

Social Media Marketing adoption in Italian SMEs

*Barriers in the adoption of Social Media by Italian wine
SMEs*



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I certify that the dissertation entitled: **Social Media Marketing adoption in Italian SMEs. Study of the problems in the adoption of social media by Italian wine SMEs**

submitted for the degree of: **MSc in International Business Management** is the result of the my own work and that where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgment is given.

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Abstract

Social Media Marketing adoption in Italian SMEs **Study of the problems in the adoption of Social Media by Italian wine SMEs**

Massimiliano Accattoli

The advent of new digital tools of communication is changing the way of doing marketing in almost every business. Social media are the main characters of this marketing evolution. The importance of Social Media Marketing is growing in the strategies and projects of many companies, including the smallest ones. However, not all small and medium-sized enterprises can find ways to approach and introduce these new instruments.

In this study it was shown which are the reasons behind the barriers between Social Media Marketing (SMM) and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and how they influence this relationship.

The study had as main objective to go deeper investigate in the problems between the two worlds, to understand why many SMEs are facing problems to the adoption of the SMM.

In order to achieve the objectives, the researcher adopted a qualitative study, dictated by the need to understand the social aspects involved. In fact, in support of this study, seven semi-structured interviews were carried out with a small sample of small and medium-sized wine enterprises in the Marche region. This sample is divided into two groups, respectively Social Media user and non-user, in order to obtain different points of view to be compared. Finally, the data obtained by the interviews were analysed within the literature and interesting findings were discovered.

The results show that there are several reasons behind those barriers. These reasons are related to the entrepreneurial mindset of Italian SMEs, the limited resources they have at their disposal and the awareness of these marketing tools (Social Media). However, one reason that links all these issues has been identified: the disinformation. This disinformation, about the use and effectiveness of social media as a marketing tool, leads the entrepreneurs to have a distorted perception of the tools.

Therefore, it is believed that the identification of this issue can bring a contribution to the study of this relationship and interesting ideas for further researches. In addition, the analysis and understanding of this disinformation problem could be a great help for SMEs, in order to improve their knowledge and awareness on the SMM world, but also for marketers, to improve their communication and approach to SMEs.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This work is taking in consideration two fields of study, the Social Media Marketing on one hand, and the Small and Medium Enterprises' world on the other hand. The combination of these two worlds lead to the core topic, that is the relationship between them, through the analysis of the barriers and the potential of this cooperation.

Social Media (SM) are nowadays opening huge possibilities to marketers and companies to achieve higher results, enabling them to reach their customers in an easier and faster way.

To understand the relationship between companies, especially SMEs, and Social Media Marketing (SMM) it is necessary to have, at least, a general background overview on the Italian SMEs world and on what these digital tools really are.

The research investigated the relationship with a qualitative research method and the collaboration of Italian SMEs in the Marche region, through semi-structured interviews.

In the following chapters are briefly explained the social media characteristics and their importance in the actual business world, the situation of the Italian SMEs and why they are so important, and finally what the Social Media Marketing is for a business.

1.1. Social Media Age

In the last decades the Web has become the strongest way of connection in the world, with digital platforms and tools available everywhere and every time we need them. The evolution brought us to a "point of no return", it means that we are so deeply into the net that we are almost totally dependent on it. In fact, most of the aspects of our life are directly linked and dependent on those social media and other digital communication tools, especially when we talk about social life.

The progress we are involved in is unstoppable and the tools that are keeping us "trapped" in this digital world are the Social Media.

To understand what Social Media are and how they work, it is better to start with some definition of tools and channels. The first definition given by one of the most influencing experts on this field, Larry Kim (2019) is that "Social media are the online platforms and technologies where users interact with each other and are the content creators." In fact, actually social media are based on the idea that people want to share or be part of something, for this reason the platform gives people the opportunity to be part of something bigger than what they can be in the "real life".

The numbers of the Social Media phenomenon are growing every year. As evidence of this increasingly popularity all around the world we can see how many people have an account in the most popular platforms: one of the most impressive is Facebook that had almost 2.5 billion monthly active users in the fourth quarter of 2019, followed by YouTube, the most famous video sharing platform, which at January 2020 had 2 billion active users. These giants are followed by WhatsApp, an instant messaging platform with 1.6 billion users and, last but not least, the most popular for young people, Instagram, that in 2018 had around 1 billion of users (Clement, 2020).

These numbers show us the influence and potential of those Media, in fact with a fast connection, these tools provide an impressive audience for businesses to reach.

These worldwide results are the first huge signal for all the managers and entrepreneurs of the entire world, with many examples of businesses that had already taken advantage of those tools by increasing their performances.

Due to the research topic, it is needed to narrow the field by focusing on the Italian situation and its Markets. In Italy, the most used social platform is YouTube, with 36.1 million users in December 2019, followed by Facebook with only a few users less, 35.9 million. The 3rd and 4th places are occupied by Instagram and LinkedIn, with respectively 27 million (+15,6% more than the previous year) and 18.7 million (+13,5% more than the previous year).

Notwithstanding, the most impressive platform is TikTok, the new raising star, with "only" 3,6 millions of users but with an impressive growth of 388% in the last year. (Cosenza, 2020)

This is a clear picture of how Italians are actively present on Social Networks and how, thanks to that, it could be easy for companies to reach a huge amount of people (customers and business partner), in order to communicate their messages and share their brands everywhere.

"Currently, most people, including business leaders, are using Social Media which provides opportunities for organizations to engage, to develop a rapport with their customers, and to foster a community to accelerate sales and awareness." (Taeuja and Toombs, 2014, p. 249)

1.2. Overview of the Italian SMEs' world

In this section of the chapter there is a brief overview of the Italian SMEs' world. The peculiarity and characteristics of this Italian world are important for the research, due to the influence they have on their relationship with the Social Media Marketing.

The Italian economy has an impressive percentage of SMEs, in fact, according to Istat (2017) official database they are the 99,9% of the Italian enterprises with the 77,5% of the all employees in the country. The Italian SMES have their own points of strength, the first of which is the entrepreneurial culture spread all over the country, shown by the fact that there is a plenty of new activities born every day. A high percentage of young people has this entrepreneurial mindset and culture because of their parents and families: in Italy, as in some other countries in the world, there is a strong belief in the job generational succession tradition that lead people to follow their parents' path continuing their jobs' activities, thus this entrepreneurial spirit is almost inevitable. (Santovito, 2016)

One of the Italian SMEs' gap could be recognized in the low level of high-tech and interest for new technologies, which, in comparison with other countries, is often placed below the average level.

Considering the strong traditions that characterize this country, most of all concerning food and the artisan world, Italian economy is identified by a unique and high-quality businesses. As already said, these traditions tend to be related to a strong entrepreneurial culture but, at the same time, they could be related to a restricted mind and way of thinking, being reluctant to changes and innovation. The SME's entrepreneurs are focused on what the tradition of their businesses has always taught them and what led them to achieve their results; this mindset could represent an "easy way" to survive but it does not exploit the potential to achieve best results. This mentality is keeping the door of many SMEs closed to changes and digital and technological advancement, fundamental for growth and success in this continuously evolving world.

For what concerns the importance of the advancement and improvement of the digital and technological side of the business, as showed by the Digital Transformation Scoreboard 2018 of the Talent Garden research, the 54% of the entrepreneurs is aware that it is really important to have the skills and always keep going with the flow of technologies. However, the 46% of them rarely provide training and courses to improve and update the necessary skills for the new digital world.

A reassuring factor is that SMEs are aware that they must have the right resources if they are going to take a new path towards change and technological advancement. In fact, many SMEs are investing in new technologies and looking for professionals, as Digital Marketing specialist, Data Analyst, Digital Communication expert, able to help and guide the company through this evolution.

As in the rest of the Business markets, the factor that has completely changed the focus of every companies, especially B2C, is the movement from the centrality of the company and their production processes towards customer experience and feedback.

Considering the previous explanation about the strong Italian tradition guiding businesses, has to be said that most of the youngest and newest businesses, usually led by relatively young entrepreneurs, tend to be more open to changes and digital progress, while the old and stable businesses are more difficult to convince and move from their strong mindset and solid roots.

An iconic example is the Caffè Carbonelli case, where the two brothers guiding the brand facing a problematic situation had two different approaches: the most traditionalist of them would have taken the car and go around looking for clients, while the other one decided to change their way of business and tried to find the solution in a more digital way, trusting the potential of the online world. Due to his innovative point of view the company had a big success, following the online way and taking advantage of the potential given by Digital Marketing, becoming one of the major Coffee sellers online. (Cosimi, 2014)

1.3. Social Media Marketing

Marketing is a tool in continuous evolution, especially in the last decades with the advent of the digital technologies. Thanks to the digital nature of tools such as Social Network, the communication between people in every part of the world is immediate and has practically no limits. Nowadays it is almost unthinkable to communicate with someone without the use of Social Media. (Papa, 2019)

A huge number of companies around the world is changing its marketing strategies, adapting them to digital channels suitable for communication and promotion. This has changed the way of many companies to manage their activities and their strategic and executive approach, all oriented to marketing (Papa, 2019). In fact, Social Media Marketing is made of strategies, which are in line with those of the company and bring added value to the achievement of company's objectives. (Di Fraia *et al.*, 2015)

The characteristic that allows SMM to be spread so widely in various sectors of working world is what differentiates it from the older channels and tools as TV, Radio and Newspaper: its opportunity to co-create, receive spontaneous free feedback and general opinion, without the mere promotion of products and services. All these actions are made through a sort of collaboration with the consumers who, almost unconsciously, are giving companies the most important information about their product but, even more important, insights about what they really want and need.

This last statement represents the focus of those strategies and actions adopted by the new digital marketing, which generates a new concept: the consumer is the core of company's objectives.

1.4. Research Purpose and Objectives

The previous part of the chapter, providing a general background, has given the first important information and inputs that influence the entire research. A deeper look has been taken into few aspects: Social Media Marketing, especially how it is helping and improving companies' performances of those who introduced it; the close mindset that rules the small businesses in Italy, especially the ones directly related to the agricultural field and markets. With this analysis, a clear issue rises to the surface. In this case the problem is represented by the boundaries built between SMEs and Social Media Marketing, most of the time exactly by those important actors of the Italian economy.

Many studies have demonstrated how Social Media can be used by companies and how they are helping them in increasing performances; although, most of the researches are based on bigger companies, with a high potential and a big amount of resources available. Therefore, there is not enough data on the small and medium enterprises' situation. Actually, due to the percentage of SMEs in Italy and their completely different dimension, possibility and mindset, those studies, focused on the generic SMM could be not completely useful to small and medium entrepreneurs. This lack of specific studies for SMEs and eventually their specific sector, could be one of the reasons for the barriers? Could it be that they don't see themselves in those "examples", so they are still reluctant to face the change and try new technologies related to the digital marketing?

It is very important to clarify the objective of this research, which is not to demonstrate that SMEs which do not use Social Media as a marketing tool are wrongly managing their brands. The aim of this work is to illustrate the potential of these tools, discovering the reasons behind these barriers, to give the opportunity to improve their strategies and give useful information, in order to ensure that all stakeholders have the knowledge necessary to make the right decision for their business. This research is going to investigate if entrepreneurs

are aware of the true potential and skills of these tools, or if they are not, thereby creating a potential limit for their possibilities for decision making and growth.

The aim of the research leads to original results as they fill a gap in the study of the relationship between SMEs, with the viewpoint of the entrepreneur's perception, and Social Media Marketing. Since the researcher did not identify any study that analyzed this relationship focusing on the entrepreneur's point of view.

To summarize the research objectives, it can be stated that there will be an analysis of the reasons behind the barriers between social media marketing and SMES, taking as study sample and source the Marche wine sector in Italy. The final aim of this research is to find out possible solutions to overcome those barriers and illustrate SMEs the tools to act in the best way possible.

The ones that follow are the questions which drive this research and that will be answered through it.

Why are SMEs particularly reluctant to social media marketing?

Which are the strongest barriers between Italian SMEs and social media marketing?

Which are the reasons behind these barriers?

The significant presence of social media in the business world, from the largest to the smallest companies, is putting many entrepreneurs and managers in front of an important choice. Large companies, with their available potential, have already made a move on this issue, but many SMEs are still standing at that crossroads. in a country like Italy where SMEs are the "boss", how are these entrepreneurs reacting?

Many of them are facing some problems in the approach to this new world, there are reasons behind these issues, and this research investigates precisely these reasons.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to acquire a good knowledge base on the subject, it is necessary to analyse the available literature on the subject.

In this specific case, as previously mentioned, there are scarce available resources for what concerns the specific case of Italian SMEs and Social Media Marketing, particularly if talking about wine sector. Therefore, it is necessary to use and take into account previous studies, as recent as possible, that are nonetheless related to the research objectives.

Talking about digital marketing, in the academic world there are various positions and opinions, especially about social media marketing. In fact, in the generic opinion, social media have a continuously open and controversial debate, and taking a look at them from various business points of view come up a very interesting debate. From a critical point of view, the majority of authors and studies on Social Media Marketing have a positive opinion about the use of these tools within the companies. In fact, as shown by the many evidence given by related studies on the subject and the number, provided by Eurostat reports, of companies, that still use social media as a marketing tool in Italy (48%), it is clear that these tools have a really amazing potential for companies.

In order to have a clear structure and understand the process carried out in the literature analysis, given the purpose of the research and the previous introduction to the literature, it was necessary to divide the various topics within the research. The analysis has been divided and presented as follows: starting from an analysis of the issues encountered during the literature research, this chapter will present a deeper analysis of Social Media what they represent and their main functions, proceeding with an explanation of how Social Media Marketing works and why it is so powerful, and concluding with an analysis of the relationship between SMEs and SMM and the barriers between them.

2.1. Social Media and their business function

It was necessary to start the analysis of the main topic with a brief description of what Social Media really are. The introduction chapter provides a general

description of these tools but here has been done an analysis through the works of authors and experts, compared to understand better what they are made for and how they influence communities.

Considering the confusion among managers and entrepreneurs about what Social Media are, here there are few suggestions of definition that are going to bring clearness.

A definition given by Kaplan & Haenlein (2010) define Social Media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content”. As it is easily understandable from this brief statement, the central concept of social media is connection, exchange and the creation of contents. In fact, the focus and aim of these tools is to give people a place where they can be connected, sharing their interests and expressing their creativity.

“Social media is a name given to web-based and mobile technologies that are used to turn communication into an interactive dialogue. This interactive dialogue can occur between organizations, communities and individuals” (Agrawal, 2019)

As said by Agrawal Harsh in this definition of SM, they are not made just for a single subject, but developed also for organizations and communities; this is to point out how it is easy to use them for business, that they are easily usable for business, as they can be used with the same simple functions and activities that a normal private user can use to communicate or enjoy himself and sometimes promote himself (socially or professionally).

Social Media are easily to access for everyone and, more important, are totally free tools. They are present in the daily life of a third of the entire world population, and this is demonstrated by the fact that Social Media are replacing other forms of communication, for instance for the news, as said by Martin Nicole from Forbes Journal “nearly 64.5 percent receive breaking news from Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Snapchat and Instagram instead of traditional media”.

This means that people are active almost every day on their SM accounts, and that they trust what is in there. For this reason, the power of these tools is greater than you might think. This demonstrate how many people could be

reached and how much they could be influenced by the contents of these platforms.

There are various opinions about how SM are affecting our lives, some of them favorable and other strongly contrary.

There are many reasons behind the SM "enemies", one of them is identified in the lack of privacy that this tools may have; in fact, some experts are fighting against the big companies that own SM platform, because they see them as tools to control and gain information about the population, as expressed by Richard Stallman, programmer, Founder of GNU Project and the Free Software Foundation: "Facebook is not your friend. It is a surveillance engine".

A GQ article written by Benji Hansen-Bundy (2018) talks about how SM modify our brain, how much it is dangerous to be part of them and not being aware of what is really going on there. According to that, they are built to connect people, and that is true, but the way there are used is what people doesn't know. Those platforms have the risk, replacing a real conversation, to create misunderstanding and fight among people; people get really evil when they feel safe behind a screen.

"It's not a humble place. You know the story of Lord of the Flies, where these boys are stuck on an island and they turn into a wolf pack and they become horrible to each other? That's Twitter." (Hansen-Bundy, 2018)

On the other side, as previously explained, Social Media are giving the opportunity to people all over the world to be connected, to feel part of something even when they cannot be part of a community in real life, as the example of Facebook and his CEO Mark Zuckerberg, which expresses himself in this regard : "When you give everyone a voice and give people power, the system usually ends up in a really good place. So, what we view our role as, is giving people that power."

What it is interesting, in both those sides and opinions, for this research is the fact that is clearly stated how much SM are strong and powerful and how their influence can be used in many ways, particularly for business.

In the following paragraph there is the fundamental phase that analyses the role of SM as Marketing tools, to see how they work and why they are growing and becoming popular among companies in every sector of the business world.

2.2. Social Media Marketing: how it works?

As already known, Social Media have already become fundamental tools for marketers of all work sectors. To have clear view of these tools in a company, it is important to know how they work and what they can do. Here are explain some characteristics of SMM and their usage on SMEs.

Thanks to their nature, they extend the potential of the marketing strategies, developing new way of communication, channels and resources for market research.

Starting from a basic framework on the Marketing Mix, managers divide their analysis into four section to find out what their costumers' needs are; basically, the marketing mix is a typical tool to help managers planning what to offer and how to offer it to customers (Kotler *et al.*, 2017). These factor to take in consideration are proposed by Jerome McCarthy in the 1950s as the 4Ps: product, promotion, place and price. This model is so important because it explains the idea of marketing as simple as possible, making it more understandable. Since this work tries to understand why SMEs don't use SMM and one of the reasons is that many managers and entrepreneurs don't have the essential knowledge to evaluate it, this model was chosen in this analysis because of its clarity. In fact, with an easy and adaptable model it is easier to face this problem.

This model, through the years, has been modified and adapted to the necessity of the evolution of marketing. In fact, there are some other experts that have proposed an adaptation of the 4Ps into a more suitable marketing mix, oriented in different ways and with different priorities. The marketing mix has been criticized because considered too obsolete and not satisfactory for the needs of the actual businesses' orientation toward customers and stakeholders. The main argument against the 4Ps is that the model is internally oriented; this limitation leads to the lack of customer orientation and the insufficient attention to the relationship with customers. (Constantinides, 2002)

One of the proposals has been done by Dr. Bob Lauterborn, professor at the University of California, where the 4Ps are replaced from the 4Cs: co-creation, currency, communal application and conversation. This new adapted model

lead to a more customer-centric view and fits better in a context such as the SMM.

There are other theories supporting the classic marketing mix, where it is argued that the 4Ps should not be changed but could be adapted to new needs. For example, 4Ps can be integrated with new communication technologies but still remain in line with the idea of understanding the needs of the consumer. (Möller, 2006)

The most popular version of the marketing mix model can be considered the simplest one, in which a fifth 'P', Participation, is added to the other four. It could be considered as the easiest because of the concept of collaboration between the company and the customers in the idea creation and the other processes. This is an evolution from the push messaging of traditional marketing (one-way, large amounts of broadcast and print media, with minimal opportunities for interaction and enterprise-customer feedback), where the brand message is controlled in a top-down direction, toward the bottom-up of e-commerce. (Tuten and Solomon, 2004)

As aforementioned, digital marketing can improve the marketing performance. To do this, however, it must follow and be consistent with the company's strategies so that it can help it achieve its objectives, because as stated by Bertoli Miriam (digital marketing consultant), in *Social Media Marketing - Strategies and techniques for B2B and B2C companies* (2015, p. 387): "Digital marketing and communication are to all intents and purposes one of the levers of marketing and as such they help the company achieve the goals for which it is active every day." For this reason, being an enhancer of a company's marketing strategies, they must be integrated in the best possible way, in order to be effective and lead to the desired results. It is often not so easy, especially for SMEs, to incorporate and integrate these elements into their strategies and activities.

Bertoli developed a method that can assure the correct functioning of a digital marketing strategies and can help companies to understand the processes and how to use it. She divided it into 5 phases:

- Analysis;
- Punctual definition of the strategy;
- Operational plan and action;

- Measurement;
- Continuous improvement.

This process is used considering at its core the formalization of the "5W+How" questions: why, who, what, where, when and how. These questions are the basis from which start the strategies and understand how and if it is needed to use digital marketing tools for the company.

How it is well understandable, the focus here is on the strategies that are necessary to understand why to use Social Media, and then on the how use them, in fact, mentioning Dr. Bertoli's work again, "every time someone starts with: "Let's open a Facebook Page, something to publish then we find it" or develops a new site starting from the dress, from the graphics, it's as if he was starting to build a building by placing a sofa in the middle of the building site"(Di Fraia *et al.*, 2015, p. 387). This means that, even when a company decide to use those tools, it is necessary to have a clear understanding and the right competences to not waste time and money. In few words, you need to be prepared and skilled.

Going deeper into SMM, since they have become a fundamental part of any marketing strategy, they must become also an integral part of the company's DNA.

Considering their characteristics, Social Media are made of different factors to take care of and to consider when using them as a marketing tool, these factors can be: content creation, data analysis, the understanding of the data received by their activities and find the best why on how to use them. These factors are important in this research, being them part of the barriers between SMM and SMEs, as it is shown in the following chapters.

Other studies have explained that, in addition to the clearest function and usage of the social media of customer engagement, there is another very important component to consider: the internal usage of these tools. As shown in a research by Meske and Stieglitz (2013) on the adoption of Social Media by SMEs, many previous studies faced the fact that a small number of SMEs uses the power of social media communication internally in their business. The management integrated with communication tools can improve, facilitate and speed up the process of knowledge exchange throughout the entire company, from one department to one another. It was noted that not all the companies

have the necessary resources to build and use a dedicated collaborative portal, but there are other ways promoted by studies and the technological developed platform, with the only need of a basic knowledge of their functionalities.

2.3. The relationship between SMEs and SMM

After the analysis of the basic concepts about what SM and SMM are and what they can do, this section reviewed the literature about the central core of the research, summarized in the following question: what is the relation between SMEs and SMM?

As introduced at the beginning of the literature review chapter, the topic was studied only by few authors and experts, indeed the focus of the majority of the researches was always on the reason why social media are so popular, what they can do, and in the case of study applications they were always related to bigger companies instead of small and medium ones.

Those works can although be useful to understand the general topic and, adapting that to the SMEs field, it is possible to get interesting and essential information to achieve the objective of this research.

Considering the number shown on the previous chapters, it is known that Social Media are increasing their presence into the SMEs strategies, but the percentage is still low, especially when considering smaller companies. Yet, behind this numbers there are the real issues that build the barriers between SMEs and SMM.

2.3.1. What Social Media can do for a company

Through this literature research it has been done an analysis to understand which those factors are building the barriers and the reason why some companies are not able to go beyond them. To do that, it was necessary to take in consideration also the reasons of the success of SM's introduction in SMEs and why they are considered valuable tools for those companies.

Starting from what Social Media can give to SMEs, it has to be considered what internet can do: in fact, "the Internet, thanks to 'listening' and social interaction tools, allows access to large amounts of detailed information in an instant and at any time, leading to a considerable reduction in transaction costs, an extension of the geographical boundaries of the market and for smaller companies to access markets and compete with 'industry giants'" (Pencarelli and Caravelli, 2017, p. 29). Those SMEs that are already investing in marketing tools for communication have the opportunity to reduce their expenses on those activities, thanks to the cheaper service that internet (and especially Social Media) is providing. It is known that almost anything is ever for free, therefore also these tools required an investment that can be considered as monetary, for instance when it is necessary to buy Adv services or to invest in an external agency service, or as 'time' investment, in the sense of training employees or spending time to manage the tools.

With regard to the access to a huge amount of information, there is no need to explain that a small company with limited resources, but better possibilities for improvement and growth, could only benefit from a continuous acquisition of information and updating, so that they can direct their business and their strategies without adding additional economic efforts.

2.3.2. Problems to face in Social Media usage

The introduction of Social Media in SMEs, both for internal and external communication usage, is usually decided by top managers and, for this reason, is widely common that the CEO is the one who manages the use of social media especially in the smaller ones (Meske and Stieglitz, 2013). This concept introduces another problematic aspect, previously mentioned, of the relation between SMES and SMM, the wrong usage of the Social Media. This can be considered one of the crucial aspects that need to be adjusted, because it is at the base of the reason of mistrust of the SMEs managers and entrepreneurs. The incorrect usage of these tools can lead the company to a waste of resources and time, because they are actually easy tools to use but, in any kind of business, they need to be supported by a plan, in fact "create a social media marketing plan will guide companies online actions, but it will also be a measure by which they

determine whether they're succeeding or failing at social media" (Viana, 2016, p. 2)

The failure results from the misuse will be interpreted, by the person concerned and the community, as a sign of inefficiency of these instruments, increasing distrust and visions against their use.

Into the misunderstanding of the correct usage of the Social Media there is the aspect that characterizes SMEs, i.e. "a limited ability to realize risky investments and a stronger focus on core business activities, which are directly aiming on increasing the company's profit"(Meske and Stieglitz, 2013, p.62). In fact, instead of using the SM to engage their customers and create loyalty, their aim is to increase sales without considering the aspects and functions that SM use to help the company to achieve its objectives. SMM is a more long-term strategy and has to be well understood to see the indirect relation with good results.

2.3.3. Which are the barriers?

Through the analysed literature, general problems have emerged between MS and SMEs that contribute to the construction of those barriers that separate the two realities, preventing companies from being able to exploit the potential that social media can generate.

Many reasons were analysed and grouped into few issues that can be identified as the real barriers:

- The lack of knowledge: it is clear that, without a good knowledge and the right information about a determined topic is difficult to evaluate e judge things for what they really are. In fact, SMEs' managers, being not enough informed about what Social Media can do, are understandably reluctant to introduce these tools and to invest resources in them.
- The limited resources: the first point introduces us to the second barrier; in fact, SMEs are usually characterised by limited resources and entrepreneurs, who do not see the potential in those tools, are not convinced to invest their small amount of resources in them. They prefer other, easier and less risky, but less remunerable investments.

2.4. Winery SMEs in Marche Region

To understand better the research it is useful to have a general idea of the wine sector in the Marche region; in this section there are some data and important factors of this territory and its wine economy situation.

The Italian wine sector is one of the most traditional and representative in the world. As the majority of the Italian economic sectors, the winery one is mostly composed by SMEs, often family-owned and existing for many years. All these wineries, according to the OIV 2019 report, have a massive wine production of 54.8 million hectolitres per year, ranked first in the world ranking of wine producing countries, second only to Spain in terms of exports, with 29.7 million hectolitres. Italy, in the last years, had an increase in production but a decrease in international export. (OIV, 2019)

million hl	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Italy	44.2	50.0	50.9	42.5	54.8
France	46.5	47.0	45.3	36.3	48.6
Spain	39.5	37.7	39.7	32.5	44.4
USA*	23.1	21.7	23.7	23.3	23.9
Argentina	15.2	13.4	9.4	11.8	14.5
Chile	9.9	12.9	10.1	9.5	12.9
Australia	11.9	11.9	13.1	13.7	12.9
Germany	9.2	8.8	9.0	7.5	10.3
South Africa	11.5	11.2	10.5	10.8	9.5
China	13.5	13.3	13.2	11.6	9.1
Portugal	6.2	7.0	6.0	6.7	6.1
Russian Federation	5.1	5.6	6.6	5.8	5.5
Romania	3.7	3.6	3.3	4.3	5.1
Hungary	2.4	2.8	2.8	3.2	3.6
Brazil	2.6	2.7	1.3	3.6	3.1
New Zealand	3.2	2.3	3.1	2.9	3.0
Austria	2.0	2.3	2.0	2.5	2.8
Greece	2.8	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.2
Ukraine	1.5	1.1	1.1	1.9	2.0
Moldova	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.8	1.9
Switzerland	0.9	0.9	1.1	0.8	1.1
Bulgaria	0.8	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.0
World	270	275	270	249	292

Figure 1 - World Wine Production

million hl	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Spain	23.0	24.7	22.6	23.0	21.1
Italy	20.4	20.0	20.6	21.2	19.7
France	14.3	13.9	14.1	15.0	14.1
Chile	8.1	8.8	9.1	9.4	9.3
Australia	7.0	7.4	7.3	7.8	8.6
South Africa	4.2	4.2	4.3	4.5	5.3
Germany	4.2	3.9	3.6	3.8	3.7
USA	4.0	4.2	3.8	3.5	3.5
Portugal	2.8	2.8	2.8	3.0	3.0
Argentina	2.6	2.7	2.6	2.2	2.8
New zealand	1.9	2.1	2.1	2.6	2.6
Moldova	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.4
World	104	106	104	108	108

Figure 2 - World Wine Export

The Marche region, considering its quite small size, has a wine production of 878 million hectolitres, divided among the 152 wineries in the area. The research on this topic was limited by the scarce availability of institutional documentation, for this reason a cross-reference of various sources was necessary.

The food and beverage industries in this region account for 6% of the sector and 9% of the manufacturing industry but the beverage industries, including the wine producing industries, are increasing. (Baccaglio, 2016)

The winery sector, being strictly related to the agricultural field, still have a bigger distance from the new technology and development in terms of organization and communication.

Through the research carried out on platforms dedicated to the wine sector in the Marche region and by checking the various websites of the companies present in the area, some interesting features emerged. Many wineries belong to a family succession of several generations, linked to the territory and the tradition of cultivation. These characteristics are strong points in terms of quality but often a limitation on technological progress and development.

In recent years, promotional projects have been organised by wine protection agencies, such as Imt (Institute for wine protection in Marche region), to support the wine sector and help SMEs with limited possibilities. Especially in this period of emergency due to COVID-19 where the companies had a "almost total blockage of sales (especially for small businesses the drop is up to 90%)"

(Ansa, 2020), the Imt and the CCIAA (Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Craftmanship e Agriculture) are proposing initiatives to help promote the territory both nationally and internationally.

As declared by Alberto Mazzoni, director of Imt, "in the last 9 years, companies' adherence to Imt's promotional projects has almost tripled, and in the same period regional exports have grown by almost 45%", this means that companies are starting to realize how important has become the communication. These promotional projects are mostly focused on the world export of wine from Marche, and the growth of this export highlights the great possibilities that a good communication, particularly abroad oriented, brings to SMEs.

2.5. Technology Acceptance Model

As can be easy to understand, given the hierarchical decision management nature of an SMEs and the more direct decision making process (Pentina *et al.*, 2012), what is behind these barriers is the vision and perception of the managers about Social Media. For that reason, a model has been identified as useful to understand this aspect and help the knowledge of this relationship: The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) developed by Fred D. Davis (1985) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.).

This model was developed to understand and test the user's acceptance of computer-based information system. It is made on the assumption that behavioural intention to use a new technological system is based on two aspects: The Perceived Usefulness (PU) and the Perceived Ease of Use (PEU), where "PEU is the extent to which a person believes that using the technology will enhance job performance, and PEU is the belief that using the technology will be free of effort" (Pentina *et al.*, 2012, p. 69). These two factors, as explained in the figure below, are influenced by some external variables and lead to the attitude towards the technological tools.

In the study previously mentioned, carried out by Pentina (2012), regarding the adoption of social networks marketing by SMEs, it was considered appropriate and sufficient to use, as the main aspect, only the

PU by the entrepreneur, since the PEU was considered not influential in the case of social media adoption.

One of the characteristics, considered in this study as fundamental in this problematic relationship, is the ease of use of SM as a marketing tool by companies, especially SMEs, given their small size. Considering this high involvement, in this research was inevitable to consider both the perception, PU and PEU, given by the model.

Applied to the SMEs world, this tool can be a useful way to identify the right variable that are influencing the perception and lead to the understanding of the reasons that stands behind the relationship.

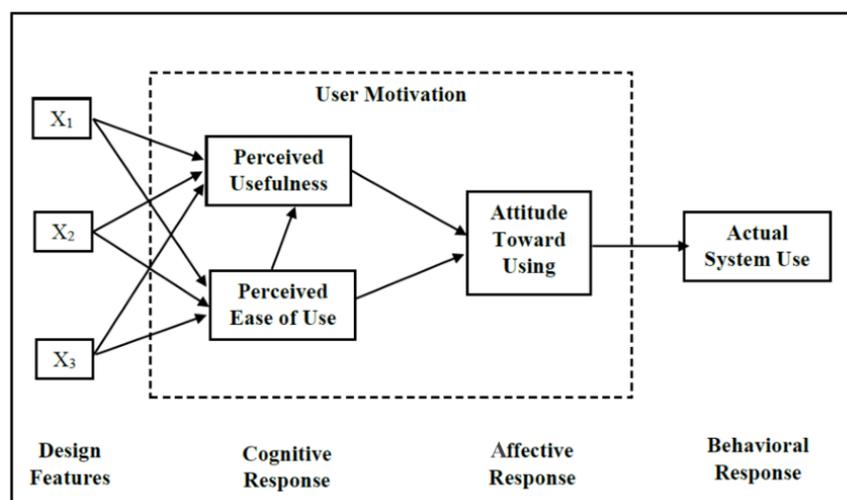


Figure 3 - Davis' Technology Acceptance Model (1985)

2.6. Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature review and the available resources, it was necessary to set a framework to go straight to the investigated point. This framework helped to go straight to the research objectives without losing track, in fact venturing into the world of social media, being it constantly evolving and having multiple applications in various fields, it is easy to lose your goal.

For this reason, as already stated many times, the created onion scheme framework starts from the background needed, as first layer. It goes deeper with other three layers, shaped by the necessary subtopic identified and finally arrived at the core of the research, with the final analysis of the results.

The search for theory and model that help to structure and give guidelines to the research was not easy. The more suitable and helpful model is the previously mentioned TAM (Technology Acceptance Model).

This model helped, as already explained, to find out the variable to be considered in the analysis of the perception of managers and entrepreneurs, and the relation of the two actors, SMEs and SMM.

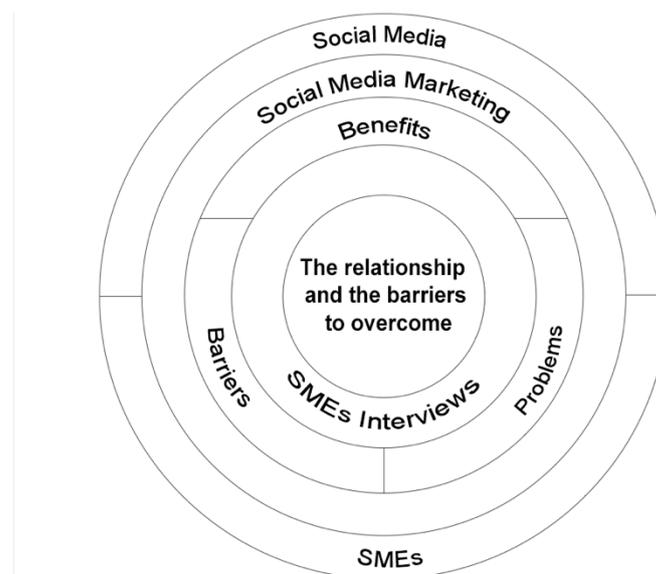


Figure 4 - Conceptual Framework

Through the literature analysis were identified 3 main variables, those are all related to the adoption and usage of the Social Media. The variables were identified as the most important factor that influence the perception and consequentially the relationship. These variables are the three factors that make up the third layer of the scheme, obtained from the analysis in the previous layers and used to build the structure of the planned interviews.

2.6.1. First layer – Social Media and SMEs

In the first layer of the onion, the research starts with the background analysis of the two major topics involved: The Italian Small and Medium Enterprises' world and the Social Media Age. This stage helps to set and give the necessary knowledge to understand the right path to follow, to do not get lost in the wide world of the Social Media Business.

Through the available data found in the literature about the most popular SM and the way they are used, it was possible to outline the first variables to use subsequently in the following steps.

It was also necessary to explore the situation with the Italian SMEs and the nature of its actors. To be able to proceed, with the following steps, it was essential to find out the factors that are affecting SMEs' mindsets and strategies; these factors have a crucial role in the approach to the Social Media world.

2.6.2. Second Layer – Social Media Marketing

This second issue that is relevant to my study, as presented in the previous section of this chapter, about the world of Social Media Marketing. In the first layer were analysed the two worlds, respectively Social Media and SMEs, and these two worlds are at the base of the topic in this second layer. In fact, the main point was to analyse the relation between the two worlds, which is growing more and more in this technological evolution that the marketing and communication sector is undergoing.

The SMM is an implementation of the traditional marketing, this implementation is strictly correlated to the company's strategies, for this reason companies have to identify what they need and what they have to implement, before introducing these tools.

Considering this influence and the highlighted correlation, it was important to select those aspects involved in SMM's introduction process and at the same moment identify and observe what SMM really change in the companies. Though the analysis three aspects were identified as important variable in the relation between the two worlds; in the next layer these variables are shown.

2.6.3. Third layer – Benefits, Problems and Barriers

The three aspects identified are the following:

- **Benefits:** it was useful to analyse what SMM brings to a company and even more important, later to bring the solution to overcome the barriers found at the end of the analysis.

- **Problems:** companies, typically making changes and improvements to their strategies, have to face many problems. The SMM, being a new way of thinking, involves the entrepreneurial mindset and consequentially bring problems in the management first of all and, then in strategy and operativity.
- **Barriers:** those previous aspects are, in some way, the basis to find out what the barriers between SMEs and SMM really are and how they are being built. These barriers are the fundamental part to arrive at the ending part of the research.

2.6.4. Fourth Layer – SMEs Interviews and The Relationship and the Barriers to overcome

The last layer before the core and final objective is fundamental to receive the necessary confirmation of the previous research. The Interviews are conducted on winery companies of the Marche region, contacted by the researcher, to get the best view possible of their experience with SMM or on their distance (voluntary or not) to it.

Finally arrived at the core of the topic, all the needed information and data are supposed to be already achieved, and their analysis starts. Thanks to the partially followed guideline of the TAM, it is possible to analyse all the factors involved in a straight way of correlation. This analysis lead to the final findings on the researched barriers and the possible way for the SMEs to overcome them.

3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter is dedicated to the explanation of the adopted methodology to conduct this research. In the various section there is the description of the characteristics the research is based on. The methodology can be structured with the onion scheme, which shows the research process through the various layers. Each layer represents in detail a fundamental step in the research process. The starting point is the philosophy behind the research, based on the reality being investigated, and justifies how the research is undertaken. Below is the approach adopted to address the research, which follows the guidelines given by the underlying philosophy. In the third step there is the choice of research strategy. This step outlines how the research is carried out by the researcher. The third step is the introduction to the more concrete layer where the time horizon is explained and followed by the data collection and analysis method. These last passages are crucial explanation of which methods are used by the researcher to achieve the necessary data, and once achieved, how they are analysed in order to bring value to the research and its final results.

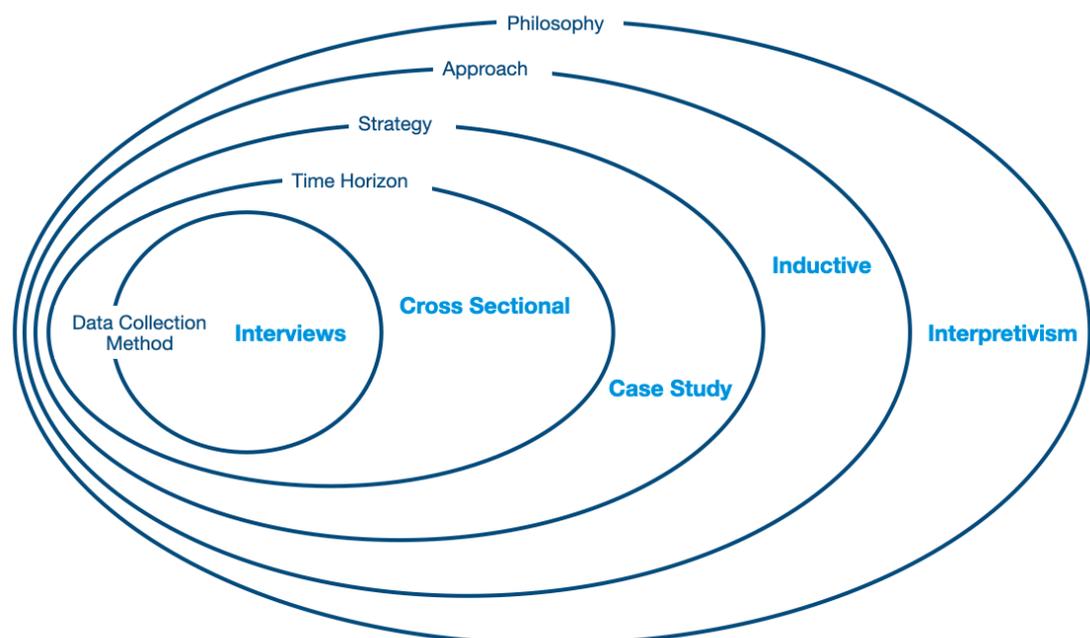


Figure 5 - Research Onion

All the choices made are directly related to the nature of the subject matter. Therefore, each choice is justified by certain characteristics and the interpretation considered most advantageous and useful for research purposes.

3.1. Research Philosophy

Considering the topic of this research, it seemed quite easy to understand which the best philosophy was to frame the entire work.

This research is based on the two topics that were rarely studied in their relationship. For this reason, the work done is almost devoid of a theoretical basis. The literature I reviewed in the previous chapter includes some theories related to two separate scholarships. Unfortunately, there are still no specific set of theories that supports the topic of this research. In addition, during the research it was also necessary to take into account the characteristic nature of the two topics involved. From this point of view, it is possible to see how my research topic is mostly based on factors affecting human aspects. For this reason, the study should be carried out considering data related to business and social media activities but also a more human aspect, related to the mentality. In the SMEs the most important influence of this relation is the mindset of the entrepreneur and the managers who take the decisions. In fact here it is aimed to "enter the social world of our research subjects and understand their world from their point of view" (Saunders *et al.*, 2007, p. 107). Also, Social Media is centred on their use that by its very nature involves humans and their mind.

To study and understand all these aspects was more suitable to use a **qualitative research**, based on the interviews to collect data. The reason for this choice is essentially due to the aim and objectives of the research, which require data that cannot be acquired with a quantitative approach, as it is finalised to establish and test relationships between numerically measurable variables.

Considering all these aspects, an **interpretivism philosophy** proved to be the most suitable for my research. The interpretivism is based on the assumption that all the social actors are different and have their perception of determined phenomenon. As explained by Walsham (1995) the aim is usually to understand the context and the perception of phenomenon and processes, how they

influence and are influenced. For example, "in the organization, all the stakeholders' approach is different and they act according to their interpretation" (GuhaThakurta and Chetty, 2015)

As previously explained, the process in a small and medium company is always guided by the entrepreneur's view of business, for this reason a qualitative analysis was the best way to achieve the information needed. A quantitative analysis was not necessary because of the nature of the research objective, which is not focused on a big amount of data collection, business results and percentage, but on the reasons explaining 'why' something is happening. The only way to identify the reasons behind the barriers on the SM adoption, and understand them, was to be focused on the decisional aspect of the companies.

3.2. Research Approach

Following the previous explanations about the chosen research philosophy, it was logical and simple to choose the most suitable research approach. What was taken in consideration is the aim of the research and the fundamental role of the SME's entrepreneur in the adoption of SM. The importance of the entrepreneur mindset is confirmed by the literature analysis regarding the SMEs, indeed the perception of the SMM's potential and its ease of usage is influenced by the entrepreneurs and managers "point of view".

The most suitable approach was identified in the **inductive approach** that constructs a less rigid methodology permitting to consider alternative explanations. The inductive approach is used to collect raw data and summarized them and link the findings to the research objective (Thomas, 2006). It usually goes from the absence of initial theory, that permits to the researcher to adopt changes during the research. Through the observation and the analysis of the phenomenon the researcher builds explanation and theories. This approach perfectly fits because one of the research's aims is the interest in "understanding why something is happening, rather than be able to describe what is happening" (Saunders *et al.*, 2007, p. 119).

3.3. Research Purpose and Time Horizon

Having adopted a qualitative approach, the **exploratory purpose** proved useful in my study. Research based on an exploratory purpose usually faces problems and phenomena with little or no prior study. The primary purpose of this kind of research is not to bring a solution but to go deeper and have a better understanding of the topic, usually a problem.

"Exploratory search makes us all pioneers and adventurers in a new world of information riches awaiting discovery along with new pitfalls and costs." (Marchionini, 2006, p. 44)

Going deeper in the problematic relation through SMEs and SMM, the research is going to understand what is happening; to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light (Robson, 2002). In fact, as this research has been done to understand the problem behind the relationship between SMEs and SMM, the aim of the research is to understand why there are certain problems and barriers, based on the perception and point of view of the principal actors involved in the relations.

This research is a small part of a huge and important field of study; for its complexity and multiple phenomena and points of view, it would require a much longer and more complex time to be analysed in all its parts. In this situation the topic is analysed with an academic research, this entails restrictions and limitations in terms of time. For this reason, the time horizon for the research is **cross-sectional**, typical of an academic project/research.

The research, however, can be a valuable contribution for this field of study, given its uniqueness and different approach from the previous studies. This contribution can be considered a good starting point for a deeper and more concrete research, which could lead to useful and interesting results.

3.4. Research Strategy and Methods of Data Collection

Following the guideline set out so far, the most suitable strategy for the study of this topic is the **case study**. This strategy is the best fit for an exploratory

research, and as said before it “has considerable ability to generate answer to the question ‘why?’” (Saunders *et al.*, 2007, p. 139).

The chosen research strategy provided the overall direction of the research processes by which the research is conducted.

The research had a clear need of contextualization and support from a concrete point of view for this reason this strategy was chosen. In fact, “case study is documented as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Wadewatta *et al.*, 2011)

The strategy was oriented to a multiple case study, consisting of the various companies considered suitable and available (as explain in the following chapter) in the territory selected as a field of study, in the wine sector.

3.4.1. Sample Selection

As explained in the introduction chapter, there was a careful analysis to identify the best subjects. There are some factors that influence the taken decision to analyse the chosen subjects, first of all the data about the presence and importance of the SMEs in the Marche region and their influence on the region economy, than the choice falls in the wine sector because it has been identified as a sector very suitable for the use of social media and which can be divided between B2B or B2C companies. The decision was to use SMEs in the B2C sector because of the characteristics that allow these companies to work with tools such as the SM, and the importance and impact they can have in winery SMEs' performance.

The sample was divided in two groups: the SMEs that are already using SM as marketing tools and the SMEs that are not using them. This was made to have a clear understanding of which is the process and the reasons behind the decision or not to adopt these tools.

This decision was simply based on the necessity to get the information about the SMEs mindset and the adoption of SM. From companies that are not using SMM was possible to achieve the information about the decision making and the difficulties they cannot solve in approaching it. In the meantime, from the SMM users the interest was on the approach adopted to introduce the SM usage but

also on the reason for their introduction. It is important to understand how the perception of the SM before the adoption was and how and why it changed.

Each SME was represented by its owner/entrepreneur, who participate in the interview.

Based on the number of wineries and due to the situation derived by the virus COVID-19 spread and the consequential closing of companies and commercial activities, was not easy to reach the availability of all the best selected companies. However, there was a satisfactory interest by some SMEs in this research, which have made themselves available to collaborate and make their contribution. The number of necessary interviews was decided based on some factors, first of all the small number of wineries in the Marche region, as shown in the literature chapter. The convenience sampling partially represents the sample selected for this research, this methods is based on a define target that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate (Etikan *et al.*, 2015), in fact, there was the necessity to adapt the number of interviews on the available access to the SMEs. Finally, was adopted the snowballing strategy, which with a kind of word of mouth permit to reach new collaboration during the period of interviews. This Snowball sampling consists in ask to the interviewees about other available similar subjects, in this case winery SMEs, to be interviewed. Practically "in this method, the existing study subjects recruit future subjects among their acquaintances." (Naderifar *et al.*, 2017)

The two groups consisting respectively of 3 non-users SMEs and 4 user SMEs, for a total of 7 cases from which to obtain the necessary information.

Therefore, the subjects were selected according to various characterizing factors:

- **the presence of a family succession:** a factor that characterizes a large percentage of SMEs in this sector;
- **the age of the managerial class:** young entrepreneurs usually more inclined to use social media and older entrepreneurs with a more closed mentality;
- **the use of social media tools:** it was considered important, as a decisive factor, to consider the wrong use of these tools and not to use

them, as it is assumed to have a strong influence on the relationship analysed.

As a result of the low response from the companies, the selection criteria were not fully met. It was therefore decided to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the few companies willing to cooperate. Although the characteristics were not fully met, the companies were still suitable for the purpose, as the final results obtained show.

The selected companies have been contacted by email, where all information about the research and its objective has been provided. It was not an easy process, always considering the current global situation, and therefore not reaching all the desired subjects, further emails of incitement and request for collaboration were used.

3.4.2. Structure of the Interviews

The research has been structured and based on 7 interviews made in a short period time, from the 23rd of April to the 2nd of May, to a small sample of subjects.

As far as the structure of the interview is concerned, it is based on the information that is deemed necessary to be obtained, based on research carried out through the literature and study of the sector. The interview needed to be not totally standardized, so that detailed and precise answers can be obtained for certain questions, but at the same time it is very important that the respondent is free to express his or her opinion and point of view (Corrao, 2005). This is precisely because the research needs information that explains the reasons and mentality behind these.

As a consequence, a **semi-structured** interview was prepared following the same criteria and considering the TAM (Technology Acceptance Model) guidelines, the identified external variability influencing the perception of the subject.

As a result of the decision to divide a sample of subjects into two groups, based on the characteristics explained above, it was necessary to produce two types of interviews. The two interviews are both focused on the reasons for the adoption or non-adoption of the Social Media for a business purpose. Obviously,

the asked question are based on the usage of these instrument, this means that for the SM users the questions aim to understand why these tools have been adopted, how they are used, how much they are used and the knowledge/competence that SMEs have at their disposal. In the non-user interviews the focus is on the reason reasons behind that decision, awareness of the opportunities that these tools provide and finally, as the other set of interviews, the knowledge and the information about the SM world.

The questions generated are based on the major important aspects needed from this study: their opinion about the Social Media world, the motivation behind the usage/non usage of the Social Media, the benefits perceived by their usage, what are the knowledge about these tools and some specific information (variables of the model) to test if they are aware of them and which is their perception of the Social Media Marketing.

Finally, there is some time at the end, dedicated to let the interviewee express general thought about the field of study and how the actual situation of the COVID-19 can influence the adoption of SM now and in the future.

In order to start conducting the interviews it was deemed necessary to carry out a first test, to test that the selected questions are well constructed and reach the information sought. For this reason, a **pilot interview** was carried out through a first candidate, and it was used to make adjustments to the questions and to understand if there was any gap in the methodology adopted, in order to modify the interview and make it more effective and precise.

3.4.3. Access to Data and Research Ethics

The interview had a duration of about 20 minutes and varies according to the interviewee's availability, as confirmed by the pilot interview.

Given the above situation mentioned regarding the COVID-19, it is carried out by telephone or video call. The conversations were recorded, in agreement with the interviewee, with an application available on the interviewer's computer.

The structure of the interviews is the same for both the two types: the researcher makes a brief introduction about the research and the topic, then

inform about the interview modalities and the consent form. The interview is guided by the researcher that ask questions and listen to the interviewee's answers, taking into account the response in order to conduct the interview based on the information provided.

All recordings and transcriptions made are collected by the researcher and saved on a personal drive. Access to these resources is protected by a password, in order to ensure the privacy of all collaborating companies, as specified in the consent forms drawn up and adopted.

3.5. Adjustments and Issue Encountered

During the research for useful literature related to the topic, there were some problems to face and overcome in order to proceed with the work and achieve the expected results. The more relevant problems are explained in this section to give the idea and justification for some decision and adjustment during the research work.

The first problem was related to the difficulty in finding the necessary resources strictly related to the main topic; this research could be considered as a mix of two major topics: Social Media used as marketing tools for the Italian SMEs, with a huge amount of available resources, and the general study of the Italian SMEs', especially their marketing strategies and activities, with not a lot of materials but quite enough to proceed. Considering them separately, the literature about these concepts was sufficient and easy to find, while few issues were encountered in the research for an analysis of the relation between them, for which only few resources were available.

As mentioned in the introduction, most of researches and studies are based on cases about big companies, which have a simpler relationship with these instruments. This is due to the nature of the companies, in fact, they have a different mindset, more international and open than the one of SMEs, and much more resources to invest in; anyway, as will be explained later in this chapter, this is not always a real problem. Then, it was necessary to analyze and use the founded resources adapting them to the research topic and making a combined analysis with other important resources based on the results of the

planned interviews made by the author, which are discussed and explained further in the following chapters.

For what concerns the interviews, the companies selected for taking part in this research were a mix of SM users and non-users. This choice was made in order to have different points of view on the argument. Here another problem was faced, because of the actual situation in Italy (as well as all over the world) caused by COVID-19: many companies are facing a very difficult time, dealing with very urgent issues in order to keep their operations active. In fact, the majority of the contacted companies did not reply at all at the first contact email. Some of whom had already given their availability to participate to the interview and give their contribution to the research in the first contact, after the new developments of the situation the contact ended with mostly all of them. Consequently, a change of plan was necessary in order to continue the work. For this reason, the initial decided number of interviews, has suffered a forced reduction. This situation required a greater effort to obtain the collaboration of a sufficient number of companies. As a result, the work has slowed down considerably in order to obtain appointments and carry out the necessary interviews.

Another consequence of the COVID-19 situation is the necessary closing of the College and its library, where there is a percentage of resources not available online but only physically. Fortunately, the topic touches on ever-changing issues so manuals and theories, related to them, can be very young. The older paper manuals in the library are not always available online and for this reason they were not available in this unpleasant situation.

3.6. Methods of Data Analysis

In this paragraph a brief explanation on the used methodology of the collected data analysis is given, with necessary information and justification for the adopted methods.

The analysis is divided in few steps, starting from the transcription and translation of the interviews to the coding process and finally the identification of the main themes. It is important to consider the two small sample group as two points of

view with the same aim. In fact, in the analysis they are considered as a whole group of interviews. The only differentiation and kind of comparison has been done in the identification of the findings, considering the background of the SMEs and its recent history in terms of SMM utilization. As can be seen in the finding and discussion chapter, the use of each statement has been considered, when necessary, on the basis of the relationship of the SME with the Social Media.

3.6.1. Interviews Transcription and Translation

First of all, the interviews, previously recorded with Voice Memos program, has been transcribed in a Microsoft Word document. A Word document was used for each interview, entering all the information necessary to identify the interview (Company, time, duration, etc.). In each interview transcription were used the letter "I" when referred to the Interviewer sentences and "R" for the respondent. Since the interviews were conducted in a different language (Italian) from that of the interview, it was necessary to translate each of the interviews, keeping the original transcript in the same document.

I: Do you use Social Media for marketing in your company?

R: Yes, we use them, we mainly use, the world of Facebook, we mainly use Instagram, we mainly use a newsletter platform, which allows us to, I think this is also part of social media?

I: Yes yes, it's one of the communication channels.

R: So, I'm taking care of it personally with my brothers. We are a family business, I am currently the sixth generation together with my brother Alberto and we are the ones who

Figure 6 - Example of interview transcription Word document

3.6.2. Coding Process

To analyse all the interview in the best and easy way possible, it was decided to use the popular tool Microsoft Excel. There are many useful and performant tools, perfect for the purpose, but in this case, due to the small number of interviews, Microsoft Excel was the best choice. Therefore, following the methods explained

by Solveig Ose (2016), the interviews were transferred in a single Excel document, sorted chronologically, and the name was replaced by the numerical reference. After the interview transcripts were transferred to the Excel document, formatting was done to prepare the next step, i.e. the creation of an encoding.

To create the coding structure were used few fundamental parameters, in order to maintain the anonymity of the participating companies and facilitate the identification and use of the information obtained. The initial basic code to identify the Interviewer and interviewee sentences was maintained.

The parameters used for the coding are the following:

- **Interview's number:** indicated with the Letter "I" and the respective number. For example: **I1**, **I2**, **I3**, etc.
- **Social Media User/Non-user:** indicated with "U" for the company currently using SM as a marketing tool and "NU" for those who do not use them.
- **Question and Responses:** indicated with "Q" and "R" with the respective number. In this case the coding is separate for each interview, starting from "Q1" and "R1" to the last one and repeating the same numeration for each interview.

	A	B	C
1	Interview number	SM User/Non-user	Questions and Responses number
2			
3	I1	U	Q1
4	I1	U	R1
5	I1	U	Q2
6	I1	U	R2

Figure 7 - Example of Excel Codification

3.6.3. Themes Identification and subdivision

The last step was probably the most important one, the review of all the interviews to identify the main themes. From the interviews many information are achieved but it is important to identify them and create a code to be able to find use them in the fastest and easiest way possible when necessary. Firstly, a

vertical lecture of the interviews has been done to identify the relevant aspects and inconsistencies. Then, a horizontal analysis to define and group the main themes (Mauceri, 2016). During the interviews I have been taken some notes in a notebook, trying to immediately catch the most relevant information and facilitate the next steps. This decision proved to be very useful when the issues had to be identified in order to create the reference codes. therefore, through a review of the interviews and with the help of the notes, it was easier to complete the work.

Identified the main themes and highlighted the most relevant sentences, a reference number has been assigned to each of them, as shown in the table of figure 8. To each of the previously highlighted sentences has been attached a number, correspondent to the themes they talk about.

Themes	Code Number
Incorrect usage	1
Awareness of the tools	2
Disinformation	3
Marginal role	4
Traditional Mindset Limit	5
Generational Succession	6
Perceived Benefits	7
Resources limitation	8
Covid-19 Situation	9

Figure 8 - Themes Code Table

Finally, an evaluative analysis was made to understand the most relevant themes and the way they are related to each other. There were 9 themes in identified in total, but not all of them were analyzed individually. In fact, some were considered not relevant individually because they were identified only in an interview or because they were closely related to other themes. For this reason, they have been grouped under other more relevant themes, in order to contribute in a more linear and homogeneous way to the final analysis.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This last chapter is the fundamental one, which gives the final meaning of the research. Here are presented the results of the entire research, through the explanation of the identified findings and a conclusive discussion where they are analyzed in a critical way. From this conclusive analysis the insights useful to improve the relationship between the two studied realities have been drawn and analyzed.

The conducted interviews gave many useful feedbacks, in fact the majority of the interviewees were really interested and wanted to collaborate, for this reason they explain a lot of aspects of their reality. Through the analysis of the transcript and the help of the Excel coding method, it was easy to identify the major themes. The first thing that comes to light at the end of the analysis is how closely these issues are related to each other.

In this section, with the use of some significant extracts from the interviews, are presented the most relevant findings for the research objectives. To have a clearer view of how the findings are analyzed and interpreted I decided to present each theme separately with a final and general comparison analysis. Usually for a qualitative research is not easy to separate the findings from the discussion, in fact, for a better result each theme, with the relative finding, is analyzed and discussed in the same section. The presentation of the results is indeed represented by a narrative prospective, which is constructed through the interweaving of my interpretation and analysis and significant quotations from the interviewees, reported as representation of their thought. (Corbetta, 2014)

The themes are divided in the three major section, explained below, that are:

- Traditional Mindset Limit
- Resource Limitation
- Awareness of the tools

4.1. Traditional Mindset Limit

In the literature review chapter, the traditional entrepreneur mindset has already been addressed and its characteristics define as possible limitation in

long term and risky investments (Meske and Stieglitz, 2013). From the analysis of the interviews one of the most frequent themes is that of the entrepreneurial mindset. In fact, six interviewees out of seven explained in different ways and with different "justification" their experiences and points of view highlighting this limit. During the analysis of the interviews, the interpretation derives not just from voluntary explanations of the interviewee but also from involuntary expressions of their thought.

An example came to light when, to an over 50 years old female entrepreneur, has been asked about his vision of these instruments and the motivation of their usage or non-usage, to which they replied with the following statements:

"I don't believe it, I don't believe it and personally I don't want to hear about it, so until now it hasn't been done." (I7NUR5)

As can be clearly seen, the interviewee has a strong position on the argument. This point of view was very clear and repeated throughout the entire interview. This is the first mistrust proof of a "old-style" entrepreneurs on these new technological tools, as evidenced by the attachment to one's own working mentality and culture, closed to change, made explicit during the entire interview and represented with this significant statement.

In one interview there was this direct statement: "my father, is personally against the use of these social" (I2UR5)

In this latter case the situation is different and much more indicative than the previous one, in fact here is a female 30 years old co-owner of the company that is explaining her father point of view. In this company, as stated by the interviewee and confirmed by a previous online research, they have already introduced these tools many years ago, with the help of the young generation. Nevertheless, the old mindset doesn't change, remaining wary of this communicative change. Here there is another important aspect that was found out through the analysis of the same previously mentioned interview, and which was identified in many of the other interviews: the generational succession, that is explained later. The citation is referred to a company in which the its founder was convinced by the two young sons to introduce Social Media in their marketing strategy. Despite the decision to open the doors to this new technology, the traditional entrepreneur is still convinced about the futility of these tools and does not trust them, as explained by this statement: "I always try

to encourage him to transmit what he thinks to me, in such a way that I can then transmit it within our social networks. It's not even easy to tell a story in this way, with a figure like my father who is obviously quite jealous of his own content" (I2UR5).

In fact, another reason, highlighted in the same interview mentioned above, is the fear of sharing their content. Given the easy access of everyone to the published information and being in a high competition sector, they explain the fear of being copied by competitors and lose their originality. As explained by the young interviewee the low knowledge of the instruments and the web in general represents a source of distrust for the old entrepreneur (her father).

This mistrust is due to a fear of leaving the old habits and strategies. Most entrepreneurs feel safe in their reality, achieving their usual results, sometime high, sometime low and that "In any case, the company has managed to survive" (I4NUR6), as stated by a 58 years old male entrepreneur and winery owner.

There are many other examples, given by the same interviewee, enforcing the idea of an old and close mindset that are building a huge wall between the companies and the SMM, and some of them are very clear:

"I spent little time on this too, but I don't have much time to waste." (I4NUR6).

In this statement we perceive even more the distrust in these tools, considered useless and only a waste of time. The entrepreneur cannot see the benefits that this tool can bring to his company.

The identified reason behind the barriers between SMEs and SMM resides in the close mindset, driven by the belief that there are no benefits and possible improvements in the introduction of Social Media in the marketing strategies. To understand better the theme identified in the interview, it was necessary to go deeper in the reason that are at the base of the entrepreneur traditional close mindset. It is clear that there is a fear of change in the Italian entrepreneurs' culture, too tied to the strategies he has used up to that point and now trusts.

As previously introduced, an important aspect is the generational succession, in fact, some of the SMEs that have collaborated in the research have experienced a generational succession.

Italian entrepreneurs over sixty years old account for 60% of the total and the 70% of them is planning a family succession. (Bianchi, 2015), the majority can be considered a generation away from the period of communication technology we are living through. Considering this factor, the introduction of a newer generation management (or co-management) can help in opening the SME to new opportunities.

Indeed, this very process of succession has been for them the reason of change with regard to new communication technologies such as Social Media. The advent of a new mentality, younger than the previous one and grown up with these tools, has made that there was an opening towards SMM. Unfortunately, as highlighted during the analysis, not all the successors got carried away by this new wind and remained firm on their old positions but although "family succession is a difficult change, it requires a change of mentality, [...] but it is a solution that enriches the whole business and puts it on a higher step" (Montecamozzo, 2012).

4.2. Resources Limitation

The second important theme identified in the analysis is the barrier built by the limited resources available in a SME. Usually the resources of a company are related to the available time, the economic potential of the company and the competences.

Many interviewees declared to not have enough time or competences to manage Social Media in an appropriate way. This was considered an important factor also because it was identified in both non-user and user SMEs' interviews. Here the same interviewee is explaining this aspect, repeating it in many of his responses:

"in SMEs there is an operativity that does not always allow to have a permanent staff and therefore this is certainly difficult." (I2UR11);

"sometimes it goes in the background because there is a necessary work to be done in the company that does not allow us to dedicate ourselves exclusively to that." (I2UR2).

As the statements above, of the 30 years old female entrepreneur shows, many companies, managing their social profile internally, are time limited by the fact that who manage them is someone with other priority roles, therefore not completely dedicated to Social Media Marketing. Most of the times they are completely without a marketing department that can therefore manage these tools. This is can be understandable in a business reality like the SMEs wine sector, where as explained, they are characterized by the agricultural and traditional culture and the family business core.

Some have explained the fact that they try to make time for social media management at the expense of their primary tasks, but it is not always easy to do so, like in this extract: "we do not focus exclusively on that but goes hand in hand with the other tasks from which we go to cut time. [...] we say that our duties are others" (I2UR1).

This small portion of time given to these tools is linked, and due to, the absence of necessary competences on planning and managing a SMM strategy. In fact, many of them confessed to not be able to manage these tools.

The first one, a 50 years old female entrepreneur explained: "internally I don't think we would be able to do it, [...] we need someone to take care of it and do this job." (I7NUR4);

As expressed by the previous interviewee, also this 58-year-old owner declared: "I am not up to it; I understand that I am not up to such delicate things." (I4NUR5).

Lack of skills is often a limit between the company and technological innovations such as social media, this is due to the perceived ease of use by the entrepreneur guided by the external variable, as explained in the Davis' Model of Technology Acceptance. Considering the tool not suitable to their knowledge and not functional for their company, the entrepreneur is not inclined to risk any kind of investment. In fact, "the benefits of these technologies are greater the more the company adapts the skills of human capital and its organizational processes at the same time." (MID, 2003, p.97)

In some interviews was asked the question "have you ever thought about investing in training courses to improve your skills?", in order to understand what they are willing to do to increase their competences and be better prepared in

the operation and specific management of social media, here one of the most explicit responses: "problem of time and personal tasks, to stay behind specific courses that are dedicated to this." (I2UR9).

The limitation of available time influences both the user and non-user in the improvement of their competences and knowledge, in fact, they confirm to have interest in always improve their opportunities but at the same time do not have the resources to access to them.

What was interesting in the analysis of the interviews is the fact that one of these resources was never mentioned by the interviewees, it is about the economic resource. This was considered interesting mainly because the great advantages and opportunities that MS give to companies with a reduction in costs compared to the previous way of communicating and finding information, as reflected in the work *Web strategy and Social Media in artisan micro-enterprises of Basilicata* by Tonino Pencarelli and Antonella Caravelli (2017).

In fact, as the extracts shows, the focus was always on the limited time available and the lack of necessary competences. Some questions were asked about the willingness to make economic investments in SMM, but the answer was always very vague. Only in some cases it was stated that economic investment was not necessary, as explained in the young female manager interview:

"there is a good answer, and this has perhaps led us to go ahead like this and avoid investments" (I1UR9).

This could be due to not wanting to expose their limitations in order not to make a bad impression, or simply not to give information about their economic situation.

These factors were considered so important also because of their influence on the entrepreneur's perception of the Social Media as marketing tools. In fact, as can be seen from some of the respondents' answers, the use of social media is perceived as a waste of time, something not worth investing in: "I spent little time on this too, but I don't have much time to waste." (I4NUR6).

Linked to this theme there is a positive feedback received during the interviews for what concern the awareness of the importance of these tools. This theme is discussed and explained in the next section of this chapter.

4.3. Awareness of the tools

As already introduced previously, this topic was identified in a way closely linked to the lack of skills declared by interviewees. In fact, in many of their statements, both for user and non-user SMEs, right after have explained their lack of competencies and the perceived complexity and delicacy of the usage of these marketing tools, here two over 50 years old entrepreneurs stated that there is a need of experts and dedicated staff, able to work with Social Media Marketing:

“maybe by having someone who is a technician, a specialist, because I am not up to it, I understand that I am not up to such delicate things, [...] this integration has to be done by experts, not by us so sporadically.” (I4NUR5);

“we need someone to take care of it and do this job.” (I7NUR4);

“It's important to build your own image on the web, but as I told you, you always need professionals.” (I4NUR7).

It seems like they are aware of the importance of the marketing tools, but even more interesting that they are aware of the importance of their correct usage.

The correct usage of this instrument was considered a high influential factor of the Social Media usefulness perception. Not having many concrete examples available in the popular informational channels, as in the literature, the SMEs' entrepreneurs are almost completely abandoned to what is their perception of something new. As already explained in the literature reviews problem section, they have no support base to rely on, other than their experience, or that of their acquaintances, or the little concrete and truthful documentation available.

Incorrect use of any kind of instrument often leads to a failure in achieving the desired objectives, even more so if the instrument is based on new mechanisms and strategies. This failure inevitably leads to a distorted perception of the instrument used, making it not effective or not fit for the chosen purpose. This can be linked to the TAM (Davis, 1985) used as a guideline to understand the perception of the SMEs, represented by entrepreneurs and managers. In fact, the input given by the wrong usage seems to create a negative perception of usefulness in the Entrepreneur.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, there has been positive feedback regarding the awareness of Social Media tools by companies who already make quite "appropriate" use of them. In fact, some are conscious of what they have to do and how, explaining "that it makes no sense to open too many channels and then not being able to manage them in the right way, [...] we did not want to take the step too long and then find ourselves to manage them in a way not appropriate to their nature and specificity." (I1UR2).

Also, some interviewees, representing non-users SMEs, stated that they are aware of the importance of the SMM especially for realities like theirs. But a contradiction was noted in their statements, in fact, those who profess to be aware, however, are the same ones who do not consider it appropriate to use these beneficial tools in their activities.

Through a comparison with the literature concerning the problems in research methods and interviews, the phenomenon that may have influenced the respondents' answers in this research has been identified, it is the Social Desirability Bias. The Canadian Sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) explained that every human in the interaction with the everyday life world has the tendency to present an altered version of himself in order to conform to the values or norms dictated by social life. In fact, by social desirability bias we mean that distorting factor of the sample, caused by the respondents' tendency to give socially desirable answers, instead of choosing the answers that would reflect their true feelings.

This phenomenon was also identified within another theme, about the actual situation due to the COVID-19 virus. Due to the pandemic emergency most of the companies in the country were forced to stop their activities, causing many problem and issues to face. In this period the usefulness of new communication technologies has emerged with great force. many companies have spilled over to the web, e-commerce platforms and social media to try to overcome the forced stop and the resulting lack of work.

Indeed, some interviewees, as this relatively old male entrepreneur, have expressed this need to have their presence online, because they perceived it as the only way to stay active and do not lose the connection with their customers:

“now the situations have changed and I'm starting to become more aware of what it is and start using it a bit more.” (I4NUR4).

At the same time some of them affirmed their intention to introduce Social Media in their company, but that they stopped the process of SM adoption precisely because of the situation, as said by a 50 year old female, which maybe does not allow for new investments: “there is a project that I already wanted to start, but because of this particular emergency situation we had to stop” (I7NUR2).

This can be linked to the barrier of limited resources, particularly in this emergency situation, but being the SMM one of the possible solution to overcome the forced stop, their decision seems to demonstrate again the wrong perception of these tools, considered not worth the effort in terms of resource use.

For these reasons, given the discrepancy between certain statements within the same interviews, the latter are to be considered unreliable and untrue.

4.4. What stands behind these issues?

The themes discussed above bring the research to an interesting point. The identification of these issues and situations highlights the reasons that contribute to build the barriers between this particular cohort SMEs and the use of Social Media Marketing, going to partially answer the questions underlying this research. But there is still one question that has not been completely answered: Which are the reasons behind these barriers?

Starting from the followed model of technology acceptance (Davis, 1985) by the entrepreneurs, the interviews' questions has been used as external input (variable identified in the initial analysis) to understand the perception that lead the reasons behind their decisions.

In order to answer this question, an analysis has been made on all the themes identified through the interviews and the information previously collected through the literature review. The issues addressed in the previous chapters seem to be all connected by a problem, considered the reason for their existence.

As it is possible to see from the previous analysis and discussion, the obtained results can be based on different reasons. In the first section, the mindset

limitation theme resulted to be based on the mistrust of the SMEs' entrepreneurs and their belief that their way of managing the company is the best to achieve their usual results. It is clear that these reasons are poorly substantiated, as shown by the data related to the Social Media Marketing performance, which as revealed by a 2019 report published by Buffer (2020) "73% of marketers believe that social media marketing has been "somewhat effective" or "very effective" for their business".

In the same way in the second theme, the analysis has led to the identification of some motivations that are at the basis of the barrier created by the resources available in an SME.

These reasons are guided by a perception of the value of Social Media tools for marketing activities. In fact, what emerges is that the tools are not considered worth an investment by the company, for various reasons carried out by the respondents, such as "we do not need them" or "I do not consider them useful to my business, given the small size of the company", and many others.

As explained by introducing this paragraph, the analysis and comparison of the results has led to the identification of what has been considered the reason behind all these issues: the disinformation.

In this case this statement was considered as a clear declaration of the perception received by the uninformed entrepreneur: "I can't understand the impact they can have on the company." (I4RUN4).

All the problems explained in this final discussion can be considered the result of a big problem of disinformation in the SMEs' world, about the Social Media Marketing and everything it stands for.

Why the entrepreneurs do not trust new technological tools which have been proven by various studies and statistics to be very effective? Why they do not know they can easily manage these tools with a small effort in economic terms or investing in their competences? These questions, in this research, have found only one answer: SMEs do not receive the right information. Sometimes as already said they don't have enough information available on this topic, sometimes this information is available but not clear or concrete enough to convince an old-style entrepreneur, very much tied to tradition.

In the interviews there are some examples of this level of disinformation, identified through the analysis of other themes. For example, more than one of the SMEs, during the interviews, wanted to highlight their attachment to the territory, to their tradition and love for their wine. They try, with their product, to pass the values that are at the base of their craft, the quality of their product and the love and commitment that is behind the product offered to the consumers. As this example of an over 60 year old entrepreneurs shows, however, they do not see the possibility of doing so through the use of social media: "being satisfied and orient myself not always to the market and what the market wants, but according to my way of seeing the value of wine. [...] people want to understand the varietal component of wine, of the product, so how it is made and how it is made, so I have my own style." (I5NUR6).

They are convinced that the Social Media Marketing is just oriented to increase sales, but they don't know that Social Media are communicational tools, so perfect to communicate values and tell stories.

"In a time of rapidly compounding technology generations, the most successful businesses will consistently deliver high touch to customers with one of our oldest traits... the telling of a story."

Jim Blasingame.

This quotation enforces one of the main and best usage that a company can do of the Social Media, so tell a story and share their values.

The wrong perception of the SMM can be a limit also to the many institution and agency that are trying to help the promotion of the Marche's SMEs in this period of COVID-19 (Shown in the literature review chapter). In fact, the mistrust risks thwarting the efforts of these institutions, and it risks making important opportunities for SMEs miss out.

Fortunately, the knowledge and awareness of these tools is increasing, as shown by this statement taken from the interview of a young co-owner (30 years old):

"I think that the SMM should be exploited by everyone, also because it has a cost, let's say, that could not be ignored" (I2UR11).

Fortunately, this increasing awareness is helping SMEs to seize the opportunity given, especially in this period, as the data provided by the director

of the Imit Alberto Mazzoni shown about the consequent growth in the last years in Italian wine export. (Ansa, 2019)

This problem of disinformation can be seen not just as a lack in the research of information but also in a lack of given information. As explained at the beginning of the research, there is very little literature available on the problematic relationship between SMEs and SMM. In fact, one of the aims of this research is to help SMEs to understand better the SMM world, identifying the problems and the reasons behind them, so as to be able to make a small contribution to the SMEs and to be able to contribute, albeit small, to the study of this very important topic.

At the end of the analysis the results of the research show information and insight that could be considered useful not just for SMEs but also for Marketers. Considering the problem of disinformation at the base of barriers between SMEs and SMM, the situation could be seen as an interesting insight for marketers, giving them the opportunity to change the approach to the Small and Medium Enterprises. Changing the approach and being more focus on the SMEs will bring improvements in both SMEs, a world with a huge amount of opportunity, and Marketers.

5. CONCLUSION

Social Media are now in everyday life, they are influencing our thoughts, our actions and many other aspects of our life. This is not happening just in our private life, but also, sharply in most of the businesses around the world. Marketing has been updated with these new and efficient communicational tools, changing its strategies and processes.

Companies are trying to keep up with these new technologies that are growing fast, but this is not easy for everyone. In fact, many small and medium enterprises are facing difficulties in the adoption of Social Media in their marketing strategies.

This study has led to the identification of interesting results in response to the research objectives initially indicated. Moreover, these results could be considered original because of the gap they are going to fill in the literature about this topic, analysing this relationship with the influence of the social factor related to the entrepreneurial point of view.

As explained in the previous chapter of finding and discussion, some of the reasons, considered to be key factors in the construction of barriers between SMEs and SM, have been identified. In fact, the interviews with the representatives of the SMEs allowed us to understand what the real problems in this relationship were.

It was not always easy to identify the real reasons and motivations for their decisions, as the interviewees often did not want to state them explicitly. In fact, a careful analysis of the interviews with the available literature was necessary, especially with regard to the tradition and entrepreneurial mindset of Italian SMEs.

The traditional mindset limit was in fact considered the most influential factor in the adoption of these new technological tools. SMEs world has this strong limit in new technologies investment, which is flanked by the other elements identified as limited resources. The competences and the available time are important factors in an SME and a limit in terms of investments.

Fortunately, some of the SMEs interviewed expressed awareness of the importance that these tools have in the business world. Unfortunately, however, in some cases this awareness seems to be an end in itself, i.e. there is no concrete

feedback in the actions and decisions by the entrepreneur, probably driven by the entrepreneurial mindset closed to change.

Behind all these factors was identified what was considered the major problem which need to be solved: the disinformation.

This disinformation stands at the base of almost all the limit of the SMEs in the Social Media adoption. The research has come to the conclusion that in addition to the issues listed above, this theme is the one that most affects the perception that entrepreneurs have of these tools. Sometimes the incorrect information, other times the feedback from an experience based on an incorrect use of the tool and sometimes also the obstinacy of the small entrepreneur linked to his tradition and his known world, which rejects any attempt at approach.

In this regard, another interesting insight was identified during the analysis of the results and literature. In the Marche region there are several institutions, both governmental and non-governmental, as the previously cited Imt, that propose promotional initiatives and development opportunities for the wineries of the territory. These initiatives, which are often aimed at the SMM, are to be considered really interesting and useful, but an important doubt arose from the comparison of the results of this research and these initiatives, i.e. whether they are really perceived and considered in the right way by SMEs' entrepreneurs. Is the closed mentality of the entrepreneur a limit even when initiatives and projects such as these are proposed by official bodies, very often without economic expenses to be incurred? This interesting topic would need more in-depth and dedicated research, but unfortunately due to timing problems due to the nature of the research, it was not possible for me to proceed with this research. However, it remains a good starting input for future research.

This insight leads us to an interesting conclusion, which can be an important input for more in-depth research but also to help directly and concretely the actors involved in this relationship. In fact, as explained in the previous chapter, the problem of disinformation is not a one-way street. This means that the problems to be solved are not only to be seen as a limitation of SMEs but as an opportunity for Marketers. At this time of emergency when SMM is growing even

faster and new ideas are on the agenda, marketers have the opportunity to find new approaches or systems of communication with SMEs.

The discussed results are all based on the sample of winery SMEs based in the Marche Region of Italy. The decision to base the research on this sector and in this territory, as explained in the introductory chapter, is due to the importance of the Italian wine sector and its very large percentage of SMEs.

The results obtained through these cases have not been influenced by the peculiarities of the SMEs in the Marche region, due also to the similarity of the SMEs wine sector in Italy as already described. I tried to obtain an evaluation that could be as general and transferable as possible. In order to be sure of transferability, it would be necessary to investigate the characteristics of the chosen sector for the analysis. In this case the results can be considered valid for winery SMEs, and with a more in-depth comparison also for SMEs from other sectors. This is supported by the characteristic of the research that focuses on the SME entrepreneur and the general characteristics of Italian SMEs.

Given the simple used research process to achieve these results, it can be considered easily repeatable and as explained for the result transferable with the necessary clarifications also to other sectors. So, this explanation of the research process allows other research to follow this path and conclusions. This research has been done completely following the reality discovered through the process of data collection and analysis, it is considered a truthful representation of what the relationship is.

As already said, this research has had some limitations, one of which was the current global emergency situation that has affected most businesses. In fact, there was a limitation in the number of SMEs available to collaborate, given the problems they had to face for the COVID-19 situation. It might therefore be interesting to have the possibility, in the future, to expand research and get new or even deeper insights. Moreover, as already mentioned, it may be a starting point to be able to analyse different business sectors, in a wider research, and get an even more interesting result.

This research, despite the limited time and resources available, has led to interesting results. As already mentioned, they have a double important purpose: to enrich the study of this relevant issue in the world of SMEs and marketing studies, giving new insights and hoping to inspire new research; but also to bring a concrete contribution for Italian SMEs in approaching Social Media tools and taking advantage of their important potential in this ever-changing world.

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Appendix A – Plain Language Statement



GRIFFITH COLLEGE DUBLIN

Griffith College GBS Plain Language Statement

I. Introduction to the Research Study

Identify the Research Study Title: Social Media Marketing in SMEs

University: Griffith College, Graduate Business School

The principal investigator: Dr Garrett Ryan

II. Details of what involvement in the Research Study will require

This project involves taking part in interviews and or completion of a survey. These interviews will be audio taped and seek to gather information on your experience of Social Media Marketing introduction/usage in your company. It is estimated that these interviews will take no longer than 60 minutes to complete. Participants will be offered a copy of their interview transcripts for validation purposes.

III. Potential risks to participants from involvement in the Research Study (if greater than that encountered in everyday life)

I do not anticipate any risk to participants as a result of involvement in this Research Study.

IV. Benefits (direct or indirect) to participants from involvement in the Research Study

The objective of this Research Study is to gain new knowledge that will help understand and face the problems in Social Media usage for SMEs. This Study may therefore be of benefit to you by providing you with the opportunity to contribute to the development of these polices so that you and other staff may benefit from improved developmental opportunities.

V. Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of participants. Participant names will not be recorded, as all participants will be assigned a code. The taped interviews will be downloaded to a password-controlled computer, and typed transcripts will be held within password-controlled documents. Audio tapes and hard copies of transcripts will be held in a locked filing cabinet. Biographical details and mentions will be omitted in the final report to

protect participant's identity. Confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

VI. Advice as to whether or not data is to be destroyed after a minimum period

Audio tapes will be destroyed on the successful completion of the Master in International Business Management.

VII. Statement that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

Involvement in this Research Study is voluntary. Participants who decide to take part may withdraw from the Research Study at any point. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the Research Study have been completed.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person.

Please contact:

Dr Garrett Ryan,
Griffith College Research Ethics Committee
South Circular Road, Dublin 8, Ireland

Mail: garrett.ryan@griffith.ie

Tel: +353 1 4163324

Appendix B – Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

I. Research Study Title: Social Media Marketing in SMEs

University: Griffith College, Graduate Business School

The principal investigator: Dr Garrett Ryan

II. Clarification of the purpose of the research

The aim of the research is to analyze the introduction and usage of Social Media in SMEs' marketing strategies, trying to find out the main issues that raise the barriers between them and propose solution to those.

III. Confirmation of particular requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement

This project involves taking part in interviews and or completion of a survey. These interviews will be audio taped and seek to gather information on your experience of Social Media Marketing introduction/usage in your company. It is estimated that these interviews will take no longer than 60 minutes to complete. Participants will be offered a copy of their interview transcripts for validation purposes.

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me) Yes/No

I understand the information provided Yes/No

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study Yes/No

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions Yes/No

I am aware that my interview will be audiotaped Yes/No

IV. Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

Involvement in this Research Study is voluntary. Participants who decide to take part may withdraw from the Research Study at any point. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the Research Study have been completed.

V. Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations

Every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of participants. Participant names will not be recorded, as all participants will be assigned a code. The taped interviews will be downloaded to a password-controlled computer, and typed transcripts will be held within password-controlled documents. Audio tapes and hard copies of transcripts will be held in a locked filing cabinet. If participants unwittingly make mention of other staff by name, such names will be substituted for a fictitious name in the final report.

VII. Signature:

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project

Participants Signature: _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____