chapter was ultimately to find answer to these questions and provide interesting findings. We can summarize them as follow:

1- The testimonial presence in the advertising content has a strong impact on consumers and it is able to increase the number of likes, comments and shares. In particular the type of testimonial that generates the highest level of user engagement is the one of celebrities, on which companies should focus when planning a promotional campaign.

2- Posts that contains emotions can elicit consumers reactions since they are considered to be the most interesting and attractive. Although positive emotions are obviously the most used by companies, we found out that negative emotions are sometimes more effective in capturing users' attention, leading to an higher degree of engagement.

3- Companies are used to publish on their Facebook fan pages posts that rely on promotion of both tangible and intangible attributes. We found out that, for the specific characteristics of the fashion industry, intangible attributes generate more engagement and involvement in terms of likes and shares than tangible ones.

4- Finally, among posts with a conative goal, companies prefer to use a call to action related to the post that generate more comments and shares and results more engaging, even though on the other hand a call to action related to the brand is able to attract more likes.

Social Media have gained a fundamental role in communication and marketing strategies and, for this reason, companies must take great care with the findings and results of this study. For companies it is very important, when managing fan pages and brands' Facebook presence, to create high quality contents and to exactly know the users' behavioral dynamics on the social network, in order to reach the higher user engagement possible. Our analysis can be very usefull in this field and can help companies in developing their Facebook publishing strategies. In fact, for an effective result and in order to create successful promotional campaigns, they need to know what drives engagement and they need to keep things in line with their fans' needs.

Conclusions

Consumer engagement has become one of the most important aspect in companies' activity and the main objective of their marketing and communication strategies.

We have seen that the latest development in non-conventional marketing and the evolution of Social Media as new communication tools has led to innovative business and consumption models, in which users have gained a leading role. In this context, companies need to: interact with their users and fans, create long lasting relationships with them and generate high level of users' engagement. For this reason, fan pages can be a very useful tool since they allow to collect people all around the globe but, at the same time, companies have to create high quality and attractive promotional campaigns and be aware of users' behavioral dynamics on the social network, in order to reach the higher degree of consumer engagement.

Posts of brands' Facebook fan pages can have different characteristics and their content can have different effects on different consumers.

This research work and results of our analysis show that there are different factor variables such as use of emotion, testimonial presence and focus on intangible attributes, that can have strong impact on final measures of user engagement such as number of likes, comments and shares. This study, however, is not supposed to be an end point, since it has several limitations and further research is needed.

Researchers and scholars have already demonstrated that use of emotions and testimonial in advertising influence users' reactions and involvement. Our empirical study provides support to these theories, in addition to important findings and starting points for future research.

Specifically, we have seen that celebrities generate the highest level of engagement, but results of the analysis show that there are only few celebrities that generate a lot of likes, comments and shares, while many other celebrities do not have the same strong impact. Then we have seen that use of emotions in posts is very important. Companies tend to use positive emotions, since they are the more appreciate by users, but negative emotions, rarely used, are more able to capture users' attention.

Results has also shown that, in particular for the fashion industry, posts that rely on description and advantages given by intangible attributes, such as quality, brand reputation and notoriety, are more attractive and engaging for consumers. Moreover, we have found that companies prefer to use conative posts with a call to action related to the post, since it increase the number of comments and shares, resulting more engaging, and imply direct actions on the post content.

These findings are very important and they can help companies in developing their Facebook publishing strategy. However, this research study provides several avenues for further investigation.

In particular, with regard to the testimonial presence, results has shown that there is big difference not only between different categories of testimonial, but even within the category of celebrity. This finding might deserve further investigation and it will be very interesting a more specific study only on celebrities' differences.

Finally, future research should also focus on another starting point given by the analysis of the use of emotions. Users tend to highly share posts with positive emotions, but negative emotions generate stronger reactions and more comments. This is a remarkable finding, consistent with some literature on emotions, and it would be interesting a deeper research study, in order to find possible explanations to this users' behavior reaction.

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