



Social Media Marketing tools for cruise lines

Increasing customer engagement through posting strategies

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Agenda



- 1. Background and rationale of the study**
2. Literature review
3. Conceptual framework & hypotheses
4. Method
5. Empirical results & implications
6. Limitations & further research

Background

«**Social Media (SM)** provide undoubted opportunities for fostering firms' relationships with their customers, and **online customer engagement (CE)** has become a widespread objective when developing communication strategies for firms operating in business where customer references, word-of-mouth (WoM) and feedback are predictors of success»



- ❖ **Social Media Marketing:** grounds on the use of social media tools/applications (e.g. blogs, forums, social networks, etc.) for marketing objectives.
- ❖ **(Online) customer engagement:** refers to those customer activities influencing firm's success, e.g. purchases, incentivized referrals, SM conversations and service suggestions.

Rationale of the study

- ❖ To investigate the **determinants** of **online CE** in the cruise sector by addressing the **posting activities** of leading cruise companies on their Facebook pages.



- ❖ Why the **cruise sector** as field of investigation?

- ✓ High involvement & high rate of repeaters
- ✓ Customer complaints & service recovery
- ✓ Experiential marketing, customer satisfaction & engagement
- ✓ Emotion & Word-of-Mouth (WoM)



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Literature review (1/2)



- ❖ An increasing number of scholars challenged the **role of SMM** in **tourism**.
- ❖ 27 papers are reviewed and systematically analysed:
 - ✓ **Temporal breakdown**: 10 out of 27 papers published in the last two years.
 - ✓ **Geographic scope**: international perspective (50%) and regional or country-based approaches (Europe and Far East).
 - ✓ **Theoretical perspective**: behavioural intention theory, user-generated content theory, experiential marketing, social influence theory.
 - ✓ **Paper type**: mostly research papers (86%).
 - ✓ **Methods**:
 - Quantitative research papers: regression model; SEM, factor analysis
 - Qualitative research papers: single / multiple case studies; content analysis

Literature review (2/2)



❖ **Topics debated** (four main streams):

1. Impact of SM on tourist' decision process (e.g. Sotiriadis and Van Zyl, 2013);
2. Impact of SM on tourist' behavioural intentions and implications on customer satisfaction and loyalty (e.g., Bronner and Hoog 2011; Chung et al., 2017);
3. Efficiency of SM campaigns & economic-financial KPIs (e.g., Wozniak et al., 2017);
4. Role played by travellers within SM:
 - User-generated contents (e.g., Ketter and Avraham, 2012);
 - Interaction in SM (e.g., Perez-Vega et al., 2018);
 - Brand communities (Hede and Kellett, 2012);
 - Media influencers (Xu and Pratt, 2018).

❖ **Literature gap**: only a limited number of scholars have explored which kind of content, format and timing used in **posting strategies** would **engage** effectively tourists on SM.

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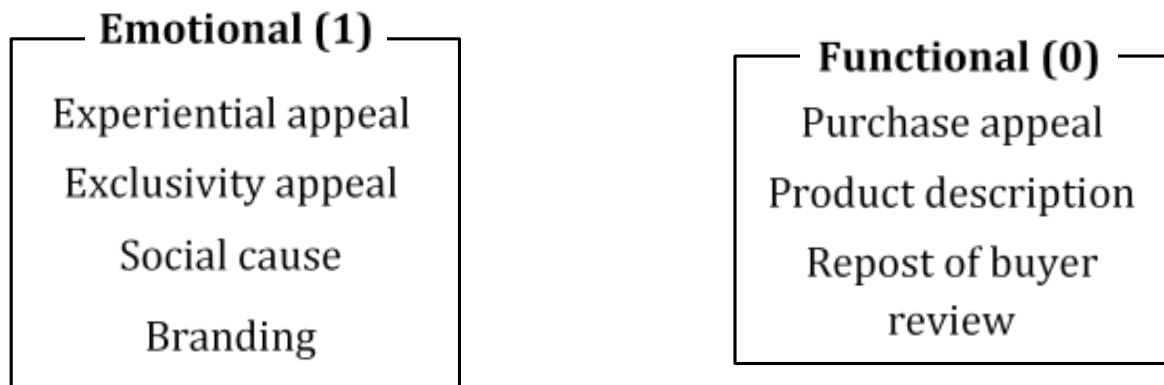


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Conceptual framework (1/2)



- ❖ The paper investigates the implications of **SMM** on **online CE** in the tourism industry by addressing **corporate posting strategies** on Facebook pursued by leading cruise companies.
 - ✓ **Posting strategies:** content, format & timing
 - ✓ **SMM tool:** Facebook
 - ✓ **Online CE:** modelled as likes, comments & shares
- ❖ **Post content**
 - ✓ Emotional vs. functional nature of communication (7 categories)



H1. Emotional corporate posts obtain a higher number of likes (H1.a), comments (H1.b) and shares (H1.c).

Conceptual framework (2/2)



❖ Post format

- ✓ Text length of the post
- ✓ Video contents
- ✓ Web url link

H2. The length of the corporate post is negatively associated to the total number of likes (H2.a), comments (H2.b) and shares (H2.c) received.

H3. Corporate posts enriched by video contents obtain a higher number of likes (H3.a), comments (H3.b) and shares (H3.c).

H4. Corporate posts including a web url link reach a higher number of likes (H4.a), comments (H4.b) and shares (H4.c).

❖ Post timing

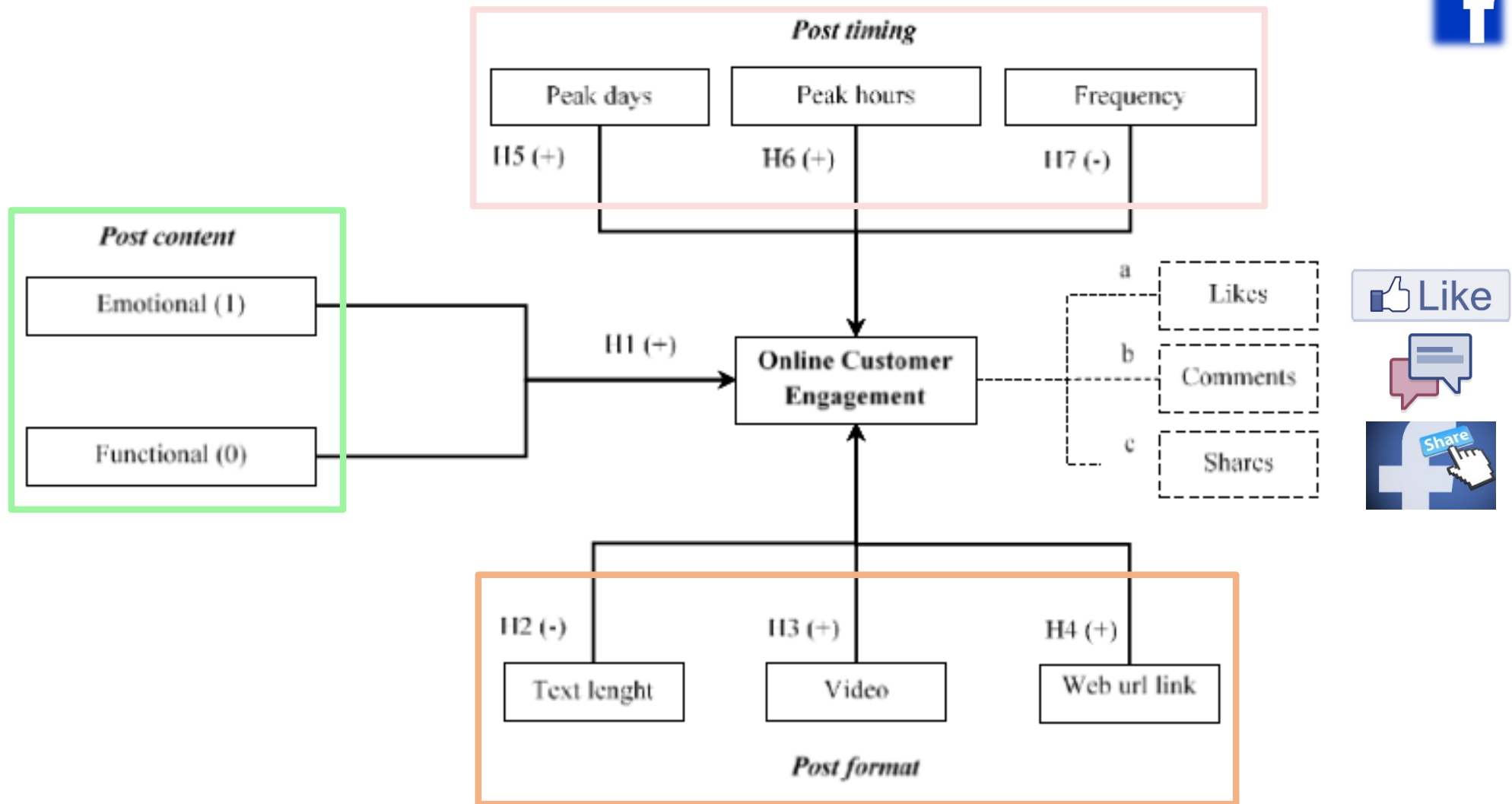
- ✓ Days of the week (peak vs. off-peak)
- ✓ Hours of the day (peak vs. off-peak)
- ✓ Frequency

H5. Corporate posts uploaded on Thursday, Saturday or Sunday receive more likes (H5.a), comments (H5.b) and shares (H5.c).

H6. Corporate posts shared during the peak hours (i.e. from 09:00 am to 08:00 pm) generate a higher number of likes (H6.a), comments (H6.b) and shares (H6.c).

H7. A high corporate post frequency negatively affect the number of likes (H7.a), comments (H7.b) and shares (H7.c) received.

Research hypotheses



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Sample selection & data gathering (1/2)

- ❖ **Sample:** three leading cruise lines holding a top position in the Mediterranean Sea with a proactive approach toward Facebook (capacity to stimulate online CE)



Corporate information		Costa Crociere	MSC Crociere	Royal Caribbean International
<i>General information</i>	Year of foundation	1854	1987	1968
	Headquarters	Genoa (Italy)	Geneva (Switzerland)	Miami (USA)
	Group affiliation	Carnival Corporation (USA)	MSC S.A. (Switzerland)	Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd.
<i>Social media activity on Facebook*#</i>	No. of followers	2,438,074	4,410,549	4,289,774
	No. of posts (textual)	330	447	188
	No. of likes	151,835	353,229	55,546
	No. of comments	22,342	61,495	5,298
	No. of shares	19,576	80,715	7,327
	No. of url links	172	440	115
	No. of images	265	386	185
	No. of videos	69	63	20

* For all the sample companies data refers to the sample timeframe (April 2016 – May 2017).

In the case of Royal Caribbean International, data refers to the italian corporate facebook page.

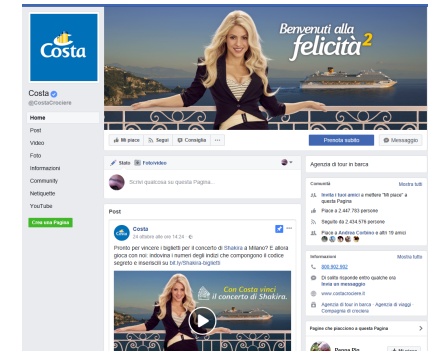
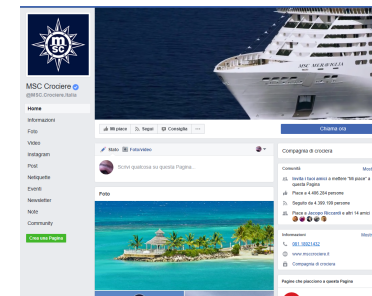
Source: authors' own elaboration from Annual Reports and corporate websites.

4. Method

Sample selection & data gathering (2/2)

❖ Data gathering:

- ✓ Corporate verified Italian Facebook pages of the sample cruise lines
- ✓ 12 months (April 2016 – May 2017) track record
- ✓ 982 corporate posts examined
 - MSC (446)
 - Costa Crociere (331)
 - Royal Caribbean Cruises (205)
- ✓ Collection of data related to posting strategies & DB Development



Company	ID	Check date	Date	Post_testo	D1_LIKE	D2_COMM	D3_SHAR	D1_LIKEra	D2_COMM	D3_SHARr	D4_WEIG	PC0_EMOT	PC1_EXPE	PC2_EXC	PC3_SOCA	PC4_PUR P
								te	rate	ate	HTED			L		C
MSC crociere	1	31/08/2017	01/04/2016	Affonda i tuoi piedi nella sabbia vulcanica di	1088	49	195	0.0002496	1.124E-05	4.473E-05	3103	1	1	0	0	0
MSC crociere	2	31/08/2017	02/04/2016	Un'emozione a più di 100 metri di quota. Vertigo è il più lungo	1457	136	184	0.0003342	3.12E-05	4.221E-05	4058	1	1	0	0	0
MSC crociere	3	31/08/2017	03/04/2016	Il modo migliore per rilassarsi: un massaggio corpo	312	20	50	7.157E-05	4.588E-06	1.147E-05	884	1	1	0	0	0
MSC crociere	4	31/08/2017	05/04/2016	Visita Tallinn e la Cattedrale Alexander Nevskv che sorge	303	8	48	6.95E-05	1.835E-06	1.101E-05	822	1	1	0	0	0
MSC crociere	5	31/08/2017	05/04/2016	Aggiungi po' di dolce ad un tramonto sul mare con uno dei	1831	76	151	0.00042	1.743E-05	3.464E-05	4494	1	1	0	0	0
MSC crociere	6	31/08/2017	06/04/2016	Dal cibo italiano al Tex-Mex e tanto di più. c'è un mare di	193	22	19	4.427E-05	5.046E-06	4.358E-06	528	0	0	0	0	0
MSC crociere	7	31/08/2017	06/04/2016	MSC Crociere è orgogliosa di annunciare la	924	33	154	0.0002119	7.57E-06	3.532E-05	2563	0	0	0	0	0
MSC crociere	8	31/08/2017	07/04/2016	Concediti il lusso caraibico, quest'anno c'è un motivo in più.	219	6	21	5.023E-05	1.376E-06	4.817E-06	540	1	0	1	0	0

Variables operationalization

❖ Variables:

- ✓ **3 dependent variables:** no. of likes, comments and shares (count variables)
- ✓ **7 independent variables**
- ✓ **2 control variables:** posting firm and post time exposure

Independent variables

<i>CONT</i>	Post content	The content of each post has been coded assigning value 1 if it predominantly includes emotional content and 0 when the content relates to functional appeals. Emotional appeal includes: experiential appeal, exclusivity appeal, social cause, and general branding. Conversely functional appeal groups together purchase appeal, product description and repost of buyer review.
<i>TELE</i>	Text lenght	Count variable operationalized as the total number of characters composing the post (spaces excluded).
<i>VIDE</i>	Video	Dummy variable which takes value 1 if the post contains a video and 0 otherwise.
<i>WEBU</i>	Web url	Dummy variable which takes value 1 if the post contains a link to a web url and 0 otherwise.
<i>DAWE</i>	Day of the week	Dummy variable which considers the day of the week in which the content has been uploaded on the corporate Facebook page. The variable takes value 1 if the post has been created during those days which report peak traffic data according to leading empirical research conducted on Facebook (i.e., Thursday, Saturday or Sunday) as reported in Section 3, and 0 otherwise (Monday, Tuesday, Friday).
<i>HOPE</i>	Peak hour	Dummy variable which takes value 1 if the post has been upload during the peak hour and 0 otherwise. In line with data and references reported in Section 3, peak hours for Facebook traffic are from 09:00 am to 08:00 pm.
<i>FREQ</i>	Frequency	Count variable operationalized as the number of posts published by the company on its corporate Facebook page before the sample post in the previous 72 hour.

❖ Methodological issues:

- ✓ To test out 21 research hypotheses we performed Negative binomial regression (NBR) analysis (as the conditional variance exceeds the conditional mean).

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Negative binomial regression analysis

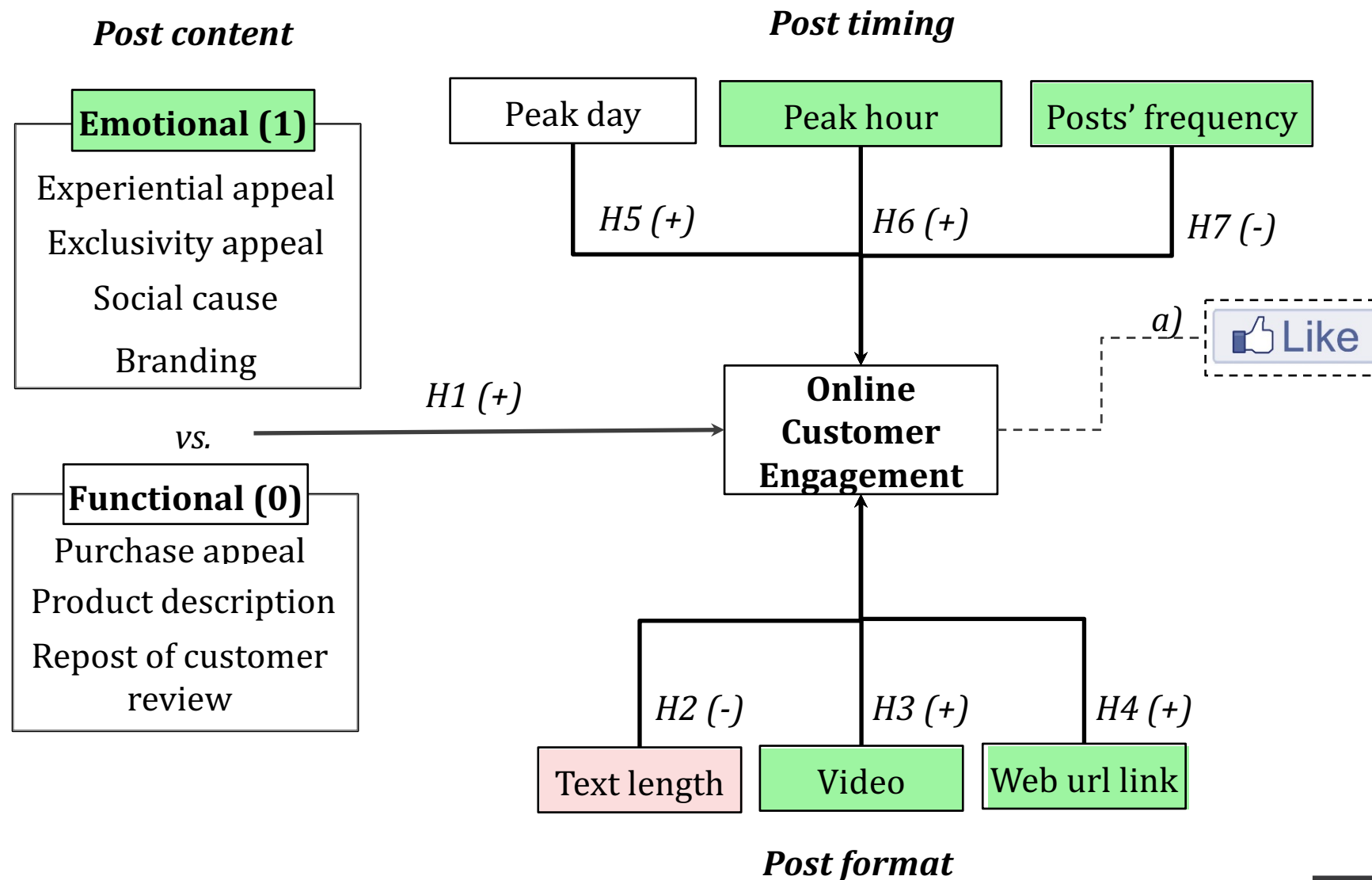
	<i>Model 1 (LIKE)</i>	<i>Model 2 (COMM)</i>	<i>Model 3 (SHAR)</i>
<i>Constant</i>	6.53048 *** 0.33537	2.73873 *** 0.46865	3.82007 *** 0.39548
<i>Independent variables</i>			
CONT	0.51759 *** 0.05752	0.71304 *** 0.08175	0.46590 *** 0.06998
TELE	-0.38360 *** 0.06071	-0.24164 ** 0.08874	-0.30865 *** 0.07041
VIDE	0.25674 ** 0.07885	0.18896 0.11659	0.83378 *** 0.09692
WEBU	0.13324 * 0.06318	-0.04687 0.09325	0.24403 ** 0.07529
DAWE	0.02235 0.05602	-0.10523 0.08049	0.06538 0.06821
HOPE	0.33976 * 0.13294	0.56090 ** 0.19087	0.57705 *** 0.16550
FREQ	-0.05857 * 0.02604	-0.04249 0.03698	-0.02829 0.03140
<i>Control Variables</i>			
COSTA	0.52236 ***	1.07770 ***	0.49571 ***
MSC	1.08964 ***	0.93034 ***	0.98348 ***
TIME	0.00064 * 0.00031	0.00169 *** 0.00048	0.00048 0.00038
LR Chi-squared	292.79 ***	161.17 ***	305.48 ***
alpha	0.65340 ***	1.31460 ***	0.96679 ***

- ❖ All models are statistically significant
- ❖ 14 out of 21 hypotheses are empirically validated
- ❖ Results related to Model 1 and Model 3 are strongly similar to each others
- ❖ Model 2 unveils the lower statistical significance
- ❖ Surprisingly variables related to post timing only partially impact on online CE

5. Empirical results & implications

Negative binomial regression analysis

(focus on Model 1 – Online CE modelled as n. of likes)



Post contents: discussion & implications

- ❖ The **emotional content** of the post is found to significantly impact on **online CE** modelled as **number of likes, comments** and **shares**.
- ❖ Further investigations on post content (as reported below)



<i>Post content</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Likes (median)</i>	<i>Comments (median)</i>	<i>Shares (median)</i>
<i>Emotional</i>					
Experiential appeal	456	46.4%	386	23	44
Exclusivity appeal	29	3.0%	511	33	50
Social Cause	11	1.1%	233	6	24
Branding	115	11.7%	361	19	35
<i>Functional</i>					
Purchase appeal	152	15.5%	226	15	33
Product description	196	20.0%	310.0	17	33
Repost of buyer review	23	2.3%	395	76	38
<i>Median</i>			329	20	38
Kruskal-Wallis chi-squared			59.978	48.255	21.598
p-value			1.00E-04	1.00E-04	1.40E-03

❖ LIKES:

- ✓ Exclusivity appeal;
- ✓ Experiential appeal;
- ✓ Branding

❖ COMMENTS:

- ✓ Experiential appeal;
- ✓ Repost of buyer review;

❖ SHARES:

- ✓ Experiential appeal
- ✓ Exclusivity appeal

- ❖ **Kruskal-Wallis test:** to test differences in median among categories of post content.

5. Empirical results & implications

Post format: discussion & implications

- ❖ Long texts reduce heavily the total number of reactions from users: long messages require longer engagement time, which is not coherent with common Facebook usage patterns (short usage sessions).
- ❖ Corporate posts enriched by video obtain higher number of likes and shares.
- ❖ The inclusion of a web url within the post uploaded increases the number of likes and shares.

Post timing: discussion & implications

- ❖ Our findings provide robust empirical support only for the role of **posting hour**.
- ❖ **Post frequency** negatively affects only the total number of likes.
- ❖ Surprisingly, the **day of the week** in which the post is uploaded is not found to influence tourists' online CE.



<i>Day of the week</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Likes (median)</i>	<i>Comments (median)</i>	<i>Shares (median)</i>
Monday	153	15.6%	442	35	39
Tuesday	136	13.8%	348	20	40
Wednesday	154	15.7%	295	20	35
Thursday	160	16.3%	313	25	42
Friday	183	18.6%	251	14	29
Saturday	111	11.3%	330	17	41
Sunday	85	8.7%	381	20	40
<i>Median</i>			329	20	38
<i>Kruskal-Wallis chi-squared</i>			28.351	25.092	17.144
<i>p-value</i>			1.00E-04	3.00E-04	8.80E-03

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Limitations & further research

1. SMM strategy is addressed along with a **static perspective**; further B2C and C2C dialogues are neglected.
 2. Our analysis only includes posting strategies on **Facebook**; it does not provides information on other main SMM tools such as **Twitter** or **LinkedIn**.
 3. Paper neglects qualitative aspects related to **post format**.
- Introducing a **dynamic approach** capable to capture cruisers interactions or users' comments to specific corporate posts (e.g., blogs; fan pages; etc.).
 - The adoption of **alternative SMM tools** as well as **integrated communication strategies** of tourism companies need to be further investigated.
 - Additional investigations on the type/nature of **images/photos** uploaded by cruise lines and tourism companies are requested (see the rapid diffusion of SM platforms such as Instagram).

**THANK YOU
FOR
YOUR
ATTENTION!
ANY QUESTIONS?**

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