

Campania's Wine on the Net

Campania's Wine on the Net:

*A Translational-Terminological
Analysis of Winespeak*

By

Francesco Nacchia

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To the love of my life, Alessia

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NOTE TO THE READER

All digital texts included in the corpus have been used for exclusively scientific purposes.

All external sources have been acknowledged throughout this work. However, when terminological and translational comments are made, the owner of the texts is not mentioned. This, in order not to affect the reader's perceptions about this or that winery in either a negative or positive way.

All web sources were accessible when the research was being carried out, therefore I apologise if any of them may not work or be freely consultable any longer.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aims, Research Questions, and Motivations

The present research revolves around the analysis of *winespeak*—the name given to the set of terms¹ used in wine descriptions—in the context of online promotional communication of Campania’s DOP, DOC, DOCG, IGP, and IGT wines. Firstly, the study aims to evaluate the main features of wine discourse in Italian and English online communication by both verifying the degree of harmonisation with national and international wine terminological standards, and simultaneously observing creative language uses based on existing frameworks. Indeed, a distinguishing characteristic of wine tasting terminology is the coexistence of both technical and creative terms that respond to the marketing and cultural dimensions of the wine phenomenon (S. M. Pavel, 2013). Secondly, the focus is also on the inter-linguistic transfer from Italian into English; by means of an inter-lingual comparison, similarities and differences in the communicative approach among the online wineries considered within and outside the Italian-speaking community are spotted. This, moreover, enables the examination of translation choices’ stability and of the overall translation quality with a specific focus on the accuracy and efficiency dimension. In this respect, textual and translational strategies adopted by the businesses individually can provide information about their willingness to reinforce brand popularity internationally. Briefly, the investigation seeks to answer five overarching research questions:

- To what degree does wine tasting terminology comply with national Italian and English recommended standards?
- Do terminological standards play a role in bridging the gap between wine experts and non-experts?
- Through which translation techniques is Italian wine tasting terminology rendered in English?

¹ “A lexical unit consisting of one or more than one word which represents a concept inside a domain” (B. Bessé *et al.*, 1997 p. 152).

- How can the degree of translation efficiency and accuracy be assessed?
- How can Campania's winemakers' attitudes towards foreign markets be assessed?

The corpus is represented by the tasting notes² in Italian with the respective English translations (where available) taken from winemakers' websites included in *Guida Catalogo delle Aziende Vitivinicole e Vinicole della Campania—edizione 2016/2017* issued by Regione Campania and Associazione Italiana Sommelier.³

Subjectivity always plays a role in human intellectual works, even those that claim objectivity. In choosing material for this study, the researcher embraced B. Johnstone's (2000 p. 24) assertion that qualitative researchers must, as much as possible, avoid choosing topics and collecting data on the basis of their expectations as this may skew scientific observations and, in the worst-case scenario, invalidate them. In other words, so-called 'cherry picking' (R. Wodak and M. Meyer, 2009 p. 11)—the selection of data that appear to confirm the scholar's expectations—has been avoided here for the sake of obtaining genuine scientific results. However, two major reasons for choosing this topic—one extrinsic, the other intrinsic—underlie the present research; these can be broadly defined as 'academic' and 'cultural/identitarian', respectively. The former stems from the author's desire to demonstrate how the interaction between his two main fields of study—Translation and Terminology—may benefit both providers and users of linguistic products.

Indeed, as K. Kerremans (2015) states while discussing B. Hatim and I. Mason (1990) and J. House (2001), inter-lingual mediators such as interpreters and translators play a critical role in transferring specialised knowledge and terminology to other communities, although this may require careful handling of contextual and cultural factors:

² Hereafter referred to as 'TNs', 'wine descriptions', 'tasting sheets', and 'wine reviews'.

³ Available at:

http://www.agricoltura.regione.campania.it/pubblicazioni/guida_vini_2016.html
(last accessed 23/01/17).

Translating terminology poses important challenges for translators. On the one hand, translators need to acknowledge the role that terminology fulfils in communicating specialised knowledge in a precise way. On the other hand, they need to be aware of the fact that terminology use is conditioned by several contextual factors. For translators, it is therefore important to know what linguistic options (i.e. terminological variants) are available in languages for expressing specialised knowledge and to understand how these options can be used (i.e. how they function) in specific communicative settings. (K. Kerremans, 2015 online)

However, the interaction between Translation and Terminology has long been underestimated by scholars, as have the benefits of mixing competencies relating to both disciplines in carrying out a translation project dealing with a precise technical field. The main reason for this is that during a translation effort, “[...] terminology work is often *hidden*” (L. Bowker, 2015 p. 305 discussing S. E. Wright and G. Budin, 2001 p. 873) and advantages coming from the implementation of a terminology management⁴ strategy can hardly surface. Moreover, this has been further reinforced by the unprofessional approach of some translators:

[who] merely enter key words into a search engine and simply retrieve the first ten hits, thinking that any text containing these key words will be a useful source of information for their purposes. As a result of this naïve approach, the texts retrieved may be inappropriate in terms of register, technicality and type. (L. Bowker, 2015 p. 317)

Although an effective terminology management system can benefit the linguistic quality of translations, as well as reducing time and costs (*Ibid.*, p. 305), a number of studies have shown that “the most frequent mistakes in translated content are terminology-related [and that] very few companies do any terminology management at all” (K. Warburton, 2015 p. 367).

The identitarian motivation for this study therefore lies in the concern for the quality of inter-linguistic and inter-cultural communication related to wine, which should be treated not as a mere consumption product, but as a cultural object whose historical and territorial significance must be transposed. Furthermore, this is especially true in the current period of

⁴ “From the point of view of the translation and localization industry practitioners, terminology management can be more practically defined as the activity of systematically collecting, processing, classifying and consistently applying vocabulary that has specific meaning in a given subject field or context (terms) according to some governing terminology” (M. Popiolek, 2015 p. 341).

global standardisation, with its consequential loss of cultural specificity. Wine creates strong ties within the regions where it is produced, and linguistic usages may be affected by territoriality to such an extent that translation to a foreign language may create culture-bound issues. Culture-bound terminology has lately gained favour within the field of study; specialised knowledge activation is seen as an event entailing the intertwining of subjective perception, cultural impulses, and other contextual factors:

Both general and specialized concepts are often culture-bound. This is only natural since concepts are mental constructs, created in the minds of human beings who exist in their bodies as well as in specific geographic locations [...]. In this sense, culture bound terminology [...], has recently emerged as a new approach towards specialized conceptualizations, which underlines that each community parcels reality in a different way. This generates culture-specific concepts and terms. Even term variation should not be regarded as a linguistic phenomenon isolated from conceptual and cultural representations since it is one of the manifestations of the dynamicity of categorization and expression of specialized knowledge [...]. (P. Faber and P. León-Araúz, 2014 pp. 140-141)

Furthermore, wine tasting—as a well-established professional practice—is known to stimulate creativity in wine writers, leading to an uncontrolled enrichment of the wine vocabulary. This may create terminological instability, such as variation, synonymization, metaphorization, and denotation, which may further hamper successful inter-lingual communication. Also, because of its unrecorded nuances, wine communication may not flow smoothly intra-linguistically, let alone when this involves a linguistic and cultural shift to a foreign reality. Instability is also evident in the variety of denominations/labels given to the specialised language itself: ‘winespeak’, ‘wine talk’, and ‘oinologlossia’—a term coined by M. Silverstein (2003)—are the most popular.

In this connection, the author wishes to point out that although he enjoys drinking wine on some occasions, he does not consider himself a member of the wine discourse community, and has no previous experience of sensory analysis of food or wine. However, this potential drawback may also be an advantage, endowing the researcher with an objective and unbiased view of the field and its discourse dynamics; it may also be compensated for by the thorough study of diverse textual and multimedia wine-related resources. Indeed, as R. K. Yin (2009) remarks, case study investigators “should be unbiased by preconceived notions, including those derived from theory, [and] should be sensitive and responsive to contradictory evidence” (p. 69).

In summary, considering Campania's long-standing reputation and tradition of wine-making, its agri-food heritage, which has a cultural significance to be preserved over time and transposed to geographically and culturally distant places, the fact that it is the author's place of birth, and that the regional-dialectal impulses may boost linguistic creativity to create interesting translational-terminological issues in the inter-linguistic transfer, this region was chosen for a case study focusing on the descriptions of wine.

1.2 Expected Results and Potential End-Users

The first part of this study's analysis is devoted to the identification of frequent terms and their semantic areas of belonging. In the second part, the results are expected to identify the degree of harmonisation between terminology used and well-established international standards, thus quantifying the impact of terminological creativity on the descriptions of Campania's wines in promotional online Italian and English texts. This should provide new insight into the role of terminological tools in contemporary communicative wine scenarios, which are characterised by the coming together of people from different fields with varying levels of expertise. The third part of the analysis is expected to illuminate certain typical translational-terminological strategies used by TNs' writers in the context of promotional discourse.

Based on these premises, a picture emerges of a heterogeneous audience. The primary end-users were identified as follows: first, Italian winemakers who sell or expect to sell wine online, both on the national and international market; second, translators who have been commissioned market-oriented TNs translations; and third, ordinary wine drinkers who long for a better understanding of the field of wine to support their purchasing choices. C. Hommerberg (2011) has noted the importance of studies on the language of wine due to their ability to reduce the knowledge gap between experts and non-experts:

Studies [entailing] the analysis of wine reviews can [...] provide real world writers and recipients with increased knowledge about the (explicit and implicit) strategies that can be drawn on in order to construct a message that is persuasive in the specific situation when it occurs. (p. 11)

Thus, the study aims to be accessible, that is, readable and understandable, not only for linguists and other academics, but also for members of the wine community and ordinary wine drinkers.

1.3 Book Outline

In the second chapter, some key notions about online commerce of wine and the latest communication tools available to businesses are given. Initially, the evolutionary path of the Internet is briefly outlined, with references to the earliest steps—from Web 1.0, based on one-way communication between content creator and users—the current state—Web 2.0, characterised by interaction between creators and users—and future perspectives—Web 3.0. Then, the opportunities opened up to businesses are discussed, looking in particular at the website models available, the benefits of selling a product on the net, as well as the importance of social media. Subsequently, a brief history of wineries' online presence is mapped; Wine 1.0 and its evolution into Wine 2.0, as well as the upcoming Wine 3.0, are described in their basic components. Within this framework, it is underlined how the global wine industry has been slow to exploit social media as a marketing tool since traditional selling channels still work for this product type. At the same time, the Internet is proving to be the favourite place for consumers to look for information before a purchase that may impact their social perception. In the following sub-section, languages and their role in expanding one's business is outlined; tapping into a larger consumer audience through the use of social media tools can be incredibly fruitful if combined with a coordinated linguistic strategy. Basically, English is the language of business and the one most website-owners choose to have their website translated into; however, communicating in multiple languages can boost a company websites' rankings. Finally, the current state of Italian online wine commerce is briefly investigated from a social media presence perspective.

The third chapter outlines the object of research from a conceptual, historical, and linguistic perspective. Firstly, the well-established norms of the wine tasting practice, together with its cultural and professional aspects, are described. Specifically, the sensory analysis, defined as a professional practice, is examined in all its components—visual, olfactory, taste, tactile, and aftertaste; contextual factors impacting the taster's perceptions are also discussed. An overview of the specialised language of wine tasting is provided, including its main linguistic and stylistic traits, and the primary steps in its evolution. *Winespeak*, the name given to the specialised language used by members of the wine community, is then defined. Compared to other specialised languages, the one at issue here is generally considered as more shifting, ambiguous, and lacking objectivity, due to both the potential knowledge gaps between experts and novices—

which may hamper communication—, and metaphorical and subjective linguistic usages. Then, the lexicon is analysed in a diachronic perspective, and linguistic trends—especially in terms of word choices and descriptions length—in history are discussed; in this respect, it is shown how socio-cultural trends and values attached to wine have impacted the choice of knowledge domains from which words are drawn. A historical perspective is embraced also for the discussion of wine assessment methods; beginning with judgements in degrees of goodness, the focus shifted onto the effects of wine on the human body, then its medical implications, the contribution of chemical components to the wine quality, and finally aesthetic and aristocratic social values. The following sub-section is devoted to the description of the two major components of the language of wine, a creative and a terminological one; basically, the former is the one chiefly contributing to the terminological instability of the specialised language—fed by subjective and inventive impulses that lead wine writers to use words metaphorically—, whereas the second consists of words belonging to the field of wine whose meaning is shared within the wine discourse community. The former has led critics to negatively define the language of wine as ‘vinobabble’ (A. Lehrer, 2010 p. 49) or ‘idiot-speak’ (M. Gluck, 2003 p. 107), a one inaccessible to non-experts. Thus, this issue is discussed in a dedicated sub-section. Next, attention is paid to the ‘tasting note’, the most popular textual genre accommodating descriptions of the wine tasting process, and the one analysed in the present study; in the dedicated sub-section, common contents and categories are discussed. Also, the difficulties arising from the tasting experience due to its multi-sensorial nature are displayed; in particular, the impact of the visual impression on other senses, and the lack of words for olfactory sensations are put under the spotlight. Finally, the last sub-sections are dedicated to the description of early and contemporary wine scoring systems—G. Grazzi-Soncini’s, M. Amerine’s, Roseworthy’s, and R. Parker Jr.’s among the others.

The fourth chapter presents a literature review on *winespeak*, which falls within the scientific field of Linguistics and the sub-field of Terminology; specifically, the focus is on research that deals with lexico-semantic issues. It has to be noted that the substantial quantity and variety of studies on wine results from the variety of contexts in which wine discourse occurs, giving rise to spoken and written texts to be used as corpora. Indeed, scholars in the field of Linguistics have investigated *winespeak* from different perspectives that look at the textual and discursual aspects of wine reviews, the metaphorization and metonymization dynamics in wine discourse, the lexico-semantic

treatments for computational application, and the evolutionary path of wine talks, which explore trends in qualitative and quantitative evaluations.

The fifth chapter deals with the theoretical frameworks and methodological approach for the analysis itself. The communicative approach—developed by M. T. Cabré (1999)—is introduced as the main theory on which this study relies. Then, the terminological and translational frameworks for the three-step analysis are described: the former comprehends authoritative English and Italian terminological tools—*The Wine Aroma Wheel* (A. C. Noble, 1990)⁵, *Red Wine Mouthfeel Wheel* (R. Gawel *et al.*, 2000), *The White Wine Mouthfeel Wheel* (G. J. Pickering, 2006)⁶, the Wine and Spirit Education Trust's⁷ *Systematic Approach to Tasting Wine* (level 2 and 4), the Associazione Italiana Sommelier's *Terminologia per la Degustazione del Vino*, and L. Maroni's *Ruota Sensoriale Sinestetica*—; the latter is represented by L. Molina and A. Hurtado Albir's (2002) scheme of translation techniques. Finally, the software *Antconc*, *AntWordProfiler*, and *Paraconc*—utilised for the analysis—are briefly introduced.

The sixth chapter presents the texts composing the main corpus and the related sub-corpora, as well as the guidelines for their selection. In addition, issues concerning Campania's winemakers' online presence in terms of website models and translated versions are discussed in order to get an overall picture of their willingness to both exploit ecommerce and open to foreign markets. The material used for the study is identified in *ad-hoc*, domain-specific (G. Corpas and M. Seghiri, 2009 p. 78) authentic parallel corpora of wine tasting notes in English and Italian, which were selected on the basis of some basic criteria—*representativeness* and *availability*—and more specific ones. The collection phase is then described in all its steps, including the online search, text extraction, and the creation of individual .txt files for all Italian and English TNs. Concluding this preliminary phase, the number of TNs per language collected in the corpus and the information about website types, foreign language versions, and the social media presence of Campania's winemakers are reported.

The seventh chapter is devoted to the three-step inter-linguistic terminological and translational analysis described in the previous chapters. The analysis is carried out on the *Complete Italian Corpus* (CIC), which also includes TNs with no English translation; the *Parallel*

⁵ See also: A. C. Noble, 1995 and A. C. Noble *et al.*, 1984, 1987.

⁶ See also: G. J. Pickering and P. De Miglio, 2008.

⁷ Hereafter referred to as 'WSET'.

English Corpus (PEC), including the English-language TNs; and the *Parallel Italian Corpus* (PIC), which comprises only those Italian TNs accompanied by English translations. The analysis from the CIC provides quantitative and qualitative data on the terminological behaviour of all Campania's wineries chosen for this research project, whereas the PIC and PEC are evaluated by means of an inter-linguistic comparative approach in order to deepen understanding of translational-terminological dynamics. It begins with the quantification of types and tokens, the creation of the wordlist, and an analysis of word frequency in the English and Italian main corpora using the software *Antconc*. Preliminarily, the selected texts are observed for making some approximations of the types of content typically present in wine descriptions from Campania's wineries' websites, and whether these comply with those displayed by R. Caballero's (2007) 'Rhetorical Organization of Tasting Notes'. The author's specific focus in this analytical step is on the frequency of wine-related terms, their semantic areas of belonging, and the consistency between the Italian and English parallel corpora in terms of word frequency. For all corpora, the first 100 words per frequency are displayed, and semantic areas are identified; then, only words related to the wine tasting process until the 300th are further discussed. In the second step, the degree of harmonisation with existing authoritative Italian and international terminological standards is assessed using the software *AntWordProfiler*. In this step of the analysis, the PIC and PEC are analysed to determine the percentage of words included in the terminological tools within the corpus. This sheds light on the roles these tools play in promoting terminological stability within the context of commercial wine discourse. In this phase, the extent to which Campania's winemakers rely on Italian and English terminological tools in their descriptions, along with the usefulness of these terminological tools in bridging the gap between businesses and consumers are assessed; furthermore, the semantic areas from which words not belonging to any of them are drawn are attempted to be identified. Finally, the third step—carried out using the software *Paraconc*—is devoted to an inter-linguistic comparison of the Italian source texts and English target texts aimed at verifying the general degree of translation accuracy and efficiency, as well as identifying specific translational-terminological choices that may affect the reader's comprehension. The section discusses the inter-linguistic analysis aimed at verifying the overall quality of the English translations and the most common translation techniques exploited among those comprised in L. Molina and A. Hurtado Albir's (2002) scheme. The purpose of the analysis is to qualitatively assess the TNs in order to

establish a general idea of how Campania's winemakers relay their traditions and promote their products to an international English-speaking consumer base, as well as to assess terminological choices in translation. Here, the most frequent translation techniques used, the extent to which the English versions can be regarded as efficient and accurate, and how wine-related terminology is treated in translation are accordingly explored.

The conclusion chapter summarizes the light shed by the investigation on the research questions, drawing attention to the terminological and translational dimensions. Also, the strengths and weaknesses of the analysis methodology are assessed, and the current state of Campania's wine international trade is outlined. The chapter closes with concluding comments on the significance of the present research within the context of interdisciplinary studies focusing on language and Economics in the age of consumerism.

CHAPTER TWO

WINE ON THE INTERNET: KEY NOTIONS AND CURRENT STATE

The success of the Internet as a competitive field has affected global commercial dynamics to the degree that, for businesses, an online presence is no longer considered a competitive strategy, but an essential survival requirement (R. A. Kerin *et al.*, 2013). This chapter provides key notions of the online communicative and sales tools available to businesses—winemakers included—beginning with an outline of the evolution of the Internet. Additionally, the current state of global and Italian online wine commerce is investigated.

2.1 The Internet’s Evolutionary Path

Ecommerce—defined as “the process of buying and selling products or services using electronic data transmission via the Internet and the World Wide Web” (E. E. Grandon and J. M. Pearson, 2004 p. 197)—represents a recent, growing, and valuable model for the sale of products and services. Ecommerce began with the launch of Amazon and Ebay in 1995, and “got a right ticking-off only 6 years later when the dot-com bubble burst in 2001” (A. M. Kaplan and M. Haenlein, 2010 p. 60). Its recent success hinges on both the development of mobile commerce, and the unprecedented increase in Internet access worldwide—now about 40% of the global population (Internetlivestats, 2015)—and, accordingly, in potential online customers. In 2014, the global value of business-to-consumer ecommerce (B2C) amounted to \$1.5 trillion, increasing by 20.3% from 2013 (Emarketer, 2014). In Europe, ecommerce grew steadily during the last several years, with a reported 15% annual increase that is expected to continue in the future, resulting in sales of €477 billion in 2015, €540 billion in 2016, and €609 billion in 2017 (Ecommerce-Europe, 2015). With an overall share of 60%, the UK, Germany, and France, lead the European ecommerce market, followed by Russia, Spain, and Italy, which may improve their shares in the near future if they succeed in taking advantage of “growing confidence in surfing the web, higher disposable

incomes, and further growth in fast, affordable mobile Internet through smartphones and tablets” (*Ibid.*). In particular, Russia and Italy, together with Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, and Canada, are expected to drive the growth of ecommerce (*Ibid.*).

Ecommerce has evolved alongside Web 1.0 into Web 2.0, meaning that “applications such as personal web pages [...] and the idea of content publishing [that] belong to the era of Web 1.0 [...] are replaced by blogs, wikis, and collaborative projects [...]” (A. M. Kaplan and M. Haenlein, 2010 p. 61). The earliest reported use of the expression dates to 1999, in famous user-experience designer D. Di Nucci’s article “Fragmented Future”. D. Di Nucci understood that web at that time was in its embryonic stages, and that “the first glimmerings of Web 2.0 [were] beginning to appear” (D. Di Nucci, 1999 p. 32). In 2003, J. Robb identified the structural elements of Web 2.0 and described them on his weblog:

What is Web 2.0? It is a system that breaks with the old model of centralized Web sites and moves the power of the Web/Internet to the desktop. It includes three structural elements: 1) a source of content, data, or functionality (a website, a Web service, a desktop PC peer), 2) an open system of transport (RSS, XML-RPC, SOAP, P2P, and too an extent IM), and 3) a rich client (desktop software). Basically, Web 2.0 puts the power of the Internet in the hands of the desktop PC user where it belongs. (J. Robb, 2003 online)

However, the first person to popularise the expression ‘Web 2.0’ is commonly believed to be D. Dougherty (vice president of O’Reilly Media, Inc.) who used the term at a meeting where a potential conference about web development was being discussed. At that time, there was “a huge amount of disagreement about just what Web 2.0 mean[t], with some people decrying it as a meaningless marketing buzzword, and others accepting it as the new conventional wisdom” (T. O’Reilly, 2005 p. 1). T. O’Reilly attempted to clarify its meaning in the article, “What is Web 2.0? Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software” published in 2005, describing how Web 2.0 differed from Web 1.0 by comparing authentic websites (e.g. Google vs Netscape) and establishing criteria for other websites’ inclusion in the category ‘Web 2.0’. According to T. O’Reilly (2005), these features included:

- Services, not packaged software, with cost-effective scalability.
- Control over unique, hard-to-recreate data sources that get richer as more people use them.
- Trusting users as co-developers.

- Harnessing collective intelligence.
- Leveraging the long tail through customer self-service.
- Software above the level of a single device.
- Lightweight user interfaces, development models, and business models. (p. 5)

Recently, Web 2.0 has become Mobile Web 2.0, in which Web 2.0's tools have been transferred from desktop and laptop PCs to mobile devices (I. Chard, 2008). Considering the increasing use of smartphones by Millennials (Experian, 2014), the primary advantage of ecommerce allows businesses to target a wide range of potential buyers that are always online.

Web 2.0 has paved the way for the emergence of social media, broadly defined 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” (A. M. Kaplan and M. Haenlein, 2010 p. 61). In this passage from web monologues (one-to-many) to dialogues (many-to-many) (L. Pitt *et al.*, 2011), end-users no longer play a role as passive content users; instead, they are active content generators, moving within a “nonlinear model where nearly everyone can communicate with each other” (C. Hoffmann *et al.*, 2016 p. 156) through the exploitation of various signifying modes. L. Safko and D. Brake (2009) claim the label ‘social media’ includes:

Activities, practices and behaviours among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using [...] Web-based applications [...] to create and easily transmit content in the form of words, pictures, videos and audios. (p. 6)

Today, social media platforms continue to evolve, as functions are added or adapted to users' specific needs. R. Wollan *et al.* (2011) have categorised social media platforms, identifying seven types, which include: blogs; ratings and reviews; referrals and sharing; forums; user-created content; member profiles; and social networking.

2.2 The Internet for Businesses

Establishing an online presence is crucial for businesses seeking new income sources. The most basic form of online presence is a corporate website, available in different models—for example, brochure websites, ecommerce websites, community websites—according to the business's goal, and including both design and content options, among them: context,

content, connection, communication, community, commerce, storytelling, other languages, and updating' (R. A. Kerin *et al.*, 2013). Of course, these can be combined according to taste and drive the consumer experience.

However, the Internet has become so crowded that a website may not be as visible and accessible as desired unless users are guided to it through the 'portal' of social networks. Given the prominent role these latter play in people's daily lives,⁸ businesses may benefit from social media presence in other ways as well, such as: two-way communication, content creation by users, immediate remote sharing, brand visibility, and facility of information searching (J. F. Rayport and J. Sviokla, 1994; W. G. Mangold and D. J. Faulds, 2009; A. M. Kaplan and M. Haenlein, 2010). In particular, social media is regarded as the best way to build relationships and foster customer engagement (K. Ling *et al.*, 2005; C. Ashley and T. Tuten, 2005), and provides significant advantages over traditional marketing methods by allowing customers to become participants rather than outside viewers (D. Evans, 2010). This communicative approach involves exploiting social media as a tool for dialogue with customers rather than solely a means to spread information or to advertise (G. Szolnoki *et al.*, 2014a).

Merchant-customer dialogues are mainly fuelled by consumers' desire to share their product experiences across social networks as a form of 'control' over them (D. Evans, 2010). These shared experiences may limit customers' uncertainty when purchasing online, because they already believe to know what they are buying (A. Dehont, 2013). Consumers believe social media networks to be reliable and trustworthy sources of information (L. Thach and D. Kolb, 2013), and are more likely to be influenced by consumer-generated content than by marketer-generated information for experience products⁹ (S. Bae and T. Lee., 2011; P. Chen *et al.*, 2004; H. J. Cheong and M. A. Morrison, 2008; C. Park and T. Lee, 2009). In general, modern buying decisions are increasingly influenced by ecommerce and recommendations of online users rather than conventional promotion (M. Siegrist and M. E. Cousin, 2009), thus proving 'word of mouth' a powerful marketing tool (K. S. Coulter and A. Roggeveen, 2012). In ecommerce scenarios, companies should act as facilitators of these conversations while monitoring, interacting, and building

⁸ According to the data collected by Statista "during [the first quarter of 2016], it was found that 1.09 billion active users visited the social network daily. Overall, daily active users accounted for 66 percent of monthly active users" (Statista, 2017 online).

⁹ Products whose price and characteristics can be ascertained only upon consumption (see P. Nelson, 1970).