PROFILING ITALIAN STREET TRAVEL AGENCIES BASED ON THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARDS SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract

User Generated Content (UGC) exerts a great influence on tourists' choices, sometimes driving them to change the accommodation previously suggested by a street travel agency. In this context travel agencies need to proactively use both the Internet and UGC to build and maintain their competitive advantage. Despite this, there is no published paper profiling travel agencies based on how they use social media (SM). This study was therefore carried out to profile a sample of 281 Italian street travel agencies based on their perceived strategic value, perceived usefulness, emotional engagement, perceived ease of use, intention to use, satisfaction and intention to recommend SM use to others. Four segments were identified, namely: "Passive users", "Enthusiasts", "Strategically myopics" and "Active users". Hence, chi square analysis was run to ascertain significant differences among clusters based on business-related variables. Findings show that significant differences among clusters exist only based on the frequency of SM use and the overall travel agencies' attitude towards the importance of marketing and promotion tools for their competitiveness. Theoretical contributions and managerial implications are discussed, providing suggestions for further research.

1. Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICT) are essential nowadays for the survival and competitiveness of businesses in the tourism industry (Cheng and Cho, 2011). The Internet has especially revolutionised the hospitality and tourism sector in the way product information is distributed and online purchases are provided (Hidalgo-Alcázar et al., 2014), calling for tourism businesses to find the best use of technology to constantly improve their efficiency and respond to the consumers' evolving needs (Law et al., 2014).

As a second wave of digital transformation called Web 2.0, the advent of social media also represents an important opportunity for tourism marketing, as more and more prospective tourists rely on user-generated content (UGC) to choose services such as accommodation, itineraries and destinations according to other consumers' feedback and experiences (Litvin et al., 2008; Del Chiappa et al., 2018). Since the Internet and UGC have become popular tools for travel planning, it is necessary for travel agencies to include these in their e-commerce model and marketing strategy.

Among such digital tools, social media not only represents a source of useful ideas but also exerts a great influence on the actual planning process, even after tourists' decisions have been taken (e.g. Xiang et al., 2015). Adopting a supply-side perspective, social media represents an opportunity for marketers to provide engaging storytelling to a wider audience and better interactions with customers (Fotis et al., 2012). This further proves the urgency of integrating UGC platforms such as social media in the marketing strategy of tourism operators. Despite the fact that several studies have illustrated the benefits of technology adoption and social media engagement in the tourism industry (e.g. Park and Oh, 2012; Abou-Shouk et al., 2013; Law et al., 2014; Roult et al., 2016), there has been limited investigation into how street travel agencies use social media to promote their business. Specifically, this paper aims to profile a sample of 281 Italian street travel agencies according to the extent to which they engage with social media as part of their marketing operations. Furthermore, the study also aims to investigate whether significant differences exist among clusters based on a number of business characteristics (e.g. the presence of a person in charge of managing social media, number of employees, etc.).

2. Literature Review

In 2017, tourism accounted for €223.2 billion of the GDP (13% of total GDP) in Italy (WTTC, 2018). Despite still being under researched and under theorised (Thomas et al., 2011), small and medium enterprises (SMEs)

play an important role in ensuring the success of tourism development of any tourism destination (Hallak et al., 2015). In Italy, this is particularly evident with regard to the travel agency sector, where micro (employing less than 10 people) and small (employing between 10 and 49 people) travel agencies have the biggest shares in terms of value added and employment (Eurostat, 2012). However, travel agencies are currently threatened by an increasing disintermediation taking place in the tourism industry, caused by the advent of e-commerce (Buhalis and Licata, 2002; Stamboulis and Skayannis, 2003). In order to react to these changes, tourism SMEs are encouraged to develop technology adoption and new marketing communication tools (Abou-Shouk et al., 2013).

Technology adoption can improve business efficiency and performance (e.g. Teo et al., 2009), as well as small improvements in decision making, transactions, inventory keeping, accountability, knowledge building, employment growth, staff recruitment and staff satisfaction (e.g. Daniel and Wilson, 2006; Álvarez et al., 2007). By specifically engaging in e-commerce, tourism SMEs can benefit from a wide range of advantages: earn more profits (e.g. Park and Oh, 2012); increase productivity and sales (e.g. Simpson and Docherty, 2004; Migiro and Ocholla, 2005); facilitate collaboration with new and established partners (Taylor and Murphy, 2004); create new products and services (Migiro and Ocholla, 2005), and improve their services and communication with customers (e.g. Saffu et al., 2008). These benefits have the potential to provide survival in the market, stability and competitive advantage (e.g. Kartiwi and MacGregor, 2007).

With regard to marketing operations, SMEs can also widely benefit from e-commerce, mainly enhancing distribution channels and reducing costs (Abou-Shouk et al., 2013). By implementing marketing campaigns on the Internet, businesses can also better promote their image and reputation to a wider audience (Collins et al., 2003; Cho and Huh, 2010). While Abou-Shouk et al. (2013) have found that marketing and competition are the main benefits perceived by small and medium travel agents in engaging with e-commerce, SMEs still encounter different barriers to their involvement with digital media (Camilleri, 2018). For example, such businesses may only employ advertisement and not use the Internet in promoting their services to niche or small markets (Shah Alam, 2009; Sin Tan et al., 2010). Furthermore, SMEs may not have enough resources and time at disposal to engage with digital media, nor the skills and competence (Brouthers et al., 2015; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015). Another important barrier to adopting digital marketing may be SMEs' management resistance caused by prejudices or no clear strategy of which communication channel would be the most effective (Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015). In addition, a concern for privacy and security may also deter making online transactions (Gupta et al., 2013).

Because of the co-existence of barriers and benefits, the extent of technology adoption by SMEs has been defined as variable, and few studies have defined adoption stages accordingly. Lefebvre et al. (2005) distinguish e-commerce non-adopters and adopters. Adopters gradually engage in information search and content creation online (stage 1); electronic transactions (stage 2); complex online transactions (stage 3) and, finally, electronic interaction and collaboration (stage 4) (Lefebvre et al., 2005). Al-Qirim (2007) identifies starters, who use e-mail and the Internet; low-level adopters of e-commerce, who develop websites; advanced-level adopters who make online transactions; extended adopters, who use the Intranet and extranet. From their review of literature on e-commerce technology adoption, Chen and McQueen (2008) have drawn four growth stages, characterised by: (1) searching information and using e-mail; (2) online marketing through a static website; (3) online ordering with manual payment; (4) online transactions.

Very few studies have devoted their attention to profiling SMEs according to their ICT adoption level. In profiling small accommodation providers, Hills and Cairncross (2011) have found that some are little aware of the advantages the Internet provides and are unresponsive to them, while others proactively engage in innovative practices to respond to UGC websites. Moreover, Spencer et al. (2012) has found that the levels of technology adoption in owner-managed small firms are strongly driven by the typology of leadership, profiled in: resistors, enforcers, stabilisers, reactors and converters. Together with the level of employee acceptance, management attitude is also believed to constitute a major challenge and even a barrier to adopting social media in SMEs, more than "hard factors" such as costs and technical problems (Meske and Stieglitz, 2013).

While so far literature has discussed SMEs' adoption of e-commerce, limited research has focused on travel agencies as adopters of ICT, nonetheless practising digital marketing. The use of ICT has been described as an ideal tool for travel agencies because of their intrinsic need to constantly adjust fares, reservations and itineraries, as well as to provide electronic tickets (Bigné et al., 2008). Through the Internet, travel agencies can also amplify their service offer online, which represents a source for consolidation and competitiveness in the market (Suárez Álvarez et al., 2007). Direct customer interaction is also enhanced by the web, which is important to improve information distribution and customer satisfaction with the travel agency (Roult et al., 2016). Finally, cost reduction has also been found to be a major benefit of marketing content on the Internet (Law et al., 2004).

In this scenario, researchers nowadays concur that social media are increasingly trusted by consumers who rely on UGC content to make decisions according to other consumers' experiences (Fotis et al., 2012). As such, travellers' reviews are among the preferred information sources

consumers use to make their choices. In this context, consumers have also been found to often post online comments and reviews with regard to their experience with street travel agencies (Cioppi et al., 2016). Recent studies have also showed that UGC could induce tourists to even change the accommodation choice suggested by travel agencies (Del Chiappa, 2013; Del Chiappa et al., 2014; Prayag and Del Chiappa, 2014). This urges traditional travel agencies to engage in social media use in order to retain a secure and competitive position in the distribution chain. In fact, social media can be considered relevant marketing tools that street travel agencies can use to gain greater interaction and connectedness with customers (Trusov et al., 2009; Michaelidou et al., 2011), as well as fast and easy information provision and diffusion, often engaged by customers themselves (Kaplan and Haelnein, 2010; Park and Oh, 2012). Furthermore, social media are particularly useful for enhancing brand awareness and image, as well as for proactively improving their online reputation (Park and Oh, 2012; Pencarelli et al., 2015), managing complaints and saving marketing costs on other platforms (Weber, 2007).

Despite this, and besides the limited research describing the advantages for travel agencies in developing e-marketing, there is still very little research aimed at investigating the extent to which street travel agencies use social media to promote their business. This is particularly evident in Italy: despite the fact that some studies have analysed how effective Italian travel agencies are in managing their official website (e.g. Cioppi and Buratti, 2014), there has been no published paper specifically devoted to investigating social media adoption. Based on a relatively recent call for further research investigating how tourism enterprises engage with consumers and stakeholders across social media platforms (Law et al., 2014), this study was carried out to profile a sample of 281 Italians street travel agencies based on the extent to which they engage with social media as part of their marketing operations.

3. Methodology

For the purpose of this study, an ad-hoc questionnaire was built based on prior literature. Specifically, the survey was divided in three main parts.

In the first part, the respondents were asked a number of questions aimed at assessing their social media (SM) use in the workplace, the size of their firm (i.e. number of employees) and level of social media engagement, as well as the firm's general attitude towards marketing and communication tools.

In the second part, respondents were asked to express the extent to which they agreed or disagreed (1=completely disagree, 5=completely

agree) with a list of statements specifically used to measure:

- the perceived usefulness of SM, with perceived usefulness being defined as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance" (Davis, 1989, p. 320);
- the perceived ease of use, with perceived ease of use being defined as "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort" (Davis, 1989, p. 320);
- the perceived strategic value of SM, with perceived strategic value being defined as the value that an organisation thinks to gain in term of operational support, productivity and strategic decision when using SM (Grandon and Pearson, 2003; Saffu et al., 2008).

The statements used to measure each construct were sourced from Grandon and Pearson (2004) and Camilleri (2018), and partially adapted to suit the specific research setting of this study.

In the third part, respondents were asked to express the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a list of statements specifically used to measure:

- their emotional engagement with SM use, with emotional engagement being viewed as the "positive affect: enjoyment, fun, psychological arousal" (O'Brien and Toms, 2008, p. 948), assessing the employees' motivation and interest in using SM. The items were sourced from O'Brien and Toms (2008) and partially adapted to suit the specific research setting of this study;
- their level of satisfaction towards SM use, their intention to use SM in the future and to recommend them to others. The items used to measure these constructs were sourced from previous studies (i.e. Davis, 1989; Zeithaml et al., 1996) and partially adapted to suit the specific research setting of this study.

The survey was conducted online during April-June 2015. The database of the emails was assembled by using a well-established Italian tourism book/directory. Hence, a total of 2,500 travel agencies were finally included. These travel agencies received an e-mail inviting them to complete the online questionnaire by clicking on a link directly provided in the email. At the end of data collection, a total of 281 valid questionnaires were obtained. This yielded a response rate of 10.44%, which can be considered acceptable, given that SMEs studies usually recognise response rates of less than 10% being the norm in SMEs-related data collection (Jay and Schaper, 2003).

4. Findings

The sample (Tab. 1) was composed by 281 respondents employed at small and medium travel agencies, with one (78.2%) or two (14.0%) branches and less than 10 employees (89.0%). Most of the respondents had star-

ted to use SM 1-2 years (39.2%) or 2-3 years (18.5%) before the data collection, and tended to use SM a couple of times a week (27.5%) or a few times a day (28.6%). Of the travel agencies involved in this study, 15% employed a social media (SM) manager full time, 39.5% had a SM manager working part time and 38.9% did not have a dedicated SM manager. The majority of travel agencies (83.4%) did not restrict /limit their employees' access to Internet , and had not adopted Internal guidelines for SM use (84.1%). Further, 56.5% reported that they did not have adequate hardware and software for SM use. However, the firms involved had an overall positive attitude towards marketing and communication tools (83.10%).

Tab. 1: Sample composition

How often do you use social media?	%	How many co-workers have Internet access?	%
Hardly ever	5.8	None	4.7
Less than once a month	5.3	Few	3.6
A couple of times a month	10.6	Most of them	8.3
A couple of times a week	27.5	Everyone	83.4
Around once a day	22.2	**Branches**	
A few times a day	28.6	1	78.2
When did you start using social media?		2	14.0
Less than 3 months ago	5.3	3	4.1
Less than 6 months ago	7.9	More than 3	3.7
Less than a year ago	16.4	**Employees**	
1-2 years ago	39.2	Less than 10	89.0
2-3 years ago	18.5	Between 11 and 20	6.7
More than 3 years ago	12.7	Between 21 and 40	2.5
Is there a SM manager in your firm?		Between 41 and 60	0.5
Yes, full time	15.1	Between 61 and 80	1.0
Yes, part time	39.5	More than 80	0.5
No	38.9	**Do you have adequate HW e SW for SM use?**	
No, we rely on a consultant	5.4	Yes	43.5
No, we rely on ADV o PR agency	1.1	No	56.5
Does your firm have guidelines for SM use?		**Does your firm have a positive attitude towards Mk and Communication tools?**	
Yes	15.9	Yes	83.1
No	84.1	No	16.9

Source: Our elaboration (2018)

On the whole, the strategic value of SM was partially acknowledged (e.g. "Using SM media provides information that help make effective decisions" – M=3.29; "Using SM increases firm's productivity – M=3.06), and some concerns were raised with regard to the role of SM use in improving staff productivity (M=2.76) and communication in the organisation (M=2.71). Overall, the respondents partially perceived SM as stimulating (M=3.11) or interesting tools (M=3.29), and showed a neutral position in relation to SM ease of use ("I think social media would be flexible to interact with" – M=3.15). Despite this, respondents mainly scored highly on their perceived usefulness of SM (e.g. "Using SM helps develop awareness of our offer" - M=4.02; "Using SM helps provide new distribution channels" – M=3.81), and their intention to use SM (e.g. "I will probably use and continue using SM" – M=3.67). Overall, they were neither satisfied or dissatisfied with the effectiveness of SM use (M=3.15) and only appeared partially willing to recommend SM tools to others (M=3.31). Despite this, they intended to start or continue using SM in the future (M=3.64).

For the purpose of this study, a factor-cluster approach was employed (Hair et. al, 2010). Hence, an explorative factor analysis, principal component analysis, and varimax rotation were used to reveal the underlying factors in the data. Six factors summarising the 75.17% of total variance were identified (Tab. 2). The first factor was named "Perceived strategic value" (PSV) (42.29% of total variance), and was strongly related to items describing the strategic benefits perceived in using SM. The second factor was labelled "Perceived usefulness" (PU) (10.07% of total variance), and was composed by items describing the perceived advantages of SM use on travel agencies' marketing operations. "Emotional engagement" (EE) was identified as the third factor (9.74% of total variance), with items measuring the extent to which respondents found SM engagement stimulating. "Perceived ease of use" (PEU) (5.12% of total variance) included items describing the level of ease of use of SM. The fifth factor, "Intention to use" (IU) (4.72% of total variance), measured the behavioural intention of respondents to use SM. The last component was named "Satisfaction and intention to recommend" (SIR) (3.20% of total variance) and was related to items measuring the respondents' level of satisfaction in using SM and their intention to recommend these tools to others.

Tab. 2: Factor Analysis

	Loadings	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Alpha
Perceived Strategic Value (PSV)		15.649	42.295	0.948
PSV.1 Using social media increases firm's productivity	0.452			
PSV.2 Using social media provides information that helps make effective decisions	0.597			
PSV.3 Using social media helps improve customer service	0.686			
PSV.4 Using social media helps have new distribution channels	0.672			
PSV.5 Using social media helps reap operational benefits	0.816			
PSV.6 Using social media helps provide effective support role to operations	0.792			
PSV.7 Using social media helps increase ability to compete	0.729			
PSV.8 Using social media helps provide better access to information	0.762			
PSV.9 Using social media helps provide access to methods and models in making functional area decisions	0.799			
PSV.10 Using social media helps improve communication in the organisation	0.684			
PSV.11 Using social media helps improve staff productivity	0.764			
PSV.12 Using social media helps support strategic decisions	0.760			
Perceived Usefulness (PU)		3.728	10.076	0.930
PU.1 Using social media helps expand our target markets and identify new customers	0.814			
PU.2 Using social media helps develop awareness of our offer	0.856			
PU.3 Using social media helps enhance effectiveness in marketing communication	0.743			
PU.4 Using social media helps increase our ability to find new customers in our target markets	0.808			
PU.5 Using social media helps improve knowledge sharing	0.731			
PU.6 Using social media helps provide new distribution channels for our products	0.807			
PU.7 Using social media helps increase our competitiveness	0.765			
Emotional engagement (EE)		3.605	9.744	0.955

EE.1 Using social media is fun	0.780			
EE.2 Using social media is stimulating	0.767			
EE.3 Using social media is interesting	0.708			
EE.4 Using social media is enjoyable	0.797			
EE.5 Using social media makes me feel good	0.724			
EE.6 Using social media let me feel good	0.786			
Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)		1.897	5.126	0.914
PEU.1 Learning to operate social media is easy for me	0.820			
PEU.2 Using social media would enable us to accomplish our tasks more easily	0.524			
PEU.3 Social media would be flexible to interact with	0.824			
PEU.4 It would be easy for me to become skilful at using social media	0.879			
PEU.5 I can use social media without help from an expert	0.790			
PEU.6 In general, I think I would find social media easy to use	0.904			
Intention to USE (IU)		1.749	4.728	0.964
IU.1 I will probably continue using social media	0.819			
IU.2 I intend to continue using social media	0.815			
IU.3 I will often use social media in the future	0.778			
Satisfaction and Intention to recommend (SIR)		1.185	3.202	0.911
SIR.1 All in all, the degree of social media effectiveness satisfies our expectations	0.843			
SIR.2 In general, our firm is satisfied with the advantages derived from social media use	0.838			
SIR.3 I will recommend social media use to other people / colleagues	0.716			

Source: Our elaboration (2018)

The scores of the six principal components were entered into a cluster analysis. A two-step cluster analysis was applied: a hierarchical cluster (Ward method and Manhattan distance) was performed. Four groups emerged, based on a dendrogram inspection and an ANOVA test (p-value < 0.00) (Hair et al., 2010). Then, a non-hierarchical method (k-means) was applied to factor scores, and four different groups were identified, namely: "Passive users", "Enthusiasts", "Strategically myopics" and "Active users" (Tab. 3)

Tab. 3: Cluster analysis

	Passive users	Enthusiasts	Strategically myopics	Active Users
	N=32	N=176	N=40	N=33
PSV	-0.10182	0.26173	-118.815	0.14304
PU	-1.63194	0.16722	0.39822	0.20796
EE	0.16683	0.29794	-0.44901	-120.656
PEU	-0.36622	0.06771	-0.10132	0.11681
IU	0.34082	-0.02324	-103.136	1.04356
SIR	0.52321	-0.01883	0.19057	-0.63793
PSV				
PSV.3	3.00	3.55	1.88	2.91
PSV.4	3.25	3.74	1.95	3.48
PSV.5	3.28	3.92	2.1	3.55
PSV.6	3.31	4.18	2.51	4.15
PSV.7	2.78	3.79	1.95	3.33
PSV.8	2.78	3.72	2.13	3.30
PSV.9	3.03	4.10	2.1	3.55
PSV.10	3.28	4.11	2.41	3.79
PSV.11	2.97	3.68	1.87	3.06
PSV.12	2.59	3.29	1.71	2.15
PSV.3	2.63	3.38	1.61	2.3
PSV.4	2.69	3.60	1.90	2.79
Perceived Usefulness (PU)				
PU.1	2.94	4.19	3.80	4.05
PU.2	3.16	4.37	4.40	4.10
PU.3	3.06	4.16	4.20	3.62
PU.4	2.91	4.07	3.80	4.05
PU.5	2.81	4.13	3.60	3.62
PU.6	2.78	4.24	3.60	4.05
PU.1	2.88	4.07	3.20	3.75
Emotional engagement		3.605	9.744	0.955
EE.1	2.88	3.52	2.00	2.24
EE.2	3.16	3.72	2.05	2.36
EE.3	3.16	3.89	2.25	2.73
EE.4	2.87	3.58	2.03	2.21
EE.5	2.23	2.99	1.38	1.42
EE.6	2.68	3.48	1.67	1.79
Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)				

PEU.1	3.19	3.76	3.53	3.55
PEU.2	2.69	3.26	2.10	2.76
PEU.3	2.81	3.43	2.73	3.06
PEU.4	2.63	3.45	3.03	3.06
PEU.5	2.81	3.47	2.80	3.36
PEU.6	2.69	3.56	3.08	3.27
Intention to USE (IU)				
IU.1	3.84	4.04	2.08	4.27
IU.2	3.69	4.00	2.03	4.36
IU.3	3.53	3.97	1.78	4.15
Satisfaction & Intention to recommend (SIR)				
SIR.1	3.09	3.36	2.83	2.64
SIR.2	3.09	3.42	2.50	2.50
SIR.3	3.13	3.75	2.83	2.32

Source: Our elaboration (2018)

"Passive users" (N=32), the smallest segment, was mainly composed of SM early users (18.8% reported a 2-3 years length of SM) and used SM a couple of times a week. They worked for travel agencies with one (57.1%) or two branches (21.4%), and employing less than 20 people (75% employed less than 10 people and 14.3% between 11 and 20 people). SMEs in this cluster did not have SM use guidelines (78.1%) and a substantial proportion had restricted Internet access to their employees (26.6%). Further, half of travel agencies in this cluster had a SM manager part time (while 43.8% did not have one) and reported inadequate hardware and software for SM use (58.6%). Most travel agencies belonging to this cluster had a positive attitude toward marketing and communication tools (89.7%).

"Enthusiasts" was the largest group (N=176), comprising SM daily users (36.3% a few times a day) with 1-2 years of SM use (38.9%). The travel agencies in this cluster were small, with one branch (80.6%) and less than ten employees (89.3%). Nevertheless, they often employed a SM manager part-time (35.5%) or full time (20.9%), and did not limit Internet access to their staff (88.9%). Most travel agencies in this group did not follow any guidelines for SM use (87.4%), and showed an overall positive attitude towards marketing and communication tools (94.1%). However, they reported a lack of adequate software and hardware for SM use (57.4%).

"Strategically myopics" (N=40) were mostly SM low users (31.3% used SM a couple of times per month), with 1-2 years of SM use (75%). They were employed at micro travel agencies (91.1% with less than 10 employees and 88.60% with one branch). Travel agencies in this group had not hired a SM manager (60%) and partially limited their workers' use of Internet: 19.5%

of respondents in this group reported that their co-workers had little to no access to the Internet, with no guidelines for SM use (76.3%). Employees did not have adequate technology to engage with social media (52.8%) and their firm had a negative attitude towards marketing and communication tools (56.8%).

"Active users" (N=33) was composed by respondents with a recent and frequent engagement with SM (21.4% a few times a day; 25% around once a day; 42.9% were reported to have 1-2 years of use). Respondents in this group worked at small and medium firms (7.4% employing between 21 and 40 workers, 14.8% with 11 to 20 employees), with two (14.8%) to three (25%) branches. They were employed in agencies with a part-time (46.4%) or full-time (17.9) SM manager and perceived marketing and communication tools positively (88.90%). These travel agencies did not adopt guidelines for SM use (89.3%) and did not limit their employees' Internet access (89.3%). However, a lack of adequate software and hardware for SM use was still reported (55.6%).

Overall, "passive users" scored relatively close to the central value of all the items measuring their perception of SM use, thus showing a relatively passive/neutral attitude towards the SM PSV and PU (e.g. "Using SM helps reap operational benefits" – M=2.78; "provide new distribution channels for our products" – M=2.78). Further, they did not feel emotionally engaged when using SM ("I think using SM is enjoyable" – M=2.23), which could be associated to the fact that SM were not perceived as easy to use by this group (M=2.69). While they were not satisfied (M=3.09) nor willing to recommend SM (M=3.13) to other people, "passive users" scored relatively high in items measuring the IU SM in the future (M=3.84).

"Enthusiasts" scored high on most items, showing a very positive attitude towards social media. In particular, they scored high in their PSV of SM (e.g. "Using social media helps improve customer service" – M=3.92; "provide better access to information"; M=4.11), PU (e.g. "Using social media helps develop awareness of our offer" – M=4.37; "provide new distribution channels for our products" – M=4.24), as well as PEU (e.g. "Learning to operate social media would be easy for me" – M=3.76; "In general, I think I would find social media easy to use" – M=3.56), and they thought using SM could be fun (M=3.52) stimulating (M=3.72) and interesting (M=3.89). Furthermore, they showed enthusiasm in their willingness to use and continue to use SM in the future (M=4.04) and to recommend it to other people (M=3.75) but, at the same time, they were only slightly satisfied with the degree of SM effectiveness (M=3.36) and the advantages derived from SM use (M=3.42).

The "strategically myopics" mainly perceived SM as a useful marketing tool that may increase the effectiveness of marketing mix activities, but they did not believe that SM could be of use in operations such as

developing and improving the companies' strategies, thus showing a certain level of SM-based "strategic myopia". Specifically, they scored high on items measuring the SM PU (e.g. "Using SM helps develop awareness of our offer" – M=4.4; "enhance effectiveness in marketing communication" – M=4.2), but scored low or very low on items related to their PSV (e.g. "Using SM provides information that helps make effective decisions" – M=1.95; "support strategic decisions" – M=1.90). Further, they appear to be quite concerned about the PEU (e.g. "I can use SM without help from an expert" – M=2.8) and they did not view SM as enjoyable or interesting tools (e.g. "Using SM is interesting" – M=2.25; "I think using SM is enjoyable" – M=1.67). Overall, they appeared to be dissatisfied (M=2.83), not willing to recommend SM use (M=2.83) or to use SM in the future (M=2.08).

The "active users" perceived SM as useful tools in improving both the firm's operational strategies and marketing activities, but not enjoyable or very easy to use. Specifically, they scored slightly positive on items measuring the PSV (e.g. "Using social media provides information that help make effective decisions" – M=3.48; "increase ability to compete" – M=3.55) and positive on items related to the PU of SM ("Develop awareness of our offer" – M=4.1; "Increase our ability to find new customers in our target markets" – M=4.05), but, at the same time, they stated / believed that using social media was neither fun (M=2.24), stimulating (M=2.36) or enjoyable (M=2.21). Further, they scored neutral or slightly positive on items measuring PEU (e.g. "I think learning to operate social media would be easy for me" – M=3.55; "I think I can use social media without help from an expert" – M=3.36). Surprisingly, despite scoring the lowest mean value in terms of both satisfaction (M=2.64) and intention to recommend to others (M=2.32) among all the clusters, they were very willing to start or continue to use SM in the future (M=4.36).

A series of Chi-squared statistical tests were performed with the aim to identify any differences among clusters based on specific business-related variables (Tab. 4).

Tab. 4: Chi-squared test

	Chi-squared	**Sig**
How often do you use social media?	*26.157*	*0.036**
When did you start using social media?	25.042	0.052
Is there a SM manager in your firm?	20.150	0.064
Does your firm have guidelines for SM use?	3.963	0.265
How many co-workers have Internet access?	**21.205**	**0.012***
Branches	*35.628*	*0.024**
Employees	85.822	0.185

Do you have adequate HW e SW for SM use?	0.301	0.960
Does your firm have a positive attitude towards Marketing and Communication tools?	**52.143**	**0.000****
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$*		

Source: Our elaboration

Results showed that differences existed between clusters based on the frequency of use of SM (χ^2 = 26.16, p=0.036), freedom to access the Internet (χ^2 = 21.21, p=0.012), number of branches (χ^2 = 35.63, p=0.024) and the firm's attitude towards marketing and communication tools (χ^2 = 52.14, p=0.000). No significant differences existed in length of use SM (χ^2 = 25.04, p=0.052), SM manager employment (χ^2 = 20.15, p=0.064), adoption of guidelines for SM use (χ^2 = 3.96, p=0.265), number of employees (χ^2 = 85.82, p=0.185) and adequate HW and SW for SM use (χ^2 = 0.30, p=0.96).

5. Conclusion

Despite the important role played by micro and small travel agencies in facilitating the competitiveness and the development of tourism destination (Hallak et al., 2015), especially in the context of Italy, very few studies have been devoted to analyse the ways micro and small travel agencies are reacting to changes and threats caused by the advent of globalisation, e-commerce and social media. This research was therefore carried out to broaden the scientific debate around this topic.

Specifically, the study presents and discusses results of a factor-cluster analysis, and showed that Italian street travel agencies are not homogeneous in their views and attitude towards SM use, as expressed in terms of six different factors, namely: perceived strategic value, perceived usefulness, emotional engagement, perceived ease of use, intention to use, and satisfaction and intention to recommend to others. Hence, results confirm that the level of SMEs' technology adoption is also not homogeneous (Lefebvre et al., 2005; Al-Qirim, 2007; Chen and McQueen, 2008). Specifically, results showed that four different clusters exist (i.e. passive users, enthusiasts, strategically myopics and active users), with passive and strategically myopics only accounting for 25.62%. Further, findings show that significant differences among clusters only exist based on frequency of SM use, freedom to access the Internet, number of branches and the firm's attitude towards marketing and communication. On the contrary, no significant differences were reported based on the adoption of SM use guidelines, number of employees, adequate hardware and software for SM use, length of SM use, and presence of a SM manager. The fact that clusters do not differ based on length of SM use and the availability of a SM manager seems to

contradict prior research suggesting that attitude towards technology, e.g. internet and social media, should be more positive when people are more experienced with it (Schumacher and Morahan-Martin, 2001). This may suggest that travel agencies are becoming quite sceptical about the actual benefits SM use allows them to exploit.

Further, the majority of respondents reported a lack of adequate technology at their disposal for SM use, which confirms that SMEs and travel agencies still do not have enough resources to engage with digital media (Brouthers et al., 2015; Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015). That said, this study found that "strategically myopics", the cluster with the most negative attitude towards SM use, also reported the highest consensus on stating that their firms had a negative attitude towards marketing and communication tools. This finding seems to suggest that SM adoption by SMEs is not necessarily driven by technical-related factors, and other factors (e.g. leadership and management attitude) may play a key role in inhibiting SM adoption (e.g. Spencer et al., 2012; Meske and Stiegliz, 2013). However, this study also showed that most Italian travel agencies (54.6%) employed a part-time or full-time SM manager, showing that the majority acknowledges the importance of digital media and is willing/committed to establish a specific organisational position in charge of this task. Moreover, 16.7% of the "strategically myopics" was reported not to allow their co-workers to access the Internet. This result further confirms that SMEs' management prejudices about technology and e-commerce are still one of the main barriers to adopting digital marketing (Taiminen and Karjaluoto, 2015; Camilleri, 2018).

The present study offers relevant insights for both researchers and practitioners. From a theoretical point of view, the study contributes to the scientific debate on the SMEs' adoption of technology and, more specifically, on SM use as a marketing and communication tool for travel agencies, widening the number of variables that can be considered as potential factors moderating the SMEs' perception of SM tools. From a managerial point of view, this study suggests that "soft" factors (e.g. management attitude towards the adoption of technology and the employees' degree of acceptance) are key factors facilitating SM adoption in travel agencies, and more in general in tourism-related SMEs. Furthermore, our results suggest that once travel agencies start engaging with social media, they should consider the possibility of removing all limitations to Internet access, while setting internal rules preventing SM for personal use during working hours. Furthermore, results suggest that travel agencies should employ a SM manager (part-time or full-time), in order to create a more favourable environment for employees to accept such engagement with digital tools, and to proactively manage and nurture the online reputation of the organisation. Finally, the reported lack of adequate software and hardware for

SM use leads to recommend that travel agency owners and managers invest more in upgrading their hardware and software systems. In this vein, considering that spending on the adoption of technology is often slowed down by costs and financial issues (e.g. Levy and Powell, 2005; Meske and Stiegliz, 2013), policy makers could consider the possibility to provide travel agencies with financial support (e.g. contributions, tax reliefs, etc.).

Despite the theoretical and managerial contributions, this paper is not free of limitations. First, the study is based on a convenience sample (not representative of the total population of travel agencies), so the findings cannot be considered generalisable. Future research could repeat this study on a larger sample and in other countries, as well as consider a wider number of variables that could moderate the views travel agencies have towards SM use. Further studies could also run more sophisticated statistics (i.e. SEM analysis) to test the different constructs shaping the intention to use (or continue to use) SM, the overall satisfaction and intention to recommend SM use to others.

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