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Master’s Degree in International Economics and Commerce  
Curriculum: Business Organization and Strategy

**MANAGING ONLINE COMMUNITIES:  
A NEW DRIVER FOR THE BUSINESS  
DEVELOPMENT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The following paper focuses on the topic of online communities and how they can represent a driver to increase a brand's business, listing what the strategies for identifying and managing communities to therefore manage digital platforms and communication strategy to generate consumers not only of economic value, but also social to increase the reputation of the brand.

The first chapter focuses on the changes that marketing has undergone following the transition to a digital world in which all customers are connected not only to the brand but also to each other. The forces that influence the process of purchasing and consuming products/services will be initially exposed, and on what action to increase the loyalty of consumers who are placed at the centre of the marketing strategies of modern companies. In this context, communication also necessarily changes, which passes from a vertical vision, in which the brand communicates with customers who cannot respond to the message, to a horizontal orientation, in which the consumer is not only able to communicate in reverse with the brand, but lives in a connected society in which it establishes conversations and relates to other consumers. Digital subcultures are analyzed, that is groups of individuals with interesting characteristics for marketing managers for their social functions, among these are netizens, those who actively participate in the life of the internet by creating content. Precisely in relation to the influences, the O-Zone identifies three main spheres of influence in the process of finding information and purchasing, the outer, the influence of others and one's own.

The second chapter exposes a brief description about the birth of the internet and social media to focus the discussion on the concept of online communities, aggregations of individuals who generate conversations about a common interest. The community bases its activities on digital platforms such as social media, blogs, forums and messaging platforms. Among these, Facebook plays an important role,

with its recent policy aimed at managing online communities as the heart of the platform. Several reports have noted the importance of management of an online community and, in the case of branded communities, there was a positive influence on corporate results in cases where the executive team was directly involved in the community. Subsequently, the types of communities will be exposed, listing their characteristics and the typical platforms on which they operate. The speech ends with a distinction between communities born spontaneously by consumers and those directly created by the brand to stimulate conversation.

The third chapter deals with the issue of identifying communities and social listening, which starts with the concept of “netnography”, a practice through which it is possible to study the behaviour of individuals in online communities in a non-invasive way, without therefore showing itself in its role of “netnographer”. The next step involves social listening, through which it is possible to understand what the sentiment is around the brand, analyzing the communities and producing useful insights at a strategic level for marketing campaigns. The data analysis mainly comes from social media analysis, which, through classification and selection processes, allows to extrapolate which communication channels are effective and how to improve them. The chapter concludes by reporting data from an experiment on influencer marketing practice, offering advice both for the influencer regarding his behaviour on the social platform, and for the brand regarding which figure to choose to promote his products/services.

The fourth chapter directs the paper towards the management of the online community and the role of content marketing. The chapter opens with the presentation of the "customer journey", the path that each customer takes from the moment they come into contact for the first time with the brand up to the purchase of the product/service and the eventual loyalty and transformation phase into brand ambassador. The practice of content marketing is subsequently exposed, the creation of content for the company's social platforms and the amplification of the same with particular attention to the elements

aimed at online communities. The chapter continues with the exhibition of ideal content marketing practices, created by big brands such as GoPro, Starbucks and Lego, can create communities of highly loyal consumers involved in brand values. The Tutor Audio case is presented in this chapter, an educational platform reserved for teaching music production, which has been able to create a community of enthusiasts and professionals in the sector, providing quality content to its users. During the case study, it was possible to interview the online community manager directly, obtaining important information about their social strategy. The chapter concludes with some ideal digital and content marketing strategies based on the results of research, experiments and testimonials obtained during the writing of the paper.

## **ABSTRACT**

Il seguente elaborato è incentrato sul tema delle online community e di come esse possano rappresentare un driver per incrementare il business di un brand, elencando quali siano le strategie di individuazione e gestione delle comunità, per poi giungere alla cura delle piattaforme digitali e della strategia di comunicazione per generare dei consumatori di valore non solo economico, ma anche sociale al fine di aumentare la reputazione del brand.

Il primo capitolo si concentra sui cambiamenti che il marketing ha subito in seguito al passaggio ad un mondo digitale in cui tutti i clienti sono connessi non solo al brand ma anche tra di loro. Vengono inizialmente esposte quali forze condizionano il processo di acquisto e consumo dei prodotti/servizi e su quali agire per aumentare la fedeltà dei consumatori i quali sono posti al centro delle strategie di marketing delle aziende moderne. In questo ambito, cambia necessariamente anche la comunicazione, la quale passa da una visione verticale, in cui il brand comunica con i clienti i quali non possono replicare al messaggio, ad un orientamento orizzontale, in cui il consumatore non è solo in grado di comunicare in maniera inversa con il brand, ma vive in una società connessa in cui instaura conversazioni e si relaziona con altri consumatori. Vengono successivamente analizzate le sottoculture digitali, ovvero gruppi di individui con caratteristiche interessanti per i marketing manager per le loro funzioni sociali, tra questi vi sono i “netizen”, coloro che partecipano attivamente alla vita di internet creando contenuti. Proprio in relazione alle influenze, la O-Zone identifica tre sfere principali di influenza nel processo di ricerca di informazioni e acquisto, la esterna, l’influenza altrui e la propria.

Il secondo capitolo espone una breve descrizione riguardo la nascita di internet e dei social media per focalizzare successivamente il discorso sul concetto delle online community, aggregazioni di individui i quali generano conversazioni riguardo un interesse comune. La community basa le proprie attività

sulle piattaforme digitali quali social media, blog, forum e piattaforme di messaggistica. Tra queste riveste un ruolo importante Facebook, con la sua recente policy indirizzata verso la gestione delle comunità online come cuore della piattaforma. Diversi report hanno constatato l'importanza della gestione di una comunità online e, nel caso delle branded community, è stata registrata un'influenza positiva sui risultati aziendali nei casi in cui il team esecutivo era direttamente coinvolto nella comunità. Successivamente verranno espone le tipologie di community, elencando le loro caratteristiche e le piattaforme tipiche su cui operano. Il discorso si conclude con una distinzione tra le comunità nate spontaneamente dai consumatori e quelle direttamente create dal brand per stimolare la conversazione.

Il terzo capitolo affronta il discorso dell'individuazione delle community e l'ascolto sociale, il quale parte con il concetto di "netnography", pratica attraverso la quale è possibile studiare il comportamento degli individui nelle comunità online in modo non invasivo, senza dunque palesandosi nel suo ruolo di "netnografo". Il passo successivo prevede l'ascolto sociale, il quale attraverso il quale è possibile capire quale è il sentimento intorno al brand, analizzando le community e producendo insight utili a livello strategico per le campagne di marketing. L'analisi dei data proviene principalmente dall'analisi dei social media, la quale, attraverso processi di classificazione e selezione permette di estrapolare quali canali di comunicazione risultano efficienti e come migliorarli. Il capitolo si conclude riportando dati provenienti da un esperimento sulla pratica dell'influencer marketing, proponendo consigli sia per l'influencer riguardo al proprio comportamento nella piattaforma social, sia per il brand riguardo a quale figura scegliere per promuovere i propri prodotti/servizi.

Il quarto capitolo indirizza l'elaborato verso la gestione della comunità online ed il ruolo del content marketing. Il capitolo si apre con la presentazione della "customer journey", il percorso che ogni cliente effettua dal momento in cui entra in contatto per la prima volta con il brand fino all'acquisto del prodotto/servizio e alla eventuale fase di fidelizzazione e trasformazione in ambasciatore del brand.

Viene successivamente esposta la pratica del content marketing, la creazione i contenuti per le piattaforme social dell'azienda e l'amplificazione degli stessi con particolare attenzione agli elementi rivolti alle comunità online. Il capitolo continua con l'esposizione di pratiche di content marketing ideali, realizzate da grandi brand quali GoPro, Starbucks e Lego, in grado di creare community di consumatori altamente fidelizzati e coinvolti nei valori del brand. Successivamente viene presentato il caso Tutor Audio, una piattaforma didattica riservata all'insegnamento della produzione musicale, la quale è stata in grado di creare una community di appassionati e professionisti del settore, fornendo contenuti di qualità ai propri utenti. Durante lo studio del caso è stato possibile intervistare direttamente il gestore della comunità online, ottenendo informazioni importanti riguardo la loro strategia social. Il capitolo si conclude con alcune strategie ideali di digital e content marketing basate sui risultati delle ricerche, degli esperimenti e delle testimonianze ottenuta durante la scrittura dell'elaborato.

# **1. CHAPTER I: MARKETING IN A DIGITAL WORLD**

## **1.1 TRADITIONAL AND DIGITAL MARKETING**

Marketing is defined as all the techniques utilized by the managers to promote, sell, and manage the relationship with clients of a product or service. It is important to point out that the main goal of marketing's strategies is to communicate the value of what the companies want to sell. This subject has passed several phases and has undergone several transformations due to the constant change in the economy and the consumer. It comes from the transition from an agricultural economy, based on self-consumption, to one characterized by the division of labor, industrialization, and diversification of incomes and consumption. Greater communication has led the individual to be more informed, more attentive to social issues, with constantly changing needs that the companies producing goods and services must be able to interpret and exploit as an advantage over their competitors.

Marketing consists of identifying and satisfying human and social needs through coherent and coordinated processes aimed at a dual objective: to create economic and social value for the offer; transferring functional, symbolic, emotional or experiential value to the demand. Among these processes, we find marketing analysis, which focuses on the exchange relationships between organizations and individuals (or public and government institutions), and marketing management, which represents the science of choosing target markets, acquisition and maintenance and growth of customers through the creation, distribution and communication of a higher value than competitors, through planning and feed-back activities. Marketing mainly works on: goods, services, events, experiences, people, places, properties, organizations, information, and ideas.

All marketing activities can be classified according to some basic variations, which are combined within the marketing-mix by Neil Borden, these are product, price, distribution, and communication. These

levers allow influencing the customer's perception of value, which by analyzing the benefits and performance of the product, will be attempted or not to purchase. Another traditional scheme used by companies to elaborate their marketing strategies is certainly the 4P paradigm of Jerome McCarthy, who identifies product, price, place, and promotion as fundamental elements to be defined. The third important scheme is represented by the pyramid of needs of Abraham Maslow based on a series of elements arranged in a hierarchical order that start from physiological ones such as hunger or thirst, indispensable to survive, to reach the needs of self-esteem and self-actualization, passing through those of safety and belonging.



**Figure I.1 “Maslow’s pyramid of needs”**

In the practical case, using this scheme, it is possible to identify and study the slice of target to which a product will be addressed, which, being also basic and predisposed to the realization of primary needs, could stimulate a sense of belonging and self-realization to a community as far as sponsored by famous influencers.

In support of marketing, several other branches are aimed at analyzing the consumer, understood as an individual who, thinking and continually subjected to countless influences, must be studied to interpret his decision-making processes.

We can identify three main orientations looking at the market. The first one is about the production, where the demand is greater than the supply, a few companies have to satisfy a large number of goods

using the price as the only element of competitive advantage. The second one is about the product/service, where the focus is on objective quality, without taking care of a multidimensional level concept composed by the perceived and expected quality defined by the consumers. The third orientation is about the sales, that takes place in a context where sales take place without taking into account the needs and the changes in the market during the time. All these three orientations have a common limit represented by the internal vision of the organization, without paying attention to the dynamics of the market and the need of the client, risking the market ouster. Over the years, consumer behaviour has changed, moving from unrestrained consumerism to much more thoughtful and socially conscious purchasing decisions.

When it comes to the web 3.0 and especially the expansion of social media phenomenon, we talk about the digital marketing, it is difficult to define because nowadays it's impossible to find marketing that produces effect only to the offline environment, but it's all related to the online aspect.

Digital marketing is the process by which a firm employs, either partially or exclusively, digital tools, techniques, and tactics to create value for its customers. Firms create goods and services (digital product) that meet customers' needs and wants, communicate (digital promotion) and deliver (digital place) those products, and lastly extract a portion of the value created (digital price) online. Collectively, these elements constitute a firm's digital marketing strategy.

In marketing, we talk about touchpoints, the points through which the company comes into contact with consumers. In the case of digital, the most important is the smartphone, the first element used by consumers to search for information.

In this modern marketing context, consumers have an active role in the business and are looking for the best experience through touchpoints. It is possible to say that in a society as fast as today, consumers are constantly bombarded with advertisements, so as to define two categories of users, the informed and

the distracted; in the digital context they are both valid, the purchase decisions are very thoughtful but at the same time, the great amount of information to which they are subjected every day, makes them vulnerable and distracted.

The key point of digital marketing is that of data analysis, which aims to improve the customer experience, accompanying a subject within a funnel path, which as a stranger to the channel, makes him become a potential customer, customer and finally ambassador. Obviously, during this journey, there will be a sort of skimming up to the consumer really interested in the product offered by the company, which will be its spokesperson, spreading a positive assessment of the brand.

It is now easy to understand why it is essential for the marketing division to create a communication strategy aimed at effectively qualified consumers.

## **1.2 MACRO-ENVIRONMENT. WHAT AFFECTS THE PURCHASE?**

The study of consumer buying behaviour examines how individuals, social groups and organizations choose, purchase, use and dispose of goods, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy their needs and desires. Marketing managers must study and understand consumer behaviour in order to design and implement efficient marketing activities.

Successful companies know how to recognize unsatisfied needs and new market trends even before they become emerging needs. So they are able to intercept them and design new market offerings, to generate a profit. Needs evolve in the track of trends that manifest themselves in the so-called macroenvironment, to which companies must necessarily pay attention. First of all, we need to distinguish between fad, trend, and megatrend.

A fad is an unpredictable element, of short duration and often without social significance. The advantage for companies is to exploit a fashion with the right timing to make money and beat competitors.

The trend is more predictable than fashion and certainly longer lasting; they are often analyzed by companies in order to organize a marketing policy strategy. An example is represented by fast-food chains. These, expanding into territories such as Italy, Greece, and Spain, have had to adapt their menus to local tastes, inserting healthier foods than other high-calorie products, precisely because of the spread of negative publicity that has created a trend towards consumption of healthy foods.

Megatrend is a great social, economic, political and technological change that can affect consumers for several years. In support of companies, companies that specialize in "cool hunting" are involved in studying emerging trends in order to recognize new opportunities or new threats.

The main forces of the macro-environment that companies must constantly keep under control are represented by demographic, economic, socio-cultural, environmental, technological, political and institutional. By monitoring these elements, it is possible to carry out measurements related to the

potential demand, assessments on achievable investments and actual sales forecasts on which useful results depend on feeding the business plan analysis and the activities of the managers.

According to the stage model, the consumer in his purchasing and consumption process generally goes through five phases (Fig. I.2).



**Figure I.2 “Purchasing and consumption model”**

- Perception of the problem, activated by internal or external stimuli (physiological impulses or marketing activities of companies).
- Search for information within personal, commercial, public or empirical sources.
- Evaluation of the alternatives offered by the market.
- Purchase decision, with the consequent choice of brand, point of sale, quantity, time of purchase and method of payment.
- Post-purchase behaviour, in which the consumer can experience a negative or positive gap with respect to their expectations.

The path through which a consumer goes through the phases of the decision-making process and the way in which the purchase choices are manifested depends on various factors that amplify or reduce the articulation and complexity of the process. These factors are: the kind of product purchased and consumed, the role played in the purchase or consumption, the place where the purchase takes place, the reasons behind the purchase and the way in which the research process takes place.

Recurring and typical behaviour of consumers is to experience a true state of anxiety after making a purchase, even those of ordinary routine. This state of anxiety is called cognitive dissonance, it derives from the fact that each of the alternatives that the consumer has taken into consideration when choosing presents advantages and disadvantages.

The chosen alternative, therefore, will have defects that the rejected alternatives did not have. The cognitive dissonance is much higher the more it increases the monetary value of the purchase made; the degree of attraction of the rejected alternatives; the importance relative to purchasing decisions (buying a house creates a cognitive dissonance greater than buying something of lesser value).

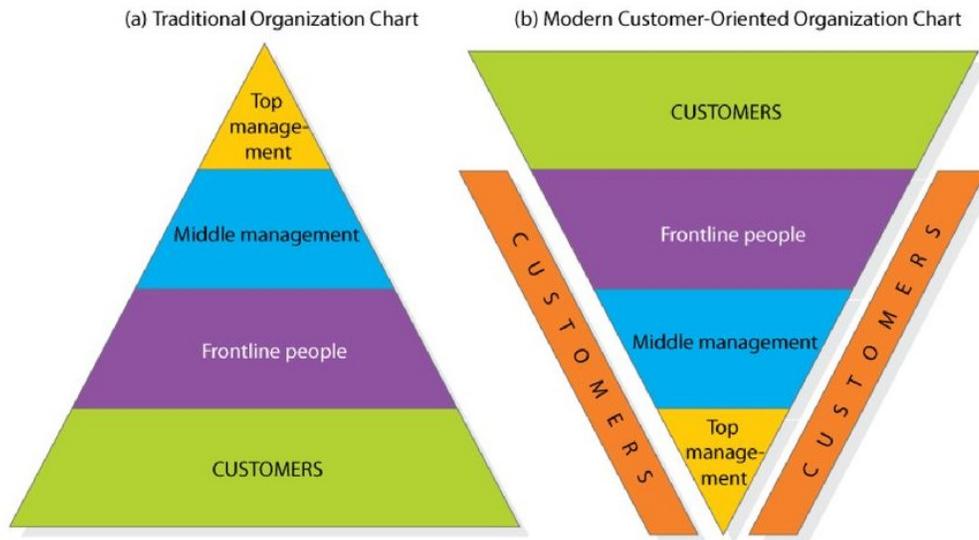
To reduce this dissonance, the consumer will try to obtain as little information as possible regarding the products discarded after the purchase, continually convincing himself about the goodness of the choice made (confirmation seeker), or he will try, before making the purchase, to turn the more stores, to try to understand which is the best choice to make.

It is possible to reduce post-sales dissonance by setting advertising campaigns in such a way as to give security to the consumer by giving greater importance to the advantages of the product offered and to arrive at a fundamental process of marketing: loyalty.

### **1.3 LOYALTY. VALUE CREATION, SATISFACTION, AND FIDELITY**

The consumer's response to marketing stimuli is never only rational, but also composed of an emotional nature, a brand or a product can make the consumer feel proud, excited or confident. This is part of the key concept of loyalty, the set of actions aimed at maintaining existing customers and is carried out mainly through a series of strategies aimed at creating the highest degree of Customer Satisfaction. Customer loyalty is stimulated and promoted by studying particular marketing actions that provide benefits, advantages or rewards from the sponsoring company to all consumers. In this way, the corporate brand is necessarily associated with positive characteristics, which the consumer remembers. The best way to increase customer loyalty is to achieve a high degree of satisfaction which translates into a high loyalty rate.

The marketing managers who obtain the best results are those who carry out the careful management of their customers. The strategy consists mainly of knowing how to meet or exceed customer value expectations and develop trust and loyalty to the point of generating collaborative relationships with customers. The companies that succeed most in this task have abandoned the traditional organization chart, with the top management at the top, the middle management in the central part, while the operators in contact with the public and the customers placed at the base (Figure I.2A), and adopt a new scheme that puts the client at the top of his organization chart, at the next level the staff that directly meets, serves and satisfies the customers, while at the base the managerial area, which hires intermediary managers and supports their work (Figure. I.2B)



**Figure I.3 “Customer-oriented organization chart”<sup>1</sup>**

With the spread of digital technologies, customers are always better informed and do not just expect companies to contact and satisfy them, but also to listen to them and respond to them with fair offers that are relevant to their aspirations.

Customers place greater value on the offer that can provide them with the highest satisfaction, affecting the likelihood that they will buy the product again. The value perceived by the customer is the relationship between the evaluation of all the benefits and all the costs of an offer compared to the alternatives. The search for loyalty takes place through specific customer value development programs, which will lead the customers being satisfied and willing to repurchase, despite the competition of other

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<sup>1</sup>“*Marketing Management*”; Philip Kotler, Kevin Keller; 2012

brands on the market.

Crucial to these purposes is the customer relationship management (CRM), a set of processes that help companies to collect and organize detailed information on individual customers to measure the status of the relationship and the value of the customer. Methods are designed to reinforce the relationship and increase customer warmth; interactions with customers are managed through the previously identified contact points, trying to establish the longest possible loyalty. The goal is, therefore, to transform current customers into consumers who praise the company, encouraging other people to turn to the company for their purchases.

## 1.4 FROM VERTICAL TO HORIZONTAL

When it comes to how to communicate with the customers in order to gain attraction, in the last years, we observed a shift from a vertical communication marketing to a horizontal one driven by different factors.

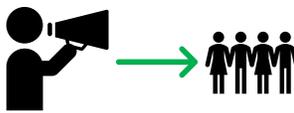


Fig.I.4A “Changes in communication”



Fig. I.4B

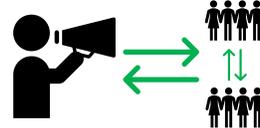


Fig. I.4B

First of all, let's define how it changed during the years. Starting from vertical communication we have only one way defined as “one to many” (Fig. I.2A) where the company can talk with all the customers in the same way this is the case when firms use billboards, newspapers ads, mass media, tv spots to promote their products. This methodology can reach a large range of audience but with a low degree of customization. The communication is considered one way because customers have no possibility to interact in the opposite way with the firm.

Thanks to the digital expansion and the Web 2.0 has been introduced new channels for a “one to one” communication (Fig. I.2B) where every single user can interact with the company but, only the company has the control on this interaction, allowing a more specified offer for the customers. This strategy is linked to relationship marketing with a customer relationship approach (CRM) that tries to bring loyalty to the customers towards the brand. In this way, firms can collect, differentiate and analyze data from customers and elaborate a high customizable communication campaign.

Nowadays there is no hierarchy and we have a “many to many” interaction (Fig. 1.2C), the so defined horizontal interaction. Looking closely at this scenario, we have the firm that communicates to the

customers its offer. The fundamental point of this new era of communication consists of the fact that people are much more interconnected than in the past, they get information and ask for advice through their networks. This brings the decision process about a purchase from individual to social; in fact it is possible to observe an increasing reliance on the part of clients for review platforms, such as Amazon's for general purchases or Tripadvisor for restaurants and tourism. The company, on its side, stands at the same level of consumers and this allows also greater transparency perceived by the clients and a need for collaboration with them to generate innovation. Customers welcome the communications offered by the brands with greater distrust but rather refer to their acquaintances, making the buying process more social.

One of the main factors of the change is technology thanks to all the new tools that we can use to manage this interaction, which has brought information sharing to a much higher level than in the past. Nowadays the power is on social groups, the informal conversations about brands are more credible instead of targeted advertisements indeed customers tend to follow relatives' and acquaintances' advises choosing a brand. Thanks to communities, even the buying processes become more horizontal, they rely more on their circle looking for reviews and asking for offline advice, rather than accepting passively brand communications. The customers themselves are becoming active means of communication. In this new era, one of the biggest errors that firms can do in defying their strategies is trying to implement a vertical approach in the digital world. Since 1999 the Cluetrain Manifesto talked about a logic made of relationships – “A powerful global conversation has begun. Through the Internet, people are discovering and inventing new ways to share relevant knowledge with blinding speed. As a direct result, markets are getting smarter, and getting smarter faster than most companies”<sup>2</sup>. and the 2015 edition

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<sup>2</sup> “*The Cluetrain Manifesto*”; Rick Levine, Christopher Locke, David Searls, and David Weinberger; 1999

states that marketing is conversations –“We were right, the markets are conversations - if we want to know the truth about your products we will find it elsewhere – we know that these conversations are extremely important to you, unfortunately they are ours”<sup>3</sup>. So in this new world a company must communicate transparently because in any case customers will be able to discover the truth. Another factor that shifted the communication from horizontal to vertical is globalization, the market gives ideas about what to produce and what are the trends and companies try to capture the market signals trying to satisfy their needs and, in the end reaching the advocacy stage.

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<sup>3</sup> “*The Cluetrain Manifesto*”, 2015 Edition; Rick Levine, Christopher Locke, David Searls, and David Weinberger; 2015

## 1.5 DIGITAL SUBCULTURES

Speaking of advocacy, the concept of word of mouth, or the flow of information that is created among consumers, about a product or service offered by the company must certainly be mentioned. While some segments base their preferences on personal experiences or advertising and the media used by companies, others base their own choices on information received by word of mouth, thus tending to ask and offer recommendations about a brand.

In the digital age, the set of individuals that constitute the beating heart of word of mouth, and at the same time of the marketing objectives to which companies must strive, is represented by digital subcultures, more specifically in young people, women, and netizens.

Young people are those who create the tendencies to which later-age individuals will have to tag along, not having the same mental agility. “According to a report by the United Nations Population Fund (UNPFA), in 2014 there were 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10 and 24, the highest number in human history, and their number will continue to grow. Interestingly, approximately 90 percent of them are living in less-developed countries. They are facing all sorts of life challenges to realize their full potential in education and career while managing social dynamics among their peers. Marketers are identifying and solving these challenges. The goal is to be relevant to young people's lives and therefore to gain access to their growing wallets”<sup>4</sup>. It is essential to focus on them as usually, the products positively reviewed by young people are more likely to establish themselves within the market and allow to identify trends for the near future. In this regard, the category of young people is defined as "early adopters", and it is those who are studied by companies to test the effectiveness of their products and stimulate brand activation.

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<sup>4</sup> “*Marketing 4.0, moving from traditional to digital*”; Philip Kotler, Hermawan Kartajaya, Iwan Setiawan; p.32; 2017

The second most important subculture in digital marketing is represented by women who are segmented into housewives, workers and career women. The roles they play in a buying process are mainly three: the first is to collect information, which is often well thought out, constantly establishing whether the previous collection was actually correct or not through continuous research and conversations about the brands. The second one is to involve a greater number of touchpoints, adopting a holistic approach. Women analyze different elements to determine the real value of a product or service, taking into account both their own needs and those of the entire family. The third concern the key role of financial managers of the house, as often it is not only the products that pass through these multiple decision-making paths, but also investments and financial services. So, companies need to analyze these processes to be able to respond to the needs of this consumer sector.

The third subculture is represented by the netizens, which are defined as those who actively participate in the life of the Internet, mainly promoting its development. Examples of users belonging to this category, it is possible to find them within the largest content creation platforms, such as Youtube, Facebook, Instagram, blog websites. They are not limited to observing and enjoying the contents, but they are active collectors and creators; they are characterized by a propensity to absolute sharing by establishing many-to-many conversations. As content creators, they classify and review the products or services of companies, spreading a positive or negative word of mouth. This may be the case of Youtuber who reviews various kinds of products within their own channels, which, having a large number of followers, are able to direct consumer choices. For this reason, brands must aim to make them evangelizes and bearers of positive word of mouth within the community. Nowadays we have “over 4.33 billion people were active internet users as of July 2019, encompassing 56 percent of the

global population”<sup>5</sup> [Appendix 1]

Together, these three categories represent the key to digital marketing, a company that can identify and satisfy their needs, will be able to propose a generally more efficient marketing strategy.

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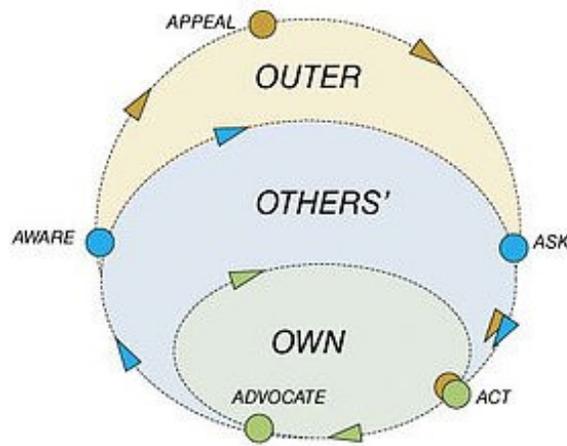
<sup>5</sup> “*Worldwide digital population as July 2019*”, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/617136/digital-population-worldwide/>, J. Clement, 2019

## **1.6 THE O ZONE**

The marketing 4.0 customer, from the moment he comes in contact with a brand, to the moment he buys the product/service offered by it, must follow through different stages, identified in 5A, which are Aware, Appeal, Ask, Act and Advocate.

In the "aware" stage (I know) customers are passively exposed to the communications of the brands, of which they subsequently become aware, entering the "appeal" phase (I like). Pushed by curiosity, customers come to ask for information about the brand, thus going through the "ask" phase, turning the journey from individual to social. If the information collected is positive and satisfactory, the customer will continue with the purchase, thus reaching the "act" phase (I'm buying). The final stage is characterized by the propensity to repurchase and advice to other individuals, effectively representing evangelists and promoters of positive word of mouth; this is called the "advocate" phase (I recommend).

The main objective of marketing 4.0 is, therefore, to make a customer aware of the existence of a brand, a positive promoter. To do this is required a strategy that can influence three main sources: one's own influence, others' influence, and outer's influences. These sources are enclosed within the O Zone, a tool able to help marketers to identify the effects that different types of influences generate on consumers. (Fig I.5).



**Figure I.5 “O Zone scheme”**

The own influence comes from the customer himself, is based on the experiences he had in the past with the brand and is often closely linked to the value and needs recognized by the individual customer. A customer is satisfied not only if he has had a good shopping experience, but also if the post-purchase service has been adequate.

The influence of others comes from a very restricted external environment, which could be that of friendships, relatives and spreads in the form of word of mouth. Alternatively, this type of influence also comes from social networking platforms, often driven by digital subcultures such as netizens. To push a customer to buy based on confidence in the others' opinion, it is essential to develop an adequate community marketing plan, involving the most loyal customers in the process of converting the customer towards the brand.

The last type of influence is outers' one. It comes from sources that are not related to the customer, which could be to advertising or other classic marketing communications, or directly from the staff in contact with customers. This type of influence, as it comes directly from the company, is certainly the

most controllable.

It is not excluded that the three types of influence can interact with each other, indeed, it is often the external advertising that through the word of mouth of a more restricted community, can orient the personal preferences of the customers. In consideration of the 5A's stages, those in which the customers are most influenced are the ask and act phases, that are those in which the client has more propensity to interact with the external environment in order to gather information and purchase. The consequence of the digital age is the increasing propensity on the part of consumers to base their purchasing decisions on others' opinions rather than personal ones, especially if these come from sources and platforms considered reliable. Researches shows that "the most used tools to base purchasing decisions are those of ratings and reviews, preferred by 63% of social media users"<sup>6</sup> [Appendix 2], because they let customers to understand real users' experiences.

The rise of referral marketing occurred following the awareness by companies that the buyer is no longer a passive, but active spectator. The consumer looks for information, reads opinions and asks for advice, he no longer relies on advertising. One of the most powerful tools in modern times is influencer marketing, the outline will be analyzed in the following chapters, but it consists in the use of highly followed people in social networks capable of influencing entire groups of people. The practice of spreading word of mouth has become critically important in digital marketing, as it is able to achieve higher conversion rates and faster sales closures. Through referral marketing, companies rely on current customers, who, cultivated to become ambassadors, do their best to spread the brand to other potential customers.

The next chapter will analyse how the influences and thoughts coming from the external sphere,

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<sup>6</sup> "*Which is the preferred source for product and service information*", Nielsen, 2015

constituted in an online community, will be an important element to which the company must refer to increase the attractiveness of the brand.

## **2. CHAPTER II: ONLINE COMMUNITIES**

### **2.1 ONLINE COMMUNITIES: THE “NEW SEGMENT”**

The historical period from 1983 to 1992 marked a change destined to become epochal in the life of every individual on the earth. These were the years in which the TCP/IP protocol was developed, a process capable of sending digital data in the same way as a traditional letter is sent. In 1990, with the advent of the HTTP protocol and the HTML language, the first hypertext browser/editor programs were created that led to the opening of the first website in the world, developed by CERN (European Center for Nuclear Research), giving made internet life. In 1995 Microsoft developed on its operating system, the first web browser named "Internet Explorer", able to connect users between them, guaranteeing them access to this new technology in development. The concept of social networks developed already in 1997, and then expanded in 2003 thanks to MySpace. This platform initially contained a blog, and later, due to a programming error, some users were able to customize their personal areas related to their profile. It was thanks to this casual fact that MySpace managed to involve a large number of users and decided to leave the problem unsolved.

In 2004, the nineteen-year-old Mark Zuckerberg, together with some university colleagues, defined, thanks to his Facebook platform, an even clearer and more restricted concept of social networks, that is an IT platform based on real profiles to stay in touch with known people.

The concept of community in the digital place arises thanks to all these developments. Usually people communicate through blogs, social networks, chatrooms and forums. Online communities are often born around a topic that is common to a group of people, who talk and advise each other about certain aspects, such as services or a specific product A simple definition is given by the business dictionary, that define the online community as “ a network of people who communicate with one another and with

an organization through interactive tools such as e-mail, discussion boards and chat systems”<sup>7</sup>. From this definition, we can extract some of the fundamental elements around which communities revolve. Some of these are: the content, what could be articles, information and news about a topic of common interest; a platform in which to communicate, which could be a forum and an instant messaging system to make these communications immediate and in real time.

Online communities differ from traditional ones mainly in the way of communicating and reaching the various members, in fact in the past the most important barrier was certainly represented by the geographical position, the communities could develop only if they were in the same geographical area. In the new web communities, thanks to the internet, sharing an interest or a conversation has completely broken down every type of barrier, a person from one continent can easily talk about a certain topic with another person in another continent. In a certain sense, we can say that compared to the past, a spontaneous first-step of targeting is created.

Online communities can be a public space hosted by social media sites, private versions run by brands on special community software, communities that facilitate customer support or scale customer advocates or provide customer feedback.

One of the first forms of online community is represented by those of forums, digital spaces that are part of a large central platform, which provides its users with completely customizable pages. Usually the forum revolves around a common topic, which could be that of motors, sports or a certain passion. It is then divided into several subsections where users communicate by opening discussions.

All this, especially in recent years, is moving towards social networks. Just Facebook, the largest social networking platform, through the "groups" function, which they are able to offer an added value to

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<sup>7</sup> “*Online community definition*”; <http://www.businessdictionary.com/>

companies if they are well managed as they allow to create cooperation and establish relations with the members. At the base of this work, there is the choice of a target audience that will create the community around the brand.

Communities rely on social community platforms, which are focused on collective relationships and activities in which users participate by sharing the same interest or identity factor. Building and maintaining relationships are the main reasons behind the development of social communities.

Social communities can be represented by:

- Social network sites (SNS): they are online hosts that allow their members to build and manage personal profiles, identify other members to whom they can connect (friends, followers or fans), participate using different services offered by the site (messaging, post, etc.) (E.g. Facebook, LinkedIn)
- Forums/Message Board: they are the oldest version of social media. These are interactive versions of electronic bulletin boards, where registered members can discuss, posting questions, opinions, news and photos. (E.g. Alfemminile.com, RCuniverse forums)
- Microsite: section of website dedicated to customer where they can interact each other, it's important to make sure that it is easy to navigate and follow conversation threads.

The Facebook algorithm has undergone a profound change precisely in favour of the working groups, and of the development of communities and relationships, in fact through its use, it is possible to note that a good 50% of the news is composed of news concerning the groups of which it is part, very often with a higher priority than other news.

The intention is to direct user traffic to the functions aimed at creating and expanding communities, as reported in the official note regarding the January 2018 update: "Today we use signals like many people

react to, comment on or share posts to determine how high they appear in News Feed. With this update, we will also prioritize posts that spark conversations and meaningful interactions between people. To do this, we will predict which posts you might want to interact with your friends about, and show these posts higher in feed. These are posts that inspire back-and-forth discussion in the comments and posts that you might want to share and react to—whether that’s a post from a friend seeking advice, a friend asking for recommendations for a trip, or a news article or video prompting lots of discussion.”<sup>8</sup>

The same Zuckerberg in an official note released in the same month, gave attention to the need for a change to make users more connected to each other, especially around the topics of interest to them: “One of our big focus areas for 2018 is making sure the time we all spend on Facebook is time well spent. We built Facebook to help people stay connected and bring us closer together with the people that matter to us. That's why we've always put friends and family at the core of the experience. Research shows that strengthening our relationships improves our well-being and happiness.”<sup>9</sup>

Companies that intend to propose marketing campaigns aimed at these communities will have to analyze their behaviour and monitor conversations. The ultimate goal of this analysis is to improve customer engagement, bringing it to the next levels of satisfaction and finally advocacy, the final stage of the customer loyalty process.

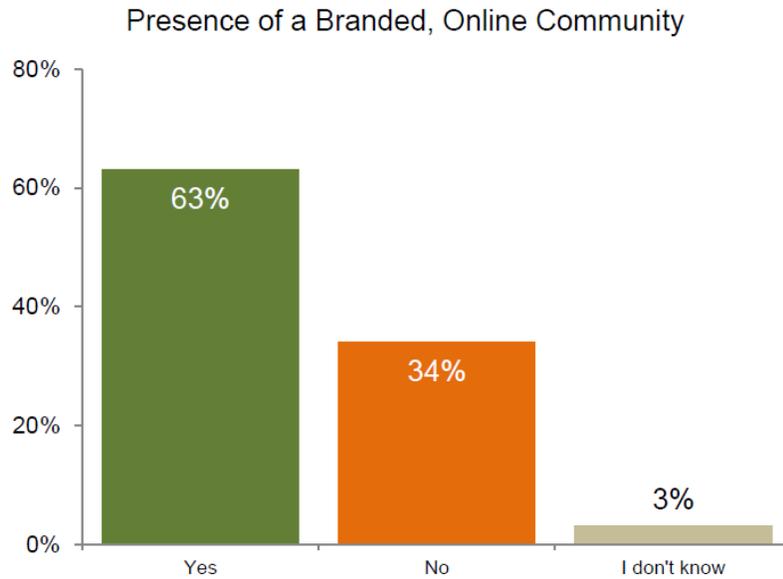
In a study conducted by Demand Metric, were analysed several companies with a revenue range of less than \$ 10 million to over \$ 1 million annually and asked why they were implementing branded communities and why they were not implemented. The analysis showed that two thirds of the companies

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<sup>8</sup> “*News Feed FYI: Bringing People Closer Together*”; <https://www.facebook.com/business/news/news-feed-fyi-bringing-people-closer-together>; Facebook Business, Adam Mosseri (head of news feed); 2018

<sup>9</sup> “*Bringing People Closer Together*”; Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook, 2018

make use of communities (Figure II.1), especially the large ones.

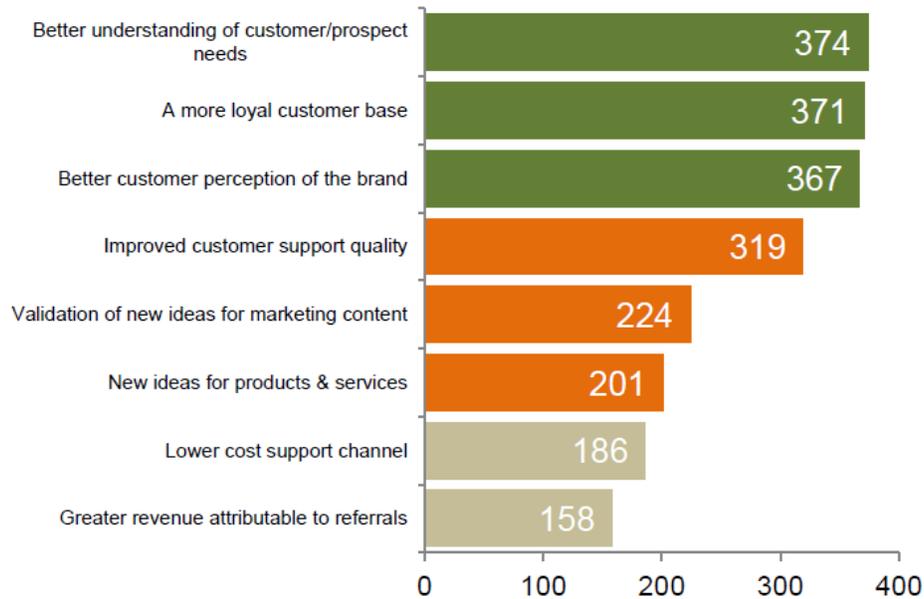


**Figure II.1 “Presence of branded online community”**

The reason behind the lack of implementation of the communities by the rest of the companies is to be attributed to the lack of necessary resources rather than a decision at the strategic level. The outputs of the implementation of a management of the communities, from a business strategy point of view, is mainly to support social media and identify upsell and cross-sell opportunities.

If we focus attention on the consumer, the fundamental objective is to understand and analyze accurately and from a direct and internal point of view the perception that customers have about the brand

## Branded, Online Community Benefits

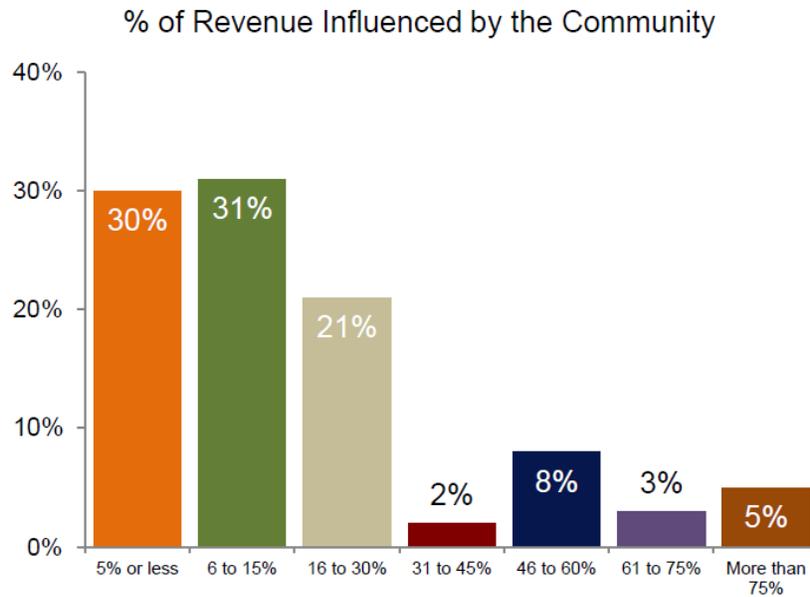


**Figure II.2 “Branded online community benefits”**

As shown in Figure II.2, the greatest benefits deriving from the exploitation of a branded community are certainly those of understanding the needs of consumers, followed by the creation of a greater customer base, useful for guaranteeing a constant fund of revenues. Other benefits that companies can derive are those of improving the quality of customer support, in fact, customers are more willing to dialogue within the community, rather than directly to the company, especially if it comes to reporting a complaint. The communities also act as a source of inspiration for the development of new ideas, as they represent stores of thoughts and desires of customers, on what they would like to have within the new products or services offered by the company.

The analysis of the data coming from the study of the communities is then used to create metrics that will then allow to determine the progress of the it, if the management is correct and to understand where

to act and what to change in the field of marketing and communication, to determine an increase in revenue contribution and ROI.



**Figure II.3 “Revenue influenced by the community”**

As can be seen from the graph in Figure II.3, the percentage of revenue influenced by the communities is up to 15% in the majority of cases, to then drop to 20% for percentages lower than between 16% and 30% and more percentages low but still significant for percentages greater than 50%.

As reported by Demand Metrics, “the formation of a community around a brand or cause isn’t a new phenomenon. Such communities have existed for decades, formally and informally. Those who manage communities have leveraged any technology available to facilitate better communication. LISTSERV is one example of technology that helped facilitate dialogue. Today, branded, online communities are more sophisticated, due in large part to the technology that powers them. The role of communities has evolved from simply offering information to engagement. Company owned communities are websites

that act as engagement engines. They enable companies to create social relationships with customers and prospects and to foster peer-to-peer relations that drive engagement with the company, brand, product or service. As communities are discussed in the balance of this report, the assumption is that they are branded: built, curated and managed under the banner of a specific brand, and integrated into one or more aspects of that brand's online presence.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “*Online communities: driving customer engagement & influencing revenue*”; benchmark report; Demand Metric Research Corporation; 2014

## 2.2 TYPES OF COMMUNITIES

Communities can be generally classified according to the factors that influence the company and the brand and whether they are public or private.

Companies can derive from public communities, a real-time method to monitor customer's feeling about the brand, products and marketing campaigns. Private communities are born precisely because of the need to have a more limited control over public communities, with the possibility to interact on the doubts and complaints of the members, learning from them to improve the customer experience and create trust and brand awareness. Vanessa Thompson, research director at IDC's Enterprise Social Network and Collaborative Technologies says that: "The nature of business interactions is moving toward ongoing communication and building relationships and away from prescriptive and responsive interactions, Organizations will focus on driving brand awareness as well as having ongoing conversations with customers. This is particularly suited to online communities where brands can quickly build a trusting relationship with customers, employees, partners and suppliers."<sup>11</sup>

We can identify four types of online communities: social, support, advocate and insight communities. We need to identify a clear strategy and goals to understand what kind of community to act on. The following table from visioncritical.com immediately summarizes what these types of communities are and on what elements they act by allowing companies to choose the type that best suits their needs:

- Social Communities: Social communities are those that arise from social network platforms, such as, for example, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Companies make use of social networks to understand the main trends of the moment, monitor the activities of competitors

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<sup>11</sup> "Building Relationships"; <https://www.idc.com/getdoc.jsp?containerId=257492>; Vanessa Thompson

and store information and attitudes about customers. These are the ideal platforms to allow a demographic targeting of customers. An element to which companies must be careful in the analysis of social communities, is certainly that of not relying solely on these data, as some may provide false consumer preferences. In addition, social networks are difficult to control, and unpredictable. The main strength of social communities is certainly in being able to establish a direct channel in real time between the company and consumers, in order to monitor the feelings about the product and to the brand.

- **Support Communities:** These communities are instead created by the brands to allow communications with customers within a space that is decidedly more controllable than that of social communities. In fact, software is used to host users and encourage them to collaborate and converse. One of the main purposes is to lighten the task of customer service, allowing users to respond to one another regarding certain problems they may have encountered, giving them advice and solutions to solve. What is created is a sort of mutual support rather than a conversation around the brand, which is instead the main purpose of social communities. Companies can also benefit from monitoring members to identify the key problems that affect them and develop new ideas to stem problems.
  
- **Advocate Communities:** This third type of community is mainly made up of loyal customers who become effective testimonials of the brand, promoters of positive word of mouth and bearers of enthusiasm among customers, increasing the impact of companies on social media network. The most used method to transform a normal customer into a brand ambassador is that of gamification, that is to guarantee the user a prize for his own contribution. All this allows companies to increase brand awareness by creating advertising through their

testimonials, also reducing costs for eventual advertising and social campaigns. “A key component of online community design is the way in which members are rewarded for their community engagement via a user reputation signal, an indicator of an online participant’s past behaviour or lack thereof”<sup>12</sup>. The GoPro action camera manufacturer, for example, uses the gamification method. In fact, through the “GoPro Awards” initiative, the best shots/videos are rewarded with discounts of hundreds of euros on products from the same company. In this way, customers on the one hand feel they belong to a lively and stimulating community, on the other they will try to promote their shots on social networks using the brand's hashtag, thus generating curiosity among other users and consequently further publicity.

- Insight Communities: The fourth type of community that we can find in the digital era is represented by the Insight Community. This is certainly the most restricted and the one to rely on most especially in the product/service test phase. In fact, the users that form this type of community are those who will bind to the company in a long-term relationship, wishing to provide useful feedback to the company for future development. The data extrapolated from the comments of the insights are much more accurate than those deriving from the other types of community, precisely because of the continuous and lasting contact with the brand. The main object of insight communities is to test marketing concepts, product ideas and provide the customer experience found in products, very often still in the form of prototypes. Often the users who are part of it are the same as those of the advocate community, that is, customers who become ambassadors of the brand they care about. These aims have a double aspect: on

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<sup>12</sup> “*Establishing online trust through a community responsibility system*”; Ba S.; Decision Support Systems; 2001; Pages: 323-336

the one hand the company can collect accurate and meaningful data regarding the experience that users have had in the testing phase; on the other hand, users feel they are an integral part of the decision-making process and the development of the company's ideas, observing how their opinions influence the company's choices. The essential requirement that the brands must respect in the use of insight communities is that of transparency in communication by establishing a two-way dialogue with customers, reporting how the feedback received influenced the company's decision-making. Examples can be found in companies that use this type of community, especially in the digital sector, as in the programming of the launch of new streaming platforms, or new software functions for videogames products, in this case under the name of beta/alpha versions or in testing new strategies for customizing and selling products of companies that operate online. Users become involved in the development of new products, in an open innovation concept in which the design process is not only linked to internal divisions but also open to external sources. When users have a specific role within the community, the engagement is positively affected: "From a managerial perspective, this work highlights the importance of considering reputation as a consumer brand online tool community. When it comes to reputation signals, choosing one that can evoke a social role is important, particularly for new community members. These insights have implications for community managers as they have the ability to personalize the online consumer experience and change the way that user reputation is emphasized or deemphasized"<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "*Adaptive personalization using social networks*"; Chung et al.; Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science; 2016; Pages: 66-87

## 2.3 BRANDS' COMMUNITY VS USERS' GENERATED COMMUNITY

Communities can be born spontaneously, formed on the basis of a common interest, or purposely generated by companies precisely to exploit the fact the resulting benefits they bring in the formulation of corporate strategy.

The self-created communities are generated around a product/service or a set of them belonging to a brand. This community is made up of users who share their experiences in a completely autonomous way, not therefore induced by the company through review platforms or other means directly linked to the brand. An example could be a blog, a forum or a Facebook group created and managed by users. The peculiarity lies precisely in the fact that there has been no type of manipulation by the company being discussed, but it is precisely the spontaneity that characterizes it. Usually this type of community is generated around niche brands that sometimes have not yet developed a communication plan aimed at creating a community, but which, thanks to their products, have generated great interest among consumers. The key object of the communities, especially those generated spontaneously is mutual help and advice. "Reciprocity captures voluntary, discretionary behaviours to help those who have helped the actor previously, as well as other members of a virtual community who need assistance. Participation in an online community leads consumers to believe that they will receive reciprocal support from other members, should they face difficulties in the future. Thus, online communities facilitate communal, rather than simply exchange-oriented, relationships."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "*Online relationship marketing*"; Lena Steinhogg, Denni Arli, Scott Weaven, Irina V. Kozlenkova; Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science; 2019; Pages 369-393

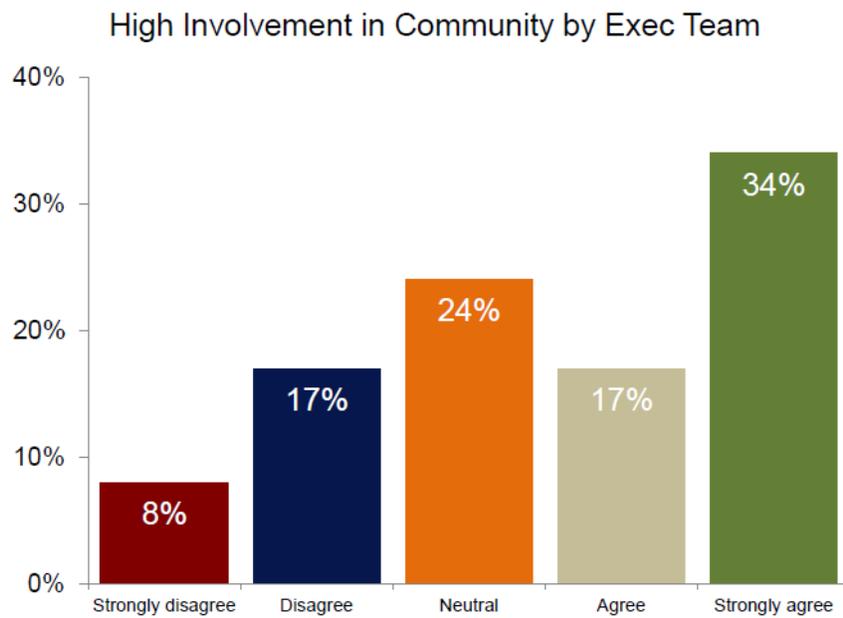
The communities that are generated by the brands are those that are created and managed by the brands themselves. The term brand community was defined in 2001 by Muniz Albert M. and Thomas C. O’Guinn as “A specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand”<sup>15</sup>. An example is the company's main social page, which publishes content to capture users of the social media platform. In parallel, the social page or company website can refer to blogs, forums, or Facebook groups with other platforms aimed at creating online communities, which are in any case directly linked to the brand. The fundamental advantage that derives from the creation of a brand community is that of stimulating the sense of belonging by consumers towards the brand, above all thanks to the adoption of initiatives aimed at making users participate in the development of corporate ideas. In this regard, Starbucks, the most American coffee chain of its kind in the world, has launched the initiative “What’s your Starbucks idea?” which allows to listen to consumers' ideas by filling out a form with their proposals for new types of products or improving an existing one. Another example is represented by the Danish company Lego, a famous toy manufacturer, through the creation of a community in which to express opinions about designs and a voting system, users can propose their projects and see the ideas accepted with greater number of votes. This is a way to make the brand viral by stimulating participation and engagement and will be discussed in the next chapters.

Another point to be analyzed is the eventual participation by the executive team in the communities, again through the study conducted by Demand Metric it emerges that the longer a branded, online community has been in place, the more likely it is for executives to have high levels of involvement in

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<sup>15</sup> “*Brand Community*”; Journal of Consumer Research; Muniz Albert M. Jr. and Thomas C. O’Guinn; 2001; Pages: 412-32

those communities. There are certainly communities born out of executive vision, but this data seems to imply that it's more common for executives to come on board over time, ramping up involvement as communities mature and begin to produce results that executives care about.



**Figure II.4 “High involvement in community by executive team”**

The engagement can be divided into two dimensions, internal engagement and external engagement. In the internal one the executive team is directly involved in the community while in the external one the engagement is given by the members of the community, in mature communities it was noticed that the external engagement was more present, this could be from the fact that a community composed of more active and efficient members, it needs confirmation of participation by the brand itself, which, through the executive team directly involved, demonstrates direct communication aimed at collaborating with the needs of customers.

The involvement of the brand directly within the community, with official figures of reference among the members, allows a more horizontal communication, where the company is on the same level as consumers, making them feel like actual collaborators of the company project.

The adoption of the community needs a constant analysis of the progress of the same, above all of the way the members interact, to understand how it is evolving and on which elements to focus. To do this, is possible to use social listening techniques and understanding of the social interactions that will be the subject of the next chapter are necessary.

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### 3 CHAPTER III: COMMUNITY DETECTION AND LISTENING

#### 3.1 NETNOGRAPHY

There are several techniques aimed at detecting and managing online communities, one of these is “netnography”. The concept of netnography was developed by Robert Kozinets and was defined at its origins as: “a new qualitative method devised specifically to investigate the consumer behavior of cultures and communities present on the internet”.<sup>16</sup>

The method of netnography, therefore, transforms the concepts of ethnographic practice into applications for the study of human behaviours in online communities. The objective of this discipline is to study human beings and investigate them without interfering with them, therefore with a non-invasive approach. Those who apply this technique, enter the community not showing up as researchers, participate in conversations and establish relationships, also developing empathy with other members.

Two key concepts to develop genuine conversations with community members are sociality and emotion. Researchers and brands that are sociable, have no problems communicating with their consumers and involve them through their communication channels. In turn, customers will feel listened to and involved, therefore more likely to publish content and foster mostly positive conversations with brands. The other fundamental element to be able to establish conversations with consumers is that of emotion, in fact, through emotions, brands can exert a greater influence in the minds of customers, convey engaging messages and induce customers to act in a certain way.

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<sup>16</sup> “*On Netnography: Initial Reflections on Consumer Research Investigations of Cyberculture*”; Robert V. Kozinets; in *NA - Advances in Consumer Research* Volume 25, eds. Joseph W. Alba & J. Wesley Hutchinson, Provo, UT : Association for Consumer Research; 1998; Pages: 366-371.

In another publication, Kozinets extends the definition with: “Ethnography is an anthropological method that has gained popularity in sociology, cultural studies, consumer research, and various other social scientific fields. The term refers both to fieldwork, or the study of the distinctive meanings, practices, and artefacts of particular social groups, and to the representations based on such a study. Ethnography is an inherently open-ended practice. It is based on participation and observation in particular cultural arenas as well as acknowledgment and employment of researcher reflexivity.”<sup>17</sup>

Netnography, as part of the social listening process, which will be analyzed later, considers these elements to generate attraction in conversations and stimulate community members to talk about the brand. It differs from social listening in that those who practice it become an active participant in online communities, with a more immersive approach.

The communities in which netnography is most effective are usually those managed by users and therefore the user-generated community as their members are more likely to talk about the brand without limitations, in a completely spontaneous way.

Netnography requires those who practice it to gather information on what the feeling is about the researched object, developing empathy with the members and understanding what information can be useful to the company to change or develop new marketing and communication strategies.

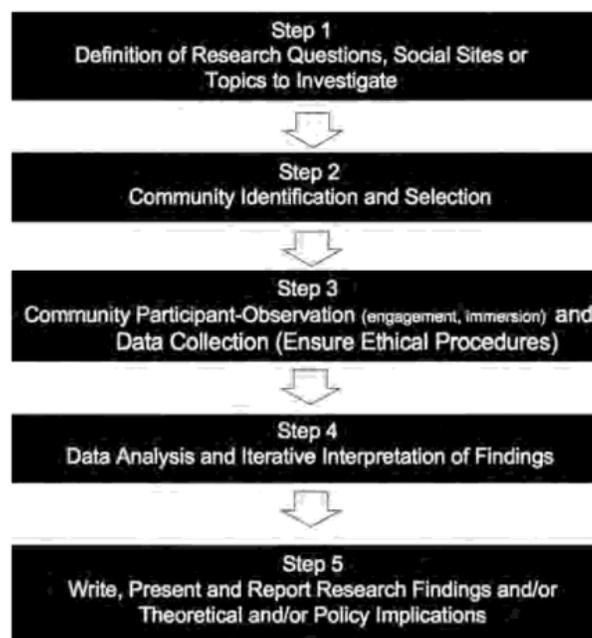
The pivotal point of netnographic practice is to carry out an analysis using face-to-face approaches with community members: “The main advantage, of the netnographic approach, was that I was gathering experiential, naturalistic, and interactional information from newsgroups and private bulletin boards. These were naturally occurring conversations, not primed focus group interviews, not one-on-one

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<sup>17</sup> “*The Field Behind the Screen: Using Netnography for Marketing Research in Online Communities*”; Robert V. Kozinets; Journal of Marketing Research; Vol. XXXIX; February 2002, Pages: 61-72

querying, it was in some way as if I was performing an ethnography but was wearing my invisibility jacket - a netnographer must attend to the goal of a complete immersion in the phenomenon, just as must an ethnographer - it takes an experienced and adept ethnographer to be a good netnographer. Without detailed cultural acknowledge and an ability to follow a cultural investigation through to all of the touchpoints that matter (both F2F and virtual), a netnography is not going to have the impact or reliability that it needs to have in order to inform important decisions or build valid understanding.”<sup>18</sup>

To carry out the research, the netnographer have to follow a series of protocols:



**Figure III.1 “Netnography protocol”**

The first step involves a definition of the research plan that we want to carry out, initially identifying

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<sup>18</sup> “Click to Connect: Netnography ad Tribal Advertising”; Journal of Advertising Research; Robert V. Kozinets; York University; 2006; Pages: 279-285

the platform we want to use, and the object of the research based on the needs of the company. The second point is that in which the ideal community is identified to carry out such research which will then be analyzed through direct immersion among the participants. At this point, researchers will also need to stimulate engagement with members and encourage them to talk about the brand in a genuine and direct way by exploring the relationships that are created. The data is then collected and reported in writing to understand what the strategic implications for the brand may be.

Hine, in its publication "Virtual Ethnography" sceptically defines netnography as an element that may be important but that nevertheless derives from netnography and which constitutes its virtual interpretation, valuing how it can be useful for exploring relationships to internal community: "Virtual ethnography is not only virtual in the sense of being disembodied. Virtuality also carries a connotation of not quite, adequate for practical purposes even if not strictly the real thing – virtual ethnography is adequate for practical purposes of exploring the relations of mediated interaction, even if not quite the real thing in methodologically purist terms. It is an adaptive ethnography which sets out to suit itself to the conditions in which it find itself"<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> "*Virtual Ethnography*"; Christine Hine; University of Surrey; UK; 2000; Pages: 63-6

### 3.2 SOCIAL LISTENING AND MONITORING

Analyzing the interactions that are created between the members of a community or the users of an online platform, can be useful to study the perception of brands by consumers, identifying which elements can generate greater engagement, and what are the latent desires and customers' anxieties.

Social listening is the process of monitoring conversations in the digital world to proactively understand what is being said about the brand and the online industry, especially within social media and in online communities. “Social listening occurs in a variety of mediated contexts, but it has yet to be clearly defined in the realm of communication and listening studies - we describe social listening as a dimension of listening comprising a blend of purposes complementary to the existing appreciative, comprehensive, critical, discriminative, and therapeutic listening types - as mediated communication continuously evolves within the communication landscape, the urgency to understand social listening will surely increase. With this in mind, we introduce and define social listening as an emerging type of listening and as a means of attaining interpersonal information and social intelligence that can empower relationships and influence the way we listen to and communicate with one another through increasingly popular mediated channels.”<sup>20</sup>

The goal is therefore to provide feedback on what is the current sentiment regarding the brand, in order to create targeted and more attractive offers, both in the sense of new products or services, and in the form of more targeted communications and content. The analysis of the data coming from digital platforms is then processed by software that provides useful information for customer intelligence.

Social listening is useful for carrying out market research, as they provide more truthful data than

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<sup>20</sup> “*Defining Social Listening: Recognizing an Emerging Dimension of Listening*”; Margaret C. Stewart & Christa L. Arnold; *International Journal of Listening*; Volume 32, 2017 Pages 85-100

traditional marketing interview. If we take a call center call interview as an example, the client might be more reluctant to provide information as it creates a feeling of direct control, or he knows that the conversation is in place for market research purposes. Conversely, the analysis of a conversation within a social network, if born on a spontaneous basis, such as could happen in a community, provides data on what is the true perception of the brand by of the consumer. The consumer in fact in the community communicates with other users as if he were in a conversation with a friend and relative, providing praise or concerns about the product or service.

The social listening is composed of a first phase in which social media channels are monitored concerning one's brand/business and the most popular trends are identified. Subsequently information is collected to understand what actions to take to improve the brand reputation.

However, a distinction must be made between social monitoring and social listening.



**Figure III.2 “Differences between social monitoring and social listening”**

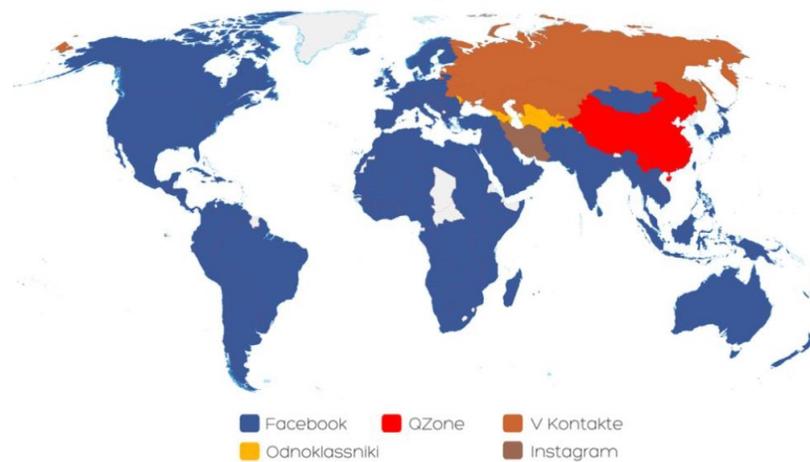
Social monitoring includes all actions aimed at tracking and responding quickly to customer messages about their products and services. A customer who feels heard even in the complaint phase can develop a positive concept of the brand when it responds to its own needs by taking on the problem. Social listening, on the other hand, analyzes the general feeling about the brand, in a broader conception, it

identifies which is the perception.

Social listening thus provides a true picture of the social dynamics in the communities. The next step will then be the intervention by special members for netnographic research purposes, which will direct the conversations towards the aspect that he wants to analyze, without however showing up as researchers, but simple members of the community. Social listening can be done, as well as in the brand's proprietary channels, also within community aggregation platforms, among these there is Reddit, a famous platform especially within the United States that offers users, defined as Redditor to create conversations about any topic. In fact, the platform features a classification of the contents by alphabetical order, referring to thousands of conversations, from current situations to speeches relating to brands. The platform is highly flexible in terms of content, and is the creator of content, in fact it addresses the basis for content creators, who are self-managing their own conversations. Also, in the political sphere, Barack Obama uses the platform in the political propaganda phase, generating a site for the large amount of traffic generated.

### 3.3 SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS

Since the rise of social networks, the analysis of its contents has been fundamental to understand if a company has developed a marketing and communication plan that is adequate to the objectives set and to identify any margins for improvement.



**Figure III.3 “World map of social networks”**

There are several social networks that are used based on the geographical location. For example, according to data dating back to January 2018, in Europe and the Americas the dominant platform is Facebook, with a monthly number of users active in the world of 2.3 million in the second quarter of 2018 [Appendix 3] and an average of 30.000.000 monthly users in Italy [Appendix 4] In eastern areas, on the other hand, other social media such as QZone and Odnokiasniki have developed. The demographic composition of the users of these platforms is as varied in data as in the level of education or employment rate [Appendix 5].

The use of social networks has also allowed an improvement in the customer care service, and it is on this aspect that users show a greater interest or feel themselves listened to and have an immediate source

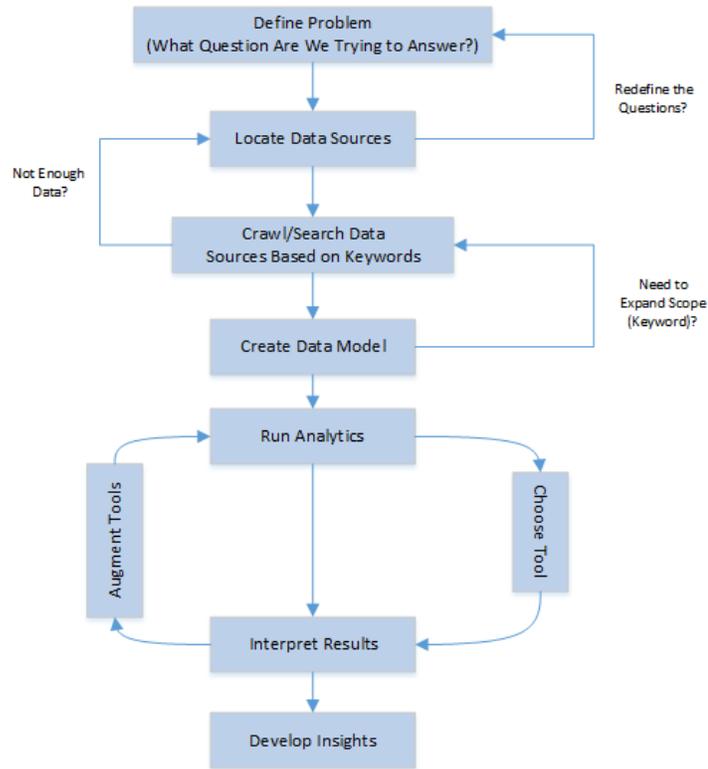
to solve their problems with the product offered by the company.

Social platforms are sources of data useful for monitoring the performance of company business; this analysis process takes place through social media analytics also defined as, “the art and science of extracting valuable hidden insights from vast amounts of semi-structured and unstructured social media data to enable informed and insightful decision making.”<sup>21</sup>

The social media analysis is carried out through three main phases: a first phase is made up of the identification of the data, in which a large amount of information is collected regarding a sector and then carried out a first screening by filtering the data that can be significant for the analysis in question. This first step is therefore characterized by a rather general analysis, as may be the language that was used in the platform, the platform itself that was used, the geographical region of origin of the users, the type of content (which may be a text, a photo rather than a video). All these data are catalogued in a time frame to understand if a given event is subject to seasonality or to a particular event.

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<sup>21</sup> “*Digital analytics for marketing*”; Marshall Sponder, Gohar F. Khan; New York; Routledge; 2018



**Figure III.4 “Social media analysis scheme”**

We then enter into a first phase of the analysis of the collected data, ie the process that transforms the raw data into insight. The analysis of the data is carried out trying to interpret not only the content of the elements published by the users, but also the feeling, to understand which are the drivers that generated it.

To understand a priori if an element can be significant to analyze the communication strategy is almost impossible, which is why it is important to carry out a collection of data based on the topic of interest but as broad as possible, so as to subsequently choose which data to use based on its correlation with others.

The search for information within social media platforms often takes place through the use of keywords, or keywords that create a filter of content in web traffic. The most striking example is represented by hashtags, they can be defined as containers in which all the concepts linked to a common topic converge.

The hashtag is a new form of bottom up content classification. On a marketing prospective it is very important because users that uses the same keywords do not know each others but they share they interest, they are part of the same network, same community and the same segment. Marketers can understand what the sentiment is, the objects or who are the influencers (the most relevant users on a hashtags)

Once the data has been collected, we try to understand which link one can have on the other by undertaking analytical analyzes. Data analysis allows to identify the rebound rate, the organization of the content and whether the customer target is correct or not, understanding where to act to improve the consumer experience. Once the audience to which the search is addressed has been determined, it is necessary to determine the degree of education of the same, for example a user with greater knowledge will use more specific terms and will be able to provide more truthful feedback on his experience of use of the product/service and will have by consequence, different expectations.

In order to help the interpretation of the data deriving from the analysis, the business intelligence comes, that can be described as: “a set of techniques and tools for the acquisition and transformation of raw data into meaningful and useful information for business analysis purposes”<sup>22</sup>

In summary, initially there is a segmentation of the audience, classifying users based on their degree of preparation regarding the topic of discussion, and the degree of advocate they have towards the brand.

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<sup>22</sup> “*IBM Cognos business intelligence: Discover the practical approach to BU with IBM Cognos business intelligence*”; Adkison D.; Birmingham England: Packt Publishing/Enterprise; 2013

Subsequently, the main topics of interest are identified within the social platform, which are the communities and the feeling within them. The next step is to understand if the feeling found differs in a positive or negative way compared to those of the competitors in the same sector and consequently understand what the conversion rate of users between the brand and its competitors is. The final point of the analysis of a social media platform is to interpret how the relationships between the elements described above influence consumers' propensity to buy and what are the factors on which to push to manipulate and influence their decisions.

“Social media presents a promising, albeit challenging, source of data for business intelligence. Customers voluntarily discuss products and companies, giving a real-time pulse of brand sentiment and adoption.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> “*Business intelligence from social media: a study from the VAST box Office Challenge*”; Lu Y., Wang F., Maciejewski R.; IEE Computer Graphics and Applications; 2014

### **3.4 INFLUENCER MARKETING: THE EXPERIMENT RESULTS**

Since the spread of social media, digital marketing strategies have had the goal of amplifying the brand's content within the online network. One of the most common examples in modern times is represented by influencers. Influencers are internet users who through their content also passively and actively influence their followers, they are particular experts emerging with strong voices or magnetic insights. They can be classified into three main classes: microinfluencer, macroinfluencer and celebrity.

The macroinfluencer has a high amount of followers (usually from 25.000) and has the ability to influence them not only for his notoriety, but especially for his credibility and reliability through a relationship of trust cultivated over time. Brands exploit the success of macroinfluencers to stimulate the word of mouth. The user, even if he does not know the influencer personally, tends to trust their opinion because he feels he is a part of his life and has the illusion of having a direct relationship with him.

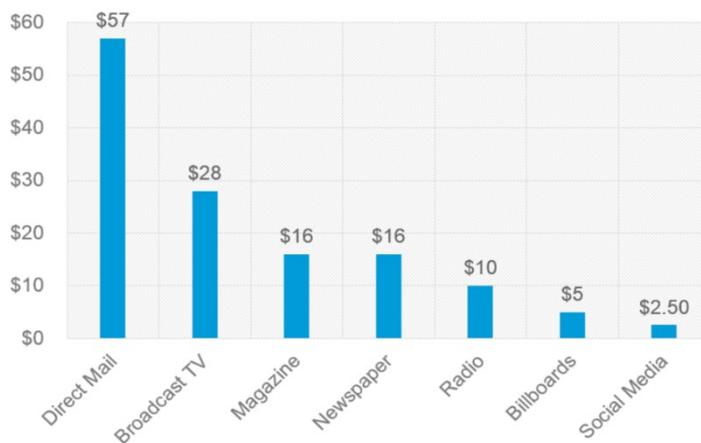
The microinfluencer is characterized by a closer relationship with their followers based on the fact it has the lower number of followers between these three categories, has a more solid and real relationship and differs from the macroinfluencer precisely due to a minor separation between influencers and the public. For the brand, the adoption of a microinfluencer for its marketing strategy certainly entails a lower cost than an influencer with a higher follower pool. According to a Later report, micro-influencers have higher engagement rates on their posts.

Finally, the celebrity is an individual characterized by a big number of followers thanks to his VIP status and his position power; it will therefore necessarily be followed as a macroinfluencer is. Unlike macroinfluencers, celebrity often becomes a model to follow for his lifestyle.

The common thread that links these three categories is the presence of a social capital that is created

through the building of personal brand. Social capital is defined as “the value of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging diverse people, with norms of reciprocity”<sup>24</sup>, and is able to create engagement, a very important element in the choice of influencers to be integrated into their strategy as it is an indication of how many followers are truly interested in an influencer’s content.

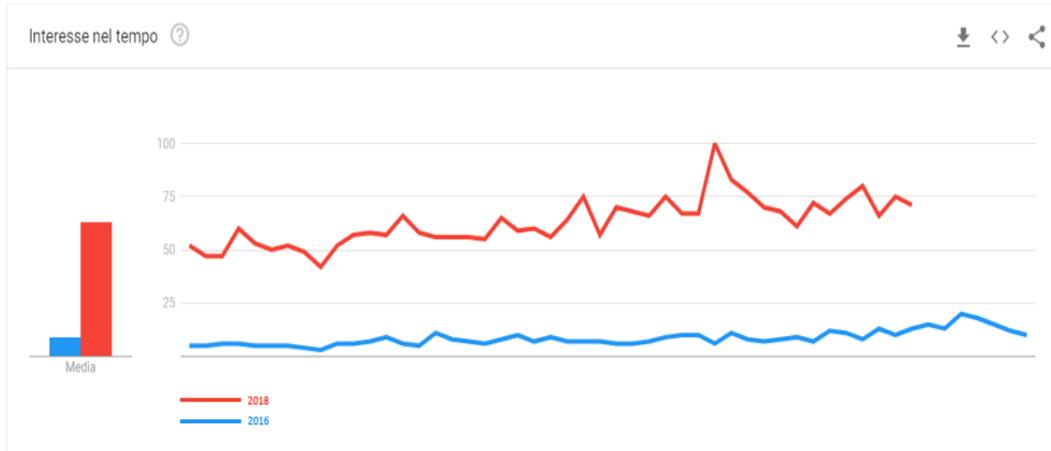
Analyzing the data, they show that social media is the channel that allows to reach a comparative advantage compared to others traditional channels like magazine, newspaper, radio and billboards.



**Figure III.5 “Usage’s cost of communication channel”**

The social media influencer represents a growing phenomenon, in fact, according to data from Google Trends, the Google Search for "Instagram Influencer" in 2018 (red line) grew by almost 700% compared to 2016 (blue line).

<sup>24</sup> “*Social Capital and Participation in Everyday Life*”; Dekker P., Usaner E. M.; Roulledge; 2001



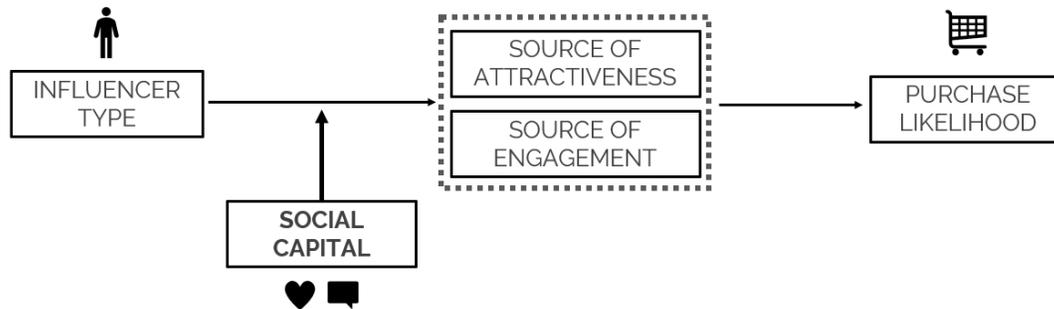
**Figure III.6 “Google search for Instagram influencers”**

The main platform for influencer marketing is Instagram. Many companies are increasing the budget reserved for these strategies.

In this regard, a study will be presented below to investigate the different effects of types of influence to analyze the effect of the level of influence on social capital to provide managers with useful information on how to choose the best social media influencer and for influencers on how to behave to foster engagement. The social capital, as already defined is the investment in social relations by individuals through which they gain access to embedded resources to enhance expected returns of instrumental or expressive actions. Three processes can be identified for modelling social capital: Investment in social capital; access to and mobilization of social capital and returns of social capital. The possible returns on investment in social capital can be economic, political and social.

The main hypothesis of the experiment is aimed at demonstrating that the presence of answers has a positive impact on the purchase likelihood. The conceptual model of the experiment starts from the identification of the influencer type, which will have its social capital and stimulates the purchase

likelihood through source of attractiveness and source of engagement.



**Figure III.7 “Influencer experiment: conceptual model”**

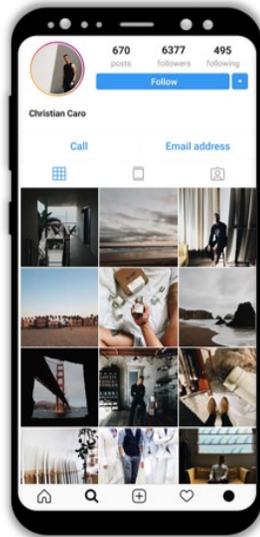
The first object of discussion of the experiment is about social capital manipulation, through the presentation to the analyzed subjects of three different types of interactions, based on the quantity, quality and behaviour of the influencer. The experiment takes place through the presentation of two posts in the form of a static-group comparison, with a 2x2 matrix composed of the distinction between micro and macroinfluencer on one hand and the presence of responses by the influencer itself or by other users delivered through four different survey. The tool used to generate the questionnaire was that of Google Form with the help of Google Script to randomize the sending of the 3 different types of questionnaires [Appendix 7] to around 120 respondents.

At the beginning the experiment presented have 3 different idea one based on the interaction by quantity and so how many like an influencer is able to collect under a single post, the second one was interaction by quality and so about wich kind of comment we can find under a specific post , if they are relevant or not with the product of the post and finally the main and definitive decision of the influencer behaviour so how the influencer directly interact with his follower.

The first manipulation took place by submitting to the respondents the Instagram profile of a

microinfluencer and a macroinfluencer, presenting them with the same name and the same contents published, what changes is only the number of followers between micro and macroinfluencer.

### MICRO INFLUENCER



### MACRO INFLUENCER



**Figure III.8 “Influencer experiment: first manipulation”**

The questions regarding these first images were related to what the respondents thought of the profile, such as the average age of the followers, the kind of interests to which the profile belonged and what link existed between the influencer and the followers (friends, relatives, fans, commercial partners).

The second manipulation is about the creation of social capital and was performed by presenting the same content published by the same influencer, with the difference that while in one picture the answers belonged to the influencer trying to generate social capital through interaction, in the other they belonged to general people. We decide to use a general brand of drink for not influence the attention of the respondent and comment on the right.



**Figure III.9 “Influencer experiment: second manipulation”**

The questionnaire presented questions such as the choice of a degree of preference with respect to the propensity to purchase the exposed product, the type of possible interaction that the respondent would have (comment, like, sharing, word of mouth). The questions were aimed at understanding which type of post generated the most interaction.

The analysis of the data from the questionnaire showed that:



**Parameterschätzer**

Abhängige Variable: Purchase likelihood

Parameter	Regressionskoeffizient	Standard Fehler	T	Sig.
Konstanter Term	2.800	.196	14.257	.000
[TypeofInfluencer=0]	.300	.278	1.080	.282
[TypeofInfluencer=1]	0 <sup>a</sup>			
[SocialCapital=0]	-.233	.278	-.840	.403
[SocialCapital=1]	0 <sup>a</sup>			
[TypeofInfluencer=0] * [SocialCapital=0]	-.300	.393	-.764	.447
[TypeofInfluencer=0] * [SocialCapital=1]	0 <sup>a</sup>			
[TypeofInfluencer=1] * [SocialCapital=0]	0 <sup>a</sup>			
[TypeofInfluencer=1] * [SocialCapital=1]	0 <sup>a</sup>			

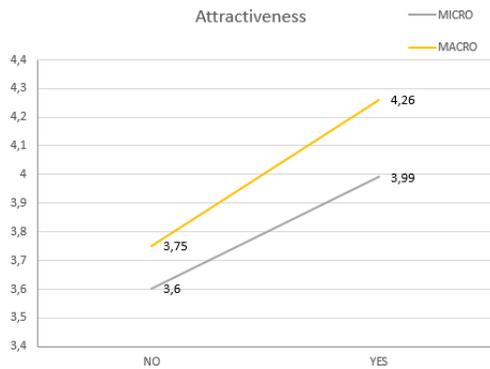
<sup>a</sup> Dieser Parameter wird auf Null gesetzt, weil er redundant ist.

**Coding of Variables:**  
 Type of influencer  
 (0) = Micro  
 (1) = Macro  
 Social Capital  
 (0) = No Reply  
 (1) = Yes Reply

- THE ABSENCE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL HAS A MARGINAL SIGNIFICATIVELY NEGATIVE IMPACT ON PURCHASE LIKELIHOOD

**Figure III.10 “Influencer experiment: purchase likelihood”**

Through the regression analysis, it’s possible to see that the absence of social capital (influencer answering in the comment) makes no difference between micro and macro influencer, while it is completely different with presence of social capital, where the micro shows better results-The value -2.33 shows that there is a negative impact with significance at .433. The absence of social capital has a marginal significantly negative impact on purchase likelihood. This means that when people notice that the influencer is not actively participating in the discussion, they do not encounter a direct contact with the community that turns into a lower propensity to purchase the product displayed in the content. In general, through the graph it is possible to notice how the microinfluencer that responds to the comments of the followers stimulates a greater possibility to purchase (with a value of 3.1) compared to the macroinfluencer that behaves in the same way (2,8).



- THE ABSENCE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL HAS A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE ATTRACTVENSSS OF THE POST.

**Coding of Variables:**  
 Type of influencer  
 (0) = Micro  
 (1) = Macro  
 Social Capital  
 (0) = No Reply  
 (1) = Yes Reply

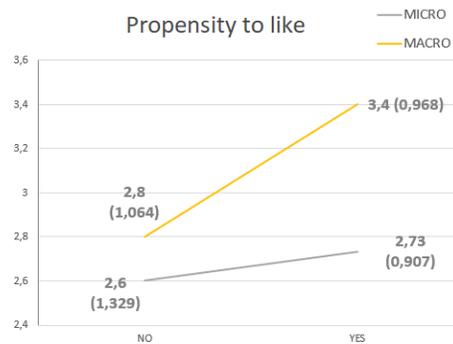
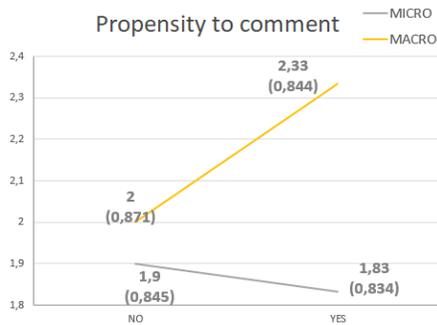
Abhängige Variable: sum\_attraktivenss\_likeability

Parameter	Regressionskoeffizient	Standard Fehler	T	Sig.
Konstanter Term	4,264	,223	19,090	,000
[Typeofinfluencer=0]	-.267	,316	-.844	,400
[Typeofinfluencer=1]	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	.
[SocialCapital=0]	-.517	,316	-1,636	,105
[SocialCapital=1]	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	.
[Typeofinfluencer=0] * [SocialCapital=0]	,119	,447	,267	,790
[Typeofinfluencer=0] * [SocialCapital=1]	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	.
[Typeofinfluencer=1] * [SocialCapital=0]	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	.
[Typeofinfluencer=1] * [SocialCapital=1]	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	.

a. Dieser Parameter wird auf Null gesetzt, weil er redundant ist.

**Figure III.11 “Influencer experiment: attractiveness of the post”**

The absence of social capital has a negative impact on the attractiveness of the post resulting in a value of -517 at 0.105 of significance. The macro in behaves better than micro in the attractiveness of the post, showing better results with or without social capital. This may be due to the fact that an influencer who is actively involved in the discussion about their content is more likely to generate attractiveness in their posts. In fact, a follower who notes participation by his "idol" is more inclined to make an intervention in the discussion by giving a comment.



- MICRO IN GENERAL BEHAVE IN A WORSE WAY THAN MACRO
- MACRO SLIGHTLY INCREASE THE PROPENTION TO LEAVE A "LIKE" IN PRESENCE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL.

**Figure III.12 “Influencer experiment: propensity to comment and like”**

Micro in general behave in a worse way than macro. Macro slightly increase the propension to leave a “like” in presence of social capital.

The outcome of the research brings to some implications both for managers and for influencers. Based on this experiment, the managers have to consider that the social capital affect the purchase intention. So in the strategic formulation they have to choose the right influencer, based on the new findings. Influencers who actively interact with subscribers gets high level of engagement among their followers. The work can be a starting point, despite this, there is room to improve the in-depth analysis of the questionnaire (e.g. no budget constraints, more effective manipulation).

The experiment places importance on the management and care of a community, in this case through the figure of the influencer, who is able to generate a social capital that must be cultivated, to bring the follower to take an interest and buy the products/services offered by the brand. The ideal influencer is the one who shares the company's products without payment, thus distinguishing itself from the testimony by vocation towards the brand. Looking ahead, future years will pay more attention to the

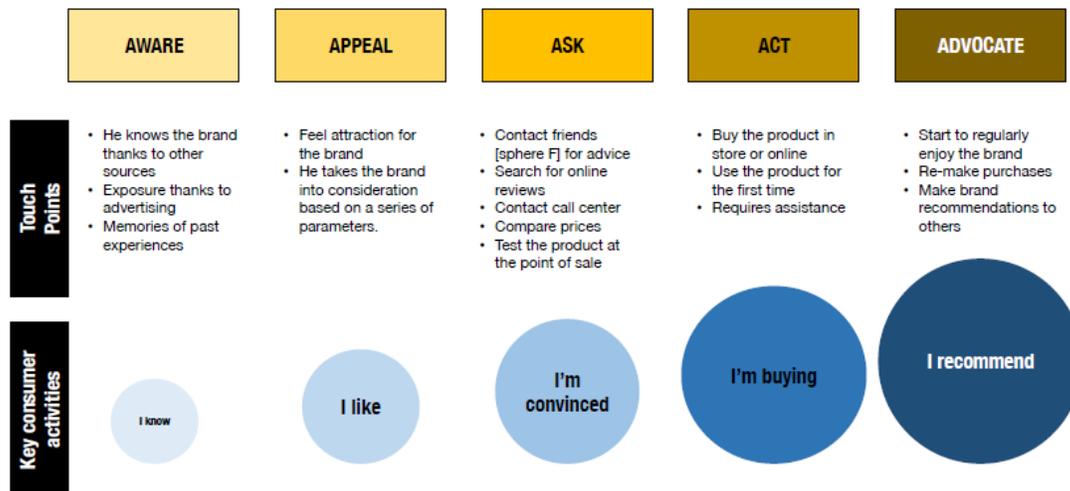
authenticity of the content created by users and content creators able to establish a relationship of trust with their followers will be privileged, through the publication of ever shorter and more impactful elements, as shown the growing interest in new platforms such as “TikTok” that offer this new kind of user experience

## 4 CHAPTER IV: COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT: THE ROLE OF CONTENT MARKETING

### 4.1 THE ROLE OF COMMUNITIES IN THE CUSTOMER'S JOURNEY

The process of managing a community attributes importance to the analysis of the process that each consumer takes in the experience of a brand and which touchpoints to investigate. The customer journey, as expressed in the previous chapters, is a path that the customer takes from the moment he becomes aware of a brand until the moment he decides to act by purchasing and subsequently becoming an ambassador in case of positive experience with the product/service.

The journey is made up of numerous touchpoints through which the customer experiences the various steps.



**Figure IV.1 “Customer’s journey path”**

In the aware’s stage, consumers are passively exposed to a list of brands of which only some will be remembered or taken into consideration stimulating attraction. Shifting to appeal’s stage, the brand has to be able to strike and remain imprinted in the consumer’s memory bringing curiosity. The ask phase

takes place when the consumers look for information and is influenced by the community they are part of, stimulating commitment. In the act stage, if the feedback obtained in the previous phase is positive, the consumer proceeds to purchase stimulating affinity. The last stage is represented by the advocate, seen as an evolution of the concept of loyalty, the consumer can develop a strong sense of loyalty that makes him an ambassador of the brand with which he has come into contact. The ultimate goal of this path is to create a seamless experience for the consumer and implement a series of tactics to increase the conversion rate of each stage of the model.

When it comes to community, the stage on which to pay attention is that of the ask, in fact, during this phase, the consumer must be convinced that what he will buy reflects his needs and expectations. To do this, it will research and listen to opinions from different categories of people; ask friends, search for online reviews, compare prices and test the product where possible.

The role of the communities is therefore fundamental in this phase, as the customer participates in the digital world, he will attend the online communities to have explanations about the brand in which he is interested. The community therefore acts as a marketing lever because through relationship and trust it is able to influence the thought of the consumer who is still undecided about his opinion on the brand. To direct the customer towards a positive thought about the brand, it must find the feeling of being heard within the community.

The community, like all the processes, has its own lifecycle, consisting of an initial phase called inception, of stabilization phases called establishment and maturity and a last phase called mitosis. The sense of belonging of users towards the community increases passing the phases of its life cycle. During the Inception phase, real interaction with the target audience begins, members are invited to the community and an engagement is maintained with them, starting discussions and stimulating members to participate, so as to create a relationship that can guarantee a user base capable of supporting the

community project in the long term. During this phase, the actions must be constant and low entity in order to keep the community alive, that could be the creation of continuous discussions to stimulate user activity, to ensure a continuous flow of activity, feedback and source of opportunities to initiate future activities. To understand if there are the conditions for creating a community, it is necessary to analyze the percentage of visitors who have visited the company's web pages and if can be defined a sort of routine in their behaviour. It is important to keep in mind that it is not necessary to build a community from scratch, but to find the existing community and provide them with the platform to interact. In the establishment phase, the community has reached the basic level of users to support itself and the activity of the members is growing more and more, the efforts of the community manager will therefore move to a more macro-level, thus aiming at groups of users stimulating the sense of community. These activities include the organization of events to stimulate the participation and interest of internal and external users (such as any other users invited by those already present in the community). As the community grows, the manager should be able to guarantee greater moderation by hiring other collaborators, so as not to risk reaching a level that makes it uncontrollable.

In the maturity phase, a first level of sense of community has been established, managers will have to report users when necessary towards the central topic of the community, optimize the platform used and establish an overall point of view for the goals and vision of the community.

The last phase is represented by mitosis, in which the sense of belonging to the community by the majority of users is very high, different sub-groups are therefore identified, each managed and controlled by a moderator who will collect useful data for strategic purposes. Collaborators are often very active users of the community who have developed a deep sense of loyalty.

Returning to the customer Journey, and to the 5A model, it will cross paths with the lifecycle of one or more communities. The customer therefore, during the information search phase, will come across a

community related to his topic of interest and will begin his journey to join them. Depending on the stage of the life cycle of the community he will meet, he will find himself immersed in a community that will push him to collaborate for the expansion of the same, or in an already mature community that will stimulate the conversion rate by trying to immediately retain the user.

The meeting point between the two processes can be all the phases of the customer journey, but one of the most significant is the ask phase. Subsequently, the second intersection takes place in the last phase, i.e. advocate. In fact, at this stage the online community is the ideal place to host loyal customers who will be promoters of positive word of mouth and will push other users towards the brand. Customers who have become ambassadors will be those who will recommend the brand, promoting its ideas, from a more intimate point of view.

In 2011 Google developed the concept of "moments of truth". The concept involves a first moment called ZMOT (Zero moment of truth) in which the customer, even before going to the physical store to try the product, relies on online research, evaluating any alternatives, also consulting with the communities he finds in network. The second moment is called FMOT (First moment of truth) in which the consumer proceeds with the purchase, moving to SMOT (Second moment of truth) by consuming the product and noting the actual experience of use. Positive or negative, the experience is shared, thus reaching the TMOT (Third moment of truth). Sharing can take place both in an "offline" environment, in the sphere of the O-Zone, and in an online environment with the communities, possibly the same one that had been previously consulted, confirming or discussing the opinions of the other members, who may be in their ZMOT phase, thus activating the process of other consumers.

The theory joins another concept expressed by Google, named micro-moments. In modern times, it is not possible to make a clear distinction between online and offline activities, as it is not possible to

decide to surf online. Today as in the future, we live continuously connected, in moments of micro-moments including: I want-to-know: This is the moment when 66% of consumers interrogate the web in search of information and deepen the news learned through advertising. I want-to-go: 82% of smartphone users search online for the business in their area, acquiring contacts such as address, email and opening hours to plan a possible visit or appointment. I want-to-do: it's the moment when 91% of smartphone users do a research to understand how to carry out a task or try something new. I want-to-buy: includes the time when 82% of users who visit a store, consult their smartphone for product information, read reviews and decide whether to buy or not. The latter is among the most important to analyze for a brand as the customer enters a delicate phase in which he could opt for the alternative of a competing product. Companies should investigate their social networks in relation to these micro-moments by understanding which processes need to be improved in the various channels, or which to push according to their type of business.

## 4.2 CONTENT MARKETING STRATEGY

Customers of the modern era use social media and therefore digital platforms to inquire about the brands they are interested in.

"Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly defined audience - and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action"<sup>25</sup>.

The aim of the content marketing activity is therefore to create conversations about content. Content marketing has become a leading marketing technique in digital marketing communication and uses the point of view of consumers to build relationships by creating and sharing engaging content in social media that enhance their daily lives. The evolution from commercials and journalistic insertions has been further amplified with the development of social media, which have allowed users to enjoy content at any time and at their convenience. Social media allow a more interactive and, above all, cheaper relationship than traditional one-to-many communication.

First of all, content must be able to capture attention in the first few seconds, this is because today the customer is immersed in a much more hectic world and has the possibility to skip the content if he does not find it interesting. It is difficult to attract the attention of the potential customer, nowadays the attention span is reduced to the minimum [Appendix 6] because of the big amount of information available into the web, since "over 4 million blog posts are published every day, and there are 317,000 Facebook status updates every 31 seconds"<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> "What is Content Marketing"; Content Marketing Institute; Joe Pulizzi;

<sup>26</sup> "Internet Stats & Facts for 2019"; Hosting Facts; <https://hostingfacts.com/internet-facts-stats/> ; 2018

In the world of digital, people love content. Targeted content is created to answer customers' basic questions. More content leads to more leads with the same amount of effort. The inbound philosophy (that consumers buy differently today than they did 10 years ago) is supported by a methodology that helps a brand attract.

“Content marketing is the process of developing and sharing relevant, valuable, and engaging content to target an audience with the goal of acquiring new customers or increasing business from existing customers<sup>27</sup>”

For content to work, it is no longer required that it directly increase sales, but rather that it increases curiosity and attractiveness towards the brand, very important sensations, especially in the appeal and ask phase of the customer's journey.

Content marketing takes place through the creation of content or the collection from external sources and then distribute it in the channels through which the company wants to communicate with customers. The process from creation to publication is divided into several stages, each of which deserves special attention. These are the stages and the main characteristics of each of them:

- Definition of objectives: The objectives of the content marketing policy must follow those of the company and must be measurable in order to determine its effectiveness. Therefore, sales-related objectives, particularly related to the act phase, that is the moment when the customer completes the purchase, cross-selling towards parallel products, upselling and lead generation (typical of B2B), with particular attention, can be included to align sales channels with distribution channels. Another category of objectives is linked to the brand, its awareness, the

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<sup>27</sup> “*Definition of Content Marketing*”; Amanda Maksymiwiw; Senior Content Marketing Manager; Lattice Engines

brand association and the achievement of the advocacy phase (typical of B2C). In this context, content marketing should aim at creating content consistent with the character of the brand.

- Definition of the audience: It is necessary to identify which audience is the content marketing campaign to address in order to create content targeted to the selected target. The subdivision can take place on a geographical, demographic, psychographic and behavioural basis or by digital subcultures, which will create the communities. Through the study of the target audience, it is possible to identify what is the sentiment about a topic, what the desires and which individuals are most active and with the greatest influence, which can then be used to spread the brand ideas through influencer marketing.
- Content planning: content planning includes the idea of which elements will be published and how they can create a cohesive flow capable of following a narrative line. The contents published in the distribution channels must in fact be understood as a story, which will slowly be revealed but capable of keeping the customer's curiosity high. The narrative arc, in fact, must be short and support the overall storyline by supporting the customer's journey not only in the appeal and ask phase, but also in the others. The contents must be close to the interests of consumers, be able to help them in the fulfilment of their desires and must reflect the brand's characters beyond the value proposition. During this phase, the formats in which the contents will be published must be chosen, if in writing, therefore in the form of newsletters, press releases, case studies, articles; or if in visual form, such as infographics, short films or interactive illustrations that often remind the customer to perform an action with the content itself. “The Content Marketing Institute reported that over 80 percent of B2C companies use

illustrations and photos, newsletters, videos, and website articles whereas over 80 percent of B2C companies use case studies, blogs, e-newsletters, and in-person events”<sup>28</sup>.

- Creation, distribution and amplification of the contents: Once the planning has been carried out, we arrive at the creation of the elements that will make up the content marketing strategy, they must be original and of high quality, thus requiring an effort not to be underestimated in order not to incur elements negative disadvantages for the company. The contents can be created internally, taking care to assimilate the necessary qualities typical of editors and journalistic authors. The other possibility is to contact external agencies, professionals of the sector who will produce the contents. The elements of content marketing can also be sponsored by external sources, as well as by consumers themselves, inviting them to produce content to share on official social channels.

Once the content has been created, it must be disseminated. The principal media channels can be enclosed in three main groups. The first is represented by proprietary channels, characterized by complete flexibility in the choice of publication times. Media of this type include corporate events, blogs and online communities run by the company. A limit can be identified in the fact that this channel is effective towards those who are already customers of the company, but nevertheless it requires a substantial economic effort to take care of the contents. The second channel is that of paid media, channels in which the brand pays for the distribution of its content, in the form of banners, affiliate networks, paid advertisements and search engine ads. Payment takes place on the basis of "impressions" or the number of times

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<sup>28</sup> “*Marketing 4.0, moving from traditional to digital*”; Philip Kotler, Hermawan Kartajaya, Iwan Setiawan; p.95; 2017

the content is viewed or the actions that are taken towards that content. This is a method often used by large companies, which can invest a considerable sum, but allows to reach new customers and promote brand awareness. The third channel is composed of earned media, i.e. the diffusion of the brand's contents through word of mouth or advocacy. Often this is activated with high quality content that is considered interesting by users, who share it on the social platforms and communities they are part of, making it viral. This position can also be achieved by brands that promote social initiatives, increasing word of mouth.

After distribution, content must be amplified, especially earned media. This can be done through influencer marketing, i.e. identifying the leading and most followed figures in a given area. These figures have a great influence on their followers and on the communities around them, they are often considered models to be experts. As expressed in the previous chapters, especially in the outcomes of the experiment on influencer marketing, the relationship must lead to a mutual benefit: for the brand it is important that its content is disseminated through influencers that represent a direct channel with consumers; on the other hand, it is important for influencers to gain visibility through dissemination activities, in order to improve their reputation. The next step is to participate in the conversations generated by the content amplification process, thus reaching the last phase of content marketing.

- Evaluation and optimization of content marketing: The last step is the most important at a strategic level when it is needed to ascertain whether the planning and the goals set have been achieved or not. Social listening allows at this stage to follow the customer in his customer journey and to understand through performance indicators which content is more effective or less effective. The content impression and brand recall are initially evaluated (how many

people remember the brand name). The bounce rate is then analyzed, i.e. the percentage of people who leave the site after visiting a page of it, the time spent on the site and the number of pages visited. The analysis continues with the search on the position in the search engine results by inserting keywords related to the brand and how many visits come from them. From a point of view closely related to content, the ratio between the number of clicks and the impression, the call-to-action conversion rates, i.e. those activities that the customer completes thanks to a content.

After the evaluation, the corrections must be defined through which to optimize the content marketing strategy. This occurs in more detail than the traditional marketing strategy, as it is possible to measure each step of the content marketing strategy, keeping track of the performance based on the topic of the contents, the channels, and the way in which they have been amplified, through the above indicators.

The content marketing strategy therefore requires a constant effort that begins with the planning of the contents, up to the evaluation of their effectiveness, and then starts again producing new contents on the basis of the ideas obtained during the analysis phase. It must therefore be taken into account that an activity can increase a brand's business by virtue of its direct channel with customers, the result of the digital era in which we live. "Content is the emotional and informational bridge between commerce and consumer. Building that bridge requires more than a budget, editorial calendar, and vision. It requires people who care, who love content, and what it can do for people. Not just what it can do for revenue, but rather how it helps people live their lives."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> "*Content Marketing*"; Jay Baer; President & Social Media and Content Marketing Strategist; Convince & Convert

### **4.3 CONTENT MARKETING FOR COMMUNITIES**

After analyzing what is the process that forms a content marketing strategy, we need to understand what the most effective contents are in managing a community.

Just as the published content should stimulate users to the conversation, the content addressed to a community must promote constant conversation, often accompanied by a social listening by the community managers to direct the participants towards what they want to discover and feed the discussion.

At the basis of the brand-consumer relationship, mutual trust must be established in order to allow users to open up to the conversation about the brand, whether positive or negative. One of the biggest flaws that a brand can make in the management of social channels is to eliminate negative comments, obtaining negative consequences in terms of brand trust, rowing against the current to a horizontal and transparent communication.

The best way to establish a successful online community is to constantly ask the opinion of the participants, making them feel part of the development process, an example is the surveys regarding possible community developments and improvements.

Another example may be to ask for an evaluation of the contents published in the community, in order to understand if they meet the common interest. This strategy is useful for pushing customers to return to the platform to see their advice put into practice.

Pushing customers towards the creation of content in exchange for a prize that can be in the form of promotion for the products/services offered by the brand can be an excellent way to increase brand-consumer trust. This strategy also allows users to improve their sense of participation and contribution to the community. User generated content is stimulated by community managers. "User generated content (UGC) provides opportunities for individuals to express themselves through sharing ideas with

others. A study theorized that brands could become vehicles for self-expression, an integral part of self-concept. The social dimension of UGC also can set the stage for self-presentation and new identity creation, rewarding users with recognition from their community peers. This identity-based component of UGC is interpreted as a way that consumer can express attitudes and behaviours that are agreeable to others”<sup>30</sup>.

It is also important to inform its customers, this occurs through the publication of case studies, sector articles, or simply through the publication of a review of a product/service offered by the company exposing the positive but also negative aspects, as we live in an era in which anyone who wants to find information can do it, so it is therefore worth anticipating users in this research and providing them with all the tools necessary to judge the brand, with the advantage of generating total trust at least by the brand. A company operating in a B2B and B2C context can share content of interest for both sections, showing the technical side of the product for the B2B environment and the practical and emotional aspect for the B2C environment

The publication of results obtained by the company, both from a business point of view, and above all regarding the evolution of the community, encourages collaborators and users themselves to share content on their social networks.

Since the internet is an open source of information, it is unnecessary to hide the positive or negative conversations from customers. The goal of a company that wants to develop a successful marketing campaign lies in trying to have the conversation, cultivating the community and providing them with the information necessary to judge the brand before they discover it elsewhere.

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<sup>30</sup> “*Memo to Marketers: Quantitative Evidence for Change: How User Generated Content Really Affects Brands*”; Journal of advertising research; G. Christodoulides, C. Jevons, J. Bonhomme; Vol. 52 No. 1; Page 5; 2012

The best way to generate a content marketing strategy addressed to a community is to start from the trends, continuously monitoring the discussions related to the brand and participate in it in the event that the discussions last several days, finally trying to move it to their platforms.

Another fundamental step is to increase the visibility of content, this can be done by sharing content continuously, following an editorial calendar divided into the various platforms used by the company. The constant publication of articles, photos, educational videos, real experiences of the product/service allows to reach a larger pool of users. The format should take on a personal and weighted aspect based on the participants of the community, promoting a feeling of intimate relationship with customers.

Useful content to stimulate participation and a sense of community is that of organizing events, possibly with personalities or experts connected to the brand sector. The event allows to provide the community with real-time content, in a position to generate a high interest not only at the time of its development, but also subsequently, proposing participants to share, in their social networks and on the platforms in which it operates. company, photos containing a reference to the brand during participation in the event.

The creation of a remote event may be useful, in which users do not participate directly in the meeting but follow and comment on a direct interview between a company representative and an expert.

An event can also be understood as a particular day of the year, for example it can be positive to ask users to share content related to the use of the product during a holiday. In this way, the customer will feel a feeling of participation in the brand's social channels, while on the other hand, the company will gain in visibility and content sharing.

It is important to put the consumer experience with the brand at the centre of the community, proposing the sharing of questions and curiosities that will be answered by the consumers themselves. As expressed in the previous chapters, very often we rely more on opinions of people who are on the same level than those provided by the company itself.

The hashtag, keywords around which conversations develop, plays an important role in the sharing of the brand. Hashtags allow users who do not know each other to start discussions around a common theme such as the launch of a new product from the company that generated it, rather than the promotion of an event or a new feature. The managers of the company's social channels can extrapolate the most interesting content and publish it to give consumers a voice.

In the next paragraph, the marketing strategies addressed to the communities of some of the most famous brands will be analyzed, who have managed to create an experience around their products/services.

#### **4.4 BEST PRACTICE**

Several companies have managed to create an active and stimulating community through which to expand their business, below are some examples of managing online communities and how they have contributed to creating value for the brand, both in B2C and in B2B.

- GoPro

The GoPro is an "action cam" designed and marketed by the homonymous company founded by Nick Woodman. He owes his great fame to GoPro, of which he is CEO. The company today boasts the sale of three million pieces in a three-year period, and a listing of 2.25 billion dollars, thanks also to the collaboration with Foxconn, a Taiwanese company that produces iPhones, which has purchased nine percent. The case represents an excellent example of the activation of a brand community, thanks to the good marketing policies implemented by the company and the excellent response with its customers, who have recognized and confirmed its quality. GoPro pays great attention to creating a positive word of mouth, through effective advertising processes and meticulous management of its community (hero community), to make the consumer himself the promoter of the product purchased, praising its characteristics and recommending it to other consumers. It therefore becomes primary to try to establish a participatory relationship with the consumer, both for reasons related to the waning influence of conventional commercial media, and for the growing need to reduce the complexity of information and evaluation processes. GoPro has selected brands of international renown and perfectly compatible with the concepts of its products. A striking example that shows how the American company has been able to choose a good sponsorship channel, is represented by the partnership with "Red Bull GmbH", the Austrian producer of the commercial energy drink of the same name, as well as owner of the Toro Rosso/Red Bull Racing team and football and hockey teams. "Red Bull it has always been synonymous

with breath-taking events: downhill, diving, up to the Baumgartner companies. A choice that has always been clear and evident, event marketing in its most spectacular form as the main marketing strategy, an opportunity to associate certain characteristics with the product (energy, strength, determination). Obviously, the potential of the GoPro could not go unnoticed by the Red Bull team, which now uses the action camera and first-person videos to immerse its users in these extraordinary events and make them feel, even if only for a moment, protagonists. There is no initiative of the Austrian drink that does not find fertile ground in the emotional videos that GoPro can give.”<sup>31</sup>

In addition to GoPro's collaboration in Red Bull sporting events, the most successful company is that of the famous jump "Stratos", which recorded 8 million live viewers and an increase in subscribers to Red's YouTube channel Bull from 2,142 on average per day to 87,801 on the day of the event with more than 900,000 Facebook interactions, of which 83,000 shares, leading to a 7% increase in sales of energy drinks. The event, which went viral, had as its protagonist Felix Baumgartner, an Austrian paratrooper who wanted to achieve the highest free fall in the world by breaking down the wall of sound, launching himself from a capsule suspended at about 36,600 meters with a helium-filled balloon, equipped with a special suit similar to that of astronauts. GoPro cameras recorded the big event step by step, releasing videos that increased the interactions in the social channels of the action cam in parallel with those of the Austrian company, reaching about 19 million views.

GoPro's strong point was that of knowing how to create a community around its products, bringing consumers closer to the brand, who have set up groups within social networks in which to exchange tips, opinions and indications on how to make their own videos and photos.

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<sup>31</sup> “3 Casi innovativi di GoPro marketing da non perdere”; Pogliani M.; Ninjamarketing.it; 2015

The intuition of the specialists of the American company is as simple as it is ingenious: not to dwell so much on the product, as much as on what users can do with it, making them promoters of the brand. GoPro pushes consumers to become "heroes" in everyday life, living and sharing their moments with the world, transforming the product into a philosophy of life. This is where the brand's top slogan is born: "Be a hero".

The first step in developing a brand community is to transform customers into fans of the proposed lifestyle, which is not really easy for a company that produces video cameras. To do this, GoPro often promotes initiatives aimed at involving the user of its compacts, such as the adoption of particular themed contests in which consumers try their hand at shooting in an attempt to reflect the proposed topic. "The company selects the most spectacular videos proposed by users, buys the rights and promotes them through its own channels. Fans are at the center of product marketing strategies"<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> *“GoPro e l’eroe che è in ognuno di noi; 5 insegnamenti di una grande esperienza di marketing”*; Mama; Gema.it; 2016

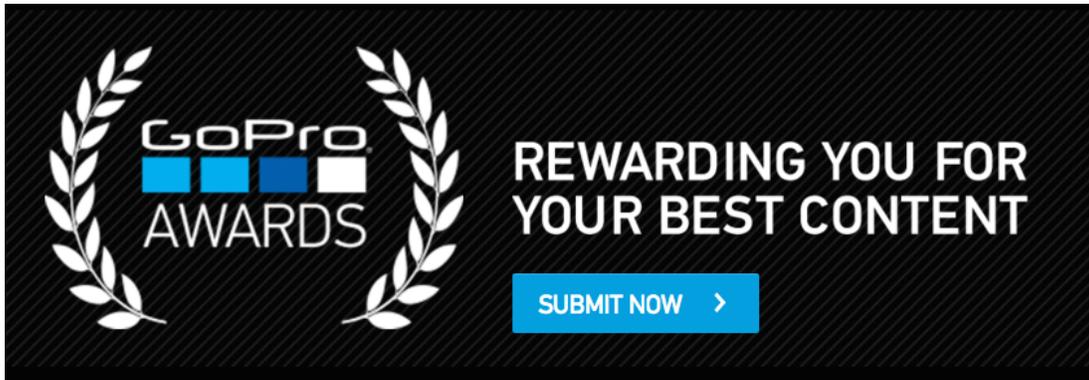


**Figure IV.2 “GoPro content 1”**

Through this initiative, GoPro tries to involve its customers in promotional activities, creating a relationship of complicity with the company, demonstrating the value of its products through the appreciation of fans, mainly enhancing people and their emotions. The content shared on the company's social platforms contains a short caption regarding the photo, a mention to the user who made it and

finally an invitation to consumers to purchase a new product, complete with a call-to-action link to the manufacturer's website.

One of the main tools used by the company to gratify its users, is that of the rewarding system, through which it pushes them to send the most spectacular and significant photos directly to GoPro, guaranteeing in case of appreciation a cash prize that in some cases can even go up to several hundred dollars.



**Figure IV.3 “GoPro awards initiative”**

The company estimates around 10 million fans on Facebook and 16 million followers on Instagram, as well as numerous fan blogs, demonstrating how successful the strategy has been.

- Starbucks

Starbucks is a coffee chain founded in Seattle in 1971 which has more than 28,000 stores in 78 different countries and a total revenue of nearly \$ 27 million. The first store was opened by three boys attending the University of San Francisco. The company also works socially, promoting the donation of unsold food in places where there are poor economic situations. The main goal of the company is to provide an experience to the consumer, who will not go to the store only to buy the famous drink, but will spend time inside it working, studying or simply chatting with other people.

One of the recurring initiatives in Starbucks' content marketing strategy is to invite its customers to share photos by proposing a theme, sometimes they are invited to post photos in which reusable cups are used to promote environmental initiatives, other times they are asked to show the place where they are traveling by posting a photo of the drink ordered in a particular country

(Figure IV.3)



**Figure IV.4 “Starbucks content 1”**

The post that stimulated sharing generated great interest in the Starbucks community, in this case generating thousands of reactions and comments in the main post and a large number of shares in the social networks of individual users.



The common vision of the company revolves around trust in people, whether they are employees or consumers. “Aside from fine coffee, it’s the wonderful people you meet that make Starbucks so special. People like you. People with ideas, passion and curiosity. You’re the reason we try so hard to make our coffeehouses warm, welcoming places to gather. And you’re the one we want to give voice to in our online communities. We’d like to help you have fun, dream big and connect to the people and ideas that interest you. Because we believe marvellous things happen when you put great coffee and great people together”<sup>33</sup>. The main objective is to provide a unique customer experience of its kind, placing the customer in the most comfortable situation possible and transforming a simple action such as drinking coffee, into a lifestyle, at a time of day to be immediately connected to the brand Starbucks.

- Lego

The Lego company was born in Billund in Denmark in 1932, its products are sold in over 140 countries worldwide. The brand's content marketing is solely focused on the famous plastic blocks, with a unique format for its social channels. The strategy aims to share the creations made by users, as shown in the following post (Figure IV.5).

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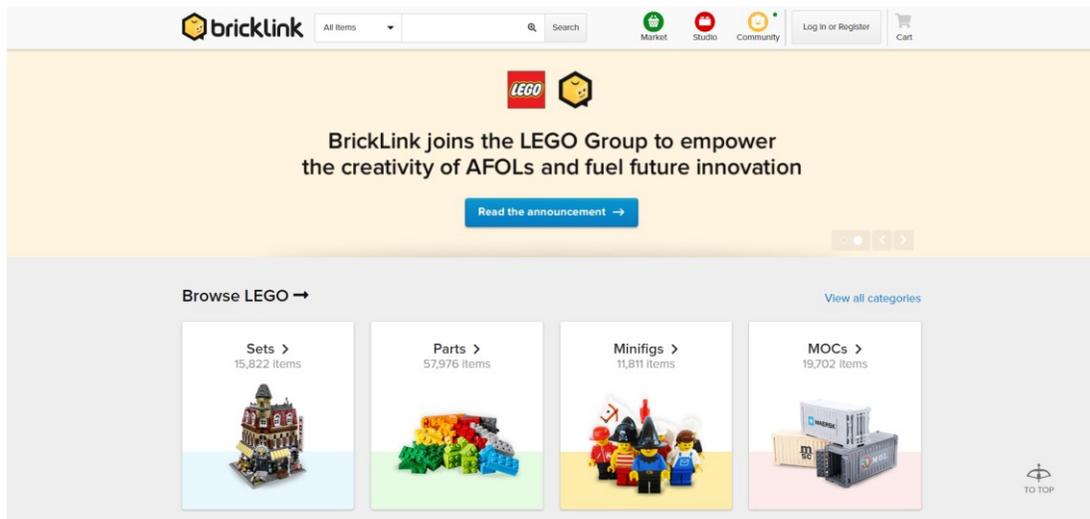
<sup>33</sup> “*Online Community*”; <https://www.starbucks.com/coffeehouse/community>; 2019



Figure IV.6 “Lego content 1”

The content promotes the launch of a timed event in which users are invited to share their creations around a theme that changes from month to month.

The Lego group has announced the purchase of Bricklink, the largest online community of adult Lego fans, the platform has about a million members who come up with and share ideas, design products through online software, discuss the Lego world.



**Figure IV.7 “Lego Bricklink platform”**

The platform also acts as a real catalogue for Lego products, and guarantees a customer base for the brand. The initiative allows consumers to be part of the product design. Lego focuses heavily on its community, offering the tools to express creativity. Lego's long-term goal is to cultivate its community of adult consumers, providing them with the means and platforms to share their work. Also, this initiative can be linked to the concept of open innovation as Lego consumers become promoters of ideas through their creativity, a resource of ideas in the innovation process.



18.3 million media impressions, an 870% increase in traffic on the Facebook page, approximately 76,000 drinks shared online and a total of 378,000 labels printed in the country.<sup>34</sup>.

- EyeForTravel

In the context of B2B, companies operating in the modern world need to increase their opportunities and efficiency by ensuring a competitive position on the market for global competition. The goal of the B2B communities is to share technological tools, integration with IT solutions and business opportunities to increase turnover. The investment is therefore aimed at the development of open platforms dedicated to its suppliers, partners or any sector operator with whom to integrate their work. EyeForTravel has developed a community of commercial, marketing, digital and data experts operating in the travel sector. The goal is to help the travel industry to deliver winning customer experience. By subscribing, users can access conferences, articles, reports and events, as well as an on-demand library in which to search for content. The community in the B2B context constitutes an open environment in which operators can interact, guaranteeing the growth of the entire system, integrating ideas, projects, people and companies. “We cannot do this without you, our community, and we need your help. From helping to shape our event content to filling a speaker or sponsor slot, contributing a feature or opinion to our website or sharing a research idea, there are many ways you can get involved.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> “*Case Study On Coca Cola Share A Coke Campaign*”; Digital Vidya;  
<https://www.digitalvidya.com/blog/case-study-on-coca-colas-share-a-coke-campaign/> ; Akshay Heble; 2019

<sup>35</sup> “*About us*”; <https://www.eyefortravel.com/about-us>; EyeForTravel

- Blomdahl

Blomdahl is a company producing hypoallergenic jewellery with a total absence of nickel, it is an excellent example for a content marketing strategy aimed at both the B2C and B2B environments, in fact articles or simply presentations of hypoallergenic products are offered, defining the technical characteristics for B2B operators, including those who work in the pharmaceutical field, focusing on the hypoallergenic characteristic of the product and the beauty of the product for the B2C environment.

## **4.5 TUTOR AUDIO CASE**

Tutor Audio is an Italian web platform, born as the first online music production school in Italy. The platform specializes in distance teaching and training in the music sector. The audience to which the services are addressed is made up of users who intend to improve or create their own music, the use of music production software and the programs connected to them. The target is composed by both people who work in the music sector as a profession, and enthusiasts with low cost equipment. Tutor Audio operates through its website where users can view video tutorials, music lessons given by specialized teachers and download packages of fragments/samples of musical works. Some audio-visual contents are made available for free while others can be purchased through a subscription defined as Premium.

The mission of the school is to train music producers capable of establishing themselves in the world of music, through the creation of over 300 lessons where the techniques dedicated to the 6 stages of music production are taught: synthesis, production, drafting and arrangement, mixing, mastering and home recording. The goal is to grow a new generation of Italian producers by offering advanced online courses by eliminating the obstacles of time and distance. Customers are acquired and will become part of the community, they will specialize and will strengthen the position of the platform.

The school therefore operates within the digital learning sector, which offers a more effective and interactive alternative for the study of a subject of interest. The term digital learning refers to an integrated platform of channels and tools - from webinars to social networks, from mobile applications for training to gamification initiatives - which allow people to be trained more effectively, using the most appropriate means for use. of content. The user can take the courses when he deems it most appropriate, based on their commitments and needs.

The school collaborates with important brands operating in the music sector, such as midiware, eko

music group, izotope, softube, lennar digital, se-electronics and antares. The main point of the tutor audio case is to bring users within their community, propose a problem and offer their courses as a solution. This also highlights the concept of sharing knowledge of methodological advice from industry enthusiasts to optimize production costs and times.

By entering the community, users can access a series of introductory and basic videos on the various production software, this to stimulate the user's curiosity to want to investigate more on the features.

The first platform used by the school is the website, through which to access the main information, contacts and an explanation of how the courses are distributed. The first screen offers the possibility to access the school's Facebook channel, where the real community is present. The option "Join our community", refers to a community presentation web page and then refers precisely to Facebook.

The other platform used is Instagram, where video fragments and notions are displayed to stimulate curiosity and attract community users to buy a course. In fact, Instagram offers through the "Stories" function, to publish updates and video clips, or the possibility of inserting a direct link to a web page. The feedback section provides to Instagram followers real customer experiences and thoughts about how the school helped them, sharing the screenshot of satisfied customers.

The main platform is Facebook, which, through the groups function, allows users to have a space available in which to interact. Entering into the community, users can find a free basic course with over fifty lessons, streaming lectures, tips and tricks by producer's expert.

The following will analyze the school's content marketing strategies and how the online community is managed on the various platforms.



Figure IV.9 “Tutor Audio content 1”



Figure IV.10 “Tutor Audio content 2”

In Figure IV.6 is it possible to see an example of content created by the school on the Facebook page. The content announces the availability of a new course which can be purchased online on the official web page. There is also a reference to the official Facebook group in which to view a part of the course, in order to evaluate any purchase in advance.

The following example (Figure IV.7) presents the extract of a video course, in this case a master class offered by a professional in the sector, information about the course and the possibility of having a direct channel through which to communicate with the author of the lesson. The extract is made specifically to stimulate user curiosity, who, if intrigued, will proceed to purchase through the website.

In the official group, users post feedback, questions and concerns, ask for information about the courses and in addition to being helped by the staff, the concept of mutual help is developed. Tutor Audio has

succeeded in creating a community of industry experts who make their skills and experiences available to the others.

In addition to offering educational videos, the community allows users to provide a platform in which to communicate, ask for advice and receive answers through a direct channel with Tutor Audio. The strategy is to provide the community with continuous reference points, through the teachers who remain available to users, with the possibility to write to the teacher into a dedicated section of the courses. The following content (Figures IV.8) represents an example of this



**Figure IV.11 “Tutor Audio example of community care”**

In the example in question, a user asks for advice regarding a phase of music production, the answer to the question comes directly from a community manager, who explains the solution to the user. The interaction has generated an increase in trust between the school and the user who finds in the platform, a place where they can get answers.



**Figure IV.12 “Tutor Audio content 3”**

Another type of content created by the school (Figure IV.9) consists in inviting the followers to send music demos within a period of time to get feedback on how to improve it. Subsequently, the steps necessary to obtain the advice are listed, including the request to join the group, and therefore to join the official community.

In fact, it is possible to note that most of the school's content marketing strategies are aimed at directing user traffic to the community, subsequently arriving at the purchase of the course. The concept is

therefore to identify a need on the part of the user, expose it to the community and receive the necessary tools to fill it.

The customer journey that the future Tutor Audio's customer will follow will be like the following: the customer who uses an audio recording software if not already properly trained, will find himself faced with the need to acquire some useful knowledge to carry on his business. In this context, a need will be generated which must be met through training. First of all, a typical user of these mixing platforms will turn to web browsing, mainly to YouTube, which is one of the main sources of explanatory videos. Browsing the internet, he may come across Tutor Audio, and it is precisely at this moment that he enters the Awareness phase. After viewing a video, content, or news relating to the school, the customer will enter the Appeal phase, starting to generate curiosity about the brand. It is important for Tutor Audio to provide quality content, able to attract the potential customer and make it clear that he can find the answer to his requests in the school. The format on which content aimed at this goal should rotate should be based on the following phrase "Do you want answers to your needs? We provide you with the means to have them, find out more by visiting our community ". We therefore come to the concept of community, which has the task of accompanying the customer in the ask phase, in which he will find people inside and outside the company who will help him in choosing the package to buy, or through free advice in the form of comments. If satisfied, the customer will proceed with the purchase by entering the act phase. After purchasing one of the courses, the customer, through the constant attendance of the community to which it was previously addressed, begins the process of conversion to brand ambassador. To do this the community must be properly cared for and listened to by the managers. When a customer becomes a brand ambassador, he will recommend joining the community to other users who will be in the information search phase, and in turn will repeat the process. The care of the community, through lower costs, to keep customers attracted to the brand, while ensuring a platform of

specialists in the sector. Tutor Audio can rely on netnography, social listening and social media analysis to identify potential customers and direct them to their community. On the web there are several communities about music production and home recording, social listening allows to identify these conversations.

While writing the paper, it was possible to contact Mattia Gresta, the main creator and moderator of the community, in charge of most of the content marketing and management strategies of the Facebook online community. The outcomes of the interview will be reported below.

The community was born from the need to transmit what Tutor Audio was, to identify a place on the web, where school/consumer interaction was possible, promoting the participation of users who not only limit themselves to interacting by putting likes on the post, but participate actively to the growth of the group, becoming a consumer of greater value. The Facebook group is used to convey the quality of the information offered by the school, as well as that of the products offered, that is, the courses. The community was actually born in May 2019, after several test strategies, and each platform contains call-to-action to drive traffic to the Facebook group. For some years the idea of the community had become a trend for the web, it is possible to find several examples in the education sector, which is also all in the making. The community is also the place where the user has a question he doesn't know where to ask, then he can post it in the Facebook group. At the moment, the representatives of the school itself respond, because there are still no fully competent people. The fact of being present in the users' doubts highlights that they try to provide the most valid information possible. Tutor Audio hopes that the community will grow in a few years, seeing users respond to each other, provide feedback to other users, who through training have contributed to the creation of a platform of professional people, adding value to the community. The communication was structured for those who wanted to learn, the group was so full of people that they are not yet adequately prepared, with the consequence that they are unable to

answer questions from other users. The school hopes for a populated community in the future, with answers to the conversations that are not limited to the admin but will come from the community itself. The idea was born from a strategic investigation, Mattia Gresta added that he had tried on himself how much he could influence a community in the purchasing process, noting that the probability arose when he received direct contact and personalized communication. Subsequently, another discussion to be addressed is that relating to the fact that not all the audience is present on Facebook. On this platform it is in fact possible to capture a target of customers over the age of 25. This represents a limit because the younger target is more present on other platforms such as Instagram. This problem derives from the fact that today social networks have changed, they have divided the contents, the type of content and functions have been deliberately divided between the various platforms. In fact, Facebook is intended for a more adult audience, to host communities and content that take longer to assimilate, while Instagram is for a more modern audience, with a much lower average attention that needs immediate and impactful contents. However, it is necessary to adapt the strategy to each platform. Instagram for example is useful for filling the community, in fact through the "Everlike" tool, it was possible to add likes to hundreds of profiles, possibly close to the music sector, who then came into contact with the school profile and exchanged the following and they were subsequently invited to the official community. The limits of the Facebook platform are in its use, many users have the profile only to follow the communities but access it a few times, losing many of the contents and conversations offered. On the other hand, Facebook is more successful in converting interested people in customer as it offers more effective functions to sell the product than Instagram. The latter aspect is very important as the purchase is meticulously thought out due to the high cost of the courses, which can even reach €500.

The community manager is Mattia Gresta. The choice to entrust the management of the community to a single person is justified by its low size. To help him in the creation of the contents, his partner Simone

Bocchino intervenes, who, however, being in charge of the didactic section, mainly deals with the creation of the contents, live lessons and master classes, which will then be disseminated by Mattia Gresta in the different platforms. Tutor Audio was among the first communities in the sector to be born in Italy, therefore it was not possible to analyze the strategies of competitors. However, the idea developed following the study of several foreign businesses, especially in the USA where they were very successful by the adoption of the communities, which allow to generate a sense of exclusivity and a more selected audience.

Regarding the influencer marketing speech, Tutor Audio did not select particular prominent individuals on the web but relies on the quality of the brand thanks to the choice of important technical partners and partnerships aimed at increasing visibility and trust in the school. The added value in this sense is given by the partner Simone Bocchino, who also being a teacher of “Fonderie Sonore”, a school based in Rome, has managed to create an important social network over the years. He organizes master classes and also directly answers users' doubts in the community, spreading among users the feeling of being listened to and being able to communicate directly with an important professional figure in the music sector. Tutor Audio took the adoption of endorsers into consideration but most of the time they wanted an important financial compensation, leaving out the possible return in terms of image that they could have had.

The content that was most successful in the content marketing strategy was the masterclasses. This type of content is able to generate a very important empathic relationship between student and teacher in a digital world where it is not possible to come into direct contact with the product. For example, to evaluate a traditional school, the future student can go to the building, talk to the professors and develop a relationship and experience sensations. Digital tools allow to recreate this direct experience also on the web.

The community plays an important role in consumer decision making. Nowadays, the attention span is reduced to the minimum, it is difficult to sell an expensive online course hoping that the user will read and understand the description offered. The consumer must be stimulated, and one of the means that allows this is the possibility of a phone contact in which the seller explains the details of the product to the consumer, offering a direct and highly personalized experience. Direct contact has increased sales, as the brand gains credibility. The difference between the page and the community is in the fact that the latter allows a more intimate relationship and the lead has a greater value. Through phone contact, it is possible to know the fears and ambitions of the potential consumer who want personalized and direct content to which they can recognize themselves. Working also in B2B context, has allowed Mattia Gresta to understand both sides of the business, both from the point of view of the buyer and the seller. The consumer is also involved in the planning of the master classes, offering the possibility of choosing the day or the next topic through surveys. The masterclass takes place on a separate private group where the user pays to ensure one of the limited places for the lesson, which is recorded after the direct and sent to the private profile on the site. As regards for responsiveness in participating to user conversations, Tutor Audio tries to leave room for the community itself to respond to any doubts of its users, stimulating the conversation. If the answers arrive within a couple of days, the managers monitor the conversation and intervene if an inaccuracy has been said or if further clarifications is required. If the answers do not arrive, the teachers themselves will answer the questions.

About the plans for the future, one of the platforms to be improved is YouTube to which little attention has been given since it is still not very moderate by Google and there are many fake profiles that bring negative comments and feedbacks. An interesting platform is Twitch, very useful for direct streaming, but now the school prefers to see the evolution of the situation, leaving others the first step. The main goal for the future is to look for other teachers, competent people to expand the school's roster.

## 4.6 RESULTS FOR MARKETING STRATEGIES PURPOSES

“It is necessary to know how to co-evolve together with the market: co-innovate and co-create together with your customers, together with your suppliers and together with the system. Adriano Olivetti's teaching, which we must make our own, translates into enterprise as a community of intent and interests' A company as an 'expression of living' in which different subjects (workers, investors, customers, territory, suppliers) take part, each with particular interests, who, however, cooperate to achieve a series of common objectives that go well beyond their individual interests. Company conceived as a historical social entity in constant relationship with the physical, social and cultural environment that surrounds it, towards which it assumes responsibility far beyond the achievement of profit”<sup>36</sup>.

The real added value of a company in the modern era is knowing how to create a community around it. Groups of consumers and collaborators who allows to directly manage changes in a fast and unpredictable digital world in certain aspects. The creation of a community adapts to the need to establish a multidirectional dialogue between consumers and brands.

The process of creating and managing a community can therefore represent an important driver for the development of the business related to the brand. A series of techniques, investments and precautions are required that can result in a more effective marketing campaign and with less use of economic resources than traditional ones.

A brand that engages in the creation of a community must therefore initially interrogate the web, in search of possible aggregations of individuals in digital platforms, which could form the initial base of

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<sup>36</sup> “*Perché una buona community, oggi, decreta il successo di un marchio*”; Centodieci.it; Roberto Panzarani <https://www.centodieci.it/2017/01/creare-community-attorno-al-brand/>; 2017

the community. Social listening allows to identify what are the main feelings related to a topic, to understand how to set up the marketing campaign and create the online community. Social media platforms will therefore be analyzed, through a process of data collection and processing, in order to have a general idea of which platform is suitable for the brand community.

The choice of the digital platform on which to operate must be based on the sector, the type of business and the type of campaign that the brand wants to create. If the strategy involves the development of a business activity or service and consultancy suppliers, the suitable channel will be LinkedIn or Facebook. If instead it foresees the development of the territory, of projects or social houses, the ideal platform in which to establish a relationship with operators will be Facebook, WhatsApp through the groups function, or Messenger as a more responsive relationship is required.

The customer journey of a customer is outlined by different touchpoints through which the company can get in touch with potential consumers. From the aware phase to the advocate phase, efforts should be aimed at optimizing touchpoints, in order to increase the conversion rates from potential customer to customer, subsequently convincing him of the quality of the product/service offered to make him a loyal customer who will spread word of mouth.

Once a group has been created within one of the digital platforms (it can be the company page itself, a group on a platform specialized in community management, or simply the Facebook groups function), the basic community will be represented by the first customers who became ambassadors. When, in the search for information, the customer still doubtful about the quality of the brand, meets the base of ambassadors customers, they will find individuals ready to give advice, placing themselves at the same level as consumers, as such. This form of horizontal communication is at the basis of the management of a community, the consumer wants to be listened to, wants to have a direct connection with the brand

and at the same time wants to interact on an almost confidential and informal level, as if he were talking to a friend. The data show that customers no longer trust the advertisements disclosed by companies, typical of vertical marketing strategies, but seek the opinion of people they trust, who can even be represented by the figure of the influencer. As shown in the experiment conducted in the third chapter, influencers are and will be powerful marketing tools in the future, through which the brand can increase its visibility, attractiveness and trust. The influencer often represents a community, the results have shown that the interaction between influencers and followers, in promoting a product, leads to positive results in terms of attractiveness of the post and the propensity to buy.

The care of a community passes through content marketing strategies, effective content marketing is that which stimulates user participation, cooperation in developing a brand by listening to proposals or gamification initiatives. Various types of content will be proposed below for a content marketing strategy aimed at managing the community and honing the advocacy of consumers towards the brand

The first type of post concerns the request for consumer opinion (Figure IV.13). Surveys and conversations aimed at improving the perception of the brand, contribute by consumers to increase the feeling of being heard, participation and trust. On the part of the brand, they allow to increase the insights that marketers have available, the creation of a targeted campaign and greater monitoring over the line that the company is following.



**Figure IV.13 “Best practice: what do you think about us”**

The other type of content focuses on making consumers proponents of ideas (Figure IV.14). It is therefore allowed, through specific forms, to share any improvements regarding different aspects of the company, from the processes of purchase/use of the service or product, to the improvement of communication channels, up to the proposals for the creation of new products/services itself. By consumers it allows to increase listening, trust, participation in the development process and above all the rate of return and active participation in the brand channels, to monitor their proposals. On the part of the brand, it allows to have a continuous source of ideas available, directly from consumers, filling any deficiencies.



**Figure IV.14 “Best practice: share your idea”**

Another content concerns the proposal to share experiences of using the product or simply situations concerning the brand (Figure IV.15), sometimes through contests to promote gamification, gratifying customers with any discounts and promotions. Sharing allows to increase the participation of the consumer community, advocacy in seeing their own contents shared by the brand, allowing the company to increase visibility through sharing and stimulate word of mouth and curiosity. The sharing of the experience of using the product/service can be carried out by publishing direct feedback, which can provide other consumers with direct evidence and a social proof about the quality of the brand, as demonstrated by the sharing of screenshots by Tutor Audio in an apposite section of Instagram. This allows to push the doubtful customer towards the next stages of his customer journey.



**Figure IV.15 “Best practice: share the brand”**

The creation of events (Figure IV.16) for the community allows instead to create a direct participation of users in the brand, increasing trust and commitment. It is possible to give greater value to the brand's products by increasing.



Figure IV.16 “Best practice: join our event”

## CONCLUSIONS

From the results achieved so far, the testimonies, and the trends analyzed, it is possible to reach considerations regarding community management and the digital marketing strategy to increase the business of an activity.

From the moment in which the method of interaction between brand and consumers has changed, moving from a one-way interaction in which the brand communicated its offer to the consumer who was a passive spectator, to a two-way relationship not only between the company and the consumer, but also among individuals themselves, marketing strategies have also had to adapt and have undergone profound changes.

The right approach to be adopted in the digital world is that consumers are tiles of an infinite social network and each of them has influence over the other. In this context, the successful brand turns out to be the one that stimulates the conversation, both positive and negative, by monitoring it and improving the components that have generated a disservice in the customer's journey experience. As mentioned in the first chapter, today we live constantly online, companies come into contact with highly informed but distracted people because of the large amount of information they can find on the web. Therefore, it is not possible to hide any negative aspects regarding the product/service offered, as consumers themselves can easily find any type of information. Somehow managing and manipulating the influence that acts on a customer's purchase path plays a fundamental role in the formulation of a company's marketing strategies.

Therefore, the online community is the element on which to act to monitor, evaluate and direct the perception of the brand. The online communities allow to establish an intimate, direct and often personalized relationship with consumers, thus generating a lead of greater value for the company. The

community must be nourished with useful content in this sense, useful to stimulate users towards interaction knowing that they have direct contact to rely on. The best results were obtained by brands such as Tutor Audio have included direct contact possibilities, highly targeted to the individual customer. The simple call-to-action for a phone call, or to a direct message, stimulates the customer to advance in his customer journey, proceeding with the purchase at the end or even during the interaction. In areas such as online education, the absence of physical contact and empathy must be bridged through digital tools, trying to recreate the same sensations of offline interactions in the consumer, gaining trust towards who is selling the product. One solution in this sense is the sharing of testimonials from other consumers, providing direct social proof about the quality of the product.

The elements deriving from the content marketing strategy must certainly be quality content, but also reflect the values of the brand, leading consumers to become spokespersons for the cause and brand ambassadors who push other customers to reach the advocacy phase of the customer journey.

The research also revealed that many successful brands are adopting open innovation strategies, inviting consumers to join the growth process by proposing their ideas, thus getting external resources to innovate. This policy is more effective if the creation of an insight community is supported, a space in which to host users who decide to participate in the innovation process, providing feedback about their experiences, testing phases of products/services or simply stimulating them to free their own creativity.

The use of social platforms for those wishing to try their hand at digital marketing must be carefully studied. Indeed, digital presence is united if not adequately supported by continuous management aimed at listening to its community of followers. The key word in this sense is reactivity. When a consumer interacts with the brand through a social platform or a direct contact through a call-to-action, he expects an immediate reverse interaction, in order not to generate dissatisfaction. The digital world is in fact a double-edged sword, which if not properly supported risks becoming not only useless, but also harmful

to the business of those who use it. The goal should therefore be to bring consumers to talk about the product, service, or the cause of the brand, by stimulating word of mouth to generate more leads towards the company.

A famous quote deriving from Oscar Wilde's work "The Picture of Dorian Gray", significantly reflects the concept of awareness and conversations in digital marketing: *"There is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about "*.

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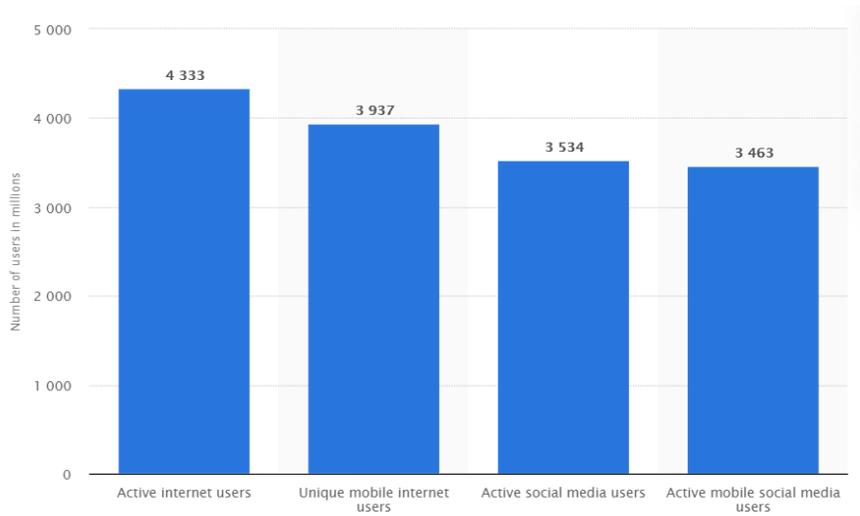
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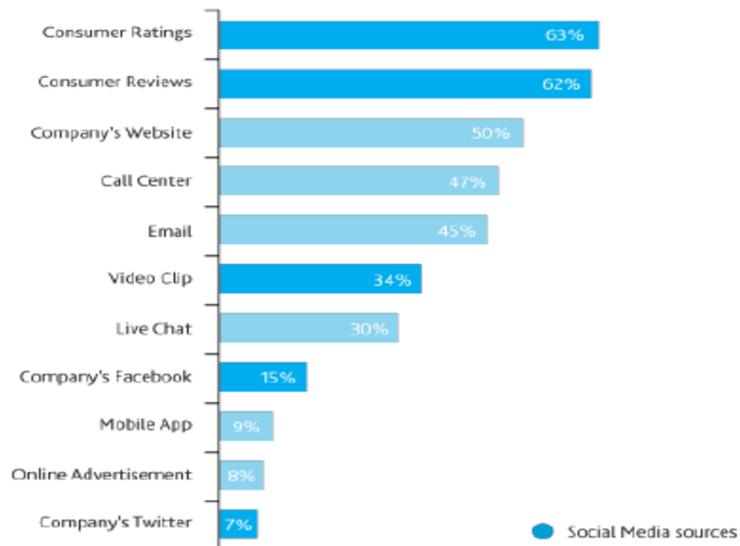
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## ATTACHMENTS



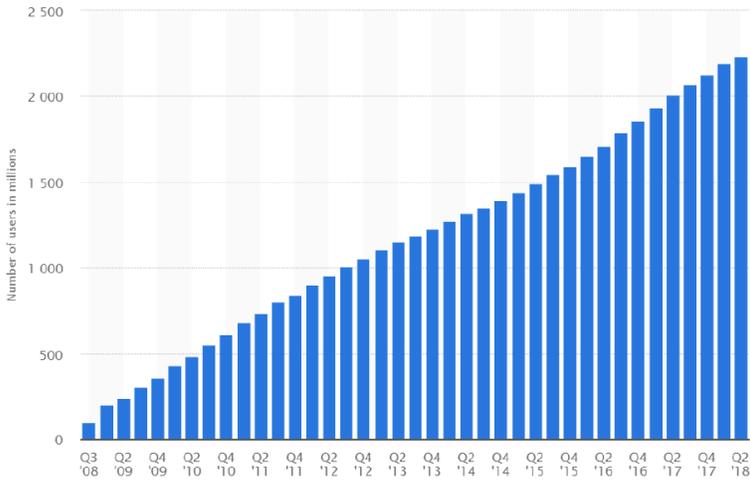
### Appendix 1 “Global digital population in 2019 (in millions), Roweb.ro”

#### % Social Media Users



### Appendix 2 “Preferred sources for product and service information, Nielsen.com”

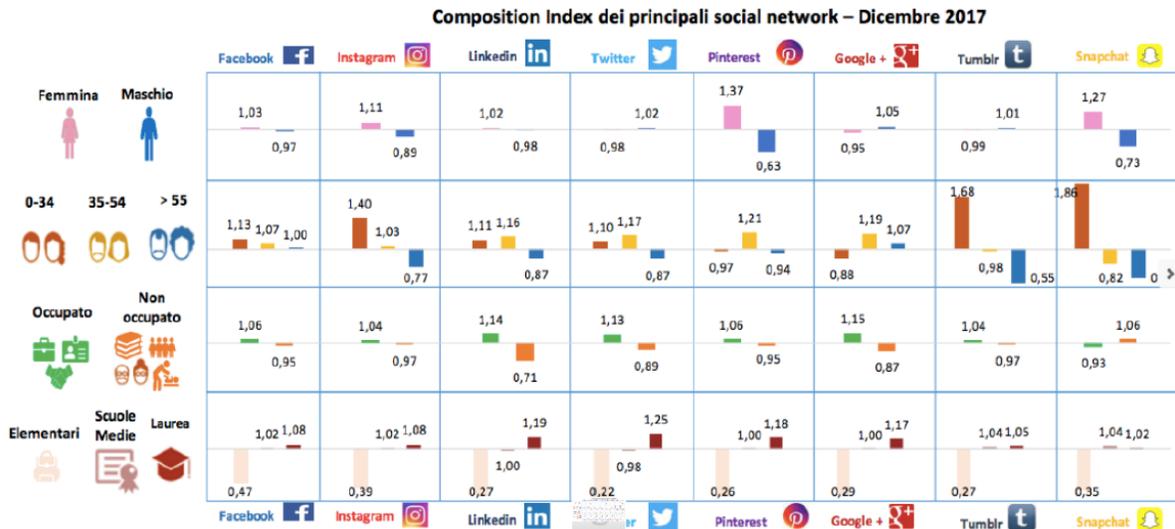
**Number of monthly active Facebook users worldwide as of 2nd quarter 2018 (in millions)**



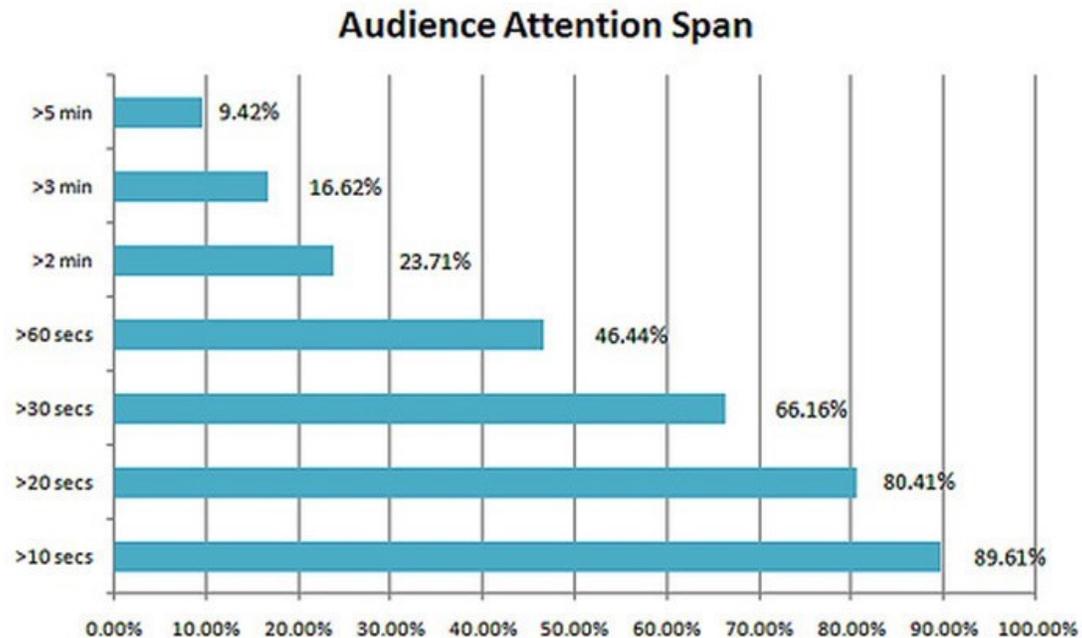
**Appendix 3 “Montly active facebook users worldwide, Statista.com”**

Social Media	Utenti mensili in Italia
Facebook	30.000.000
YouTube	24.000.000
Instagram	14.000.000
LinkedIn	8.000.000
Google+	7.300.000
Twitter	6.900.000
Pinterest	4.700.000
Tumblr	2.500.000
Snapchat	2.000.000

**Appendix 4 “Social media users in Italy, Vincos.com”**



Appendix 5 “Composition index of the main social network, Vincos.com”



Appendix 6 “Audience attention span, Medium.com”

How old do you think is the average subscriber of the profile shown? \*

- Under 14 years
- 14 -19 years
- 20 -29 years
- 30 - 39 years
- Over 40 years

What do you think about the interests of subscribers to this profile? \*

Multiple choice

- Music
- Sports
- Film/Television
- Travelling
- Culture
- Photography
- Altro...

In your opinion, is this influencer a model for his followers? \*

- Yes
- No
- I do not know

In your opinion, in which category belongs the majority of his followers? \*

Multiple choice

- Friends
- Acquaintance
- Fan
- Commercial partner

Please indicate how much do you like the post shown. \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Bad        Good

---

Domanda \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I do not like        I like it very much

---

Domanda \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Unfavorable        Favorable

---

Domanda \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Boring        Interesting

---

Domanda \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Unpleasant        Enjoyable

---

Please, rate the brand "Orangina". \*

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Bad        Good

Domanda *								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
I do not like it	<input type="radio"/>	I like it very much						

Domanda *								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Unpleasant	<input type="radio"/>	Enjoyable						

Domanda *								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Low quality	<input type="radio"/>	High quality						

Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements. *					
	I strongly disag...	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	I strongly agree
I'm interested in...	<input type="radio"/>				
I would leave a ...	<input type="radio"/>				
I would leave a l...	<input type="radio"/>				
I would talk pos...	<input type="radio"/>				

How likely is it that you will buy the product shown? *						
	1	2	3	4	5	
Very unlikely	<input type="radio"/>	Very probably				

How many hours a day do you usually spend on social media? \*

- Less than 30
- 30 min. - 1 hour
- 1 hour - 2 hours
- 2 hours - 3 hours
- More than 3 hours

How often do you use Instagram?

- Every day
- At least one a week
- At least once a month
- Never

How old are you? \*

- Less than 15
- 16-20
- 21-25
- 25-30
- 30-40
- More than 40

**Appendix 7 “Influencer marketing: the experiment results - questionnaire”**