

Ilaria Curina

NEW MEDIA IN TRADE SHOWS

**Support tools
or dominant
solutions for the future?**

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INTRODUCTION

Book's background

Systematically defined in 1986, Trade Shows (TSs) still represent today a leading business and development instrument for the global and European economy (Tafesse, 2014). With 465 exhibition centers, the European continent still holds approximately 50% of global exhibition space, especially in Germany, Italy, and France, which dominate the entire industry in terms of venues, exhibitors, and visitors (UFI, 2018; 2016; AEFI, 2016; Li, 2015; Chu and Chiu, 2013; Smith *et al.*, 2004). In the European context (whose industrial system mainly consists of small- and medium-sized businesses), trade shows are still one of the most effective communication tools to promote products and services, contact new customers, and, above all, to gain access to new markets. In particular, today, trade shows continue to represent a communicative platform of primary importance for the majority of the European Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Moreover, each year the exhibition industry contributes to the movement of millions of visitors, thus creating significant impacts on the host cities in terms of transport, catering, and hotel facilities (UFI, 2018; 2017; 2016; Tafesse, 2014).

In the literature context, the trade show (TS) topic became a systematic research argument during the 1980s-1990s (Søilen, 2013). In those years, the trade show theme was mainly focused on the importance of this instrument in a purely promotional/sales perspective (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2015; Tafesse and Korneliussen, 2012; Bathelt and Schuldt, 2008; Power and Jansson, 2008; Herbig *et al.*, 1998). In particular, trade shows were only perceived as demand-supply meeting places where the main exhibitor objective was to close a final sale before the end of the event itself (Çobanoğlu and Turaeva, 2014). The

focus was, therefore, mainly directed on the trade shows' selling objectives at the expense of the non-selling-objectives (Menon and Manoj, 2013).

In contrast, in recent years, a trend reversal has occurred. Indeed, the trade show tool (far from being considered as a mere selling and promotion instrument) has begun to be perceived as a vital part of a firm's marketing mix (Rinallo *et al.*, 2017; Sasaka, 2012) and as a strategic marketing leverage achieving selling and non-selling objectives (Çobanoğlu and Turaeva, 2014). By encompassing the potentialities of mass communication (typical of advertising), of profiling strategies (typical of direct mail and direct sales), and of network strategies (typical of new media), over the years, TSs have acquired new functions and new roles. This evolution also happened in light of the major socio-economic changes of the new millennium (Li, 2015). In particular, the XX and XXI centuries brought with them important socio-economic changes, thus forcing trade shows to deal with the effect of the globalization phenomenon, the advent of new media, and the consequences of the 2008 crisis (Brzeziński and Jasiński, 2014; Kirchgeorg *et al.*, 2010).

Among these evolutions, the advent of new communication media represents one of the most relevant phenomena that occurred in the contemporary TSs scenario. In detail, the websites and social media adoption, as well as the affirmation of the first virtual trade shows (VTSS) as a possible extension or replacement of the traditional events, constitute the main features characterizing this trend (Gottlieb and Bianchi, 2017; Singh *et al.*, 2017; Wu and Wang, 2016; Chongwatpol, 2015; Tafesse and Korneliussen, 2013; Geigenmüller, 2010; Kirchgeorg *et al.*, 2010; Ling-Yee, 2010; Lee *et al.*, 2008; Semler, 1999). In light of this evolving TSs scenario, the Internet may become, especially in the future, one of the most valuable marketing tools for the trade show sector, with websites and social media platforms extending the life of the traditional trade show event in the virtual environment.

Book's objectives

Faced with this background, the aim of the present book is to gain a deeper understanding of the adoption and use of the new media in the TS context and, in particular, from the exhibition organizers' perspective.

After delineating the complexity and the multiple facets characterizing the TSs phenomenon, as well as the speed with which these tools change over time, the first purpose of the work presents twofold objectives: on the one hand, identifying the thirty-year evolution (1988-2018) of the TS literature from a business and management perspective, and on the other, outlining

the main trends emerging from the recent business and management TS literature (2010-2018), in light of globalization effects, the consequences of the economic crisis, and the new advent of media. To reach these purposes, a systematic literature review will be adopted.

In the second part of the book, the impact of new media (i.e., social media and VTSs) in the trade show sector (especially from the organizers' perspective) will be deepened. More specifically, the focus on the organizer's category represents an attempt to fill a specific research gap, emerged from the analysis of the existing TS literature (devoted to the new media adoption), concerning the scant attention towards this stakeholders' target. Subsequently, the TS organizers' perspective will be adopted with a view to analyzing (i) the implementation of the social media tools on trade show strategies and activities and (ii) the reaction to the virtual trade shows' advent. Starting from this overview, the impact of social media and the virtualization phenomenon on the TS strategies and activities will be investigated through in-depth interviews directed to a sample of European organizers. By doing so, their online behaviors will be thoroughly examined (e.g., type of adopted social media platforms, typology of activities carried out, business figures in charge of social media management, the role assumed by users).

Book's structure

The book is structured into seven chapters. In Chapter 1, the TS instrument will be defined and conceptualized. In particular, the attention will be focused on its functions and roles, with a particular interest directed to the digital phenomenon and the TS virtualization.

Chapter 2 will present the descriptive results deriving from the thirty-year systematic literature review process, aimed at identifying all the business and management papers dedicated to the TS phenomenon between 1988 and 2018.

In Chapter 3, the trends most investigated by the identified papers will be examined and subdivided into three specific timeframes (1988-2003; 2004-2009; 2010-2018), corresponding to the main evolutions of the contemporary TS sector (i.e., effects of globalization, information and communication technologies advent, post-crisis consequences). Moreover, in a second phase, the focus will be moved towards the most recent TS trends (2010-2018) emerging from the business and management literature, with the final aim of creating a possible framework of synthesis concerning the current TS tendencies. Among these, the trend related to the advent of the new media will constitute the main focus of Chapter 4.

By focusing on the empirical analysis related to the European organizers' interviews, Chapter 5 will present the research methodology and the selected survey sample, while Chapter 6 will show the general (descriptive statistics of the selected sample) and detailed results (answers obtained from the in-depth interviews) subdivided into macro topics: [1] social media management; [2] social media activities and TS phases; [3] social media and the role of users; [4] social media strengths, weaknesses, and challenges; [5] TS future scenarios.

Finally, in Chapter 7, the theoretical/managerial implications will be discussed.

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FIRST PART

TRADE SHOW TENDENCIES: A THIRTY-YEAR LITERATURE REVIEW

1. THE DEVELOPMENT OF TSs ACCORDING TO THE LITERATURE

1.1. Background and context: Trade show definition

Expositions, exhibitions, trade fairs, scientific or technical conferences are just some of the names used in literature to define trade shows. Even if the names associated to TSs may differ and be used interchangeably, the real nature of the activity remains the same: a major industry-marketing event (Gottlieb *et al.*, 2014).

The specialized literature clearly shows that trade shows represented and continue to represent today one of the most important elements influencing the attendees' purchase decision in the B2B markets, second only to direct sales in terms of importance to the marketing mix (Gottlieb *et al.*, 2011; Herbig *et al.*, 1997). Overall, as trade shows are multi-faceted business tools (Gottlieb *et al.*, 2014), a wide range of definitions emerges from the literature. In this paragraph, an evolution of the principal definitions, proposed by the literature, is presented.

For many centuries, the TS term has been used ambiguously, with trade shows being conceived as essential sales and communication tools (Kirchgeorg *et al.*, 2010).

During the 1980-1990 decade, (a period in which the TS topic became a systematic research argument), several authors began to focus their attention mainly on the selling objectives of trade shows by defining them as events in which products and services are sold (Bonoma, 1983). In those years, literature regarded trade shows as transaction cost-saving settings that, by bringing together (at the same time and place) a large number of stakeholders, reduced the time and costs connected to the buyers' purchasing processes (Black, 1986).

As a result of the globalization effect, in the 1990-2000 decade, the focus moved towards the importance of trade shows as potential international networking forums (Palumbo *et al.*, 1998; Sharland and Balogh, 1996; Rosson and Seringhaus, 1995). In particular, trade shows began to be defined as significant marketing tools that could influence the firms' ability to compete and grow in the rapidly globalizing business environment in a substantial way (Seringhaus and Rosson, 1998). During the same timeframe, trade shows also began to be defined as promotional tools involving both direct selling and advertising (Blythe, 1999; Gopalakrishna and Lilien, 1995) and as services involving a series of activities that must be perfectly coordinated (Munuera and Ruiz, 1999).

As the trade show tool is a dynamic instrument that adapts itself to socio-economic needs, the TS concept has also evolved over time, in order to accompany the last years' evolutions (for an in-depth analysis, please refer to Paragraph 1.4). In particular, in the early 2000s, the focus of the trade show definition evolved from selling objectives to the importance recognized to the relational aspects, with several authors defining trade shows as essential tools for communication, development of relationships with key stakeholders, and for information collection (Blythe, 2002; Rice and Almossawi, 2002; Tanner, 2002; Godar and O'Connor, 2001; Wilkinson and Brouthers, 2000).

By following trade show evolution and the growing importance recognized to the offering of entertainment experiences in the TS context and to the role of trade shows as temporary clusters, during the 2000-2010 decade, the definition evolved again by focusing on trade shows as activities whose outcomes are influenced by the quality and quantity of experiences provided by both exhibitors and organizers (Borghini *et al.*, 2006). At the same time, TSs started to be conceived as temporary networks of companies that proposed micro-experiences for their visitors. They did so by presenting their products and by incentivizing visitors' interaction among themselves in a short span of time in one location (Evers and Knight, 2008; Lee and Kim, 2008; Maskell *et al.*, 2006; Torre and Rallet, 2005). Moreover, the TS definition is further enriched during the post-crisis period, with several authors beginning to underline the importance of trade shows as platforms for incentivizing social contacts and for reassuring customers, by showing them that vendors are still in business and economically stable (De Vaujany *et al.*, 2013; Manero and Uceda, 2010). At the same time, the post-crisis definitions also incorporate the importance of the role of TSs as knowledge exchange platforms, with Rinallo *et al.* (2010, p. 253) conceiving them as "learning expeditions that engage industrial buyers' creative thinking towards the solving of work related problems". By continuing along the same direction, Søylen (2010) defines trade shows as compressed

situations of knowledge and fun catering, while Tafesse and Skallerud (2015) describe them as strategic exchange mediums through which participants can establish a wide range of exchange relations in order to reach their organizational goals and objectives.

In the attempt to conceptualize trade show activities, Rinallo *et al.* (2010) continue the trade show study from the experiential perspective by defining them as embodied experiences characterized by physical fatigue and sensorial overwhelming.

Meanwhile, in their 2017 work, the attention is more concentrated on the importance of trade show events as miniature versions of global industry clusters, with a multitude of participants horizontally linked as competitors and vertically linked as suppliers or users.

During the post-crisis years, different studies also extend the trade shows' definitions proposed by the 1990s authors devoted to the globalization phenomenon, by describing them as excellent possibilities for participants to network with international operators in the same industry, giving them access to new foreign markets (Jeong, 2016; Measson and Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Kalafsky and Gress, 2014; Jer, 2014; Li and Shrestha, 2013).

Table 1.1 summarizes the evolution of the TS definitions during the last 30 years.

Tab. 1.1 – Evolution of trade show definitions

TIME FRAMES	MAIN FOCUS
Late 80's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the trade shows' selling objectives
1990-2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on globalization effects • Focus on the TS promotional role
Early 2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the relational aspects
2000-2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the experiential component and on the role of TSs as temporary clusters
(2010 – onwards)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the importance of reassuring clients • Focus on the role of TSs as knowledge exchange platforms • Extension of the study focused on the role of TSs as export channels (started during the 1990-2000 decade)

Source: Author's elaboration

1.2. TSs typologies

In order to reduce the confusion and ambiguity around the TS concept, the specialized literature and the Global Association of the Exhibition In-

dustry (UFI) have achieved a classification of the trade show typologies, which aims to simplify the study of a heterogeneous sector such as that of the exhibition. Notably, five classification criteria have been proposed (UFI, 2010; Beier and Damböck, 2008): [1] Market coverage; [2] Typologies of admitted visitors; [3] Geographical coverage; [4] Exchange typologies; [5] Trade show typologies.

Tab. 1.2 – Trade show classification criteria

CLASSIFICATION CRITERIA	TRADE SHOW DENOMINATION
<i>Market coverage</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General trade shows • Multi-industry trade shows • Specialized trade shows
<i>Typologies of admitted visitors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • B2B trade shows (Business to Business) • B2C trade shows (Business to Consumers) • Mixed trade shows
<i>Geographical coverage</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional trade shows • National trade shows • International trade shows
<i>Exchange typologies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National exchange trade shows • Demand trade shows • Supply trade shows • International exchange trade shows
<i>Trade show typologies</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical trade shows • Virtual trade shows

Source: Author’s elaboration from UFI (2010)

1.2.1. Market coverage

From a product point of view and based on the degree of specialization of the offered products, trade shows can be classified as general, multi-industry, and specialized (Wu *et al.*, 2008; Dekimpe *et al.*, 1997). While general trade shows are events open to a variety of merchandising sectors, offering a wide range of goods/services (belonging to every sphere of life and mainly addressing the general public as end-users), the multi-sectorial ones show products and services belonging to different sectorial and commercial areas.

On the contrary, the specialized trade shows display products limited to a specific sub-sector or a specialized segment of a given industrial sector. If, in the 1990s, the nature of specialized trade shows was mainly horizontal (shows with exhibitors selling a variety of products or services and with

attendees usually coming from a single market segment and looking for either specific products or services or a broader variety), today the vertical nature prevails (shows with a fairly narrow focus, attracting a specific type of visitors).

1.2.2. Typologies of admitted visitors

Based on the typologies of admitted visitors, trade shows have been subdivided into three categories: Business to Business, Business to Consumer, and mixed trade shows.

The first classification (B2B trade shows) includes events exclusively reserved to the sector operators, characterized by specific features which distinguish them from the other typologies: [1] the exhibitor is normally a producer or a supplier of specific products/services or complementary to the industry sectors, authorized to participate in the specific trade show event; [2] the buyer is the end company or another distributor who, however, operates within the same exhibitor's sector; [3] participation is limited to specific buyers, who can often access the event by invitation only; [4] for qualification, pre-registration or company credentials are normally required as well as the payment of a registration or participation fee; [5] the duration of these events can range from one day to 7/10 days, depending on the type of sector they represent; [6] the event frequency is generally, annual, or biennial (UFI, 2010).

Business to Consumer (B2C) trade shows are events open to the public, where exhibitors are generally retailers, manufacturers, or service companies, whose main goals are to make people aware of their products and sell them directly to the end consumer. The B2C events allow exhibitors and visitors to meet in the same place. This allows the former group to be able to directly sell their products, increase their visibility and brand reputation. It enables the latter group to be able to choose from a wide range of products, participate in demonstrations, and receive expert advice through training and entertainment activities. Overall, B2B and B2C trade shows represent events led by different categories of objectives: if, on the one hand, information and entertainment are the main purposes of the B2C trade shows, the constant upgrading and the possibility to create contact networks between operators of the same sector are the principal aims of the B2B trade shows.

The result of a combination of B2B and B2C trade fairs represents the third classification, the mixed trade shows. These are events where the organizers decide to address both the industry and final consumers.

1.2.3. Geographical coverage

By adopting the exhibitors' and visitors' origins as a reference variable, the trade shows can be classified into regional, national, and international (Rinallo *et al.*, 2017).

Regional exhibitions are events whose catchment area is limited to visitors who come from neighboring areas. National trade shows are addressed to visitors from much more extended geographical areas than the specific location in which such events are organized. Meanwhile, international fairs attract not only the national public but also foreign visitors. In particular, an event usually assumes the internationality status when the proportion of exhibitors and foreign visitors reaches a minimum percentage of 20% (UFI, 2010).

1.2.4. Exchange typologies

Based on their level of internationality, trade shows can be further classified with respect to the relative weight of exhibitors and foreign visitors, and to the type of exchange exercised during the event. Through this classification, trade shows are defined as events of national exchanges, of demand, supply, and international exchanges.

Characterized by a low level of internationalization for both exhibitors and visitors, by national exchanges, and by a public of consumers, the national exchange trade shows can subsequently evolve towards more internationally-inspired events.

The demand or import trade shows include events offering a full range of products required internally. Consequently, the foreign presence concerns almost exclusively the exhibitor's side.

The supply or export manifestations are events whose tendency for internationalization mainly affects the visitor side. Promoting a specific sector of undisputed excellence of the organizing country represents the main purpose of this trade show typology.

A high level of internationality on both the visitors' and exhibitors' sides represents the main feature of international exchange trade shows.

1.2.5. Trade show typologies

The last classification is based on the type of organized events and proposes the distinction between real and virtual events (Golfetto, 2000).

Real trade shows are events that take place in specific physical sites where visitors and exhibitors build face-to-face interactions. On the contrary, in virtual trade fairs, visitors and exhibitors organize their appointments in a virtual setting, where products and services are displayed and offered online 24 hours a day (For an in-depth analysis of the virtualization phenomenon, please refer to Paragraph 1.6 and 1.7).

1.3. TSs functions

In addition to the main classification criteria, the specialized literature also tried to summarize the principal functions assigned to the trade show tool by subdividing them into three distinct categories (Golfetto, 2000): socio-economic, marketing, and informative.

1.3.1. Socio-economic functions

The support of cities and territorial development, the creation of synergies with local economic inducements, and the promotion of infrastructures represent the main objectives pertaining to the first function. Trade shows become, in this way, strategic businesses not only for organizers and attendees but also for the territories that can benefit from an important induction, thanks to the establishment of a virtuous circular mechanism between the trade show and the territory where it is located. In particular, on the one hand, the event presence can stimulate wealth circulation, facilitate outreach, enhance the real estate market, and generate an impact on infrastructure and mobility. On the other hand, the territory can affect the trade show activities' results on the basis of the infrastructural features, business culture, sectorial peculiarities, and innovative spirit that characterize it (AEFI, 2009a).

1.3.2. Marketing and informative functions

From the marketing perspective, trade shows represent a privileged opportunity for exhibitors to meet and establish contacts with different industry players (especially during B2B events) who normally tend to participate actively in the dynamics created in the TS context.

As relational interactions represent a main component of TSs, the information, arising from the exhibitors' and visitors' contacts, become one of the main products exchanged during the event itself (informative function). In this way, trade shows allow firms to gather valuable information in order to determine their position with respect to their competitors, verify the participants' satisfaction towards products and strategies, estimate the demand needs and dimension and finally underline the modalities with which market trends are evolving. Despite these attempts to categorize the TS main typologies and functions, the dynamism, with which this tool has adapted itself to the recent years' socio-economic changes, has led to and continues to lead towards a constant evolution of its roles, functions, and nature (Alberca *et al.*, 2015).

1.4. Past, present, and future: Genesis of Trade shows

The beginning of the contemporary trade shows coincides symbolically with the organization of the first sample fairs in Leipzig (1894). These differed from earlier events by presenting only single patterns and samples of mass products, thus enabling a considerable reduction in the exhibition surface area (Brzeziński and Jasiński, 2014). The new formula, introduced at the Leipzig fair, was quickly followed by events in Lyon, London, Paris, and then all the others. Despite the new vitality assumed by trade shows thanks to this transformation, for some time, they still presented a highly general nature with non-specialized promotion-information exchanges as their principal functions (Bathelt *et al.*, 2014).

Subsequently, thanks to the fast technical revolutions, production specialization, and development of an international division of work, fairs evolved gradually into trade fairs. The first trade show took place in Parma in 1939, while the 1950s are considered the groundbreaking period in TS development (Brzeziński and Jasiński, 2014). In particular, during that period, trade shows underwent two important transformations: [1] professionals represented the primary participants at these events; [2] trade fairs became increasingly specialized in nature, as a consequence of the growing complexity and diversity of manufacturing sectors (Bathelt *et al.*, 2014).

During the 1970-1980 decade, an increase in growth in trade shows occurred, firstly in Europe and then in North America, and other industrialized countries (more recently, the growth of the exhibition sector has also extended to developed areas and, in particular, to China, India, and South America). At the same time, in those years, the ever more diffused specialization trend was accompanied by the periodic recurrence and regular

scheduling of trade show events. In particular, the exhibition scheduling began to consider the dates of the same sector trade shows organized around the world, in order to balance the international calendar and allow participants to visit different events, focused on their own sector, in any given years.

The XX and XXI centuries brought with them important socio-economic changes, forcing trade shows to deal with the effect of the globalization phenomenon, the advent of new media, and the consequences of the 2008 crisis (Brzeziński and Jasiński, 2014; Kirchgeorg *et al.*, 2010).

Against this background, the exhibition sector has had to adapt its roles and functions. Table 1.3 shows the three major stages of change characterizing the latest years of evolution and the respective consequences that have taken place in the trade show domain.

Tab. 1.3 – Last years' TS sector evolution

YEARS	DRIVERS OF CHANGE	CONSEQUENCES
1990s	Globalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rationalization
2004	ICT advent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus from hard to soft
2010	Consequences of the economic crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New challenges to face • Planning of new business models • Access to new markets • Creation of alliances/networks • Product innovations • Trade show as gathering place

Source: Author's elaboration from UFI (2016); Aldebert *et al.* (2011)

1.4.1. Globalization effects

Concerning the first driver of change, by the late nineteenth century, economic processes, corporate production networks, and trade were already international in nature. The realization of the first world exhibitions, attracting thousands of participants around the world in order to see the technological progress of the developed economies, represented a clear consequence of this emerging phenomenon (Bathelt *et al.*, 2014).

The degree of economic internationalization began to decrease during the beginning of the twentieth century, as a result of protectionist policies and the two World Wars, which eliminated many of the global connections created in the previous period (Held *et al.*, 1999). The globalization effects, accompanied and amplified by the rapid economic development of emerging

geographic areas, did not return until the 1990s. This new wave of globalization, characterized by different trade regimes, the development of modern transportation, storage, information, and telecommunication technologies, leads the trade show protagonists to abandon their protectionist and nationalistic approach and to understand the necessity of organizing more and more international events (Palumbo *et al.*, 1998; Seringrahus and Rosson, 1998; Sharland and Balogh, 1996; Rosson and Seringaus, 1995).

At the same time, a transition from the producer-exhibitor viewpoint to a demand orientation emerges. Indeed, new and more effective supply aggregations are built based on the consumers' informative needs.

In a context in which the generalist organization of trade shows has almost been completely replaced by sectorial specialization, the ability to present the highest possible number of supply alternatives, for a specific reference sector, becomes one of the most important roles assumed by contemporary trade shows (UFI, 2010). By leading to a constant connection of people, cultures, markets, and goods thanks to a global scale information flow of exchanges and relationships, the globalization phenomenon determines, in the exhibition domain, a process of rationalization, characterized by an international redistribution of trade show activities and by global restructuring (Bathelt *et al.*, 2014; UFI, 2010). At the same time, since the pressure of competition conduces exhibitors to avoid local events (which do not have an international range), a process of disappearance of many local events begins to take place. In Europe, in particular, due to the maturity of the sector and to the increasing interest of buyers towards Extra-European events, a process of concentration of events and locations occurs. For instance, trade shows that were once classified as international, become national or local, others are exported to non-European countries, or merge between themselves in order to compete on the international market and to assume greater importance as leaders of their sectors (UFI, 2010). Despite this process of agglomeration, international trade shows do not become, under the globalization phenomenon, similar events in cosmopolitan places but, on the contrary, they preserve their origins in terms of distinctive features connected to their national specialization (Bathelt *et al.*, 2014).

Parallel to this development, knowledge circulation and knowledge flows become core activities of contemporary trade shows, which assume the fundamental role of nodes in the global economy. In particular, thanks to the exhibition platforms, worldwide participants can inspect new products, build linkages and networks, and reduce the level of uncertainty due to the different features (culture, institutions, economy, technology, society, and policy) of countries and production environments.

Overall, there has been an emergence of a new global economy accompanied by global climate changes, oil price peaks, and increases in mobility and transportation costs. Therefore, in the future, trade shows could assume an ever more significant role as relational settings, through which international networks can be supported when “other routinized regular direct exchanges become rare” (Bathelt *et al.*, 2014, p. 8).

1.4.2. ICT effects

With regard to the ICT driver of change, if on the one hand, the diffusion of new technologies (and in particular the World Wide Web) did not lead to the disappearance of the physical events to the benefit of completely virtual formats, on the other, the Internet has certainly influenced and continues to influence the exhibition sector dynamics (Gottlieb and Bianchi, 2017; Kirchgorg *et al.*, 2010; UFI, 2010; Lee *et al.*, 2008). In particular, due to the failure of the first virtual events’ experiments, the role of real trade shows takes on new vigor, especially in those sectors that should have been virtual, by their nature, like hi-tech trade shows. In this way, web portals and websites become valuable tools at the service of the TS players; virtual contact points, between the trade show participants, which contribute to the promotion of the real event, whose capacity to create physical and real contacts still represents one of the main success features of modern trade shows. In this context of growing virtuality, trade shows assume the role of informative platforms, where the exchange of knowledge and information, among the exhibition system’s stakeholders, becomes one of the main functions. This is at the expense of an outdated vision, which saw the selling task as the main reason for participating in a trade show (Bonoma, 1983).

Overall, the ICT advent has determined a double effect on the exhibition system: firstly, the opportunity to visit websites, in order to obtain information about products and services, gradually reduces the importance of the event, understood as mere exhibition space. Secondly, new technologies can have an enabling effect on the TS settings by supporting the creation and management of experiential and entertainment activities for participants. The focus, therefore, moves from the hard component of trade shows (where importance is recognized to the location, its dimensions, and infrastructure provision) to the soft one, and in particular to the enhancement of specific abilities, such as event organization and the capacity of becoming flexible containers of conferences, meetings, workshops, seminars, and entertainment occasions (Rinallo *et al.*, 2010). In this way, trade shows lose their mere role as a product show-

case by becoming service and experience incubators that allow the consolidation of relationships between exhibitors and visitors throughout the year (thanks to the Internet support), and not only during the event execution (Gottlieb and Bianchi, 2017; Geigenmüller, 2010; Lee *et al.*, 2008).

1.4.3. Economic crisis effects

In a profoundly changed international economic environment, due to a crisis, considered by many economists as one of the worst that history remembers (second only to the Great Depression of 1929), the exhibition industry, like all the other sectors of the economy, had to react necessarily in order to adapt itself to the socio-economic mutations.

The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry (UFI) decided to propose (from 2009) the Global Exhibition Barometer with the exact aim of assessing, on a yearly basis, the effects of the economic crisis on the global exhibition sector. Notably, this barometer is an analysis tool updated twice a year through the submission of a questionnaire addressed to all UFI associates (170 exhibition centers from 50 different countries, including 26 in Europe), divided into four geographical areas: Europe, America, Asia, and the Pacific Middle East/Africa. In particular, according to the Global Barometer 2010, the economic crisis, started in 2008-2009, it began, especially in 2010, to generate its first consequences by negatively affecting the global exhibition sector in terms of occupied surfaces, number of participants, average unit revenues, and number of hosted trade fairs (UFI, 2010).

From a geographical perspective, if Europe represents the continent most affected by the economic crisis, the Middle East and Africa are the areas that have suffered less, with the majority of operators claiming an increase in sales during the post-crisis period. Asia and America, on the other hand, had a stationary situation during the onset of the crisis, followed, in 2010, by a trend reversal, with three-quarters of the surveyed operators declaring an increase in turnover (AEFI, 2009b; UFI, 2010).

Against this background of change, the sectorial literature (AEFI, 2009b; UFI, 2010) identifies some structural mutations that could characterize the future dynamics of the exhibition sector. In particular, there are five main emerging trends: [1] the diffusion of new interactive and high-intensity information media; [2] the internationalization of big size TS organizers; [3] the ever-pervasive insertion of experiential contests; [4] the reduction of the life cycle duration of manifestations; [5] the importance of reduction in the exhibition space's value.

The first trend concerns the diffusion of new high intensive and interactive media, which could represent valid alternatives to specific types of trade shows in the future. For instance, the Internet could allow businesses to virtually display goods and services to potential customers, organize meetings, and offer consumers the opportunity to carry out orders and purchases in a simple and instantaneous way.

The second structural change, the internationalization of large TS organizers, could lead to an increasing structuration of multinational groups, through alliance strategies, with the ultimate goal of creating transactional networks. An example is offered by the advent, also in the Italian context, of large foreign organizers, who (besides proposing events) have become shareholders of Italian exhibition centers.

The increasingly pervasive insertion of experiential contents, within the trade show format, represents the third trend potentially characterizing TS future dynamics. More specifically, trade shows could enrich themselves with “*events in the event*” in order to immerse visitors into experiential settings where they can be involved firsthand in socialization, fun, and learning activities (Rinallo *et al.*, 2010).

At the same time, the reduction of the life cycle of specific events will necessarily lead to a re-design of the trade show formats and to the creation of new trade show concepts.

The last trend concerns the importance of a reduction in the exhibition space value. In particular, it evolves from a strategic factor for a manifestation’s success/failure (specialty) to a commodity. In this context, the presence of other entities or organizers offering alternative spaces to those used for exhibitions (e.g., historic buildings, dismantled industrial buildings, etc.) could become a critical phenomenon for the trade show industry.

From the intersection between these five potential structural changes characterizing future trade show dynamics, two main tendencies emerge: the first trend underlines a profound mutation of the functions that the TS organizers will be called upon to play in the future. This change is closely linked to the advent of new media on the one hand, and on the other, to the progressive loss of relevance and value of exhibition location, as mere spaces for rent.

Directly connected to the progressive increase of the experiential component in the TS formats and to the reduction of the manifestations’ life cycle, the second trend focuses on the possible mutations concerning the functions of the trade show events.

Overall, if on the one hand, the first trend seems to lead towards a rethinking of the strategies and roles of TS organizers in the offering of space and

service, the second, on the other, underlines the necessity to identify new modalities of conceiving and designing trade shows.

In addition to the structural changes, which can potentially transform the post-crisis trade show scenario, specialized literature also identifies possible strategies (subdivided into three categories), which the TS protagonists can adopt in order to answer the context's mutations.

The creation of new business models represents the first possible strategy. Notably, it focuses on the creation of partnerships between TS players. This means that rather than adopting outsourcing or insourcing logics, the creation of hybrid models, primarily based on agreements and alliances, could be preferred.

The second strategy (business rationalization) aims to work on specific key dimensions of the TS space and services offered and in particular on: [1] the reduction of the cost of the exhibition space and services; [2] the use of the exhibition spaces to host non-fair events (such as congresses, recreational and cultural events); [3] the entrance into correlated businesses/expansion of the portfolio offered.

The last strategy (product innovations) focuses on the introduction of innovations into trade show dynamics through the reduction of the events' duration. It does this by simultaneously rescheduling the opening times, through the adoption of the Internet, in order to organize events resulting from a mix of real and virtual formats and finally through the creation of innovative concept events (AEFI, 2009b; UFI, 2010).

Overall, the post-crisis consequences, accompanied by the previous phenomena (new media advent and the globalization effects) represent the main mutations characterizing the development of the TS tool in recent years. Moreover, the evolution of trade fairs occurred at the same time as significant changes were taking place in the main functions of these events for participating players. Visitors, exhibitors, buyers, and organizers' motivations, for attending trade shows, have in fact profoundly changed over time, thus leading to a necessary adaption of the functions and roles of the trade fair instrument in order to meet the stakeholders' needs (Bathelt *et al.*, 2014).

1.5. Trade shows: New roles and functions

Starting from the assumption that the TS study is inevitably tied to the principal stakeholders operating in the trade show platforms (Tafesse, 2014), a focus on the evolution of the trade show players' reasons for attending a

trade show becomes crucial for analyzing how TS functions and roles have changed over time.

From the buyers' perspective, today, TS participation is no longer connected to the sole purpose of making orders. On the contrary, buyers decide to attend a trade show event principally in order to find out the latest trends, identify industry innovations, and seek new ideas (Rinallo *et al.*, 2017; Luo and Zhong 2016; Oromendía *et al.*, 2015; Evers and Knight, 2008; Ling-Yee, 2006; Rice and Almosawi, 2002). Consequently, the product becomes only a small part of what they want to see and know, since they are more interested in enhancing the competencies and the ancillary services proposed by the participating companies.

For their part, organizers no longer play the mere task of space vendors. On the contrary, they begin to develop specific organizational skills, accompanied by an ever more aware role as guides and directors of the exhibition show (Tafesse, 2014).

At the same time, in order to obtain positive results, today, exhibitors cannot only rely on their stands' aesthetics and on their ability to communicate different information concerning their offer and prices (now easily available on the Net). On the contrary, they will have to shift their ability to build relationships and create real shows for their visitors.

Indeed, visitors are no longer interested in participating in simple showcase events in order to receive information. Instead, they want to be involved in active events, where they can develop relationships, share ideas, experiment with products, situations, and live emotions (Rinallo *et al.*, 2010; Borghini *et al.*, 2006).

Against this background, the literature focus moves over time from TS selling objectives to non-selling ones. In particular, in the 1980s and 1990s studies, the interest was mainly directed towards the selling tasks (Tanner and Chonko, 1995; Gopalakrishna *et al.*, 1995; Gopalakrishna and Lilien, 1995; Shoham, 1992; Kerin and Cron, 1987; Bonoma, 1983) of the trade show instrument (lead generation, closing sales, finding new customers, qualifying leads, and prospecting).

In contrast to this, starting from the early 2000s, the attention begins to be diverted towards the non-selling functions (Blythe, 2002; Rice and Almosawi, 2002; Tanner, 2002; Godar and O'Connor, 2001). In particular, Blythe (2002) underlines, in his work, how TS functions (from the exhibitors' perspective) can be divided into selling and non-selling groups. The latter is categorized as meeting existing customers, enhancing the image of

the company, carrying out general market research, meeting new distributors or agents, launching new products, and even enhancing staff morale. Moreover, the author devotes particular attention to the public relations function, which enables the maintenance of the exhibition firm's position/credibility by creating a healthy image, as non-attendance would lead to a perception that the exhibitor may be in trouble.

In their work, Rice and Almosawi (2002) mainly focus their attention on the human interaction function of trade shows. Indeed, they represent (with respect to impersonal forms of marketing, such as the Internet) strategic opportunities for meetings, product demonstrations, and relationship development between customers and suppliers. The authors also categorize TS functions into four different exchange categories: [1] product/service exchange (such as introducing a new product or demonstrating a product); [2] information exchange (exchanging information about technology); [3] financial exchange (concluding a contract or making a sale) and [4] social exchange (interaction between participants).

By focusing on the exhibition firms' perspective, Evers and Knight (2008, p. 555) highlight the network function of trade shows as "temporary hubs that stimulate processes of knowledge creation and dissemination". In particular, trade shows allow the creation and development of effective network infrastructures and relationships for international growth and expansion. In this way, instead of conceiving trade shows as mere selling opportunities, participating firms begin to regard them as an entry-point into long-term networks, from which sales could eventually generate. Therefore, the trade show outcomes cannot be measured "in terms of immediate sales but in terms of widening and intensifying one's business network" (Evers and Knight, 2008, p. 556). Following the same research direction, Luo and Zhong (2016) confirm, in their work, that recent studies on TSs have shown a significant shift from selling to non-selling functions, especially from a knowledge diffusion perspective. In particular, in the information economy era, trade shows assume the role of rapidly spreading industry knowledge by motivating exhibition participants to create constant improvements and innovations.

Another critical TS task, emerged from recent literature, concerns the personal branding function, which can be categorized into: target advertising, networking (Sarmiento *et al.*, 2015b), maintaining relationships, attending, exhibiting, and participating in conferences, educating, and learning (Brzeziński and Jasiński, 2014). In particular, the authors identify four TS functions for professional development: [1] career research activities (focus

on the most direct way of acquiring jobs); [2] networking (gaining and developing current business relations); [3] professional knowledge (trends research and skills development); and [4] personal branding (manifesting itself in direct meetings and opportunities for public presentations during the event). Overall, for both exhibitors and visitors, trade shows could assist in the career development function both for short term (job offers) and long-term (relations, professional knowledge) perspectives.

Access to new markets and competition overview represent the main TS functions investigated by Rinallo *et al.* (2017). More specifically, trade shows allow participants to engage in intensive interactions, develop, and maintain networks by enabling them to find potential future partners and then to promote trans-local linkages over time.

At the same time, in addition to their vertical dimension, exhibition events provide a unique competition overview and create opportunities for horizontal learning by displaying what is happening in a specific industry sector. This benchmark function of trade shows becomes, in this way, a crucial source for participating firms' decision processes (Søilen, 2010). More in detail, "trade shows in different parts of the world enable industrial marketers to tap into specific bases of market knowledge, observe the behavior of the competitors that serve these markets, and ultimately develop innovations that are suited to a variety of foreign needs and preferences" (Rinallo *et al.*, 2017, p. 7).

Overall, the new TS functions, emerged from recent literature, can be summarized into five specific categories: [1] Reassurance function; [2] Contact function; [3] Experiential function; [4] Exchange function; [5] Benchmark function.

1.5.1. Reassurance function

The reassurance function concerns the role of TSs as platforms, chosen by participating firms, in order to confirm, through their presence, their position and credibility and to show customers that they are still in business and economically stable (De Vaujany *et al.*, 2013; Søilen, 2010).

1.5.2. Contact function

The possibility to touch products, in order to understand what they are like and how they work, represents the contact function of trade shows. More

specifically, as products represent one of the most important experience providers, the opportunity to see examples of prototypes or products enables the attraction of even more visitors or buyers who, by taking away samples or prototypes, can take a part of their experience back into their company. In this way, samples and prototypes can function as “souvenirs able to re- evoke experiences that will be more easily shared with co-workers not present at the event” (Borghini *et al.*, 2006, p. 1156).

1.5.3. *Experiential function*

The experiential function gives the possibility of immersing visitors in an embodied experience, where TS participants can touch, smell, listen to, and taste different stimuli, and speak to people face to face (Borghini *et al.*, 2006).

In this way, the TS organization will be increasingly characterized by the insertion of entertainment and show activities, innovative elements that could transform traditional trade fairs into platforms in which experiences become a new economic proposal (Rinallo *et al.*, 2010).

1.5.4. *Exchange function*

The fourth task (exchange) can, in turn, be categorized into five major exchange functions: transactional, informational, social, symbolic, and cultural (Tafesse and Skallerud, 2015). Distinctive combinations of exchange structures, rules, resources, and outcomes characterize these five functions.

The transactional exchange represents the most basic form, which can be conceived as the monetary or contractual transfer of goods and services between suppliers and buyers at trade shows (Rice and Almosawi, 2002; Tanner, 2002; Godar and O’Connor. 2001).

The information exchange concerns the transfer and sharing of information among TS stakeholders through trade show interactions and activities. For this reason, trade shows offer common spaces or events in order to allow a casual gathering of players and facilitate multilateral exchanges (Rinallo *et al.*, 2017; Oromendía *et al.*, 2015).

The social exchange function relates to the establishment of new personal and professional relationships and social ties as well as the maintenance of

existing ones (Sarmiento *et al.*, 2015a; 2015b). In particular, social interactions become crucial in order to reduce social distance, develop new knowledge, nurture ongoing search processes, and establish communities of practice (which allow getting ideas for innovation, discussing common problems, obtaining solutions, exchanging favors, and circulating knowledge). From this perspective, trade shows offer a neutral setting for these interactions: a function that is not often recognized, but that represents, on the contrary, a fundamental motivation to attend a TS event (Borghini *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, while social relationships create connections, especially on an individual level, the creation of networks allows interactions on an institutional level (Tafesse and Skallerud, 2015). Networks can assume horizontal or vertical dimensions. Horizontal networks connect competing firms, and vertical networks link complementary firms. The resulting networks become infrastructures crucial for facilitating collaborative learning, economizing on transaction costs, and for accessing new foreign markets.

The symbolic exchange concerns the construction of the brand image, market position, corporate reputation, or technological leadership.

In particular, TS players often attend a trade show not only for economic necessities, but also to see and be seen. In fact, events such as ceremonies enable participants to engage in macro-level symbolic exchanges by acquiring importance, visibility, and reputation (Tafesse and Skallerud, 2015).

The last exchange function (cultural) is rarely seen as a potential form of exchange among trade show stakeholders, even if it enables the reproduction and transfer of cultural norms, values, and meanings among culturally different market players (Tafesse and Skallerud, 2015). Acculturation represents the major outcome of this category of exchange, which is defined as “the process in which individuals learn and adopt the norms of a culture different than the one in which they grew up” (Cleveland and Laroche, 2007, p. 250).

1.5.5. Benchmark function

The last function of trade shows, emerged from recent literature, is the benchmark one. This aims to provide a unique competition overview by building opportunities for horizontal learning and by showing what is going on in the field. It also shows which new products competitors are developing (Rinallo *et al.*, 2017; Luo and Zhong, 2016; Søylen, 2010; Blythe, 2002).

Table 1.4 summarizes the classification of the main functions of trade shows identified by recent literature.

Tab. 1.4 – New trade show functions: A classification

FUNCTION	MAIN TASKS
<i>Reassurance function</i>	Maintaining firm's position, credibility, a healthy image; Confirming existing suppliers; Evaluating alternatives.
<i>Contact function</i>	Product presentation/demonstration; Touching products; Understanding how products work; Taking away sample/prototypes.
<i>Experiential function</i>	Immersing participants in embodied experiences; Touching, smelling, listening to, tasting different stimuli.
<i>Exchange function (Transactional)</i>	Selling to customers; Financial exchange; Signing a contact; Making a sale; Selling goods/services; Increasing sales opportunities; Monetary or contractual transferring of goods and services.
<i>Exchange function (Informational)</i>	Obtaining up-to-date information; Gathering purchase, competitors, general market and latest technologies information; Transferring and sharing of information; Gathering information about market access, new products, potential suppliers, and alternative purchases; Facilitating the exchange of knowledge; Stimulating processes of knowledge creation and dissemination; Knowledge acquisition and diffusion; Presenting the latest and future trends; Promoting research and training; Launching new products.
<i>Exchange function (Social)</i>	Facilitating/enhancing business networks; Meeting/contacting customers/buyers and distributors/suppliers; Establishing/maintaining relationships; Meeting among visitors; Developing and work on existing business relationships; Nurturing ongoing search processes; Reducing social distance from sellers; Establishing communities of practice and personal acquaintances; Renewing existing friendships; Forging professional rapport.
<i>Exchange function (Symbolic)</i>	Enhancing the image of the company and the staff morale; Strengthening reputation and brand image; Acquiring importance and visibility; Generating company and brand awareness; Personal branding; Professional development; Enhancing market position, corporate reputation or technological leadership; Enhancing a company's profile and its new products.
<i>Exchange function (Cultural)</i>	Knowing the organizational culture; Involving the reproduction and transfer of cultural norms, values, and meanings among culturally diverging markets; Deploying cultural values, norms, and customs.
<i>Benchmarking function</i>	Carrying out general marketing research; Gathering purchase, competitors, general market and latest technologies information; Scanning other markets; Watching competitors; Evaluating developments in the industry; Offering a unique competition overview.

Source: Author's elaboration

1.6. Digital concept: towards the trade shows virtualization?

Being one of the most crucial triggers of the recent TSs evolution, the advent of the Internet and web 2.0 applications has profoundly influenced and continues to affect the exhibition sector dynamics (Lee *et al.*, 2008).

Started in order to support scientists in the worldwide exchange of information, research, and discoveries, the World Wide Web is the first concept that leads the way to the development of the distance communication concept

by exploiting the ICT potential (Choudhury, 2014; Erragcha and Romdhane, 2014; Patel, 2013). Subsequently, the passage from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 brought about two major consequences: [1] a value production's shift from businesses to consumers and [2] a power shift from firms to users (Aghaei *et al.*, 2012; Berthon *et al.*, 2012; Cormode and Krishnamurthy, 2008; Constantinides and Fountain, 2008).

Characterized by user-generated content, usability, and interoperability, Web 2.0 becomes a means of interaction and collaboration, with the end-user assuming a leading role as content co-creator (Allen, 2013). Defined for the first time in 2004 during the O'Reilly Media Web 2.0 Conference, Web 2.0 has been briefly described as a network platform spanning all connected devices. In particular, the 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the main advantages of that platform: consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, involving individual users, building network effects through the participation principle, and going beyond the essence of Web 1.0 by offering richer experiences to users (O'Reilly, 2007).

A result of the latest internet-based applications is social media. Social media (SM) represent the Web 2.0's highest expression in the form of online platforms offering users the opportunity to create and share digital contents, in a few clicks, thus transforming communication into many-to-many dialogues (Hanna *et al.*, 2011; Kietzman *et al.*, 2011). Notably, they are categorized by the specialized literature into the following classifications: collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds. Social media were defined in 2010, by Kaplan and Heanlein 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" (2010, p. 61).

The emergence of a new category of users (creative consumers) has come about as a direct result of Web 2.0 and social media applications. These consumers have become the main protagonists of the online environment. Defined by Berthon *et al.* (2012, p. 263) as the "dynamos of this new media", 2.0 users begin to create and consume, at the same time, data, in this way, giving life to social media by producing most of the value in terms of content creation.

At a corporate level, the potentialities offered by the Internet and in particular by the social media applications have become a major business opportunity for firms of any size and from any sector. In particular, three

macro-areas of social media utilization in the business setting emerge (Lacoste, 2016; Siamagka *et al.*, 2015):

- *Business intelligence and information gathering*: by drawing on the enormous amount of information provided by social media, firms can carry out business intelligence activities and monitor their current/potential competitors and customers, thus mapping their purchase behaviors and identifying market segments to serve and business opportunities to capture (Ainin *et al.*, 2015; Wamba and Carter, 2013);
- *Relational networks creation*: firms can adopt social media in order to communicate more quickly and in real-time with their customers, ensure clients' loyalty, influence conversations, and in order to generate positive word of mouth towards their products, services, and brands (Michaelidou *et al.*, 2011). More in detail, the establishment of bilateral firm-customer dialogues contributes in creating an open climate for the benefit of the global customer relationship (Ainin *et al.*, 2015), the user trust levels towards the brand (Wamba and Carter, 2013), and the feedback processes (Michaelidou *et al.*, 2011). In addition, the relational network creation does not only concern the current/potential customer dimension, but also the search process for suppliers (Michaelidou *et al.*, 2011) or qualified human resources (Zaglia *et al.*, 2015), through the adoption of social platforms specifically dedicated to recruitment;
- *Branding*: the third field of social media adoption, in the business setting, concerns the branding area and, in particular, the creation of campaigns aimed at increasing the company's brand awareness and at communicating its mission in the online context (Michaelidou *et al.*, 2011).

Against this background, the Internet becomes one of the most powerful marketing tools also for the trade show industry (Lee *et al.*, 2008).

In particular, TS literature identifies the main typologies and uses of the new technologies by subdividing them according to the event's stage: Pre-show, at-show, post-show (Singh *et al.*, 2017; Ling-Yee, 2010).

Table 1.5 summarizes the main new media typologies (with the respective advantages), adopted in the exhibition sector, classified on the basis of the TS phases.

Tab. 1.5 – New technologies and TS phases: A classification

TS PHASES	TYPLOGIES OF ADOPTED TECHNOLOGIES	ADVANTAGES
Pre-show	Websites	Increase of communication effectiveness; data collection; efficiency improvement of access process to TS events.
	Online configurators	Improvement of organizational effectiveness; reduction of the temporal resources dedicated to the design phase; increase of the interaction between organizers and exhibitors; greater autonomy in organizing the exhibition space.
	Virtual catalogs	Increase of promotional and informative effectiveness; Exhibition complement; enhancement of the multimedia offer.
At-show	Scent marketing	Improvement of the corporate image; possibility to redefine the communicative mechanisms; more communicative effectiveness; extension of the trade show multi-sensorial offering; creation of olfactory concepts.
	Motion detection devices	Interaction improvement; data collecting; increase of turnaround times; curiosity stimulation.
	Augmented reality	Increase of the informative offering; emotional impact; possibility of displaying and interacting with digital contents; increase of the informative and communicative component.
	Three-dimensional solutions	Increase in engagement; possibility of displaying products not present at the fair; increase of spectacularity.
	Touch-screen display	Costs reductions related to the possibility of minimizing the exhibition space; interactivity increase; data collecting.
	Positioning devices	Integration opportunities with the promotional/informative social media campaigns; possibility to obtain geo-referenced data.
	RFID	Possibility to trace the participants' behaviors within the exhibition spaces; possibility of collecting real-time information; possibility of identifying the areas of interest; possibility of reorganizing the spaces/communicative strategy on the basis of the collected information; increase in interactivity; possibility of collecting precise information for the elaboration of performance indexes and for the customization of the content offer.
	NFC	Interaction dynamics change; simplicity of use; possibility of offering greater processes' automation; expansion of the digital information offer; collection of detailed data about the user; possibility of proposing customized contents on the basis of the visitors' preferences; increase in interaction; increase in the offered services.
	Two-dimensional barcodes	Link between the physical and virtual worlds; increase in the communication possibilities; possibility of redefining the exhibition offer; increase in interactivity; possibility of redefining the communicative strategies; possibility of obtaining precise data; increase in the precision of the post-event analysis.
Post-show	CRM Software	Improved management of the relationships with customers; more effectiveness in defining the relationships with customers; more communicative and promotional capability; possibility of giving customized suggestions to the customers.
	Websites	Extension of the TS offer; possibility of having a permanent virtual showcase; greater visibility.
	Value and performance measures	Possibility of having accurate information focused on the TS performance; possibility of accurately expanding performance analysis; increase in the efficiency and effectiveness of data.

Source: Author's elaboration

1.6.1. Pre-show stage

The main purpose of the pre-show promotion is to identify the specific target of participants and invite them to visit the trade show event. In order to reach this objective, an effective pre-show strategy can be adopted. Within this strategy, three fundamental aspects should be taken into consideration (Lilien and Grewal, 2012): qualification (determining which trade show players represent good opportunities for the event and for the exhibitors and are therefore worthy of establishing contact), invitation (promoting a visit to the trade show event for qualified attendees), and indispensability (emphasizing the importance of the manifestation).

1.6.1.1. Websites

One category of technological innovations, that aims to increase the visibility and the effectiveness of the promotion phase, is represented by the websites of the specific trade show events. Considered as a primary resource for gathering information, TS websites provide, to the potential participants, the possibility of booking their presence in advance, subscribing to the activities that will be carried out during the event, obtaining privileged access to content available only at the time booking. In addition, websites also offer an initial set of information about the public who will be present at the event and the first feedback regarding their interests towards it. Overall, the advantage that websites bring with them is bivalent: from the public perspective, they enable to carry out the registration and booking activities in advance, therefore eliminating the possible loss of time that these practices would entail (if carried out in loco), while from the organizer's point of view, they offer precious user-generated databases (Lee *et al.*, 2008).

1.6.1.2. Online configurators

The second pre-show category, the online configurators, allows managing the organization of the exhibition space through the adoption of specialized portals. These tools are able to raise the efficiency levels of the design phase by ensuring there is a smaller waste of temporal resources, and that there is flexibility in terms of use and the opportunity to have a tri-dimensional preview of the exhibition space. In this way, even though the online configurations do not bring radical mutations to the traditional TS management

process, they combine the organizers' and exhibitors' necessities by offering more precise and timely communication.

1.6.1.3. Interactive catalogs

The last typology of technological innovations, adopted during the pre-show phase, concerns the interactive catalogs. By representing the natural electronic evolution of traditional brochures, these tools assume a fundamental role as informative supports (able to deepen the contents that will take place during the event) and as virtual showcases, especially for those products that cannot be easily exhibited during the exhibition event (Chongwatpol, 2015; Dawson *et al.*, 2014).

1.6.2. *At-show stage*

The at-show phase represents the most interactive one, characterized by a greater relevance at the participatory level and by the development of multiple dynamics, in response to the different typologies of visitors and events (Lilien and Grewal, 2012). In this stage, the adopted technological innovations are principally aimed at [1] increasing the interactivity and spectacularity of the event (improvement of the exhibition experience); [2] entertaining the participants by permitting them to interact into the exhibition spaces actively and to share the experiences during the event; [3] collecting precise information about the at-show participants.

1.6.2.1. Scent marketing

From the perspective of the exhibition experience improvement, the adoption of innovative tools assumes a fundamental role in the processes of interactivity and poly-sensory implementation. Scent marketing, in particular, represents a recent solution adopted within the exhibition sector, which aims to increase the incisiveness and the effectiveness of the trade show communicative strategy, through an emotional and multi-sensorial approach. The TS image improvement, the reinforcement of the communicative mechanisms, and the realization of olfactory messages through the transmission and sensorial connection to specific psychophysics inputs represent the main objectives of this first typology of tools.

1.6.2.2. Gesture recognition tools

Mechanisms allowing the increase of interactive capacity of the exhibition spaces, the gesture recognition tools offer visitors (in order to draw their attention to) the opportunity to interact with a display, positioned inside the exposition. In addition to the entertainment objective, these instruments also collect valuable information by requesting the insertion of personal data and e-mails from visitors, in order to send them promotional materials from the event at a later date. Overall, the contribution of this technology is not only connected to the visitors' entertainment, but also to its ability to become an efficient and dynamic means from the informative and promotional point of view.

1.6.2.3. Three-dimensional solutions and augmented reality

At the same time, three-dimensional solutions are interfaces even more adopted in the exhibition sector for informative and didactic purposes. They represent an evolution of the visual promotion mechanisms, able to visualize a product without its necessary physical presence.

Finally, the contribution of augmented reality, in the trade show environment, is mainly connected to the raising of the interactive level and to the offering of new multimedia experiences within the TS booths. By adopting this technology, it is, therefore, possible to realize more effective and engaging communication strategies, structured in a different way, with respect to the traditional ones.

1.6.2.4. Touch-screen technologies and geo-location devices

Touch-screen technologies and geo-location devices represent the main technologies adopted during the at-show phase (Chongwatpol, 2015; Lilien and Grewal, 2012) in order to enable visitors to interact in the exhibition spaces actively. Although touch screen technology was invented about 40 years ago, it struggled to be adopted within the exhibition context, unlike other media. In particular, this category of devices offers a high level of interactivity, allowing visitors to view videos, produce presentations, or interact with animations. The main solutions adopted, in the trade show context, concern the presence of totems (which replace the traditional maps) and exhibitors' virtual showcases. These allow the identification of the thematic

areas that visitors most appreciated, through the possibility of saving the touch screen data.

Another device, which is beginning to be adopted within the TS setting, concerns geo-location technology: even more exhibitors, in fact, require their visitors to register at their own exhibition space (through mobile apps) by offering in turn gadgets. This activity brings about the effect of information propagation and visibility by influencing more and more visitors through a digital expansion of the exhibition space. More specifically, after making the access to the system through the creation of a personal profile, visitors can not only control their position within the exhibition space and the information about the planned activities, but they can also find out who else is nearby, view his or her personal information, and decide if to interact with them. Participants can also have the opportunity to virtually share their TS experience through the insertion of photos taken during the event or eventually take part in contests. Overall, the contribution of geo-location technology is multiple by representing both a starting point for dedicating more attention to visitors and a fundamental means for data collection. In fact, the spatial location allows the understanding of participants' displacements and, at the same time, the identification of the most visited exhibition areas. The possibility of linking the information to positioning data also enables a more in-depth pooled analysis.

1.6.2.5. RDIF, NFC technologies and bi-dimensional barcodes

The RFID, NFC technologies, and the bi-dimensional barcodes represent the third category of technologies adopted during the at-show phase.

These are used in order to reach the objective of collecting precise information about at-show participants (Chongwatpol, 2015).

In particular, RFID technology is adopted in order to communicate information between a fixed device and moving objects at a short distance, like the visitors of the exhibition space. In other words, the main contributions of this technology lie in the ability to trace an accurate analysis of the customer's behavior and to graphically trace the participants' physical displacements during the trade show event. These are used in order to analyze their attitudinal conducts by thereby increasing the quality of the investigations focused on trade show dynamics. In addition to the traffic function, the integration of this technology with visual media can enable the display of customized contents. When the visitor accesses the device, real-time information is provided to the exhibitors, and therefore they know where to

concentrate their attention or where their presence is required. Overall, the RFID adoption assumes a crucial role, both during the at-show phase (offering the opportunity to redefine the communication strategy during the event, through the collection of real-time information) and in the post-show phase (using the collected data in order to re-organize future relations and build offers targeted on the individuals' interests).

The NFC technology will probably have an important impact on future exhibitions and events. This impact will be enough to substantially redefine the trade show dynamics by equipping exhibitors with tools able to offer more information in a faster and more convenient manner and by allowing them to sell directly during the event through mobile phone interactions.

At the same time, the adoption of the bi-dimensional barcodes can add greater value to the trade show offer by allowing participants to gather information in a more convenient and dynamic way. In particular, by using these barcodes, participants can access (through mobiles or tablets) specific contents, visualize videos, the news, the map of the event, and take part in contests. From the exhibitors' and organizers' perspectives, these tools provide valuable databases concerning the visitors' behavior. These tools can be used in order to redefine their strategies, both at the exhibition and at the business level. They can also be used to propose more customized offers based on the customers' preferences, habits, and needs.

1.6.3. Post-show stage

Finally, during the post-show phase, the focus is mainly directed on the analysis of performance metrics, the comparison between the obtained data and the initial prefixed objectives, and on the management of relations, created during the at-show stage (Lilien and Grewal, 2012).

1.6.3.1. CRM Software

The CRM software represents the first category of technological applications adopted during this last phase. In particular, customer relationship management tools are applications destined for the management of customer relationships and gaining customer loyalty. Since the development of lasting relationships with the TS participants remains one of the main exhibitors' and organizers' objectives, the adoption of these tools allows the customization of the offer based on each visitor's preferences. In this way, the need for a customer-oriented approach is satisfied. More specifically, through this

software, exhibitors can organize their contacts' profiles by categorizing them and by planning different strategies for each interlocutor (e.g., the possibility of suggesting information based on the users' expressed preferences).

1.6.3.2. Websites

Another technology, adopted in order to promote the continuation of the trade show experience, is represented by the official websites, which assume the role of giving continuity to the event in the post-show phase. In particular, by becoming fixed virtual displays, they aim to transform themselves into virtual completions of the physical events, through which visitors can shop online, access the exhibitors' virtual showcases, contact and collect information about them (Lee *et al.*, 2008).

1.6.3.3. Value and performance indexes

The last post-show category of tools concerns the value and performance indexes, applications also adopted in the at-show stage (e.g., RFID and NFC technologies). They are used, in this case, in order to exploit the collected information for measuring visitors' satisfaction, to evaluate the correspondence between the prefixed goals and the achieved results, and in order to identify, through the analyzed feedback, possible modifications/improvements for future editions of the event.

1.7. Virtual trade shows

Another recent trend, emerging from the arena of trade show digitalization, relates to the incorporation of virtual environments as a strategic marketing tool (Geigenmuller, 2010).

Virtual trade shows started in the 1990s, as a result of the Internet evolution. More specifically, the term "virtual" refers to the computer-generated artificial world which humans are free to explore (Stone, 1993). In this sense, virtual trade shows (VTSs) represent web-based platforms where TS actors can interact virtually at any time and from any place (Geingenmuller, 2010). The real pioneer of trade show virtualization was the German group Messe Frankfurt. This group created a pilot product: throughout the year, the exhibition center made a virtual platform available, where visitors could find up-

to-date information on exhibitors and products presented during the real events, and where they could exchange ideas and discuss topics of common interest. Despite the fact that ICT were deeply influencing the organization of the exhibition sector during the early 2000s, the replacement of physical events with virtual ones did not become, until now, a reality. The main motivation lay in the fact that even if virtual events could offer unprecedented databases of information, they were not yet able to carry out those functions that have rendered the traditional fair an irreplaceable meeting occasion (Golfetto, 2000)¹.

In recent years, a new focus on the role of VTSs has emerged (Gottlieb and Bianchi, 2017; Geigenmüller, 2010; Kirchgeorg *et al.*, 2010) especially concerning the comparison with real-world trade shows, the main advantages, constraints, and challenges arising from their adoption, as well as the assessment on whether or not virtual events could definitively replace the real and physical formats in the future (for an in-depth analysis, please refer to Paragraph 3.2.4).

1.8. Conclusions

Overall, this chapter allowed to delineate:

- the complexity and the multiple facets characterizing the phenomenon of trade shows, as well as the speed with which these tools changed over time;
- the evolution of the trade show definition over the years;
- the main typologies of trade show through the categorization proposed by the specialized literature;
- the traditional functions assigned to the trade show tool;
- the new roles and functions of trade shows in light of the major evolutions characterizing the latest years (globalization effect, new media advent, consequences of the 2008 economic crisis);
- the impact of the digitalization phenomenon on the trade show sector.

¹ Even if the various attempts to build electronic trade shows had led to the supply of different services (specialized search engines) and to the enrichment of the traditional trade show services (booths pre-display, contact bookings, local services pre-organization), they had, in no way, replaced the central functions of the real events. Contemporary electronic contact, in fact, was still unable to guarantee the complete cognitive process on products and knowledge, which remained delegate to the richness of the direct interpersonal contact and to the information skills offered by the overall view of the real context (Golfetto, 2000).

Faced with this scenario, the main objective of Chapters 2 and 3 will be two-fold:

- identify and analyze the thirty-year business and management international literature focused on trade shows, thus gaining a broader understanding of the evolution of the TS tool;
- outline the main trends emerging from the more recent (2010-2018) literature, in light of the globalization effects, the consequences of the economic crisis, and the new advent of media.

2. DESCRIPTIVE REVIEW OF TSs LITERATURE

2.1. Literature Review: Criteria definition

In order to outline the evolution of the business and management literature devoted to the topic of TSs, in this chapter, a process of literature review has been adopted and structured in the following phases: [1] collection, [2] systematization/selection, [3] in-depth analysis of the identified review database.

As a systematic review search begins with the identification of specific keywords and terms, which are built from the scoping study (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003), in the first phase the most appropriate search strings have been identified (“*Trade show**”; “*Trade fair**”) and then employed in a subsequent systematic research. Scopus and Web of Science are the scientific databases selected for the review, which have enabled the filtering of the results by [1] subject area (Business, management, and accounting), [2] document type (Article and review) and [3] time frame (1988-2018). These databases were searched for articles containing “*trade show*” and “*trade fair*” in their titles, keywords, or abstracts. These specific search strings have been chosen since Kirchgeorg and colleagues (2010) affirmed that the term “*trade show*” is regarded as a synonym for “*trade fair*”.

Tab. 2.1 – Literature review’s selection criteria

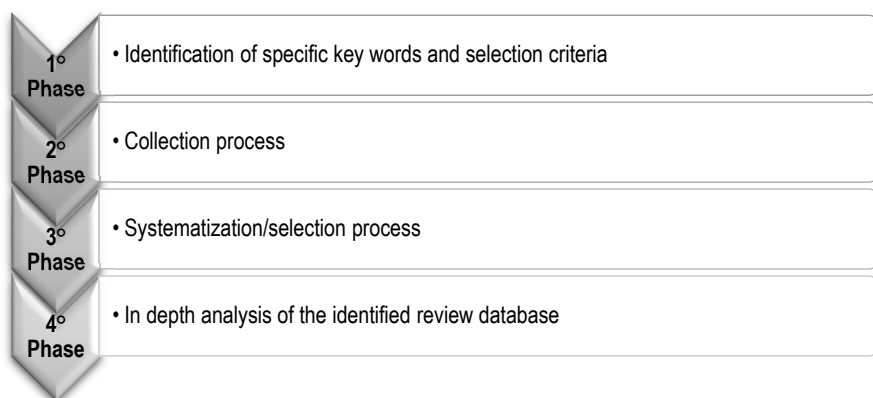
SELECTION CRITERIA	
Keywords	“Trade show*”; “Trade fair*” (in title, abstract, key words)
Document Type	Article; Review
Subject Area	Business, Management, and accounting
Time frame	1988-2018
Database	Scopus, Web of Science

Source: Author’s elaboration

Through the application of the selection criteria, the literature search identified 1,059 articles (1,026 from the Scopus database and 33 from Web of Science). Starting from this panel, the abstract or full text (when needed) of the identified papers have been read in order to select the articles focused on the topics of trade shows/trade fairs. In this phase, the papers that do not deal with the analyzed theme were deleted. In case of ambiguity (abstracts that did not allow the clear identification of the level of attention to the topic), the full text was read.

At the end of this systematic process, a final database of 214 articles has been identified.

Fig. 2.1 – Literature search process



Source: Author's elaboration

2.2. Descriptive review

The present paragraph provides an in-depth descriptive analysis of the papers' panel, devoted to the topics of trade shows/trade fairs. In particular, the descriptive survey focuses its attention on the following aspects: [1] source, years, and journal analysis; [2] methodology analysis; [3] TS specialization (analysis of the most investigated trade show sectors); [4] TS geography (analysis of the most investigated countries).

2.2.1. Source, years, and journal analysis

Overall, the majority of articles (181) comes from the Scopus database; 5 papers come from the Web of Science search engine, while 28 are present in both databases.

For what concerns the selected keywords, 135 articles have been found through the search string “trade show*”, 51 through the “trade fair*” one, while the remaining 28 papers have been identified through both terms.

From a temporal point of view (Tab. 2.2), the interest of business and management literature, for the topics of trade shows/trade fairs, began to grow in particular from 2008, until two peaks were reached in 2010 and 2017 (with 16 papers) and in 2018 (with 22 articles dedicated to the argument).

Tab. 2.2 – Year distribution of articles (n=214)

YEARS	NUMBER OF PAPERS
1988	0
1989	1
1990	2
1991	0
1992	4
1993	6
1994	5
1995	3
1996	4
1997	4
1998	4
1999	6
2000	5
2001	2
2002	9
2003	5
2004	5
2005	4
2006	7
2007	5
2008	10
2009	9
2010	16
2011	10
2012	10
2013	6
2014	11
2015	14
2016	9
2017	16
2018	22

Source: Author’s elaboration

The descriptive analysis also enabled the identification of the journals that have published three or more than three articles on the topics of trade shows/trade fairs. In particular, Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing (n=24), Industrial Marketing Management (n=22), and Journal of Convention & Event Tourism (n=13) are the journals that devoted more space to the trade show/fairs theme.

Tab. 2.3 – Journal distribution of articles (Journals with >=3 articles)

JOURNAL	NUMBER OF PAPERS
Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing	24
Industrial Marketing Management	22
Journal of Convention & Event Tourism	13
Journal of Business Research	7
Journal of Promotion Management	5
International Business Review	4
Journal of Marketing Communications	4
Tourism Management	4
European Journal of Marketing	3
Industrial Fabric Products Review	3
International Marketing Review	3
Journal of Global Marketing	3
Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research	3
Journal of Marketing	3

Source: Author's elaboration

2.2.2. Methodology analysis

From the methodology perspective, 102 papers adopt quantitative methods, 83 qualitative ones, while the remaining (n=29) adopt mixed methods. In particular, the statistical analysis, the questionnaire, the interviews, and the case studies represent the most adopted methodologies among the papers of the review panel.

2.2.3. TSs specialization and geography

In this final section of the descriptive review, the most investigated trade show sectors and countries have been identified. Overall, more than half of the review's papers (n=138) focus their attention on specific TS sectors, while the remaining papers (n=76) deal with the TS tool from a general business and management view. In particular, the tourist trade shows (n=21), the industrial trade shows (n=19), the events/meetings/conventions (n=19), the printed trade shows (n=11), and the food and beverage trade shows (n=10) represent the most analyzed TS specializations. Finally, from a geographical point of view, the descriptive review enabled the highlighting of how the last thirty-year business and management literature, devoted to the topics of trade shows/trade fairs, was concerned with deepening the study of the trade show tool both in developed and emerging countries. Notably, there is a prevalence of works conducted in Europe (42%) and Asia (28%), followed by the USA (23%), Africa (6%), and Oceania (1%).

3. ANALYTICAL REVIEW: SUBJECT AREA ANALYSIS

3.1. Subject areas identification

This chapter presents the results of the full-text reading process of the overall review's papers (n=214), devoted to the topics of trade shows/trade fairs in the last thirty years (1988-2018). In order to reach the objective concerning the analysis of the evolution of the thirty-year TS business and management literature, a process of thematic narrative analysis has been done. Through this method, it was possible to identify, for each review's article, the main investigated subject area of analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

3.1.1. Overall timeframe (1988-2018)

Firstly, the total frequencies (in how many review's papers a subject area appears, in the overall timeframe [1988-2018]) have been calculated (Tab. 3.1).

In particular, the focus towards the study of the trade show as a marketing mix tool able to contribute to establishing valuable relationships between various trade show stakeholders (n=64), the trade show as a knowledge/information exchange platform (n=46), the trade show stakeholder behavior and objectives (n=46), the trade show participation (n=45), the trade show management process (n=44), the trade show performance variables (n=38), the role of the trade show tool in the firms' internationalization process (n=35), and the trade show as a network building incubator (n=34) represent the most analyzed subject areas by business and management literature dedicated to the TS theme during the last thirty years.

In the second part of this paragraph, all the identified subject areas are looked at individually in more depth.

Tab. 3.1 – Total frequencies per each identified subject area (Time frame: 1988-2018)

SUBJECT AREA	FREQUENCY
TS and relationship building	64
TS and knowledge/information exchange	46
TS and stakeholder behavior	46
TS participation	45
TS management	44
TS performance	38
TS and internationalization processes	35
TS and network building	34
TS effectiveness	27
TSs as experiential platforms	21
TS and new media	20
TS selection	10
TSs as temporary clusters	8
TSs as territory catalysts	6
Virtual TSs	5

Source: Author's elaboration

TS AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

This first trend concerns the role of TSs as relational incubators, which offer valuable opportunities for initiating and building relationships between TS attendees. More specifically, in the TS context, firms should focus on establishing dialogues rather than simply aiming for one-way communication (Blythe, 2009). Even if exhibiting and participating in trade shows is expensive and requires hard work, with specific aims and good planning, these events can provide excellent relational opportunities (Star, 2006) by establishing direct interactions and building relationships between TS stakeholders (Swedberg, 2004). In particular, the majority of works devoted to this topic are designed to underline the importance of the relational opportunities in the TS context (Rinallo *et al.*, 2010); to explore the TS relational importance for future trade show scenarios (Kirchgeorg *et al.*, 2010); to investigate the quality of relationship (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2015; Jin *et al.*, 2012); to introduce a new concept in the marketing relationship domain (“*communication*”) concerning the simultaneous practice of business communication and community creation in the TS setting (Björner and Berg, 2012); to in-

investigate the mix of relationship marketing and transactional marketing perspectives (Oromendía *et al.*, 2015); and to analyze buyer and seller interactions in order to evaluate their impact on relationship quality (Sarmiento *et al.*, 2015a; 2015b; 2015c). For an in-depth analysis, please refer to Paragraph 3.2.1.

TS AND KNOWLEDGE/INFORMATION EXCHANGE

The function of trade shows as information and knowledge exchange platforms represents the second trend emerging from the business and management studies. Despite the growing interest of literature about this research area, the academic attention on knowledge diffusion at TSs remains in its infancy. First, because the research has mainly focused on the learning process and the mode of interaction between exhibitors and visitors (Reychav, 2011; Ling-Yee, 2007) and second, because there is a lack of empirical research at the industrial or whole TS level (Luo and Zhong, 2016). In particular, the existing studies, which focused on TS knowledge/information diffusion, explain this trend only qualitatively, with few quantitative papers studying the structure of knowledge diffusion in the TS context (Bettis-Outland *et al.*, 2012; Bettis-Outland *et al.*, 2010). For an in-depth analysis, please refer to Paragraph 3.2.1.

TS AND STAKEHOLDER BEHAVIOR

This third subject area refers to what TS stakeholders do during the trade show event and the analysis of their behavior. In particular, some of the authors devoted to this area of research focus their attention on the way in which stakeholders attend trade shows (Godar and O'Connor, 2001), the exhibition firms' behavior in emerging markets (Rice and Almosawi, 2002), the way in which exhibitors set their TS objectives (Serighaus and Rosson, 2004; Blythe, 2002), the investigation of the attendees behavior in order to theorize about the nature of ongoing processes in industrial markets (Borghini *et al.*, 2006), the analysis of the trade show attendees, based on their objectives and behavior (Gopalakrishna *et al.*, 2010), and the examination of consumers shopping behavior at trade shows (Tafesse and Korneliussen, 2012).

TS PARTICIPATION

This research area concerns the study and the analysis of the principal objectives leading the TS attendees to participate in trade show events. In particular, the authors devoted to this topic, focus their attention mainly on the exhibitors' and visitors' participating objectives identification (Wu *et al.*, 2008).

From the exhibitors' perspective, introducing new products, meeting current and potential customers, selling at the show, generating awareness for specific products, improving company awareness/image, new products, and gathering competitive information represent the main objectives found in the TS participation literature (Wu *et al.*, 2008). Overall, exhibitors seem to assign greater importance to long-term selling and qualitative objectives related to customer contacting, customer-interaction, image building, competitiveness-building, and intelligence/information collection (Skallerud, 2010; Godar and O'Connor, 2001; Munuera and Ruiz, 1999; Seringhaus and Rosson, 1998).

From the visitors' point of view, seeing new products, fact-finding for future purchases, making a purchase, attending seminar/association meetings, seeing specific companies/products, solving problems, building relational networks, and obtaining technical or product specification represent the principal purposes that lead TS attendees to participate in trade show events (Sarmiento *et al.*, 2015b; Wu *et al.*, 2008).

Godar and O'Connor (2001) also focus their attention on the buyers' participation objectives, stating that the trade show format is, for this target, a conveniently consolidated location to gather information on a variety of competitive vendors, to look over the competing product offerings, to identify alternative purchases, to evaluate the stability of the companies making the products (in order to find sufficient information to make purchasing recommendations), to build the morale of the sales force, to maintain their contacts with sellers and other users, to start future cooperative actions, and to develop contacts for future purchases.

TS MANAGEMENT

In the last thirty years, research about trade show management has been fairly extensive (Tafesse and Korneliussen, 2012). Notably, the majority of papers are designed to study the trade show management topic in the rapidly globalizing TS environment (Seringhaus and Rosson, 1998), to expand the exhibitors' and visitors' points of view from a services management perspective (Munuera and Ruiz, 1999), to underline what types of objectives and management processes successful exhibitors set during three different stages: pre, at, and post show (Lee and Kim, 2008; Tanner, 2002), to analyze the exhibitors' strategic approach to managing their trade fair activities (Blythe, 2009), to explain how managers plan and perform specific trade show tasks, to delineate the effect of managerial responsibilities for important trade show tasks on marketing performance (Tafesse and Korneliussen, 2012) and on trade show selection decision (Berne and Garcia-Uceda, 2008), to analyze the exhibitors' activities related to booth management

(Gilliam, 2015; Tafesse and Korneliussen, 2012; Telpner, 2003; Bartz, 2002), and to expand TS management literature from the organizer perspective by examining how resource deployment strategies influence TS organizers' performance effectiveness (Tafesse, 2014).

TS PERFORMANCE

From the review, it emerges how much of the existing business and management literature on TSs focuses on performance issues. It is a predictable result since TS participation is expected to yield positive outcomes. Despite this preoccupation, little agreement exists regarding how TS performance should be measured and how it could be defined both at a theoretical and at an empirical level (Ling-Yee, 2007; Ling-Yee, 2006; Hansen, 2004). Although several papers deal with the TS performance topic, during the 1990s most of these studies focused their attention on the overall TS success or sales performance (Seringshaus and Rosson, 2004; Dekimpe *et al.*, 1997), without incorporating other TS performance dimensions (Lee and Kim, 2008). Starting from the assumption that trade show performance is multidimensional and includes both selling (customer assurance, new market development, access to key decision-makers, product information dispersal, on-site sales, providing customer services) and non-selling dimensions (maintaining company image, competitive intelligence, market scanning, boosting employee morale, testing new products), in 1999 Shoham proposed three TS performance sub-dimensions: gathering information, managing relationships, and psychological activities. Following this trend, in 2004, Hansen built a framework (including both sales-related and behavior-related activities), which became the most comprehensive and theoretical grounded model of TS performance of the literature in the 2000s (Tafesse and Korneliussen, 2011; Skallerud, 2010; Tafesse *et al.*, 2010). More specifically, Hansen built a model composed of five dimensions of performance, which are relevant for trade shows exhibitors: an outcome-based sales dimension and four behavior-based dimensions (information gathering, relationship building, image building, and motivation activities).

- *Sales-related activities*: this dimension includes all activities related to on-site sales.
- *Information gathering activities*: this domain includes all activities related to the information collection about competitors, customers, industry trends, and new products at trade shows.
- *Image-building activities*: activities related to the construction of TS corporate image and reputation.

- *Relationship-building activities*: activities aimed at maintaining and developing relationships with current and new potential customers and other valuable TS stakeholders.
- *Motivation activities*: activities related to maintaining and enhancing the motivation of employees and customers.

Overall, Hansen's scale represents a practical model able to measure the extent to which a company has achieved a satisfactory level of performance through participating in trade shows (Skallerud, 2010). The model, proposed by Hansen (2004), was later validated and extended in 2008 by Lee and Kim, who categorized the factors that differentially affect TS performance into three stages (pre-show, at-show, post-show) in order to analyze the relationship between these determinants and TS performance at each stage. In this way, by verifying and modifying Hansen's framework, Lee and Kim (2008) proposed a model that captures the multidimensionality of TS performance. In particular, by relating each performance dimension to tactical variables (quantifying show objectives, pre-show promotion, booth staff training, booth size, booth location, at-show promotion, booth staffing, follow-up, and performance measurement), they found out how these factors have significant and different impacts on each TS performance dimension.

The main post-Hansen (2004) and post-Lee-Kim (2008) works focused on the topic of TS performance, are those of Skallerud (2010), who examines the differences at international trade shows between exhibitors participating in joint or individual booths in terms of structure, strategy, and trade show performance; the work of Tafesse *et al.* (2010) and later of Rodriguez *et al.* (2015), whose objective is to analyze the role of complaint management as a key factor influencing the quality of the relationship between the participants at leisure trade shows, which becomes, in turn, a fundamental factor for the business performance; the paper of Tafesse and Korneliussen (2011), who investigate TS performance dimensions in an emerging market context and the study of Alberca *et al.* (2015), whose paper represents the first attempt to include the TS sector, type, frequency, numbers of present countries, and number of free passes issued, into the performance measurement.

Finally, Lin *et al.* (2018) identify a three-component trade show evaluation framework on exhibitors' and visitors' performance that accounts for the relationships between all three key stakeholders (i.e., visitors, exhibitors, and organizers), namely VEO framework. Notably, exhibitor and visitor performance evaluations consist of three components addressing three corresponding stakeholders: satisfaction with self-performance and satisfaction with the other two key stakeholders, respectively.

TS AND INTERNATIONALIZATION PROCESSES

Another research area, emerging from the review, concerns the role of trade shows as temporary clusters, through which participating and exhibiting firms can overcome their geographical borders, having access to new markets. More specifically, the literature attention towards the TS internationalization process began to grow during the 1990s with Seringhaus and Rosson (1998) who analyzed, in their paper, the function of TSs as significant marketing tools able to influence a company's ability to compete and succeed in the rapidly globalizing business environment. By providing opportunities to gather intelligence, gain customer sales, disseminate information, identify prospects, and be visible within the industry, trade shows become useful export promotion activities (Wilkinson and Brouthers, 2009; Mullen *et al.*, 2003), whose strategic role of creating and developing international networks for competitive advantage assumes, for literature, a leading position (Evers and Knight, 2008).

Overall, the majority of works devoted to this topic are aimed at studying TSs as export learning channels (Rinallo *et al.*, 2017; Jer, 2014; Richardson *et al.*, 2012) especially in the SMEs context (Rinallo *et al.*, 2017; Jeong, 2016; Measson and Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Kalafsky and Gress, 2014; Li and Shrestha, 2013; Kontinen and Ojala, 2011; Ramírez-Pasillas, 2010). For an in-depth analysis, please refer to Paragraph 3.2.2.

TS AND NETWORK BUILDING

In addition to the TS relationship building role, different papers also underline the trade show importance in terms of network platforms. More specifically, trade shows represent not only selling/buying or communication tools, but also interactive business networks (where evaluating business partners, distributors, and suppliers) and a good venue for working on webs of vertical (with suppliers, intermediaries, or customers), or horizontal (with associations, partners, or regulators) relationships (Berne and Garcia-Uceda, 2008; Ling-Yee, 2007). In other words, trade shows go beyond being a simple marketing platform by transforming themselves into a support to the establishment and enhancement of network structures (for enabling participating firms to grow and expand internationally) and into a vital context in which networks are built and maintained for international advancement (Evers and Knight, 2008).

Overall, the majority of authors devoted to this topic focus their attention on the importance of the TS network building role for future trade show scenarios (Kirchgeorg *et al.*, 2010); on the network's construction at an international level (Measson and Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Kontinen and Ojala, 2011;

Siskind, 2011); and on the development of networking strategies in the TS context (Sarmiento *et al.*, 2015b). For an in-depth analysis, please refer to Paragraph 3.2.1.

TS EFFECTIVENESS

The definition of effectiveness, adopted by TS literature, is that of Kottmann (2002), who suggests it is the degree to which a predefined objective matches an achieved objective independent of the input. If a predefined purpose has been achieved, it will be considered effective by becoming, in this way, a success. In the TS context, objectives reflect the results that trade show stakeholders expect to achieve through TS participation (Gottlieb *et al.*, 2014).

From the organizers' and exhibitors' point of view, it becomes fundamental to understand what visitors believe constitutes a really effective trade show event (Sarmiento *et al.*, 2015c; Gottlieb *et al.*, 2014; Prado-Roman *et al.*, 2012; Kirchgeorg *et al.*, 2009). In particular, the majority of papers, devoted to the effectiveness of TSs, are designed to identify possible measures and control variables (Dekimpe *et al.*, 1997); to offer some tips to increase exhibit effectiveness (Herbig *et al.*, 1997); to focus on the effectiveness of the participating firms' activities (Blythe, 1997); to analyze the effectiveness of buyer-seller relationships (Ling-Yee, 2006); to understand the motivations and evaluations of the effectiveness of travel trade shows (Yuksel and Voola, 2010); to expand the visitor's perspective by conceptualizing and developing a specific measurement index for perceived TS effectiveness into the B2C trade show context (Gottlieb *et al.*, 2014); to compare the effectiveness of virtual and offline trade shows, from the exhibitors' and organizers' points of view (Gottlieb and Bianchi, 2017; Geingemuller, 2010); to investigate the TSs efficiency by providing insights for trade show exhibitors and by offering a benchmarking analysis of the business factors for the most efficient trade shows in each sector (Alberca *et al.*, 2018).

TSs AS EXPERIENTIAL PLATFORMS

Another area of study, enhanced by TS literature, concerns the role assumed by the entertainment and experiential component in the trade show management process. In particular, the majority of papers devoted to this topic, have focused their attention on the study of trade shows as embodied experiences (Borghini *et al.*, 2006); on the application of conceptual models and methods, developed in experiential marketing literature, to managing visitor experiences at trade shows (Rinallo *et al.*, 2010); on the translation of contemporary trade shows from sales appointments to "festivals" (Søilen, 2010); on the creation of a theoretical framework based on experiences in

the TS context (Bjorner and Berg, 2012); on the TS visitor role as an active participant in the creation of the experiential setting of the trade show event (Gottlieb *et al.*, 2014); on the influence of environmental stimuli on nonbusiness visitors' emotions (Wong *et al.*, 2017); on the examination of the experiential marketing activities during international fashion trade shows (Koi-visto and Mattila, 2018); on the analysis of the influence of trade show event personality on exhibitor's eudaimonic and hedonic happiness and advocacy intentions (Rai and Nayak, 2018); on the study of the interface between emotional intelligence (EI), trust, and organizational learning in the context of the trade show environment (Bettis-Outland and Guillory, 2018). For an in-depth analysis, please refer to Paragraph 3.2.3.

TS AND NEW MEDIA

The advent and impact of new communication media, in the TS context, represents another subject area emerging from the business and management literature review. More specifically, website adoption, the web 2.0, the social media phenomenon, and the affirmation of the first virtual trade shows (VTSs), as a possible extension or replacement of the traditional events, represent the main features characterizing this topic. Overall, there is no doubt that the Internet becomes one of the most valuable marketing tools for the trade show sector, with websites and social media platforms extending the life of the traditional trade show event in the virtual environment (Lee *et al.*, 2008). In particular, the authors devoted to this area of research focus their attention on TS website evaluation (Lee *et al.*, 2008); on the growing importance of new media for trade show future scenarios (Kirchgeorg *et al.*, 2010); on the effect of the internet on the TS marketing performance (Tafesse and Korneliussen, 2013); on how TS webpage interactivity influences trade show organizers' performances (Tafesse, 2014); on internet platforms management (Chongwatpol, 2015; De Vaujany *et al.*, 2013) during the pre and post-show phases (Ling-Yee, 2010) and also during the TS event (Singh *et al.*, 2017); on the exploration of the characteristics of TSS' onsite Information Technology (IT) and on the analysis of the relationships among onsite IT usage, visitors' effectiveness, and perception through the innovation characteristics (Hlee *et al.*, 2017). For an in-depth analysis, please refer to Paragraph 3.2.4.

TS SELECTION

An additional subject area, emerged from the review, concerns the identification of the criteria adopted by TS attendees in trade show selection and evaluation. More specifically, trade show organizers need to know the factors adopted by potential visitors in their ex-ante TS evaluation (Berne and

Garcia-Uceda, 2008). It should be borne in mind that the growing number of trade show events increases the complexity of TS attendees' decisions to participate, and the organizers must be able to attract visitors and exhibitors. In order to reach this objective, they need to identify the criteria influencing the TS stakeholders' decisions to attend. Very few published works have empirically explored exhibitors' and visitors' evaluations and selection criteria (Berne and Garcia-Uceda, 2008). Berne and Garcia-Uceda (2008) are the first authors that tried to fill this literature gap by identifying three general criteria that may influence the potential exhibitors' and visitors' TS selection decision: [1] perception of/information on TSs (types of TS, convenience of the location and timing, TS reputation and management, the anticipated quantity and quality of attendance); [2] the marketing objectives of the company (customer acquisition and retention objectives, distribution network objectives, product scanning objectives, and marketing research objectives); [3] the perceived, relative, and differential costs deriving from attending TSs.

TSs AS TERRITORY CATALYSTS AND TEMPORARY CLUSTERS

The role of trade shows as temporary clusters, through which the host cities (in which the event is performed) can take advantage of the TS appeal in terms of visibility, represents another subject area emerged from the business and management studies dedicated to the trade show topic. In particular, the authors devoted to this research area focus their attention on the study of trade shows as multidimensional relational platforms/relevant temporary hubs (Rinallo *et al.*, 2017; Tafesse and Skallerud, 2015); on international TSs' dynamics (Luo and Zhong, 2016); on the destination's attractiveness as a key component of the TS's success; on the identification of the destination factors explaining why some destinations are more attractive TS hosts than others (Lee *et al.*, 2016). For an in-depth analysis, focusing on this subject area, please refer to Paragraph 3.2.2.

VIRTUAL TSs

Belonging to the more general subject area devoted to the impact of the Internet in the TS context, the virtual trade shows' study concerns the incorporation of virtual environments as a strategic marketing tool. In particular, the works dedicated to this topic focus their attention on virtual trade shows' management (Semler, 1999); on the construction of a framework for understanding the role and contributions of virtual trade fairs in developing relationships (Geigenmüller, 2010); on the exploration of the key factors (including the virtualization phenomenon) that will shape the future of trade shows as a marketing instrument until the year 2020 (Kirchgeorg *et al.*, 2010); on

the examination of the exhibitors' experiences with VTSs; on the exploration of the managers' perceptions concerning the main drivers and challenges of VTSs participation (Gottlieb and Bianchi, 2017). For an in-depth analysis, please refer to Paragraph 3.2.4.

3.1.2. First timeframe (1988-2003)

In the second phase of the analytical review process, the overall period of analysis has been divided into three timeframes (1988-2003; 2004-2009; 2010-2018) in order to analyze how the TS theme evolved during the last thirty years of study. The temporal subdivision has been carried out by adopting a framework extracted from the literature based on the main evolutions characterizing the trade show sector of the last thirty years. For an in-depth analysis, please refer to Paragraph 1.4.

Tab. 3.2 – Last thirty years TS sector evolution

YEARS	DRIVERS OF CHANGE	CONSEQUENCES
1990s	Globalization	Rationalization
2004	ICT	Focus from hard to soft
2010	Consequences of the economic crisis	New challenges to face; Planning of new business models; Access to new markets; Creation of alliances/networks; Product innovations; Trade show as gathering place

Source: Author's elaboration from UFI (2016); Aldebert *et al.* (2011)

During the first period of analysis (1988-2003), the following areas represent the most investigated topics: the analysis of the trade show management process (n=18), the study of trade show stakeholder behavior (n=16), the examination of the trade show stakeholder participation motives (n=16), the trade show effectiveness (n=12), the identification of possible variables able to quantify trade show performance (n=11), and the role of the trade show tool as a firms' internationalization accelerator (n=9). No articles between 1988-2003 focused their attention on the “TS and new media”, “TSs as experiential platforms”, and “TSs as temporary clusters” subject areas (Tab. 3.3).

Tab. 3.3 – Total frequencies per each identified subject area (1° Period: 1988-2003)

SUBJECT AREA PAPERS 1988-2003	FREQUENCY
TS management	18
TS and stakeholder behavior	16
TS participation	16
TS effectiveness	12
TS performance	11
TS and internationalization processes	9
TS and knowledge/information exchange	7
TS and relationship building	5
TS and network building	4
TS selection	4
TSs as territory catalysts	1
Virtual TSs	1
TS and new media	0
TSs as experiential platforms	0
TSs as temporary clusters	0

Source: Author's elaboration

3.1.3. Second timeframe (2004-2009)

Over the second analyzed timeframe (2004-2009), the following subject areas were the topics on which the business and management trade show literature was mainly focused on: relationship building in the TS context (n=13), the study of the trade show management process (n=10), the trade show network building process (n=9), trade show stakeholder behavior (n=9), and the role of the trade show as a knowledge/information exchange platform (n=8). No articles focused their attention on the phenomenon of virtual trade shows and on the function of TSs as temporary clusters.

Tab. 3.4 – Total frequencies per each identified subject area (2° Period: 2004-2009)

SUBJECT AREA PAPERS 2004-2009	FREQUENCY
TS and relationship building	13
TS management	10
TS and network building	9
TS and stakeholder behavior	9
TS and knowledge/information exchange	8
TS performance	7
TS participation	7
TS and internationalization processes	4
TSs as experiential platforms	4
TS effectiveness	3
TS and new media	2
TSs as territory catalysts	1
TS selection	1
Virtual TSs	0
TSs as temporary clusters	0

Source: Author's elaboration

3.1.4. Third timeframe (2010-2018)

During the third reference period, a trend, which had already started during the second timeframe, is confirmed, with a growing focus of the literature on the importance of the TS instrument from a relational and information exchange perspective. In particular, the subsequent topics represent the areas of study most frequently investigated by the review's papers between 2010 and 2018: TS and relationship building (n=46), TS and knowledge/information exchange (n=31), TS and internationalization processes (n=22), TS participation (n=22), TS and network building (n=21), and TS and stakeholder behavior (n=21).

Tab. 3.5 – Total frequencies per each identified subject area (3° Period: 2010-2018)

SUBJECT AREA PAPERS 2010-2018	FREQUENCY
TS and relationship building	46
TS and knowledge/information exchange	31
TS and internationalization processes	22
TS participation	22
TS and network building	21
TS and stakeholder behavior	21
TS performance	20
TS and new media	18
TSs as experiential platforms	17
TS management	16
TS effectiveness	12
TSs as temporary clusters	8
TS selection	5
TSs as territory catalysts	4
Virtual TSs	4

Source: Author's elaboration

3.1.5. Subject area per timeframe: A comparison

In this paragraph, a comparison of the total frequencies' subject areas per timeframe has been made in order to highlight how they have evolved within the last thirty-year business and management literature (Tab. 3.6).

From the thematic review of the overall papers' database (n=214), firstly, it emerges how some research topics have characterized the entire reference period (1988-2018), with significant growth during the second and third timeframe by confirming themselves as areas of great interest for the TS literature of the last years. Specifically, several papers (belonging to all three analyzed timeframes) focused their attention on the study of the following research themes: TS and relationship building, TS and knowledge/information exchange, TS and network building, and TSs as territory catalysts. Overall, it becomes clear how business and management TS literature has focused, over the last thirty years, on the importance of the trade show event as a vital tool of the marketing mix, which is able to contribute to the creation

of valuable relationships and networks between the TS stakeholder (*TS and relationship building* and *TS and network building*), to incentivize the creation/diffusion of information/knowledge exchange (*TS and knowledge/information exchange*), and to support the economy of the context in which it is located (*TSs as territory catalysts*).

Tab. 3.6 – Total frequencies' subject areas per temporal periods - A comparison

SUBJECT AREA	PAPERS 1988-2003	PAPERS 2004-2009	PAPERS 2010-2018	TREND
<i>TS and relationship building</i>	5	13	46	<i>Constant growth</i>
<i>TS and knowledge/information exchange</i>	7	8	31	<i>Constant growth</i>
<i>TS and internationalization processes</i>	9	4	22	<i>Degrowth/growth</i>
<i>TS participation</i>	16	7	22	<i>Degrowth/growth</i>
<i>TS and network building</i>	4	9	21	<i>Constant growth</i>
<i>TS and stakeholder behavior</i>	16	9	21	<i>Degrowth/growth</i>
<i>TS performance</i>	11	7	20	<i>Degrowth/growth</i>
<i>TS and new media</i>	0	2	18	<i>Focus on the third timeframe</i>
<i>TSs as experiential platforms</i>	0	4	17	<i>Focus on the third timeframe</i>
<i>TS management</i>	18	10	16	<i>Degrowth/recovery</i>
<i>TS effectiveness</i>	12	3	12	<i>Degrowth/recovery</i>
<i>TSs as temporary clusters</i>	0	0	8	<i>Focus on the third timeframe</i>
<i>TS selection</i>	4	1	5	<i>Degrowth/growth</i>
<i>TSs as territory catalysts</i>	1	1	4	<i>Constant growth</i>
<i>Virtual TSs</i>	1	0	4	<i>Degrowth/growth</i>

Source: Author's elaboration

From the analysis of the evolution of the TS trends, it also emerges how some research topics have experienced a decrease of attention from the literature between the first and the second timeframe, which has followed by an interest increase during the third one. In particular, these topics are related to the role of trade shows as firms' internationalization accelerators (*TS and internationalization processes*); to the examination of the trade show stakeholder participation motives (*TS participation*); to the investigation of the TS stakeholders (*TS and stakeholder behavior*); to the analysis of performance measurements (*TS performance*); to the study of the TS selection criteria (*TS selection*); to the examination of the VTs (*Virtual TSs*).

The third category of TS research topics is characterized by an attention decrease between the first and the second timeframe, followed by an interest recovery from the literature during the third timeframe. Notably, the analysis of the TS management process (*TS management*) and the identification of variables able to measure the effectiveness of the trade show event (*TS effectiveness*) belong to this third group.

Finally, the last cluster is composed of research topics specifically analyzed during the third timeframe. In particular, the study of the advent and adoption of the Internet in the TS context (*TS and new media*) and the analysis of trade shows as experiential platforms (*TSs as experiential platforms*) and as temporary clusters (*TSs as temporary clusters*) represent thematic areas that have received increasing literature attention, especially during the third timeframe.

Overall, during the second (2004-2009) and especially during the third (2010-2018) time period, a growing interest of the literature emerges for [1] the TS tool as an information platform devoted to the creation of relational networks, especially from an international growth/expansion perspective; [2] the importance of the TSs as temporary clusters; [3] the growing role of new media tools, web communications, and trade show virtualization; [4] the recognition of the role played by the experiential/entertainment component in TS organization and management.

3.2. TSs contemporary tendencies (2010-2018): A possible Framework of analysis

In addition to the delineation of the evolution of the TSs areas of study, deepened by the business and management literature during the last thirty years, in this paragraph, a focus on the principal contemporary tendencies emerged from the review has been achieved. For this reason, only the third timeframe's papers have been taken into consideration in order to reach a further objective of the book concerning the identification of the main trends emerging from the recent (2010-2018) TS business and management literature. The third-timeframe research articles (n=114) were then critically examined to underline the specific TSs trends that they have dealt with.

A critical analysis of the selected papers identified four major tendencies tied to contemporary literature. In particular, alongside the leading role recently assumed by the trade show tool as an informative stage (Rinallo *et al.*, 2017; Bettis-Outland *et al.*, 2010; Kirchgeorg *et al.*, 2010) for the creation of relational networks (Jeong, 2016; Alberca *et al.*, 2015; Measson and Camp-

bell-Hunt, 2015; Oromendía *et al.*, 2015; Sarmiento *et al.*, 2015a; 2015b) in a perspective of opportunities for international growth/expansion (Kalafsky and Gress, 2014; Jer, 2014; Li and Shrestha, 2013), above all for small and medium-size firms (Kontinen and Ojala, 2011), there has been an increasing interest of recent literature towards the emotional impact the trade show event can generate in the TS stakeholder (Bjorner and Berg, 2012; Rinallo *et al.*, 2010). The literature attention, therefore, moves from the purely economic and commercial aspects of the TS tool to the emotional/experiential component as a key factor for the overall effectiveness of trade show performance and as one of the main TS reasons for visitors' participation (Gottlieb *et al.*, 2014). The experiential impact needs to be sought not only during the planning/realization phase of the trade show event, but also through an increasingly omnichannel strategic approach, thus enabling the management of the TS online and offline channels in a more systematic way, and thereby giving visitors the uniformity of the TS online and offline experience.

In the subsequent sections, the four trends will be discussed one by one.

Table 3.7 provides a possible framework of the principal tendencies emerging from recent business and management literature devoted to the topics of trade shows.

Tab. 3.7 – Principal TS tendencies in the business and management study (2010-2018)

RELATIONSHIP MARKETING	INTERNATIONALIZATION PROCESS
TSs and relationship building TSs and network building TSs and information/Knowledge exchange	TSs and internationalization processes TSs as temporary clusters TSs as territory catalysts
TSs as experiential platforms	TSs and new media Virtual trade shows (VTs)
EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING	INTERNET MARKETING

Source: Author's elaboration

3.2.1. TSs and relationship marketing

The first trend, emerged from the third timeframe's review, concerns the TSs role as relational platforms, in which contacts' search, network building, and information/knowledge exchange become one of the main reasons for stakeholder's participation and involvement. Overall, relationship marketing

encompasses the study of interactions, relationships, and networks (Sarmiento *et al.*, 2015a; 2015b; 2015c). In particular, Rinallo *et al.* (2010) underline the importance of relational opportunities as one of the principal drivers of valuable trade show experiences. It is certain that visitors attend trade shows to meet people and see old friends. In this way, TSs enable visitors to create and maintain social relationships with key players in their business networks. Using a multistage scenario analysis in order to explore the key factors that will shape the future of trade shows as a marketing instrument until the year 2020, Kirchgeorg *et al.* (2010) also confirm the relational importance of TSs. Indeed, the authors underline that all experts surveyed in their study affirmed that personal contacts and relationship building between decision-makers, companies, and customers, in an attractive and emotive TS setting, will still be highly valued in 2020. In their paper, Aldebert *et al.* (2011) define TSs as channels for business transactions, dialogue, contacts, communication, and sharing of common opportunities and ideas. The investigation of the relationship's quality in the TS context represents the focus of Rodriguez *et al.* (2015) and Jin *et al.* (2012), whose work confirms that exhibitors' relationship quality with organizers is composed of four factors: [1] service quality and relationship satisfaction, [2] trust and affective commitment, [3] communication, and [4] calculative commitment. Of extreme interest is Bjorner and Berg's contribution (2012), that enriches the TS relationship building trend with the introduction of the “*communification*” concept used to “denote the simultaneous building of community while communicating business-related issues to strengthen and build relationships with customers over time, with exclusivity and co-creation of experiences as important components” (Bjorner and Berg, 2012, p. 30). In other words, they underline the existence of a “practice of communification” in the exhibition context, that is, the simultaneous practice of business communication based on collective community creation, in which stakeholders strategically ameliorate their relationships with each other. In their paper, Geigenmüller and Bettis-Outland (2012) underline how the value TS attendees derived from adopting the trade show tool is related overall to the possibility of establishing and nurturing customer relationships/high-quality interactions and of engaging in marketing and competitor analysis. Defined by Jer (2014) as relationship building events, trade shows become for all intents and purposes, marketplaces in which relationship building and learning processes drive functional upgrading amongst the participants, who have the opportunity to link up with players from other regions and countries (Rinallo *et al.*, 2017).

The mix of relationship marketing and transactional marketing perspective has been investigated by Oromendía *et al.* (2015) from a tourist and

travel shows point of view. This is considered as a major theme in the general TS literature of recent years. In particular, in their paper, they analyze the effect of managing relationships among three partners (trade organizer, exhibitor, and end customer) on the exhibitor's performance during the trade fair. They then compare that effect with transactional influence, discovering how relationship marketing offers higher levels of satisfaction and performance than transactional marketing. Focused on the B2B trade fair context, Sarmiento *et al.* (2015a) study the TS from a relationship marketing perspective. Their main purpose is to analyze buyer and seller interactions and to evaluate their impact on relationship quality and on the development of relationships in the long-term. Findings reveal that the atmosphere of the B2B events' setting encourages socializing behavior, fundamental to enhance the quality of relationships. The trade fair, therefore, becomes a privileged place for relationship building and development where socialization episodes occupy a relevant role (Tafesse and Skallerud, 2015; Sarmiento *et al.*, 2014). In a subsequent work, Sarmiento *et al.* (2015b) discover that often the most experienced visitors are the ones who are involved in interactions and networking with a multitude of TS players. It is exactly the opportunity to have face-to-face interactions and to reassure customers, by showing them that vendors are still in business and economically stable despite the recent recession (De Vaujany *et al.*, 2013), one of the biggest advantages of trade fairs, which still makes them essential marketing tools and far from being replaced as a result of the virtualization phenomenon (Brzeziński and Jasiński, 2014).

In addition to the socialization role, several authors also underline in the context of the relationship-marketing trend, the TS importance in terms of stakeholder's network incubator (Grakhova *et al.*, 2018; Zhong and Luo, 2018; Blanchet, 2017; Rinallo *et al.*, 2017; Wang *et al.*, 2017). In particular, Kirchgorg *et al.* (2010), in their work, hypothesize how the future competitive advantage of trade shows may lie in creating efficient platforms. These will enable TS players to network and discuss topics related to their industry. In other words, the authors suggest that TSs will continue to represent an integral and valuable part of a firms' marketing mix, as well as TS stakeholders continuing to evolve towards information brokers in order to promote the networking process between market players. Defined by Jer (2014) as network building events, by Manero and Uceda (2010) as social and business networks, and by Bjonner and Berg (2012) as platforms to network with customers, potential customers, and other stakeholders, TSs become collective promotional tools able to develop, maintain, and facilitate the establishment of dynamic networks (Antolin-Lopez *et al.*, 2015; Tafesse and Skallerud, 2015; Brzeziński and Jasiński, 2014; Aldebert *et al.*, 2011), find potential

future partners, scan other markets, analyze competitors, and evaluate, as a benchmark instrument, the development in the industry (Rinallo *et al.*, 2017). In particular, international trade fairs represent a good context for SMEs to create ties leading to international markets by offering valuable possibilities to network with international operators in the same industry (Measson and Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Kontinen and Ojala, 2011; Siskind, 2011). Based on a qualitative approach, the work of Sarmiento *et al.* (2015b) underlines the fact that TSs are relevant in developing a relationship marketing strategy. This involves networking with a multitude of players that goes beyond the simple interactions between exhibitor and visitor.

Together with the TS relationship and network building roles, the last identified role concerning the TS and marketing relationship trend is related to the function of trade shows as information and knowledge exchange platforms (Bettis-Outland and Guillory, 2018; Player-Koro *et al.*, 2018; Rizo-myliotis *et al.*, 2018; Van Tuijl *et al.*, 2018; Zhong and Luo, 2018; Rinallo *et al.*, 2017; Wong *et al.*, 2017; Wubs and Mailliet, 2017). In particular, it has emerged from recent literature that trade fairs represent information sources for industrial buyers. In their work's findings, Rinallo *et al.* (2010) reveal that the search for information (albeit not necessarily related to short-term purchases) represents one of the main motivations for attending TSs. However, the authors affirm that information search processes at trade fairs take place in physical settings, which are quite different from other communication instruments (e.g., browsing a website). For this reason, they make sense of these differences by proposing the metaphor of trade fair visits as “*embodied experiences*”, which are characterized by sensorial overwhelming, information overload, and physical fatigue. In addition, they also reveal, in their findings, that the most salient components of valuable TS experiences are cognitive and relational in nature. Trade shows, therefore, become learning expeditions, in which the information search is not necessarily motivated by short-term purchase motivations, but represents an opportunity “to keep oneself up to date and, according to some, to escape the daily routines and have the time to reflect on broader issues. Visits to trade shows thus result in new ideas and unexpected knowledge that may be retained for future use” (Rinallo *et al.*, 2010, p. 254). Of the same opinion, in their work, Richardson *et al.* (2012) underline how trade shows can help participants quickly acquire relevant knowledge by leading to greater familiarity and trust between one another and thus leading towards the sharing of valuable knowledge. Also, in a future perspective, the information function of trade fairs will gain in importance (Kirchgeorg *et al.* 2010) to the detriment of the transaction function. These results imply that the TSs participants have to become market

experts in order to answer to information and interaction needs. Defined by De Vaujany *et al.* (2013) as privileged places where TS players exchange their explicit or tacit know-how, as knowledge spillover channels (Jer, 2014), and as a feasible manner of obtaining information and knowledge (Antolin-Lopez *et al.* 2015), trade shows represent events where firms learn from one another and where they have the opportunity to acquire first-hand and face to face knowledge about markets and players (Rinallo *et al.*, 2017). In particular, participating firms attend major trade shows in their specific industry in order to acquire relevant information about their sectorial context and to take advantage of the information diffusion process. In this way, TS participants can constantly follow the moving borders of the industry as well as its continuously renewed knowledge bases (Aldebert *et al.*, 2011). Also in this case, it has emerged that there has been a noticeable shift of attention in recent literature from TS selling to non-selling activities, especially those which are knowledge diffusion-based (Luo and Zhong, 2016; Measson and Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Sarmiento *et al.*, 2015a; 2015b; Tafesse and Skallerud 2015; Menon and Edward, 2014; Sarmiento *et al.*, 2014; Siskind, 2011). In order to quantify the importance of the information-based activities, Bettis-Outland *et al.* (2012; 2010) try to identify in their paper a return on trade show information (RTSI) index, which could be used to measure the impact of information gathered at trade shows. Their papers also aim to suggest differences in how exhibitors and visitors perceive tangible versus intangible benefits and how they value trade show information, thus opening the door to future research in the trade show information value area. In conclusion, the TS function of information gathering, which was consistently neglected in the past (Søilen, 2010), has adopted a valuable role in recent years. Trade shows confirm themselves as fundamental opportunities to gather information about competitors, their products, and services. Knowledge is thus created through the observation and interpretation of the trade show environment and other players within it. Moreover, knowledge processes derive from the informal and social interactions that take place in the TSs context. TS stakeholders absorb and gather information thanks to their physical proximity to other players (Cheng *et al.* 2014). Therefore, knowledge sharing becomes a core process at trade shows (Reychav, 2011).

3.2.2. TSs and the internationalization process

The second trend emerged from the recent (2010-2018) literature, devoted to the TS topic, concerns the role of trade shows as temporary clusters, through

which firms can escape their geographical borders, thus having access to new markets, and through which the host cities (in which the trade fair event is performed) can take advantage of the TS wide appeal in terms of visibility (Geldres-Weiss and Monreal-Pérez, 2018; Gottlieb and Beatson, 2018; Haddoud and Onjewu, 2018; Schulte-Römer, 2018; Zhong and Luo, 2018; Palmer *et al.*, 2017; Tafesse and Skallerud, 2017; Rinallo *et al.*, 2017). In particular, Richardson *et al.* (2012) affirm that trade shows do not only support internationalization in the short term, by helping acquire relevant knowledge through workshops or conference participation, but they can also support it in the long-term by carrying new ventures, which typically possess limited resources with which to conduct international businesses (Jer, 2014), towards new geographical markets' access. In this way, firms can use trade fairs as an export learning channel in order to acquire market and technical knowledge from the foreign markets' players, to develop strong linkages with foreign buyers (Jer, 2014), and to benefit from the TS export promotion processes (Rinallo *et al.*, 2017). Defined by Rinallo *et al.* (2017) as collective marketing platforms that industry agglomerations can use to affirm their presence in international markets, trade shows offer a good context for family SMEs to meet international operators of the same industry. This, in turn, may give them the opportunity to access new foreign markets (Jeong, 2016; Measson and Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Kalafsky and Gress, 2014; Li and Shrestha, 2013; Kontinen and Ojala, 2011). By creating a positive national brand and by attracting foreign participants, trade fairs become beneficial platforms for the survival, growth, and expansion of smaller industrial firms (Rinallo *et al.*, 2017). In this way, these firms can overcome their geographical and resource limits (Ramírez-Pasillas, 2010). In this perspective, trade show events are seen as temporary clusters through which firms can escape the liabilities of embeddedness and interact with, and learn from, distant participants (Rinallo *et al.*, 2017). In this line of research, trade shows establish themselves as multidimensional relational platforms (Rinallo *et al.*, 2017) and as relevant temporary hubs helping identify new technologies and solutions, support collaboration with and among firms, and foster new partnerships (Aldebert *et al.*, 2011). As affirmed by Rinallo *et al.* (2017) and Tafesse and Skallerud (2015), from the economic geography perspective, TSs are primarily viewed as temporary learning stages (in which contact among geographically distant industry players is facilitated), as well as temporary concentration platforms of otherwise dispersed participants, stakeholders, and activities in a given place at a given time (Palmer *et al.*, 2017; Richardson *et al.*, 2012; Aldebert *et al.*, 2011; Ramírez-Pasillas, 2010). In their paper, Luo and Zhong (2016) confirm this trend by focusing on the international TSs, defined

as a perfect example of a temporary cluster bringing together a wide range of players in the same industry chain into a specific space for a short time.

In addition to being temporary clusters able to support the participating firms' internationalization process, TSs also assume a valuable role as territory catalysts, having a considerable impact on the locality in which they are performed (Bjorner and Berg, 2012; Sainaghi and Canali, 2011; Kirchgeorg *et al.*, 2010). Faced with a broad range of stakeholders, trade shows become attractions, catalysts, place marketers, and image-makers for the destination in which they are located (Jin *et al.*, 2013). At the same time, the destination's attractiveness represents a key component of the TS's success, which contributes, together with the event itself, to the creation of an integrated event experience (Lee *et al.*, 2016). Notably, in their paper, Lee *et al.* (2016) identify a set of varying destination factors (tradition and history, local income and population, infrastructure and communication availability, location, tourism, environmental and weather conditions, public investment and support policies, the city's international standing, exhibition center size, and the composition of regional industry) which explain why some destinations are more attractive trade show hosts than others.

3.2.3. *TSs and experiential marketing*

The third trend, emerged from recent business and management literature, concerns the role taken by the entertainment and experiential component in trade show management (Barbosa and Scavarda, 2018; Bettis-Outland and Guillory, 2018; Gottlieb and Beatson, 2018; Koivisto and Mattila, 2018; Schulte-Römer, 2018; Rai and Nayak, 2018; Bloch *et al.*, 2017; Rijkens–Klomp *et al.*, 2017; Wong *et al.*, 2017). Rinallo *et al.* (2010) are the first authors that deal with this area of study during the third timeframe review period (2010-2018). In particular, in their work, they apply the conceptual models and methods developed in the literature on experiential marketing to managing visitor experiences at trade shows. They do this through the observation of visitor movements across different stands and other event areas and the observation of visitor interactions with the different experiences provided on the booths and with other visitors. Overall, the experiential approach gained attention at the end of the 1990s thanks to the Pine and Gilmore (1999) and Schmitt (1999) publications. Indeed, they put customers' experiences at the center of marketing strategies. In this way, the experience becomes a new supply category. They also affirm that, by proposing memorable and complex experiences characterized by interrelated components

(product design and packaging, store atmosphere), firms can obtain advantages over competitors in terms of customer satisfaction. According to Rinallo *et al.* (2010), despite the fact that trade shows represent one of the few cases of B2B experiential marketing proposed in the Pine and Gilmore book, the literature on TSs so far has not investigated from an experiential perspective. On the contrary, the B2B trade show setting is characterized by a wide range of sensorial stimuli (sounds, odors, colors, signs, physical objectives), which bring with them information and attraction. In this way, TSs immerse visitors in a physical and cognitive experience that requires their active participation. It follows that trade shows become experiential platforms in which visitors are immersed in a mix of sensorial stimuli, cognitive processes, emotional responses, relational activities, and active behaviors.

From the exhibitor's perspective, the experiences they provide are related to the opportunity for visitors to see, examine, and touch, in a professional and socialized context, samples, products, and prototypes as reminders able to revoke the experience when the trade show is over. Moreover, Rinallo *et al.* (2010) find that many exhibitors also offer various types of in-stand events, such as product demonstration (Kim and Mazumdar, 2016; Gottlieb *et al.*, 2011), social events, technical seminars or conferences, and entertainment events (Søilen, 2010).

Together with the cognitive component, which transforms trade shows into valuable sources of learning, another important TS experiential driver is characterized by the occasions to build relations, which allow visitors to establish and maintain relationships with key players. In particular, the social component in the TS context enables the development of a sense of community between participants sharing the same interests and problems, together with the creation of a feeling of belonging. In this way, visitors are conducted towards an emotional state that is difficult to obtain through other communication tools.

In addition to the cognitive and relational components, the TS setting also offers a leisure factor thanks to the planning of cocktail hours, invitations to dinner, and social events. The main purposes of these activities are to relieve the professional visitor's tiredness and to reinforce social ties between TS participants.

Overall, the visitors' experience is influenced by two different experiential providers: on one side, the exhibitors in the stands and the exhibition space organizer, on the other, the 'director' who has the fundamental task of creating and managing the stage (creation of information and rest areas, planning of technical and social events, exhibitors' booths maps and exhibition routes management, making available information on websites). In his article, Søilen (2010) confirms the transformation of contemporary trade shows (in particular

in business to consumer markets) from sales appointments to “festivals”. This is a consequence of the characteristics of the new consumer who has become more and more bored and is always looking for entertaining and creative activities (Ahola, 2012). Consequently, trade shows should continue the evolution of their core focus (began in the early 2000s), which moves from products-services-sales towards dialogues-relations-entertainment and finally experiences. Also in this line of research, Bjorner and Berg (2012) present in their work a theoretical framework based on experiences in the TS context. Starting from the assumption that exhibitions (with their own dramaturgy, choreography, and architecture) are essentially experiential, interactive, and relational, the proposed framework is composed of three affirmations: the creation of “collective experiences” is an important element in events; experiences in such settings are “co-created”; and these co-created experiences are created based on audience participation. By participating in events together, attendees share experiences and, at the same time, they are involved in co-creating them as active participants. In this way, according to Carù and Cova (2006), since contemporary consumers aim to be immersed into experiential settings in order to have a memorable experience, in the TS platforms, visitors yearn for immersing themselves into the exhibition environment through the fielding of all five stimuli: sense (product test), feel (emotional shows), think (technical and cognitive presentations), act (guest star shows with the visitors’ involvement), and relate (social dinners, cocktails hours). In their paper, Gottlieb *et al.* (2014) focus their attention on the TS visitors’ perspective by affirming how they may even be viewed as active participants in the creation of the experiential setting of the trade show event. The authors also identify specific items constructing the TS entertainment factor: special events and presentations as integral parts of the overall TS experience; the TS exhibitors as part of an ensemble rather than isolated entities; the range of exhibits able to amuse, please, and divert TS visitors; the cognitive processes through product and service information (often collecting a variety of brochures could be equated to fun shopping for many TS visitors). Gottlieb *et al.* (2014) conclude by confirming how the entertainment facet of TSs represents a fundamental contributor to the overall TS effectiveness perception from the consumer visitor’s perspective. For this reason, organizers of B2C trade shows should pay close attention to the creation of a carnival-like atmosphere through the offering of onstage shows, live music, information sessions, and celebrity presence. At the same time, the exhibiting firms should be considered as a fundamental part of the experiential tapestry, whose principal task is to convert their booths into multiple experiential stages in order to transform the B2C trade show into a successful entertainment platform.

3.2.4. TSs and Internet marketing

The role assumed by new communication media in the TS context represents the last trend identified by recent business and management literature (Barbosa and Scavarda, 2018; Blanchet, 2018; Gottlieb and Bianchi, 2017; Hlee *et al.*, 2017; Singh *et al.*, 2017). In particular, online communication media assume a prominent strategic role as a support tool for trade fair events. The creation and management of official websites (able to accompany users before, during, and after the TS event), the constant assessment of their quality (website structure, content design, user experience), the adoption of social media and the affirmation of virtual trade shows (VTSs) as a valid extension of the traditional event (Geigenmüller, 2010) become fundamental components of physical TSs, whose ability to favor real contacts still represents one of the major success motivations of the trade show tool (Wu and Wang, 2016; Sarmento *et al.*, 2015a; Dawson *et al.*, 2014; Sarmento *et al.*, 2014; Melles, 2013; Kirchgeorg *et al.*, 2010). In this line of research, Kirchgeorg *et al.* (2010) underline in their article the growing importance of new media as a positive trend for the future of trade shows. Findings from Tafesse and Korneliussen's work (2013) undeniably indicate that the adoption of multiple new media tools, for trade show campaign purposes, leads to higher levels of marketing performance. In his paper, Tafesse (2014) examines how resource deployment strategies (and in particular the TS webpage interactivity) influence TS organizers' performance effectiveness. In particular, a webpage is considered interactive when it possesses specific technological features permitting users to engage in real-time information exchange. Following this conceptualization, TS webpage interactivity is measured by counting all the interactivity webpage's tools (e.g., e-mail addresses, online registration, application forms, social media plugins, FAQs, and contact addresses). From a TS management perspective, the interactive webpage's value lies in its ability to support and create richer online interactions among exhibitors, visitors, and organizers. At the same time, interactive webpages allow TS organizers to learn about their stakeholders (their profile, interests, and service needs), to develop customized services, and to contribute to TS attendance levels by supporting valuable learning and information exchanges. In this way, trade shows become marketing packages where the event itself represents only the iceberg's visible part, and the customers are accompanied before, during, and after the show via Internet platforms (websites, mobile applications, and social media) (Chongwatpol, 2015; De Vaujany *et al.*, 2013). Focused on the exhibitor's perspective, Ling-Yee (2010) underlines the importance for exhibitors to adopt the right approach

to internet marketing by using online communication media primarily for informational and communication purposes during the pre-show promotion and for customer service and support purposes during the post-show follow-up. Singh *et al.* (2017) add to Ling-Yee's work (2010) by stating the importance of also integrating new media interactions during the show in order to reduce the amount of unanswered customers' queries and to optimize overall TS management. Despite the fact that the importance of new media and technologies is growing extremely fast, new styles of consumption are emerging, and new demands about the core competencies of the TS tool are rising (Kirchgeorg *et al.*, 2010). In particular, on the demand side, the public continues to show an interest in attending trade fairs in order to gather information, see and try products, and build relationships (Oromendía *et al.*, 2015). At the same time, considerable evidence (Gottlieb and Bianchi, 2017) shows that the complement of virtual-based channels to the traditional physical event can increase TS performance and effectiveness. This tendency is expected to become even stronger as Internet adoption continues to grow, and new media make an increasing number of virtual channels such as social networks available.

In this context, a recent trend in the arena of TSs emerges concerning the incorporation of virtual environments as a strategic marketing tool (Gottlieb and Bianchi, 2017). A virtual trade show (VTS) is "a type of virtual event, where exhibitors and visitors connect with one another via the virtual environment (Internet), regardless of geographic location, to interact and exchange information" (Gottlieb and Bianchi, p. 17). A VTS normally includes a virtual exhibition hall (in which users can enter with specific permissions), virtual stands or booths to exhibit goods and services information, web conferences, web seminars, and educational presentations. Participants can communicate with various stakeholders (staff, other visitors) and can select from a wide range of chat rooms, videoconferences, and forums. Despite the VTS development, a sparse amount of literature has examined exhibitor's experiences and challenges related to virtual trade show participation (Gottlieb and Bianchi, 2017; Geigenmüller, 2010). In their work, Gottlieb and Bianchi (2017) intend to enrich this field by examining exhibitor's experiences with VTSs and by exploring managers' perceptions about the main drivers and challenges of VTS participation, in an attempt to identify the necessary marketing abilities required for this purpose. Major themes, regarding the perceived participation benefits of VTSs, if compared to the real world TS, emerge from the study: to communicate with current and potential stakeholders in a more personalized manner, to gain new markets' access with important costs (logistical costs, transaction costs, merchandise, and brochure

costs) and other advantages (budget constraints, security issues), to help institutions to increase brand awareness, and gather relevant market intelligence. Equally, specific VTS constraints also emerge, such as the additional costs necessary to train employees to handle technology and manage virtual interactions with visitors and the complexity of the Internet infrastructure and VTS systems (long registration processes, problems related to internet browser support). As a result, the research concludes by suggesting that VTSs will not replace real-world TSs in the foreseeable future. This is because they are still considered relatively new to organizations and because a general lack of knowledge about their advantages and challenges still exists. In summary, the findings reveal how VTSs are adopted as surrogates for real-world TSs in times of tight budgets. Furthermore, the research data shows that the VTSs' future will also depend on TS managers, who must consider that in an on-demand world, clients and users will judge firms by their ability to offer interactions and experiences literally anywhere. "Now with a virtual ubiquity that moved from a desktop PC to laptops, tablets and mobile phones there is no time to lose to provide customers the comprehensive offline/virtual experience where they want it, how they want it and when they want it" (Gottlieb and Bianchi, 2017, p. 25).

Since the focus of the second part of this book is on the advent and adoption of new media in the TS context, in the next chapter, this fourth trend will be deepened by intersecting it with a stakeholder analysis. In particular, for each identified paper focused on the Internet marketing trend, and belonging to the third timeframe's review (2010-2018), the two investigated areas of study (*TS and new media* and *Virtual TSs*) have been cross-correlated with the stakeholder category (exhibitors, visitors, organizers) the specific article is focused on. Through this intersected analysis, it will be possible to identify the most surveyed TS stakeholders by the contemporary TS literature focused on the Internet marketing trend.

4. FOCUS ON THE TSs AND INTERNET MARKETING TREND

4.1. TSs and Internet marketing from a stakeholder perspective

Table 4.1 shows, for each Internet marketing trend (line) and for each stakeholder category (column), the authors who have dealt with them. In the subsequent sections, for each TS participant's perspective, an intersected review (Internet marketing trends – stakeholder category) will be presented.

Tab. 4.1 – Internet marketing/stakeholder category Matrix (Papers 2010-2018)

Reference Stakeholder	Visitors	Exhibitors	Organizers
Subject Area			
<i>TS and new media</i>	Chongwatpol (2015); Brzeziński and Jasiński (2014); Dawson <i>et al.</i> (2014); De Vaujany <i>et al.</i> (2013); Delafontaine <i>et al.</i> 2012	Blanchet (2018); Gottlieb and Bianchi (2017); Singh <i>et al.</i> (2017); Chongwatpol (2015); Brzeziński and Jasiński (2014); Dawson <i>et al.</i> (2014); De Vaujany <i>et al.</i> (2013); Tafesse and Korneliussen (2013); Kirchgeorg <i>et al.</i> (2010); Ling-Yee (2010); Geigenmüller (2010)	Blanchet (2018); Barbosa and Scavarda (2018); Gottlieb and Bianchi (2017); Tafesse (2014); De Vaujany <i>et al.</i> (2013); Kirchgeorg <i>et al.</i> (2010)
<i>Virtual TSs</i>	Gottlieb and Bianchi (2017); Kirchgeorg <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Gottlieb and Bianchi (2017); Geigenmüller (2010); Kirchgeorg <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Gottlieb and Bianchi (2017); Kirchgeorg <i>et al.</i> (2010)

Source: Author's elaboration

Overall, by focusing on the 2010-2018 TS papers devoted to the Internet marketing trend, it emerges how exhibitors represent the most investigated TS stakeholders, followed by organizers and visitors.

4.1.1. Trade show visitors' perspective

For what concerns the visitors' stakeholder category, the intersected review allows underling how this TS target has been taken into greater account by the *TS and new media* trend, with respect to the *Virtual TSs* one. In particular, Chongwatpol (2015) underlines in his study how the drastic mutations in consumer markets, characterizing the last decades, have amplified the pressure and challenges for the TS sector. In this context, Information Technology can assume a key role in simplifying routine business tasks at trade shows. Notably, the author focuses his attention on the Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology, which is able to automate traditional TS processes. More specifically, this technology allows to connect buyers and sellers, for instance, through the use of the mobile phone. Indeed, attendees "can use their mobile phone to capture trade information such as brands, tagged locations on a map of the conference center, or events scheduled at the trade site through two-dimensional barcodes in the QR code format" (Chongwatpol, 2015, p. 662-663). Moreover, by adopting this technology, marketing analysts can not only predict possible mutations in visitors' purchasing attitudes but also respond promptly to what they really need through the offer of customized products and services.

By analyzing one of the biggest tourism fairs, ITB Berlin, Brzeziński and Jasiński (2014) underline how the trade show context has been profoundly influenced by the globalization effects, as well as by the new technologies (first of all the advent of the social media channels). Furthermore, in their study, Dawson *et al.* (2014) and De Vaujany *et al.* (2013) underline how trade shows have now become a marketing package where the event itself is only the visible part of the iceberg, with visitors and customers accompanied before and after the event via the Internet.

Finally, by focusing on the Bluetooth technology, Delafontaine *et al.* (2012) detect how this technology can be very useful in the TS context in order to collect precious data about the movement of TS participants. Notably, the authors carry out an empirical case study examining the behavioral attitudes of visitors registered through Bluetooth technology at a major trade show in Belgium. Results underline the relevance of Bluetooth tracking, in the TS context, in collecting data from visitors at mass events.

4.1.2. Trade show exhibitors' perspective

Overall, much of the TS exhibiting base is composed of commercial organizations with different profiles in terms of size, industry sector, target, previous experience in the trade show context (Tafesse, 2014; Kerin and Cron, 1987). Although they are a residual percentage, also organizations with non-commercial objectives (government agencies, non-governmental organizations, industry/trade associations) can be included in this TS stakeholder category.

By specifically focusing on the stakeholder analysis, it emerges how exhibitors represent the most studied TS target by the 2010-2018 TS papers dedicated to the Internet marketing trend. In particular, Blanchet (2018) underlines in her study how TS exhibitors can adopt visual tools, such as pictures and movies, logos and maps, catalogs, online press articles, and Internet links to the videos of the show, in order to make the TS participation more interactive. By focusing on the exhibitors' perspective on virtual marketing capability requirements, Gottlieb and Bianchi (2017) highlight the key role of the Internet as a marketing tool able to create efficient interactions between the different TS participants during the pre-show promotion, at-show selling, and postshow follow-up on the information exchange level. By continuing along this research area, Singh *et al.* (2017) examine the antecedents and outcomes of Information Technology integration in the TS context. In particular, the authors underline the effective use of new media for B2B professionals and exhibitors, as well as the IT contribution towards enhancing their customer relationship management (CRM) efforts in reaching trade show objectives. More specifically, in order to support TS activities and post-show CRM activities, exhibitors should integrate websites and e-mail marketing to approach potential customers during the pre-show promotion (focus on the quality of website design, information content, ease of navigation, graphic attractiveness), to increase real-time communications between booth personnel and customers during the show, and to maintain networks and relationships during the post-event phase. Through the adoption of a questionnaire administered to exhibitors at a large international trade show, Tafesse and Korneliussen (2013) detect how the adoption of multiple media tools, at multiple customer touchpoints, leads to higher levels of marketing performance in a trade show campaign environment. By hypothesizing the possible future TS scenarios, Kirchgeorg *et al.* (2010) underline the increasing role that online media and virtual reality providers will be able to assume in the future TS context. Focused on the exhibitors' right approach to internet marketing, Ling-Yee (2010) underlines the importance of adopting internet platforms primarily for informational and communicational purposes (during the

TS pre-show promotion) and for customer service and support purposes (during the TS post-show follow up). In particular, the author aims to examine the influence of capability-driven and institution-driven factors on the Internet Technology usage in trade show markets. Overall, findings underline the key role of the Internet for trade show marketing on trade show exhibitors' performance. Moreover, results also highlight the relevance of the website tool in providing quality information, building up the exhibitors' image, and supporting superior customer post-show follow-up services.

With reference to the TS virtualization trend, taking into account the exhibitors' perspective, Kirchgeorg *et al.* (2010) explore the key factors (including the virtualization phenomenon) that will shape the future of trade shows as a marketing instrument until the year 2020. Through a survey addressed to 400 German managers of exhibiting companies, their findings show that none of the suggested scenarios predicts that trade shows will definitively be replaced by virtual formats in the near future. In her study, Geigenmüller (2010) proposes a framework aimed at identifying the role and contributions of virtual trade shows in developing relationships. Findings identify different factors determining value creation through virtual trade shows. In particular, the exhibitors' understanding of the information relevance, network orientation, customer integration capability, and relationship attributes represent the major issues influencing the virtual trade shows' effectiveness. By continuing along this research area, Gottlieb and Bianchi (2017) investigate the exhibitors' experiences and the perceptions of the main benefits and constraints of participating in virtual trade shows. Findings highlight that exhibitors still decide to participate in virtual formats and allocate budgets without defining key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure the VTS's participation effectiveness. On this basis, the authors argue that exhibitors need to identify the marketing capabilities required for virtual environments better. In addition, they also need to markedly improve the outcomes of their VTS marketing strategies through conscious resource allocation.

4.1.3. Trade show organizers' perspective

Defined as institutions responsible for trade shows' creation, management, and maintenance (Tafesse, 2014; Kay, 2005), TS organizers can be private firms, professional organizations, industry associations, or government agencies (Tafesse, 2014; Jin *et al.*, 2010; Kresse, 2005). The foremost TS organizers' objective is balancing the interests of a multitude of stake-

holders (including exhibitors, visitors, regulators, associations, external service suppliers, and government agencies) (Tafesse, 2014).

In order to categorize this TS target, the specialized literature identifies two structural attributes: the degree of specialization and the ownership structure (Tafesse, 2014). In particular, with regard to the degree of specialization, trade show organizers can be classified into specialized or generic. With a global presence across multiple countries, the core business of specialized organizers is the management of year-round TS events across various sectors (Tafesse, 2014). On the contrary, for the generic trade show organizers, TS management represents only a part of their business. This is because their activity portfolio also includes the organization of other types of events, plus media, and support services, etc. The second attribute, ownership structure, can subdivide TS organizers into three different categories: privately owned, association owned, and state owned (Tafesse, 2014; Jin *et al.*, 2010; Kay, 2005; Kresse, 2005). Privately owned trade show organizers are structured in the same way as competitive firms of other industry sectors, who are all led by the objective to make a profit (Tafesse, 2014). The second category, association owned, represents players who organize events in order to satisfy the needs of association members. In order to achieve this objective, these associations can take up the trade show management task, or they can outsource some phases of the process to external suppliers (Tafesse, 2014). State agencies represent the third category of TS organizers based on the ownership structure classification. As well as the associations, they can deal with the trade show management by themselves or delegate part of the process to external players (while maintaining discretion on key strategic issues). Faced with the growing recognition of trade shows as political and economic tools, governments have begun to exploit TSs to present their policy agendas increasingly. In order to reach this objective, they foster the participation of state agencies in the realization and management of trade shows (especially in emerging economies like China, Russia, the Gulf States, and African countries).

Relating to the perspective of motivation, the main TS organizers' objectives, emerged from specialized literature, can be summarized as follows (Tafesse, 2014; Aspers and Darr, 2011): to earn profit, to form and develop markets, to facilitate the formation/development of product and service markets, to support industries and regional development.

Focusing on the Internet marketing trend, it becomes visible from the review that there is little academic literature dealing with the organizers' perspective. Despite the limited attention toward this TS category, several authors stress the need to fill this gap (Gottlieb and Bianchi, 2017; Tafesse, 2014; De Vaujany *et al.*, 2013; Kirchgeorg *et al.*, 2010). One of the more

recent studies, focused on the impact of new media for TS organizers, is that of Barbosa and Scavarda (2018). In particular, by adopting a case study, the authors underline the strategic factors and issues for the competitiveness of mega trade shows, including the aspects related to the adoption of information technology. Indeed, findings detect the relevance of intensive use of the new media tools, especially in the post-event stage, where human interaction with customers assumes a leading position. In his work, Tafesse (2014) examines how specific market-based resources (including TS webpage interactivity) influence trade show organizers' performance effectiveness. By focusing on the organizers' perspective, this article contributes to the sparse literature on this TS category, through the identification of the main market-based resources vital for the trade show organizers' performance effectiveness. In particular, since TS organizers are asked to interface with a multitude of players, the author proposes webpage interactivity as an indicator of organizers' customer-linking capability (quantified by counting the interactivity tools offered in the webpage, such as e-mail addresses, online registration, application forms, social media plugins, FAQs, and contact addresses). In the context of TS management, webpage interactivity becomes fundamental for organizers in order to facilitate online interactions with exhibitors and visitors, to enhance the knowledge about them (profile, commercial interests, service needs), and to create customized services. Findings highlight the significant impact of market-based resources (especially TS webpage interactivity) on TS attendance levels. More specifically, TS organizers can increase the number of attendees by improving the interactivity of their webpages and by facilitating learning and effective information/knowledge exchange.

Through 15 semi-structured interviews conducted during the INDTS trade show, De Vaujany *et al.* (2013) identify the new media adopted by the event organizer in order to communicate with current and potential visitors. In particular, the creation of an official website (for the broadcasting of the event's information) and the sending of online satisfaction surveys to all visitors (in order to achieve the potential and current consumers' targets) represent the primary online communication tools selected by the event organizer. By focusing on the future TS possible scenarios, Kirchgeorg *et al.* (2010) highlight how the advent of the new media represents, especially for TS organizers, a growing and positive trend. However, despite this leading role assumed by the new technologies, organizers still believe that face-to-face communication will represent one of the most important strengths of physical trade shows, also in the future.

From the virtualization phenomenon perspective, in their scenario analysis, Kirchgeorg *et al.* (2010) involve experts who represent exhibitors and trade show organizers in order to explore (also from the organizers' point of view) the key factors (including the advent of VTSs) that will shape the future of trade shows as a marketing instrument until the year 2020. More recently, Gottlieb and Bianchi (2017) explore the organizers' experiences with virtual environments in order to highlight the principal challenges and drivers of organizing virtual versus physical trade shows.

4.2. Towards an empirical analysis

Starting from the review's results and from the identification of (1) the main trends characterizing the trade show environment and (2) the most examined stakeholders' categories by the literature focused on the Internet marketing trend, the second part of this book will be focused on the analysis of the impact of new communicative media, within the TS sector, from the organizers' perspective. More specifically, the focus on the TS organizer's category represents an attempt to fill a specific research gap, which emerged from the review, concerning the scant attention of TS literature towards this specific stakeholders' target (Gottlieb and Bianchi, 2017; Tafesse, 2014; De Vaujany *et al.*, 2013; Kirchgeorg *et al.*, 2010). In particular, the exhibition organizers (who are responsible for the planning and implementation of TS events) represent the linchpin of the entire system. They communicate with a multitude of participants and coordinate their different interests and objectives into a productive market force (Tafesse, 2014). Without the interfacing role assumed by TS organizers, it is hard to imagine how the different market players could fully maximize their presence at trade fairs. Relating to this, the primary task of trade show organizers is to keep their events going by understanding and consequently satisfying the needs of the different market stakeholders convened around the trade show (Tafesse, 2014; Rinallo and Golfetto, 2011). In order to reach this objective, organizers should facilitate interactions with and among TS participants, through the offering of special spaces and events (Berne and Garcia Uceda, 2008) and through the adoption of interactive tools (Tafesse, 2014). These processes will allow them to establish real-time relations and to understand the interests and objectives of their attendees thoroughly.

On the basis of these preliminary considerations, the TS organizers' perspective will then be adopted with a view to analyzing (1) the implementation of digital communication tools on trade show strategies and activities and (2)

the reaction to the virtual trade shows' advent. Starting from this overview, in the second part of the book, in-depth interviews (directed to TS organizers) will be adopted in order to analyze the impact of social media implementation and the virtualization phenomenon on TS organizers' strategies and activities. In doing so, it can gain deeper insights into their online behaviors (types of adopted social media platforms, typology of activities carried out, business figures in charge of social media management, the role assumed by users, and the importance given to the virtualization phenomenon). Relating to this, the objectives of this second part of the book will be the following.

From the TS organizers' perspective, identify:

- the main strengths/weaknesses in their social media adoption;
- the main challenges to overcome (in order to effectively exploit the social media potentialities);
- the role given to the users;
- their position with respect to the advent of virtual trade shows as new formats of the future.

In order to reach these objectives, the data were collected through in-depth interviews specifically addressed to trade show organizers that directly handle and manage TS events. For this reason, the sample was identified by focusing on the Italian and European (France, German, Spain) exhibition centers with the following specific parameters (see chapter 5 for the reasons behind the selection of countries):

- direct event organizers and not only space renters;
- with a high level of popularity on social media (data that should identify the most active exhibition centers, which are consequently better able to attract TS users in the social media context).

SECOND PART

TRADE SHOW ORGANIZERS AND THE ADOPTION OF THE NEW MEDIA: TOWARDS AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

5. METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

5.1. Definition of the research design

In order to reach the empirical purposes, the book employs an explorative research design, characterized by three main phases: [1] identification and adoption of a social media popularity index, extracted from the literature, in order to identify, among a sample of TS organizers, the most popular ones in the social media context; [2] construction of an in-depth interview focused on the use of social media from the TS organizers' perspective; [3] administration of the in-depth interview to a sample of TS organizers identified through the adoption of the social media index.

5.1.1. *Social media popularity Index*

Starting from the necessity to identify an index for the measurement of social media popularity, during the first stage of the research design process, an analysis of the literature focused on this topic, has been performed. More specifically, the criteria adopted in order to find the articles focused on this topic are the following: [1] Keywords (“*Social media popularity*”); [2] Document type (article); [3] Databases (Scopus and Web of Science). Through this literature research, 23 articles specifically dedicated to the social media popularity themes have been identified (Tab. 5.1).

Tab. 5.1 – Social media popularity studies

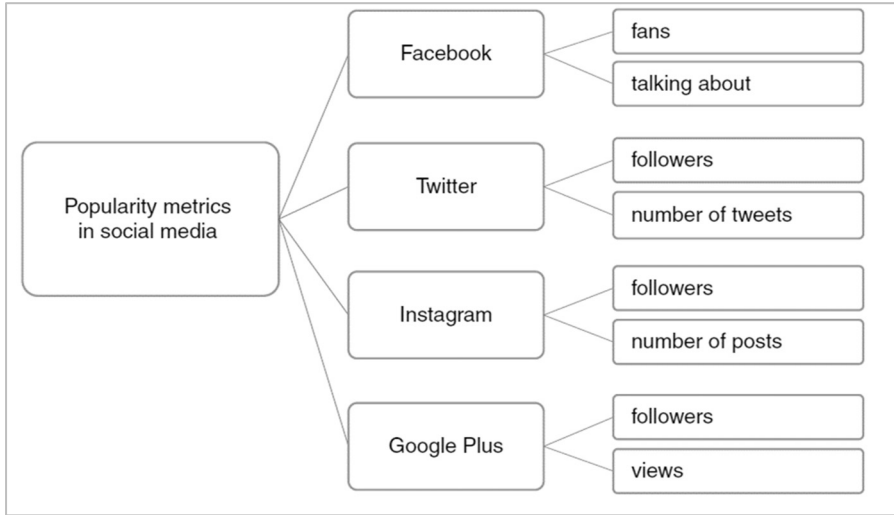
Authors	Year	Authors	Year
Awais <i>et al.</i>	2019	Zhang	2018
Chandra and Gnapapriya	2019	Chen and Lu	2017
Du <i>et al.</i>	2019	Elkarim <i>et al.</i>	2017
Ismawani <i>et al.</i>	2019	Lardo <i>et al.</i>	2017
Lappas <i>et al.</i>	2019	Prasetio <i>et al.</i>	2017
Pretorius <i>et al.</i>	2019	Lappas <i>et al.</i>	2016
Tavazoee <i>et al.</i>	2019	Xu <i>et al.</i>	2016
Abou-Elgheit	2018	Figueiredo <i>et al.</i>	2014
Ha and Lee	2018	Speer	2014
Jin and Muqaddam	2018	Speer	2013
Jin and Ryu	2018	O'Connor	2013
Lahuerta-Otero <i>et al.</i>	2018		

Source: Author's elaboration

From the table, it emerges how the interest of the literature is extremely recent (the first articles were published in 2013). By recognizing the importance of the popularity concept in the social media environment for organizations, brands, or individuals, in these articles, the authors propose possible social media popularity metrics, in the absence of a standardized scale widely accepted by the literature. The main motivation connected to this lack of an unanimously shared index may be identified in the fact that the social media thematic is not only extremely contemporary (social media were systematically defined, for the first time by Kaplan and Heanlein in 2010), but also incredibly rapid, as well as not easy to circumscribe.

Since the study of the social media impact on trade show strategies has not yet been intensified by the literature (Singh *et al.*,2017), no article has dealt with the construction of a popularity index specifically applied to the TS context. For this reason, the metric adopted has been chosen among the identified indexes (even if applied to another analysis sector) and, at a later stage, adapted to the present research scope. More specifically, the social media popularity index proposed by Lardo *et al.* (2017) has been adopted since the authors' definition of social media popularity (*the ability to attract fans and followers*) is the most in line with the present book's approach.

Fig. 5.1 – Social media popularity Index



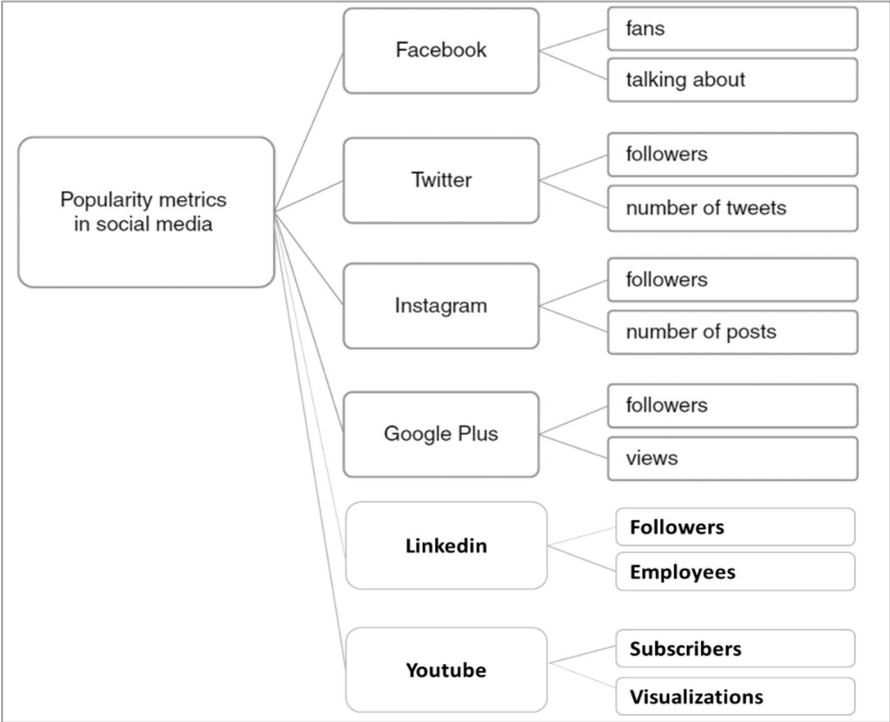
Source: Lardo *et al.* (2017)

After identifying the base model, the second step (as suggested by the literature) is to focus on the most important and relevant social media for the investigated context (Treem and Leonardi, 2013; Botha *et al.*, 2011; Reyneke *et al.* 2011). In order to reach this objective, the identification of the most significant social media for trade show activities has been carried out. This analysis has identified two other types of social media (LinkedIn and YouTube), which are relevant for the TS environment (Browne, 2012) in addition to those proposed by Lardo *et al.* (2017). Figure 5.2 summarizes the final social media popularity index adopted in the present book.

The overall assigned popularity score provides a quick way to compare the social media popularity of one TS organizer to another. In particular, the index has been calculated through the benchmark method (Reyneke *et al.*, 2011): each variable measures the performance (part of popularity) of each TS organizer examined compared to the best performance obtained in that specific dimension. For each organizer, the singular variable assumes a value of between 0 (not present) and 1 (best performance). More specifically, value 1 has been attributed to the best observation of each variable, while values between 0 and 1 have been calculated by proportioning each observation to the best one. By summing each variable's performance, a final social media popularity index with values between 0 and 12 will be obtained. This index has then been adopted to rank a predetermined sample of TS organizers, in

order to identify and select the most popular ones in the social media context (best in class). These are the ones to whom the in-depth interview will be directed (please refer to Paragraph 5.2 for the definition and identification of the sample).

Fig. 5.2 – Social media popularity Index (for the TS context)



Source: Author’s elaboration on Lardo *et al.* (2017)

5.1.2. *In-depth interview: structure and administration*

In order to collect primary data concerning the adoption of social media in the TS context from the organizers’ perspective, in-depth, semi-structured interviews have been adopted. In particular, interviews were chosen due to their potential of providing detailed information and perceptions that would otherwise be impossible to access (Gottlieb and Bianchi, 2017).

The interview guide had five sections: [1] general information; [2] social media management; [3] social media and the role of users; [4] social media strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and [5] future scenarios.

The first section (*general information*) requires the denomination of the exhibiting organization, the geographical localization, the number of employees, the percentage and main typologies of events directly organized (in order to have absolute confirmation that the interviewed subjects are direct TS organizers), and the interviewee's role.

In the second part (*Social media management*), the main questions concern the initial reasons for social media adoption, the social media management process, the main goals the interviewees intend to pursue through social media and to whom (e.g., exhibitors, visitors, other stakeholders) their social media efforts are most directed.

In the third section of the interview (*Social media and the role of users*), the focus is specifically directed towards the functions performed by social media during the three event phases (pre-show, at-show, and post-show) and on the role assumed by users in the interviewees' social media strategies.

The fourth part (*Social media strengths, weaknesses, and challenges*) aims to identify and classify the main strengths/weaknesses of adopting social media in communicative strategies, as well as the main challenges to overcome in order to effectively exploit the social media potentialities.

The last section of the interview concerns the possible future TS scenarios and dynamics, in the light of the social media impact and the virtualization phenomenon, from the organizers' point of view.

After identifying the sample, singular e-mails were sent to each possible participant, in order to clearly present the project (through the attachment of a letter of presentation and the interview's questions) and in order to set up a telephone appointment. The length of the interviews varied from 25 to 45 minutes, with an average of approximately 35 minutes. In total, 38 in-depth interviews were conducted during the 2019. The names of respondents and organizations have been suppressed for confidentiality reasons.

The transcripts were examined by adopting a process of thematic analysis in order to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes that emerged from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Interpretations of emerging themes are the results of interview transcripts, interviewer notes, and the extant literature (Gottlieb and Bianchi, 2017). In particular, different answers have been combined (when possible) into categories in order to achieve a clearer picture of the issues being talked about. Appendix B summarizes the questions raised during the interview.

5.2. Definition and identification of the sample

As stated in the previous chapters, the in-depth interview has been specifically addressed to trade show organizers directly handling and managing TS events. More specifically, the sample is composed of Italian, French, German, and Spanish exhibition centers characterized by two indispensable parameters: [1] direct event organizers (and not only space renters) and [2] with high social media popularity. In the remainder of the paragraph, the countries' selection criteria and the identification modality of both the starting sample (on which the social media popularity index has been adopted) and the final sample (to which the interview has been sent) will be illustrated.

5.2.1. Countries selection criteria

Italy, France, Germany, and Spain are the countries selected for the empirical analysis. The selection method (Tafesse, 2014) reflects a composition of the most representative TS countries in Europe, in terms of exhibition capacities, square meters, economic results (UFI, 2016; Bathelt *et al.*, 2014), and the impact of digitalization (UFI, 2018; 2017).

Overall, it is possible to find the most mature examples of trade show activities in Europe. In particular, Western Europe represents the most highly developed trade show region in the world. Notably, large international trade shows tend to be located in the main manufacturing countries (Germany, Italy, France, and Spain), in highly accessible cities, often centered on traditional principal production scores. On the contrary, in the other European countries, trade show activities are much lower and largely consist of national or regional events.

From the exhibition capacity perspective, the European market is almost exclusively characterized by specialized exhibition centers for collective (and often very large) trade events.

The crucial role assumed by trade shows in Europe is directly linked to its specific industrial organization's structure. This is mainly composed of small and medium-sized firms with a marked export orientation. As a consequence of the reduced firms' dimensions, the distances to final markets, the consequent high costs (necessary to reach them), and the complex coordination between firms and markets, small and medium-sized firms work together. In this way, they can increase the volume of trade shows, and also, the establishment of

collective organizations, industrial clusters, consortiums, and trade associations is encouraged. Therefore, trade shows become the preferable communication instrument over other tools since they provide multiple feedback and communication possibilities, as well as advantages in terms of evaluating the competitive environment, establishing commercial networks, and so forth.

At the sectorial level, European trade shows are generally related to specific national traditions or strengths (such as Italian furniture, French fashion, and German machinery/machine tools). Despite these specializations, competition between exhibition complexes and trade shows exists. In particular, in recent years, after an initial period of globalization orientation, a multiplication of exhibition centers began, driven by the desire to generate local/urban revenues and to support the production image of the host territories (Bathelt *et al.*, 2014). The main results of this multiplicative phenomenon have been the creation of new events and the replication of existing shows in different exhibition complexes, with the consequent fragmentation and division of existing trade shows into several splinter events. Characterized by a significant number of international trade shows, Italy, France, Spain, and Germany are also home to leading exhibition centers (UFI, 2018; 2017; 2016).

5.2.2. *Sample: Modality of identification*

During the first phase, by consulting the *n.fiere.com* database, all the exhibition centers in Italy, Germany, France, and Spain were selected (Tab. 5.2). Overall, 305 exhibition organizations have been extracted: 50 from Germany, 54 from Italy, 118 from France, and 83 from Spain. Starting from this database, all the exhibition centers, which did not respect the first parameter (being direct event organizers and not only space renters), were eliminated. In order to reach this objective, each exhibition center's website was analyzed and, through the consultation of the information concerning the event calendar, it was possible to specifically identify the exhibition centers that directly organize trade shows, from those which instead only rent their spaces. At the end of this systematic research, a database of 211 exhibition centers has been built.

Tab. 5.2 – Identification of the database (1° phase)

COUNTRIES	NUM. OF EXHIBITION CENTERS	NUM. OF DIRECT ORGANIZERS
Germany	50	41
Italy	54	50
France	118	59
Spain	83	61
Total	305	211

Source: Author's elaboration on *n.fiere.com*

During the second phase, in order to identify the most popular exhibition centers in the social media context, the social media popularity index (previously identified) was adopted on this identified database (Tab. 5.3).

Tab. 5.3 – Social media popularity Index

SOCIAL MEDIA	METRICS	SOURCES
Facebook	Fans; Talking about	Lardo <i>et al.</i> (2017)
Twitter	Followers; Tweets	Lardo <i>et al.</i> (2017)
Instagram	Followers; Posts	Lardo <i>et al.</i> (2017)
Google Plus	Followers; Views	Lardo <i>et al.</i> (2017)
LinkedIn	Followers; Employees	Browne (2012)
YouTube	Subscribers; Visualizations	Browne (2012)

Source: Author's elaboration on Lardo *et al.* (2017), Browne (2012)

By creating a classification for each country, it was possible to identify the most active exhibition centers in the social media environment, thus satisfying the second parameter necessary for the inclusion in the final sample (high social media popularity). In particular, the final ranking for each country involves exhibition centers, which reported the social media popularity index value equal or superior to the sample's median¹. An interview request was sent to these selected exhibition organizations. Table 5.4 summarizes the different phases that led to the final sample.

¹ In particular, for Germany, the first 21 exhibition centers were chosen because they have a final index equal or superior to the sample's median ($M_e=0,18$). For Italy, the first 25 exhibition centers were selected ($M_e=0,36$), for France, the first 30 ones ($M_e=0,17$), while for the Spanish classification, the first 31 exhibition centers were chosen ($M_e=0,14$).

Tab. 5.4 – Definition of the sample: A synthesis

	MODALITY	GERMANY	ITALY	FRANCE	SPAIN
1° Phase Starting sample	Extraction of the sample from <i>n.fiere.com</i>	50	54	118	83
2° Phase Centers that respect the 1° parameter	Consultation of the calendar of each center's website	41	50	59	61
3° Phase Centers that respect the 2° parameter	Adoption of the social media popularity index and selection of centers based on the sample's median	21	25	30	31

Source: Author's elaboration

In the next chapter, the general (descriptive statistics of the best in class exhibition centers per country and comparisons between them) and detailed results (categorization and presentation of the answers obtained from the in-depth interviews) will be illustrated.

6. RESULTS

6.1. Descriptive statistics of the survey sample

In this paragraph, the descriptive statistics of the best in class German, Italian, Spanish, and French exhibition centers (n=107) will be presented, both from the overall social media popularity index and from the singular indexes' perspective (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google Plus, YouTube, LinkedIn).

6.1.1. Overall social media popularity Index

It emerges from the analysis of the overall social media popularity ranking how the German exhibition centers achieve, on average, the highest result, with an index equal to 1.71, immediately followed by the Italian centers (1.68). The Spanish and French TS organizers present the lowest popularity level, in the social media environment, with an overall average index of 1.13 and 1.07, respectively.

Tab. 6.1 – Overall SM popularity Index: A comparison

	N	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION
Index_GER	21	0.18	6.74	1.71	1.649
Index_ITA	25	0.37	5.86	1.68	1.548
Index_SPA	31	0.14	8.09	1.13	1.816
Index_FRA	30	0.17	7.31	1.07	1.585

Source: Author's elaboration

6.1.2. Singular social media popularity Indexes

By focusing on the singular social media popularity indexes within each specific investigated country, it emerges from Table 6.2 how the German exhibition organizers are, on average, more popular on YouTube (with a mean of 0.49) and Facebook (0.31), followed by LinkedIn (0.27), and Twitter (0.25). On the contrary, Instagram (0.22) and Google Plus (0.17) represent the social media platforms where the German exhibition centers are less popular.

From the Italian exhibition organizers' perspective, Twitter (0.37) and Facebook (0.34) are the social media where the Italian centers are more popular, followed by Instagram (0.31), Google Plus (0.25), and LinkedIn (0.24). Instead, YouTube represents the social media platform in which the Italian organizers are less popular (0.18).

By concentrating on the Spanish organizers, Table 6.2 shows how Twitter represents the social network in which they are more popular, with an average index equal to 0.33, followed by Instagram (0.22), LinkedIn (0.18), Facebook (0.15), and Google Plus (0.14). On the contrary, YouTube is the social media platform where the Spanish organizers are less popular (0.11).

Lastly, from the French exhibition organizers' point of view, Twitter is the platform where they are more popular with an average index equal to 0.30, followed by LinkedIn (0.26), Instagram (0.16), and Facebook (0.15). On the contrary, Google Plus (0.10) and YouTube (0.10) represent the social networks in which the French organizers are less popular.

Tab. 6.2 – Singular SM popularity Indexes: A comparison

SOCIAL MEDIA	MEAN Germany	MEAN Italy	MEAN Spain	MEAN France
Facebook Index	0.31	0.34	0.15	0.15
Twitter Index	0.25	0.37	0.33	0.30
Instagram Index	0.22	0.31	0.22	0.16
Google Plus Index	0.17	0.25	0.14	0.10
YouTube Index	0.49	0.18	0.11	0.10
LinkedIn Index	0.27	0.24	0.18	0.26

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 6.2 also allows analyzing the social media indexes by comparing them between the different countries' samples.

In particular, by focusing on the Facebook Index, the Italian TS organizers are the most popular exhibition centers on this social media platform (in terms of number of fans and people talking about them), with an average index equal to 0.34. The German sample follows closely behind with a mean of 0.31, while the French and Spanish organizers place themselves in third place with an average index equal to 0.15.

Also concerning the Twitter Index, the Italian exhibition organizers achieve, on average, the highest value (in terms of number of followers and tweets) with a mean of 0.37, followed by the Spanish (0.33) and French centers (0.30).

With an average value equal to 0.31, the Italian exhibition organizers place themselves in first place in the Instagram Index ranking (in terms of number of followers and posts), followed by the Spanish and German TS centers (0.22).

In addition to this, regarding the Google Plus Index, the Italian exhibition organizers turn out to be the most popular centers on this social media platform (in terms of number of followers and views) with a mean of 0.25, followed by the German (0.17) and Spanish samples (0.14).

By focusing on the YouTube Index, it emerges how the German exhibition centers are, on average, the most popular organizers on this social media platform (in terms of subscribers and visualizations) with a value of 0.49, followed by the Italian (0.18), Spanish (0.11), and French samples (0.10).

Also concerning the LinkedIn Index, the German exhibition organizers achieve, on average, the highest result (in terms of number of followers and employees) equal to 0.27, followed by the French (0.26) and Italian (0.24) centers.

Table 6.3 summarizes, for each singular social media, the highest and lowest average index achieved among the analyzed samples (Germany, Italy, Spain, and France).

Tab. 6.3 – Social media indexes: A synthesis

	HIGHEST MEAN	SAMPLE	LOWEST MEAN	SAMPLE
Facebook Index	0.34	Italy	0.15	France, Spain
Twitter Index	0.37	Italy	0.25	Germany
Instagram Index	0.31	Italy	0.16	France
Google Plus Index	0.25	Italy	0.10	France
YouTube Index	0.49	Germany	0.10	France
LinkedIn Index	0.27	Germany	0.18	Spain

Source: Author's elaboration

Overall, by focusing on the most relevant data emerging from the descriptive analysis, it is possible to affirm that:

- the German and Italian organizers are the most popular exhibition centers in the social media environment, by achieving, on average, the highest popularity indexes. On the contrary, the Spanish and French centers accomplish, on average, the lowest index;
- the German exhibition organizers are, on average, more popular on YouTube, while Google Plus is the social media platform where they are less popular;
- Twitter is the social media platform where the Italian, Spanish, and French centers are more popular, while on the contrary, YouTube is the social media where they are less popular;
- the highest index of popularity on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Google Plus has been achieved, on average, by the Italian organizers, while YouTube and LinkedIn are the social media platforms in which the German centers are more popular, with respect to the other investigated countries.

6.2. Identification of the interview's respondents

In this paragraph, the sample of the interview's respondents will be presented. Firstly, an email was sent to each possible participant, in order to clearly present the project and to set up a telephone appointment or to require the compilation of an online interview. Thirty-eight exhibition organizers (out of 107) accepted the request to join the project (Tab. 6.4). The names of respondents and organizations have been suppressed for confidentiality reasons.

Tab. 6.4 – Respondents' characteristics (n=38)

SAMPLE	RANKING POSITION	NUM. EMPLOYEES	EVENTS ORGANIZED (%)	TYOLOGIES OF ORGANIZED EVENTS (B2B/B2C)	INTERVIEWEE ROLE
Germany	2	2.300	38%	B2B	Manager corporate communications
Germany	5	24	26%	B2B/B2C	Head of communication
Germany	8	161	43%	B2B/B2C	Head of marketing
Germany	12	150	10%	B2B/B2C	Head of marketing
Germany	14	200	85%	B2B/B2C	Head of press and digital media
Germany	17	50	10%	B2B/B2C	Head of marketing
Germany	18	14	21%	B2B/B2C	Head of marketing
Germany	19	26	15%	B2B/B2C	Head of marketing
Germany	20	12	18%	B2B/B2C	Head of marketing
Germany	21	10	25%	B2C	Exhibition director
Italy	2	>280	90%	B2B/B2C	Digital marketing manager
Italy	4	37	10%	B2C	Head of marketing
Italy	5	27	25%	B2B/B2C	Supply & Operations manager
Italy	6	36	90%	B2B/B2C	Head of communication
Italy	7	130	70%	B2B	Head of human resources
Italy	8	48	10%	B2B/B2C	Head of ICT
Italy	10	24	13%	B2C	Head of marketing
Italy	12	16	50%	B2B/B2C	Head of marketing
Italy	16	15	80%	B2B/B2C	Business manager
Italy	17	8	80%	B2B/B2C	Head of marketing
Italy	22	>280	90%	B2B/B2C	Digital marketing manager
Italy	23	8	80%	B2C	Head of communication
Italy	25	10	50%	B2B/B2C	Head of marketing
Spain	2	400	12,%	B2B/B2C	Head of marketing
Spain	3	295	42%	B2B/B2C	Head of marketing
Spain	4	40	50%	B2B/B2C	Community manager

(continue)

(continued)

Spain	6	40	15%	B2B/B2C	Head of marketing
Spain	11	6	32%	B2B/B2C	Head of communication
Spain	15	22	70%	B2B/B2C	Head of marketing
Spain	16	19	22%	B2B/B2C	General director
Spain	17	14	10%	B2B/B2C	Exhibition director
Spain	22	7	60%	B2B/B2C	Head of communication
France	5	109	88%	B2B/B2C	Head of marketing
France	8	15	37%	B2B/B2C	Head of marketing
France	12	40	33%	B2B/B2C	Marketing support
France	18	74	30%	B2B/B2C	Social media supervisor manager
France	20	30	48%	B2B/B2C	Head of press
France	29	5	25%	B2B/B2C	Project manager

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 6.5 summarizes the characteristics of the respondents' sample.

Tab. 6.5 – Respondents' characteristics: A synthesis

Geographical localization	Italy	34%
	Germany	26%
	Spain	24%
	France	16%
SM popularity Index position	1-5	24%
	6-10	18%
	11-20	42%
	More than 20	16%
Number of employees	1-10	18%
	11-20	18%
	21-50	34%
	51-100	4%
	More than 100	26%

(continue)

(continued)

% of events directly organized	1-10	13%
	11-30	32%
	31-50	26%
	51-70	5%
	71-100	24%
Typologies of organized events	B2C Trade shows	11%
	B2B Trade shows	5%
	B2C and B2B Trade shows	84%
Interviewee's role	Head of marketing	45%
	Head of communication	13%
	Exhibition director	8%
	Other roles	34%

Source: Author's elaboration

6.3. Trade show organizers and social media adoption: Main findings

In this paragraph, the main findings emerging from the in-depth interviews will be presented by subdividing them into five principal macro topics: [1] social media management; [2] social media activities and TS phases; [3] social media and the role of users; [4] social media strengths, weaknesses, and challenges; [5] TS future scenarios. For each answer, the transcripts were examined by adopting a process of thematic analysis in order to identify and report patterns or themes that emerged from the interview (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

6.3.1. Social media management

The findings, related to the initial motivations that led TS organizers to adopt social media in their communicative strategies, suggest that the exhibition centers present similar reasons. In particular, ten major themes, regarding the motivations of social media adoption, emerge from the data: [1] to prove the exhibition organizer's digital spirit; [2] to gain exhibitors and visitors in view of the events via individual, benefit-oriented, creative communication; [3] to complement the information channels and activities; [4]

to get in contact with younger generations; [5] to promote a direct spread of events' information towards potential customers; [6] to adapt their promotional languages; [7] to quickly communicate to huge pools of customers; [8] to increase their visibility, reputation, and credibility in the online environment; [9] to obtain real-time feedback; [10] to strengthen customer relations. Overall, all respondents state the possibility of developing continuing and real-time communication with their stakeholders as the top motivation for adopting social media. As one respondent mentioned: *“as well as providing our customers and partners with the opportunity of participating in trade fairs – which are indispensable trading and interaction platforms in “real life” – through social media, we give them the means for constructive communication 365 days a year”* (Respondent 2).

In terms of typologies of adopted social media platforms, respondents confirm, to a large extent, the use of the same social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google Plus, YouTube, LinkedIn) identified by the literature as the most relevant for the TS context (Browne, 2012). At the same time, the interviews' answers also add important data concerning the specific category of events (B2B, B2C) promoted through the different social media channels (Tab. 6.6). In particular, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, and Twitter are the principal platforms adopted in order to promote business to consumer trade fairs, YouTube and Vimeo are used to foster both B2C and B2B events, while Google Plus, LinkedIn, and Xing represent the main social media chosen for the promotion of B2B trade shows. Moreover, Instagram and Snapchat represent the most adopted platforms for the specific promotion of sport events.

Tab. 6.6 – Social media typologies and promoted event categories

SOCIAL MEDIA	PRESENT IN THE TS LITERATURE	PROMOTED EVENT CATEGORIES
Facebook	✓	B2C
Twitter	✓	B2C
Instagram	✓	B2C, sport events
Pinterest		B2C
Snapchat		Sport events
YouTube	✓	B2B, B2C
Vimeo		B2C, B2B
Google Plus	✓	B2B
LinkedIn	✓	B2B
Xing		B2B

Source: Author's elaboration

By focusing on the management of the social media role, within the exhibition organization, the majority of respondents state that there is no separation between the social media and marketing/communication departments, as the planning and implementation of social media activities are always carried out in coordination with the marketing and communication divisional departments. Notably, the main objective of this organizational decision is to ensure a coherent development of the brand identity (of the exhibition center as well as the singular organized events) in the different promotional channels.

On average, the number of permanent employees, specifically dedicated to social media, is 3 (ranging from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 10). In addition to the permanent employees and heads, the majority of respondents state that the number of people dedicated to social media activities increases as the proximity of events gets closer. This is achieved by temporary recruiting (or a consultation request to a digital marketing society) aimed at strengthening the permanent staff, and by the identification of a community manager responsible for each organized trade show. Only a restricted percentage of respondents (5%) affirm that they opt for the total outsourcing of social media capabilities through the recruitment of external agencies. Table 6.7 summarizes the main roles, in charge of the management and development of social media strategies, outlined by respondents.

Tab. 6.7 – Social media management and development: Main roles

MAIN ROLES RESPONSIBLE FOR SOCIAL MEDIA
[1] Social media manager; [2] Press officer; [3] Head of communication; [4] Head of marketing; [5] Community manager; [6] External agency; [7] Digital marketing manager; [8] Web marketing officer; [9] Head of ICT

Source: Author's elaboration

Concerning the percentage of the total communicative budget specifically dedicated to social media, from the interviews, an upward trend emerges, outlined by the majority of respondents. They state that the budget dedicated to social media has increased significantly in recent years. In particular, the average percentage invested by respondents in social media, in the total of the communication budget, is currently equal to 13% per annum, ranging from a minimum of 2% to a maximum of 35%.

By concentrating on the main goals, the exhibition organizers intend to pursue through the adoption of social media, some major themes emerge from the data analysis. The first goal concerns the contribution of social media to transform organizers' target groups into effective visitors and exhibitors. This objective represents one of the most important efforts to be pursued in the TS context. This transformation can be encouraged by social media

through their ability to establish continuous relationships with their own target audience. As one respondent mentioned: “*Generally speaking, social media channels offer a means of communicating with our core target groups, exhibitors, visitors, and media representatives, without restrictions on time or place. Our organization uses the aforementioned social networks primarily for providing information, service and support, and for interacting with visitors and exhibitors*” (Respondent 2).

Another relevant goal to pursue through the adoption of social media concerns the possibility of offering invitations to the events, in an interactive and immediate manner. In this way, “*the show’s popularity increases and multiplies*” (Respondent 10).

Additional objectives the respondents state wanting to aim to achieve through social media adoption are the growth of the organizer’s brand awareness and the construction of loyal relations, through direct and real-time contacts between the exhibition centers and their stakeholders.

The remaining goals, emerged from the answers’ transcripts, are the following: expand the catchment area, increase the flow of visitors to the exhibition center, direct messages to defined targets (general VS professional public), investigate the market, manage the relationships with clients/visitors through a bidirectional communication, acquire new customers and reach new targets (otherwise unreachable), increase online visibility and reputation (of the exhibition center as well as of the organized events), generate traffic to the official websites. Table 6.8 illustrates the main goals that exhibition organizers intend to reach, through the adoption of social media.

Tab. 6.8 – Social media main goals

SOCIAL MEDIA MAIN FUNCTIONS	MAIN GOALS
<i>Attraction function</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transformation of the target groups into effective visitors/exhibitors; Invitation to the events; Increase/multiplication of the events’ popularity; Expansion of the catchment area; Increase of the flow of visitors; Acquisition/achievement of new customers/targets.
<i>Real-time interaction function</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of continuous relationships with the target audience; Sending of messages to defined targets; Management of relationships through bidirectional communications.
<i>Loyalty function</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the organizer’s brand awareness; Construction of loyal relations.
<i>Benchmark function</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigation of the market.
<i>Online visibility function</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in online visibility and reputation; Generation of traffic to the official websites.

Source: Author’s elaboration

To reach these objectives, the majority of respondents claim that the social media staff provides for the preparation of an editorial calendar (to avoid casual management of the social media contents), also by adapting activities and contents to the different adopted social media platforms. As one respondent stated: *“In the interests of 360-degree communication, we prepare our subject areas for the exact needs of all communication channels, and we adapt contents for various formats”* (Respondent 2).

Only one interviewee affirms that, within his own organization, the process of adaption is reverse by stating that *“we adapt the social media structure to the evolution of our activities”* (Respondent 16).

Table 6.9 summarizes the main promotional activities done by TS organizers in the different social media platforms.

Tab. 6.9 – Social media promotional activities

SOCIAL MEDIA	MAIN USES	MAIN TARGETS
<i>Facebook</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of pages dedicated to singular events/exhibition center; Sharing of events' tests, photos, and videos; Planning of promotional campaigns on Facebook Ads. 	Visitors
<i>Twitter</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tale of the event through short sentences; Adoption of Hashtag in order to find the event; Creation of interactive networks among the event's players. 	Visitors; Exhibitors; Relators
<i>Instagram</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing of the event's videos and images; Invitation to Instameets; Adoption of Instagram stories. 	Visitors
<i>YouTube</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing of videos (of singular events; of the exhibition centers). 	Visitors/Exhibitors
<i>LinkedIn</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion of the exhibitor organization; Search for new stakeholders. 	Exhibitors

Source: Author's elaboration

Moreover, from the transcription of the answers, it emerges how the respondents are aware of the importance of using the adopted social media, in a different and specific way, since each type of social media presents unique characteristics. More specifically, the exhibition organizers claim to use Facebook and Instagram for their promotional activities in order to reach the visitors' target. They do so through the creation of pages dedicated to the singular events (which allow users to specify whether they will participate and enable them to be constantly updated with information), the sharing of texts, images, and videos concerning the event, the planning of advertising campaigns (via Facebook Ads), and through invitations to InstaMeet via Instagram. Twitter and YouTube are mainly adopted in order to reach both visitors and exhibitors' targets. On the one hand, they exploit the abilities of the first platform by

relating the event through short sentences in order to create interactive networks among the event’s protagonists (such as exhibitors in the case of trade shows and speakers in the case of workshops or conferences) and by using hashtags (which allow users to find the events more easily). On the other hand, they exploit the abilities of the second platform by sharing videos of the events as well as of the exhibition center. In the search for new exhibitors, organizers state that they notably use a LinkedIn premium tool (*Sales Navigator Professional*), which allows them to find specific stakeholders, as well as to promote their organization in specific target markets.

With regard to the success measurements in social media, a major concern firms identify when considering whether or not to adopt social media, is how to measure the return on investment (ROI). In particular, the ROI within social media has long been a bone of contention (Hays *et al.*, 2013), as the success of social media efforts is often extremely difficult to gauge (Fisher, 2009). Notably, the interviews’ findings identified four key areas in which social media efforts are being evaluated in the TS context: audience size, audience engagement, audience sentiment, and audience conversion (Tab. 6.10). The majority of respondents state that they mainly focus their attention on the numbers and dimensions of their audience, as their primary objective is to maximize their social media visibility. In particular, the most nominated measures are the number of followers, number of likes, and video views. The number of comments, number of posts, and number of shares are found within the second category of measures (audience engagement). This is because engagement represents, for respondents, the subsequent dimension to the audience size dimension. In addition, TS organizers affirm that they examine audience sentiment through the analysis of the social media contents/comments and through direct interviews directed to specific samples in order to evaluate the users’ satisfaction towards their social media activities. The last category of measures concerns audience conversion and, in particular, the analysis of the conversion rate of followers to tickets sold.

Tab. 6.10 – Social Media success measurements in the TS context

KEY AREAS	MEASURES
<i>Audience size</i>	Number of likes; account likes; Video views
<i>Audience engagement</i>	Number of comments; number of posts; number of shares
<i>Audience sentiment</i>	Direct interviews; contents; comments
<i>Audience conversion</i>	Conversions to tickets sold

Source: Author’s elaboration

6.3.2. Social media activities and TS phases

In order to enrich the TS literature (Singh *et al.*, 2017; Ling-Yee, 2010) focused on the identification of the new technologies' main typologies and uses according to the event's stage (pre-show, at-show, post-show), interviewees were also asked if they adopt social media in a different way and which functions they entrust to them during the three TS phases (Tab. 6.11). The majority of respondents affirm that they exploit the social media tools in a different way according to the three event phases. In particular, with regard to the first phase (pre-show), the main function recognized to social media is promotional and attractive in nature: TS organizers state that they adopt social media, in this specific stage, in order to encourage information and dialogue, promote target groups' (visitors and exhibitors) construction and attention, place their messages, attract specific targets, and create a viral stimulus towards the event (especially through the development of advertising campaigns via Facebook and the power of social media sharing).

During the second phase (at-show), social media assume the leading role of real-time information distributor and visitors' support as "*a mobile distribution of contents via social media is of particular importance, especially when an event is actually taking place*" (Respondent 2). In this way, visitors can quickly access information when they participate physically in the event (tools such as Facebook Live and Live Twitting are becoming more and more relevant for publishing real-time contents, conveying emotions, and engaging the public). In other words, during the at-show phase, the function of social media is primarily informative and communicative in nature. Their main objective is to carry out 360° communication addressed to both visitors and exhibitors (program communication, real-time images, videos, and texts of the event).

Finally, in the post-show phase, organizers adopt social media tools in order to analyze the event's feedback and the stakeholders' satisfaction, to provide visitors and exhibitors the possibility to follow up the event after its closure, and to keep the attention high and constant for the next event edition through the insertion of constantly updated information. In particular, during this final stage, organizers relate the event through the users' comments and their exchange of opinions developed in real-time during the show via social media. In this way, respondents remember the event even in the weeks after its closure, especially through the insertion of the most relevant memories (including photos and videos) on their social media pages.

Tab. 6.11 – Social media functions and TS phases

TS PHASES	SM FUNCTIONS	MAIN OBJECTIVES
PRE – SHOW	<i>Promotional/attractive function</i>	Creation of information/dialogue; Promotion of target groups' construction; Messages placement; Attraction of specific targets to the events.
AT – SHOW	<i>Informative/supportive function</i>	Real-time distribution of information; Visitors' support; Carrying out 360° communications; Conveying of emotions; Engagement of the public.
POST – SHOW	<i>Follow-up function</i>	Possibility of following up the event after its closure; Analysis of the event's feedback; Evaluation of the stakeholders' satisfaction; Retention of high and constant attention to the next event edition.

Source: Author's elaboration

6.3.3. Social media and the role of users

This section of the interview has the primary objective of figuring out if the role of exhibition stakeholders as active participants, identified by the TS experiential literature (Lee *et al.*, 2016; Gottlieb *et al.*, 2014; Jin *et al.*, 2013; Ahola, 2012; Bjorner and Berg, 2012; Rinallo *et al.*, 2010; Soilen, 2010; Borghini *et al.*, 2006; Wu *et al.*, 2006), could also be extended to the figure of users from the exhibition organizers' perspective, or if, on the contrary, they assume, for respondents, a passive role within their social media activities.

From the transcription of the respondents' answers, three different roles assigned by respondents to their users (with different degrees of involvement) emerge: partnership, collaborative, and recipient roles.

In the first case, organizers affirm that they act in a spirit of partnership with their target groups by conceiving them as social media content co-creators and active participants in the planning of their communicative activities (through their involvement via competitions, contests, real-time focus groups).

Characterized by a lower level of users' engagement, the collaborative role provides for a cooperative adoption of their observations, comments, and positive/negative critiques in order to improve the organization of future events. In other words, even if users are conceived as collaborative stakeholders, their cooperation is, however, limited to the exploitation of their opinions/comments, without considering their potential role as active players in the planning of the organizers' social media activities.

Finally, a reduced number of respondents state that they still treat users as simple recipients of their social media contents, in this way adopting the

online channels as unidirectional media, where organizers are the senders and users the recipients.

Tab. 6.12 – Social media users’ role from the organizers’ perspective

USERS’ ROLE	MAIN FEATURES
<i>Partnership role</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a spirit of partnership with the target groups; Users conceived as social media contents co-creators, active participants, and communication accelerators.
<i>Collaborative role</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance recognized to the users’ feedback; Improvement of events through users’ feedback.
<i>Recipient role</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Users conceived as simple recipients of the social media contents; Adoption of social media as unidirectional media.

Source: Author’s elaboration

6.3.4. *Social media strengths/weaknesses and main challenges*

6.3.4.1. Social media strengths

From the transcription and aggregation of the data, the main strengths of adopting social media in the TS context are the following: [1] to obtain access to new/distant markets; [2] to create engaging stories; [3] the possibility of spreading a large amount of information to specific target groups; [4] the exchange of quick and real-time communications; [5] reinforcement of the stakeholders’ loyalty; [6] to increase brand awareness; [7] to acquire market intelligence.

Access to new/distant markets

According to the respondents, the first strength of adopting social media is to access new or distant markets they would otherwise not be able to reach due to budget limitations and, in particular, due to the higher costs of other promotional and communicative media. From this point of view, social media allow organizers to converse in real-time with potential and current exhibitors and visitors by enabling at the same time the construction of direct and interactive relations with them. Moreover, respondents also value the convenience of communicating with their stakeholders from their home or office, often at any time of the day.

Creation of engaging stories

The opportunity to create engaging stories and to keep the attention of stakeholders in the periods in which there are no events organized represents

another relevant social media strength identified by respondents. In particular, through the preparation of a content calendar, the majority of organizers state that they create, on their social media channels, immersive storytelling, with the principal aim of keeping the exhibitors' and visitors' attention high, even beyond the physical events. Overall, organizers accompany stakeholders before, during, and after the events, via social media. In this way, they give established relations a feeling of continuity.

Diffusion of a large amount of information

For organizers, social media also enable the spreading of huge amounts of information through interactive and real-time communications. This can be directed to a specific target audience. In particular, organizers affirm that the adoption of social media, in their communicative strategies, allows them to send engaging, personalized messages for specific categories of users, in a whole new manner compared to that offered by the traditional communicative and promotional tools.

Reinforcement of stakeholders' loyalty and brand awareness

Organizers confirm that loyalty and brand development are important in the virtual world. In particular, according to the majority of respondents, being virtually permanently available, through an active presence on the social media channels, provides reassurance, raises stakeholders' loyalty (of exhibitors towards the exhibition organizers, and of visitors towards the organized events), and increases organizers' brand awareness and credibility, since they are able to answer a variety of questions in a short period of time. More specifically, for respondents, social media in the TS context allow the building of campaigns aimed at increasing the exhibition center's brand awareness (as well as that of the singular organized events). They also enable them to communicate their structure, activities, mission, and events in the online context.

Acquisition of market intelligence

Respondents consider social media significantly superior to other communicative and promotional media in the areas of marketing intelligence and information gathering. In particular, by drawing on the huge amount of information provided by social media, respondents carry out business intelligence activities and monitor their current/potential competitors (especially the activities carried by the other exhibition centers) and customers (exhibitors and visitors), in this way, they can map their stakeholders' behaviors and they can identify specific targets to serve and business opportunities (the offer of new events) to capture.

6.3.4.2. Social media weaknesses

With reference to the main weaknesses of adopting social media from the organizers' perspective (Tab. 6.13), the multiple answers have been combined into four different categories: [1] back-off costs; [2] difficulty of measuring their effectiveness; [3] technological problems; [4] passing fad effect.

Back-off costs

The first weakness concerns all the costs necessary to manage social media (in terms of human resources, budgets, the time needed to train staff). In particular, respondents fear that they will not be able to recover them, due to the difficulty of quantifying the social media return on investment. Overall, most of the interviewees claim not to be able to get a precise idea of the impact, on their activities, of the transfer of part of the communication on these new channels.

Difficulty of measuring effectiveness

Measuring the effectiveness of online communicative media has always presented a problem to practitioners and academics, and for most of them, it is still an unsolved issue (Gottlieb and Bianchi, 2017, Gottlieb *et al.*, 2011).

By focusing on the analysis of the answers, it emerges that respondents consider the difficulty of measuring the performance of social media as one of the main weaknesses related to their adoption. In light of this difficulty, it becomes more complex for organizers to be able to evaluate social media effectiveness and, consequently, to make decisions about their management in the long term (resources, budget, activities).

Technological problems

Another weak point of social media adoption revolves around technological problems, especially during the at-show phase (e.g., the potential lack of Wi-Fi in the pavilions, technological barriers, and temporary access problems to the social media platforms).

Passing fad effect

The last weakness concerns the belief that social media can represent a passing fad destined to disappear in the near future. Overall, this feeling seems to reduce the will of organizers to invest more in social media channels.

6.3.4.3. Social media challenges

In addition to the main strengths/weaknesses of adopting social media, also the principal challenges to overcome, in order to effectively exploit the social media potentialities, have been extracted from the interviews. In particular, from the transcription of the answers, the main challenges tied to social media adoption, pointed out by the TS organizers, have been identified and clustered into the following: the necessity [1] to ensure a balance between social media opportunities and human resources; [2] to maintain the events' visibility over time; [3] to create constantly interesting and engaging contents; [4] to adopt social media in a coherent way with respect to the other communicative tools used and to the overall strategy, and [5] the importance of managing negative comments.

Balance between social media opportunities and human resources

The first challenge concerns the necessity to identify a balance between social media opportunities, the required human resources, and the back-off costs. In particular, the majority of interviewees affirm that social media adoption requires qualified employees and budgets (specifically dedicated to social media management). These are fundamental in order to actually exploit the social media opportunities in the TS context. For this reason, it becomes crucial for organizers to adopt social media only if they can devote resources and budgets to these new communicative channels, whose opportunities would be drastically reduced without an adequate organizational structure.

Retention of visibility over time

The necessity to maintain their social media visibility over time represents the second challenge that emerged from the respondents' answers. Indeed, entry into the social media environment means, for respondents, that the attention of their followers must always be kept high, thus avoiding a decline of their own social media visibility. At the same time, it becomes essential for organizers to design and propose constantly interesting and engaging ideas and contents to users. These represent fundamental prerogatives in order to maintain an active and constant presence on their social media.

Coherent adoption of social media

Respondents also highlight the importance of coherently integrating social media adoption with the other used communicative channels as well as with the overall communicative strategy. In fact, only in this way it will be possible to “*coherently communicate our identity and mission to the users,*

thus avoiding sending discordant and contradictory messages through the different communication channels” (Respondent 4).

Management of negative comments

The need to constantly and promptly manage the negative comments left by users represents a further challenge pointed out by respondents. In particular, presence on social media means that the organizers must be 360° active by adding updated contents, interacting with followers, and by responding readily to both positive and negative comments. Only in this way, it will be possible for respondents to exploit constructive opinions and to reply to those that can affect their image and reputation.

Table 6.13 summarizes the main social media strengths, weaknesses, and challenges to overcome, extracted and categorized from the transcription of the organizers’ answers.

Tab. 6.13 – Strengths, weaknesses, and challenges of social media adoption for organizers

STRENGTHS
[1] Access to new/distant markets; [2] Creation of engaging stories; [3] Diffusion of a large amount of information; [4] Exchange of quick and real-time communications; [5] Reinforcement of the stakeholders’ loyalty; [6] Increase in brand awareness; [7] Acquisition of market intelligence
WEAKNESSES
[1] Back –off costs; [2] Difficulty in measuring effectiveness; [3] Technological problems; [4] Passing fad effect
MAIN CHALLENGES
[1] Balance between social media opportunities and human resources; [2] Maintain the events’ visibility over time; [3] Creation of constantly interesting and engaging contents; [4] Coherent adoption of social media; [5] Management of negative comments

Source: Author’s elaboration

6.3.5. TS future scenarios

In order to enhance the studies focused on the analysis of TS future scenarios (Gottlieb and Bianchi, 2017; Kirchgeorg *et al.*, 2010), in this section of the interview, respondents were asked to express which are, in their opinion, the possible evolutions of traditional trade shows, in the light of the advent of social media and the virtualization phenomenon. Starting from the assumption that the synthesis of information regarding what is important for trade shows is a necessary foundation for understanding future uncertainties (O’Brien, 2003), the following question has been raised: “*Trade shows*

provide the benefit of facilitating face-to-face communication between market players and hence require their physical presence at one location. In your opinion, will this trend continue to form part of the competitive advantage of trade shows in the future?”

Table 6.14 summarizes the main reasons why real events are still relevant to the sector’s future, from the organizers’ perspective.

Tab. 6.14 – Future TS scenarios: The role of real events

MAIN MOTIVATIONS OF THE PHYSICAL TRADE SHOWS' IMPORTANCE
[1] Real product experience; [2] Face-to-face communications; [3] Human interactions/contacts; [4] Social/temporary aggregator role

Source: Author’s elaboration

In particular, in a first phase, due to the fact that there was a huge amount of opinions expressed by respondents, a process of transcript aggregation was done. This enabled the identification of the main categories of real events’ competitive advantages that emerged from the interview’s answers.

The real product experience represents the first category of advantages recognized to the physical events, as *“there is no other place than a good set-up trade fair, with all the relevant players physically present in the pavilions, which gives target groups the opportunity to access a real product experiential platform”* (Respondent 5). In other words, by allowing TS stakeholders to live the product and service experience through the use of the five senses, real events *“offer a kind of added value that cannot be substituted by any digital tools”* (Respondent 2). Moreover, even if the product for its own sake becomes less and less relevant, on the contrary, the knowledge of its story (the motivations and ways in which to use it) becomes one of the most important reasons for participation in trade shows for the respondents. Starting from this assumption, for organizers, real events represent the most appropriate context in which TS stakeholders can really experience products and services in their entirety.

The possibility to undertake in face-to-face communications and to establish real interactions and contacts represent further categories of the competitive advantages of the physical trade shows for respondents. In particular, *“face to face encounters are part of the real events’ DNA. At a certain point in the relationship, exhibitors and visitors need to meet in a place like the TS context in order to finalize their business. In most cases, participants are not buying a common use product, but on the contrary, they are looking for products/services for which they require direct communications and relations”* (Respondent 13). Overall, personal and face-to-face relations will represent

one of the most important prerogatives in the TS context in the future (especially in the technological sector), “*even if exhibitors and visitors will choose more and more carefully which events they will participate in*” (Respondent 15). Indeed, “*despite the possibility of displaying products and novelties through the Internet and despite the advent and diffusion of the e-commerce platforms, the main peculiarities characterizing the real events (real product experience, human contacts, face-to-face communications) will also represent in the future their most relevant strengths*” (Respondent 16). This is because physical trade shows are able to aggregate geographically distant players in the same place and at the same time (social and temporary aggregate role) in a few square meters. In other words, although people communicate more and more via the Internet on a regular basis, “*physical events, that bring memorable experiences, will continue to triumph among visitors*” (Respondent 27), who want to experience real emotions, build face-to-face relations and share, with other stakeholders, a story in the TS context.

As different respondents state, despite the 2008 crisis and the trade show system stalling from 2009-2011, today, the sector is growing. In this context, “*the main players are called upon to renew and redesign the trade shows’ role as a necessary response to the crisis*” (Respondent 26) by notably wagering on the cultural, congressional, and entertainment events which will have the greatest impact on TS future for organizers.

Table 6.15 summarizes the possible trends characterizing the TS future scenarios from the organizers’ perspective.

Tab. 6.15 – Trade show future scenarios: Possible trends

POSSIBLE FUTURE TS TRENDS	
<i>Product’s story</i>	Knowledge of the product’s story as one of the most important trade shows’ participation reasons.
<i>Face-to-face relations</i>	Personal and face-to-face relations as fundamental prerogatives in the future of trade shows.
<i>Trade show selection</i>	Exhibitors and visitors will choose more and more carefully which events they participate in.
<i>Memorable experiences</i>	Memorable experiences (in the real TS context) will continue to triumph among visitors.
<i>TS sector’s recovery</i>	Despite the 2008 crisis, today the sector is growing.
<i>Trade show role renewal</i>	The main players are called upon to renew/redesign the trade shows’ role.
<i>Cultural/congressional and entertainment events’ relevance</i>	Event’s category will have the greatest impact on the TS’s future.

Source: Author’s elaboration

Concerning the impact of the virtualization phenomenon on future TS scenarios (Gottlieb and Bianchi, 2017; Kirchgeorg *et al.*, 2010), the majority of respondents state that, in their opinion, TS virtualization will not represent a possible scenario for the sector's future. However, some motivations in support of the possibility that this phenomenon could become a reality emerge (potentialities of augmented reality, construction of ongoing relations with users, acquisition of new target audience, acquisition of market intelligence). In particular, virtual trade shows could become a real alternative to the physical ones, only when the potentialities offered by augmented reality will actually be part of everyday life. This is as well as when some specific conditions will be respected in order to use it effectively (specialized human resources, virtual marketing capabilities, virtual customer retention capabilities, technological barriers elimination). Indeed, respecting these requirements will enable the proper exploitation of the VTSs strengths and in particular the possibility of accompanying users before, during, and after the event (by creating, in this way, ongoing relations that go beyond the limited duration of the physical events), and the opportunity of acquiring new target audiences and market intelligence. More specifically, the organization of virtual trade shows allows the access to new markets that organizers would not otherwise be able to access due to budget constraints, security issues, or the difficulties in reaching specific foreign markets. At the same time, VTSs also enable the conquest of new target audiences, which are difficult to reach through the establishment of real events, since in the virtual world, *“technology can help us to converse with exhibitors and visitors, by bridging language gaps”* (Respondent 13). Organizers also consider virtual trade shows superior to real ones in the areas of marketing intelligence and information gathering. As opposed to the real events' context, organizers of virtual trade shows can log and analyze data inserted by visitors and exhibitors (through voluntary basis registration processes), information that is fundamental in providing targeted messages and in creating relationships of trust with their stakeholders. In this way, by fostering interactive and real-time communications between organizers and their potential and current exhibitors/visitors, virtual trade shows collect direct market data that respondents confirm using in order to plan and manage their future strategies.

Regarding the motivations in support of the impossibility that virtualization will represent the TS future scenario, it emerged from the transcripts that the majority of respondents state that physical relations, face-to-face communications, and human contacts (prerogatives of the real TSs) cannot be substituted by virtual reality and digital tools, which on the contrary could be adopted as strategic supports. As one respondent mentioned, *“the rise of virtual reality*

and digital communication, in the TS and event sector, initially led to concern that digital exhibitions of products and services would, in the long term, replace trade fairs and congresses as we know them. The fact is that this development never happened. In fact, digital media is very suitable as an added service for the event, for example, with interactive plans for exhibition grounds, trade fair calendars, online ticketing, and much more besides. Trade fair activities, which are enhanced through virtual products or trend presentations, are already a reality today. However, digital communication and virtual reality are no substitute for the real product experience and the real contact with partners and customers that a trade fair offers” (Respondent 2). As proof of that, the majority of respondents confirm that their past attempts to offer virtual platforms have received a negative response from their exhibitors and visitors. On the contrary, today, exhibitors and visitors still require direct contacts with the products and face-to-face interactions with their stakeholders. In addition to these motivations, interviewees also state that what will characterize the sector’s future is not the real versus digital debate, but on the contrary, what will change is the trade shows’ formats (from the duration, content, and organization point of view). More specifically, the advent of digitalization will allow the systemization of huge amounts of data that will put trade shows in a strong position in terms of market knowledge. In other words, “there is no question of replacement (digitalization or real events). There is a question of clever connection” (Respondent 5).

In summary, data show that VTs do not represent a possible substitution of the real events for organizers, but on the contrary, they can act as a continuation of physical trade shows, by supporting and extending them beyond their temporary duration.

Table 6.16 summarizes the main motivations for and against the advent of the virtualization phenomenon in the future of the TS sector’s scenario.

Tab. 6.16 – Future TS scenarios: Trade show virtualization

TRADE SHOW VIRTUALIZATION: A possible (P) or impossible (IM) future scenario?	
P	IM
[1] Potentialities of augmented reality; [2] Construction of ongoing relations with users; [3] Acquisition of new target audiences; [4] Acquisition of market intelligence	[1] Impossibility of substituting real product experiences with virtual reality; [2] Non-duplication of face-to-face communications; [3] Absence of human interaction; [4] Impossibility of replacing the five senses; [5] Virtualization as an extension of the real event

Source: Author’s elaboration

In order to synthesize the possible impact of social media on TS dynamics, the last question of the in-depth interview (“Overall, which is, in your opinion, the impact social media will have in future trade show scenarios?”) enabled the identification of three possible future scenarios from the organizers’ perspective:

- *Scenario A*: virtual, co-creative, social media high impact;
- *Scenario B*: supportive, reactive, social media medium impact;
- *Scenario C*: temporary, uncertain, social media low impact.

In the first scenario (A), social media will assume a leading role as an effective extension of the real-world trade show experiences. In particular, they will become an added value in the planning, management, and support of the physical event, whose duration will no longer be limited to a short period, but it will be extended, via social media, throughout the year. In other words, “the aim of modern trade show players will be to implement a winning mix of real TS activities and added digital benefits, by offering in this way a combination of two typologies of experience: a temporary and physical experience and an extensive and digital one” (Respondent 2).

In this scenario, in turn, users will assume a partnership role, since they will be called upon to act as co-creators of the organizers’ communicative strategies, as co-authors in the choice of the future event portfolio, and as co-designers of the exhibition spaces. This process of co-creation will become real thanks to the natural capacity of social media to allow the creation of specific networks of operators (where they can exchange ideas and opinions and propose new trade fair concepts) and thanks to the organizers’ awareness and ability to use them in the most effective way.

Tab. 6.17 – Core characteristics of Scenario A

FACTOR SPECIFICATION FOR SCENARIO A
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [1] Social media as physical events extensions; [2] Social media as added value for the TS experience; [3] Digital and real contents co-creation; [4] Users as contents co-creators (<i>Partnership role</i>); [5] Social media adoption in each phase of the trade show (<i>pre-show, at-show, post-show</i>)

Source: Author’s elaboration

Scenario B is characterized by a minor impact of social media on the TS sector’s future. In fact, the role of social media will merely be supportive in the promotional phase of physical events. In this perspective, the digital channels will be adopted in the pre-show stage, in order to increase the online visibility of singular trade shows as well as the organizer’s structure. They will also be adopted during the post-show phase in order to analyze and eventually exploit the users’ comments and feedback. In this scenario, users will

not assume a really active role, but they will be seen as simple and occasional collaborators, who will not be encouraged to propose their ideas and opinions in a proactive way. On the contrary, the comments left by users, by their own initiative, will be used by organizers, in a reactive and often not planned way, simply in order to know extemporaneous opinions concerning events that have just finished.

Tab. 6.18 – Core characteristics of Scenario B

FACTOR SPECIFICATION FOR SCENARIO B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [1] Social media as a support promotional channel; [2] Social media as an online visibility support; [3] Social media as a customer support channel; [4] Users as simple collaborators (<i>Collaborative role</i>); [5] Social media adoption in the pre-show and post-show phases

Source: Author’s elaboration

In the last scenario (C), social media are perceived as a passing fad tool, which will be substituted in the future by new virtual platforms specifically thought for the trade show sector. In this context, social media will have a minimum impact on TS dynamics since they will only be adopted as a marginal communicative tool with a purely informative role. In this way, users will become simple recipients of the communicative strategies, without assuming any role of active collaboration with the organizers. Overall, in this scenario, social media will occasionally be adopted, by losing their current role, substituted by other platforms (first of all VTSSs), which will be able to maximize exhibition experiences on a digital level.

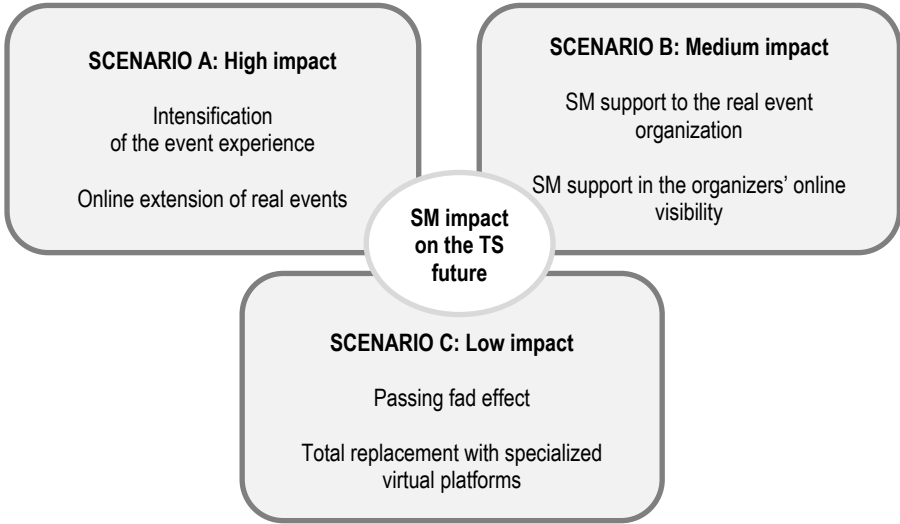
Tab. 6.19 – Core characteristics of Scenario C

FACTOR SPECIFICATION FOR SCENARIO C
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [1] Social media as a passing fad tool; [2] Advent of new specialized virtual platforms; [3] Substitution of Social media with VTSSs; [4] Users as recipients (<i>Recipient role</i>); [5] Social media occasional adoption

Source: Author’s elaboration

Figure 6.1 summarizes the three social media scenarios, built from the extraction and aggregation of the core characteristics that emerged from the respondents’ answers.

Fig. 6.1 – Social media (SM) impact in the TS future scenarios: A synthesis



Source: Author's elaboration

7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1. Summary of discussions

Limited empirical research has examined social media adoption in the TS context, especially from the organizers' perspective. The present book aims to address this gap by exploring organizers' perceptions of the main drivers and challenges of adopting social media. Based on a literature review process and in-depth interviews with exhibition organizers, the work aimed to reach different objectives. In the following paragraphs, a summary of the research objectives, the theoretical and managerial implications, and the future research perspectives will be presented.

7.1.1. Theoretical objectives

Starting from the complexity and multiple facets characterizing the TS studies, as well as the velocity with which these tools change over time (Tafesse, 2014), the theoretical purpose of the present book presented a threefold objective. On the one hand, an analysis was performed of the last thirty-year (1988-2018) evolution of the trade show literature from a business and management perspective and the main trends, emerging from the recent period (2010-2018) in the light of the globalization effects, the new advent of media, and the consequences of the economic crisis, were extracted. On the other hand, the most surveyed stakeholders (in the TS studies focused on the Internet marketing trend) were identified in order to find possible literature gaps, which need to be filled. To reach these objectives, a process of literature review, concerning all the business and management articles dedicated to the trade shows (TSs) and trade fairs (TFs) topics of the last thirty years (1988-2018) has been adopted.

Focus on the thirty-year evolution of the TS literature

Through the adoption of the review process, it has been possible to outline the evolution of the TS studies during the last thirty years (1988-2018) in terms of TS definition, roles/functions, and the main subject areas on which the literature focused during the analyzed period of reference. In particular, the whole period of analysis has been ideally divided into three timeframes (1988-2003; 2004-2009; 2010-2018), corresponding to the principal evolutions characterizing the TS sector over the last thirty years (UFI, 2016; Aldebert *et al.*, 2011).

Table 7.1 summarizes the literature's evolution, concerning the TS definition and roles, during the three identified timeframes of analysis.

Tab. 7.1 – TS definition and roles' evolution

TIMEFRAMES	TS DEFINITION	TS FUNCTIONS
1988-2003 <i>Globalization</i>	Focus on the TS selling nature and on the TSs as microcosms for international transactions and promotions	[1] Transactional exchange functions; [2] Promotional functions
2004-2009 <i>ICT advent</i>	Focus on the TSs as relational, temporary, and experiential clusters	[1] Contact functions; [2] Experiential functions; [3] Social exchange functions
2010-2018 <i>Economic crisis consequences</i>	Focus on the TSs as clients reassurance places, knowledge exchange platforms and international networks	[1] Reassurance functions; [2] Information, symbolic and cultural exchange functions; [3] Benchmark functions

Source: Author's elaboration

It can be seen, from the review, how TS definitions and roles have evolved over time. In particular, in the first timeframe (1988-2003), the articles dedicated to the TS topic focus their attention on the trade shows' selling nature as well as their transactional exchange function. Subsequently, during those years, the focus moves on to the definition of trade shows as microcosms for international transactions and promotions. The nature of trade shows as relational, temporary, and experiential clusters represents the main definition attributed to TSs during the 2004-2009 timeframe, with the majority of articles confirming the contact (product's presentation, demonstration, contact), experiential (immerse stakeholders in embodied experiences), and social exchange functions (establish and maintain relationships) as the most important roles of the TS platforms. During the last analyzed timeframe (2010-2018), the literature definition of TS evolves again, with the majority of studies focusing on its reassuring aspect (trade shows as clients' places of reassurance). This is probably a consequence of the effects of the economic crisis. At the same time, the 2010-2018 articles focus their attention on the

nature of trade shows as knowledge exchange and international networks, whose main functions are tied to their informative, symbolic, cultural exchange, and benchmark capabilities.

From a thematic perspective, the analytic review’s results also enabled the highlighting of the main areas of study on which the literature focused during the three analyzed timeframes. Table 7.2 allows viewing, for each identified thematic issue, the first two periods when the highest number of articles (focused on this specific subject area) has been published.

Tab. 7.2 – TS subject areas per timeframes

Subject Area	Papers 1988-2003	Papers 2004-2009	Papers 2010-2018
TS and relationship building		✓	✓
TS and knowledge/information exchange		✓	✓
TS and internationalization processes	✓		✓
TS participation	✓		✓
TS and network building		✓	✓
TS and stakeholder behavior	✓		✓
TS performance	✓		✓
TS and new media		✓	✓
TSs as experiential platforms		✓	✓
TS management	✓		✓
TS effectiveness	✓		✓
TSs as temporary clusters			✓
TS selection	✓		✓
TSs as territory catalysts	✓	✓	✓
Virtual TSs	✓		✓

Source: Author’s elaboration

Overall, by focusing on the total frequencies (in how many articles a specific topic has been dealt with, during the whole timeframe), it has been possible to highlight how the literature of the last thirty years has mainly focused its attention on the study of the TS relational function (n=64), on the role of trade shows as knowledge and information exchange platforms (n=46), and on the analysis of the TS stakeholders’ behaviors (n=46).

Tab. 7.3 – TS subject areas per timeframes (Frequencies)

Subject Area	Tot.
TS and relationship building	64
TS and knowledge/information exchange	46
TS and stakeholder behavior	46
TS participation	45
TS management	44
TS performance	38
TS and internationalization processes	35
TS and network building	34
TS effectiveness	27
TSs as experiential platforms	21
TS and new media	20
TS selection	10
TSs as temporary clusters	8
TSs as territory catalysts	6
Virtual TSs	5

Source: Author's elaboration

Turning to the singular analyzed publication periods (Tab. 7.4), during the first timeframe (1988-2003), the articles mainly focus their attention on the managerial aspects of TS instruments and on the behaviors and participation objectives of their attendees. During the second timeframe, the attention towards the relational role of TS platforms increases. On the contrary, the interest towards the analysis of TS participants' behavior and their participating objectives decreases with respect to the 1988-2003 timeframe. In addition, it emerges from the publication periods' comparison how only from the second timeframe (2004-2009), the literature started to deal with the study of experiential marketing applied to the TS context and with the investigation of the new media presence (as a consequence of the Internet and the advent and diffusion of Web 2.0). The focus on the relational and informative aspects of trade shows increases, significantly, during the third publication period (2010-2018), as well as the role of TSs in the firms' internationalization process, the study of TS performance (probably as a consequence of the sector's crisis and the importance of attracting potential stakeholders to participate), the adoption of new media in the TS context, and the role of trade shows as experiential and territory catalysts. The identification of trade shows as temporary clusters represents a field of study which was enhanced only from 2010 onwards.

Tab. 7.4 – TS subject areas per timeframes (Frequencies)

Subject Area	Papers 1988-2003	Papers 2004-2009	Papers 2010-2018
TS and relationship building	5	13	46
TS and knowledge/information exchange	7	8	31
TS and internationalization processes	9	4	22
TS participation	16	7	22
TS and network building	4	9	21
TS and stakeholder behavior	16	9	21
TS performance	11	7	20
TS and new media	0	2	18
TSs as experiential platforms	0	4	17
TS management	18	10	16
TS effectiveness	12	3	12
TSs as temporary clusters	0	0	8
TS selection	4	1	5
TSs as territory catalysts	1	1	4
Virtual TSs	1	0	4

Source: Author's elaboration

Focus on the main TS trends characterizing the 2010-2018 literature

The review process also enabled the identification of the main trends characterizing the recent TS literature. In particular, through a thematic narrative analysis of the articles' full texts published between 2010 and 2018 (n=114), it has been possible to highlight the main areas of study of the contemporary literature. In particular, the analysis of the selected papers identified four major tendencies emerging from the recent trade show literature. Table 7.5 synthesizes the results (emerging tendencies and respective sub-trends), while table 7.6 specifies, for each tendency, its primary features.

Tab. 7.5 – Contemporary TS tendencies (2010-2018): Principal sub-trends

TENDENCIES	SUB-TRENDS
<i>Relationship marketing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TSs and relationship building; TSs and knowledge/information exchange; TSs and network building
<i>Internationalization process</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TSs and internationalization process; TSs as territory catalysts; TSs as temporary clusters
<i>Internet marketing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TSs and new media; Virtual TSs
<i>Experiential marketing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TSs as experiential platforms

Source: Author's elaboration

Tab. 7.6 – Contemporary TS tendencies (2010-2018): Main features

TREND	FEATURES
<i>Relationship marketing</i>	<p>[1] TSs as relational platforms; [2] Contacts' search, network building, and information/knowledge exchange as main reasons of TS stakeholders' participation/involvement; [3] TSs as relational incubators; [4] Importance of relational opportunities in the TS context (and in future scenarios); [5] Investigation of relationships' quality; [6] Introduction of the "communification" concept; [7] Investigation of the mix of relationship marketing and transactional marketing; [8] Investigation of the TS participants' interactions; [9] TSs as information and knowledge exchange platforms; [10] TSs as interactive business networks; [11] TSs as supports to the establishment/enhancement of network structures; [12] Development of networking strategies in the TS context.</p>
<i>Internationalization process</i>	<p>[1] TSs as temporary clusters through which firms can go beyond their geographical borders and through which the host cities can take advantage of the TS wide appeal in terms of visibility; [2] TSs as export learning channels; [3] TSs as collective marketing platforms that industry agglomerations can use to affirm their presence in international markets; [4] TSs as a good context for SMEs to meet international operators; [5] TSs as beneficial platforms to the survival, growth, and expansion of small firms; [6] TSs as multidimensional relational platforms/relevant temporary hubs; [7] TSs as temporary learning stages; [8] TSs as temporary concentration platforms of otherwise dispersed players, stakeholders, and activities in a given place, at a given time; [9] TSs as territory catalysts, having a considerable impact on the localities in which they are performed.</p>
<i>Internet marketing</i>	<p>[1] Advent/impact of new communication media in the TS context; [2] Growing importance of new media as a positive trend for the future of trade shows; [3] New media as support tools for trade show events; [4] Incorporation of virtual environments as strategic marketing tools; [5] Official web sites, social media, and VTSSs as fundamental components of the physical TSs (by extending their life in the virtual environment); [6] TS website evaluation; [7] Internet effects on TS marketing performance; [8] Internet platform/VTSSs management; [9] New media adoption in the pre-show, at-show, and post-show phases; [10] Identification of possible interactions between the complement of virtual-based channels to the traditional trade show event and its performance and effectiveness; [11] Identification of the role/contributions of VTSSs in developing relationships; [12] Identification of the main drivers/challenges and the necessary marketing abilities required for VTSSs participation; [13] VTSSs as surrogates for real-word TSs in times of tight budgets.</p>
<i>Experiential marketing</i>	<p>[1] Focus on the role assumed by the entertainment/experiential component in trade show management; [2] Application of the experiential marketing concepts and methods on the TS context and dynamics; [3] Evolution of the TS core focus from products-services-sales towards dialogues-relations-entertainment and finally experiences; [4] TSs as embodied experiences; [5] TSs as experiential platforms in which participants are immersed in a mix of sensorial stimuli, cognitive processes, emotional responses, relational activities, and active behaviors; [6] TSs as important sources of learning; [7] TSs as community platforms; [8] Role of the moments of leisure in the TS context; [9] TS entertainment facet as a fundamental contributor to the overall TS effectiveness perception; [10] Creation of theoretical frameworks based on experiences in the TS context; [11] TS stakeholders as active players in the creation of the experiential setting of the trade show event.</p>

Source: Author's elaboration

Focus on the most investigated TS stakeholders within the Internet marketing trend

In the third phase, the attention has been focused on the contemporary Internet marketing tendencies by intersecting them with a stakeholder analysis. In particular, for each article belonging to the third publication period (2010-2018), the identified sub-trends (*TS and new media*; *Virtual TSs*) have been cross-correlated with the eventual stakeholder category (Exhibitors, visitors, organizers) the specific article is focused on.

Table 7.7 synthesizes the number of articles (published between 2010 and 2018) that focused their attention on the visitors, exhibitors, and organizers' perspectives for each sub-trend. Overall, it can see from the table how the exhibitors' target is the most studied stakeholder category. On the contrary, the visitors and organizers' point of view represents the least investigated, in this way confirming scant attention of the contemporary TS literature towards these specific targets.

Tab. 7.7 – Internet marketing sub-trends and stakeholders' perspectives (Papers 2010-2018)

Reference Stakeholder	Visitors	Exhibitors	Organizers
Subject Area			
<i>TS and new media</i>	5	11	6
<i>Virtual TSs</i>	2	3	2
Total	7	14	8

Source: Author's elaboration

7.1.2. Empirical objectives

Starting from the theoretical results, the empirical purpose of the present book has been to gain a broader understanding of the impact of new media (social media and VTSs) in the trade show sector, from the organizers' perspective. More specifically, the focus on the TS organizers' category has represented an attempt to fill a specific research gap that emerged from the intersected review (Internet marketing tendencies-stakeholder analysis). In particular, the TS organizers' point of view has been adopted with a view to analyzing the implementation of the social media tools on their trade show

strategies and activities and their reaction to the virtual trade shows' advent in order to gain deeper insights about their online behavior.

Starting from this overview, the objectives, that motivated the empirical section of the present book, have been the following: analysis of (1) the main strengths, weaknesses, and challenges concerning the TS organizers' social media adoption; (2) the role given to the users in their social media activities; (3) their position with respect to the advent of virtual trade shows as new formats of the future. To reach these empirical objectives, an explorative research design, characterized by three main phases (identification/adoption of a social media popularity index, extracted from the literature, in order to identify, among a selected sample of TS organizers, the most popular ones in the social media context; construction of an in-depth interview focused on the use of social media from the TS organizers' perspective; administration of the in-depth interview to the sample identified through the adoption of the social media index) has been adopted. In particular, the in-depth interview has been chosen due to its potential to provide detailed information and perceptions that would otherwise be impossible to access (Gottlieb and Bianchi, 2017).

Focus on the TS organizers' social media adoption

In the first phase, the implementation and use of social media in the TS context has been investigated, as well as the main strengths/weaknesses of adopting them, and the main challenges to overcome. In order to collect primary data concerning the main strengths and weaknesses of adopting social media in the TS context from the organizers' perspective, the answers' transcripts have been examined by adopting a process of thematic narrative analysis, aimed at identifying and clustering possible specific patterns that emerged from the interview. Tables 7.8 synthesizes the main strengths and weaknesses of adopting social media in the TS context.

Moreover, the interviewees were also asked to identify the main challenges necessary to overcome in order to exploit the social media potentialities (Tab. 7.9).

Tab. 7.8 – Social media adoption in the TS context: Main strengths/weaknesses

STRENGTHS	MAIN FEATURES
<i>Access to new/distant markets</i>	Social media [1] enable organizers to access new/distant markets they would otherwise not be able to reach due to budget limitations/the higher costs of other promotional/communicational media; [2] enable organizers to converse in real-time with potential/current exhibitors and visitors; [3] allow building direct and interactive relations with their own stakeholders.
<i>Creation of engaging stories</i>	Social media [1] enable maintaining the stakeholders' attention in the periods in which there are no organized events; [2] facilitate creating immersive storytelling able to keep the exhibitors/visitors' attention high, also beyond the physical events; [3] enable accompanying TS stakeholders before, during, and after the events; [4] give a continuity to the <i>at-show</i> established relations.
<i>Diffusion of information</i>	Social media [1] enable the spreading of a huge amount of information; [2] allow to send engaging messages cut out for specific categories of users.
<i>Loyalty and brand awareness reinforcement</i>	Social media [1] provide reassurance, raise TS stakeholders' loyalty, and increase organizers' brand awareness; [2] facilitate the accomplishment of campaigns aimed at increasing the exhibition center's brand awareness; [3] enable the communication of the exhibition center's structure, activities, mission, and events in the online context.
<i>Acquisition of market intelligence</i>	Social media [1] enable to carry out information gathering and business/marketing intelligence activities; [2] facilitate the monitoring of current/potential competitors (especially the activities performed by other exhibition centers) and customers (exhibitors and visitors); [3] enable the mapping of stakeholders' behavior and the identification of specific targets to serve and business opportunities (the offer of new events) to capture.
WEAKNESSES	MAIN FEATURES
<i>Back-off costs</i>	[1] The social media management requires back-off costs (in terms of human resources, budgets, time needed to train staff); [2] The fear of not being able to recover them; [3] The difficulty to get a precise idea of the impact, on the respondents' activities, of the transfer of part of the communication on these new channels.
<i>Difficulty of measuring effectiveness</i>	[1] Difficulty of measuring the social media performances; [2] Complexity in evaluating social media effectiveness and consequently in making decisions about their management in the long term (resources, budget, activities).
<i>Technological problems</i>	[1] Technological problems especially during the <i>at-show</i> phase; [2] Lack of Wi-Fi in the pavilions; [3] Technological barriers; [4] Temporary access problems to the social media platforms.
<i>Passing fad effect</i>	[1] Belief that social media can represent a passing fad destined to disappear in the near future; [2] Reduction of the will to invest more in the social media channels due to this feeling.

Source: Author's elaboration

Tab. 7.9 – Social media adoption in the TS context: Main challenges

CHALLENGES	MAIN FEATURES
<i>Balance between social media opportunities and human resources</i>	[1] Necessity to identify a balance between social media opportunities, the required human resources, and the back-off costs; [2] Requirement for qualified employees and budgets specifically dedicated to social media management, which are fundamental in order to actually exploit the social media opportunities in the TS context.
<i>Retention of visibility over time</i>	[1] Necessity to maintain social media visibility over time; [2] Necessity to maintain the attention of followers high, thus avoiding a decline in social media visibility; [3] Necessity to constantly design and propose to users interesting and engaging ideas and contents; [4] Necessity to maintain an active and constant presence on the social media.
<i>Social media coherent adoption</i>	[1] Necessity to coherently integrate social media with the other adopted communicative channels as well as with the overall communicative strategy; [2] Necessity to coherently communicate the own identity and mission to users, thus avoiding sending discordant and contradictory messages through the different communication channels.
<i>Management of negative comments</i>	[1] Need to constantly and promptly manage the negative comments left by users; [2] Necessity to be 360° active, by adding updated contents, interacting with the followers, and by responding readily to both positive and negative comments; [3] Necessity to exploit constructive opinions and to reply to those that can affect their own image and reputation.

Source: Author's elaboration

Focus on the users' role in the TS organizers' social media adoption

In order to identify how TS organizers perceive the role of users in the social media adoption, the transcriptions of the respondents' answers have been categorized, and three different roles (with different degrees of involvement) emerged: partnership, collaborative, and recipient role.

Tab. 7.10 – Social media users' role from the organizers' perspective

USERS' ROLE	MAIN FEATURES
<i>Partnership role</i>	[1] Creation of a spirit of partnership with the users; [2] Users conceived as social media content co-creators, active participants, and communication accelerators; [3] Users' involvement via competitions, contents, and real-time focus groups.
<i>Collaborative role</i>	[1] Cooperative adoption of users' observations, comments, and positive/negative critiques; [2] Improvement of events through users' feedback; [3] Users' cooperation limited to the exploitation of their opinions/comments; [4] No consideration of their potential role as active participants in the planning of the organizers' social media activities.
<i>Recipient role</i>	[1] Users conceived as simple recipients of the social media contents; [2] Adoption of social media as unidirectional tools.

Source: Author's elaboration

Focus on the TS organizers reactions to the VTs advent

The aim of the last empirical objective was to deepen the study of the impact of the advent of VTs from the organizers' perspective. The tran-

scriptions of the respondents' answers have enabled the identification and categorization of the main reasons belonging to the possibility/impossibility that these tools could become a reality for the TS future environment (Tab. 7.11 and 7.12). Overall, the data show that, in the near future, VTs do not represent a possible substitution of the real event. On the contrary, they can act as a continuation of the physical trade shows by supporting and extending them beyond their temporary duration.

Tab. 7.11 – Trade show virtualization: Possible future scenario (Motivations)

MOTIVATIONS	MAIN FEATURES
<i>Potentialities of augmented reality</i>	[1] VTs could become a real alternative only when the potentialities of augmented reality will actually be part of everyday life and specific conditions are respected (specialized human resources, virtual marketing capabilities, the elimination of technological barriers).
<i>Construction of ongoing relations with users</i>	[1] Possibility of accompanying users before, during, and after the event; [2] Creation of ongoing relationships that go beyond the limited duration of the physical events.
<i>Acquisition of new target audience</i>	Possibility of [1] accessing new markets; [2] gaining a new target audience; [3] bridging language gaps.
<i>Acquisition of market intelligence</i>	[1] VTs as superior to physical ones in the areas of marketing intelligence/information gathering; [2] Possibility of logging/analyzing data inserted by visitors and exhibitors; [3] Possibility of providing targeted messages and creating relationships of trust with the stakeholders.

Source: Author's elaboration

Tab. 7.12 – Trade show virtualization: Impossible future scenario (Motivations)

MOTIVATIONS	MAIN FEATURES
<i>Impossibility of substituting real experiences with virtual reality</i>	[1] Physical relations, face-to-face communication, and human contact cannot be substituted by virtual reality; [2] Impossibility of replacing the five senses; [3] Negative feedback (from exhibitors and visitors) about the organizers' proposal of VTs.
<i>Revolution of the traditional event format</i>	[1] The future TS scenario will not be characterized by the real versus digital debate, but on the contrary by the real TS formats evolution.
<i>Real events and digitalization integration</i>	[1] There is no question of replacement (digitalization or real events). There is a question of clever connection between the features of physical TSs and virtual media.
<i>Virtualization as an extension of the real event</i>	[1] VTs can act as a continuation of physical TSs by supporting and extending them.

Source: Author's elaboration

7.1.3. Theoretical implications

Overall, the book offers three specific theoretical contributions. First, it marks one of the first systematic efforts at reviewing the trade show business and management literature. In particular, the work covered 214 TSs articles (see Appendix A) published during the last thirty years and synthesized their contents in terms of trade show evolution (definition, roles, functions, and areas of study). Second, the work extends previous limited research on the adoption of social media in the TS context by identifying specific drivers and challenges in using these channels from the exhibitor organizers' perspective. The third contribution is the identification of the relevance of enhancing the online popularity concept also applied to the trade show environment.

In particular, for what concerns the investigation of the social media adoption in the TS context, through the adoption of in-depth interviews addressed to a sample of TS organizers, the present work allowed identifying specific features and aspects related to the use of social media from the organizers' point of view. In terms of typologies of adopted social media platforms, even if the interview's results mainly confirm the use of the same social media identified by the literature as the most relevant for the TS context (Browne, 2012), they also enable the addition of others to the contemporary TS studies (Tab. 7.13).

Tab. 7.13 – Social media typologies in the TS context

ADOPTED SM TYPOLOGIES	PRESENT IN THE TS LITERATURE	IDENTIFIED BY THE PRESENT WORK
Facebook	✓	
Twitter	✓	
Instagram	✓	
Pinterest		✓
Snapchat		✓
YouTube	✓	
Vimeo		
Google Plus	✓	
LinkedIn	✓	
Xing		✓

Source: Author's elaboration

Findings also showed that the main goals of adopting social media in the TS context can be classified into attractive (e.g., invitation to the events),

relational (e.g., establishment of direct relationships with the TS target audience), loyalty (e.g., increase in stakeholders' loyalty and TS participants' brand awareness), benchmark (e.g., investigation and analysis of the TS market), and online visibility functions (e.g., increase of the online visibility and reputation).

Regarding the social media performance measurements, starting from the assumption that the ROI within social media has long been a bone of contention for the literature (Hays *et al.*, 2013; Fisher, 2009), the present work identified four key areas, in which social media efforts are evaluated in the specific TS context: audience size, audience engagement, audience sentiment, and audience conversion.

The results of the in-depth interviews also enabled to identify the social media functions according to the event's stages (pre-show, at-show, post-show) (Tab. 7.14).

Tab. 7.14 – New technologies and TS phases: A social media classification

TS PHASES	ADVANTAGES
<i>Pre show</i>	[1] Creation of information/dialogue; [2] Promotion of target groups' construction; [3] Messages placement; [4] Attraction of specific targets to the events.
<i>At show</i>	[1] Real-time distribution of information; [2] Visitors' support; [3] Fulfillment of 360° communication; [4] Conveying of emotions; [5] Engagement of the public.
<i>Post show</i>	[1] Possibility of following up the event after its closure; [2] Analysis of the event's feedbacks; [3] Evaluation of stakeholders' satisfaction; [4] Retention of high and constant attention to the next edition of the event.

Source: Author's elaboration

Finally, for what concerns the application of the online popularity concept in the TS environment, the present work has extracted from the literature and adapted an online popularity index in order to identify the most popular organizers (in the social media environment), within a pre-selected sample, to whom to address the in-depth interview. Since the study of the social media impact on the trade show context has not yet been enhanced by the literature (Singh *et al.*, 2017) and no article has dealt with the construction of an online index specifically applied to this sector, the importance of the social media popularity in the trade show industry was here deepened through the creation of an index for the evaluation of the social media popularity of the TS organizers (For more details, see Paragraph 7.1.4).

7.1.4. Managerial implications

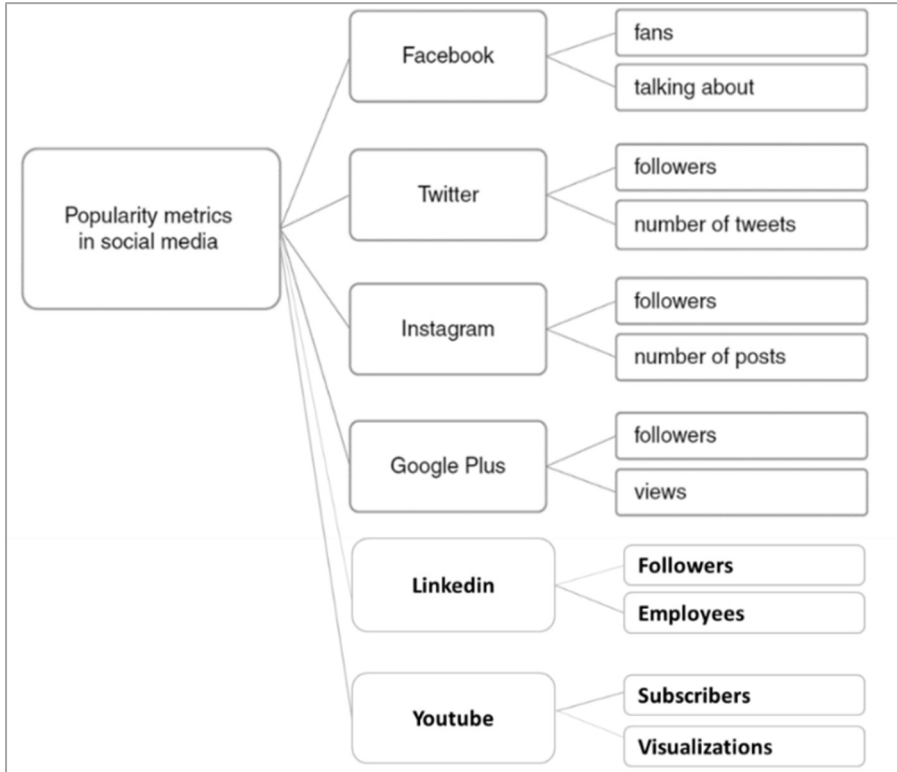
From the managerial perspective, the book offers three specific managerial contributions. First, starting from the existing literature, the work elaborated an index for the evaluation of the social media popularity of the TS activities. Second, the research identified the main drivers and challenges for exhibition managers who want to adopt social media in their communicative strategies. Third, the study highlighted the need to develop a social media strategic orientation in synergy with the realization of other specific actions, whose managerial importance emerged from the specialized literature (creation of relationships inside and outside the trade show environment, the offer of TS experiences, and international openness).

The first managerial implication concerns the ideation (starting from the analysis of the existing literature) of an index for evaluating the social media popularity of the TS organizers' activities (Fig. 7.1). In particular, this tool enables the calculation of one's overall social media popularity index as well as the singular social media values (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google Plus, LinkedIn, YouTube). It also allows the comparison of one's results with those of competitors. In addition, this index also facilitates the identification of the social networks in which the organizer is more/less popular by monitoring, over time, the social media activities in order to enhance and/or modify them.

Through the adoption of the in-depth interviews, the study identified the main drivers and challenges TS organizers will face in the adoption and integration of social media in their communicative strategies. In particular, the research data also show that the correct adoption of social media, in the TS context, will most likely depend on finding solutions to existing challenges surrounding their specific features (see Paragraph 6.3.4.3). Secondly, it will depend on the way social media will be integrated with the other adopted communicative and promotional tools. Overall, although social media have become more popular and accepted, especially since the post-crisis era of the 2010s, it seems that their management, in the TS context, requires more attention and planning.

Indeed, the third order of managerial implications concerns the identification of the necessity to develop a strategic orientation in order to totally exploit the potentialities offered by the social media tools, in synergy with the other trends emerged from the TS literature (relationship marketing, experiential marketing, and internationalization processes).

Fig. 7.1 – Social media popularity Index (for the TS context)



Source: Author’s elaboration on Lardo *et al.* (2017)

Focusing on the analysis of the overall social media popularity ranking, it emerged how the German and Italian organizers are the most popular exhibition centers in the social media environment by achieving, on average, the highest popularity indexes. In particular, while the German exhibition organizers are, on average, more popular on YouTube, the Italian centers are more popular on the Twitter platform.

From the comparison of the singular social media average indexes between the different samples (German, Italian, Spanish, and French exhibition organizers), it emerged how the highest index of popularity on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Google Plus has been achieved, on average, by the Italian organizers, while YouTube and LinkedIn are the social media platforms in which the German centers were found to be more popular, with respect to the other investigated countries.

Overall, from the social media popularity analysis, two relevant data emerged: firstly, the TS organizers' awareness about the importance of being visible and popular in the social media environment (the minimum popularity index is, however, higher than zero). Secondly, the average social media popularity indexes (obtained by the exhibition centers of the four surveyed countries) highlight an important improvement gap, in terms of popularity, on the analyzed social media. Starting from the assumption that in the near future, the TS visitors' experiences will be ever more integrated across the physical and virtual environment (Gottlieb and Bianchi, 2017; Labrecque *et al.*, 2013), organizers will have to carefully manage and plan their social media presence in order to keep up with the increasing requests of TS stakeholders. Furthermore, organizers must consider that in an on-demand world, clients will judge them by their ability to offer experiences and interactions literally everywhere (Dahlström and Edelman, 2013).

For what concerns the first data emerged from the social media analysis (the TS organizers' awareness about the importance to be present in the social media environment), the in-depth interviews do not deny this trend, thus proving that this result is not accidental, but on the contrary, it is the outcome of a real organizers' awareness towards the role of social media (in terms of management, functions, and uses) in their communicative strategies. Focusing on the Italian situation, overall, Italy ranks second in the social media popularity classification (not far from the score obtained by the first classified country), and this result is not denied by the in-depth interviews which highlight the real awareness of the respondents towards the social media importance in the TS activities and strategies. In order to improve this awareness and in order to respond to the necessity to fill the gap (in terms of social media popularity) emerged from the statistical analysis, it becomes fundamental, for the Italian (as well as the European) TS organizers, to understand the necessity to strengthen their social media presence. To do this, organizers will have to invest more in the social media adoption, in terms of specialized resources and skills, in order to enhance their already present managerial and strategic awareness towards the virtual trend. In particular, the exhibition managers are called to:

- increase awareness about the importance of social media communication as a TS support, promotion, and marketing tool;
- launch innovation processes aimed at investing more in the realization/management of the social media channels, potentially able, more than others, to attract new TS clients, by improving at the same time the loyalty of the existing ones;

- develop new and specific communicative and relational skills, alongside the traditional trade show ones (staging, logistics, hospitality abilities, etc.), through the development of relationships and networks with specialized figures in online/social media communication and through internal training processes with qualified operators.

More specifically, in order to carry out high performing social media communication actions, new specialized skills will be necessary: [1] strategic (social media activities management; social media integration with other adopted communication tools); [2] planning/management role (content management; copy and monitoring activities of the adopted social media channels). Starting from the assumption that these skills cannot always be managed within the exhibition organizations, they can be included through conscious and planned outsourcing/network processes. Faced with this overview, it becomes fundamental for organizers to understand how the promotion of their own structures and singular events should always be accompanied by constantly managed and planned social media communication (in order to follow their clients before, during, and after the events' closure). At the same time, they should also be accompanied by the awareness that a temporary and sporadic updating of their social media profiles will not be enough to attract new TS stakeholders and/or to keep the existing ones loyal.

However, the competitiveness of the Italian and European trade show systems is not only tied to the effectiveness of the web and social media communication, but also to the development of further specific actions concerning the other trends emerged from the TS literature (creation of relationships inside and outside the trade show environment, the offer of TS experiences, and international openness). Only through a synergistic management of the different trends (Tab. 7.15), it will be possible, for organizers, to remain competitive in the current and foreseeable TS context.

Overall, this book represents a first attempt to enhance the investigation of social media adoption in the trade show activities. In particular, none of the previous works, focused on the ICT advent in the TS context, takes into account the role of social media in supporting trade show effectiveness as a CRM tool. In this way, the integration process among digital media and physical trade shows remains an under-investigated topic by contemporary literature.

Tab. 7.15 – TS trends' management: Principal required actions

TREND	ACTIONS
<i>Relationship marketing</i>	[1] Support the TSs role as relational platforms and incubators; [2] Develop the TS functions concerning the contacts' search, network building and information/knowledge exchange; [3] Handle the quality of the relationships between TS participants; [4] Adopt the "communification" strategy (support to the development of communities' creation in the TS setting); [5] Balance the mix of relationship marketing and transactional marketing; [6] Support the TS participant's interactions and the information/knowledge exchange between TS attendees; [7] Support the creation, establishment, and enhancement of interactive business networks between TS players; [8] Develop networking strategies in the TS context.
<i>Internationalization process</i>	[1] Support the TSs role as temporary clusters; [2] Develop the TS role as export learning channels; [3] Use TSs as collective marketing platforms that industry agglomerations can use to affirm their presence in international markets; [4] Transform TSs in good contexts where to meet international operators; [5] Organize TSs by conceiving them as temporary concentration platforms of otherwise dispersed players, stakeholders, and activities in a given place, at a given time.
<i>Internet marketing</i>	[1] Use of new media, by conceiving them as support tools for trade show events; [2] Incorporate virtual environments as strategic marketing tools; [3] Adopt and manage official web sites, social media accounts, and VTSS platforms as strategic supporting channels of their physical TS events (by extending their life in the virtual environment); [4] Manage and constantly monitor their own websites and social media presence; [5] Exploit the social media potentialities during the pre-show, at-show, and post-show phases.
<i>Experiential marketing</i>	[1] Apply the experiential marketing concepts and methods on the TS context and dynamics; [2] Evolve the TS core from products-services-sales towards dialogues-relations-entertainment and finally experiences; [3] Support the TSs role as embodied experiences; [4] Immerse TS participants in a mix of sensorial stimuli, cognitive processes, emotional responses, relational activities, and active behaviors; [5] Support the TS roles as sources of learning and community platforms; [6] Organize moments of leisure within the TS setting; [7] Promote the TS entertainment facet; [8] Develop the organizers' role as active players in the creation of the experiential setting of their trade show events.

Source: Author's elaboration

The main limitations, characterizing this work, provide avenues for future researches. More specifically, the study paves the way for investigating the use of social media in the trade show sector further by analyzing, for example, the effect of social media usage for pre-show, at-show, and post-show promotion on the achievement of sales objectives set for a trade show. Future research could also analyze the effect of social media usage in trade shows on the achievement of non-sales performance objectives (Hansen *et al.*, 2004), such as information gathering, exhibition image building, relationship improvement, and achievement of contacts. For what concerns the other trends characterizing the TS context, from the work emerges, on one side, the necessity to be skilled on each of them in order to remain competitive in

the contemporary and foreseeable trade show scenario and, on the other, the awareness that the competitiveness of the TS sector is based on an integrated adoption of these trends and actions. Starting from this assumption, in the future, it could be interesting to investigate the relational, experiential, and internationalization trends from the Italian TS organizers' perspective, as well as in comparison with the rest of Europe, in order to identify the highest performing strategic trends and those that instead need managerial improvement.

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APPENDIX A

List of reviewed articles (n=214)

YEAR	AUTHOR(S)	TITLE, JOURNAL
1989	Barczyk <i>et al.</i>	<i>Trade show participation: inter-industry and organizational motives.</i> Journal of Professional Services Marketing, 4(1), 131-148.
1990	Bello and Barczak	<i>Using industrial trade shows to improve new product development.</i> Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, 5(2), 43-56.
1990	Pizam	<i>Evaluating the effectiveness of travel trade shows and other tourism sales-promotion techniques.</i> Journal of Travel Research, 29(1), 3-8.
1992	Bello	<i>Industrial buyer behavior at trade shows: implications for selling effectiveness.</i> Journal of business research, 25(1), 59-80.
1992	Gopalakrishna and Williams	<i>Planning and performance assessment of industrial trade shows: An exploratory study.</i> International Journal of Research in Marketing, 9(3), 207-224.
1992	Sashi and Perretty	<i>Do trade shows provide value?</i> Industrial Marketing Management, 21(3), 249-255.
1992	Shoham	<i>Selecting and evaluating trade shows.</i> Industrial Marketing Management, 21(4), 335-341.
1993	Bello and Lothia	<i>Improving trade show effectiveness by analyzing attendees.</i> Industrial marketing management, 22(4), 311-318.
1993	O'Hara <i>et al.</i>	<i>Industrial trade shows abroad.</i> Industrial Marketing Management, 22(3), 233-237.
1993	O'Hara	<i>Evaluating the effectiveness of trade shows: A personal selling perspective.</i> Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 13(3), 67-77.
1993	O'Hara and Herbig	<i>Trade Shows: What Do the Exhibitors Think? A personal selling perspective.</i> Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, 8(4), 18-25.
1993	Shiple <i>et al.</i>	<i>Dimensions of trade show exhibiting management.</i> Journal of Marketing Management, 9(1), 55-63.
1993	Williams <i>et al.</i>	<i>Trade show guidelines for smaller firms.</i> Industrial Marketing Management, 22(4), 265-275.

1994	Florio	<i>Fair trades by trade fairs: Information providing institutions under monopolistic competition.</i> Small Business Economics, 6(4), 267-281.
1994	Fayos-Sola <i>et al.</i>	<i>The strategic role of tourism trade fairs in the new age of tourism.</i> Tourism Management, 15(1), 9-16.
1994	Herbig <i>et al.</i>	<i>Measuring trade show effectiveness: an effective exercise?</i> Industrial Marketing Management, 23(2), 165-170.
1994	Seringhaus and Rosson	<i>International trade fairs and foreign market involvement: Review and research directions.</i> International Business Review, 3(3), 311-329.
1994	Tanner	<i>Adaptive selling at trade shows.</i> Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management, 14(2), 15-23.
1995	Gopalakrishna and Lilien	<i>A three-stage model of industrial trade show performance.</i> Marketing science, 14(1), 22-42.
1995	Rosson and Seringhaus	<i>Visitor and exhibitor interaction at industrial trade fairs.</i> Journal of Business Research, 32(1), 81-90.
1995	Tanner and Chonko	<i>Trade show objectives, management, and staffing practices.</i> Industrial Marketing Management, 24(4), 257-264.
1996	Hansen	<i>The dual motives of participants at international trade shows: An empirical investigation of exhibitors and visitors with selling motives.</i> International Marketing Review, 13(2), 39-53.
1996	Herbig <i>et al.</i> (a)	<i>Differences in trade show behavior between manufacturers and service-oriented firms.</i> Journal of Professional Services Marketing, 14(2), 55-78.
1996	Herbig <i>et al.</i> (b)	<i>Differences in trade show behavior between north american-focused firms and worldwide-oriented firms.</i> International Journal of Commerce and Management, 6(1/2), 97-109.
1996	Sharland and Balogh	<i>The value of nonselling activities at international trade shows.</i> Industrial Marketing Management, 25(1), 59-66.
1997	Blythe	<i>Does size matter?-objectives and measures at UK trade exhibitions.</i> Journal of Marketing Communications, 3(1), 51-59.
1997	Dekimpe <i>et al.</i>	<i>Generalizing about trade show effectiveness: A cross-national comparison.</i> The Journal of Marketing, 61(4), 55-64.
1997	Herbig <i>et al.</i>	<i>Differences between trade show exhibitors and non-exhibitors.</i> Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, 12(6), 368-382.
1997	Mohsin and Ryan	<i>Business visitors to the northern territory expo.</i> Tourism Recreation Research, 22(2), 67-69.
1998	Abbott and Lanza	<i>Antitrust regulations and trade shows—: Can dealers and exhibitors be excluded.</i> The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly, 39(3), 12-19.
1998	Herbig <i>et al.</i>	<i>Trade show: Who, What, Why.</i> Marketing Intelligence & Planning, 16(7), 425-435.
1998	Seringhaus and Rosson	<i>Management and performance of international trade fair exhibitors: government stands vs independent stands.</i> International Marketing Review, 15(5), 398-412.
1998	Taylor	<i>The marketing trade show: A new method for incorporating student projects into large classes.</i> Journal of Marketing Education, 20(3), 250-257.

1999	Blythe (a)	<i>Visitor and exhibitor expectations and outcomes at trade exhibitions.</i> Marketing Intelligence & Planning, 17(2), 100-110.
1999	Blythe (b)	<i>Learning by doing-frequency of exhibiting at UK trade exhibitions.</i> Journal of Marketing Communications, 5(4), 207-221.
1999	Munuera and Ruiz	<i>Trade fairs as services: A look at visitors' objectives in Spain.</i> Journal of Business Research, 44(1), 17-24.
1999	Semler	<i>How we went digital without a strategy.</i> Harvard Business Review, 78(5), 51-3.
1999	Shoham	<i>Performance in trade shows and exhibitions: a synthesis and directions for future research.</i> Journal of Global Marketing, 12(3), 41-57.
1999	Tuncalp	<i>Evaluation of information sources in industrial marketing: implications for media planning in the Arabian Gulf.</i> Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, 14(1), 49-60.
2000	Chacko and Fenich	<i>Determining the importance of US convention destination attributes.</i> Journal of Vacation Marketing, 6(3), 211-220.
2000	Harris	<i>The shows will go on.</i> Sales and Marketing management, 152 (5), 85.
2000	Penaloza	<i>The commodification of the American West: Marketers' production of cultural meanings at the trade show.</i> Journal of Marketing, 64(4), 82-109.
2000	Wilkinson and Brouthers (a)	<i>An evaluation of state sponsored promotion programs.</i> Journal of Business Research, 47(3), 229-236.
2000	Wilkinson and Brouthers (b)	<i>Trade shows, trade missions and state governments: Increasing FDI and high-tech exports.</i> Journal of International Business Studies, 31(4), 725-734.
2001	Godar and O'Connor	<i>Same time next year—buyer trade show motives.</i> Industrial Marketing Management, 30(1), 77-86.
2001	Penaloza	<i>Consuming the American west: Animating cultural meaning and memory at a stock show and rodeo.</i> Journal of consumer research, 28(3), 369-398.
2002	Bartz	<i>Show and sell.</i> Industrial Fabric Products Review, 87(9), 54-57.
2002	Blythe	<i>Using trade fairs in key account management.</i> Industrial Marketing Management, 31(7), 627-635.
2002	Daugherty <i>et al.</i>	<i>The role of customer service in trade promotion decisions.</i> The International Journal of Logistics Management, 13(1), 43-56.
2002	Horn	<i>Making Trade Shows pay off: Utilizing promotional gifts rather than giveaways.</i> Journal of Promotion Management, 8(1), 127-136.
2002	Palumbo and Herbig	<i>Trade shows and fairs: An important part of the international promotion mix.</i> Journal of Promotion Management, 8(1), 93-108.
2002	Pinar <i>et al.</i>	<i>An examination of trade show participation in a developing country: An exploratory study in Turkey.</i> Journal of Euromarketing, 11(3), 33-52.
2002	Rice and Almosawi	<i>A study of exhibitor firms at an Arabian gulf trade show: Goals, selection criteria and perceived problems.</i> Journal of Global Marketing, 15(3-4), 149-172.
2002	Tanner	<i>Leveling the playing field: factors influencing trade show success for small companies.</i> Industrial Marketing Management, 31(3), 229-239.

2002	Tanner and Chonko	<i>Using trade shows throughout the product life cycle.</i> Journal of Promotion Management, 8(1), 109-125.
2003	Chang	<i>How should I meet potential investors at a trade show?</i> Laser Focus World, 39(5), 73.
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APPENDIX B

Interview questions

QUESTIONS

- [1] Which are the initial reasons for the adoption of social media applications?
 - [2] Which social media tools are employed?
 - [3] Who deals with the management and development of social media strategies?
 - [4] Is the social media role separated from other marketing employees?
 - [5] How many people are responsible for maintaining a social media presence, developing strategies/campaigns?
 - [6] What is the total budget dedicated towards social media? What percentage of the total marketing budget is this?
 - [7] Which are the main goals you intend to pursue through social media?
 - [8] Do you have an editorial calendar?
 - [9] Do you adapt contents and activities according to the different adopted social media platforms?
 - [10] Do you have any particular strategies to gain followers on the different social media platforms?
 - [11] To whom are most of the social media efforts directed (exhibitors, visitors, other stakeholders)?
 - [12] How do you measure successful social media efforts?
 - [13] Pre, during and post show: Do you exploit social media during all three phases?
 - [14] If yes, which functions perform social media in your strategies?
 - [15] What is the role of users in your social media strategies?
 - [16] Do you involve users in your social media strategies, in order to transform them into active players of your communication strategies?
 - [17] Which are, in your opinion, the main strengths/weaknesses of adopting social media in your communicative strategies?
 - [18] Which are, in your opinion, the main challenges to overcome in order to effectively exploit the social media potentialities?
 - [19] Overall, which is, in your opinion, the impact social media will have in future trade show scenarios?
-

[20] Trade shows provide the benefit of facilitating face-to-face communication between market players and hence require their physical presence at one location. In your opinion, will this trend continue to form part of the competitive advantage of trade shows in the future?

[21] Virtualization of trade shows: In your opinion, could virtual trade shows become the new format of the future? (If yes, why? If not, why?).

Source: Author's elaboration

Systematically defined in 1986, Trade Shows (TSs) still represent today a leading business and development instrument for the global and European economy. However, over the years, TSs have acquired new functions and new roles. This evolution also happened in light of the major socio-economic changes of the new millennium. In particular, the XX and XXI centuries brought with them important socio-economic changes, thus forcing trade shows to deal with the effect of the globalization phenomenon, the consequences of the 2008 crisis, and the advent of the new media.

Faced with this background, the aim of the present book is to gain a deeper understanding of the adoption and use of the new media in the TSs context. In particular, the work intends to reach the following objectives: (i) analysis of the thirty-year evolution (1988-2018) of the trade show literature; (ii) identification of the main trends emerging from the more recent literature (2010-2018); (iii) exploration of the impact of new media (i.e., social media and virtual tools) in the trade show sector, especially from the organizers' perspective. Notably, the focus on the organizer's category represents an attempt to fill a specific research gap, emerged from the analysis of the existing TS literature, concerning the scant attention towards this stakeholders' target.

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