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Trade shows and new media presence: The TS organizers' perspective

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Dissertation's structure: an overall framework

1.1 Theoretical objectives and research questions

The aim of the present dissertation is to gain deeper understanding about the adoption and use of Social media in the trade show (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 this work presents twofold objectives: on one hand, identifying the last twenty years' (1997-2017) evolution of the TSs literature from a business and management perspective, and on the other, outlining the main trends emerging from the recent (2010-2017) business and management international literature devoted to Trade Shows (TSs) and Trade Fairs (TFs), in the light of globalization effects, the consequences of the economic crisis and the new advent of media.

In particular, as a starting point the thesis takes the idea that the complexity and confusion related to the nature of trade show instruments (also confirmed by the recent literature (Tafesse, 2014)), could be best understood through a systematic review of the business and management literature devoted to this topic.

Moreover, starting from the assumption that the TSs study is inevitably tied to the principal stakeholders operating in the trade show platforms (Tafesse, 2014), another objective of the dissertation's review will be the identification of the most surveyed stakeholders (*exhibitors, visitors, organizers, other stakeholders*), in order to find possible literature gaps which need to be filled.

Relating to this, the research questions, that motivated the theoretical section of this dissertation, are the following:

RQ [1] *How has the business and management literature, devoted to TSs, evolved in the last twenty years?*

RQ [2] *Which are the main trends emerging from the recent (2010-2017) business and management literature devoted to TSs?*

RQ [3] *Which are the most surveyed TSs stakeholders in the contemporary business and management sector's literature?*

1.2 Methodology

In order to answer these theoretical research questions, the present dissertation adopts a process of literature review concerning all the business and management articles, of the last twenty years (1997-2017), dedicated to the trade shows (TSs) and trade fairs (TFs) topics.

1.3 Dissertation theoretical structure

The first part of the dissertation is structured as follows:

Chapter 2: Delineation of the TS topic's context and background (Definition of the TS instrument and its new functions and roles, identification of the evolutionary genesis emerging from the literature, focus on the digital phenomenon and TS virtualization);

Chapter 3: Identification of the descriptive characteristics of the review's database (papers frequency per year, journal analysis, identification of the most representative works per year, authors and methodology analysis);

Chapter 4: Identification of the subject areas most dealt with by the review papers, subdivided into three timeframes (1997-2003; 2004-2009; 2010-2017) corresponding to the main latest evolutions of the TS sector (Effects of globalization, ICT advent, post-crisis consequences); Identification of the main trends emerging from the recent (2010-2017) business and management literature dedicated to TSs and construction of a possible framework of analysis;

Chapter 5: Intersection of these trends with the analysis of the stakeholder categories (ex. focus on exhibitors, visitors, other stakeholders) in order to identify possible literature gaps that can be filled; Presentation of intersected reviews (contemporary trends analyzed according to the stakeholder category).

1.4 Empirical objectives and research questions

After analyzing the review's results and identifying the main trends characterizing the recent TS literature and the most examined stakeholders' categories, the empirical aim of the present work is to deepen 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 organizer's category represents an attempt to fill a specific research gap, which emerged from the review, concerning the scant attention of the TS literature towards this stakeholders' target (Rinallo et Al., 2016; Tafesse, 2014; Jin et Al., 2013). The TS organizers' perspective has been then adopted with a view to analyzing the implementation of the social media tools on trade show strategies and activities and the reaction to the virtual trade shows' (VTSs) advent, in this way enriching the literature studies focused

on the "*TSs and new media*" and "*Virtual TSs*" trends (two of the main tendencies emerged from the literature review, whose results have been synthetized in the theoretical section of the dissertation).

With reference to the first analyzed trend, as its starting point, the dissertation takes the work of Singh et Al. (2017), which proposes the investigation of the implementation and use of social networks and other rapidly developing digital communication tools for trade show activities, in future researches.

Regarding the second trend, the present work intends to extend the study of Gottlieb and Bianchi (2017), which examines the exhibitors' experiences of participating in virtual trade shows (VTSs), by deepening the impact of the virtualization phenomenon from the organizer's perspective.

Starting from this overview, the main purpose of the dissertation is to analyze, through in-depth interviews, the impact of social media and the virtualization phenomenon on the TS organizers' strategies and activities. In doing so, it should gain deeper insights about their online behavior (type of adopted social media platforms, typology of activities carried out, business figures in charge of social media management, the role assumed by users).

This objective is accomplished by formulating specific research questions and by doing in-depth interviews that can answer them. Relating to this, the RQs, that motivated the empirical section of the present work, are the following:

- With reference to the first analyzed trend (the implementation and use of social media from the TS organizers' perspective):

  RQ [4] Which are the main strengths/weaknesses of the social media adoption? Overall, from the TS organizers' perspective, which are the main challenges to overcome, in order to effectively exploit the social media potentialities?

  RQ [5] In the social media adoption, how TS organizers perceive the role of users?

- With reference to the second analyzed trend (the advent of virtual trade shows):

  RQ [6] From the TS organizers' perspective, could virtual trade shows become the new format of the future?

1.5 Methodology

In order to reach the empirical purpose, the present dissertation employs an explorative research design, characterized by three main phases:

1. Identification and adoption of a social media visibility 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;

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 the TS organizers (*n*=107), identified through the adoption of the social media index;

4. Examination and elaboration of the interviews' transcripts (*n*=38) by adopting a process of thematic analysis in order to identify, analyze and report patterns or themes that emerged from the data (Braun, Clarke, 2006).

1.6 Dissertation empirical structure

The empirical part of the dissertation is structured as follows:

Chapter 6: Presentation of the results of a process of literature review aimed at identifying how business and management literature defines the concept of online visibility;

Chapter 7: Presentation of the research methodology and the selected survey sample;

Chapter 8: Presentation of 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;

Chapter 9: Discussion concerning the theoretical/managerial implications, the main limitations of the work and possible directions for future research.

Table 1.1: Dissertation's structure: an overall framework

Theoretical section	Objective	To gain deeper understanding about the adoption and use of Social media in the trade show (TS) context and in particular from the exhibition organizers' perspective.
	Research questions	**RQ** [1] How has the business and management literature, devoted to the TSs, evolved in the last twenty years? **RQ** [2] Which are the main trends emerging from the recent (2010-2017) business and management literature devoted to TSs? **RQ** [3] Which are the most surveyed TSs stakeholders in the contemporary business and management literature sector?
	Methodology	Literature review.
Empirical section	Objective	To analyze the impact of social media implementation and the virtualization phenomenon on the TS organizers' strategies and activities.
	Research questions	**RQ** [4] Which are the main strengths/weaknesses of the social media adoption? Overall, from the TS organizers' perspective, which are the main challenges to overcome, in order to effectively exploit the social media potentialities? **RQ** [5] In the social media adoption, how TS organizers perceive the role of users? **RQ** [6] From the TS organizers' perspective, could virtual trade shows become the new format of the future?
	Methodology	Adoption of an explorative research design (Adoption of a SM visibility index; in-depth interviews, examination of the interviews' transcripts by adopting a process of thematic analysis).

Source: Author's elaboration

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The development of TSs according to the literature

2.1 Introduction

Trade shows (TSs) were defined in 1986 as "events that bring together, in a single location, a group of suppliers who set up physical exhibits of their products and services from a given industry or discipline" (Black, 1986).

TSs still represent a leading business and a development instrument for the global and European economy (Tafesse, 2014).

With 465 exhibition centers, the European continent still holds more than 50% of global exhibition space (AEFI, 2016), especially in Germany, Italy and France which dominate the entire industry in terms of venues, exhibitors and visitors (UFI 2016; Li, 2015; Chu, Chiu, 2013; Smith et Al., 2004).

In particular, today, in the Italian 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 into new markets. According to AEFI, in 2016 for 88.5% of Italian SMEs, trade fairs continue to represent a communicative platform of primary importance.

In 2016, the Italian exhibition centers hosted 946 events, 189 of which were international. Overall, each year the exhibition industry contributes to the movement of millions of visitors, generating a turnover of 60 billion euros and a sales volume of 2 billion euros (UFI, 2016). This creates significant impacts on the host cities in terms of transport, catering and hotel facilities (Tafesse, 2014).

In the literature context, the TSs topic became a systematic research argument during the 1980-1990 decade (Soilen, 2013). In those years, the trade show theme was mainly focused on the importance of this instrument in a purely promotional/sales perspective (Aloui, 2016; Li, 2015; Rodriguez et Al., 2015; Çobanoğlu, Turaeva, 2014; Soilen, 2013; Tafesse, Korneliussen, 2012; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010; Bathelt, Schuldt, 2008; Power, 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, Turaeva 2014). The focus was therefore mainly directed on the trade shows' selling objectives at the expense of the non-selling-objectives (Menon, Manoj, 2013).

In contrast, in recent years, alongside a growing interest of the literature sector towards the TSs topic (Menon, Manoj, 2013; Prado-Roman et Al., 2012), a trend reversal has occurred. The trade show tool, in fact, far from being considered as a mere selling and promotion instrument, has begun to be perceived as a vital part

of the firm's marketing mix (Rinallo et Al., 2016; Sasaka, 2012) and as a strategic marketing leverage achieving selling and non-selling objectives (Çobanoğlu, Turaeva, 2014; Soilen, 2013).

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 is also in the light of the major socio-economic changes of the new millennium (Li, 2015; Chu, Chiu, 2013; Sasaka, 2012).

Against this background, the last few years' literature has identified new functions that trade shows could exercise as relational platforms, in which the many participants (exhibitors, visitors, organizers, exhibitor centers, cities) respond not only to commercial stimuli (Andreae et Al., 2013), but also and, above all, to information/knowledge exchange (Li, 2015).

Therefore, the attention of literature has moved from selling objectives to non-selling ones. These are also able to influence the long-term, future TSs stakeholders purchase decisions in a different way (Chu, Chiu, 2013).

In this way, TSs evolve from mere promotional/sales settings to relational/informational exchange platforms able to contribute to the 1) firms' brand identity construction (Chu, Chiu, 2013); 2) establishment of informative relations between trade fair stakeholders (Li, 2015); 3) presentation/transfer of technologies/innovations of the products/services presented in the TS booths (Aloui, 2016); 4) information transfer, cooperation and future trade relations (Cop, Kara, 2014); 5) learning/knowledge creation; 6) access to new technologies, market trends and potential partners (Rodriguez et Al., 2015); 7) customer relationship building, competitive intelligence and market information gathering (De Freitas, Da Silva, 2013; Tafesse, Korneliussen, 2012); 8) relational networking (Soilen, 2013; Evers, Knight, 2008); 9) benchmarking strategies (Çobanoğlu, Turaeva, 2014).

Overall, it clearly emerges from literature how trade shows have been a topic of great interest for years (Gottlieb et Al., 2014; Tafesse, 2014; Prado-Roman et Al., 2012; Tafesse, Korneliussen, 2011) recently characterized by a profound change, which has led to an evolution of the definition, roles and functions of TSs (Rodriguez et Al., 2015). This is also in the light of the last decade's socio-economic changes (Rodriguez et Al., 2015; Menon, Manoj, 2013; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010).

2.2 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., 2014; Gottlieb et Al., 2011; Herbig et Al., 1997; Kijewski et Al., 1993). 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 in an ambiguous way, 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 TSs topic became a systematic research argument), the authors began to focus their attention mainly on the trade shows' selling objectives, by defining them as events in which products and services are sold (Black, 1986; 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, Balogh, 1996; Rosson, Seringaus, 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, 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, Lilien, 1995) and as services involving a series of activities that must be perfectly coordinated (Munuera, Ruiz, 1999).

In his work, Blythe (1999) proposed a comparison between trade shows and conventions in order to underline how these two types of business events are different in a number of ways: [1] *location*: not fixed for conventions, fixed for trade shows; [2] *participants*: only one group in the conventions (targeted by the event organizers), two groups in the trade shows, targeted by the event organizers (exhibitors and visitors or buyers), with the relationship between them influencing trade show participation; [3] *primary purpose*: educational and network opportunities in the conventions' case, business transactions and information

exchange for trade show attendees; [4] *display*: the logistic function represents, for trade shows, a fundamental concern as TSs often involve products' displays and booths; [5] *costs*: for convention participants, they are generally the same, while for trade show attendees can differ significantly for visitors and exhibitors, with the latter paying different fees depending on the location and size of their booths.

As the trade show tool is a dynamic instrument that adapts itself to socioeconomic needs, the TSs concept has also evolved over time, in order to accompany this evolution (for an in-depth analysis, please refer to the Paragraph 2.4).

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 important tools for communication, development of relationships with key stakeholders and for information collection (Blythe, 2002; Rice, Almossawi, 2002; Tanner, 2002; Godar, O'Connor, 2001; Wilkinson, 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 trade show 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 visitor interaction among themselves (Borghini et Al., 2006) in a short span of time in one location (Evers, Knight, 2008; Lee, Kim, 2008; Maskell et Al., 2006; Torre, Rallet, 2005).

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 (Manero, Uceda, 2010; De Vajuany et Al., 2013).

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) conceiving them as "learning expeditions that engage industrial buyers' creative thinking towards the solving of work related problems" (Rinallo et Al., 2010, p. 253).

By continuing along the same direction, Soilen (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. While in their 2016 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 (Luo, Zhong, 2016; Jeong, 2016 ; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015 ; Kalafsky, Gress, 2014 ; Li, Shrestha, 2013 ; Jer, 2014; Richardson et Al., 2012 ; Kontinen, Ojala, 2011 ; Ramírez-Pasillas, 2010).

Overall the TS definitions, emerging from the post-crisis years' research, summarize the multiple contributions proposed by the literature of the last 30 years, by conceptualizing these tools as important platforms for transacting business, acquiring competitive information, establishing personal, professional and institutional ties, immerging participants in an experiential context, networking with international operators, managing brand image and corporate reputation, learning about the social and cultural systems of local markets, and reassuring customers (Luo, Zhong, 2016; Jeong, 2016; Rinallo et Al., 2016; Alberca-Oliver et Al., 2015; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Oromendia et Al., 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2015a; 2015b; 2015c; Rodriguez et Al., 2015; Tafesse, Skallerud, 2015; Gottlieb et Al., 2014; Kalafsky, Gress, 2014; Jer, 2014; De Vaujany et Al., 2013; Li, Shrestha, 2013; Richardson et Al., 2012; Gottlieb et Al., 2011; Kontinen, Ojala, 2011; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010; Manero, Uceda, 2010; Ramirez-Pasillas, 2010; Rinallo et Al., 2010; Soilen, 2010).

Table 2.1 summarizes the evolution of the principal TS definitions, proposed by the literature of the last 30 years.

Table 2.1: Evolution of trade show definitions

TIME FRAMES	PRINCIPAL DEFINITIONS
1980-1990 *Attention focused on the trade shows' selling objectives*	Trade shows are temporary marketplaces where suppliers from an industry or product group gather to showcase their products and services to current and potential buyers, the media, and other purchase influencers (Black, 1986).
	Trade shows are mainly events that sell products and services or where contracts are signed (Bonoma, 1983).

1990-2000 *Focus on globalization effects*	Business events where individuals, enterprises, and organizations set up physical exhibits of their products and trade with others in domestic or foreign markets (Palumbo et Al., 1998).
	A significant marketing tool that can substantially influence a company's ability to compete and succeed in the rapidly globalizing business environments (Seringhaus, Rosson, 1998).
	Temporary markets that enable transactional and informational exchanges among sellers and buyers (Sharland, Balogh, 1996).
	Microcosms of the industries they represent, with a multitude of buyers and sellers, service providers, partners, industry and regulatory bodies, all gathered in one place to do business (Rosson, Seringhaus, 1995).
	Trade shows as potential networking forums for their participants (Rosson, Seringhaus, 1995).
1990-2000 *Focus on the TS promotional role*	Differences between exhibitions and conventions (Blythe, 1999).
	Trade shows are more like a service involving a series of activities that must be perfectly coordinated (Munuera, Ruiz, 1999).
	Promotional tools that involve both direct selling and advertising (Blythe, 1999; Gopalakrishna, Lilien, 1995).
	Trade shows are major industry marketing events (Herbig et al., 1997).
Early 2000s *Focus on the relational aspects*	An important tool for communication and the development of relationships with customers (Blythe, 2002).
	Opportunity for transactional selling, and thus may overlook opportunities that exist for initiating and building relationships with key accounts (Blythe, 2002).
	Exhibitions are a valuable way for firms to communicate with current and potential customers (Rice, Almossawi, 2002).
	A level playing field, a place where a smaller company can look like a larger one (Tanner, 2002).
	Personal, providing face-to-face contact in confined time and space (Godar, O'Connor 2001).
	A powerful way for firms to reach a large number of potential customers face-to-face at a lower cost than that of salespeople calls (Blythe, 2000).
	Trade shows are considered to be a particularly effective activity, both in terms of the immediate sales which they produce, as well as the gain in information that they provide about potential markets (Wilkinson, Brouthers, 2000).

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2000-2010 *Focus on the experiential component and on the role of TSs as temporary clusters*	Trade shows can be considered a highly cost-effective mechanism for meeting a large number of potential suppliers and customers in a short span of time in one location (Evers, Knight, 2008).
	Trade shows go well beyond that of a marketing, selling and information platform and make an important contribution to establishment and enhancement of a network infrastructure which enables small firms to grow and expand internationally (Evers, Knight, 2008).
	Trade shows as neutral territory, as accelerators of internationalization, critical knowledge hubs, network spaces (Evers, Knight 2008).
	A trade show is a temporary, time sensitive marketplace where exhibitors and visitors interact for the express purpose of purchasing displayed goods or services, either at the time of presentation or at a future date (Lee, Kim, 2008).
	A trade show may be conceived as a temporary network of companies that stages micro-experiences for their target customers thanks to the presence of their products and human resources and through a booth design that facilitates the interaction of visitors among themselves (Borghini et Al., 2006).
	Temporary industry clusters exhibiting many of the characteristics ascribed to permanent industry spatial clusters, however in a temporary and intensified form (Maskell et Al., 2006).
	Temporary clusters that enable participating firms to engage in intensive interaction based on organized proximity (Torre, Rallet, 2005).
Post-crisis period (2010 – onwards) • *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)*	From this knowledge-based perspective, trade shows are conceived as temporary clusters where forms of organized proximity make it possible for firms to interact with and learn from geographically distant participants and, as a result, escape the negative aspects of embeddedness (Rinallo et Al., 2016).
	Miniature versions of global industry clusters with a multitude of firms that are horizontally linked as competitors and vertically related as suppliers or users (Rinallo et Al., 2016).

	A trade show can be considered as a business event that generates a concentration of supply and demand in a specific place and on a regular basis, where participants (both exhibitors and visitors) can exchange opinions, receive information, and negotiate (Rodriguez et Al., 2015).
	Trade fairs as strategic exchange mediums by which firms establish a variety of exchange relations to accomplish their respective organizational goals and objectives (Tafesse, Skallerud, 2015).
	The recession also reinforced the need for social contacts to reassure customers and show them that vendors were still in business and that they were economically stable (Adams et Al., 2017; De Vaujany et Al., 2013).
	Trade shows as excellent possibilities for participants to network with international operators in the same industry, giving them access to new foreign markets (Kontinen, Ojala, 2011).
	Learning expeditions that engage industrial buyers' creative thinking towards the solving of work related problems (Rinallo et Al., 2010).
	Embodied experiences, characterized by physical fatigue and sensorial overwhelming (Rinallo et Al., 2010).
	Trade shows can be seen as compressed situation of knowledge gathering for innovations through the function of Market Intelligence (Soilen, 2010).

Source: Author's elaboration

2.3 TSs typologies and functions

In order to reduce the confusion and ambiguity around the trade show concept, the specialized literature and the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry (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.

In particular, five classification criteria have been proposed (UFI, 2010; Beier, Damböck, 2008): [1] market coverage, [2] typologies of admitted visitors, [3] geographical coverage, [4] exchange typologies and [5] trade show typologies.

Table 2.2: Trade show classification criteria

Classification criteria	Trade show denomination
Market coverage	1. General trade shows 2. Multi-industry trade shows 3. Specialized trade shows
Typologies of admitted visitors	1. B2B trade shows (Business to Business) 2. B2C trade shows (Business to Consumers) 3. Mixed trade shows
Geographical coverage	1. Regional trade shows 2. National trade shows 3. International trade shows
Exchange typologies	1. National exchange trade shows 2. Demand trade shows 3. Supply trade shows 4. International exchange trade shows
Trade show typologies	1. Physical trade shows 2. Virtual trade shows

Source: Author's elaboration from UFI (2010)

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. The specialized trade shows display products limited to a specific sub-sector or to 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).

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 based on the typologies of admitted visitors, the mixed trade shows. These are events where the organizers decide to address both the industry and final consumers.

Taking the exhibitors' and visitors' origins as a reference variable, the trade shows can be classified into regional, national and international (Rinallo et Al., 2016).

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).

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.

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

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 2.4 and 2.6).

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.

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 TS 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, 2009).

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-Oliver et Al., 2015).

2.4 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, 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, the sample 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, 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).

From the academic perspective, marketing and management scholars began investigating trade shows in the late 1960s, with the principal aim of offering guidance to industrial marketers on how to take full advantage of their TS participation (Rinallo et Al., 2016).

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, Jasiński, 2014; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010).

Against this background, the exhibition sector has had to adapt its roles and functions. Table 2.3 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.

Table 2.3: Last year's TS sector evolution

Years	Drivers of change	Principal 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)

Concerning the first driver of change (globalization effects), 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 (Bathelt et Al., 2014), represented a clear consequence of this emerging phenomenon.

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, Rosson, 1998; Sharland, Balogh, 1996; Rosson, Seringaus, 1995).

At the same time, a transition from the producer-exhibitor viewpoint to a demand orientation emerges. In fact, 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 the resulting increase 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).

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, Bianchi, 2017; Kirchgeorg 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 showcase, 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 coordinated with the event execution (Gottlieb, Bianchi, 2017; Geigenmuller, 2010; Lee et Al., 2008).

From the third drive of change point of view (consequences of the economic crisis), 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. 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, 2010; UFI, 2010).

Against this background of change, the sectorial literature (AEFI, 2010; 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 (UFI, 2010; AEFI, 2010).

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. It could do this by enabling (through the exploitation of the Internet) 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. This 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 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. It is emerged from sectorial studies, and 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 is 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, 2010; UFI, 2010).

Overall, the post-crisis consequences, accompanied by the previous phenomena, concerning the 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).

2.5 Trade shows: New roles and functions

Starting from the assumption that the TSs 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, they decide to attend a trade show event principally in order to find out the latest trends, identify industry

innovations and seek new ideas (Luo, Zhong 2016; Rinallo et Al. 2016; Oromendia et Al., 2015; Evers, Knight, 2008; Ling-Yee, 2006; Rice, Almossawi, 2002). Consequently, the product becomes only a small part of what they want to see and know. 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.

In fact, the 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, live emotions, and experiences (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, Chonko, 1995; Gopalakrishna et Al., 1995; Gopalakrishna, Lilien, 1995; Shoham, 1992; Kerin, 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 began to be diverted towards the non-selling functions (Blythe, 2002; Rice, Almossawi, 2002; Tanner, 2002; Godar, 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.

Particular attention is addressed to the public relations function, which enables the maintenance of the exhibition firm's position/credibility and creates a healthy image, as non-attendance would lead to a perception that the exhibitor may be in trouble (Blythe, 2002).

In their work, Rice and Almossawi (2002) mainly focus their attention on the human interaction function of trade shows. They represent, in fact, (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).

Also Borghini et Al. (2006) confirm the importance of TS non-selling functions, with the establishment and maintenance of relationships as well as the necessity of reducing the social and technological distance from sellers representing a couple of the main TS functions from the visitor's perspective.

In their work, Evers and Knight (2008) highlight the network function of trade shows as "temporary hubs that stimulate processes of knowledge creation and dissemination." (Evers, Knight, 2008, p. 555). In particular, for exhibition firms, trade show functions extend well beyond the traditional roles, by permitting the creation and development of effective network infrastructures and relationships for international growth and expansion.

In this way, instead of conceiving trade shows as primarily a selling opportunity, 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, Knight, 2008, p. 556).

Based on these considerations, the authors conclude by underlying the importance of the interaction and exchange function of trade shows as neutral territories and network spaces, able to facilitate face-to-face communication between firms (Sarmento et Al., 2015b; Oromendia et Al., 2015; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010; Soilen, 2010; Lee et Al., 2008). It allows them to exchange vital resources in order to advance and accelerate their internationalization processes (Rinallo et Al., 2016).

By continuing along 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 (Sarmento et Al., 2015b), maintaining relationships, attending, exhibiting and participating in conferences, educating, and learning (Brzeziński, Jasiński, 2014).

"What is unique in the trade show environment is a combination of practical and theoretical knowledge, presentation of the latest and future trends and presence of people representing all roles and fields of industry" (Brzeziński, Jasiński, 2014, p. 20). 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. (2016). 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 firm's decision processes (Soilen, 2010). Overall, "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., 2016, p. 7).

By focusing on the basic functions of the trade show as a marketing instrument, Oromendia et Al. (2015) conclude by affirming that functions pertaining to the relationship marketing perspective must be present along with functions pertaining to that of transactional marketing. Therefore, transactional and relationship marketing should be seen as complementary marketing strategies.

Overall, the new TS functions, emerged from recent literature, can be summarized into five specific categories: [1] reassurance; [2] contact; [3] experiential; [4] exchange and [5] benchmark functions.

The first function (reassurance) 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; Soilen, 2010; Blythe, 2002).

The possibility to touch products, in order to understand what they are like and how they work represents the contact function of trade shows (Oromendia et Al., 2015; Evers, Knight, 2008; Rice, Almossawi, 2002). 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).

By also including the contact 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).

The fourth task (exchange) can in turn be categorized into five major exchange functions: transactional, informational, social, symbolic and cultural (Tafesse, 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 (Tafesse, Skallerud, 2015; Rice, Almossawi, 2002; Tanner, 2002; Godar, 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 (Luo, Zhong, 2016; Rinallo et Al., 2016; Oromendia et Al., 2015; Tafesse, Skallerud, 2015; Evers, Knight, 2008; Ling-Yee, 2006; Rice, 2002; Blythe, 2002).

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 (Luo, Zhong, 2016; Oromendia et Al., 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2015a; 2015c; Tafesse, Skallerud, 2015; Soilen, 2010; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010; Evers, Knight, 2008; Borghini et Al., 2006; Rice, Almossawi, 2002). 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 which 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, 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 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 the participants to engage in macro-level symbolic exchanges, by acquiring importance, visibility and reputation (Luo, Zhog, 2016; Oromendia et Al., 2015; Tafesse, Skallerud, 2015; Blythe, 2002).

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, 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, Laroche, 2007, p. 250).

The last function of trade shows that emerged from recent literature is the benchmark function. 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 (Luo, Zhong, 2016; Rinallo et Al., 2016; Soilen, 2010; Blythe, 2002).

Table 2.4 summarizes the classification of the main functions of trade shows identified by recent literature (2000s – onwards), with the respective authors and the specific target they focus on.

Table 2.4: New trade show functions: A classification

Reassurance function		
Principal tasks	Authors	Focus on specific target
Maintaining firm's position	Blythe (2002)	Exhibitors
Maintaining credibility	Blythe (2002)	Exhibitors
Maintaining a healthy image	Blythe (2002); Soilen (2010); De Vaujany et Al. (2013)	Exhibitors
Confirming existing suppliers	Borghini et Al. (2006)	Visitors
Evaluating alternatives	Borghini et Al. (2006)	Visitors

Contact function		
Principal tasks	Authors	Focus on specific target
Product presentation/demonstration	Rice, Almossawi (2002); Evers, Knight (2008)	Exhibitors
Touching products	Rice, Almossawi (2002); Borghini et Al. (2006); Oromendia et Al. (2015)	Visitors/Buyers
Understanding how products work	Borghini et Al. (2006)	Buyers
Taking away sample/prototypes	Borghini et Al. (2006)	Buyers
Re-evoking experiences	Borghini et Al. (2006)	Buyers/Visitors

Experiential function		
Principal tasks	Authors	Focus on specific target
Immersing participants in embodied experiences	Borghini et Al. (2006)	Buyers/Visitors
Touching, smelling, listening to, tasting different stimuli	Borghini et Al. (2006)	Buyers/Visitors

Exchange function	Principal tasks	Authors	Focus on specific target
Transactional	Selling to customers	Godar, O'Connor (2001); Tanner (2002)	Exhibitors
	Financial exchange	Rice, Almossawi (2002); Tafesse, Skallerud (2015)	Buyers-Sellers
	Signing a contact	Rice, Almossawi (2002)	Exhibitors
	Making a sale	Rice, Almossawi (2002)	Exhibitors
	Selling goods/services	Oromendia et Al. (2015)	Exhibitors
	Increasing sales opportunities	Sarmento et Al. (2015a; 2015b; 2015c)	Exhibitors
	Monetary or contractual transferring of goods and services	Tafesse, Skallerud (2015)	Buyers-Sellers
Information	Obtaining up-to-date information	Blythe (2002); Borghini et Al. (2006)	Visitors
	Gathering purchase, competitors, general market and latest technologies information	Rice, Almossawi (2002); Ling-Yee (2006); Evers, Knight (2008); Oromendia et Al. (2015); Luo, Zhong (2016); Rinallo et Al. (2016)	Exhibitors/Buyers
	Transferring and sharing of information	Tanner (2002); Wilkinson, Brouthers (2009); Tafesse, Skallerud (2015)	Exhibitors/Visitors Buyers
	Gathering information about market access, new products, potential suppliers and alternative purchases	Ling-Yee (2006); Sarmento et Al. (2015a; 2015b; 2015c); Oromendia et Al. (2015)	Visitors
	Facilitating the exchange of knowledge	Borghini et Al. (2006); Brzeziński, Jasiński (2014)	Visitors
	Stimulating processes of knowledge creation and dissemination	Evers, Knight (2008)	Exhibitors
	Knowledge acquisition and diffusion	Evers, Knight (2008); Soilen (2010); Sarmento et Al. (2015a); Tafesse, Skallerud (2015); Luo, Zhong (2016); Rinallo et Al. (2016)	Exhibitors/Visitors/ Buyers
	Presenting the latest and future trends	Brzeziński, Jasiński (2014); Rodriguez et Al. (2015); Oromendia et Al. (2015)	Exhibitors
	Promoting research and training	Oromendia et Al. (2015)	Exhibitors/Visitors/ Buyers
	Launching new products	Luo, Zhong (2016)	Exhibitors

Social	Facilitating/enhancing business networks	Wilkinson, Brouthers (2000); Godar, O' Connor (2001); Evers, Knight (2008); Sarmento et Al. (2015b); Tafesse, Skallerud (2015); Rinallo et Al. (2016)	Buyers/Exhibitors
	Meeting/contacting customers/buyers	Blythe (2002); Luo, Zhong (2016)	Exhibitors
	Meeting/contacting distributors/suppliers	Blythe (2002); Borghini et Al. (2006); Ling-Yee (2006)	Visitors/Buyers
	Establishing/maintaining relationships	Rice, Almossawi (2002); Borghini et Al. (2006); Evers, Knight (2008); Kirchgeorg et Al., (2010); Soilen (2010); Brzeziński, Jasiński (2014); Oromendia et Al. (2015); Sarmento et Al. (2015a); Tafesse, Skallerud (2015); Luo, Zhong (2016)	Exhibitors/Visitors/ Buyers
	Meeting among visitors	Borghini et Al. (2006)	Visitors
	Developing and work on existing business relationships	Borghini et Al. (2006)	Exhibitors/Visitors
	Nurturing ongoing search processes	Borghini et Al. (2006)	Exhibitors/Visitors
	Reducing social distance from sellers	Borghini et Al. (2006)	Visitors
	Establishing communities of practice	Borghini et Al. (2006); Sarmento et Al. (2015b); Rinallo et Al. (2016)	Visitors/Buyers
	Establishing personal acquaintances	Tafesse, Skallerud (2015)	Exhibitors/Visitors/ Buyers
	Renewing existing friendships	Tafesse, Skallerud (2015)	Exhibitors/Visitors/ Buyers
	Forging professional rapports	Tafesse, Skallerud (2015)	Exhibitors/Visitors/ Buyers
Symbolic	Enhancing the image of the company	Blyte (2002); Oromendia et Al. (2015): Luo, Zhong (2016)	Exhibitors
	Enhancing staff morale	Blythe (2002); Wilkinson, Brouthers (2009)	Exhibitors
	Strengthening reputation and brand image	Borghini et Al. (2006); Tafesse, Skallerud (2015)	Exhibitors
	Acquiring importance and visibility	Wilkinson, Brouthers, (2009); Tafesse, Skallerud (2015)	Exhibitors
	Generating company and brand awareness	Wilkinson, Brouthers (2009); Kirchgeorg et Al. (2010)	Exhibitors
	Personal branding	Brzeziński, Jasiński (2014)	Exhibitors/Visitors/Buyers
	Professional development	Brzeziński, Jasiński (2014)	Exhibitors/Visitors/Buyers
	Enhancing market position, corporate reputation or technological leadership	Tafesse, Skallerud (2015)	Exhibitors

	Enhancing a company's profile and its new products	Rodriguez et Al. (2015); Oromendia et Al. (2015)	Exhibitors
Cultural	Knowing the organizational culture	Brzeziński, Jasiński (2014)	Exhibitors/Visitors/Buyers
	Involving the reproduction and transfer of cultural norms, values and meanings among culturally diverging markets	Tafesse, Skallerud (2015)	Exhibitors/Visitors/Buyers
	Deploying cultural values, norms and customs	Tafesse, Skallerud (2015)	Exhibitors/Visitors/Buyers

Benchmarking function		
Principal tasks	Authors	Focus on specific target
Carrying out general marketing research	Blythe (2002)	Exhibitors/Buyers
Gathering purchase, competitors, general market and latest technologies information	Rice, Almossawi (2002); Ling-Yee (2006); Evers, Knight (2008); Oromedia et Al. (2015); Luo, Zhong (2016); Rinallo et Al. (2016)	Exhibitors/Buyers
Scanning other markets	Rinallo et Al. (2016)	Exhibitors/Buyers
Watching competitors	Rinallo et Al. (2016); Soilen (2010)	Exhibitors/Buyers
Evaluating developments in the industry	Rinallo et Al. (2016)	Exhibitors/Buyers
Offering a unique competition overview	Rinallo et Al. (2016)	Exhibitors/Buyers

Source: Author's elaboration

2.6 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 Web or 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, Romdhane, 2014; Patel, 2013; Fuchs et Al., 2010). Today the worldwide Internet penetration has reached 46% of the population, with 3 and a half billion users connected to the Net, with an annual average growth of 10% (We are social, 2016).

The passage from Web 1.0 (whose main features were static websites/portals and linear navigation) to Web 2.0 brought about two major consequences: [1] a value production shift from businesses to consumers and [2] a power shift from firms to users (Aghaei et Al., 2012; Berthon et Al., 2012; Cormode, Krishnamurthy, 2008; Constantinides, Fountain, 2008).

Characterized by user-generated contents, 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; Berthon et Al., 2012;

Costantinides, Fountain, 2008; Cormode, Krishnamurthy, 2008). 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 represent 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 (Berthon et Al., 2012; Hanna et Al., 2011; Kietzman et Al., 2011; Kaplan Haenlein, 2010).

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) as the "dynamos of this new media" (2012, p. 263), 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, which are able to aggregate and connect vast networks of users, have become a major business opportunity for firms of any size and from any sector.

In particular, from the specialized literature focused on the study of Social media adoption (Lacoste, 2016; Ainin et Al., 2015; Siamagka et Al., 2015; Wamba, Carter, 2013; Berthon et Al., 2012; Michaelidou et al., 2011), three macro-areas of SM utilization in the business setting emerge:

1. *Business intelligence and information gathering*: drawing on the enormous amount of information provided by social media, firms carry out business intelligence activities and monitor their current/potential competitors and customers, mapping, in this way, their purchase behaviors and identifying market segments to serve and business opportunities to capture (Ainin et Al., 2015; Wamba, Carter, 2013);

2. *Relational networks creation*: firms adopt SM to communicate more quickly and in real time with their customers, to ensure clients' loyalty and to influence conversations, in order to generate positive word of mouth towards their products, services and brands (Ainin et Al., 2015; Michaelidou et Al., 2011). The establishment of bilateral firm-customer dialogues also 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, Carter, 2013) and the feedback processes (Michaelidou et Al., 2011). 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;

3. *Branding*: the third field of SM 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 2.5 summarizes the main new media typologies (with the respective advantages), adopted in the exhibition sector, classified on the basis of the TS phase.

Tab. 2.5: New technologies and TS phases: A classification

Trade show phases	Typologies 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 catalogues	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 redefying 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

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, 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).

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 them 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).

The second pre-show category, the online configurators, allows managing the organization of the exhibition space through the adoption of specialized portals.

This tool is 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 organizer and exhibitor's necessities, by offering more precise and timely communication.

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; De Vaujany et Al., 2013; Lee et Al., 2008).

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, 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 actively interact into the exhibition spaces and to share the experiences during the event; [3] collecting precise information about the at-show participants.

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.

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.

At the same time, the 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.

Touch-screen technologies and geo-location devices represent the main technologies adopted during the at-show phase (Chongwatpol, 2015; Lilien, Grewal, 2012) in order to enable visitors to actively interact in the exhibition spaces.

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 an 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 enable a more in depth pooled analysis.

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 the 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.

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, Grewal, 2012).

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).

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, and contact and collect information about them (Lee et Al., 2008).

The last post-show category of tools concerns the value and performance indexes, applications also adopted in the at-show stage (Ex. 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.

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).

Started in the 1990s, as a result of the Internet evolution, there was the idea that virtual trade shows could replace the physical trade shows. This was thanks to a wide range of advantages, such as the elimination of time-related restrictions and the possibility of avoiding spatial displacements necessary to travel to the physical events.

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 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, Bianchi, 2017; Geigenmuller, 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 4.2.3).

Overall, from the TS literature concerning the digitalization phenomenon, a scant presence of studies focused on the adoption of social media in the exhibition sector emerges (Singh et Al., 2017). Against this background and by considering the importance assumed in recent years by social media in the business context, these authors propose to realize future researches based on the investigation of the implementation of social media for trade show activities in the different phases (Pre-show, at-show, post-show).

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[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).

2.7 Theoretical purpose and research questions

After delineating the complexity and the multiple facets characterizing the phenomenon of TSs, as well as the speed with which these tools change over time, the first purpose of this dissertation presents a twofold objective: identifying, on one hand, the last twenty years' (1997-2017) evolution of TS literature from a business and management perspective, and on the other, to outline the main trends emerging from recent (2010-2017) business and management international literature devoted to Trade Shows (TSs) and Trade Fairs (TFs), in the light of globalization effects, the consequences of the economic crisis and the new advent of media.

More specifically, the first goal of this work is to gain a broader understanding of the roles and functions of the TS tool from a business and management point of view. As its starting point, the thesis takes the idea that the complexity and confusion related to the nature of the trade show instrument, confirmed also by recent literature (Tafesse, 2014), could be best understood through a systematic review of business and management literature devoted to this topic.

Moreover, starting from the assumption that the TSs study is inevitably tied to the principal stakeholders operating in the trade show platforms (Tafesse, 2014), another aim of the dissertation's review will be the identification of the most surveyed stakeholders (*exhibitors, visitors, organizers, other stakeholders*), in order to find possible literature gaps which need to be filled.

Relating to this, the research questions, that motivated the theoretical section of this dissertation, are the following:

RQ [1] How has business and management literature, devoted to TSs, evolved in the last twenty years?

RQ [2] Which are the main trends emerging from recent (2010-2017) business and management literature devoted to the TSs?

RQ [3] Which are the most surveyed TS stakeholders in the contemporary business and management literature sector?

In order to answer these theoretical research questions, the present dissertation adopts a process of literature review (whose criteria definition and results will be illustrated in the next chapters) concerning all the business and management articles dedicated to the topics of trade shows (TSs) and trade fairs (TFs) of the last twenty years (1997-2017).

3

Descriptive review of TSs and TFs literature (1997-2017)

3.1 Literature Review: Criteria definition

In order to outline the evolution of the business and management literature devoted to the topic of TSs, the present dissertation adopts a process of literature review 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 [3] time frame (1997-2017). 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 for the review process, since Kirchgeorg (2010) affirmed that the term "trade show" is regarded as a synonym for "trade fair".

Table 3.1: Literature review's selection criteria

SELECTION CRITERIA	
Key Word	"Trade show*"; "Trade fair*" (**in title, abstract, key words**)
Document Type	Article
Subject Area	Business, Management and accounting
Time frame	1997-2017
Database	Scopus, Web of Science

Source: Author's elaboration

Through the application of the selection criteria, the literature search identified 886 articles (Tab. 3.2).

Table 3.2: Review Database (1° Phase)

	Trade show*	Trade fair*	Total
Scopus	323	477	800
Web of Science	34	13	47
Web of science/Scopus	29	10	39
Total	**386**	**500**	**886**

Source: Author's elaboration

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 TSs and TFs. 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 158 articles has been identified (Tab. 3.3).

Figure 3.1: Literature search process

1° Phase	• Identification of specific key words and selection criteria
2° Phase	• Collection process
3° Phase	• Systematization/selection process
4° Phase	• In depth analysis of the identified review database
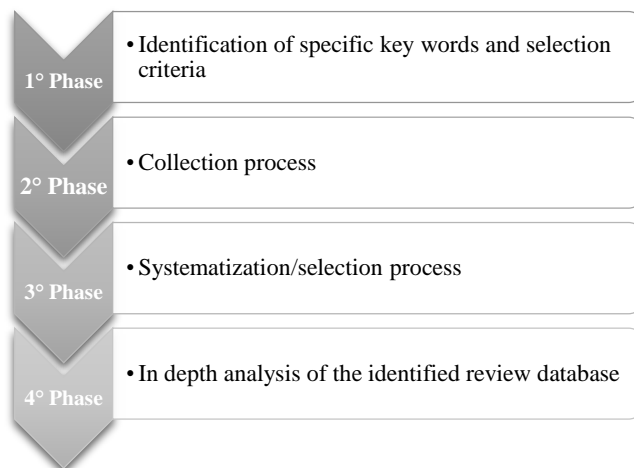
Source: Author's elaboration

3.2 Descriptive review

The present paragraph provides an in-depth descriptive analysis of the papers' panel, devoted to the topics of TSs and TFs.

In particular, the descriptive survey focuses its attention on the following aspects:

1. Source, years and journal analysis;
2. Overview of timeline for most prominent works on TSs and TFs literature;
3. Authors analysis (Affiliate universities and countries of origins);
4. Methodologies analysis;
5. TS specialization (analysis of the most investigated trade show sectors);
6. TS geography (analysis of the most investigated countries).

3.2.1 Source, years and journal analysis

Overall, the majority of articles (114) comes from the Scopus database; five papers come from the Web of Science search engine, while 39 are present in both databases. From a key word perspective, 117 articles have been found through the "Trade show*" search string, while the remaining articles (41), through the "Trade fair*" key word.

Table 3.3: Review Database (2° Phase)

	Trade show*	Trade fair*	Total
Scopus	84	30	114
Web of Science	4	1	5
Web of science/Scopus	29	10	39
Total	**117**	**41**	**158**

Source: Author's elaboration

From a temporal point of view (Fig. 3.2), the interest of business and management literature, for the topics of trade shows/fairs, began to grow during the time frame 2002-2008, until two peaks were reached in 2010 (with 16 papers) and in 2015 (with 14 articles dedicated to the argument).

Figure 3.2: Papers frequency per year
(Overall Database)
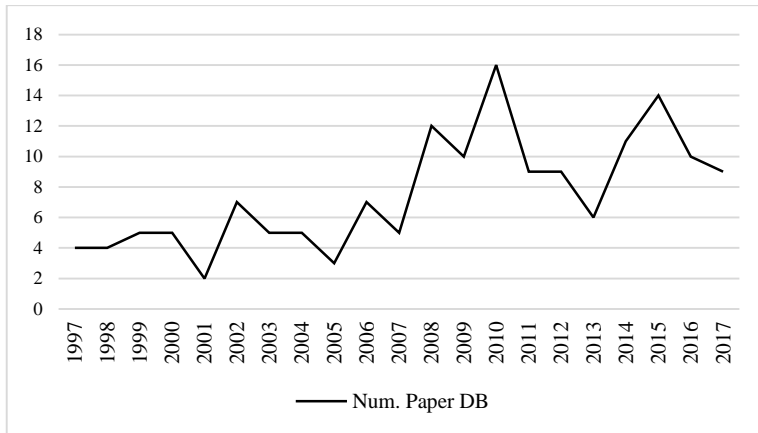
Source: Author's elaboration

The following figure shows the papers' frequency per year, respectively for the articles found with the "trade show* and "trade fair*" search strings.

Figure 3.3: Papers frequency per year
("Trade show*"/"Trade fair*")
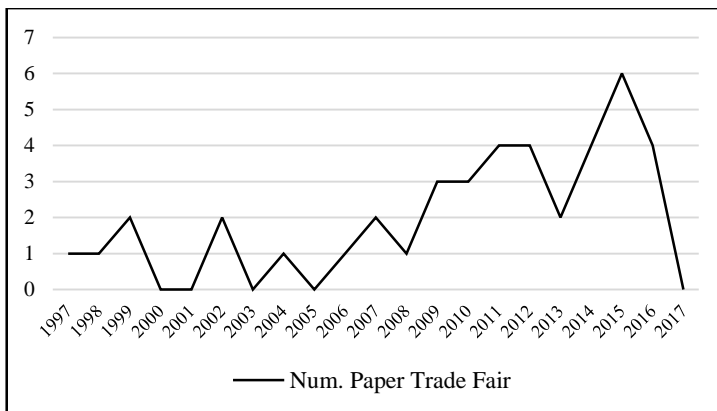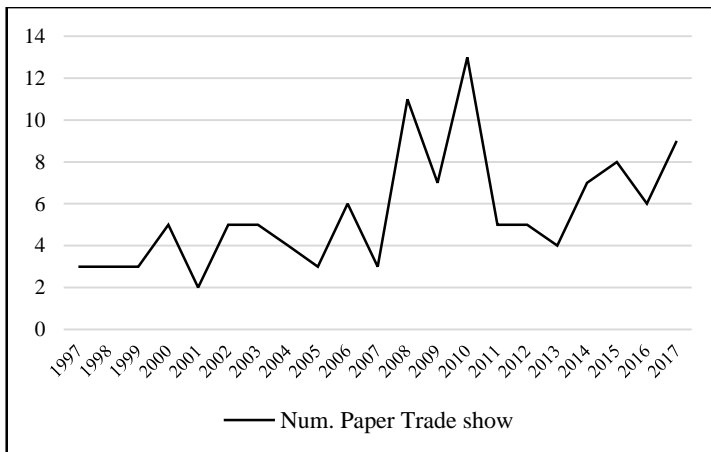
Source: Author's elaboration

The descriptive analysis also enabled the identification of the journals that have published the largest number of articles on the topics of TSs and TFs. In particular, *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing* (21), *Industrial Marketing Management* (13), *Journal of Convention & Event Tourism* (11), *Journal of Business Research* (5) and *International Business Review* (4) are the journals that devoted more space to the trade show/fairs theme.

Figure 3.4: Most recurring Journal analysis
(Overall Database: TSs and TFs)
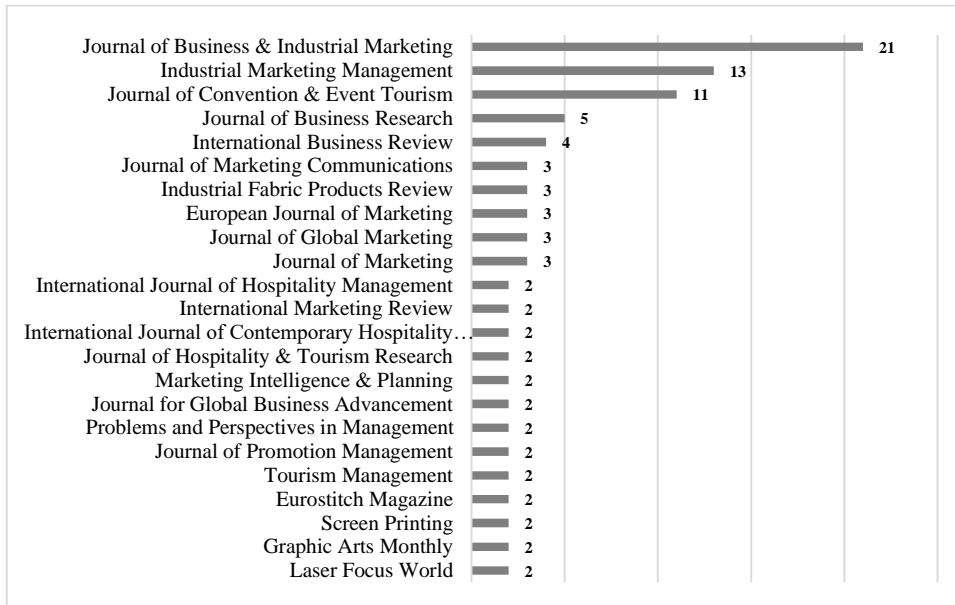
Source: Author's elaboration

Figures 3.5 and 3.6 show the most recurring journals, respectively with regard to the articles' database found through the "Trade show*" and "Trade fair*" key words.

Figure 3.5: Most recurring Journal analysis
(TSs database)

Source: Author's elaboration

Figure 3.6: Most recurring Journal analysis
(TFs database)
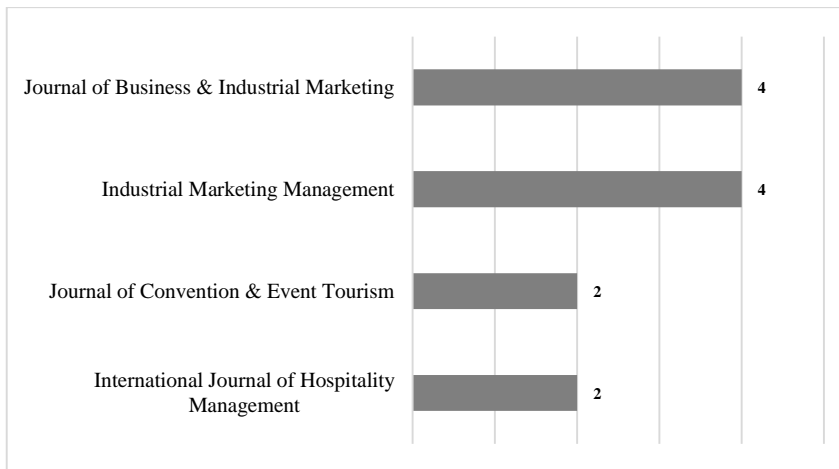
From a citation perspective (Fig. 3.7), the journals, with the highest number of papers' citations devoted to the topics of TSs and TFs, are *Industrial Marketing Management* (374), *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing* (228), *Journal of Business Research* (213), *Journal of Marketing* (145) and *International Business Review* (108).

Figure 3.7: Journals' citation analysis
(Overall Database)

3.2.2 Overview of timeline for important works in TSs literature

In this section of the descriptive analysis, the most cited articles have been identified per each review's year, in order to highlight the most important works, devoted to Trade shows/fairs literature (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4: Overview of timeline for most cited works in the literature on TSs and TFs

Time	Trade show*	Trade fair*
1997	Dekimpe et Al. [53]	Mohsin, Ryan [4]
1998	Tayloer [3]	Serighaus, Rosson [40]
1999	Shoham [26]	Munuera, Ruiz [61]
2000	Penaloza [92]	
2001	Penaloza [130]	
2002	Tanner [38]	Blythe [55]
2003	Smith et Al. [56]	
2004	Hansen [50]	Serighaus, Rosson [4]
2005	Kozak [14]	
2006	Ling-Yee [67]	Rinallo, Golfetto [60]
2007	Ling-Yee [26]	Butler et Al. [9]
2008	Lampel, Meyer [110]	Cagno et Al. [9]
2009	Kirchgeorg et Al. [4]	Blythe [15]
2010	Rinallo et Al. [36]	Ramirez-Pasillas [35]
2011	Gottlieb et Al. [17]	Aldebert et Al. [50]
2012	Geigenmuller, Bettis-Outland [6]	Jim et Al. [15]
2013	De Vaujany et Al. [4]	Jin et Al. [8]
2014	Gottlieb et Al. [6]	Kalafsky, Gress [3]
2015	Alberca-Oliver et Al. [3]; Measson, Campbell-Hunt [3]	Sarmento et Al. (a) [9]
2016	Rinallo et Al. [1]	Favre, Brailly [2]
2017	Tafesse, Skallerud [1]	

Source: Author's elaboration

In the second phase, only the papers with a specific number of citations (>=30) have been selected, in order to identify the most recognized and prominent papers, devoted to the topics of TSs and TFs, of the twenty-years' review (Hsiao, Yang, 2011; Acedo et Al., 2006).

Table 3.5: Overview of timeline for most cited works (>=30) in the literature on TSs and TFs

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Trade show	Dekime et Al. [53]			Penaloza [92]	Penaloza [130]	Tanner [38]	Smith et Al. [56]
Time	**1997**	**1998**	**1999**	**2000**	**2001**	**2002**	**2003**
Trade fair		Seringhaus, Rosson [40]	Munuera, Ruiz [61]			Blythe [55]	

	2004	2006	2007	2008	2010	2011
Trade show	Hansen [50]	Ling-Yee [67]		Lampel, Meyer [110]	Rinallo et Al. [36]	
Time	**2004**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2010**	**2011**
Trade fair		Rinallo, Golfetto [60]			Ramirez-Pasillas [35]	Aldebert et Al. [50]

Source: Author's elaboration

3.2.3 Authors' analysis

Focusing on the authors, the University of Missouri (10), the University of Almeria (5), the University of Texas (5), the University of Rey Juan Carlos (5) and the National University de Educacion a Distancia (5) represent the first affiliation schools where the authors devoted to TSs and TFs literature come from (Fig. 3.8).

Figure 3.8: Authors' analysis: Most recurring affiliate universities
(Overall Database)
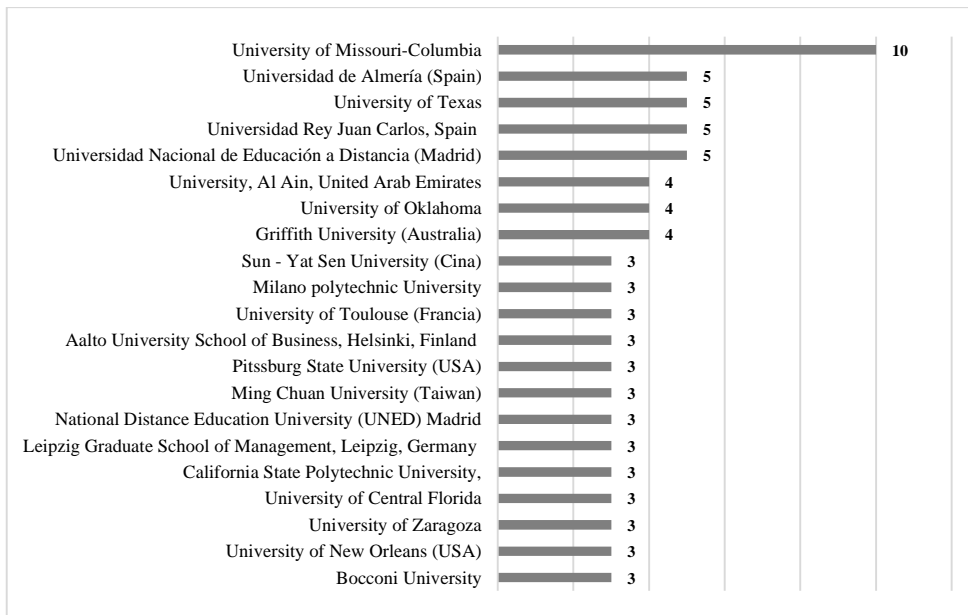
Source: Author's elaboration

From a geographical point of view (Fig. 3.9), USA (47), UK (11), Australia (9), China (8), Spain (6) and Korea (6) are the countries where the majority of authors' universities come from.

Figure 3.9: Authors universities' analysis: Most recurring countries
(Overall Database)
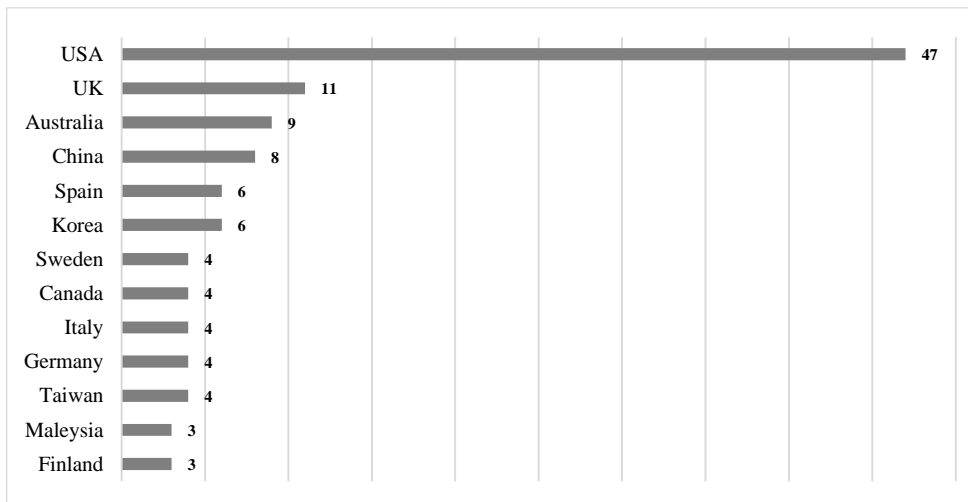
Source: Author's elaboration

3.2.4 Methodologies analysis

Through an in-depth analysis of the 158 papers of the review panel, it was also possible to identify the nature and type of the adopted methods. Overall, 72 papers adopt quantitative methods, 65 qualitative ones, while the remaining (21) adopt mixed methods (Tab. 3.6).
In particular, the questionnaire, survey, interview, case study and regression analysis represent the most adopted methodologies among the papers of the review panel (Fig. 3.10).

Table 3.6: Methodologies analysis - Nature (QUAN; QUAL; MIX)
(Overall Database)

Methodologies	Number of papers
Qualitative	72
Qualitatve	65
Mixed	21
Total	**158**

Source: Author's elaboration

Figure 3.10: Methodologies analysis - Typology
(Overall Database)
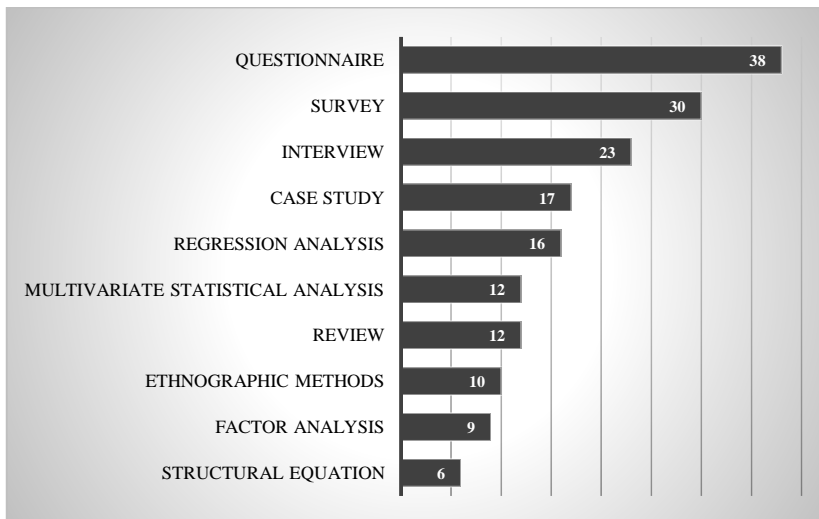
Source: Author's elaboration

3.2.5 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 a half of the review's papers (57%) do not analyze specific trade fair's sectors but, on the contrary, they deal with the TS tool from a general

business and management view, while the remaining papers (43%) focus their attention on specialized trade shows.

In particular, the tourist (14), ICT (7), food and beverage (6), electronic (6) and textile sectors (6) represent the most studied TS specializations.

Figure 3.11 TSs and specializations: The most investigated sectors
(Overall Database)
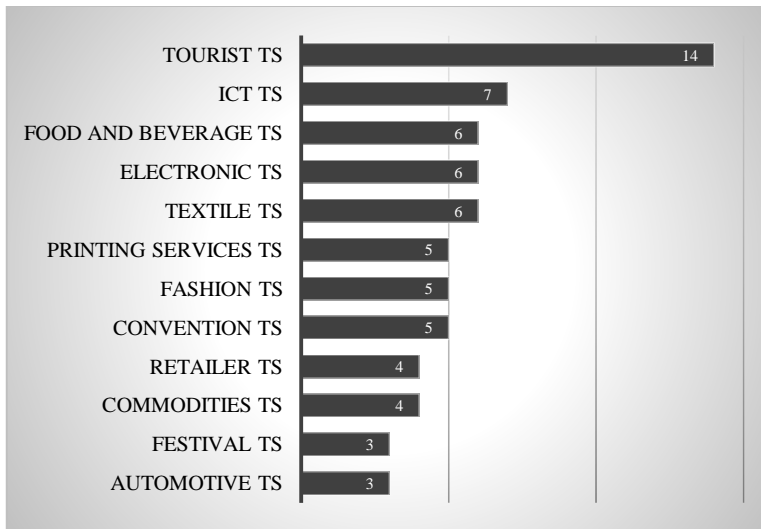
Source: Author's elaboration

Finally, from a geographical point of view, the descriptive review enabled the highlighting of how the last twenty-years' business and management literature, devoted to the topics of TSs and TFs, was concerned with deepening the study of the trade show tool both in developed and emerging countries. There was a prevalence of works conducted in Europe (39%) and Asia (32%). Figure 3.12 provides the ranking with the most investigated European and Asian countries.

Figure 3.12: TSs and geography - The most investigated European and Asian countries
(Overall Database)

Source: Author's elaboration

4
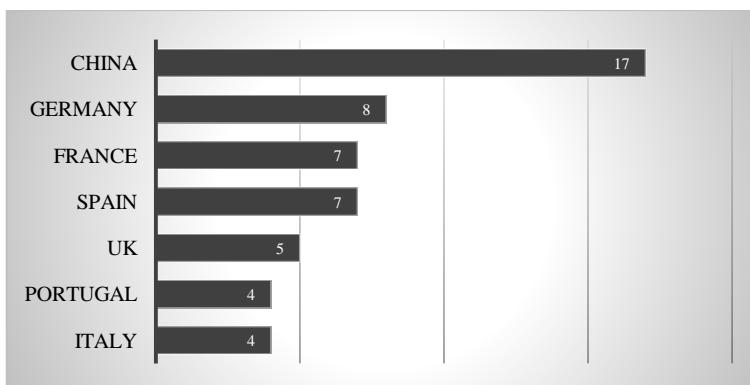
Analytical Review: Subject area analysis

4.1 Subject areas identification

This chapter presents the results of the full text reading process of the overall review's papers (*n*=158), devoted to the topics of TSs and TFs in the last twenty years.

In order to answer the first research question (*RQ [1] How has business and management literature devoted to TSs evolved in the last twenty years?*) a process of thematic narrative analysis has been done. Through this method, it was possible to identify, for each review's article, the main study area/areas concerning the TS theme (Braun, Clarke, 2006).

4.1.1 Overall timeframe (1997-2017)

Firstly, the total frequencies (in how many review's papers a subject area appears, in the overall timeframe [1997-2017]) have been calculated (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Total frequencies per each identified subject area
(Time frame: 1997-2017)

Subject Area	Frequency
TS and relationship building	45
TS and stakeholder behavior	35
TS and knowledge/information exchange	32
TS management	29
TS and network building	29
TS performance	27
TS and internationalization processes	20
TS participation	19
TS effectiveness	16
TS and new media	16
TS as experiential platforms	14
TS as territory catalysts	7
TS as temporary clusters	7
Virtual TS	4
TS selection	4

Source: Author's elaboration

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 (45), the trade show stakeholder behavior and objectives (35), the trade show as a knowledge/information exchange platform (32), the trade show management process (29), the trade show as a network building incubator (29), the trade show performance variables (27) and the role of the trade show tool in the firms' internationalization process (20), represent the most analyzed subject areas by business and management literature dedicated to the TS theme during the last twenty years.

In the second part of this paragraph, the areas of study, emerged from the business & management literature devoted to TSs and TFs, are looked at individually in more depth.

- 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 (Alberca-Oliver et Al., 2015; Antolin-Lopez et Al., 2015; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Oromendia et Al., 2015; Rodriguez et Al., 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2015a; 2015b; 2015c; Sarmento et Al., 2014; Geigenmuller, Bettis-Outland, 2012; Jin et Al., 2012; Blythe, 2002).

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, they 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, ("*communification*"), concerning the simultaneous practice of business communication and community creation in the TS setting (Bjorner, Berg, 2012); to investigate the mix of relationship marketing and transactional marketing perspectives (Oromendia et Al., 2015); to analyze buyer and seller interactions, in order to evaluate their impact on relationship quality (Sarmento et Al., 2015a; 2015b; 2015c).

For an in-depth analysis, focusing on this subject area, please refer to Paragraph 4.2.1.

- TS AND STAKEHOLDER BEHAVIOR

  This second subject area refers to what TS stakeholders do during the trade show event and the analysis of their behavior (Hansen, 2004).

  In particular, the authors devoted to this area of research, focus their attention on the way in which stakeholders attend trade shows (Godar, O'Connor, 2001), the exhibition firms' behavior in emerging markets (Rice, almossawi, 2002), the way in which exhibitors set their TS objectives (Serighaus, 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, Korneliussen, 2012).

- TS AND KNOWLEDGE/INFORMATION EXCHANGE

  The function of trade shows as information and knowledge exchange platforms represents the third trend emerging from the business and management studies (Rinallo et Al., 2016; Antolin-Lopez et Al., 2015; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2015a; b; Tafesse, Skallerud, 2015; Cheng et Al., 2014; Jer, 2014; Menon, Edward, 2014; Sarmento et Al., 2014; De Vaujany et Al., 2013; Richardson et Al., 2012; Aldebert et Al., 2011; Siskind, 2011; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010; Rinallo et Al., 2010; Soilen, 2010).

  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, 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 (Luo, Zhong, 2016; Bettis-Outland et Al., 2012; Bettis-Outland et Al., 2010).

  For an in-depth analysis, focusing on this subject area, please refer to Paragraph 4.2.1.

- TS MANAGEMENT

  In the last twenty-years, research about trade show management has been fairly extensive (Tafesse, Korneliussen, 2012). The majority of papers, dedicated to the topics of TSs and TFs, are designed to study the trade show management topic in the rapidly globalizing TS environment (Seringhaus, Rosson, 1998), to expand the exhibitors' and visitors' points of view from a services management perspective (Munuera, Ruiz, 1999), to underline what types of objectives and management processes successful exhibitors set during three different stages: pre, at and post show (Lee, 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, Korneliussen, 2012) and on trade show selection decision (Berne, Garcia-Uceda, 2008), to analyze the exhibitors' activities related to booth management (Gilliam, 2015; Tafesse, 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 AND NETWORK BUILDING

  In addition to the TS relationship building role, different papers also underline the trade show importance in terms of network platforms (Rinallo et Al., 2016; Antolin-Lopez, 2015; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2015b; Tafesse, Skallerud, 2015; Brzezinski et Al., 2014; Jer, 2014; Bjorner, Berg, 2012; Aldebert et Al., 2011; Kontinen, Ojala, 2011; Siskind, 2011; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010; Manero, Uceda, 2010; Rinallo, Golfetto, 2006).

  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, 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, 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, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Kontinen, Ojala, 2011; Siskind, 2011); and on the development of networking strategies in the TS context (Sarmento et Al., 2015b).

  For an in-depth analysis, focusing on this subject area, please refer to Paragraph 4.2.1.

- ## TS PERFORMANCE

  From the review, it emerges how much of the existing business & 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 (Seringhaus, Rosson, 2004; Dekimpe et Al., 1997), without incorporating other TS performance dimensions (Lee, 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, Korneliussen, 2011; Skallerud, 2010; Tafesse et Al., 2010).

More specifically, Hansen builds 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).

1. *Sales-related activities*: this dimension includes all activities related to on-site sales.
2. *Information gathering activities*: this domain includes all activities related to the information collection about competitors, customers, industry trends and new products at trade shows.
3. *Image-building activities*: activities related to the construction of TS corporate image and reputation.
4. *Relationship-building activities*: activities aimed at maintaining and developing relationships with current and new potential customers and other valuable TS stakeholders.
5. *Motivation activities*: activities related to maintaining and enhancing the motivation of employees and customers (Hansen, 2004).

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 (Tafesse, Korneliussen, 2011), who categorize 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 (Lee, Kim, 2008).

In this way, by verifying and modifying Hansen's framework, Lee and Kim propose 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 find 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 demonstrate how IPA can be adopted in order to evaluate and benchmark exhibitors' trade show performance on multiple activities; the paper of Tafesse and Korneliussen (2011), who investigates TS performance dimensions in an emerging market context and the study of Alberca-Oliver 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.

- TS AND INTERNATIONALIZATION PROCESS

  Another research area, emerging from the TSs and TFs 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 (Palmer et Al., 2016; Rinallo et Al., 2016; Jeong, 2016; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Tafesse, Skallerud, 2015; Kalafsky, Gress, 2014; Jer, 2014; Li, Shrestha, 2013; Richardson et Al., 2012; Aldebert et Al., 2011; Kontinen, Ojala, 2011; Ramirez-Pasillas, 2010).

  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, Brouthers, 2009; Mullen et Al., 2003), whose strategic role of creating and developing international networks for competitive advantage assume, for literature, a leading position (Evers, Knight, 2008).

  Overall, the majority of works devoted to this topic are aimed at studying TSs as export learning channels (Rinallo et Al., 2016; Jer, 2014; Richardson et Al., 2012) especially in the SMEs context (Jeong, 2016; Rinallo et Al., 2016; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Kalafsky, Gress, 2014; Li, Shrestha, 2013; Kontinen, Ojala, 2011; Ramirez-Pasillas, 2010).

  For an in-depth analysis, focusing on this subject area, please refer to Paragraph 4.2.2.

- 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 (Magro, Recio, 2015; Oromendia et Al., 2015; Menon, Edward, 2014; Li, Shrestha, 2013; Jin et Al., 2010; Skallerud, 2010; Yuksel, Voola, 2010; Berne, Garcia-Uceda, 2008; Morgan, 2008; Wu et Al., 2008; Pinar et Al., 2002; Godar, O'Connor, 2001; Munuera, Ruiz, 1999; Seringhaus, Rosson, 1998). 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, O'Connor, 2001; Munuera, Ruiz, 1999; Seringhaus, 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 (Sarmento 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.

From a sectorial perspective, by expanding the TS participation topic into the context of international travel trade shows, Oromendia et Al. (2015) and Yuksel and Voola (2010) find that the key exhibitors' motivation for participating is to improve relationships with customers.

- 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 organizer and exhibitor's point of view, it becomes fundamental to understand what visitors believe constitutes a really effective trade show event (Sarmento et Al., 2015c; Gottlieb et Al., 2014; Prado-Roman et Al., 2012; Kirchegeorg 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, 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, Bianchi, 2017; Geingemuller, 2010).

- 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 (Gottlieb, Bianchi, 2017; Singh et Al., 2017; Wu, Wang, 2016; Chongwatpol, 2015; Dawson et Al., 2014; Sarmento et Al., 2014; Tafesse, 2014; De Vaujany et Al., 2013; Melles, 2013; Tafesse, Korneliussen, 2013; Geigenmuller, 2010; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010; Ling-Yee, 2010; Lee et Al., 2008; Zuo, He, 2007; Semler, 1999).

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, 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 virtual trade show management (Geigenmuller, 2010), especially by examining exhibitors' experiences and by exploring managers' perceptions about the main drivers and challenges of VTSs participation, in order to identify the necessary marketing abilities required for

this purpose (Gottlieb, Bianchi, 2017). For an in-depth analysis, focusing on this subject area, please refer to Paragraph 4.2.3.

- TSs AS EXPERIENTIAL PLATFORMS
  Another area of study, enhanced by TS literature of the last twenty years, concerns the role assumed by the entertainment and experiential component in the trade show management process (Lee et Al., 2016; Gottlieb et Al., 2014; Jin et Al., 2013; Ahola, 2012; Bjorner, Berg, 2012; Rinallo et Al., 2010; Soilen, 2010; Borghini et Al., 2006; Wu et Al., 2006).
  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" (Soilen, 2010); on the creation of a theoretical framework based on experiences in the TS context (Bjorner, 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).
  For an in-depth analysis, focusing on this subject area, please refer to Paragraph 4.2.4.

- 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 topics of TSs and TFs (Lee et Al., 2016; Luo, Zhong, 2016; Palmer et Al., 2016; Rinallo et Al., 2016; Tafesse, Skallerud, 2015; Bjorner, Berg, 2012; Richardson et Al., 2012; Aldebert et Al., 2011; Ramirez-Pasillas, 2010; Sainaghi, Canali, 2011; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010; DiPietro et Al., 2008; Chacko, Fenich, 2000).
  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., 2016; Tafesse, Skallerud, 2015); on international TFs' dynamics (Luo, 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 4.2.2.

- 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 (Gottlieb, Bianchi, 2017; Geigenmuller, 2010; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010; Semler, 1999).

  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 (Geigenmuller, 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, Bianchi, 2017).

  For an in-depth analysis, focusing on this subject area, please refer to Paragraph 4.2.3.

- TS SELECTION

  The last identified subject area, materialized from the review, concerns the identification of the criteria adopted by TS attendees, in trade show selection and evaluation (Tafesse, Korneliussen, 2012; Berne, Garcia-Uceda, 2008; Rice, Almossawi, 2002; Munuera, Ruiz, 1999).

  More specifically, trade show organizers need to know the factors adopted by potential visitors in their ex-ante TS evaluation (Berne, 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, Garcia-Uceda, 2008).

  Berne and Garcia-Uceda are the first authors that try 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) and [3] the perceived, relative and differential costs deriving from attending TSs.

4.1.2 First timeframe (1997-2003)

In the second phase of the analytical review process, the overall period of analysis has been divided into three timeframes (1997-2003; 2004-2009; 2010-2017), in order to analyze how the TS theme evolved during the last twenty years of study. The temporal subdivision has been carried out by adopting a framework extracted from the reference literature, based on the main evolutions characterizing the trade show sector of the last twenty years. For an in-depth analysis, please refer to Paragraph 2.4.

Table 4.2: Last twenty years TS sector evolution

Years	Drivers of change	Principal 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 (1997-2003), the following areas represent the most investigated topics: the study of trade show stakeholder behavior (11), the trade show management process (10), relationship building between trade show stakeholders (5), the analysis of the trade show tool as a firms' internationalization accelerator (5), trade show stakeholder participation motives (5) and the identification of possible variables able to quantify trade show performance (4). No articles between 1997-2003 focused their attention on the "*TS and new media*", "*TSs as experiential platforms*", "*TS as temporary clusters*" and "*TS selection*" subject areas (Tab.4.3).

Table 4.3: Total frequencies per each identified subject area
(1° Period: 1997-2003)

Subject Area Papers 1997-2003	Frequency
TS and stakeholder behavior	11
TS management	10
TS and relationship building	5
TS and internationalization processes	5
TS participation	5
TS performance	4
TS and network building	3
TS effectiveness	3
TS and knowledge/information exchange	1
TS as territory catalysts	1
Virtual TS	1
TS and new media	0
TS as experiential platforms	0
TS as temporary clusters	0
TS selection	0

Source: Author's elaboration

4.1.3 Second timeframe (2004-2009)

Over the second analyzed timeframe (2004-2009), the following subject areas were the topics on which the business and management show literature was mainly focused on: the study of the trade show management process (12), relationship building in the TS context (12), trade show stakeholder behavior (8), the trade show network building process (8), the role of the trade show as a knowledge/information exchange platform (8) and trade show performance measurements (7). No articles between 2004-2009 focused their attention on the phenomenon of virtual trade shows and on the function of TSs as temporary clusters (Tab. 4.4).

Table 4.4: Total frequencies per each identified subject area
(2° Period: 2004-2009)

Subject Area Papers 2004-2009	Frequency
TS management	12
TS and relationship building	12
TS and stakeholder behavior	8
TS and network building	8
TS and knowledge/information exchange	8
TS performance	7
TS and internationalization processes	4
TS participation	4
TS as experiential platforms	4
TS effectiveness	3
TS and new media	3
TS as territory catalysts	1
TS selection	1
Virtual TS	0
TS as temporary clusters	0

Source: Author's elaboration

4.1.4 Third timeframe (2010-2017)

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 2017: TS and relationship building (28), TS and knowledge/information exchange (23), TS and networking building (18), TS and stakeholder behavior (16), TS performance (16), TS and new media (13) and TS and the internationalization process (11).

Table 4.5: Total frequencies per each identified subject area
(3° Period: 2010-2017)

Subject Area Papers 2010-2017	Frequency
TS and relationship building	28
TS and knowledge/information exchange	23
TS and network building	18
TS and stakeholder behavior	16
TS performance	16
TS and new media	13
TS and internationalization processes	11
TS participation	10
TS effectiveness	10
TS as experiential platforms	10
TS as temporary clusters	7
TS management	7
TS as territory catalysts	5
Virtual TS	3
TS selection	3

Source: Author's elaboration

4.1.5 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 twenty years' business and management literature (Tab. 4.6).

Table 4.6: Total frequencies' subject areas per temporal periods - A comparison

Subject Area	Papers 1997-2003	Papers 2004-2009	Papers 2010-2017
TS and relationship building	5	12	28
TS and knowledge/information exchange	1	8	23
TS and network building	3	8	18
TS and stakeholder behavior	11	8	16
TS performance	4	7	16
TS and new media	0	3	13
TS and internationalization processes	5	4	11
TS participation	5	4	10
TS effectiveness	3	3	10
TS as experiential platforms	0	4	10
TS as temporary clusters	0	0	7
TS management	10	12	7
TS as territory catalysts	1	1	5
Virtual TS	1	0	3
TS selection	0	1	3

Source: Author's elaboration

From the thematic review of the overall papers' database (*n*=158), firstly, it emerges how some research topics have characterized the entire reference period (1997-2017), with significant growth during the second and third timeframe (in particular *TS and relationship building, TS and knowledge/information exchange, TS and network building, TS performance*) 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* (Rinallo et Al., 2016; Ling-Yee, 2006; Penaloza, 2001); *TS and knowledge/information exchange* (Rinallo et Al., 2010; Chiou et Al., 2007; Munuera, Ruiz, 1999)*; TS and network building* (Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010; Evers, Knight, 2008; Blythe, 2002)*; TS and stakeholder behavior* (Lee et Al., 2010; Borghini et Al., 2006; Blythe, 1999)*; TS performance* (Tafesse et Al., 2010; Hansen, 2004; Shoham, 1999)*; TS and the internationalization process* (Kalafsky, Gress, 2014; Wilkinson, Brouthers, 2009; Wilkinson, Brouthers, 2000)*; TS participation* (Yuksel, Voola, 2010; Wu et Al., 2008; Pinar et Al., 2002)*; TS effectiveness* (Gottlieb et Al., 2011; Wilkinson, Brouthers, 2006; Herbig et Al., 1997)*; TSs as territory catalysts* (Jin et Al., 2013; Di Pietro et Al., 2008; Chacko, Fenich, 2000). Overall, it becomes clear how business and management TS literature has focused, over the last 20 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 (*relationship building* and *network building*), to incentivize the creation/diffusion of *information/knowledge exchange*, to support the participating firms' internationalization process (*TS and the internationalization process*) and the economy of the context in which they are located (*TSs as territory catalysts*).

It also emerges from the review how the entire twenty-years' literature has focused its attention on four other areas of study: the analysis of performance measurement (*TS performance*), the investigation of the TS stakeholders *(TS and stakeholder behavior),* the attendees' participation objectives (*TS participation*) and the identification of variables able to measure the effectiveness of the trade show event (*TS effectiveness)*. In addition to these thematic areas, enhanced by TS literature in a stable manner during the 20 years of the review's analysis, further topics emerge, whose research attention has characterized one specific analyzed temporal period.

In particular, the study of trade show management and the organization process (*TS management*) was mainly extended during the first (*frequencies* = 10) and the second period (*f*=12), followed by a noticeable literature interest decline during the third timeframe (*f*=7). On the contrary, the study of the advent and adoption of the Internet in the TS context (Gottlieb, Bianchi, 2017; Singh et Al., 2017; Tafesse, 2014; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010), the analysis of trade shows as experiential platforms (Gottlieb et Al., 2014; Bjorner, Berg, 2012; Rinallo et Al., 2010) and the study of the factors related to TS selection (Tafesse, Korneliussen,

2012) represent thematic areas that have received increasing literature attention during the two last timeframes.

In the end, the focus on the *TSs as temporary clusters* has specifically characterized the papers between 2010 and 2017 (Gottlieb, Bianchi, 2017; Rinallo et Al., 2016; Aldebert et Al., 2011; Geigenmuller, 2010).

Overall, alongside the thematic topics characterizing the entire timeframe analysis (1997-2017), during the last surveyed temporal string (2010-2017), a growing interest from business and management 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 and territory catalysts for the host cities; [3] the growing role of new media tools, web communications and trade fair virtualization; [4] the recognition of the role played by the experiential/entertainment component in TS organization and management.

Figures 4.1 and 4.2 provide a comparison (in terms of absolute values and percentages) of the total frequencies, per each identified TS area of study, subdivided into the three reference time periods, in order to visually observe how the frequencies are distributed throughout the review's period.

Figure 4.1: Total frequencies Subject area per temporal periods - A comparison (Absolute value)

Source: Author's elaboration

69
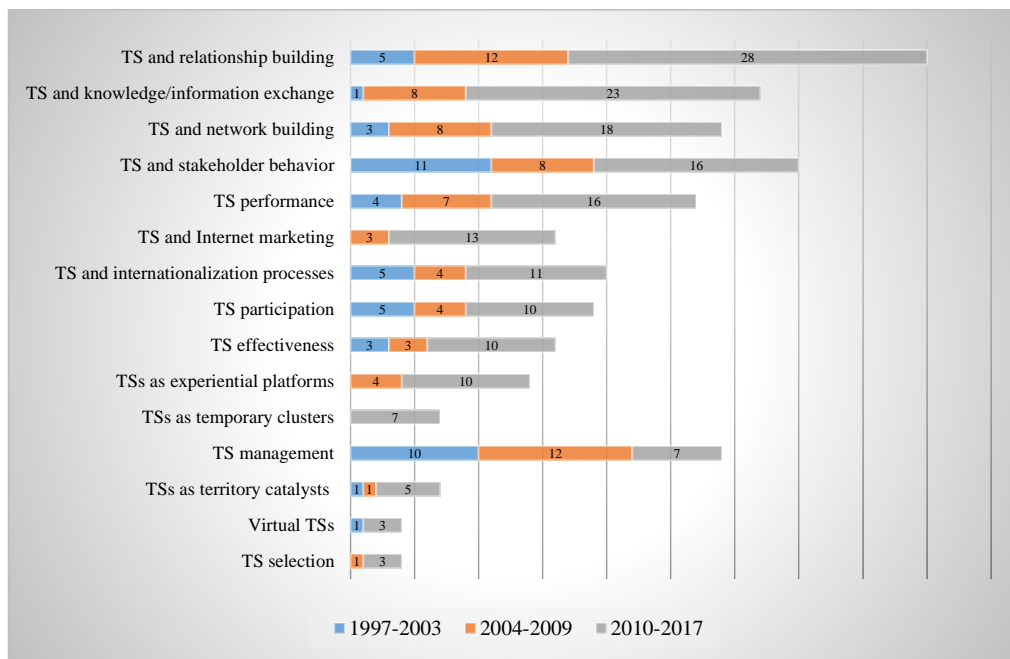
Figure 4.2: Total frequencies Subject area per temporal periods - A comparison (Percentage)
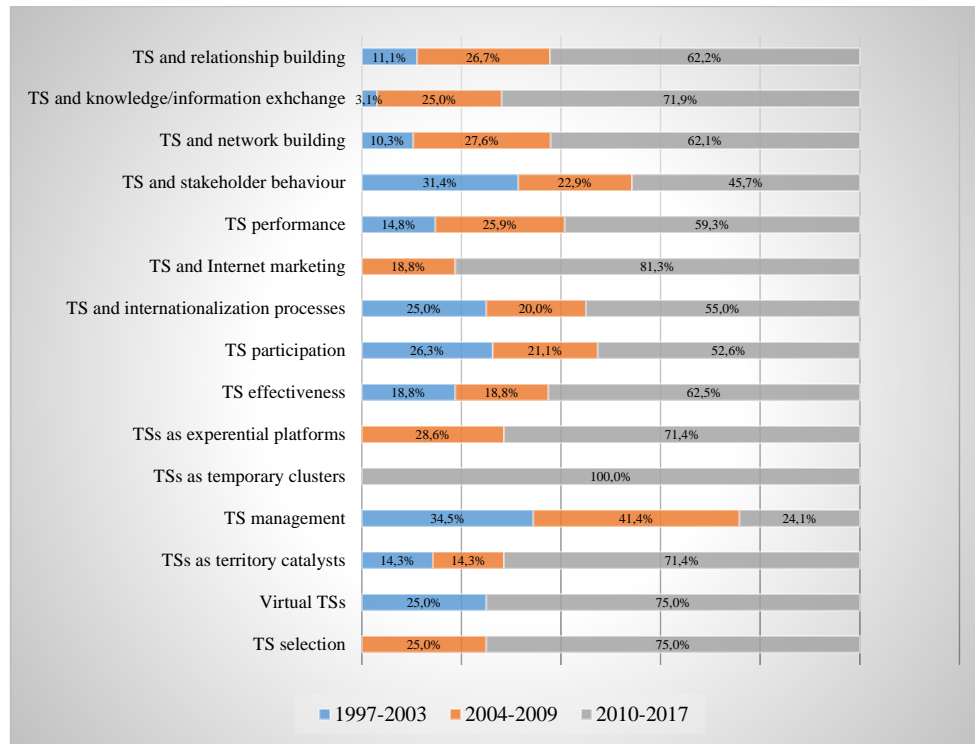
Source: Author's elaboration

4.2 TSs contemporary tendencies (2010-2017): 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 twenty 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 answer the second research question (RQ [2] *Which are the main trends emerging from recent (2010-2017) business and management literature devoted to the TSs?).*

The resulting research articles (*n*=84) 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., 2016; Bettis-Outland et Al., 2010; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010) for the creation of relational networks (Jeong, 2016; Alberca-Oliver et Al., 2015; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Oromendia et Al., 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2015a; 2015b) in a perspective of opportunities for international growth/expansion (Kalafsky, Gress, 2014; Jer, 2014; Li, Shrestha, 2013), above all for small and medium size firms (Kontinen, 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 (Gottlieb et Al., 2014; Bjorner, 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 Omni channel 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 4.7 provides a possible framework of the principal tendencies emerging from recent business and management literature devoted to the topics of TSs and TFs.

Table 4.7: Principal tendencies of TSs and TFs in the business and management study (2010-2017)

RELATIONSHIP MARKETING	INTERNATIONALIZATION PROCESS
TSs and relationship building TSs and network building TSs and information/Knowledge exchange	TSs and internationalization processes TS as temporary clusters TSs as territory catalysts
TSs and new media Virtual trade shows (VTs)	TSs as experiental platforms (the role of the entertainment component)
INTERNET MARKETING	EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING

Source: Author's elaboration

4.2.1 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 of stakeholder's participation and involvement (Rinallo et Al., 2016; Alberca-Oliver et Al. 2015; Antolin-Lopez et Al., 2015; Gebarowski et Al., 2015; Oromendia et Al., 2015; Menon, Edward, 2014).

Overall, relationship marketing encompasses the study of interactions, relationships and networks (Sarmento 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. It was underlined that all experts surveyed 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, 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, Geigenmuller 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., 2016).

The mix of relationship marketing and transactional marketing perspective has been investigated by Oromendia 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 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, Sarmento et Al. (2015a) study the TS from a relationship marketing perspective. The 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, Skallerud, 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2014). In a subsequent work, Sarmento 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 et Al. 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.

In particular, Kirchgeorg 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 scenarios 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 Bjorner 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 (Antonlin-Lopez et Al., 2015; Tafesse, Skalllerud, 2015; Brzezinski et Al., 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., 2016).

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, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Kontinen, Ojala, 2011; Siskind, 2011).

Based on a qualitative approach, the work of Sarmento 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.

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 over-load 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., 2016).

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, Zhong, 2016; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2015a; 2015b; Tafesse, Skallerud 2015; Menon, Edward, 2014; Sarmento et Al., 2014; Siskind, 2011).

In order to quantify the importance of the information based activities, Bettis-Outland et Al. (2010 and 2012), 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 paper also aims 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 TSs function of information gathering, which was consistently neglected in the past, (Soilen, 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).

4.2.2 TSs and the internationalization process

The second trend emerged from the recent review (2010-2017) of literature devoted to the topics of TFs and TSs, 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.

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., 2016).

Defined by Rinallo et Al. (2016) 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, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Kalafsky, Gress, 2014; Li, Shrestha, 2013; Kontinen, 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., 2016). In this way, these firms can overcome their geographical and resource limits (Ramirez-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., 2016).

In this line of research, trade shows establish themselves as multidimensional relational platforms (Rinallo et Al., 2016) 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. (2016) 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., 2016; Richardson et Al., 2012; Aldebert et Al., 2011; Ramirez-Pasillas, 2010).

In their paper, Luo and Zhong (2016) confirm this trend by focusing on the international TFs, 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, Berg, 2012; Sainaghi, 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.

4.2.3 TSs and Internet marketing

The role assumed by new communication media in the TS context, represents the third trend identified by recent business and management literature.

In particular, online communication media assumes 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 (Geigenmuller, 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, 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 purpose 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 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), 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 (Oromendia et Al., 2015; Brzeziński et Al. 2014).

At the same time, considerable evidence (Gottlieb, 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, 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, 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, Bianchi, 2017; Geigenmuller, 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.

At the same time from the interviews, 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 of offering 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, Bianchi, 2017, p. 25).

4.2.4 TSs and experiential marketing

The fourth trend emerged from recent business and management literature, concerns the role taken by the entertainment and experiential component in trade show management.

Rinallo et Al. (2010) are the first authors that deal with this area of study during the third timeframe review period (2010-2017).

In particular, in their work they apply the conceptual models and methods developed in 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 through 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. They put customers' experiences at the center of marketing strategies. In this way, the experience becomes a new supply category, as different from services as services are different from goods. 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, 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 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 TS is over. Moreover, Rinallo et Al. (2010) find that many exhibitors also offer various types of in-stand events, such as product demonstration (Kim, Mazumdar, 2016; Gottlieb et Al., 2011), social events, technical seminars or conferences and entertainment events (Soilen, 2010).

Together with the cognitive component, which transforms TSs into important 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 overall '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, Soilen (2010) confirms the transformation of contemporary trade shows (in particular in business to consumer markets) from sales appointments to "festivals". This is as 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 immerging 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 visitor perspective, by affirming how he or she may even be viewed as an active participant 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.

In the subsequent chapter, these four tendencies, identified through the contemporary literature review, will be looked at in more depth from the TS stakeholders' perspective.

5

TSs contemporary trends and stakeholder analysis

5.1 TSs contemporary trends from a stakeholder perspective

In this chapter of the dissertation the contemporary trends, emerged from the literature review, have been intersected with a stakeholder analysis.

In particular, for each identified paper belonging to the third timeframe's review (2010-2017), the main investigated areas of study have been cross-correlated with the stakeholder category (*exhibitors, visitors, organizers, other stakeholders*) the specific article is focused on. Through this intersected analysis, it will be possible to answer the third research question (*RQ [3] Which are the most surveyed TS stakeholders in the contemporary business and management literature sector?*), thus completing the first theoretical purpose of the present work. Table 5.1 shows, for each 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 (contemporary trends – stakeholder category) will be presented.

Table 5.1: Subject areas – stakeholder category Matrix
(Papers 2010-2017)

Reference Stakeholder / Subject Area	Visitors B2B	Visitors B2C	Exhibitors	Organizers	Other stakeholders
TS and relationship building	Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Oromendia et Al., 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2015; Antolín-López et Al., 2015; Gebarowski et Al., 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2015 (b) ; Sarmento et Al., 2015 (c); Brzeziński et Al., 2014; Sarmento et Al., 2014; Menon, Edward, 2014; Jer, 2014; Björner et Al., 2012; Aldebert et Al., 2011; Momsen, 2010	Oromendia et Al., 2015; Rodriguez et Al. 2015	Singh et Al., 2017; Alberca-Oliver et Al. 2015; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Oromendia et Al. 2015; Rodriguez et Al. 2015; Gebarowski et Al., 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2015; Antolín-López et Al., 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2015 (b); Sarmento et Al. 2015 (c); Große-Börger, 2014; Menon, Edward, 2014; Sarmento et Al., 2014; Brzeziński et Al., 2014; Jer, 2014; Jin et Al., 2012; Li et Al., 2011; Aldebert et Al., 2011; Geigenmuller, 2010	Alberca-Oliver et Al. 2015; Oromendia et Al., 2015; Rodriguez et Al., 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2015 (a; b; c)	Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2015 (a; b; c) [Experts in the TS field]
TS and network building	Jeong, 2016; Antolín-López et Al., 2015; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2015 (b); Brzeziński et Al., 2014; Dawson et Al., 2014, Jer, 2014; Björner, Berg, 2012; Guha, 2012; Siskind, 2011; Aldebert et Al., 2011; Kontinen, Ojala, 2011	Björner, Berg, 2012; Guha, 2012	Jeong, 2016; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Antolín-López et Al., 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2015 (b); Brzeziński et Al., 2014; Dawson et Al., 2014; Jer, 2014; Björner et Al., 2012; Guha, 2012; Kontinen, Ojala, 2011; Aldebert et Al., 2011; Siskind, 2011; Kirchgeorg et Al. 2010; Manero, Uceda, 2010	Kitchen, 2017; Sarmento et Al., 2015 (a ; b); Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010	Jeong, 2016; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; [SMEs] Sarmento et Al., 2015 (a; b) [Experts in the TS field]

TS and knowledge/information exchange	Luo, Zhong, 2016; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015;Antolín-López et Al., 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2015 (a); Sarmento et Al., 2015 (b), Sarmento et Al., 2014; Menon, Edward, 2014; De Vaujany et Al. 2013; Jer, 2014; Bettis-Outland et Al. 2012; Richardson et Al., 2012 ; Reychav, 2011; Siskind, 2011; Aldebert et Al., 2011; Bennett et Al. 2010; Bettis-Outland et Al., 2010	Reychav, 2011; Bettis-Outland et Al. 2010	Luo, Zhong, 2016; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Antolín-López et Al., 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2015 (a); Sarmento et Al., 2014; Cheng et Al., 2014; Menon, Edward, 2014; De Vaujany et Al., 2013; Jer, 2014; Bettis-Outland et Al., 2012; Richardson et Al., 2012; Aldebert et Al., 2011; Reychav, 2011; Bettis-Outland et Al. 2010; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010, Bennett et Al. 2010; Soilen, 2010	Sarmento et Al., 2015 (a ; b); De Vaujani et Al., 2013; Kirchgeorg et Al. 2010	Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2015 (a ; b) [Experts in the TS field]; Bennett et Al. 2010 [Franchisor, franchisee]; Cheng et Al. 2014 [SMEs]
TS and Internationalization processes	Jeong, 2016; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Kalafsky, Gress, 2014; Li, Shrestha, 2013; Jer, 2014; Richardson et Al., 2012; Kontinen, Ojala, 2011; Ramírez-Pasillas, 2010		Jeong, 2016; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Kalafsky, Gress, 2014; Li, Shrestha, 2013; Jer, 2014; Richardson et Al., 2012; Kontinen, Ojala, 2011; Ramirez-Pasillas, 2010	Favre, Brailly, 2016	Jeong, 2016; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Kalafsky, Gress, 2014; Kontinen, Ojala, 2011 [SMEs]
TS as territory catalysts	Lee et Al. 2016 ; Bjorner, Berg, 2012		Alberca-Oliver et Al., 2015; Jin et Al., 2013 ; Bjorner, Berg, 2012 ; Kirchgeorg et Al. 2010	Alberca-Oliver et Al., 2015; Tafesse, 2014; Bjorner, Berg, 2012; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010	Sainaghi, Canali, 2011 [Hotels]
TS as temporary clusters	Luo, Zhong, 2016; Richardson et Al., 2012; Aldebert et Al., 2011; Ramírez-Pasillas, 2010		Luo, Zhong, 2016; Richardson et Al., 2012; Aldebert et Al. 2011; Ramírez-Pasillas, 2010		
TS and new media	Hlee et Al., 2017; Chongwatpol, 2015; Brzeziński et Al., 2014; Dawson et Al., 2014; De Vaujany et Al. 2013	Hlee et Al., 2017; Chongwatpol, 2015; De Vaujany et Al. 2013	Singh et Al., 2017; Brzeziński et Al., 2014; Dawson et Al., 2014; De Vaujany et Al. 2013; Tafesse, Korneliussen, 2013; Kirchgeorg et Al. 2010; Ling-Yee, 2010; Geigenmuller, 2010	Tafesse 2014; Kirchgeorg et Al. 2010; De Vaujany et Al., 2013	Wu, Wang, 2016 [Official tradeshow websites]
Virtual TS			Gottlieb, Bianchi, 2017; Geigenmuller, 2010; Kirchgeorg et Al. 2010	Gottlieb, Bianchi, 2017, Kirchgeorg et Al. 2010	
TS as experiential platforms	Kim, Mazumdar, 2016; Bjorner, Berg, 2012; Rinallo et Al. 2010	Gottlieb et Al., 2014; Ahola, 2012 ; Björner, Berg, 2012; Gottlieb et Al., 2011; Soilen, 2010	Bloch et Al., 2017; Kim, Mazumdar, 2016, Jin et Al., 2013, Bjorner, Berg, 2012 ; Rinallo et Al. 2010 ; Soilen, 2010	Bjorner, Berg, 2012; Rinallo et Al. 2010	Bjorner, Berg, 2012 [Governments]

Source: Author's elaboration

5.1.1 Trade show visitors' perspective

B2C and B2B visitors represent the two main typologies of this first TS stakeholder category (Tafesse, 2014). In particular, the B2C visitors, commonly defined in literature as consumer visitors (Borghini et Al., 2006), attend trade fairs in an individual capacity (Tafesse, 2014). They do so in order to participate and immerse themselves into a multisensory experiential platform (the TS context). Overall, the hedonic behavior of B2C trade show visitors reflects the behavior of every day consumers, at a more general shopping environment (Tafesse, 2014; Gottlieb et Al., 2011; Borghini et Al., 2006).

Stakeholders, who attend trade shows on behalf of institutions (from private firms to industry/trade/government associations), represent the second TS visitors' category (Tafesse, 2014; Whitfield, Webber, 2011; Gopalakrishna et Al., 2010; Berne, Gracia-Uceda, 2008). Compared to the B2C profile, B2B visitors set professional and commercial objectives of achievement, therefore showing utilitarian behavior aimed at evaluating potential partners, establishing professional networks and relationships, maintaining contacts and supporting their sector (Tafesse, 2014).

Focusing on the contemporary trends – namely stakeholder analysis, it emerges from the review how the B2B and B2C visitors' category has been taken into account in almost all the study areas (with the exception of the virtual TS research area).

Focusing on the analysis of TSs as relationship building platforms from the visitors' perspective, Bjorner and Berg (2012) state in their work, the existence of a "*practice of communification*" in the TS context, that is, the simultaneous practice of business communication and experience based on collective community building, in which visitors can enhance their relationships with exhibitors and with each other.

In his paper, Jer (2014) confirms how for industrial customers trade shows represent relational events, where the development and maintenance of professional contacts become one of the main B2B visitors' motivations to participate (Brzeziński et Al., 2014; Menon, Edward, 2014).

Focusing on the B2B interactions, Sarmento et Al. (2014) underline the importance of studying exhibitor and visitor contacts in order to understand how relationships evolve. Through observations, interactions, and interviews, spread over a twelve month field-study of participants at trade fairs, they find that a relationship marketing strategy to B2B trade fair participation is vital for the effectiveness of this business activity and a challenge for B2B visitors (as well as exhibitors and trade fair organizers).

The study of Sarmento et Al. proceeds in 2015 with a work addressing the B2B trade fair from a relationship marketing perspective, in order to comprehend exhibitors and visitors' interactions and evaluate their impact on relationship quality and on the development of relationships in the long-term.

Two other researches, in 2015, (Sarmento et Al. [b]; Sarmento et Al. [c]) deepen the main reasons for business-to-business trade fair participation and for visitors' interactions with suppliers. In particular, the findings highlight how the most experienced B2B visitors are the ones who devalue most buying at trade shows.

Overall, almost all the existing studies, focused on the visitors' perspective, concern the B2B specialized trade shows, leaving nonprofessional visitors out of the loop (Rodriguez et Al., 2015). In fact, over the years the TS focus has shifted from selling objectives and the general public to specialized professional visitors. Despite this trend, the B2C public still shows an interest in attending trade shows, in order to gather information/knowledge and to see and try products and services.

By concentrating on this literature gap, Gottlieb et Al. (2011) focus their attention on consumer trade shows and on the analysis of visitors' perceptions of trade show experience effectiveness. Ahola (2012) investigates how trade show settings facilitate and influence consumer visitors' creativity in the different phases of the TS process, while Gottlieb et Al. (2014) develop and estimate a model to measure consumer perceptions of trade show effectiveness, with the identification of entertainment as a key factor in consumers' TS selection and participation.

Focusing on the relationship marketing perspective, Oromendia et Al. (2015) analyze the effect of managing relationships among three partners (trade organizer, exhibitor and visitor) with specific attention towards the end customer, while Rodriguez et Al. (2015) investigate the relationship quality between the exhibitor and its final customers, in order to determine whether influences exist between these two stakeholder categories.

From the networking perspective (Jeong, 2016; Antolín-López et Al., 2015; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2015 (b); Brzeziński et Al., 2014; Dawson et Al., 2014, Jer, 2014; Björner, Berg, 2012; Guha, 2012; Siskind, 2011; Aldebert et Al., 2011; Kontinen, Ojala, 2011), the role of trade shows as relational platforms able to offer TS visiting firms (especially of small and medium size) excellent possibilities of networking with operators in the same industry, represents the main focus characterizing the network building trend-B2B visitors study.

With reference to the role of TSs as knowledge/information exchange platforms from the visitors' perspective, Bettis-Outland et Al. (2010) offer an innovative point of view for estimating the value of new information acquired at TSs.

They suggest differences in the way in which exhibitors and visitors perceive and use TS information and knowledge. Bennett et Al. (2010) and Reychav (2011) focus their attention on the role of TSs as important means of gathering information from the professional attendees' perspective, who must be reassured (especially in the post-crisis period) by showing them that vendors are still in business and economically stable (De Vaujany et Al., 2013).

In their work, Sarmento et Al. (2015a; 2015b), Menon, Edward (2014), Sarmento et Al. (2014) confirm how obtaining information on new products, seeing new properties and meeting new suppliers represent the main reasons for participating in trade show events for B2B visitors.

Through a system of regression models on a cross-national sample comprised of 5,238 firms from 29 European countries, Antolín-López et Al. (2015) highlight that trade shows represent, for visiting firms, a feasible manner of obtaining marketing information and acquiring social capital in the form of contacts with potential partners and suppliers.

From an internationalization perspective (Jeong, 2016; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Kalafsky, Gress, 2014; Jer, 2014; Li, Shrestha, 2013; Richardson et Al., 2012; Kontinen, Ojala, 2011; Ramírez-Pasillas, 2010), the role of international TSs as platforms where visiting firms can overcome their geographical boundaries, by searching for relevant contacts and potential partners, represents the main focus characterizing the internationalization trend-B2B visitors study.

More specifically, the B2B visitors' target was initially studied in the "*TS as territory catalysts*" domain, with Lee et Al. (2016) who in their work investigate the indicators affecting a convention destination's competitiveness in the eyes of the trade show participants and professional visitors. It was also studied by Bjorner and Berg (2012) who look at the role of expositions in urban and regional development strategies and also at the promotion of favorable images towards investors, tourists and professional visitors.

From the TSs temporary clusters perspective, Luo and Zhong (2016), Richardson et Al. (2012), Aldebert et Al., (2011) and Ramírez-Pasillas (2010) analyze trade shows as business events where visiting enterprises, organizations and professional visitors can interact and learn from distant players in a specific space for a short time.

By concentrating on the impact of new ICT tools on the TS context from the visitors' perspective, 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 (business meetings, conferences and industrial talks) via the Internet.

In his paper, Chongwatpol (2015) focuses his attention on visitors' purchasing behaviors and in particular on the adoption of the RFID data in order to improve analytical processes at the trade show exhibition, so that marketing analysts can not only predict any mutation in attendees' behavior, but also react to what they actually need with a high quality of products and services.

Focusing on the analysis of the TSs as experiential platforms, Rinallo et Al. (2010) apply the conceptual models and methods developed on experiential marketing on the study of the B2B visitors' experiences at trade shows, in order to observe visitor movements across different stands and other event areas, analyze visitor interaction with the different experience providers on the stands and with other visitors and to elicit visitor meanings in context and their evaluations of different experiences.

By continuing along this research area, Bjorner and Berg (2012) focus their attention on the collective experiences shared by professional attendees during the event. In particular, by participating in TS events together with others, attendees

and visiting firms can share experiences, test products and follow live product demonstrations (Kim, Mazumdar, 2016) as an active audience.

5.1.2 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.

When focusing on the contemporary trend of stakeholder analysis, it emerges from the review how exhibitors represent the most studied TS target by contemporary business & management literature.

With reference to the *TS and relationship building* trend, from the exhibitors' perspective, Geigenmuller (2010) analyzes the role and contributions of virtual trade shows in developing relationships. In particular, the exhibiting firm's understanding of the importance of information, network orientation, capability of customer integration and relationship attributes emerge as influential variables on the effectiveness of VTSs.

Focusing on the quality of the exhibitor-organizer relationship, in their work Jin et Al. (2012) underline how this set up is composed of four factors: [1] service quality and relationship satisfaction; [2] trust and affective commitment; [3] communication, and [4] calculative commitment. Furthermore, perceived relationship quality differs significantly, depending on the key characteristics of exhibitors and organizers.

By concentrating on another type of interaction (exhibitors – buyers), Sarmento et Al. (2014) define trade shows as privileged fields for relationship building and development, where socialization possibilities become a key function between the different TS stakeholders. The study concludes by affirming that a relationship marketing strategy, in the B2B trade show context, is vital for business activity effectiveness and a real challenge for exhibitors, visitors and organizers.

Focusing on the same type of interaction, in their empirical research, Sarmento et Al. (2015a) analyze the visitors' interaction dynamics with the most important suppliers (exhibitors) of an existing relationship. In particular, in the B2B trade show context, exhibitors and visitors are naturally more inclined to relational interactions. For this reason, the adoption of an effective relationship marketing perspective can increase opportunities to exploit new benefits of attending trade show events. In order to improve the quality of relationships, the TS stakeholders should pay attention to the socialization events that occur in the trade show environment. Exhibitors can facilitate these events, through scheduled product presentation, seminars and social events organization.

Even in the work of Rodriguez et Al. (2015) the quality of relationships represents the main focus of the authors. They analyze this arrangement between the leisure

trade show venue and the exhibitor as well as between the exhibitor and its final customer. By doing so, they examine the effect that the quality of relationships between the leisure trade show venue and the exhibitor has on the quality of the interaction between the exhibitor and the final customers.

In their work, Gebarowski et Al. (2015) deal with the principal mistakes exhibitors could make with visitors, during the communication and relational process. These mistakes have been grouped by the authors, into four dimensions: verbal communication, non-verbal communication, personal culture, and substantial references.

The hypothetical mix of relationship and transactional marketing perspectives represents the main theme addressed by Oromendia et Al. (2015) in their article. In particular, the authors analyze the effect of managing relationships among three partners (organizer, exhibitor and end customer) on the exhibitor's performance during the TS event. They then compare that effect with the transactional influence.

In their conclusions, they confirm how relationship marketing offers higher levels of satisfaction and performance than transactional marketing.

Singh et Al. (2017) extend the trend of relationship marketing from the exhibitors' perspective, by focusing on the integration of electronic communications and personal relationships. In particular, the authors affirm that exhibitors should integrate electronic interactions (the creation and maintenance of corporate websites as effective CRM tools) and personal relations during the event, in order to optimize their communicative and building relationship processes.

Overall, it emerges from the literature how, from the exhibitors' perspective, the main reasons for attending TS events include the development of relationships with current and potential visitors together with the promotion of activities related to sales and the improvement of image (Alberca-Oliver et Al., 2015).

From the network building perspective, starting from the creation of a structural model on exhibitor performance and its effects on loyalty based on Hansen (2004), Manero and Uceda (2010) support the theory of "*trade shows as social and business networks*" in their work. This is a trend also confirmed by Kirchgeorg et Al. (2010).

In particular, these authors underline how exhibitors become information brokers who facilitate networking and interaction in the TS context.

From a practical implications' point of view, when preparing activities for a trade show, exhibitors should define their objectives, develop a list of primary information, and make a list of potential clients and customers they want to meet (Measson, Campbell-Hunt. 2015; Bjorner, Berg, 2012; Siskind, 2011), in order to fully exploit the TS network capacity.

In this way, for both exhibitors and participants, trade shows become an opportunity for career development, not only in the short-term (job offers), but also in the long-term, through the construction of business relationships and networks (Brzeziński et Al., 2014).

Based on a qualitative methodology focused on key informants (exhibitors, organizers and B2B visitors), Sarmento et Al. (2015b) discover how trade shows enable the development of a relationship marketing strategy that involves networking with a multitude of TS players and that goes beyond the simple interactions between exhibitors and visitors alone. Focusing on the same research domain, in their results, Antolín-López et Al. (2015) underline how participation in trade shows and network activities with other companies represent the most effective methods of promoting and presenting product innovation for exhibitors.

Focusing on the analysis of TSs as information and knowledge exchange platforms from the exhibitors' perspective, Soilen (2010) identifies three sources of information (obtained from TS exhibitors) subdivided into three major categories: about the product (*product intelligence*), about the exhibitors' skills (*trade show software*) and about their booths (*trade show hardware*).

By suggesting differences in how exhibitors and visitors perceive tangible versus intangible benefits (resulting from the information and knowledge acquired in the TS context), Bettis-Outland et Al. (2010) identify in their work, the need for creating a trade show information (RTSI) index.

In a subsequent work (2012), the authors propose an exploratory empirical study focused on identifying the variables, which are part of the RTSI. The article's findings show an interesting picture of how information/knowledge is used by exhibitors, after it is acquired at the TS event.

Starting from the objective of exploring the reasons why tourist firms exhibit in destination travel trade shows, Menon and Edward (2014) underline how non-selling purposes (in particular, giving information about company's products and services, exchanging knowledge and developing/maintaining relationships) represent the main exhibitors' TS objectives.

By exploring the same research domain, in their work Cheng et Al. (2014) analyze the exhibiting microenterprises' process of organizational knowledge creation. Through semi-structured interviews addressed to exhibitors at international B2B fashion trade shows, the study shows that knowledge is the result of the observation and interpretation of the TS environment and other participants within it.

By conducting an empirical study based on data collected at an international trade fair in Portugal and focused on visitor-exhibitor interactions, Sarmento et Al. (2015a) find how the typical atmosphere of the B2B trade show environment encourages socializing behaviors, useful for activating knowledge and information exchange processes. In particular, the authors underline how product importance moderates the relationship between information exchange and relationship quality, and relationship age moderates the link between social exchange and relationship quality.

Therefore, trade shows become an excellent context where exhibitors can obtain marketing information and acquire social capital in the form of contacts with current and potential customers (Luo, Zhong, 2016; Antolín-López et Al., 2015; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015).

From the internationalization perspective, for exhibiting firms ITSs represent transnational relations' incubators, which help them to go beyond their geographical boundaries (Ramirez-Pasillas, 2010) and often beyond their limited dimensions (Kalafsky, Gress, 2014). International trade exhibitions therefore become good surroundings for small exhibiting firms. They enable the small firms to create international contacts and networks with geographically distant operators in the same industry (Jeong, 2016; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Kontinen, Ojala, 2011). By proceeding in this way, as exhibitors regularly encounter other players, the trust and familiarity level between the different stakeholders increases, making access to new foreign markets easier (Richardson et Al., 2012).

In their findings, Li, Shrestha (2013) and Jer (2014) underline how Chinese exhibiting firms, participating in different ITSs, are more likely to achieve functional upgrading, by using TSs as export learning channels to gain market and technical knowledge from their customers, agents and competitors in international markets.

Focusing on the analysis of TSs as territory catalysts, Jin et Al. (2013) investigate the importance of the attractiveness of the exhibition destination in their work. Based on 616 survey responses from exhibitors collected at nine trade shows in four cities in Mainland China, the article highlights the critical importance of two types of cluster effects: "host-city leadership in the industry" and "host city/region as a source of exhibitors" to an exhibition destination's attractiveness for exhibitors.

From the TSs temporary clusters perspective, Luo, Zhong, (2016), Richardson et Al., (2012), Aldebert et Al. (2011) and Ramírez-Pasillas (2010) analyze trade shows as momentary platforms, through which exhibitors can interact and learn from distant stakeholders within a specific space for a short time.

Focusing on the impact of new media tools in the TS context, Ling-Yee (2010) analyzes the exhibitors' right approach to internet marketing. The work 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 purpose (during the TS post-show follow up).

Starting from the assumption that integrated marketing communications (IMC) can lead to higher levels of marketing performance, Tafesse and Korneliussen (2013) examine whether multiple media tools can increase the marketing performance level in a TS campaign environment, through a questionnaire administered to exhibitors at a large international trade show.

By continuing along this research area, Singh et Al. (2017) examine the antecedents and outcomes of IT integration in the TS context. They inform B2B professionals and exhibitors about the effective use of new media and the IT contribution towards enhancing their 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.

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.

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 VTSs. The findings highlight that exhibitors still decide to participate in virtual formats and allocate budgets without defining 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. They also need to markedly improve the outcomes of their VTS marketing strategies through conscious resource allocation.

With reference to the analysis of TSs as experiential contexts, in his work Soilen (2010) underlines the evolution of trade shows from sales to festival platforms, by focusing on the role assumed by the exhibiting companies in this transformation process.

In particular, Rinallo et Al. (2010) state that the experiences provided by exhibitors at trade shows are mainly based on offering visitors the opportunity to see and examine products and to interact with the booth personnel in either professional and socialization settings. Exhibitors also host different types of in-stand events, which include product demonstration, social and entertainment events.

In particular, concerning product demonstrations, Kim and Mazumdar (2016) analyze trade shows as contexts where exhibitors can demonstrate three different stages of innovation during the same event: [1] early-stage products and prototypes, which are presented for the first time (*debuts*); [2] products moving towards a launch stage (*concepts*) and [3] finished new products which are commercially available (*market-ready products*).

From this experiential perspective, exhibitors become the main source of learning, through whom visitors can obtain more in depth information and knowledge.

More specifically, the visitors' experiences are mainly influenced by two categories of experiential providers: TS organizers and exhibitors. The latter create experiences by replicating the entire set of what Schmitt (1999) defined "experience providers" (people, products, visual communications, spatial environments, sounds) on their stands. The authors' findings highlight how, among the different elements constituting experiences, the product presence and the relational factor represent the most important ones for visitors. For this reason, exhibitors should allocate resources for improving the quality of these two

experiential elements and for guaranteeing knowledgeable and competent booth personnel for the visitors.

In their work, Jin et Al. (2013) affirm that destination/venue attractiveness and the event together represent an integrated experience for exhibitors. It then becomes a key factor when they make decisions on whether or not to attend a trade show event.

5.1.3 Trade show organizers' perspective

Defined as institutions responsible for trade shows' creation, management and maintenance (Tafesse, 2014; Kay, 2007), TS organizers can be private firms, professional organizations, industry associations or government agencies (Tafesse, 2014; Jin et Al., 2010; Kay, 2007; Kresse, 2005). The foremost TS organizers' objective is balancing the interests of a multitude of stakeholders (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, 2007; 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 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 increasingly exploit TSs to present their policy agendas.

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, Darr, 2011):

- To earn profit;
- To form and develop markets;
- To facilitate the formation/development of product and service markets;
- To support industries;
- To support regional development.

Focusing on the contemporary trend of stakeholder analysis, 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, the analysis of the contemporary business & management literature highlights the presence of some authors stressing the need to fill this gap (Gottlieb, Bianchi, 2017; Favre, Brailly, 2016; Alberca-Oliver et Al., 2015; Oromendia et Al., 2015; Rodriguez et Al., 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2015b; Tafesse, 2014; De Vaujany et Al., 2013; Bjorner, Berg, 2012; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010; Rinallo et Al., 2010).

From the network building and information/knowledge exchange perspective, Kirchgeorg et Al. (2010) underline the fundamental role of TS organizers in supporting the creation of networks, interactions and information exchange processes among the market players. This task is also confirmed by De Vaujany et Al. (2013) and Sarmento et Al. (2015a; 2015b). In particular, the authors' findings highlight that organizers should play a central role in the effort of coordinating, mediating and communicating the dissemination of common ground, in order to allow TS stakeholders to build networks where they can exchange information and knowledge about their industry context easily.

In their works, Sarmento et Al. (2015a; 2015b; 2015c) also underline how the promotion of trade fairs represents another fundamental role that TS organizers should assume. This is accentuated by highlighting TFs relational benefits and by setting up the necessary conditions to develop them. In particular, TS organizers can coordinate events and activities (able to encourage relational interactions between participants), by dealing with the distribution of the exhibition space, the dining and recreation areas, the availability of information for attendees and the planning/organization of professional and social shows. In this way, they can support and amplify the role of trade shows as relationship marketing environments.

By concentrating on the organizer-exhibitor interactions, Rodriguez et Al. (2015) find how an appropriate management by TS organizers of exhibitors' complaints can have a positive effect on the relationship between these two trade show categories. Starting from this result, the authors recommend that organizers devote time and resources, in an appropriate and effective manner, to the management of exhibitors' complaints as an integral part of their marketing strategies.

By continuing along the same research domain, in their paper, Oromendia et Al. (2015) analyze the effect of managing relationships among three partners (the organizer, the exhibitor and the end customer) on exhibition performance during the TS event. With particular reference to the TSO, the results show how any strategy organizers can adopt in order to enhance the quality of relationships with exhibitors, will be significant. This is due to the fact that an effective relationship quality with exhibitors will influence the exhibitors' interactions with their customers.

Since the cost of attending trade shows is very high for exhibiting firms, in their work Alberca-Oliver et Al. (2015) also stress the importance for organizers of establishing effective relationships with exhibitors, in order to increase their TS performance and efficiency and consequently the possibility that they will participate again.

The role of TS organizers as territory supporters, able to provide efficient and involved settings on industry relevant themes, represents the main focus characterizing the intersected analysis based on TSs as territory catalysts-organizers perspective's combination (Bjorner, Berg, 2012; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010). In fact, local businesses obtain financial benefits from trade show events by offering services to exhibitors and visitors (E.g. accommodation and transportation). By considering that these economic impacts increase as more participants are attracted to trade shows, TS organizers are asked to increase the participants number levels through careful and planned strategies (Alberca-Oliver et Al., 2015; Tafesse, 2014).

In particular, Rinallo et Al. (2010) focus their attention on the experiential strategies adopted by trade show exhibitors and organizers and on the experiences had by visitors.

Their findings highlight that the accurate monitoring of visitor experiences allow organizers to design and realize more attractive events.

More specifically (as previously reported in the preceding paragraph), the visitors' experiences are mainly influenced by two categories of experiential providers: TS exhibitors and organizers. The latter arrange the first in the exhibition space, creating information and rest areas and setting up learning activities and social events. By also focusing on the organizer's perspective, the paper responds to the call for research on TSO. In a TS environment characterized by a proliferation of trade show events and by exhibitors and visitors with limited resources to participate, trade show organizers are asked to understand this dual situation, by offering experiential events where attendees can immerse themselves.

In particular, trade show organizers assume, in the experiential marketing logic, the absolute role of TS director by selecting participants (exhibitors, market leaders and innovating companies), designing the booth map and visitors' routes in the exhibition stage, setting the tone of visitors' experiences and by creating the setting in which the experiences, provided by everyone, are embedded.

Starting from an ethnographic and longitudinal field study addressed to visitors, participants and organizers, Bjorner and Berg (2012) underline how the arrangement of interactive activities, during trade show events, can encourage experiences and interactions with the possibility of developing attachments between guests and organizers.

While only one article of the review focuses its attention specifically on the role of TSs as internationalization platforms from the organizers' perspective (Favre, Brailly, 2016), three works (Tafesse, 2014; De Vaujany et Al., 2013; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010) address the issue concerning the impact of new media on the TS context, from the TSO point of view.

More specifically, through in-depth interviews addressed to TS organizers, Kirchgeorg et Al. (2010) highlight how, for this trade show category, the new advent of media represents a growing trend, regarded as a positive phenomenon for future scenarios for trade shows. Despite the leading role assumed by these new technologies, organizers however believe that the necessity for face-to-face communication will represent one of the most important strengths of physical trade shows, also in the future.

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 main online communication tools selected by the organizer were 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.

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.

The findings highlight the significant impact of market-based resources (especially TS webpage interactivity) on TS attendance levels. This allows the creation of supportive trade show settings. 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.

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) key factors (including the advent of VTSs) that will shape the future of trade shows as a marketing instrument until the year 2020.

By deepening the VTSs trend, 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.

In addition to the review's papers devoted to the TS organizer's perspective during the last period of investigation (2010-2017), the presence of articles which (even if focused on other stakeholders) offer specific managerial implications for the TS organizing participants in their conclusive results, also emerges from the literature analysis. Table 5.2 summarizes the main managerial implications.

Table 5.2: TS organizers - Principal managerial implications
(Papers 2010-2017)

Authors	TSO Managerial implications
Singh et Al. (2017)	The importance of the new media advent on the trade show organizers' strategies.
Rinallo et Al. (2016)	The role of TS organizers in industrial marketing (IM) and economic geography (EG) literature.
Luo, Zhong, (2016)	TS organizers and the entertainment component.
Tafesse, Skallerud (2015)	TS organizers' role as facilitator of a multitude of strategic marketing and industry changes.
Gottlieb et Al. (2014)	TS organizers and the entertainment component.
Jin et Al. (2013)	TS organizers as territory supporters.
Tafesse, Korneliussen (2012)	TS organizers-exhibitors interactions.
Kontinen, Ojala (2011)	TS organizers as network building facilitators.
Gottlieb et Al. (2011)	TS organizers and the entertainment component.
Soilen, 2010	TS organizers-exhibitors interactions.
Gopalakrishna et Al. (2010)	TS organizers-exhibitors-visitors interactions.

Manero, Uceda (2010)	TS organizers and the entertainment component; TS organizers-exhibitors-visitors interactions.
Yuksel, Voola (2010)	TS organizers-exhibitors interactions.
Tafesse et Al. (2010)	TS organizers-exhibitors interactions.

Source: Author's elaboration

Focused on the advent of new media in the TS context, Singh et Al. (2017) affirm that IT also offers opportunities for show organizers. In particular, through the adoption of digital content, TS organizers can improve multiple CRM activities (including attracting new exhibitors and visitors, promoting the event in media and providing networking opportunities to industry professionals).

Through an in-depth analysis of the industrial marketing (IM) and economic geography (EG) literature, Rinallo et Al. (2016) find, among other conclusive results, that while the EG literature has paid only limited attention to the TS organizers' role, it has been well recognized by IM literature. In particular, from a knowledge based perspective, these players can be defined as "organizers of organized proximity", whose activities and tasks can have significant impacts on exhibitors' and visitors' interactions during trade show events (on the contrary the initial EG literature neglected this organizers' role, by affirming that knowledge processes are the results of spontaneous and casual emergence).

The article also highlights how exhibitors and organizers often collide for different reasons (stand location, changes in trade show strategy), with the latter influencing individual exhibitors' value-creation and profit maximization.

Overall, more in-depth investigations concerning organizer-visitor and organizer-exhibitor interactions (including the impact of organizers' competencies and activities on exhibitors' return on investment) are required.

In their conclusions, Tafesse and Skallerud (2015) affirm that TS organizers need to properly understand their role as facilitator of a multitude of strategic marketing and industry changes. More specifically, organizers should encourage TS players' individual exchange functions, enhance the cultural appeal, value and competitiveness of their events and create appealing shows for exhibitors and visitors (Gottlieb et Al., 2014; Gottlieb et Al., 2011). In particular, relating to the organizer's target, TS effectiveness depends on exhibitors' and particularly on visitors' participation (Gopalakrishna et Al., 2010). For this reason, it becomes fundamental to understand what visitors and exhibitors believe constitutes an effective trade show event.

In their managerial implications, Gottlieb et Al. (2014) underline how organizers should devote particular attention to the insertion of entertainment components (on-stage shows, live music, information sessions, celebrity appearances) in their events, since it represents one of the main key factors in consumer evaluations of TS effectiveness.

More specifically, for organizers, it becomes ever more difficult to differentiate their events only on the basis of the types of offered products and services, location, promotion and price. For this reason, the TS setting should be reviewed and conceived as a fundamental differentiator of added value, conveying distinctiveness compared to competitors (Manero, Uceda, 2010).

In order to reach this goal, trade show organizers should create an effective atmosphere (Luo, Zhong, 2016) by maximizing environmental effects (lighting, color, sound, design, spatial layout) and by encouraging social exchanges with and between visitors (Manero, Uceda, 2010).

Instead, from the exhibitor perspective, organizers should offer incentives (favorable floor positions, reduced rates), in order to acquire innovative market leaders (Tafesse, Korneliussen, 2012; Manero, Uceda, 2010; Soilen, 2010), ensure that the visitors' profile corresponds to the demographics that exhibitors are targeting (Tafesse et Al., 2010; Yuksel, Voola, 2010), and mediate and support the establishment of networks and relationships between sellers and buyers (Kontinen, Ojala, 2011).

Finally, focused on the role of TSs as territory catalysts, in their conclusions, Jin et Al. (2013) underline how smaller cities should not be automatically excluded from developing successful exhibitions, because the ability to host a TS event depends not only on the destination's attractiveness, but also on the organizers' professionalism, efforts and determinations to attract stakeholders.

Overall, it emerges from the contemporary review (2010-2017) how the organizer category represents (compared to the exhibitor and visitor categories) the least studied and deepened perspective by TS literature, thereby suggesting the necessity to fill this research gap.

5.1.4 Other stakeholders' perspectives

In addition to the perspectives of the visitors, exhibitors and organizers, some articles of the review (Jeong, 2016; Wu, Wang, 2016; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Sarmento et Al., 2015a; 2015b; 2015c; Cheng et Al., 2014; Kalafsky, Gress, 2014; Bjorner, Berg, 2012; Kontinen, Ojala, 2011; Sainaghi, Canali, 2011; Bennett et Al., 2010) also focus their attention on other stakeholders, and in particular on:

- *Hotels* (Sainaghi, Canali, 2011): focus on the capacity of trade fair events to increase average room rates and hotels' occupancy;

- *Governments* (Bjorner, Berg, 2012): focus on the perceived relative importance of the experiential marketing and co-creation role (within the TS context) in the opinion of government-related authorities;

- *SMEs* (Jeong, 2016; Measson, Campbell-Hunt, 2015; Kalafsky, Gress, 2014; Kontinen Ojala, 2011): focus on the role of trade shows as platforms

offering great network-building possibilities for SMEs, as well as selling promotion and information gathering benefits and as a good context to create ties leading to international markets, to network with international operators, in the same industry, and to gain access to new foreign markets;

- *Official tradeshow websites* (Wu, Wang, 2016): focus on the creation of a general framework (website structure, content design) for creating official trade show websites based on user experience;

- *Experts in the TS field* (Sarmento et Al., 2015a; 2015b; 2015c): focus on buyer and seller interactions in the context of the trade fair, and on the evaluation of their impact on relationship quality in the long-term, also from the TS experts' perspective;

- *Franchisors and franchisees* (Bennett et Al., 2010): focus on the role of trade shows as a fundamental tool for gathering franchising information.

5.2 Empirical purpose and research questions

Starting from the review's results and from the identification of (1) the main trends characterizing the TS environment and (2) the most examined stakeholders' categories by contemporary specialized literature, the empirical purpose of this dissertation is to gain a broader understanding 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 (Rinallo et Al., 2016; Tafesse, 2014; Jin et Al., 2013).

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, Golfetto, 2011). In order to reach this objective, organizers should facilitate interactions with and among TS participants, thorough the offering of special spaces and events (Berne, Garcia Uceda, 2008) and thorough the adoption of interactive tools (Tafesse, 2014). These processes will allow them to establish real-time relations and to thoroughly understand the interests and objectives of their attendees.

On the basis of these preliminary considerations, the TS organizers' perspective will then be adopted with a view to analyzing the implementation of digital communication tools on trade show strategies and activities and the reaction to the virtual trade shows' (VTSs) advent, by thus enriching the literature studies focused on the "*TSs and new media*" and "*Virtual TSs*" trends (Gottlieb, Bianchi, 2017; Singh et Al., 2017; Wu, Wang, 2016; Chongwatpol, 2015; Tafesse, 2014; De Vaujany et Al., 2013; Tafesse, Korneliussen, 2013; Dawson et Al., 2014; Geigenmuller, 2010; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010; Ling-Yee, 2010).

With reference to the first analyzed trend, the dissertation commences with the work of Singh et Al. (2017). This work proposes to investigate the implementation and the use of social networks and other rapidly developing digital communication tools for trade show activities, in future researches.

With regard to the second trend, the present work intends to extend the study of Gottlieb and Bianchi (2017), which examines exhibitors' experiences of participating in virtual trade shows (VTSs), by enhancing the impact of the virtualization phenomenon from the organizer's perspective.

Starting from this overview, the main purpose of the dissertation is to analyze, through in-depth interviews, the impact of social media implementation and the virtualization phenomenon on TS organizers' strategies and activities.

In doing so, it can gain deeper insights about their online behaviors (type 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).

This objective is accomplished by formulating specific research questions and by producing in-depth interviews that can answer them. Relating to this, the RQs, that motivated the empirical section of the present work, are the following:

- With reference to the first analyzed trend (the implementation and use of social media from the TS organizers' perspective):

  RQ [4] Which are the main strengths/weaknesses of the social media adoption? Overall, from the TS organizers' perspective, which are the main challenges to overcome, in order to effectively exploit the social media potentialities?

  RQ [5] In the social media adoption, how TS organizers perceive the role of users?

- With reference to the second analyzed trend (the advent of virtual trade shows):

  RQ [6] From the TS organizers' perspective, could virtual trade shows become the new format of the future?

In order to answer these research questions, 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 seven for the reasons behind the selection of countries):

- Direct event organizers and not only space leases;
- With a high level of online visibility (data that should identify the most active exhibition centers in the online context and, consequently, be more able to effectively respond to the in-depth interview).

Before proceeding with the identification of the sample, it becomes necessary to exactly figure out what online visibility means for the business and management literature.

6

Online Visibility: A possible definition[2]

6.1 Literature search strategy

The present chapter presents the results of a process of literature review aimed at outlining how the business and management literature defines the online visibility concept.

During the first phase, in order to identify the terminology adopted by the specialized literature, in combination with the online visibility topic, an explorative analysis was carried out. This process has been necessary, since an ambiguous use of the term emerged. From this procedure, in fact, three terms directly connected to the online visibility concept emerged: *Online presence* (OPr), *Online reputation* (OR), and *Online popularity* (OPo).

During the second phase, these terms have been employed in a subsequent systematic piece of research (Tab. 6.1).

Table 6.1: Literature review's selection criteria

	SELECTION CRITERIA
KEY WORD	"*Online presence*"; "*Online reputation*"; "*Online visibility*"; "*Online popularity*" (**in title, abstract, key words**)
DOCUMENT TYPE	Article
SUBJECT AREA	Business, Management and accounting
DATABASE	Scopus, Web of Science

Source: Author's elaboration on Cioppi (2017)

Through the application of the selection criteria, the literature search identified 171 articles. The titles and abstracts were then reviewed for relevance to the study. In particular, duplications (the same papers from the two databases; the same papers found with different key words) and possible error of selection have been removed. At the end of this systematic process, a final database of 133 articles has been identified.

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[2] This chapter is the result of the revision of the following work: Cioppi M. (2017), *Web 2.0 e visibilità online: Un modello di misurazione per il settore turistico*, Franco Angeli, Milano.

6.2 Descriptive review

Overall, the majority of the articles (86) come from the Scopus database, 15 papers come from the Web of Science search engine, while the remaining 32 are present in both databases. From a key word point of view, only 9 articles out of 133 are focused on the OV concept, with Online Presence representing the most considered topic by the business and management literature (74 articles out of 133), followed by the OR (47 papers) and OPo (3).

Table 6.2: Final review DB

	OPR	OR	OV	OPO	TOT.
Web of science	7	7	1	0	15
Scopus	54	26	3	3	86
Web of science/Scopus	13	14	5	0	32
Total	**74**	**47**	**9**	**3**	**133**

Source: Author's elaboration on Cioppi (2017)

From a temporal perspective, the interest of the business and management literature for the topic began to grow during the time frame 2003-2009, until reaching two peaks in 2011 (with 17 papers) and in 2016 (with 20 papers dedicated to the argument).

Figure 6.1: Papers frequency per year
(Overall Database)
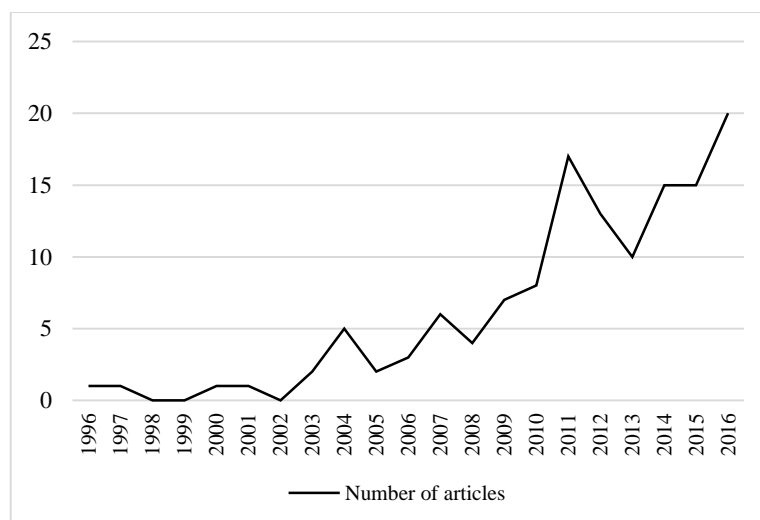
Source: Author's elaboration on Cioppi (2017)

In particular, Figures 6.2 summarizes the papers' frequency per year specifically with regard to the Visibility concept.

Figure 6.2: Papers frequency per year (OV)
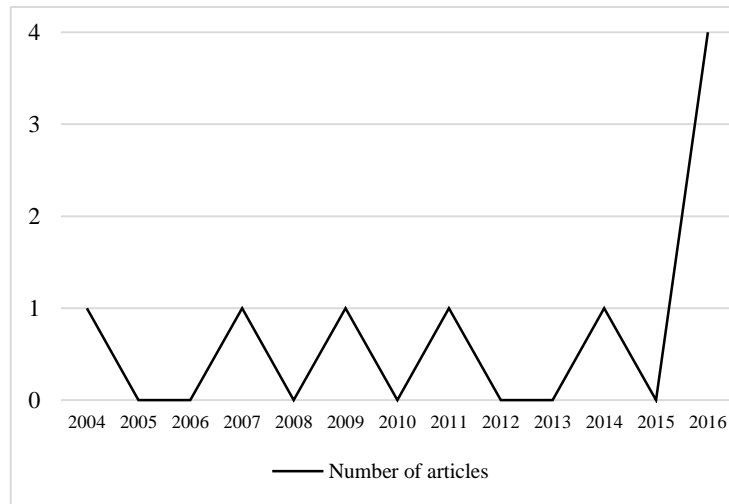
From Figure 6.2, it emerges how the business and management literature's attention towards the Online Visibility concept (started only in 2004) remained stationary between 2004 and 2015 (with one or no articles published per year), followed by an increase in the interest during 2016 with four articles devoted to the topic.

The descriptive review also enabled the identification of the journals that have published the largest number of articles on the topic. In particular, *Internet Research* (5), *Public Relations Review* (4), *Decision Support Systems* (4), *Tourism Management* (4), *Museum Management and Curatorship* (3), *International Journal of E-business Research* (3) and *Printwear* (3) are the journals that devoted the most space to the theme.

Table 6.3 illustrates the journals from which the articles specifically devoted to the OV topic come from.

Table 6.3: Papers' frequency per journal (OV)

Journals	Num. of papers
Journal of interactive marketing	2
Knowledge Management Research & Practice	1
International Marketing Review	1
The Service Industries Journal	1
Business Horizons	1
Journal of Travel Research	1
Printwear	1
Information Systems Research	1

6.3 Citation analysis

In a second phase of the work, through a process of citation analysis (Garfield, 1979), for each key words categories (OPr, OR, OV, OPo) the articles most recognized by the scientific community have been extracted, in order to identify the possible definition of online visibility, as well as those of reputation, presence and popularity and the potential interactions existing between them.

The underlying assumption is that the number of citations indicates the level of recognition and the paper's quality (Bornmann and Daniel, 2008; Baumgartner and Pieters, 2003). The aim of the present work was to find an appropriate level that excluded less documents. After testing several solutions (Di Stefano et Al., 2012; Hsiao, Yang, 2011; Acedo et Al., 2006; Schildt et Al., 2006, Ramos-Rodríguez, Ruíz-Navarro, 2004) all articles with at least 5 references have been included. Successively, all the selected articles' (*n*=44) full texts have been read and, through a process of narrative analysis, all the definitions and possible interactions have been extracted. Table 6.4 provides the main focus for each paper, identified through the abstract (in particular the main purpose declaration), and then confirmed by the text reading in full.

Table 6.4: Principal focus of the papers' panel (From a citation descending order)

Authors	Citation number	Principal focus
Zhang et Al. (2010)	137	Restaurants' online popularity
Torres et Al. (2006)	93	Cities' online presence
Chen, Yen (2004)	81	Online presence and interactivity of business websites
Kuan, Bock (2007)	79	Online presence and online trust
Drèze, Zufryden (2004)	70	Companies' online visibility
Lee et Al. (2011)	58	Online reputation system and helpful reviews in TripAdvisor
Lin et Al. (2006)	43	Online reputation in consumer-to-consumer online auction market
Okonkwo (2009)	42	Luxury brands' online presence
Hanson, Putler (1996)	41	Products' online popularity
Xie et Al. (2014)	34	Hotels' online reputation
Zhou et Al. (2008)	28	Online reputation systems in auction markets
Reuber, Fisher (2011)	27	Firms' online reputations
Rodríguez-Dominguez et Al. (2011)	27	Government's online presence
Jackson (2007)	27	Political parties' online presence
Wang et Al. (2009)	25	Retailers' online presence

Liu, Munro (2012)	25	Internet companies' online reputation systems
Dellarocas (2010)	25	Communities' online reputation systems
Abbasi et Al. (2008)	25	Online reputation systems and identity changes/reputation manipulation.
Li et Al. (2008)	25	Online reputation in the C2C market
Champoux et Al. (2012)	23	Company's online reputation prevention and rehabilitation
Soren (2005)	19	Virtual museums' online presence
Meyer, Schroeder (2009)	18	E-research online visibility
Lee et Al. (2013)	17	Companies' online presence
McCreary (2008)	16	Online presence and privacy
Murphy, Scharl (2007)	15	Multinational corporations' visibility and popularity
Smithson et Al. (2011)	14	Accommodation businesses' online visibility
Hung et Al. (2012)	14	Online reputation management
Panagiotopoulos (2012)	13	Trade unions' online presence
Wang, Zhang (2009)	13	Free samplings' online presence
Chua et Al. (2009)	12	SME blogs and online presence
Deakin (2012)	10	Intelligent cities' online presence
Bakos, Dellarocas (2011)	9	Buyers and sellers' online reputations
Larsson (2012)	8	Newspapers' online presence
Yoganarasimhan (2013)	7	Sellers' online reputation in freelance sites
Wang et Al. (2010)	7	Online reputation systems and consumers
Mani et Al. (2014)	6	Online presence and security
Andéhn et Al. (2014)	6	Social media online presence
Kaplan, Haenlein (2014)	6	Collaborative projects' online presence
De Bakker, Hellsten (2013)	5	Activist groups' online presence
Lilliker, Jackson (2013)	5	Political parties' online presence
Wilson (2011)	5	Museums' online presence
Jiwa et Al. (2005)	5	Entrepreneurship online presence
Bunting, Lipski (2001)	5	Corporate online reputation management
Otero et Al. (2014)	5	SMEs' online visibility

Source: Author's elaboration on Cioppi (2017)

During the subsequent phase, the different topics extracted from the panel of papers have been classified into specific domains, in order to highlight the sectors most investigated by the business and management literature focused on the OPr, OV, OR and OPo concepts (Tab. 6.5).

Table 6.5: Classification of the principal focuses of the panel of papers

Domain	Number of papers
Firms	10
Management processes	6
Policy	5
Culture and cities	4
Tourism	3
Auction markets	3
Buyer/seller interactions	3
Websites/social media	2
Collaborative projects	2
Online reviews/communities	2
Products	2
Newspapers	1
Luxury brands	1

Source: Author's elaboration on Cioppi (2017)

In particular, the business domain (studies especially focused on SMEs), the attention towards online presence/visibility management, the political sector, cultural and cities' promotion, the tourist industry (accommodation and restaurants), the focus on the auction market context and on the buyers-sellers interactions in the online setting represent the most studied research areas by the business & management literature devoted to the investigated online topics.

6.4 Definitions' extractions

This paragraph provides the results of the extraction's process, by presenting the definitions of OPr, OV, OR and OPo proposed by the business and management literature, in order to understand how to interpret the online visibility concept and consequently how to measure it in the social media context.

6.4.1 Online presence (OPr)

In order to identify all the OPr definitions emerging from the most cited articles' panel, the 44 full texts have been read and, through a process of thematic narrative analysis (Braun, Clarke, 2006), all the definitions have been extracted. Overall, a limited attempt to define the online presence concept emerges.

Even if the business and management literature examines the online presence topic, the number of authors that propose a definition is restricted. Indeed, in most cases, the online presence concept is treated without trying to introduce or define it.

In particular, among the articles' panel, ten works provide a possible definition of the online presence topic, even if from different sectors' perspectives: political (De Bakker, Hellsten, 2013; Lilliker, Jackson, 2013; Panagiotopoulos, 2012; Rodriguez et Al., 2011; Jackson, 2007), business (Otero et Al., 2014; Murphy, Scharl, 2007; Bunting, Lipski, 2001) and tourist (Smithson et Al., 2011; Wilson, 2011).

By summing up the definitions proposed by the selected papers, online presence is described as a resource generating tool, a part of a coherent communication strategy (Jackson, 2007); a vital tool to a brand's internet success (Murphy, Scharl, 2007); the way firms present themselves online (De Bakker, Hellsten, 2013); a marketing tool able to build closer relationships with users (Lilliker, Jackson, 2013); an expectation that firm information will be available online, a sophisticated means of accessibility and engagement with the public (Wilson, 2011) and a powerful instrument, capable of attracting consumers to a store (Otero et Al., 2014).

Despite these attempts to define and contextualize the concept of online presence, a lack and a consequent requirement of a unanimous OPr definition emerges, shared by the management and business literature.

The review's results also highlight the absence of a shared index for the measurement of online presence, with few authors trying to propose some possible variables, which could belong to it (De Bakker, Hellsten, 2013; Lee et Al., 2013; Panagiotopoulos; 2012; Smithson et Al., 2011).

6.4.2 Online visibility (OV)

Through the same process of thematic narrative analysis, all the online visibility definitions have been extracted from the most cited papers' panel. Overall, with respect to the OPr topic, a more accurate attempt to define the OV concept emerges. In particular, the definition proposed by Dreze and Zufryden (2004) represents the most complete and most adopted definition by business and management literature (Smithson et Al., 2011). In their paper, Dreze and Zufryden describe online visibility "as the extent to which a user is likely to come across a reference to a company's Web site in his or her online or offline environment" (Dreze, Zufryden, 2004, p. 22).

In particular, among the articles' panel, six works provide a possible definition of the online visibility topic, even if from different participants' perspectives: firms and multinational corporations (Dreze, Zufryden, 2004; Reuber, Fisher, 2011; Murphy, Scharl, 2007) SMEs (Chua et Al. 2009, Otero et Al, 2014) and accommodation businesses (Smithson et Al., 2011).

By summing up the definitions proposed by the selected papers, online visibility is defined as the extent to which a user is likely to come across a reference to a company's website in his or her online or offline environment (Drèze, Zufryden, 2004); as the firm's familiarity in the eyes of online stakeholders relative to that of its rivals (Reuber, Fisher, 2011); as a differentiating factor able to produce superior organizational performance through the capture of new clients; as the higher possibility of finding certain enterprises (Smithson et Al., 2011).

Moreover, although a possible metric for online visibility is the ranking of a firm's website, compared to those of its competitors and website traffic (Reuber, Fisher, 2011; Murphy, Scharl, 2007; Chua et Al. 2009; Otero et Al., 2014), the absence of an existing OV measure in business and management literature emerges (Reuber, Fisher, 2011; Smithson et Al. 2011).

In particular, even if the most complete OV measurement method is that proposed by Dreze and Zufryden (2004), the identification of an online visibility index is still at an exploratory stage and there is not a standardized scale widely accepted by researchers (Smithson et Al., 2011).

Focusing on the measurement of the number of links from other websites, the Dreze and Zufryden model (2004) does not consider the user's perspective and his or her search choices.

In order to include these preferences, Smithson et Al. (2011) propose a model integrating the psychological, motivational, economic and processing approaches of tourist users.

By continuing in the same direction (the OV measurement trend), Otero et Al. (2014) identify the principal elements which make up the online visibility index: backlinks (the greater the number of links pointing to a website, the better is its visibility), infomediaries, websites (the better the website quality, the greater the effectiveness in consumer attraction) and social media (the more a firm participates in social media, the more it improves its search engine ranking).

6.4.3 Online Reputation (OR)

From the extractions of the online reputation definitions, different focuses emerge. In particular, the authors devoted to the OR literature, seem to concentrate on specific aspects: *online reputation* (Lee et Al., 2011; Lin et Al., 2006; Zhou et Al., 2008; Reuber, Fisher, 2011; Dellarocas, 2010; Hung et Al., 2012; Chua et Al., 2009; Bakos, Dellarocas, 2011), *online reputation systems* (Lee et Al., 2011; Lin et Al., 2006; Zhou et Al., 2008; Liu, Munro, 2012; Dellarocas, 2010; Abbasi et Al., 2008; Wang et Al., 2010), *online reputation mechanisms* (Yoganarasimhan, 2013), *online reputation scores* (Lin et Al., 2006; Abbasi et Al., 2008; Li et Al., 2008) and *online reputation management* (Hung et Al., 2012; Bunting, Lipski, 2001).

Overall, similarly to the OPr literature profiling, a limited attempt to define the OR topic emerges. Although business and management literature amply treats the

online reputation theme, the number of authors that propose a definition is restricted.

From a sectorial perspective, the study of online reputation is especially tied to tourist online reviews (Lee et Al., 2011), the auction market (Lin et Al., 2006; Zhou et Al., 2008), firms and corporations (Reuber, Fisher, 2011; Hung et Al., 2012; Bunting, Lipski, 2001), internet companies (Liu, Munro, 2012), online communities (Dellarocas, 2010), reputation manipulation (Abbasi et Al., 2008), the C2C market (Li et Al., 2008), SMEs (Chua et Al., 2009), buyers and sellers (Bakos, Dellarocas, 2011), sellers (Yoganarasimhan, 2013) and consumers (Wang et Al., 2010).

By summing up the definitions proposed by the selected papers, online reputation is described as an extrinsic cue indicating the quality of online merchants and online information creators (Lee et Al., 2011); as the net impact of the positive and negative feedback (Zhou et Al., 2008); as the firm's perceptual representation among online constituents, as an uncertainty-reducing mechanism (Reuber, Fisher, 2011); as a summary of one's past actions (Liu, Munro, 2012); as a mechanism for inducing cooperation, promoting trust (Bakos, Dellarocas 2011) and for decreasing the information asymmetry between players (Yoganarasimhan, 2013); as an important component of niche marketing and differentiation (Chua et Al., 2009) and as an endogenous and self-generated indicator produced by the users for their benefit (Hung et Al. 2012).

Similarly to the OV index, also in the case of OR study, some devoted authors to this topic attempt to identify the principal measures it is composed of. These are represented by online visibility, the valence of online signals, the volume of online signals, the consistency of online signals, the perceived trustworthiness (Reuber, Fisher, 2011); the reviews helpful ratings (Lee et Al., 2011); the number of positive, negative and neutral comments (Bakos, Dellarocas, 2011; Li et Al., 2008).

In order to build a positive online reputation, three aspects become essential: being visible online, being seen as providing high-quality goods and services (Reuber, Fisher, 2011) and the activation of the online reputation management (ORM), which becomes a critical issue utilized in order to reduce the risk of negative interaction outcomes in the internationalized world (Hung et Al., 2012).

6.4.4 Online popularity (OPo)

The last extracted concept, online popularity (OPo), represents the least studied topic by the business and management literature. Only three works try to define and measure it, even if they are from different sectorial perspectives: hotel and restaurants (Zhang et Al., 2010; Xie et Al., 2014) and online products (Hanson, Putler, 1996).

More specifically, Hanson and Putler (1996) interpret popularity as an indicator of quality (adopted by consumers in order to make their online product choices). The principal variables are represented by the number of views or visits, star

ratings, web traffic to webpages (Zhang et Al., 2010) and the number of consumer reviews (Xie et Al., 2014). Despite these attempts to define the online popularity concept, and similar to the OPr and OR definition outlines, a lack and a consequent requirement to adopt a unanimous OPo definition emerges from the management and business literature.

6.4.5 OPr, OV, OR and OPo Interactions

Through the process of thematic narrative analysis and in addition to the identification of the definitions associated with the online presence, visibility, reputation and popularity, three possible interactions, between these topics, emerged from the literature.

OPr and OV Interactions
The first interaction concerns the connection between online presence and online visibility (Otero et Al., 2014; Smithson et Al., 2011; Chua et Al., 2009; Murphy, Scharl, 2007; Chen, Yen, 2004; Drèze, Zufryden, 2004). In particular, Otero et Al. (2014) affirm, in their work, that firms with an online presence should ensure their visibility by providing detailed information on their own websites and ultimately attract customers to their physical establishment for the final purchase.
By focusing on the distinction between website presence and online visibility, Smithson et Al. (2011) underline that the difference between these two variables is great: "although both of them measure Internet presence, in online visibility the evaluation of the website is used only as a bottom line and the differentiating factor – the visibility of the hotel during a tourist's search – is the key element in the measurement (Smithson et Al., 2011, p. 1584).
According to Chua et Al. (2009), the subsequent marketing process challenge for organizations with an online presence is to understand how to increase the flow of traffic to their websites/social media, in order to intensify their online visibility and then their sales. Even if an effective online presence is vital to a brand's internet success, having technology represents only the first stage of organizational diffusion. In later phases of internet adoption firms should actually promote, their websites in order to achieve higher search engine rankings, thus yielding more online visibility and subsequent website traffic (Murphy, Scharl, 2007).
In their work, Chen and Yen (2004) underline how website design improves online presence. While adding interactivity to a website may improve user satisfaction and then lead to a possible increase in site visibility.
Overall, it materializes from the review how online presence and online visibility are considered as two different stages of internet adoption, by almost all the extracted authors. The only exception is represented by the work of Drèze, Zufryden (2004), in which the OPr and OV terms are used synonymously.

OV and OPo Interactions

Concerning the second interaction (Online visibility-Online popularity), in their studies different authors (Otero et Al., 2014; Zhang et Al., 2010; Chua et Al., 2009; Murphy, Scharl, 2007; Dreze, Zufryden, 2004) adopt the same measure (web traffic to webpages) as an indicator for online visibility and online popularity. In particular, as Dreze and Zufryden (2004) affirm that "one can view online visibility as a precursor to web site traffic, in the same vein as awareness is a precursor to purchase (Dreze, Zufryden, 2004, p. 22), Zhang et Al. (2010) state the same concept but addressed to OPo, affirming that "web traffic to restaurant webpages is a measure of online popularity" (Zhang et Al. 2010, p. 699).

OV and OR Interactions

The last interaction, which appeared in the literature, concerns the connection between online visibility and online reputation. Once a firm enters the online environment (*online presence*), the intensification of its online visibility through the flow of traffic to their website and social media (Chua et Al., 2009) is not enough. Even if a fundamental stage is pointing the user towards the firm's website, then the design and information provided must be appealing [*reputation*] (Smithson et Al., 2011). In particular, according to Reuber and Fisher (2011), "there are two aspects of an online reputation: being visible online and being seen as providing high-quality goods and services" (Reuber, Fisher, 2011, p. 2).

In other words, online reputation involves both visibility and quality. Overall, the academic literature underlines that while higher search engine rankings lead to higher traffic (online visibility), the design and information provided lead to greater credibility and reputation for a website (Murphy, Scharl, 2007).

Starting from these interactions and focusing especially on the Visibility concept, it emerges from the literature review how OV represents a result of the firm's ability to drive users back to their online contact points (E.g. website, social media).

For this reason, in order to identify an effective sample of TS organizers to whom to address the in-depth interview, the attention will be directed towards the most online visible exhibition centers (which also directly manage the events).

This is because they will also probably be the most active organizers in their online presence management.

In particular, since the focus of the interview is mainly aimed at analyzing social media strategies from the TSO perspective, the first objective of this dissertation's empirical section is to find and extract an index from the literature for the measurement of social media visibility/popularity (as the literature considers them as synonymous).

Through the adoption of a social media visibility/popularity index, it will be possible to identify, within a pre-selected sample, the most active TS organizers in the social media context.

In order to reach this objective, a systematic analysis aimed at detecting the SM visibility and popularity indexes proposed by the literature has been done. The results of this analysis will be presented in the following chapter, along with the methodologies and sample adopted by the present dissertation.

7

Methodology and data collection

7.1 Definition of the research design

In order to reach the empirical purpose, the present dissertation employs an explorative research design, characterized by three main phases:

1. The identification and adoption of a social media visibility/popularity index, extracted from the literature, in order to identify, among a sample of TS organizers, the most visible/popular ones in the social media context;

2. The construction of an in-depth interview focused on the use of social media from the TS organizers' perspective;

3. The administration of the in-depth interview to the TSO sample, identified through the adoption of the social media index.

Starting from the necessity to identify an index for the measurement of social media visibility/popularity, during the first stage of the research design process, an analysis of the literature focused on this topic, has been performed.

7.1.1 Social media visibility/popularity Index

Similarly from what was pointed out by the OV review, and also from the analysis of the social media visibility's literature, it emerges how the identification of an index is still at an exploratory stage, with several authors proposing possible measures.

More specifically, the criteria adopted in order to find the articles focused on this topic are the following: [1] Key words ("*Social media visibility*"; "*Social media popularity*"); [2] Document type (article); [3] Databases (Scopus, Web Of Science, Google Scholar). Through this literature research, 22 articles specifically dedicated to the social media visibility/popularity themes have been identified (Tab. 7.1).

Table 7.1: Social media visibility and popularity studies

Authors	Year	Social media visibility/popularity (V/P)
Elkarim et Al.	2017	P
Fu, Shumate	2017	V
Lardo et Al.	2017	P
Lin et Al.	2017	P
Carr et Al.	2016	V
Fensel et Al.	2016	V
Uche, Obiora	2016	P
Zheng, Yu	2016	V
Roberts et Al.	2015	P
Zavattaro et Al.	2015	V
Ahmed et Al.	2014	V
Alzahrani, Bach	2014	P
Fan, Gordon	2014	P
Figueiredo et Al.	2014	P
Yang, Kent	2014	V
Katz, Halpern	2013	P
Levy	2013	V
O' Connor	2013	P
Quach et Al.	2013	P
Treem, Leopardi	2013	V
Botha et Al.	2011	V
Reyneke et Al.	2011	V

Source: Author's elaboration

From the table, it emerges how the interest of the literature is extremely recent (the first articles were published in 2011). In particular, eleven studies focused on social media popularity and 11 on visibility. By recognizing the importance of the visibility/popularity concept in the social media environment for organizations, brands or individuals (Reyneke et Al., 2011), in their articles, the authors devoted to this topic, propose possible SM visibility/popularity metrics, in the absence of a standardized scale widely accepted by the literature.

The main motivation connected to this lack of a unanimously shared index may be identified in the fact that the social media thematic is not only extremely

contemporary (SM 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 visibility/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 present work adopts the social media popularity index proposed by Lardo et Al. (2017), since their definition of SM popularity, (the ability to attract fans and followers), is the most in line with the dissertation's approach.

Figure 7.1: Social media popularity Index
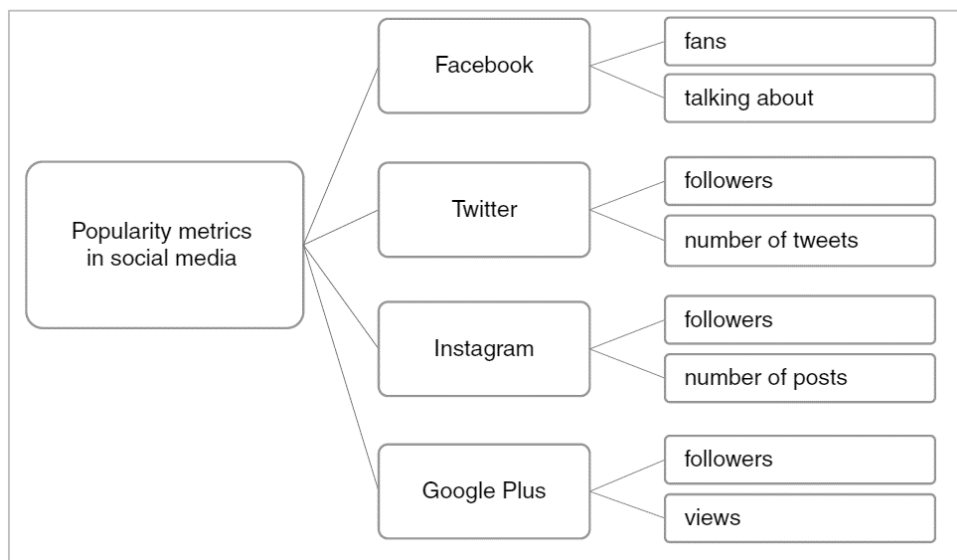
Source: Lardo et Al. (2017)

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, 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 brought two other types of social media (LinkedIn and YouTube) in addition to those proposed by Lardo et Al. (2017), in order to include all the most relevant social media for the TS environment (Browne, 2012). Figure 6.2 summarizes the final social media popularity index adopted by the present dissertation.

Figure 7.2: Social media popularity Index (for the TS context)
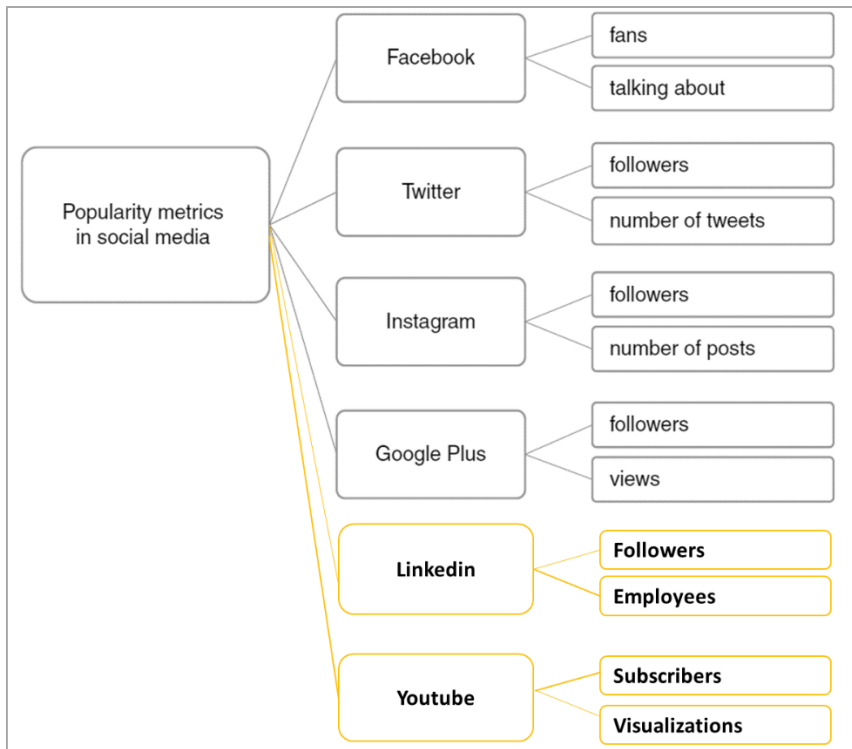
Source: Author's elaboration on Lardo et Al. (2017)

The overall assigned popularity score provides a quick way to compare the SM visibility/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 therefore 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 visible/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 7.2 for the definition and identification of the sample).

7.1.2 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, the dissertation adopts in-depth, semi-structured interviews. In particular, interviews were chosen due to their potential of providing detailed information and perceptions that would otherwise be impossible to access (Gottlieb, 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 SM management process (who deals with the management and development of social media strategies; how many people are responsible; if there is separation between social media and marketing departments; what percentage of the total budget is dedicated towards social media; measures adopted for evaluating SM strategies), 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 organizers' users in their SM strategies. In particular, the objective is to underline the main roles assumed by social media during the different TS stages (in order to enrich the literature devoted to new media and trade show phases) and to highlight if users are involved, as active participants, in the social media strategies.

The fourth part (*Social media stenghts, 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.

More specifically, the protocol questions were: 1) *Which is, in your opinion, the impact social media will have in future trade show scenarios?*; 2) *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 (if yes, why? If not, why?);* 3) *Virtualization of trade shows: In*

your opinion, could virtual trade shows replace the real ones in the near future? (If yes, why? If not, why?).

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 over a four-month period between May and August 2017 (the sample's composition will be illustrated in the next chapter). 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, Clarke, 2006).

Interpretations of emerging themes are the results of interview transcripts, interviewer notes and the extant literature (Gottlieb, 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.

Table 7.2 summarizes the questions raised during the interview, along with the authors, representing the starting point for the questions' formulation, and the clarification of whether the literature adopted is general/parental or specific (TS context).

Table 7.2: Interview questions and literature sources

Question	Authors	Literature (General/Trade Show)
Which are the initial reasons for the adoption of social media applications?	(Adaptation to Mergel, 2013; Fisher, Reuber, 2011)	G
Which social media tools are employed?	(Adaptation to Hays, Page, Buhalis, 2013)	G
Who deals with the management and development of social media strategies?	(Adaptation to Hays, Page, Buhalis, 2013)	G
Is the social media role separated from other marketing employees?	(Adaptation to Hays, Page, Buhalis, 2013)	G
How many people are responsible for maintaining a social media presence, developing strategies/campaigns?	(Adaptation to Hays, Page, Buhalis, 2013)	G
What is the total budget dedicated towards social media? What percentage of the total marketing budget is this?	(Adaptation to Hays, Page, Buhalis, 2013)	G

Which are the main goals you intend to pursue through social media?	(Adaptation to Mergel, 2013; Fisher, Reuber, 2011)	G
Do you have an editorial calendar?	(Adaptation to Hays, Page, Buhalis, 2013)	G
Do you adapt contents and activities according to the different adopted social media platforms?	(Adaptation to Hays, Page, Buhalis, 2013)	G
Do you have any particular strategies to gain followers on the different social media platforms?	(Adaptation to Hays, Page, Buhalis, 2013)	G
To whom are most of the social media efforts directed (exhibitors, visitors, other stakeholders)?	(Adaptation to Hays, Page, Buhalis, 2013)	G
How do you measure successful social media efforts?	(Adaptation to Hays, Page, Buhalis, 2013)	G
Pre, during and post show: Do you exploit social media during all three phases?	(Adaptation to Singh et Al., 2017; Ling-Yee, 2010; Lee, Kim, 2008)	TS
If yes, which functions perform social media in your strategies?	(Adaptation to Singh et Al., 2017; Ling-Yee, 2010)	TS
What is the role of users in your social media strategies?	(Adaptation to Gottliber et Al., 2014; Rinallo et Al., 2010)	TS
Do you involve users in your social media strategies, in order to transform them into active players of your communication strategies?	(Adaptation to Gottliber et Al., 2014; Rinallo et Al., 2010)	TS
Which are, in your opinion, the main strengths/weaknesses of adopting social media in your communicative strategies?	(Adaptation to Gottlieb et Al., 2017)	TS
Which are, in your opinion, the main challenges to overcome in order to effectively exploit the social media potentialities?	(Adaptation to Gottlieb et Al., 2017)	TS
Overall, which is, in your opinion, the impact social media will have in future trade show scenarios?	(Adaptation to Kirchgeorg et Al. 2010)	TS
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?	(Adaptation to Kirchgeorg et Al. 2010)	TS

Virtualization of trade shows: In your opinion, could virtual trade shows become the new format of the future? (If yes, why? If not, why?).	(Adaptation to Gottlieb et Al., 2017; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010)	TS

Source: Author's elaboration

7.2 Definition and identification of the sample

As stated in the precedent 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 leases) and [2] with high social media visibility/popularity.

In the remainder of the paragraph, the countries' selection criteria and the identification modality of both the starting sample (on which the SM popularity index has been adopted) and the final sample (to which the interview has been sent) will be illustrated.

7.2.1 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, 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. In particular, 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 (Bathelt et Al., 2014).

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 (UFI, 2012).

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 (Bathelt et Al. 2014).

7.2.1.1 Germany

In Germany, trade show events are mainly organized by exhibition centers or their subsidiary organizations. More specifically, the main roles assumed by German exhibition complexes, concern the exhibition ground management, basic services provision and direct organization of most of the proposed events (also outside the centers themselves) through their own facilities.

Frankfurt, Dusseldorf, Cologne, Hanover and Munich represent the most important German exhibition centers. They have been active since the beginning of the twentieth century. Collectively they have thousands of employees and they organize between forty and seventy shows per year, that occupy up to 90 per cent of the rental space within the center (Bathelt et Al., 2014).

The main objective connected to trade show business development, is specifically related to the desire of generating growth, within the local area/territory, by offering visibility platforms for exhibitors and visitors.

From the international events perspective, Germany represents the country hosting the most events, followed by Italy, France and Spain (UFI, 2016).

This result in turn leads to a greater regional economic impact, as Germany has always been both a major import market for manufacturing products and an important exporter (UFI, 2014).

From the point of view of specialization, industry-technology manufacturing, transportation (automotive), communication-office suppliers and furniture represent the leading sectors, with the highest share of German trade show activities (UFI, 2016; CERMES, 2013).

7.2.1.2 Italy

In terms of manufacturing and trade show activity, Italy ranks second after Germany. It is characterized with a greater number of firms in each industry than Germany. However, Italy has an industrial structure mainly composed of small firms with limited resources that impede them from counting on specialized sales forces and from accessing international markets.

This situation has led to a consequent large demand for collective events and related exhibition facilities.

Milan's exhibition center opened in 1923 and it was the first international complex built in Italy. It was followed by the construction of other smaller ones during the subsequent years. In particular, Verona, Bologna and Rimini represent the most important centers, after Milan.

Overall, the restricted accessibility, characterizing the exhibition centers outside Milan, has made the internationalization process of Italian events critical (AUMA, 2012).

From the sectorial perspective, the main areas of specialization of Italian trade show activities are represented by clothing-fashion, art-antiques and food events (UFI, 2016).

On the whole, the Italian exhibition system presents specific criticalities.

In particular concerning the absence of worldwide Italian players (only Milan is among the top 10 worldwide exhibition centers), along with the presence of an independent certification system, evaluating the National TS events' success.

To be more specific, each exhibition center self-certificates visitors and stands, while official certifications are only required for international events.

These certifications become fundamental, since they allow events to be included in the UFI statistics. On the contrary, many Italian exhibition centers consider this system superfluous and overpriced. In addition, the Italian State attributes to the Regions the competences for regulating the trade show system, thus giving local authorities the power to directly manage calendars and classify events as local, national or international.

The main consequence of this reality is the continuous creation of new event-photocopies (that often do not attract the favor of the industry players) replicated in neighboring exhibition centers and even in the same periods of the year.

The organization of these events has the main objective of upsetting the balance between the National exhibition centers and consequently stealing each other's customers and exhibitors. As a result this creates a state of confusion and disorientation for the buyers and an overall situation of earnings reduction for the entire system.

In particular, the replication of the same events in every exhibition center divides the influx of exhibitors and visitors (who, if they decided to participate in all the proposed events would face an excessive financial commitment), therefore, as a consequence, the organizers' revenues are reduced.

Against this background, the establishment of a unique control room becomes essential (which should involve the representatives of the exhibition centers, the trade show associations and the event organizers), with the principal aim of protecting the interest of the entire Italian trade show system, by at the same time enhancing the individual centers it is composed of (AEFI, 2012).

7.2.1.3 France

In France, the most important trade show events take place in Paris and Lyon, where three large and several smaller exhibition complexes are located.

Even though many other centers are situated throughout the country, they have very small dimensions, and they mainly host business to consumer trade shows related to agricultural products and traditional local consumer goods.

In Paris, the local Chamber of Commerce and a private real estate management firm (minority shareholder) jointly own all of the centers.

Many of the events proposed in Paris are either international hub events or (especially in food and furnishing accessories) export shows at a European level. There are mainly European exhibitors and many visitors from non-European countries. Even if France ranks only third in Europe in terms of trade show activity's volume, some of its events are highly internationalized from both exhibitors and visitors sides.

From the specialization perspective, in the textile-clothing industry Parisian events (along with Italian events) offer the highest quality of products in Europe. While in the design-accessories sector French trade shows have surpassed Italian TSs in terms of international participation and product quality. The same situation goes for food/beverage shows, in which Italy proposes many fragmented events competing with one another (Bathelt et Al., 2014).

7.2.1.4 Spain

Similar to the German governance model, the Spanish model is characterized by the initiative of local governments, which are particularly active in trade show activities. Furthermore, events are mostly managed by the exhibition centers themselves (70-80 per cent of the total rented space).

Overall, Spanish events mainly have an import orientation, being far fewer and smaller than in Germany. This is a situation that corresponds to the country's comparatively limited manufacturing and export activities.

Barcelona and Madrid are the cities where the main exhibition centers are located, with the first hosting mainly professional events and with the latter primarily proposing consumer shows (Bathelt et Al., 2014).

At the sectorial level, construction, gift-toys and sport-leisure represent the main areas of specialization of Spanish trade show activities, followed by the agriculture, art-antiques and transport industries (UFI, 2016).

7.2.2 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. 7.3).

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 leases), 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.

Table 7.3: Identification of the database (1° phase)

Countries	Num. of exhibition centres	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 visible and popular exhibition centers in the social media context, the SM popularity index (previously identified) was adopted on this identified database (Tab. 7.4).

Table 7.4: Social media popularity Index

SN	Metrics	Sources
Facebook	Fans; Talking about	Lardo et Al. (2017)
Twitter	Followers; Tweets	Lardo et Al. (2017)
Instagram	Followers; Posts	Lardo et Al. (2017)
Google Plus	Followers; Views	Lardo et Al. (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. In this way satisfying the second parameter necessary for the inclusion in the final sample (high social media popularity/visibility).

In particular, the final ranking for each country involves exhibition centers, which reported the SM popularity index value equal or superior to the sample's median. An interview request was sent to these selected exhibition organizations.

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 ($M_{e=}0,18$).

Table 7.5: Selected exhibition centers (Germany)

Selected TSO (Germany)	SM Popularity Index result
1	6,74
2	5,24
3	4,52
4	3,57
5	2,19
6	2,07
7	1,73
8	1,55
9	1,40
10	1,01
11	0,96
12	0,78
13	0,77
14	0,72
15	0,62
16	0,47
17	0,47
18	0,35
19	0,30
20	0,24
21	0,18

Source: Author's elaboration

For Italy, the first 25 exhibition centers were selected, due to the fact that they present a final index equal or superior to the sample's median ($M_{e=}0,36$).

Table 7.6: Selected exhibition centers (Italy)

Selected TSO (Italy)	SM Popularity Index result
1	5,86
2	5,48
3	4,32
4	3,76
5	3,56
6	2,69

7	2,20
8	1,83
9	1,72
10	1,20
11	1,04
12	0,84
13	0,75
14	0,69
15	0,68
16	0,68
17	0,62
18	0,59
19	0,57
20	0,57
21	0,56
22	0,55
23	0,54
24	0,37
25	0,37

Source: Author's elaboration

The first 30 French exhibition centers were chosen, as their index is equal or superior to the sample's median ($M_e=0,17$).

Table 7.7: Selected exhibition centers (France)

Selected TSO (France)	SM Popularity Index result
1	7,31
2	5,48
3	2,57
4	2,44
5	1,73
6	1,02
7	0,96
8	0,93
9	0,92
10	0,86
11	0,85
12	0,84
13	0,71
14	0,58
15	0,54
16	0,49
17	0,47
18	0,39
19	0,37
20	0,35
21	0,32
22	0,28
23	0,28
24	0,26
25	0,25

26	0,23
27	0,22
28	0,20
29	0,20
30	0,17

Source: Author's elaboration

Finally, for the Spanish classification, the first 31 exhibition centers were selected, because they have a final index equal or superior to the sample's median (M_e= 0,14).

Table 7.8: Selected exhibition centers (Spain)

Selected TSO (Spain)	SM Popularity Index result
1	8,09
2	2,81
3	2,67
4	2,59
5	2,40
6	1,99
7	1,81
8	1,52
9	1,40
10	1,37
11	1,05
12	0,97
13	0,95
14	0,74
15	0,60
16	0,57
17	0,46
18	0,35
19	0,29
20	0,28
21	0,24
22	0,23
23	0,22
24	0,20
25	0,20
26	0,20
27	0,19
28	0,17
29	0,17
30	0,15
31	0,14

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 7.9 summarizes the different phases that led to the final sample. 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.

Table 7.9: Definition of the sample: A synthesis

	Modality	Number of exhibition centers				
		Germany	Italy	France	Spain	Tot.
1° Phase (Starting sample)	Extraction of the sample from the *n.fiere.com* database	50	54	118	83	**305**
2° Phase (Exhibition centers that respect the first parameter)	Consultation of the event calendar of each exhibition center's website	41	50	59	61	**211**
3° Phase (Exhibition centers that respect the second parameter)	Adoption of the SM popularity index and selection of exhibition centers based on the sample's median	21	25	30	31	**107**

Source: Author's elaboration

8

Results

8.1 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 SM popularity index and from the singular indexes' perspective (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google Plus, YouTube, LinkedIn).

8.1.1 Overall SM popularity Index

It emerges from the analysis of the overall SM 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.

Table 8.1: 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

More specifically, for the German exhibition centers (*n*=21), the SM popularity Index ranges from 0,18 to 6,74, with a mean of 1,71 and standard deviation of 1,649. The Italian Index (*n* of TSO=25) ranges from 0,37 to 5,86, with a mean of 1,68 and standard deviation of 1,548, while the Spanish Index (*n* of TSO=31) ranges from 0,14 to 8,09, with a mean of 1,13 and standard deviation of 1,816.
Lastly, for the French exhibition centers (*n*=30), the SM popularity index varies from 0,17 to 7,31, with a mean of 1,07 and a standard variation of 1,585.
However, overall Table 8.1 illustrates how the average indexes, obtained by the exhibition centers of the four surveyed countries, are far from the maximum achievable value (12), thus highlighting an important improvement gap in terms of visibility and popularity on the analyzed social media.

8.1.2 Singular SM Indexes

By focusing on the singular SM popularity indexes within each specific investigated country, it emerges from Table 8.2 how the German exhibition organizers are, on average, more popular and visible 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 visible and popular.

Table 8.2: Singular Indexes - German exhibition organizers (*n*=21)

	Mean*	Std. Deviation
Facebook Index	0,31	0,461
Twitter Index	0,25	0,442
Instagram Index	0,22	0,529
Google Plus Index	0,17	0,280
YouTube Index	0,49	0,497
LinkedIn Index	0,27	0,465

* Overall achievable score: 2
Source: Author's elaboration

From the Italian exhibition organizers' perspective, Twitter (0,37) and Facebook (0,34) are the SM where the Italian centers are more popular, followed by Instagram (0,31), Google Plus (0,25) and LinkedIn (0,24). Instead, YouTube represents the SM platform in which the Italian organizers are less visible and popular (0,18).

Table 8.3: Singular Indexes - Italian exhibition organizers (*n*=25)

	Mean*	Std. Deviation
Facebook Index	0,34	0,370
Twitter Index	0,37	0,509
Instagram Index	0,31	0,440
Google Plus Index	0,25	0,296
YouTube Index	0,18	0,439
LinkedIn Index	0,24	0,439

* Overall achievable score: 2
Source: Author's elaboration

By concentrating on the Spanish organizers, Table 8.4 shows how Twitter represents the social network in which they are more popular and visible, 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 visible and popular (0,11).

Table 8.4: Singular Indexes - Spanish exhibition organizers (*n*=31)

	Mean*	Std. Deviation
Facebook Index	0,15	0,386
Twitter Index	0,33	0,354
Instagram Index	0,22	0,401
Google Plus Index	0,14	0,212
YouTube Index	0,11	0,382
LinkedIn Index	0,18	0,410

* Overall achievable score: 2
Source: Author's elaboration

Lastly, from the French exhibition organizers' point of view, Twitter is the platform where they are more visible 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 visible and popular.

Table 8.5: Singular Indexes - French exhibition organizers (*n*=30)

	Mean*	Std. Deviation
Facebook Index	0,15	0,305
Twitter Index	0,30	0,499
Instagram Index	0,16	0,387
Google Plus Index	0,10	0,249
YouTube Index	0,10	0,364
LinkedIn Index	0,26	0,451

* Overall achievable score: 2
Source: Author's elaboration

Table 8.6 summarizes the social media platforms in which the exhibition organizers are more/less popular.

Table 8.6: TS organizers and social media popularity: A synthesis

TSO	Social media platforms in which organizers are more (*M*)/less (*L*) popular					
	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	Google Plus	YouTube	LinkedIn
Germany				L	M	
Italy		M			L	
Spain		M			L	
France		M		L	L	

Source: Author's elaboration

During the second phase, after analyzing the social media indexes in a separate way, within each specific investigated country, the singular SM average indexes have been analyzed through a comparison between the different samples (German, Italian, Spanish and French exhibition organizers).

In particular, by focusing on the Facebook Index, Table 8.7 demonstrates how the Italian TSO are the most popular exhibition centers on this SM 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.

Table 8.7: Facebook Index - A comparison

	N	Mean*	Std. Deviation
Facebook Index_ITA	25	0,34	0,370
Facebook Index_FRA	30	0,15	0,305
Facebook Index_SPA	31	0,15	0,386
Facebook Index_GER	21	0,31	0,461

* Overall achievable score: 2
Source: Author's elaboration

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).

Table 8.8: Twitter Index - A comparison

	N	Mean*	Std. Deviation
Twitter Index_ITA	25	0,37	0,509
Twitter Index_FRA	30	0,30	0,499
Twitter Index_SPA	31	0,33	0,354
Twitter Index_GER	21	0,25	0,442

* Overall achievable score: 2
Source: Author's elaboration

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).

Table 8.9: Instagram Index - A comparison

	N	Mean*	Std. Deviation
Instagram Index_ITA	25	0,31	0,440
Instagram Index_FRA	30	0,16	0,387
Instagram Index_SPA	31	0,22	0,401
Instagram Index_GER	21	0,22	0,529

* Overall achievable score: 2
Source: Author's elaboration

In addition to this, regarding the Google Plus Index, the Italian exhibition organizers turn out to be the most visible centers on this SM 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).

Table 8.10: Google Plus Index - A comparison

	N	Mean*	Std. Deviation
Google Plus Index_ITA	25	0,25	0,296
Google Plus Index_FRA	30	0,10	0,249
Google Plus Index_SPA	31	0,14	0,212
Google Plus Index_GER	21	0,17	0,280

* Overall achievable score: 2
Source: Author's elaboration

By focusing on the YouTube Index, it emerges from Table 8.11 how the German exhibition centers are, on average, the most popular organizers on this SM 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).

Table 8.11: YouTube Index - A comparison

	N	Mean*	Std. Deviation
YouTube Index_ITA	25	0,18	0,439
YouTube Index_FRA	30	0,10	0,364
YouTube Index_SPA	31	0,11	0,382
YouTube Index_GER	21	0,49	0,497

* Overall achievable score: 2
Source: Author's elaboration

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 8.12: LinkedIn Index - A comparison

	N	Mean*	Std. Deviation
LinkedIn Index_ITA	25	0,24	0,439
LinkedIn Index_FRA	30	0,26	0,451
LinkedIn Index_SPA	31	0,18	0,410
LinkedIn Index_GER	21	0,27	0,465

* Overall achievable score: 2
Source: Author's elaboration

Table 8.13 summarizes, for each singular social media, the highest and lowest average index achieved among the analyzed samples (Germany, Italy, Spain and France).

Table 8.13: 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

* Overall achievable score: 2
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 visible exhibition centers in the social media environment, by achieving, on average, the highest popularity indexes with a mean equal to 1,71 and 1,68;

- The Spanish and French centers accomplish, on average, the lowest index with a mean of 1,13 and 1,07;

- The average SM popularity indexes (obtained by the exhibition centers of the four surveyed countries) range from 1,07 (France) to 1,71 (Germany). In this way, a significant improvement gap in order to reach the maximum achievable average (12) is highlighted;

- The German exhibition organizers are, on average, more popular on YouTube and less on Google Plus;

- The Italian, Spanish and French centers are more popular on Twitter, while YouTube represents the SM platform in which 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.

8.2 Identification of the interview's respondents

In this paragraph, the sample of 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. 8.14). The names of respondents and organizations have been suppressed for confidentiality reasons.

Table 8.14: Respondents' characteristics (*n*=38)

Resp.	Geographical localization (Country)	Ranking position (SM popularity Index)	Number of employees	% of events directly organized	Main typologies of organized events	Interviewee's role
1	Germany	2	2.300	38%	B2B TSs	Manager corporate communications
2	Germany	5	24	26%	B2B/B2C TSs, conferences, workshops, shows	Head of communication
3	Germany	8	161	43%	B2B/B2C TSs, conferences, workshops, shows	Head of marketing
4	Germany	12	150	10%	B2B/B2C TSs	Head of marketing
5	Germany	14	200	85%	B2B and B2C TSs, conferences, annual general meetings	Head of press and digital media
6	Germany	17	50	10%	B2B/B2C TSs	Head of marketing
7	Germany	18	14	21%	B2B/B2C TSs	Head of marketing
8	Germany	19	26	15%	B2B/B2C TSs	Head of marketing

9	Germany	20	12	18%	B2B/B2C TSs	Head of marketing
10	Germany	21	10	25%	B2C TSs	Exhibition director
11	Italy	2	>280	90%	B2B/B2C TSs, conferences, meetings, workshops	Digital marketing manager
12	Italy	4	37	10%	B2C TSs	Head of marketing
13	Italy	5	27	25%	B2B/B2C TSs, meetings, conferences	Supply & Operations manager
14	Italy	6	36	90%	B2B/B2C TSs	Head of communication
15	Italy	7	130	70%	B2B TSs	Head of human resources, planning and development
16	Italy	8	48	10%	B2B/B2C TSs, conferences, meetings, workshops, concerts, competitions, shows	Head of ICT
17	Italy	10	24	13%	B2C TSs	Head of marketing
18	Italy	12	16	50%	B2B/B2C TSs	Head of marketing
19	Italy	16	15	80%	B2B/B2C TSs	Business manager
20	Italy	17	8	80%	B2B/B2C TSs	Head of marketing
21	Italy	22	>280	90%	B2B/B2C TSs, conferences, meetings, workshops	Digital marketing manager
22	Italy	23	8	80%	B2C TSs	Head of communication
23	Italy	25	10	50%	B2B/B2C TSs	Head of marketing
24	Spain	2	400	12,%	B2B/B2C TSs, meetings, conferences, workshops, shows	Head of marketing
25	Spain	3	295	42%	B2B/B2C TSs, conferences, meetings	Head of marketing

26	Spain	4	40	50%	B2B/B2C TSs, conferences, shows	Community manager
27	Spain	6	40	15%	B2B/B2C TSs	Head of marketing
28	Spain	11	6	32%	B2B/B2C TSs, conferences	Head of communication
29	Spain	15	22	70%	B2B/B2C TSs, conferences	Head of marketing
30	Spain	16	19	22%	B2B/B2C TSs, conferences, meetings	General director
31	Spain	17	14	10%	B2B/B2C TSs, conferences, meetings, shows	Exhibition director
32	Spain	22	7	60%	B2B/B2C TSs, conferences	Head of communication
33	France	5	109	88%	B2B/B2C TSs, conferences, meetings, workshops, shows	Head of marketing
34	France	8	15	37%	B2B/B2C TSs, conferences, meetings, workshops	Head of marketing
35	France	12	40	33%	B2B/B2C TSs, conferences, meetings, workshops, shows	Marketing support
36	France	18	74	30%	B2B/B2C TSs, conferences, meetings, shows	Social media supervisor manager
37	France	20	30	48%	B2B/B2C TSs	Head of press
38	France	29	5	25%	B2B/B2C TSs, conferences, meetings, shows	Project manager

Source: Author's elaboration

Overall, concerning the geographical localization, 34% of the respondents are Italian, 26% German, 24% Spanish and 16% French.

From the Index classification point of view, 24% of the respondents ranked among the first and fifth positions, 18% among the sixth and tenth, 42% among the eleventh and twentieth, while only 16% of the respondents ranked beyond the twentieth position.

In terms of number of employees, a significant percentage of respondents (34%) state having a number of staff that ranges from 21 to 50 employees, followed by the percentage (26%) of exhibition organizers, which have more than 100

employees. The respondents with 1-10 (18%) and 11-20 employees (18%) rank in third place, followed by those having staff number composed of 51-100 people.

By focusing on the percentage of events directly organized by the exhibition centers, a significant percentage (32%) of respondents directly manage 11-30% out of the total hosted events, followed by those (26%) which organize a percentage of events ranging from 31 and 50%. The respondents that organize firsthand almost all the events (24%) and, on the contrary, those which manage a limited percentage of events (13%) comprised between 1 and 10% rank in third and fourth place, followed by those (5%) directly organizing a percentage of events that ranges from 51 to 70%.

From the events typologies perspective, the B2B (29%) and B2C trade shows (28%) are the most organized events. These were followed by conferences (16%), periodical meetings (11%), shows (8%), workshops (7%) and competitions (1%).

Lastly, concerning the interviewee's role, in 45% of cases the respondent was the head of marketing, in 13% the head of communication, while in 8% of cases the role of the interviewee was that of exhibition director. Table 8.15 summarizes the characteristics of the respondents' sample.

Table 8.15: 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%
% of events directly organized	1-10	13%
	11-30	32%
	31-50	26%
	51-70	5%
	71-100	24%

	B2C Trade shows	29%
	B2B Trade shows	28%
	Conferences	16%
Typologies of organized events	Meetings	11%
	Shows	8%
	Workshops	7%
	Competitions	1%
	Head of marketing	45%
	Head of communication	13%
Interviewee's role	Exhibition director	8%
	Other roles	34%

Source: Author's elaboration

8.3 Trade show organizers and SM 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, Clarke, 2006).

8.3.1 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 SM adoption, emerge from the data (Tab. 8.16): to prove the exhibition organizer's digital spirit; to gain exhibitors and visitors in view of the events via individual, benefit oriented, creative communication; to complement the information channels and activities; to get in contact with generation Y; to promote a direct spread of events' information towards potential customers; to adapt their promotional languages; to quickly communicate to huge pools of customers; to increase their visibility, reputation and credibility in the online environment; to obtain real time feedback; 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*).

Table 8.16 summarizes the main motivations of SM adoption from the TS organizers' perspective.

Table 8.16: SM adoption motivations for TS organizers

MOTIVATIONS
To prove the digital spirit
To gain exhibitions and visitors via individual, benefit oriented, creative communication
To complement the information channels
To get in contact with generation Y
To promote a direct spread of events' information
To adapt their promotional languages
To quickly communicate to huge pools of customers
To increase their visibility, reputation and credibility
To obtain real time feedback
To strengthen customer relations

Source: Author's elaboration

In terms of typologies of adopted SM platforms, respondents confirm, to a large extent, the use of the same social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google Plus, YouTube, LinkedIn) identified by the sector's 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. 8.17).

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, Instragram and Snapchat represent the most adopted platforms, by the TS organizers, for the specific promotion of sport events.

Table 8.17: SM typologies and promoted event categories

ADOPTED SM TYPOLOGIES	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 co-ordination with the marketing and communication divisional departments.

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, within the interviewed organizations are 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 SM 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 8.18 summarizes the main roles, in charge of the management and development of social media strategies, outlined by respondents.

Table 8.18: SM management and development - Main roles

MAIN ROLES RESPONSIBLE FOR SM
Social media manager
Press officers
Head of communication
Head of marketing
Community manager
External agency
Digital marketing manager
Web marketing officers
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 SM 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 SM 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 SM 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 8.19 illustrates the main goals that exhibition organizers intend to reach, through the adoption of social media.

Table 8.19: SM main goals

SM MAIN FUNCTIONS	MAIN GOALS
Attraction function	- Transformation of the organizers' target groups into effective visitors and exhibitors; - Invitation to the events; - Increase and multiplication of the events' popularity; - Expansion of the catchment area; - Increase of the flow of visitors; - Acquisition of new customers; - Achievement of new targets.
Real-time interaction function	- Establishment of continuous relationships with the target audience; - Sending of messages to defined targets; - Management of relationships through bidirectional communications.
Loyalty function	- Increase in the organizer's brand awareness; - Construction of loyal relations.
Benchmark function	Investigation of the market (Potential and effective clients, competitors, other stakeholders).
Online visibility function	- Increase in online visibility and reputation; - Generation of traffic to the official websites.

Source: Author's elaboration

In order to reach these objectives, the majority of respondents claim that the social media staff provide for the preparation of an editorial calendar (in order to avoid casual management of the SM 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 8.20 summarizes the main promotional activities done by TS organizers in the different social media platforms. In particular, the principal aim, expressed by respondents, is to appeal to their target groups with effective contents on their channels and to establish a trusting basis, with their stakeholders, by means of a strong focus on social media services.

Table 8.20: SM promotional activities

SM PLATFORMS	MAIN USES	MAIN TARGETS
Facebook	• Creation of pages dedicated to singular events/exhibition center; • Sharing of events' tests, photos and videos; • Planning of promotional campaigns on Facebook Ads.	Visitors
Twitter	• 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
Instagram	• Sharing of the event's videos and images; • Invitation to Instameets.	Visitors
YouTube	• Sharing of videos (of singular events; of the exhibition centers).	Visitors/Exhibitors
LinkedIn	• Promotion of the exhibitor organization; • Search for new stakeholders.	Exhibitors

Source: Author's elaboration

It emerges from the transcription of the answers concerning the question "*Do you do any particular activities in order to gain followers on the different social media platforms?*", how respondents are aware of the importance of using the adopted social media, in a different and specific way, since each type of SM 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 enables 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 to use 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 notable 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 SM efforts is often extremely difficult to gauge (Fisher, 2009).

This study has 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. 8.21).

The majority of respondents state that they mainly focus their attention on the numbers and dimension of their audience, as their primary objective is to maximize their SM visibility. In particular, the most nominated measures, adopted by the TS organizers, 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 SM 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.

Table 8.21: SM Success measurement in the TS context

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

Source: Author's elaboration

8.3.2 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. 8.22).

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 SM, 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.

Table 8.22: Social media functions and TS phases

TS PHASES	SM FUNCTIONS	MAIN OBJECTIVES
PRE – SHOW	Promotional/attractive function	• Creation of information/dialogue; • Promotion of target groups' construction; • Messages placement; • Attraction of specific targets to the events.
AT – SHOW	Informative/supportive function	• Real-time distribution of information; • Visitors' support; • Carrying out 360° communication; • Conveying of emotions; • Engagement of the public.
POST – SHOW	Follow-up function	• 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

8.3.3 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, 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 SM 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' SM activities.

Finally, a reduced number of respondents state that they still treat users as simple recipients of their SM contents, in this way adopting social media as unidirectional media, where organizers are the senders and users the recipients.

Table 8.23: SM users' role from the organizers' perspective

USERS' ROLE	MAIN FEATURES
Partnership role	• Creation of a spirit of partnership with the target groups; • Users conceived as SM contents co-creator, active participants and communication accelerator.
Collaborative role	• Importance recognized to the users' feedback; • Improvement of events through users' feedback.
Recipient role	• Users conceived as simple recipients of the SM contents; • Adoption of SM as unidirectional media.

Source: Author's elaboration

8.3.4 Social media strengths/weaknesses and main challenges

From the transcription and aggregation of the data, the main strengths of adopting social media in the TS context are the following: to obtain access to new/distant markets, to create engaging stories, the possibility of spreading a large amount of information to specific target groups, the exchange of quick and real-time communications, reinforcement of the stakeholders' loyalty, to increase brand awareness, 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 SM strength identified by respondents. In particular, through the preparation of a content calendar, the majority of organizers state that they create on their SM 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 SM 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.

With reference to the main weaknesses of adopting social media from the organizers' perspective (Tab. 8.24), the multiple answers have been combined into four different categories: back-off costs, difficulty of measuring their effectiveness, technological problems, passing fad effect.

Back-off costs

The first weakness, emerged from the elaboration of the interview's anwers, concerns all the costs necessary to manage social media (in terms of human resources, budgets, 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 SM return on investment. Overall, most of the interviewees, who have disclosed this social media point of weakness, claims 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, 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 SM adoption revolves around technological problems, especially during the *at-show* phase (ex. the potential lack of Wi-Fi in the pavilions, technological barriers and temporary access problems to the SM platforms).

Passing fad effect

The last weakness related to social media by respondents, concerns the belief that they 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.

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 inteviews.
In particular, from the transcription of the answers, the main challenges tied to SM adoption, pointed out by the TS organizers have been identified and clustered into the following: the necessity to ensure a balance between SM opportunities and human resources, to maintain the events' visibility over time, to create constantly interesting and engaging contents, to adopt social media in a coherent way with respect to the other communicative tools used and to the overall strategy and the importance of managing negative comments.

Balance between SM opportunities and human resources

The first challenge, pointed out by respondents, concerns the necessity to identify a balance between the SM opportunities, the required human resources and the back-off costs. In particular, the majority of interviewees affirm that SM 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 SM visibility over time represents the second challenge that emerged from the respondents' answers. In fact, 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 SM 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 interviewed 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.

The subsequent tables summarize the main strengths and weaknesses of SM adoption (Tab. 8.24) and the main challenges to overcome (Tab. 8.25), extracted and categorized from the transcription of the organizers' answers.

Table 8.24: Strengths and weaknesses of SM adoption for organizers

STRENGTHS
Access to new/distant markets
Creation of engaging stories
Keeping the stakeholders' attention beyond the physical events
Diffusion of a large amount of information
Communication directed to specific target groups
Exchange of quick and real-time communications
Reinforcement of the stakeholders' loyalty
Increase in brand awareness
Acquisition of market intelligence
WEAKNESSES
Back –off costs
Difficulty in measuring effectiveness
Technological problems
Passing fad effect

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 8.25: Main challenges of SM adoption and management

MAIN CHALLENGES
Balance between SM opportunities and human resources
Maintain the events' visibility over time
Creation of constantly interesting and engaging contents
Coherent adoption of social media
Management of negative comments

Source: Author's elaboration

8.3.5 TS future scenarios

In order to enhance the studies focused on the analysis of TS future scenarios (Gottlieb, 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 SM 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 8.26 summarizes the main reasons why real events are still relevant to the sector's future, from the organizers' perspective.

Table 8.26: Future TS scenarios: The role of real events

FUTURE TS SCENARIOS: *Main motivations of the physical trade shows' importance*
Real product experience
Face to face communications
Human interactions/contacts
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 well 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*).

Overall, 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 also 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*).

"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 a 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 8.27 summarizes the possible trends characterizing the TS future scenarios from the organizers' perspective.

Table 8.27: Trade show future scenarios - Possible trends

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

Source: Author's elaboration

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Concerning the impact of the virtualization phenomenon on future TS scenarios (Gottlieb, Bianchi, 2017; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010), the data collected through the interview question "*In your opinion, could virtual trade shows become the new format of the future?*" has been categorized as presented in Table 8.28.

Overall, 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 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, etc.).

In fact, 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 contact 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 term 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, the data shows that VTSs 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 8.28 summarizes the main motivations for and against the advent of the virtualization phenomenon in the future of the TS sector's scenario.

Table 8.28: Future TS scenarios - Trade show virtualization

TRADE SHOW VIRTUALIZATION: *A possible (P) or impossible (IM) future scenario?*	
P	**IM**
Potentialities of augmented reality	Impossibility of substituting real product experiences with virtual reality
Construction of ongoing relations with users	Non duplication of face to face communications
Acquisition of new target audiences	Absence of human interaction
Acquisition of market intelligence	Impossibility of replacing the five senses
	Revolution of the traditional event format
	Real events and digitalization integration
	Virtualization as an extension of the real event

Source: Author's elaboration

In order to synthetize 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 (through a process of data aggregation and categorization) of three possible future scenarios from the organizers' perspective:

1. *Scenario A*: virtual, co-creative, SM high impact
2. *Scenario B*: supportive, reactive, SM medium impact
3. *Scenario C*: temporary, uncertain, SM 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.

Table 8.29: Core characteristics of Scenario A

FACTOR SPECIFICATION FOR SCENARIO A
Social media as physical events extensions
Social media as added value for the TS experience
Digital and real contents co-creation
Users as contents co-creator (*Partnership role*)
SM adoption in each phase of the trade show (*pre-show, at-show, post-show*)

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 the physical events. In this prospective, 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. It 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.

Table 8.30: Core characteristics of Scenario B

FACTOR SPECIFICATION FOR SCENARIO B
Social media as a support promotional channel
Social media as online visibility support
Social media as a customer support channel
Users as simple collaborators (*Collaborative role*)
SM adoption in the pre-show and post-show phases

Source: Author's elaboration

In the last scenario (C) social media is 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 it 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 its current role, substituted by other platforms (first of all VTSs), which will be more able to maximize exhibition experiences on a digital level.

Table 8.31: Core characteristics of Scenario C

FACTOR SPECIFICATION FOR SCENARIO C
Social media as a passing fad tool
Advent of new specialized virtual platforms
Substitution of Social media with VTSs
Users as recipients (*Recipient role*)
SM occasional adoption

Source: Author's elaboration

Figure 8.1 summarizes the three scenarios built from the extraction and aggregation of the core characteristics that emerged from the respondents' answers.

Figure 8.1: SM impact in the TS future scenarios - A synthesis

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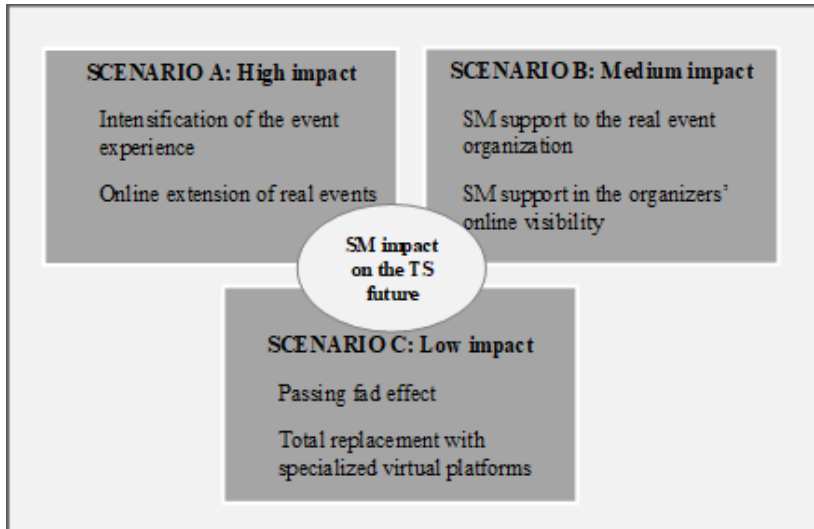
Discussions, implications and future research

9.1 Summary of discussions

Limited empirical research has examined social media adoption in the TS context, especially from the organizers' perspective. The present dissertation 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 presented six research questions. In the following paragraphs, a summary of the research questions, the theoretical and managerial implications and the future research perspectives will be presented.

9.1.1 Theoretical research questions (RQ1, RQ2, RQ3)

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 dissertation presented a threefold objective.

On one hand, an analysis was performed of the last twenty years' (1997-2017) evolution of the trade show literature from a business and management perspective and the main trends, emerging from the recent period (2010-2017) 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 recent TS studies) were identified, in order to find possible literature gaps, which need to be filled.

Relating to this, the research questions that motivated the theoretical section of this dissertation are as follows:

RQ[1] How has the business and management literature, devoted to TSs, evolved in the last twenty years?

RQ[2] Which are the main trends emerging from the recent (2010-2017) business and management literature devoted to TSs?

RQ[3] Which are the most surveyed TSs stakeholders in the contemporary business and management literature sector?

In order to answer these theoretical research questions, the present dissertation adopted 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 twenty years (1997-2017).

RQ₁

Through the adoption of the review process, it has been possible to outline the evolution of the TS studies during the last twenty years (1997-2017) 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 (1997-2003; 2004-2009; 2010-2017), corresponding to the principal evolutions characterizing the TS sector over the last twenty years (UFI, 2016; Aldebert et Al., 2011).

Table 9.1 summarizes the literature's evolution, concerning the TS definition and roles, during the three identified timeframes of analysis.

Table 9.1: TS definition and roles' evolution

TIMEFRAMES	TS DEFINITION	TS FUNCTIONS
Pre-1997 period (1980-1996)	Focus on the TS selling nature	Transactional exchange functions
1997-2003 Globalization	Focus on the TSs as microcosms for international transactions and promotions	Promotional functions
2004-2009 ICT advent	Focus on the TSs as relational, temporary and experiential clusters	Contact functions Experiential functions Social exchange functions
2010-2017 Economic crisis consequences	Focus on the TSs as clients reassurance places, knowledge exchange platforms and international networks	Reassurance functions Information, symbolic and cultural exchange functions Benchmark functions

Source: Author's elaboration

It can be seen from the review how TS definitions and roles have evolved over time, with the trade show literature focusing on different and specific aspects during the analyzed years. In particular, in the pre-1997 period, the articles dedicated to the TS topic, focus their attention on the trade shows' selling nature

as well as their transactional exchange function. During the first analyzed timeframe (1997-2003), 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, published in this period, 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 (2010-2017), 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 as a consequence of the effects of the economic crisis. At the same time, the articles, published between 2010 and 2017, focus their attention on the nature of trade shows as knowledge exchanges 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 9.2 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.

Table 9.2: TS subject areas per timeframes

Subject Area	Papers 1997-2003	Papers 2004-2009	Papers 2010-2017
TS and relationship building		✓	✓
TS and stakeholder behavior	✓		✓
TS and knowledge/information exchange		✓	✓
TS management	✓	✓	
TS and network building		✓	✓
TS performance		✓	✓
TS and internationalization processes	✓		✓
TS participation	✓		✓
TS effectiveness	✓	✓	✓
TS and new media		✓	✓
TS as experiential platforms		✓	✓
TS as temporary clusters			✓
TS as territory catalysts	✓	✓	✓
Virtual TS	✓		✓
TS selection		✓	✓

Source: Author's elaboration

It emerges from Table 9.2 how some thematic issues have characterized the overall analyzed period (*TS effectiveness, TS as territory catalysts*), others especially the last two timeframes (*TS and relationship building, TS and knowledge/information exchange, TS and network building, TS performance, TS and new media, TS as experiential platforms, TS selection*), while some subject areas have been notably dealt with by the articles published during the first and third timeframes (*TS and stakeholder behavior, TS and internationalization process, TS participation, Virtual TS*).

Studies focused on the management of trade show instruments (*TS management*) were notably published between 1997 and 2009, while only the articles published during the 2010-2017 timeframe characterized the analysis of TSs as temporary clusters.

Table 9.3: TS subject areas per timeframes (Frequencies)

Subject Area	Papers 1997-2003	Papers 2004-2009	Papers 2010-2017	Tot. Frequencies
TS and relationship building	5	12	28	**45**
TS and stakeholder behavior	11	8	16	**35**
TS and knowledge/information exchange	1	8	23	**32**
TS management	10	12	7	**29**
TS and network building	3	8	18	**29**
TS performance	4	7	16	**27**
TS and internationalization processes	5	4	11	**20**
TS participation	5	4	10	**19**
TS effectiveness	3	3	10	**16**
TS and new media	-	3	13	**16**
TS as experiential platforms	-	4	10	**14**
TS as temporary clusters	-	-	7	**7**
TS as territory catalysts	1	1	5	**7**
Virtual TS	1	-	3	**4**
TS selection	-	1	3	**4**

Source: Author's elaboration

Overall, by focusing on the total frequencies (in how many articles a specific subject area has been dealt with, during the whole timeframe), it has been possible to highlight how the TS literature of the last twenty years has specifically focused its attention on the study of the relational function of trade shows (*Frequencies*: 45), the TS participants' behavior (*f*: 35) and on the role of trade shows as knowledge and information exchange platforms (*f*:32).

Turning to the singular analyzed publication periods, during the first timeframe (1997-2003), the articles mainly focus their attention on the managerial aspects of TS instruments, the behavior and objectives of their attendees and on the analysis of trade shows in the light of the first globalization effects.

The study of TSs from an informative and network perspective represents a thematic issue enhanced, to a lesser extent, by the articles published between 1997 and 2003.

During the second analyzed timeframe, if the interest towards the management of TS instruments and its effectiveness remains unchanged (with respect to the previous period), the attention towards the relational, informative and network role of TS platforms increases as well as the studies focused on the evaluation of the TSs performance.

On the contrary, the interest towards the analysis of TS participants' behavior, their participating objectives and the study of TS dynamics from an internationalization perspective decreases with respect to the 1997-2003 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, ever more, during the third publication period (2010-2017), as well as the role of TSs in the firms' internationalization process, the study of TS performance, effectiveness and selection measures (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 (through which firms can go beyond their geographic borders, gaining 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) represents a field of study which was enhanced only from 2010 onwards.

On the contrary, the articles' attention towards the managerial aspects of TS instruments decreases during the 2010-2017 timeframe, with respect to the first two.

RQ2

The review process also enabled the identification of the main trends characterizing the recent literature dedicated to TSs and TFs. In particular, through a thematic narrative analysis of the articles' full texts published between 2010 and 2017 (n=84), it has been possible to highlight the main areas of study of the contemporary TS literature.

In particular, the analysis of the selected papers identified four major tendencies emerging from the recent trade show literature. Table 9.4 synthetizes the results (emerging tendencies and respective sub-trends), by specifying for each tendency, its primary features with the respective authors enhancing them (Tab. 9.5).

Table 9.4: Contemporary TS tendencies (2010-2017) - Principal sub-trends

TENDENCIES	SUB-TRENDS
Relationship marketing	*TSs and relationship building* *TSs and knowledge/information exchange* *TSs and network building*
Internationalization process	*TSs and the internationalization process* *TSs as territory catalysts* *TSs as temporary clusters*
Internet marketing	*TSs and new media* *Virtual TSs*
Experiential marketing	*TSs as experiential platforms*

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 9.5: Contemporary TS tendencies (2010-2017) - Main features

TREND	FEATURES	AUTHORS
Relationship marketing	• TSs as relational platforms; • Contacts' search, network building and information/knowledge exchange as main reasons of TS stakeholders' participation and involvement**;** • Role of TSs as relational incubators; • Importance of relational opportunities in the TS context (and in future scenarios); • Investigation of the quality of relationships; • Introduction of the "*communification*" concept; • Investigation of the mix of relationship marketing and transactional marketing; • Investigation of the TS participants' interactions; • TSs as information and knowledge exchange platforms; • TSs as interactive business networks; • TSs as supports to the establishment and enhancement of network structures; • Development of networking strategies in the TS context.	*Luo, Zhong (2016); Rinallo et Al., (2016); Alberca-Oliver et Al., (2015); Antolin-Lopez et Al., (2015); Gebarowski et Al., (2015); Measson, Campbell-Hunt, (2015); Oromendia et Al., (2015); Rodriguez et Al., (2015); Sarmento et Al., (2015a; 2015b; 2015c); Tafesse, Skallerud (2015); Brzezinski et Al. (2014); Cheng et Al. (2014); Jer (2014); Menon, Edward, (2014); Sarmento et Al., (2014); De Vaujany et Al. (2013); Bettis-Outland et Al. (2012); Bjorner, Berg (2012); Geigenmuller, Bettis-Outland (2012); Jin et Al., (2012); Richardson et Al. (2012); Aldebert et Al. (2011); Kontinen, Ojala (2011); Reychav (2011); Siskind (2011); Bettis-Outland et Al. (2010); Kirchgeorg et Al. (2010); Manero, Uceda (2010); Rinallo et Al. (2010); Soilen (2010)*

Internationalization process	• Role of TSs as temporary clusters through which firms can go beyond their geographical borders, gaining access to new markets; • Role of TSs as temporary clusters through which the host cities can take advantage of the TS wide appeal in terms of visibility; • TSs as export learning channels (especially in the SMEs context); • TSs as collective marketing platforms that industry agglomerations can use to affirm their presence in international markets; • TSs as a good context for family SMEs to meet international operators; • TSs as beneficial platforms to the survival, growth and expansion of small firms; • TSs as multidimensional relational platforms/relevant temporary hubs; • TSs as temporary learning stages; • TSs as temporary concentration platforms of otherwise dispersed players, stakeholders and activities in a given place, at a given time; • TSs as territory catalysts, having a considerable impact on the localities in which they are performed.	*Lee et Al. (2016); Luo, Zhong (2016); Palmer et Al. (2016); Rinallo et Al. (2016); Jeong (2016); Measson, Campbell-Hunt (2015); Tafesse, Skallerud (2015); Kalafsky, Gress (2014); Jer (2014); Jin et Al. (2013); Li, Shrestha (2013); Bjorner, Berg (2012); Richardson et Al. (2012); Aldebert et Al. (2011); Kontinen, Ojala (2011); Sainaghi, Canali (2011); Kirchgeorg et Al., (2010); Ramirez-Pasillas (2010)*
Internet marketing	• Advent and impact of new communication media in the TS context; • Growing importance of new media as a positive trend for the future of trade shows; • New media as support tools for trade show events; • Incorporation of virtual environments as strategic marketing tools; • Official web sites, social media and VTSs as fundamental components of the physical TSs (by extending their life in the virtual environment); • TS website evaluation; • Internet effects on TS marketing performance; • Internet platform management; • New media adoption in the pre-show, at-show and post-show phases; • Identification of possible interactions between the complement of virtual-based channels to the traditional trade show event and its performance and effectiveness; • Virtual trade show management; • Identification of the role and contributions of VTSs in developing relationships; • Identification of the main drivers and challenges of VTSs participation; • Identification of the necessary marketing abilities required for VTSs participation; • VTSs as surrogates for real-word TSs in times of tight budgets.	*Gottlieb, Bianchi, (2017); Singh et Al. (2017); Wu, Wang (2016); Chongwatpol (2015); Brzezinski et Al. (2014); Dawson et Al. (2014); Sarmento et Al. (2014); Tafesse (2014); De Vaujany et Al. (2013); Melles (2013); Tafesse, Korneliussen (2013); Geigenmuller (2010); Kirchgeorg et Al., (2010); Ling-Yee (2010)*

| **Experiential marketing** | • Focus on the role assumed by the entertainment and experiential component in trade show management;
• Application of the experiential marketing concepts and methods on the TS context and dynamics;
• Evolution of the TS core focus from products-services-sales towards dialogues-relations-entertainment and finally experiences;
• TSs as embodied experiences;
• TSs as experiential platforms in which participants are immersed in a mix of sensorial stimuli, cognitive processes, emotional responses, relational activities and active behaviors;
• TSs as important sources of learning;
• TSs as community platforms;
• Role of the moments of leisure in the TS context;
• TS entertainment facet as a fundamental contributor to the overall TS effectiveness perception;
• Creation of theoretical frameworks based on experiences in the TS context;
• TS stakeholders as active players in the creation of the experiential setting of the trade show event. | *Bloch et Al. (2017); Kim, Mazumdar (2016); Lee et Al. (2016); Gottlieb et Al. (2014); Jin et Al. (2013); Ahola (2012); Bjorner, Berg (2012); Gottlieb et Al. (2011); Rinallo et Al. (2010); Soilen (2010)* |

Source: Author's elaboration

RQ₃

In order to answer the third theoretical research question (*Which are the most surveyed TS stakeholders in the contemporary business and management literature sector?),* the contemporary tendencies, which emerged from the thematic narrative process, have been intersected with a stakeholder analysis.

In particular, for each article belonging to the third publication period (2010-2017), the identified sub-trends (see Tab. 9.4) have been cross-correlated with the eventual stakeholder category (*Exhibitors, visitors, organizers*) the specific article is focused on.

Table 9.6 synthetizes the number of articles (published between 2010 and 2017) 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 by the articles published between 2010 and 2017, followed by the visitors' perspective. On the contrary, the organizers' point of view represents the least investigated, in this way confirming scant attention of the contemporary TS literature towards this specific target.

Table 9.6: Sub-trends and stakeholders' perspectives
(Papers 2010-2017)

	VIS	EXH	ORG
TS and Relationship building	16	19	6
TS and Knowledge/information exchange	18	18	4
TS and network building	14	14	4
TS and Internationalization processes	8	8	1
TS as territory catalysts	2	4	4
TS as temporary clusters	4	4	-
TS and New media	8	8	3
Virtual TS	-	3	2
TS as experiential platforms	8	6	2
Total	**78**	**84**	**26**

Source: Author's elaboration

More specifically, the articles enhancing the visitors' perspective have especially focused their attention on the way in which they perceive and use TS information and knowledge (*n*=18); the way in which they build and maintain relationships (*n*=16) and networks (*n*=14) in the trade show context and their role as active players in the creation of TS experiential settings (*n*=8).

Concerning the exhibitors' perspective, the focus on the quality of their relationships with different categories of stakeholders (*n*=19); the analysis of the exhibiting firms' process of organizational knowledge creation (*n*=18); the possibility of building, within the trade show event, business networks (*n*=14) with geographically distant operators in the same industry (*n*=8) and the study of the exhibitors' right approach to Internet marketing (*n*=8) represent the main topics expanded by the articles published between 2010 and 2017 focusing on this specific target category.

Finally, from the organizers' point of view, the study of the TS organizers' role in supporting the creation of relationships (*n*=6) and networks (*n*=4), in the information exchange processes among the market players (*n*=4) and their role as territory supporters (*n*=4) are the main thematic issues dealt with by the 2010-2017 papers focused on this stakeholder's category.

9.1.2 Empirical research questions (RQ₄, RQ₅, RQ₆)

Starting from the review's results and from the identification of the main trends and the most studied stakeholders' categories by the contemporary TS literature, the empirical purpose of the present dissertation has been to gain broader understanding about 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 thematic narrative analysis process and from the results identified in order to answer question RQ_3.

In particular, the TS organizers' point of view has been adopted with a view to analyzing the implementation of the social media tools on the trade show strategies and activities and the reaction to the virtual trade shows' (VTSs) advent, by enriching in this way the studies focused on the "*TSs and new media*" and "*Virtual TSs*" sub-trends (Gottlieb, Bianchi, 2017; Singh et Al., 2017; Wu, Wang, 2016; Chongwatpol, 2015; Tafesse, 2014; De Vaujany et Al., 2013; Tafesse, Korneliussen, 2013; Dawson et Al., 2014; Geigenmuller, 2010; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010; Ling-Yee, 2010).

Table 9.7 – Empirical purpose: Selected sub-trends

SELECTED SUB-TRENDS	LITERATURE POINT OF DEPARTURE
TSs and new media	Singh et Al. (2017) work, which proposes, in future researches, the investigation of the implementation and use of social networks and other rapidly developing digital communication tools for trade show activities.
Virtual TSs	Gottlieb et Al. (2017) work, which examines the exhibitors' experiences of participating in virtual trade shows (with the aim to extend it by enhancing the impact of the virtualization phenomenon from the organizers' perspective).

Source: Author's elaboration

Starting from this overview, the empirical purpose of the dissertation was to analyze the impact of social media implementation and the virtualization phenomenon on the TS organizers' strategies and activities, in order to gain deeper insights about their online behavior.

Relating to this, the RQs, that motivated the empirical section of the present work, are as follows:

RQ[4] Which are the main strengths/weaknesses of the social media adoption? Overall, from the TS organizers' perspective, which are the main challenges to overcome in order to effectively exploit the social media potentialities?

RQ[5] In the social media adoption, how TS organizers perceive the role of users?

RQ[6] From the TS organizers' perspective, could virtual trade shows become the new format of the future?

In order to answer the empirical questions, the dissertation adopted an explorative research design, characterized by three main phases (identification and adoption of a social media visibility/popularity index, extracted from the literature, in order to identify, among a selected sample of TS organizers, the most visible/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 TSO sample, identified through the adoption of the social media index).

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, Bianchi, 2017).

RQ4

The aim of this empirical question (just as the subsequent one) is to deepen (as proposed by the literature) the study concerning the implementation and use of social media in the TS context, by identifying the main strengths/weaknesses of adopting them, as well as 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 9.8 and 9.9 synthesize the main strengths and weaknesses of adopting social media in the TS context.

Table 9.8: Social media adoption in the TS context - Main strengths

STRENGHTS	MAIN FEATURES
Access to new/distant markets	• Social media enable organizers 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 communicational media; • Social media enable organizers to converse in real-time with potential and current exhibitors and visitors; • Social media allow building direct and interactive relations with their own stakeholders.

Creation of engaging stories	• Social media enable maintaining the stakeholders' attention in the periods in which there are no organized events; • Social media facilitate creating immersive storytelling, with the principal aim of keeping the exhibitors and visitors' attention high, also beyond the physical events; • Social media enable accompanying TS stakeholders before, during and after the events; • Social media give a feeling of continuity to the *at-show* established relations.
Diffusion of information	• Social media enable the spreading of huge amount of information; • Social media allow to send engaging messages cut out for specific categories of users.
Loyalty and brand awareness reinforcement	• An active presence on SM channels provides reassurance, raises TS stakeholders' loyalty and increases organizers' brand awareness; • Social media facilitate the accomplishment of campaigns aimed at increasing the exhibition center's brand awareness; • Social media enable the communication of the exhibition center's structure, activities, mission and events in the online context.
Acquisition of market intelligence	• Social media are seen as significantly superior tools with respect to other communicative and promotional media in the areas of marketing intelligence and information gathering; • Social media enable to carry out business intelligence activities; • Social media facilitate the monitoring of current/potential competitors (especially the activities performed by other exhibition centers) and customers (exhibitors and visitors); • Social media enable the mapping of stakeholders' behavior and the identification of specific targets to serve and business opportunities (the offer of new events) to capture.

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 9.9: Social media adoption in the TS context - Main weaknesses

WEAKNESSES	MAIN FEATURES
Back-off costs	• The social media management requires back-off costs (in terms of human resources, budgets, time needed to train staff); • The fear of not being able to recover them; • 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.
Difficulty of measuring effectiveness	• Difficulty of measuring the social media performances as one of the main weaknesses related to their adoption; • Complexity, for organizers, in evaluating social media effectiveness and consequently in making decisions about their management in the long term (resources, budget, activities).
Technological problems	• Technological problems especially during the *at-show* phase; • Lack of Wi-Fi in the pavilions; • Technological barriers; • Temporary access problems to the SM platforms.
Passing fad effect	• Belief that SM can represent a passing fad destined to disappear in the near future; • Reduction of the will to invest more in the social media channels due to this feeling.

Source: Author's elaboration

In the second part of the RQ [4], the interviewees were asked to identify the main challenges, necessary to overcome, in order to exploit the SM potentialities.

Table 9.10 summarises the results of the extraction and clustering of the respondents' answers.

Table 9.10: Social media adoption in the TS context - Main challenges

CHALLENGES	MAIN FEATURES
Balance between SM opportunities and human resources	• Necessity to identify a balance between SM opportunities, the required human resources and the back-off costs; • SM adoption requires 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; • Organizers should adopt social media only if they can devote resources and budgets to these new communicative channels.
Retention of visibility over time	• Necessity to maintain SM visibility over time; • The attention of followers must always be kept high, thus avoiding a decline in SM visibility; • Organizers should constantly design and propose to users interesting and engaging ideas and contents; • Organizers should maintain an active and constant presence on their social media.
SM coherent adoption	• Necessity to coherently integrate social media with the other adopted communicative channels as well as with the overall communicative strategy; • Necessity to coherently communicate the own identity and mission to users, thus avoiding sending discordant and contradictory messages through the different communication channels.
Management of negative comments	• Need to constantly and promptly manage the negative comments left by users; • The presence on social media means being 360° active, by adding updated contents, interacting with the followers and by responding readily to both positive and negative comments; • Necessity to exploit constructive opinions and to reply to those that can affect their own image and reputation.

Source: Author's elaboration

RQ₅

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*.

Table 9.11: SM users' role from the organizers' perspective

USERS' ROLE	MAIN FEATURES
Partnership role	• Creation of a spirit of partnership with the users; • Users conceived as SM contents co-creators, active participants and communication accelerators; • Users' involvement via competitions, contents and real-time focus groups.
Collaborative role	• Cooperative adoption of users' observations, comments and positive/negative critiques (in order to improve the organization of future events); • Importance recognized to the users' feedback; • Improvement of events through users' feedback; • Users' cooperation limited to the exploitation of their opinions/comments; • No consideration of their potential role as active participants in the planning of the organizers' SM activities.
Recipient role	• Users conceived as simple recipients of the SM contents; • Adoption of SM as unidirectional media.

Source: Author's elaboration

RQ₆

The aim of the last empirical research question was to extend the existing literature focused on the exhibitors' experiences of participating in virtual trade shows (Gottlieb et Al., 2017) by enhancing the impact of the virtualization phenomenon (the advent of VTSs) from the organizers' perspective.

The transcriptions of the respondents' answers have enabled the identification and categorization of the main reasons belonging to the possibility and to the impossibility that this phenomenon could become a reality for the TS future environment. Overall, the data show (by confirming the prior literature results) that in the near future VTSs 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.

Tables 9.12 and 9.13 synthetize the main motivations concerning the possibility/impossibility that virtualization could become a future TS scenario.

Table 9.12: Trade show virtualization - Possible future scenario (Motivations)

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

Source: Author's elaboration

Table 9.13: Trade show virtualization - Impossible future scenario (Motivations)

MOTIVATIONS	MAIN FEATURES
Impossibility of substituting real experiences with virtual reality	• Physical relations, face-to-face communication and human contact cannot be substituted by virtual reality; • Virtual reality as a strategic support and added service to the real TSs; • Impossibility of replacing the five senses; • Negative feedback (from exhibitors and visitors) about the organizers' proposal of VTSs.
Revolution of the traditional event format	• The future TS scenario will not be characterized by the real versus digital debate, but on the contrary by the real TS formats evolution.
Real events and digitalization integration	• 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.
Virtualization as an extension of the real event	• VTSs can act as a continuation of physical TSs, by supporting and extending them.

Source: Author's elaboration

9.2 Theoretical implications

The present dissertation makes three specific theoretical contributions. First, this study marks one of the first systematic efforts at reviewing the trade show business and management literature. In particular, the work covered 158 TSs articles (see Appendix) published during the last twenty years and synthetized their contents in terms of trade show evolution (definition, roles, functions and areas of study). Second, the study 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 importance of enhancing the online visibility and popularity concept also applied to the trade show environment.

Theoretical implication (1)

Systematic review

The literature review process enabled the identification and systemization of all the business and management articles, devoted to the Trade Shows (TSs) and Trade Fairs (TFs) studies, published between 1997 and 2017. The identification of the review's papers also facilitated the highlighting of the evolution of the TS literature of the last twenty years. In particular, through a thematic narrative analysis, it has been possible to classify the areas of study most enhanced by the selected papers, subdivided into three publication periods (1997-2003; 2004-2009; 2010-2017) corresponding to the main latest evolutions of the TS sector (Globalization effects, ICT advent, post-crisis consequences).

In addition, the narrative process also enabled the identification of the main trends emerging from the recent (2010-2017) TS literature and the construction of a possible framework of synthesis (Table 9.14).

Table 9.14: TS trends framework of synthesis (2010-2017)

RELATIONSHIP MARKETING	INTERNATIONALIZATION PROCESS
TSs and relationship building *TSs and network building* *TSs and information/knowledge exchange*	*TSs and internationalization process* *TSs as temporary clusters* *TSs as territory catalysts*
TSs and new media *Virtual Trade shows (VTS)*	*TSs as experiential platforms* (the role of the entertainment component)
INTERNET MARKETING	EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING

Source: Author's elaboration

Another theoretical contribution, tied to the review process, concerns the identification of the most studied TS perspectives (*exhibitors, visitors, organizers*) by the contemporary literature, whose results enabled the identification of how the organizers' point of view represents a literature gap to fill.

Theoretical implication (2)

Investigation of social media adoption in the TS context

In addition, through the adoption of in-depth interviews addressed to a sample of TS organizers, the present dissertation also extended previous limited researches focused on the adoption of the new digital communication channels in the TS context, by identifying specific features and aspects concerning the use of SM from the exhibitor organizers' point of view (SM typologies and functions, social media and TS phases, SM drivers and challenges, TS future scenarios).

In terms of typologies of adopted SM platforms, even if the interview's results mainly confirm the use of the same social media identified by the sector's literature as the most relevant for the TS context (Browne, 2012), they also enable the addition of others to the contemporary TS studies (Tab. 9.15).

Table 9.15: SM typologies in the TS context

ADOPTED SM TYPOLOGIES	PRESENT IN THE TS LITERATURE
Facebook	✓
Twitter	✓
Instagram	✓
Pinterest	
Snapchat	
Youtube	✓
Vimeo	
Google Plus	✓
Linkedin	✓
Xing	

Source: Author's elaboration

The dissertation 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 SM performance measurements, starting from the assumption that the ROI within social media has long been a bone of contention for the sectorial literature (Hays et Al., 2013; Fisher, 2009), the present study 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 the enrichment of the TS literature (Singh et Al., 2017; Ling-Yee, 2010) focused on the classification of the new technologies (adopted in the trade show context) according to the event's stage (*pre-show, at-show, post-show*). Table 9.16 re-proposes the one identifying the specific roles of online tools during the different TS phases (Tab. 2.5 "*New technologies and TS phases: A classification*; see Paragraph 2.6), with the addition of the SM functions, in this way enhancing the implementation of social media, for trade shows activities, in the different phases (Singh et Al., 2017).

Tab. 9.16: New technologies and TS phases - A (new) classification

Trade show phases	Typologies of adopted technologies	Advantages
Pre show	Websites	Increase in the effectiveness of communication; data collection; efficiency improvement of access process to TS events.
	Online configurators	Improvement in organizational effectiveness; reduction of the temporal resources dedicated to the design phase; increase in the interaction between organizers and exhibitors; greater autonomy in organizing the exhibition space.
	Virtual catalogues	Increase in promotional and informative effectiveness; Exhibition complement; enhancement of the multimedia offer.
	Social media	Creation of information/dialogue; Promotion of target groups' construction; Messages placement; Attraction of specific targets to the events.
At show	Scent marketing	Improvement in the corporate image; possibility of redefining 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 in turnaround times; curiosity stimulation.
	Augmented reality	Increase in the informative offering; emotional impact; possibility of displaying and interacting with digital contents; increase in the informative and communicative component.
	Three-dimensional solutions	Increase in engagement; possibility of displaying products not present at the fair; increase in spectacularity.
	Touch-screen display	Cost 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 of obtaining geo-referenced data.

Post show (continued)	RFID	Possibility of tracing participants' behavior within the exhibition spaces; possibility of collecting real time information; possibility of the identification of 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 communication possibilities; possibility of redefying 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.
	Social media	Real-time distribution of information; Visitors' support; Fulfillment of 360° communication; Conveying of emotions; Engagement of the public.
Post show	CRM Software	Improved management of 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 the performance analysis; increase in the efficiency and effectiveness of data.
	Social media	Possibility of following up the event after its closure; Analysis of the event's feedbacks; Evaluation of stakeholders' satisfaction; Retention of high and constant attention to the next edition of the event.

Source: Author's elaboration

At the same time, the present work also enriched the TS experiential literature (Lee et Al., 2016; Gottlieb et Al., 2014; Jin et Al., 2013; Ahola, 2012; Bjorner, Berg, 2012; Rinallo et Al., 2010; Soilen, 2010; Borghini et Al., 2006; Wu et Al., 2006) and the study of the role of TS stakeholders as active players, by identifying the roles played by the SM users in the trade show context (*partnership, collaborative* and *recipient role*).

Through the transcription and aggregation of the interviews' data, the findings also showed that the main drivers for adopting social media in the TS environment are obtaining access to new/distant markets, creating engaging stories, spreading a large amount of information to specific target groups, exchanging quick and real-time communication, reinforcing stakeholders' loyalty, increasing brand awareness and acquiring market intelligence.

In addition to the SM drivers, specific weaknesses and challenges (specifically concerned the TS context) also emerged: back-off costs, difficulty of measuring their effectiveness, technological problems, passing fad effect, the necessity to ensure a balance between SM opportunities and human resources, maintain the events' visibility over time, constantly create interesting and engaging contents, adopt social media in a coherent way with respect to the other communicative tools used and to the overall strategy and the importance of managing negative comments.

Finally, concerning this second order of theoretical contributions, the present dissertation also enriched the studies focused on the analysis of TS future scenarios (Gottlieb, Bianchi, 2017; Kirchgeorg et Al., 2010; O'Brien, 2003), by identifying the main motivations that make real events still of relevance for the sector's future, the possible trends and impacts of social media on TS future dynamics.

Theoretical implication (3)
Investigation of the online visibility concept in the TS context

In order to identify the most visible organizers (in the social media environment), within a pre-selected sample, to whom to address the in-depth interview, the present study investigated, through a literature review process, the definitions of the online visibility and popularity concepts and the connections between them. Starting from the review's findings, it has been possible to define the social media visibility and popularity concepts, in general, and to apply them to the specific TS environment, by extracting from the literature and adapting an online popularity (OPo) index, used in order to identify the interview's sample. 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 present dissertation strengthened the importance of the OV and OPo concepts in the trade show industry, by creating an index for the evaluation of the social media popularity of the TS organizers.

### 9.3 Managerial implications and future researches

From the managerial perspective, the present dissertation makes three specific managerial contributions. First, starting from the existing literature, the work elaborates an index for the evaluation of the social media popularity of the TS activities. Second, the research assists in determining the main drivers and challenges for exhibition managers who want to adopt social media in their communicative strategies. Third, the study highlights 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, offer of TS experiences and international openness).

Managerial implication (1)
Identification of a SM popularity index for the evaluation of TS activities

The first managerial implication of the present dissertation 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. 9.1). In particular, as made for the selected sample (see Paragraph 8.1: *Descriptive statistics of the survey sample*), this tool enables the calculation of one's overall SM 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 visible by monitoring, over time, the SM activities in order to enhance and/or modify them.

Figure 9.1: Social media popularity Index (for the TS context)
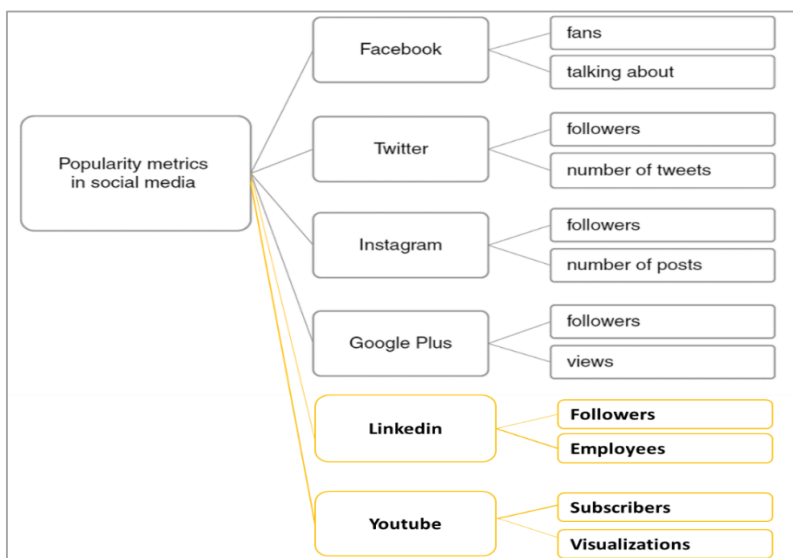
Source: Author's elaboration on Lardo et Al. (2017)

Managerial implication (2)

Identification of the main drivers/challenges in adopting social media in the TS context

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 8.3.4). 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.

Managerial implication (3)

Development of a SM strategic orientation

The third order of managerial implications concerns, in fact, 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 process).

Focusing on the tendency investigated by the present dissertation (social media adoption), from the analysis of the overall SM popularity ranking emerged how the German and Italian organizers are the most visible 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 visible on YouTube, the Italian centers are more popular on the Twitter platform (Tab. 9.17).

Table 9.17: TS organizers and social media platforms (More/less popular)

TS organizers	Social media platforms in which the organizers are more (*M*)/less (*L*) popular					
	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	Google Plus	YouTube	LinkedIn
Germany				L	M	
Italy		M			L	
Spain		M			L	
France		M		L	L	

Source: Author's elaboration

From the comparison of the singular SM average indexes between the different samples (German, Italian, Spanish and French exhibition organizers), 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 (Tab. 9.18).

Table 9.18: Singular SM indexes - A comparison

	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

* Overall achievable score: 2
Source: Author's elaboration

Overall, from the social media popularity analysis two relevant data emerged: firstly, the TS organizers' awareness about the importance to be visible in the SM environment (the minimum visibility index is, however, higher than zero). Secondly, the average SM popularity indexes (obtained by the exhibition centers of the four surveyed countries) range from 1,07 (France) to 1,71 (Germany), thus highlighting an important improvement gap, in terms of visibility and popularity, on the analyzed social media in order to reach the maximum achievable average (12).

Table 9.19: 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

* Overall achievable score: 12
Source: Author's elaboration

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, Bianchi, 2017; Labrecque et Al., 2013), organizers will have to carefully managed and planned their social media visibility in order to keep up with the increasing requests of TS stakeholders.

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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, Edelman, 2013).

For what concerns the first data emerged from the SM analysis (the TS organizers' awareness about the importance to be visible in the SM 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 SM visibility classification (not far from the score obtained by the first classified Country) and this result is not deny 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 visibility) 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 visibility.

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:

1. Increase awareness about the importance of social media communication as a TS support, promotion and marketing tool;

2. 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;

3. 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 are 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, offer of TS experiences and international openness). Only through a synergistic management of the different trends (Tab. 9.20), it will be possible, for organizers, to remain competitive in the current and foreseeable TS context.

Table 9.20: TS trends' management – Principal required actions

TREND	ACTIONS
Relationship marketing	• Support the TSs role as relational platforms and incubators; • Develop the TS functions concerning the contacts' search, network building and information/knowledge exchange; • Handle the quality of the relationships between TS participants; • Adopt the "communification" strategy (support to the development of communities creation in the TS setting); • Balance the mix of relationship marketing and transactional marketing; • Support the TS participant's interactions; • Support the information and knowledge exchange between TS attendees; • Support the creation, establishment and enhancement of interactive business networks between TS players; • Develop networking strategies in the TS context.
Internationalization process	• Support the TSs role as temporary clusters through which firms can go beyond their geographical borders, gaining access to new markets; • Develop the temporary cluster's function of trade shows, through which the host cities can take advantage of the TS wide appeal in terms of visibility; • Develop the TS role as export learning channels; • Use TSs as collective marketing platforms that industry agglomerations can use to affirm their presence in international markets; • Transform TSs in good contexts where to meet international operators; • Organize TSs by conceiving them as temporary concentration platforms of otherwise dispersed players, stakeholders and activities in a given place, at a given time.

Internet marketing	• Use of new media, by conceiving them as support tools for trade show events; • Incorporate virtual environments as strategic marketing tools; • 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); • Manage and constantly monitor their own websites and social media presence; • Exploit the social media potentialities during the pre-show, at-show and post-show phases.
Experiential marketing	• Apply the experiential marketing concepts and methods on the TS context and dynamics; • Evolve the TS core from products-services-sales towards dialogues-relations-entertainment and finally experiences; • Support the TSs role as embodied experiences; • Immerse TS participants in a mix of sensorial stimuli, cognitive processes, emotional responses, relational activities and active behaviors; • Support the TS roles as sources of learning and community platforms; • Organize moments of leisure within the TS setting; • Promote the TS entertainment facet; • Develop the organizers' role as active players in the creation of the experiential setting of their trade show events.

Source: Author's elaboration

The present dissertation 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 the contemporary literature.

The limitations, characterizing this dissertation, provide avenues for future researches. More specifically, the present work paves the way for investigating the use of social media in the trade show sector further, by investigating for example the effect of SM 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 SM 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 dissertation 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 integrate 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. List of reviewed articles (*n*=158)

Year	Author(s)	Title	Journal
1997	Blythe J.	*Does size matter?-objectives and measures at UK trade exhibitions*	Journal of Marketing Communications, 3(1), 51-59.
1997	Dekimpe M. G., Francois P., Gopalakrishna S., Lilien G., Van Den Bulte C.	*Generalizing about trade show effectiveness: A cross-national comparison*	The Journal of Marketing, 61(4), 55-64.
1997	Herbig P., O'Hara B., Palumbo F.	*Differences between trade show exhibitors and non-exhibitors*	Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, 12(6), 368-382.
1997	Mohsin A., Ryan C.	*Business visitors to the northern territory expo*	Tourism Recreation Research, 22(2), 67-69.
1998	Abbott J. A., Lanza J.	*Antitrust regulations and trade shows—: Can dealers and exhibitors be excluded*	The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly, 39(3), 12-19.
1998	Herbig P., O'Hara B., Palumbo F.	*Trade show: Who, What, Why*	Marketing Intelligence & Planning, 16(7), 425-435.
1998	Seringhaus F. H., Rosson P. J.	*Management and performance of international trade fair exhibitors: government stands vs independent stands.*	International Marketing Review, 15(5), 398-412.
1998	Tayloer K. A.	*The marketing trade show: A new method for incorporating student projects into large classes*	Journal of Marketing Education, 20(3), 250-257.
1999	Blythe J.	*Visitor and exhibitor expectations and outcomes at trade exhibitions*	Marketing Intelligence & Planning, 17(2), 100-110.
1999	Munuera J. L., Ruiz S.	*Trade fairs as services: A look at visitors' objectives in Spain*	Journal of Business Research, 44(1), 17-24.
1999	Semler R.	*How we went digital without a strategy*	Harvard Business Review, 78(5), 51-3.
1999	Shoham A.	*Performance in trade shows and exhibitions: a synthesis and directions for future research*	Journal of Global Marketing, 12(3), 41-57.
1999	Tuncalp S.	*Evaluation of information sources in industrial marketing: implications for media planning in the Arabian Gulf*	Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, 14(1), 49-60.
2000	Chacko H. E., Fenich G. G.	*Determining the importance of US convention destination attributes*	Journal of Vacation Marketing, 6(3), 211-220.
2000	Harris D.	*The shows will go on*	Sales and Marketing management, 152 (5), 85.
2000	Penaloza L.	*The commodification of the American West: Marketers' production of cultural meanings at the trade show*	Journal of Marketing, 64(4), 82-109.
2000a	Wilkinson T. J., Brouthers L. E.	*An evaluation of state sponsored promotion programs*	Journal of Business Research, 47(3), 229-236.
2000b	Wilkinson T. J., Brouthers L. E.	*Trade shows, trade missions and state governments: Increasing FDI and high-tech exports*	Journal of International Business Studies, 31(4), 725-734.
2001	Godar S. H., O' Connor P. J.	*Same time next year—buyer trade show motives*	Industrial Marketing Management, 30(1), 77-86
2001	Penaloza L.	*Consuming the American west: Animating cultural meaning and memory at a stock show and rodeo*	Journal of consumer research, 28(3), 369-398.

2002	Bartz A.	*Show and sell*	Industrial Fabric Products Review, 87(9), 54-57.
2002	Blythe J.	*Using trade fairs in key account management*	Industrial Marketing Management, 31(7), 627-635.
2002	Daugherty P. J., Kasulis J. J., Glenn Richey R.	*The role of customer service in trade promotion decisions.*	The International Journal of Logistics Management, 13(1), 43-56.
2002	Ehrenfeuchter, K	*Net curtains! Do they still exist?*	Kettenwirk-Praxis, 35(4), 13-14.
2002	Pinar M., Rogers J. D., Baack D.	*An examination of trade show participation in a developing country: An exploratory study in Turkey.*	Journal of Euromarketing, 11(3), 33-52.
2002	Rice G., Almossawi M.	*A study of exhibitor firms at an Arabian gulf trade show: Goals, selection criteria and perceived problems*	Journal of Global Marketing, 15(3-4), 149-172.
2002	Tanner J. F.	*Leveling the playing field: factors influencing trade show success for small companies*	Industrial Marketing Management, 31(3), 229-239.
2003	Chang M.	*How should I meet potential investors at a trade show?*	Laser Focus World, 39(5), 73.
2003	Mullen M. R., Sashi C. M., Doney P. M.	*Gray markets: threat or opportunity?*	Advances in International Marketing, 14(2003), 77-105.
2003	Smith W. C.	*To be or not to be: Shakespeare had it right*	TUT Textiles a Usages Techniques, 47(2003), 94-99.
2003	Smith T. M., Hama K., Smith P. M.	*The effect of successful trade show attendance on future show interes*	Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, 18(4/5), 403-418.
2003	Telpner R.	*It's showtime! Do you know what you are doing there?*	Canadian Apparel, 27(4), 18-19.
2004	Hansen K.	*Measuring performance at trade shows: scale development and validation*	Journal of Business Research, 57(1), 1-13.
2004	Parsons M. C., Rose M. B.	*Communities of Knowledge: Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Networks in the British Outdoor Trade, 1960–90*	Business History, 46(4), 609-639.
2004	Seringhaus R., Rosson P.	*An analysis model of performance measurement of international trade fair exhibitors*	Problems and Perspectives in Management, 2(4), 152-165.
2004	Smith T. M., Gopalakrishna S., Smith P. M.	*The complementary effect of trade shows on personal selling*	International Journal of Research in Marketing, 21(1), 61-76.
2004	Swedberg, J.	*Show and sell*	Industrial Fabric Products Review, 89(8), 60-63.
2005	Kozak N.	*The expectations of exhibitors in tourism, hospitality, and the travel industry*	Journal of Convention & Event Tourism, 7(3-4), 99-116.
2005	Schieffer J. M.	*Rampant exhibitionism*	Industrial Fabric Products Review, 90(9), 36-37.
2005	Zuurveen M.	*China: Join them, beat them or go your own way?*	Eurostitch Magazine, 13(77), 24.
2006	Borghini S., Golfetto F., Rinallo D.	*Ongoing search among industrial buyers*	Journal of Business Research, 59(10), 1151-1159.
2006	Friedmann S. A.	*Integrating trade shows into your marketing strategy: a waste of time and money?*	Strategic Direction, 22(5).

2006	Ling-Yee L.	*Relationship learning at trade shows: Its antecedents and consequences*	Industrial Marketing Management, 35(2), 166-177.
2006	Rinallo D., Golfetto F.	*Representing markets: The shaping of fashion trends by French and Italian fabric companies*	Industrial Marketing Management, 35(7), 856-869.
2006	Start B.	*Trade shows*	Eurostitch Magazine, 14(80), 14-16.
2006	Wilkinson T. J., Brouthers L. E.	*Trade promotion and SME export performance*	International Business Review, 15(3), 233-252.
2006	Wu J., Desarbo W. S., Chen P. J., Fu Y. Y.	*A latent structure factor analytic approach for customer satisfaction measurement*	Marketing Letters, 17(3), 221-238.
2007	Butler C., Bassiouni Y., El-Adly M., Widjaja A.	*Revamping the value chain in exhibition facilities: the case of the Dubai exhibition industry*	Facilities, 25(11/12), 419-436.
2007	Chiou J. S., Hsih C. H., Shen C. C.	*Product innovativeness, trade show strategy and trade show performance: The case of Taiwanese global information technology firms*	Journal of global marketing, 20(2-3), 31-42.
2007	Ling-Yee L.	*Marketing resources and performance of exhibitor firms in trade shows: A contingent resource perspective*	Industrial Marketing Management, 36(3), 360-370.
2007	Ling-Yee L.	*The effects of firm resources on trade show performance: how do trade show marketing processes matter?*	Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, 23(1), 35-47.
2007	Zhuo J., He X. J.	*Analysis of e-marketplace for the textile industry in China.*	International Journal of Management and Enterprise Development, 4(3), 337-353.
2008	Berne C., Garcia-Uceda M. E.	*Criteria involved in evaluation of trade shows to visit*	Industrial Marketing Management, 37(5), 565-579.
2008	Cagno E., Caron F.	*Dynamic analysis of project risk*	Journal of Risk Assessment and Management, 10(1-2), 70-87.
2008	DiPietro R. B., Breiter D., Rompf P., Goldewska M.	*An exploratory study of differences among meeting and exhibition planners in their destination selection criteria*	Journal of Convention & Event Tourism, 9(4), 258-276.
2008	Ensmar R. G.	*Business. Investing in success: Make your next trade show the business opportunity it truly is*	Specialty Fabrics Review, 93(10), 91-95.
2008	Evers N., Knight J.	*Role of international trade shows in small firm internationalization: A network perspective*	International Marketing Review, 25(5), 544-562.
2008	Gyani G. J.	*Effectiveness of QMS certification process*	Total Quality Management, 19(3), 263-279.
2008	Lampel J., Meyer A. D.	*Guest editors' introduction: Field-configuring events as structuring mechanism*	Journal of Management Studies, 45(6), 1025-1035.
2008	Lee C. H., Kim S. Y.	*Differential effects of determinants on multi-dimensions of trade show performance: By three stages of pre-show, at-show, and post-show activities*	Industrial Marketing Management, 37(7), 784-796.
2008	Lee J., Love C., Han T.	*Trade show websites: An examination of critical websites' quality factors and content items*	Journal of Convention & Event Tourism, 9(1), 35-59.
2008	Morgan S.	*Exhibitor tips for success*	Printing Impressions, 50(11), 68-70.

2008	Palumbo F. A.	*Trade show/fair piracy and industrial espionage*	Journal of Convention & Event Tourism, 9(4), 277-292.
2008	Wu J., Lilien G., Dasgupta A.	*An exploratory study of trade show formation and diversity*	Journal of business-to-business marketing, 15(4), 397-424.
2009	Berger J., Gowland C.	*arteBA Foundation and the challenge of supporting artists by promoting the market of arts.*	Academia-revista latinoamericana de administracion, 43(2009), 125-155.
2009	Blythe J.	*Trade fairs as communication: a new mode*	Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, 25(1), 57-62.
2009	Douglas M. R., Gregory S.	*Not all politics are local: exploring the role of meetings and events coordinators in the political arena*	Journal of Convention & Event Tourism 10(2), 134-145.
2009	Greene T.	*A fresh look at business development*	Screen Printing, 99(11), 16-20.
2009	Kirchgeorg M., Springer C., Kastner E.	*Objectives for successfully participating in trade shows*	Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing, 25(1), 63-72.
2009	Lanska D.	*Penny wise or pound foolish?*	Flexo, Volume 34(4), 44-48.
2009	Milner L. M.	*Consumer behavior at an industrial travel sho*	Tourism Review, 64(4), 4-11.
2009	Shamsuddoha A. K., Ali M. Y.	*Export assistance in the garment industry: an examination of awareness, use and perceived benefit*	Journal for Global Business Advancement, 2(4), 381-389.
2009	Ukena M.	*Education: It's not just for students*	Screen Printing 99(7), 24-28.
2009	Wilkinson T. J., Brouthers L. E.	*The strategic impact of international trade shows and trade missions for entrepreneurial firms*	Journal for Global Business Advancement, 2(3), 207-220.
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