Social Media adoption and managers’ perceptions

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Abstract: The first objective of this study is to review both the academic and industry literature pertaining to social media adoption, goals and manager’s perceptions. The second objective is to improve our understanding about Greek food manufacturing social media involvement and to investigate a) factors that may explain the adoption of social media and b) the perceptions of Greek managers about the use and effectiveness of social media marketing. In order to achieve the above research aims, descriptive data for two hundred firms were collected and discussed and case studies of 127 Greek food manufacturing firms were developed. The article investigates firm-initiated actions through social media and provides a theoretical understanding of what firms accomplish using social media. Social media usage was investigated: a) in respect of use of social media and most popular networks b) by identifying the impact of organizational and managerial characteristics on utilization of social media and c) by identifying manager’s perceptions about the benefits and effectiveness of social media used by company.

The results show that there is a significant effort of Greek food manufacturing firms to take advantage of the potential of social media. However, still only almost 50% of the firms are involved with social media, and Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube are the top four platforms used by Greek food firms, with Facebook leading the pack. According to marketing directors of Greek food firms the top three benefits of social media marketing are building brands, real time information about products, contests, awards etc and integrating customer services.

Keywords: Social media adoption, managers’ perceptions, Greek food firms.

1. Introduction

Social media is an umbrella term describing different types of applications such as collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia), blogs/micro-blogs (e.g., Twitter), content communities (e.g., YouTube), social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft), and virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life) [1].

Over the last decade the use of social media for commercial networking purposes has increased [2]. Many have suggested that social media can enhance the power of viral marketing [3] [4] [5]. Others suggest that social media increase the speed at which consumers share experiences and opinions with progressively larger
audiences [6]. Social Networks have a number of benefits such as a better understanding of consumer needs [7] [8] and possibilities for fast and easy collaboration. Also, the social relationships play active roles in the internationalization of firms as they serve as an effective means of generating knowledge about both the geographical and physical markets that the firm may be interested in exploiting [9]. Among the others, social media are used as an effective online tool for customer word of mouth communication and building a community [10]. Social media comprises an array of channels through which interaction between individuals and entities, such as organizations, is facilitated and disseminated. Typically, social media are highly accessible (easy to get to) and scalable (can be used to reach large numbers) [11]. Through Internet- and Web-based technologies, social networks transform broadcast media monologues into social media dialogues. The implications for corporations using several social media platforms as part of their overall marketing strategy are extremely interesting and empirical investigation on the perceptions of managers about the goals of social media has not been discussed enough in the literature.

The purpose of this paper is two-fold: first, to review both the academic and industry literature pertaining to social media goal and manager’s perceptions and second, to improve our understanding about Greek food manufacturing social media marketing and to investigate a) factors that may explain the adoption of social media and b) the perceptions of Greek managers about the use and effectiveness of social media marketing. In order to achieve the above research aims, descriptive data for two hundred firms were collected and discussed and case studies of 127 established, Greek food manufacturing firms were developed. Social media usage was investigated: a) in respect of use of social media and most popular networks b) by identifying the impact of organizational and managerial characteristics on utilization of social media and c) by identifying manager’s perceptions about the benefits and effectiveness of social media used by company.

2. Literature Review

There is a rich literature about the goals of the use of social media by firms, although it is not clear enough the perceptions of managers about the goals and the effectiveness of social media. Forrester expects social media marketing in the U.S. to grow at a 26% from 2011 to 2016 reaching an estimated worth of USD 4.995 billion. The latter pushes organizations to invest time and money in a new phenomenon that many practitioners and researchers alike know very little about, and the consequences of which they understand even less. Additionally, competitive pressures also induce companies to jump on the social media and wagon to avoid the impression of being outdated or out of touch with innovative technologies compared to their peers and competitors [12].

For both big and small firms, social media serves the purpose in better way comparing with the traditional media. It has become the best instrument to reach the customers globally and receive their valuable feedback. It can help both big and small sized firms to advertise their products and services at very meager rates or in some cases totally free as a survival for economic recovery. Users are allowed to access classified free ads and tradeshows.

In the management literature, many works suggest that a number of practitioners are either reluctant or unable to manage appropriate strategies and allocate resources accordingly to successfully engage with social media. Hence some organizations ignore or mismanage the opportunities and threats offered by these strategic tools [13] [14]. Many senior decision makers in some organizations see
social media as the wasteful pastime of teenagers. An earlier survey found while 58% of executives agreed that reputational risk and social networking should be a boardroom issue, only 15% said it actually was an issue [15]. However, for social media plans to succeed, it is extremely important senior managers to support and really understand how to move from ‘Big Brother’ to ‘engagement at a par’ [16]. There is a number of studies that trying to investigate the impact of either, organizational (e.g. firm size) or managerial characteristics (gender, age, education level) on the adoption of technology based tools or social media tools [17] [18] [19]. Damanpour and Schneider [20] argue that “older managers have been socialized into accepting prevailing organizational conditions and routines and have greater psychological commitment to them; hence, they will be less willing to commit to changing them” (p. 499). In light of the significance of manager demographics, Hausman [21] posits that “any effort to understand the innovativeness of small businesses must look at the characteristics (e.g., age, gender, education) of these individuals”.

It has been argued that social media is a function of a country’s technology, culture, and government. There is evidence of a relationship between cultural norms and values and the relative interest in a social media site across different countries. For example, Facebook and LinkedIn attract high interest in the United States, India, and South Africa, while interest in Mixi and Gree is almost exclusive to Japan where there is little interest in Facebook or LinkedIn. Using data from a global panel study, Jobs [22] and Gilfoil and Jobs [23] found that developing countries, when compared to technologically and economically developed countries, are adopting micro-blogging services at a significantly greater and relative rate than social networking services. From an international marketing strategy perspective, this means that firms cannot follow a standardized approach when it comes to social media usage. A firm will need to customize the social media aspects of its global marketing strategy to fit and accommodate national differences [16].

Firms try to realize their aims through social media [24]. According to Weinberg and Pehlivan [25], there are three main approaches towards using social media. The first is a method that is traditional, treating social media channels just like long-established media channels (e.g., television, radio, print), and using tried and true metrics on established critical ends in marketing (e.g., awareness, recall, purchase) and assessing return on investment. The second approach involves learning to discover important issues associated with social media (e.g., conversation, engagement, evangelism); in a traditional way, since efforts are made to associate social media decisions and actions to ROI. A third approach includes experimentation, in order to discovery ways of communicating with a more ‘human’ voice than a ‘corporate’ voice, along with processes, where the end effects may be transformational and could impact significantly a firm’s culture (e.g., more open/flat structures with respect to a power, control, and spanning of influence and interaction). Gastronovo and Huang [26] propose an alternative marketing model which will enable a firm to 1) increase consumer awareness; 2) increase sales; and 3) increase consumer loyalty. An objective of increasing consumer awareness will result in an emphasis on developing the inputs into the social media hub. An objective of increasing sales will result in an emphasis on driving the customer relationship management component of the model. An objective of increasing loyalty will result in an emphasis on both customer relationship management and developing the outputs of the social media hub.

Firms deepen their connections with consumers in order to have a great audience and encourage interaction with the brand. Additionally, they try to drive
purchase intent to persuade engagement with web site content and utility. There are a number of studies trying to identify the goals of each social media platform. Jansen et al. [10] found micro-blogging (Twitter) to be an effective online tool for customer word of mouth communications, and discuss the implications for corporations using micro-blogging as part of their overall marketing strategy. Facebook is a suitable tool for creating communities among stakeholders. Companies strategically need to take into consideration about their business goals and use appropriate social media tools for suitable goals (www.slideshare.com).

There is a rich empirical literature concerning the objectives underlying social media activities which can be understood within the contexts of either online word of mouth advertising [27] [28] [29], or online marketing and PR [30] [31], or web-delivered customer service [32] [33], or customer loyalty/brand community [34] [35] [36], entertainment and bonding [37] [38], improved communication and collaboration between the firm and its stakeholders [39] [40], an innovative way for firms to identify products with high selling potential [41], and co-creation of value [42] [13] [43]. Parise and Guinan [44] conducted an interview survey of 30 marketing managers and senior executives and concluded that there were four principles which guided managers’ marketing actions using social media: 1) facilitate users in generating content, 2) focus on building a community, 3) ensure authenticity of the message, and 4) look for marketing opportunities through experimentation.

Firms now have the ability through social media to influence consumer behavior in unheralded ways. By engaging customers, firms are able to develop brand-centric communities in such a way that ties customers to their products. The marketing literature cites brand communities as not only a driver of loyalty and a factor that increases a consumer’s likelihood of adopting a new product from the preferred brand, but also as a basis for oppositional loyalty against competitors’ products [45]. The existence of brand communities draws on one of the most basic human motivations, the desire to belong, to fit in, to be accepted; with brand consumption serving as the basis for coalescence and social media facilitating the connectivity, firms have an unprecedented platform for exploiting consumers’ basic drives in such a way that benefits the brand or product [46]. Within the process of community building, awareness is a first step for firms to take toward developing customer loyalty. Within the context of customers making one another aware of products, services, etc., online word-of-mouth effects occur. Through the mechanism of monitoring customer-to-customer interactions, firms are also able to make themselves aware of consumer dissatisfaction and adverse events, subsequently enabling them to take appropriate action anticipatorily [47].

The social media interaction is a crucial aspect of the type of relationship based marketing expected to be a necessary component of future marketing strategies [48] [49]. Probably the most important characteristic of the social media dyad that lends itself to firm exploitation is the important stream of real-time customer-to-customer interchanges that are publicly facilitated by the social media applications in operation daily. These data, which firms can ostensibly interpret to acquire clues about customer likes and dislikes, trends in the marketplace, changes in technology use, can yield customer insight as well market intelligence [50].

Regarding Greek data, there is a limited number of studies that presents the use and effectiveness of social media mainly either in the area of tourism and hospitality, or in the area of e-government and political campaigns [51] [52] [53], while Vlachvei et al. [54] compare social media strategies as a part of e-marketing strategies between Greek and Italian wine firms. With the growing popularity of social media, it is very important to understand how practitioners view social media.
and how their organizations are utilizing these tools to impact the consumer decision making process. It is extremely interesting especially in the case of Greek food SMEs. SMEs may benefit substantially from implementing social media tools [55]. Although reports suggest that social media tools really enhance the development of SMEs, there is little empirical research on their adoption and usage by this category of firms [56]. This work aims to contribute preliminary research to the gap in the literature concerning manager’s perceptions about the benefits and effectiveness of social media used by Greek food SMEs.

3. Data and Results

3.1. Adoption and use of social media tools

We collected data on social media usage from a sample of 200 food Greek firms. The empirical data on social media usage practices, obtained by firms’ websites from a survey conducted in March 2013. The sample has been selected based on two criteria: first all firms have internet presence for more than five years and second there are firms from all nine 3-digit subsectors according to NACE classification of food industry. In addition most of firms (92%) have more than 1 million euros sales in 2013. We used sales as an indicator of firm’s size in order to investigate if there is correlation between size or 3-digit industry and usage of social media strategies. According to the descriptive data that are presented in Table 1, 6.5% of sample firms are meat processing firms, 1.5% fish processing, 3.5% fruits and vegetables processing firms, 7% olive oil processing firms, 13.5% dairy firms, 4% mills, 7.5% bakery and farinaceous products, 19% cocoa, chocolate and confectionary and 36.5% are beverage firms (12.5% water and spirits, 3% breweries, 22% wine firms). Regarding size 26.5% of firms have sales more than ten and less than 50 million euros, and 31% of firms have sales 1-5 million euros.

Our analysis shows that there is a significant effort of Greek food manufacturing firms to take advantage of the potential of social media especially in the case of medium and large sized firms. However, still only almost 50% of the firms are involved with social media, when the relevant data for the global business environment shows that 93% of marketers use social media for business, 70% of marketers have used Facebook to successfully gain new customers and now there are over 1.15 billion Facebook users (Social mediatoday.com).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Descriptive sample data</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Production, processing and preserving of meat and meat products</td>
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<tr>
<td>Processing and preserving of fish and fish products</td>
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<tr>
<td>Processing and preserving of fruit and vegetables</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manufacture of vegetable and animal oils and fats</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manufacture of dairy products</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manufacture of grain mill products, starches and starch products</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manufacture of bakery and farinaceous products</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manufacture of cocoa, chocolate, sugar and sugar confectionary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manufacture of wines</td>
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<td>Manufacture of beer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Production of mineral waters and soft drinks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total number of firms</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
According to our results Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube are the top four platforms used by Greek food firms, with Facebook leading the pack. Facebook is the most used social media platform (98 out of 200 firms), while Twitter and YouTube are used less (only in case of 25.5% of firms and 22% of firms respectively). LinkedIn is used as a social media platform only in case of 5.5% of firms and Tripadvisor in case of 5 winery firms. It is important to note that Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have been used as parallel social networks in 10.5% of firms. Our results are almost similar with the results for other European countries in case of Facebook (European average 51.15%), Twitter (European average 29.9%), and YouTube (European average 20.69%), while the involvement of Greek food manufacturing firms in LinkedIn is much lower than the average European which reaches 33.3% [57].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Industry Subsector</th>
<th>Firms with Facebook</th>
<th>Firms with Twitter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Production, processing and preserving of meat and meat products</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing and preserving of fish and fish products</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing and preserving of fruit and vegetables</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>14.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture of vegetable and animal oils and fats</td>
<td>42.8%</td>
<td>42.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture of dairy products</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture of grain mill products, starches and starch products</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture of bakery and farinaceous products</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture of cocoa, chocolate, sugar and sugar confectionary</td>
<td>44.7%</td>
<td>21.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture of wines</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacture of beer</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production of mineral waters and soft drinks</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We tried to investigate if there is a relationship between firm's involvement in social with the size (in terms of sales) of the firms and the industry/sector they belong. Previous studies on IT adoption and use have identified a set of organizational characteristics that may explain why a firm will adopt or reject a given innovation. Firm size [17] is undeniably the most discussed by scholars. Larger firms are more likely to use social media tools than smaller; larger firms have resources (more employees, larger budgets, etc.) that may enable them to devote more attention to recent technological. Compared to large organizations, SMEs have a less hierarchy-based organizational structure and lack a close relationship between managers and consumers which is considered an enabler of greater firm innovativeness [21]; as a result, this may well trigger the SME willingness to explore innovation [19]. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

**H1: Firm size will be positively related to the adoption of social media tools**

Early studies on e-business adoption and use indicate that the engagement of SMEs in the adoption and use of e-business tools and applications is tremendously variable across sectors [58]. In addition, in a recent study of Fosso Wamba and Carter [19] is proven that industry sector has an impact on the adoption of social media tools. In particular, manufacturing companies are more likely to implement
these tools than the companies from other sectors. Following this discussion, we formulate the following hypothesis:

**H2: Industry sector will be positively related to the adoption of social media.**

The sample divided into three groups regarding size: Firms with less than 10 million sales (50 firms), firms with sales from 10 million Euros to 100 million Euros (40 firms) and firms with more than 100 million Euros sales (7 firms). Pearson’s Chi-square test for independence give us a value of 0.09 (df 2) with max 0.707 which shows that we cannot reject the null hypothesis that variables are independent.

Table 2 presents the classification of firms into 3 and 4-digit industries and the number of firms involved with Facebook and Twitter in each industry. It is interesting to note that wine firms (56.8%) along with bakery (53.3%), fruits and vegetables (57%) and meat processing (53.8%) are mostly involved with Facebook. The values of Pearson’s Chi-square test for independence when we tried to investigate the correlation between the usage of social media and the industry where firm belongs are also very small indicating that we cannot reject the null hypothesis that variables are independent. The latter indicates that we should investigate further motives or criteria that push food processing firms to be involved or not involved with social media, especially in economic recession times.

Utilization of the above tools depends on the abilities, resources and characteristics of each company. A substantial number of Greek SMEs belonging to the small and medium enterprise category often struggle to keep up with even the more traditional online web activities, such as having a presentable and truly interactive web site; lack of financial and human resources and lack of time are usually serious barriers for such firms. According to Constantinides et al [59] first of all, firms interested in using the social media must be willing to allocate some financial and human resources to that activity. Firms can use social media either in a passive or in an active way. They have to listen to the voice of the market in order to be informed not only about changing consumer needs and trends, but also to hear the customer’s opinion about competitors or products. Also, firm should create and make available online tools that allow users to interact with the firm and other customers, customize their experience, express their creativity either in advertising copies or design of new products, integrate good ideas from customers into the mainstream marketing program, and so on.

### 3.2. Manager’s characteristics and perceptions

For the second part of this study, a questionnaire survey was administered to 500 companies in food manufacturing. We used a questionnaire in order to identify a) factors that explain the adoption of social media and b) manager’s perceptions about the benefits and effectiveness of social media usage in each firm. Each company was initially contacted by telephone to identify the name and the job title of the most suitable person in each firm to answer our questionnaire. These sample respondents includes chief executive officers (CEOs) or vice presidents or senior managers in strategy divisions or senior managers of marketing. CEOs are the ones who provide vision, decide on the firm’s mission and strategies and supervise the strategy implementation process. So, the questionnaire is addressed to the CEO of sample firms. A follow up e-mail was sent to non-respondent firms about three weeks after the initial mail survey. Then, about two weeks later, we called non-respondents by telephone to follow up in an attempt to increase the response rate. 127 completed
and usable questionnaires were finally received, a response rate of 25.4 percent. The data obtained were analyzed by using statistical software SPSS Version 17.0.

According to the descriptive statistics, seventy-eight percent of the respondents were males. The average age of the respondents was 44.5 years old. Fifty-nine percent of the managers attended at least college, while twenty-two percent have a master degree and five percent have a PhD degree.

Gender, age and the manager’s education level is considered to be a key enabler of manager openness and receptivity to innovations. In our case, younger managers are expected to adopt more likely social media tools. Also, managers with higher levels of education have the ability to create a favorable atmosphere for the adoption and implementation of innovative tools. Previous research has found that educated executives are more likely to use a plethora of multifarious approaches to solve problems, make decisions and lead the company [20]. Therefore, we formulate the following hypotheses:

**H3:** Younger managers will be more likely to adopt social media.

**H4:** Managers’ gender (male) will be positively related to the adoption of social media

**H5:** Managers’ education will be positively related to the adoption of social media.

The data were analyzed using logistic regression. Since our dependant variable is measured as a nominal variable (adoption and non-adoption), we use regression analysis to test our hypotheses [60] [61]. Logistic regression is used when the dependent variable is nominal and when there is more than one independent variable. Table 3 highlights the results of the regression analysis. The Hosmer-Lemeshow statistic indicates a poor fit if the significance value is less than 0.05. Here, the model adequately fits the data. According to the results only one of the three hypotheses was supported. Manager’s education level has a significant impact on the adoption of social media tools by Greek food firms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>Exp (B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.631</td>
<td>0.220</td>
<td>0.514</td>
<td>1.505</td>
<td>1.879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.883</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>0.022</td>
<td>1.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.370</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.138</td>
<td>7.227</td>
<td>1.447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-2.527</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>0.939</td>
<td>7.241</td>
<td>0.080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-2loglikelihood</td>
<td>148.213</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cox &amp; Snell R2</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nagelkerke R2</td>
<td>0.120</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hosner &amp; Lemeshow Test</td>
<td>0.920</td>
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</table>

We tried to investigate the perceptions of managers regarding the goals and benefits of social media tools. Respondents were asked, to choose the three out of eight most important benefits for their firms from the use of social media. More than 60% of the respondents believe that one of the most important benefits of adoption and usage of social media is brand building. By engaging customers in a social experience revolving around the brand, firms are able to develop brand-centric communities in such a way that ties customers to their products. The chain of influence linking brand communities in the retention of consumers via the mechanism of increased brand loyalty is extremely crucial for firms.
Also, more than 60% of respondents believe that the ability to inform customers about new products, contests, customized offers, awards, etc. on real time is another one important benefit for firms. Probably the most important characteristic of the social media dyad that lends itself to firm exploitation is the important stream of real-time firm to customer interchanges. The third benefit of social media according to our results is the ability of integrating customer service. Almost 50% of respondents agree that advanced web-delivered customer service is crucial for retention and satisfaction of customers.

However, according to our results almost 35% of respondents believe that the ability to develop and promote customized products, along with reducing advertising expenditures and developing a community and engaging customers are also important benefits for Greek food manufacturing firms. The economic benefits of social media in companies’ strategic marketing decisions, makes the study of social media and the way companies and customers respond to them a necessity so that specific measurements and decisions can take place [62].

4. Conclusions
This work presents a comprehensive picture of the theoretical and practical debate around Social Media, with special attention to implications for the Greek food SMEs. The article reviews the literature around the adoption, use and the benefits of social media, along with the first empirical efforts on investigating the perceptions of managers about the effectiveness of social media.

The second objective of this study is to improve our understanding about Greek food manufacturing social media involvement, to identify the impact of organizational and managerial characteristics on utilization of social media and to investigate the perceptions of Greek managers about the goals and effectiveness of social media marketing. In order to achieve the above research aims, descriptive data for two hundred firms were collected and discussed and case studies of 127 Greek food manufacturing firms were developed. It should be clarified that the sample used is slightly small and the research is ongoing.

![Figure 1. Manager’s perceptions about the benefits of social media](image-url)
It could be argued that Greek firms are still at the early stages of adoption for many of these platforms, that global usage patterns are likely to shift. Only almost 50% of the firms are involved with social media, and Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube are the top four platforms used by Greek food firms, with Facebook leading the pack. However our results cannot support any kind of correlation between size of the firms and usage of a particular social media platform, or any correlation between the subsector that firm belongs and social media. However, using the data of the 127 case studies, we prove that the education level of managers has a significant impact on the adoption of social media tools.

According to marketing directors of Greek food firms the top three benefits of social media marketing are: building brands, real time information about products, contests, awards etc and integrating customer services. Further research should include not only the involvement of firms with social media but also the motives, content and social media metrics in order to derive implications.

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