



University of Bologna

Second cycle degree in Digital Humanities
and Digital Knowledge (DHDK)

SOCIAL MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES

**SIAMO UN'AGENZIA
CON LE PALE.**



TAFFO
FUNERAL SERVICES

Case study of Taffo Funeral Services, analyzed for the course of
Social Media Technologies, a.y. 2019/2020.

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1. TAFFO CASE STUDY

1.1 WHY TAFFO FUNERAL SERVICES?

The case study chosen concerns Taffo Funeral Services¹ (further on: Taffo), a funeral agency that undertaken strong web advertising campaigns since 2017. The Social Media Manager of the agency constantly creates provocative advertising on the theme of death, using current topics. The fame of Taffo is due to the irreverent use of social media to promote a very special type of service, services for dead, which is difficult to put on the web. Taffo is succeeding in this feat. The numbers on the agency's social networks prove it. Let's analyze who Taffo is, what services it offers and how its marketing campaign is structured.

1.2 WHO IS TAFFO?

Taffo Funeral Services is a historical funeral home with more than 70 years of activity, operating in Rome. Some of the services it offers include preparation of the bodies, setting up the funeral home, supply of coffin, floral decorations, cremation, legal assistance and others.

Taffo shows that even the communication of a funeral agency can be original and aimed at the involvement of the client, without giving up professionalism and respect for an intimate and painful moment like death. Taffo, in fact, has made an unconventional approach to death its hallmark.

1.3 HOW DOES TAFFO ADVERTISE?

Taffo has really revolutionized the way the funeral industry communicates. It jumped to the headlines a few years ago thanks to irreverent and playful web marketing that created a new way of communicating for its particular sector.

Actually, Taffo advertising was born long before social media because it already used very provocative posters. Then, from 2017, it started posting its advertising campaigns on social media.

Taffo mainly uses Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to advertise.

The data collected on 20th March 2020 show that the Facebook² page has more than 213,000 likes, the Instagram³ profile has more than 51,000 followers and the Twitter⁴ account collects about 21,000 followers.

How is it possible that a funeral agency is so successful on social network?

Thanks to its Social Media Manager, Riccardo Pirrone⁵, who has created original advertising campaigns with current topics, with social and political implications (for example in the fight against the use of drugs, in support of the donation of organs, or in favor of the prevention of fatal road accidents).

The campaigns on socials have had in a short time the best effects that a brand could wish for: being remembered and attracting support.

In the next page, some examples of Taffo advertising are reported (all the images are taken from Taffo's Facebook and Instagram pages for research purpose).

¹ Taffo website: <http://www.taffo.it/>

² Taffo Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/onoranzefunebritaffo/>

³ Taffo Instagram account: <https://www.instagram.com/taffofuneralservices/?hl=it>

⁴ Taffo Twitter: twitter.com/taffoofficial?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor

⁵ Riccardo Pirrone LinkedIn account: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/riccardopirrone/?originalSubdomain=it>



Fig. 1

2020/03/07 – Coronavirus emergency
Facebook: 32,489 likes, 28,193 shares
Instagram: 11,500 likes
Twitter: 2,891 likes, 785 shares

Eng. translation: It is not difficult. Stay at home or we'll all stay all in the coffin.



Fig. 2

2019/05/24 – European Elections
Facebook: 26,216 likes, 18,102 shares
Instagram: 5,500 likes
Twitter: 3,360 likes, 951 shares

Eng. translation: Italians, we will be waiting for you at the urn.



Fig. 3

2018/12/04 – Flat Earth theory
Facebook: 10,036 likes, 3,595 shares
Instagram: 2,700 likes
Twitter: 1,593 likes, 464 shares

Eng. translation: The only flat earth is the one that will bury us.



Fig. 4

2018/11/19 – Organ donation
Facebook: 13,056 likes, 8,319 shares
Twitter: 1,575 likes, 601 shares

Eng. translation: Organs are important, but heavy. Donate them.



Fig. 5

2018/09/06 – Luigi Di Maio gaffe
Facebook: 16,759 likes, 10,265 shares
Instagram: 1,600 likes

Eng. translation: Luigi, if we were made up of 90% water, we wouldn't sell coffins, but tanks.



Fig. 6

2018/08/07 – Vaccines controversy
Facebook: 30,200 likes, 22,676 shares
Instagram: 2,500 likes
Twitter: 1,639 likes, 913 shares

Eng. translation: Do not get vaccinated.
We're also prepared for an epidemic.

On Facebook and Instagram, Taffo is a point of reference both for having fun and for marketing experts. However, there are several doubts about this kind of communication: posts are funny but are you ever going to buy a service from Taffo Funeral Services?

The topic of discussion is the management between making people talk about itself on social networks and selling its services. Why should people, whose relatives die, turn to the funeral home that made them laugh? Riccardo Pirrone says that "[...] no one wants to be reminded that their own death or that of a loved one can come at any time and we play on that with our posts. We reassure and joke about a profession that is very often dislike. Sagacity and courage can really make the miracle in communication" (t.d.r.)⁶.

The social campaigns designed for Taffo have reached thousands of people throughout Italy. Riccardo Pirrone has managed to make Taffo the funeral agency of Italy, even though Taffo operates in Rome. Of course, there is no benefit in having followers outside the area of Rome. The importance of that kind of communication is the strong return of image. Taffo Funeral Services is a company that has a name locally, and this is where the business can monetize, but its message has gone far beyond riding memorable social campaigns. The fact of joking about a sensitive topic like death makes them subject to quite a few criticisms. The point is just this: Taffo's posts play with death, they never joke about dead people or tragedy. Joking about death is the way not to be afraid of it⁷.

⁶ *La strategia social di Taffo funziona? L'intervista*, N. Bano, 2018/01/11, <https://blog.leevia.com/social-media-marketing/strategia-social-taffo-funziona-intervista/>

⁷ «Taffo & Co», chi è l'inventore delle pubblicità social: «Mi mandano mail minatorie, ma io ci rido su», G. Marchina, 2019/04/02, <https://www.open.online/2019/04/02/taffo-co-chi-e-linventore-delle-pubblicita-social-mi-mandano-mail-minatorie-ma-io-ci-rido-su/>

The innovation that Taffo brought is Real Time Marketing within the social communication of a funeral agency. Real Time Marketing consists in creating content using a hot theme. Taffo uses news and current topics to advertise its services. Some posts are super viral because they talk about news that affect everyone.

2. SOCIAL NETWORKS ANALYSIS

In this phase, free online tools have been used to analyze the trend of Taffo's social profiles over two different periods: some analysis refer to a period of 30 days, from 24th February 2020 to 24th March 2020, and others to a period of one year, from March 2019 to March 2020. This is useful to make comparisons. The analysis refers to Taffo's Facebook and Instagram accounts. It has been decided not to analyze Twitter account because it is not relevant for the analysis purpose, since it has not a great number of followers. Different aspects of the social networks have been analyzed with the following analysis tools: Keyhole⁸, Ninjalitics⁹ and Socialinsider¹⁰. They allow to measure the impact of social media, the number of reached users and other data types.

2.1 FACEBOOK

The Facebook account collects 213,490 followers¹¹. In the period from 24th February 2020 to 24th March 2020, 5 posts were published on the Facebook page with an average of 19,130 likes, 620 comments and 7,449 shares.

The graph below shows the types of posts published in this period and the average of engagement of each post type. As shown, Taffo's communication works primarily with images, which are the most engaged. The engagement value is obtained by summing the number of likes, plus the number of comments and shares that each post obtained.

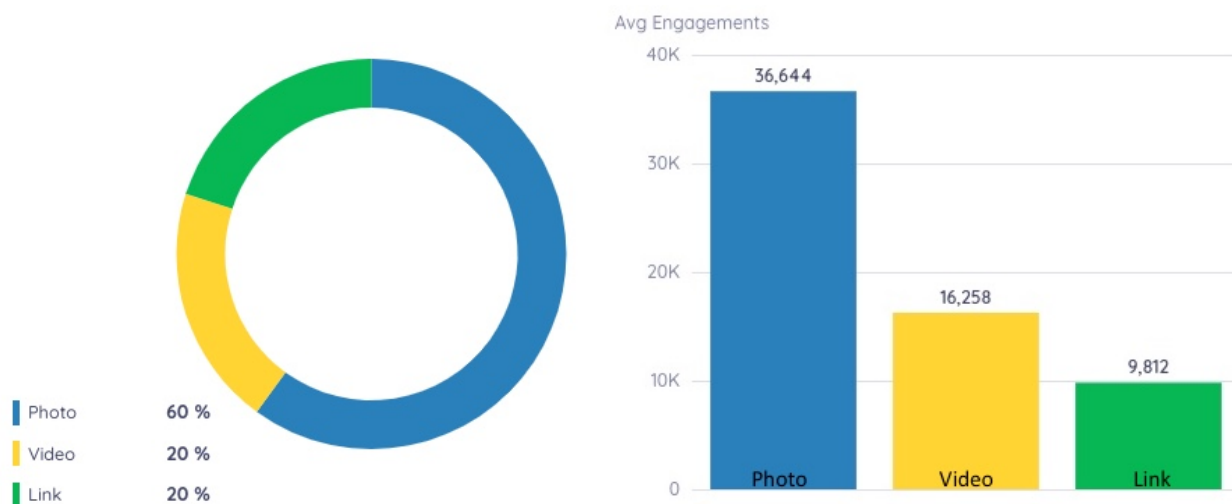


Fig. 7: Most frequent post types (left chart) and most engaging post types (right chart).
24th February 2020 – 24th March 2020. (Data source: keyhole.co)

⁸ Keyhole: <https://keyhole.co/>

⁹ Ninjalitics: <https://www.ninjalitics.com/>

¹⁰ Socialinsider: <https://www.socialinsider.io/>

¹¹ Data reported dates to 24th March 2020.

The graph below shows the number of likes that each post received.



Fig. 8: Account statistics concerning total likes received from each post in the period from 24th February 2020 to 24th March 2020. (Data source: keyhole.co)

It is interesting to note that in the period analyzed, the post that received the most success is that of 7th March 2020 (Fig. 1), concerning the Coronavirus emergency. Doing a broader analysis, in particular analyzing the period from March 2019 to March 2020, it can be noticed that the post in question is the one that received the highest number of likes and shares in absolute. This is very interesting because it well shows how, in a period of crisis in Italy, Taffo has succeeded in its intention, in this case to pass an important message to Italians, that is to stay at home to avoid being infected by the virus. The post is cynical but it had a good purpose. In fact, in the first phase of the emergency, people did not stay at home, as Govern suggested. So, trying to joke about it with a pun (in Italian between the words “casa” and “cassa”), Taffo sent a positive message. The message has an ironic tone, the one that is always used for Taffo's communication, but it aims to make Italians aware of such a difficult period. As the numbers show, this kind of communication works and people like it. The engagement value of the post of Coronavirus emergency is the highest found analyzing the period of March 2019 – March 2020: 61,876. The value is obtained by summing the number of likes plus the number of comments and shares.

The graph in the next page shows top hashtags by engagement in the period 24th February – 24th March 2020. As shown, the four hashtags concern the international emergency period related to Coronavirus. The trend is influenced by the particularity of the period, but the numbers show that, even in this period, Taffo made good communication, not only to advertise but, above all, to sensitize people to be safe, to turn a thought for the dead and to donate for the hospitals most affected by the emergency.

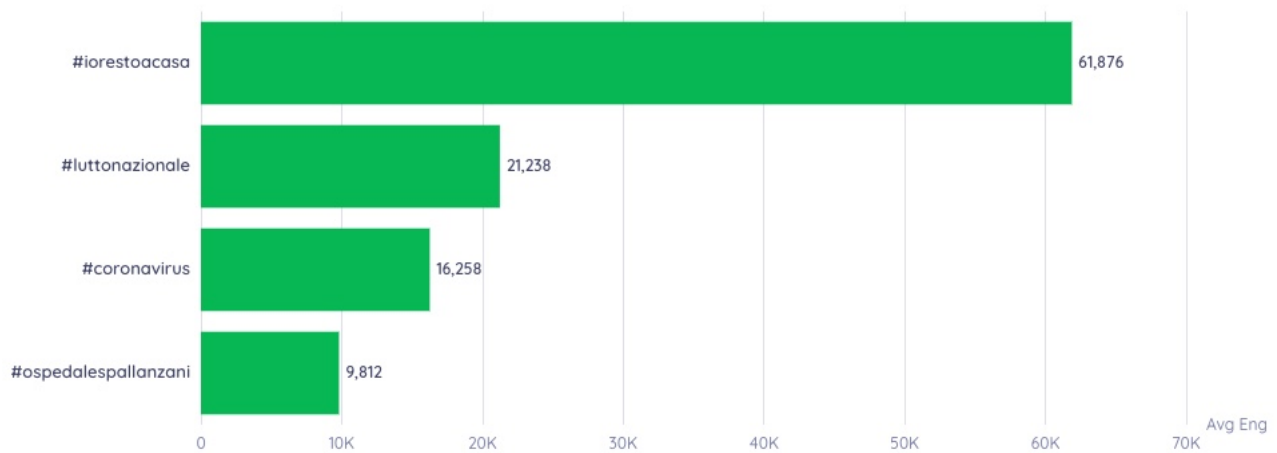


Fig. 9: Graph of the top hashtags by engagement concerning the period from 24th February 2020 to 24th March 2020. (Data source: keyhole.co)

The chart in the Fig. 10 concerns the analysis of top hashtags by engagement related to one year, from March 2019 to March 2020. It may be useful to make a comparison with the previous graph (Fig. 9). As we can see, the hashtag *#iorestoacasa* (English translation: I stay at home) remains the most engaged.

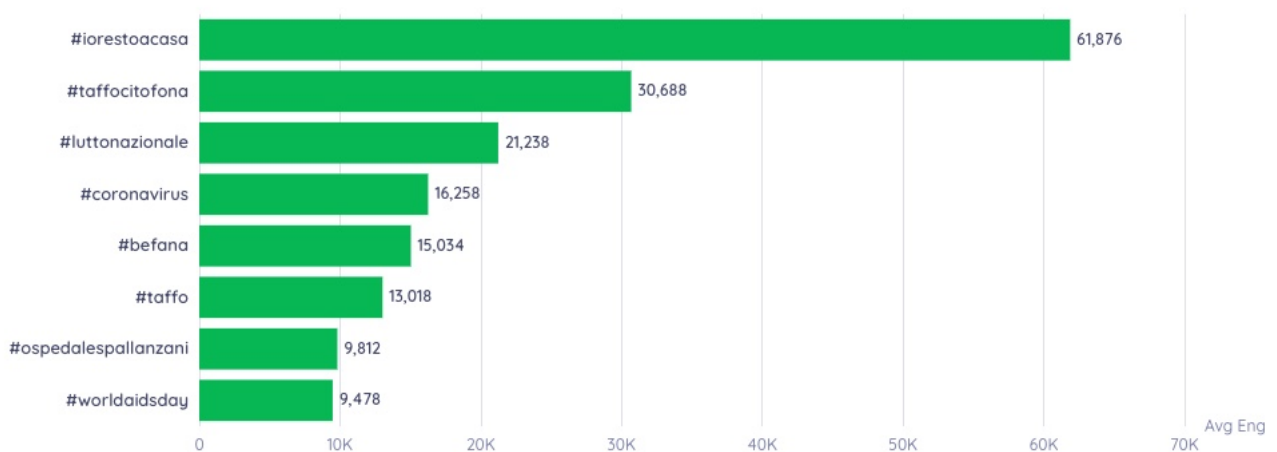


Fig. 10: Graph of the top hashtags by engagement concerning the period from March 2019 to March 2020. (Data source: keyhole.co)

2.2 INSTAGRAM

The Instagram account of Taffo collects 51,795 followers and 221 posts¹².

In the period from 24th February 2020 to 24th March 2020, 5 posts were published on the Instagram account with an average of 7,153 likes and 124 comments, reaching an average engagement rate equal to 14.10%.

Here a graph of the total likes received from each post.



Fig. 11: Account statistics concerning total likes received from each post in the period from 24th February 2020 to 24th March 2020. (Data source: keyhole.co)

The graph below refers to the total likes received from the posts published in the months between March 2019 and March 2020. The orange columns refer to the number of posts published in a month, while the red dots indicate the number of total likes collected by them.

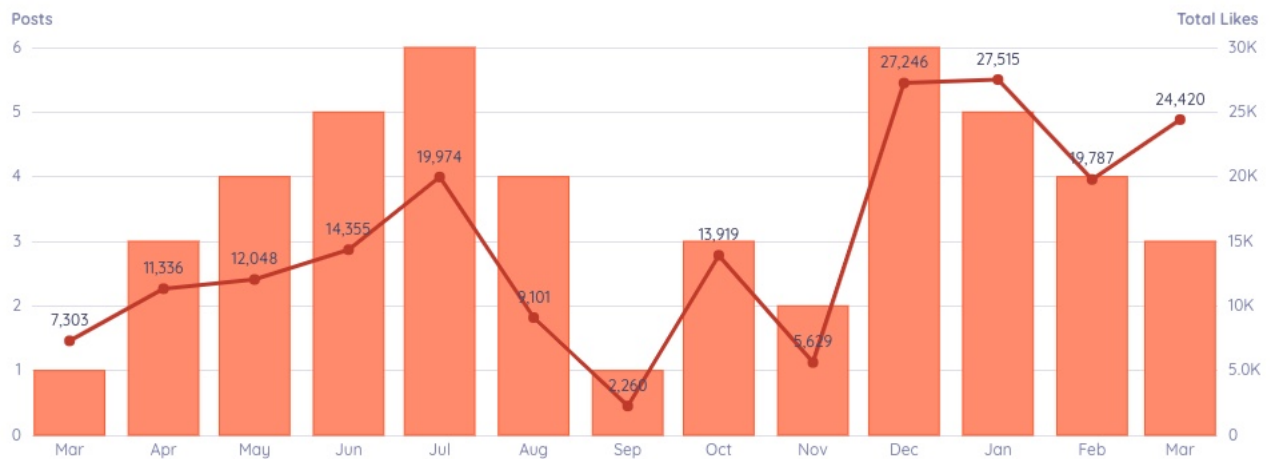


Fig. 12: Account statistics concerning total likes received from posts published in the months between March 2019 and March 2020. (Data source: keyhole.co)

As the graphs show, the number of likes received on Instagram is different from those obtained on the Facebook profile. This is because the Instagram page has only 50,000 followers while the Facebook page has more than 210,000. However, the post that received the most likes on Instagram is the same as on Facebook, i.e. the post of 7th March 2020 (Fig. 1).

¹² Data reported dates to 24th March 2020.

As we can see from the charts below (Fig. 13 and 14), in the days between 7th and 8th March 2020 there was a strong increase in followers, due to the publication of Coronavirus post (Fig. 1).

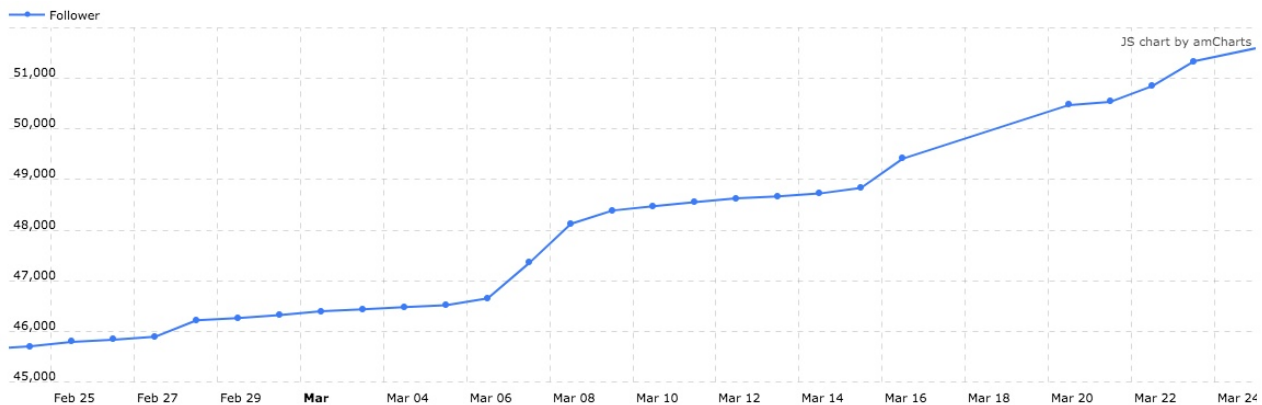


Fig. 13: Instagram profile growth from 24th February 2020 to 24th March 2020. (Data source: ninjalitics.com)

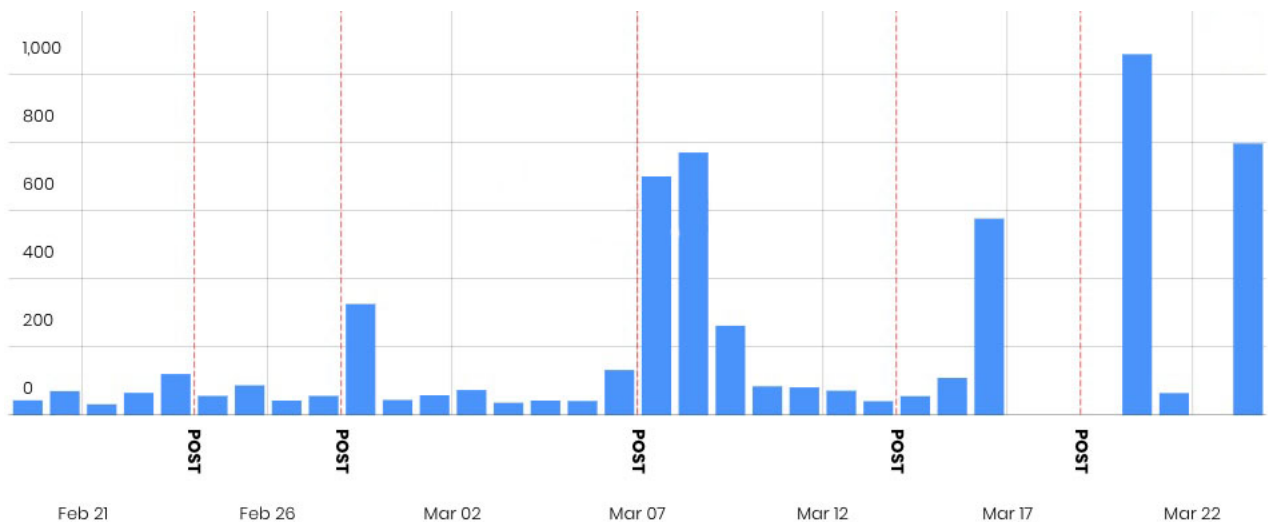


Fig. 14: Instagram daily growth from 21th February to 24th March 2020: increase of 5,878 followers. (Data source: ninjalitics.com)

It is interesting to note that there is another strong increase in new followers around 20th March 2020. Taffo's Instagram profile has seen a strong growth of followers due to the publication of a post on 19th March 2020. It is also about Coronavirus emergency but this time the tone is quite different from the ironic tone of post of 7th March 2020: Taffo asks for a day of national mourning to respect the dead and the pain of their families, and calls for the suspension of singing from balconies, which was an initiative that had taken hold in Italy. The engagement of the post is not as high as the previous one but the proposal has been welcomed by many Instagram influencers, who have asked everyone to suspend the usual appointment of sharing music from the balconies.

3. TAFFO'S TURNOVER

After introducing Taffo's success on socials thanks to its advertising campaigns, it is possible to analyze economic return.

The company's turnover data are provided by the *Aida* – Analisi Informatizzata delle Aziende Italiane (Computerized Analysis of Italian Companies)¹³. It is a database containing the financial statements of over 700,000 Italian companies. It allows access to original documents filed with the Chambers of Commerce. The following information concerns the financial statements carried out by Taffo Funeral Services in 10 years, from 2009 to 2018.

The financial statements are the set of accounting documents that a company must draw up periodically, in accordance with the law, in order to pursue the Principle of Truth and to ascertain clearly, truthfully and correctly its equity and financial position at the end of the administrative period of reference, as well as the economic result for the year. In other words, the financial statements are a snapshot of the financial situation of a company or legal entity.

The following figure shows the data concerning Net Profit per year (Fig. 15). Net profit is the total profit made by a company, reported in its financial statements. To calculate net profit, costs and expenses incurred and taxes paid must be subtracted from total revenues. Net profit is the strategic datum for assessing the profitability of a company over a period.

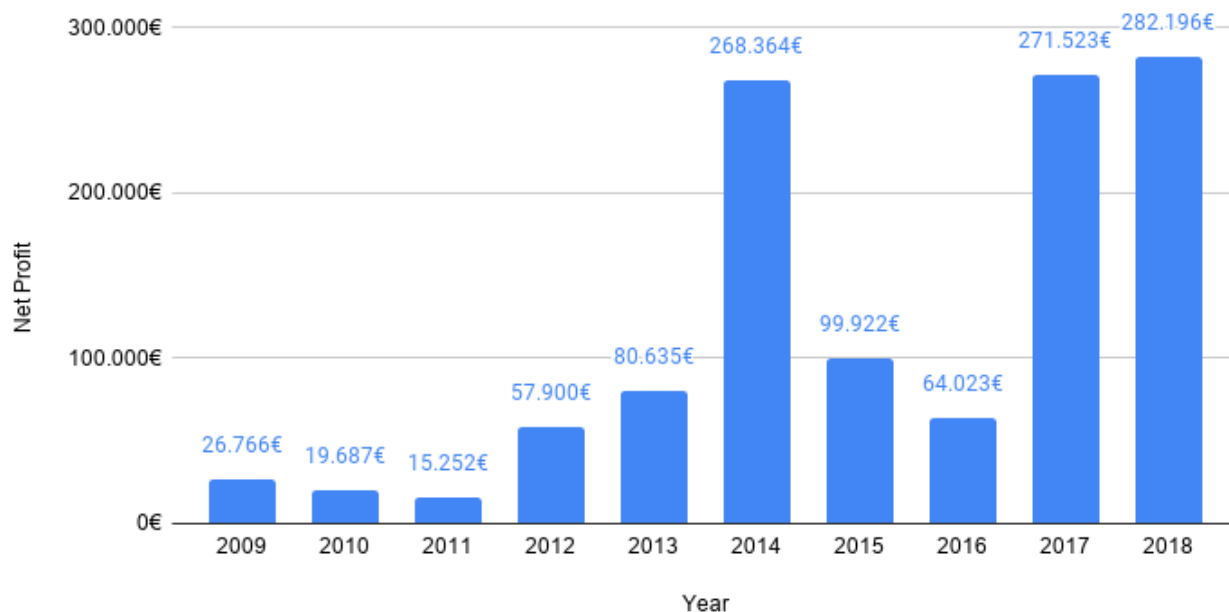


Fig. 15: Chart of the net profit in years between 2009 and 2018. (Data source: Aida)

The relevant data for my analysis are those of the period 2014-2018. As shown, after a strong increase in revenues in 2014, there has been a rapid decline. The least productive year was 2016. It is important to remember that Taffo's social strategy started in 2017. The first posts on Instagram date back to January 2017. The Facebook page was already active before 2017, but it did not use the type of communication developed by the Social Media Manager Riccardo Pirrone, so it did not have a high level of engagement.

As shown, 2017 and 2018 were very productive years. It can be assumed that this is partly due to the effectiveness of social communication. Surely there are many factors at stake when it comes to

¹³ Aida portal: <https://www.bvdinfo.com/it-it/le-nostre-soluzioni/dati/nazionali/aida>

companies, especially family businesses, but the wise use of social networks can be a great ally in communicating services to a wide audience.

Taffo's case is of great sensation because there are no other funeral agencies that can boast such a high number of followers. Other companies have tried to imitate Taffo's social campaigns, but without achieving the desired results. This is because Taffo has placed itself with great importance in the social world, knowing how to make the most of the opportunities of hot topics.

4. WEB SOURCES

Here are some online articles and video that I have consulted to learn more about Taffo Funeral Services case study; the online tools I used to analyze the social networks and economic turnover; the links to social networks webpages.

4.1 ARTICLES & VIDEO

1. Storie di successo: l'uomo dietro al successo social di Taffo, Il Sole 24 ore, 2019/10/04, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjnL0ZCGBqw>
2. Seduta con Riccardo Pirrone, M. N. Borgese, 2019/05/24, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmLHJA3rm9E>
3. *Taffo Funeral Services alle "onoranze" della cronaca e dei social*, A. Bortolotto, 2019/08/26, <https://www.thismarketerslife.it/digital/social-media/taffo-funeral-services-alle-onoranze-della-cronaca-e-dei-social/>
4. «Taffo & Co», chi è l'inventore delle pubblicità social: «Mi mandano mail minatorie, ma io ci rido su», G. Marchina, 2019/04/02, <https://www.open.online/2019/04/02/taffo-co-chi-e-linventore-delle-pubblicita-social-mi-mandano-mail-minatorie-ma-io-ci-rido-su/>
5. *Brand positioning, storytelling and strategy: some case histories, from Taffo to Motta, up to Nike's campaign with Colin Kaepernick*, 2018/10/02, <https://medium.com/iquii/brand-positioning-storytelling-and-strategy-some-case-histories-from-taffo-to-motta-up-to-the-375e777a1156>
6. *La strategia social di Taffo funziona? L'intervista*, N. Bano, 2018/01/11, <https://blog.leevia.com/social-media-marketing/strategia-social-taffo-funziona-intervista/>
7. *Business design per le PMI*, M. Fusco, C. Pinna, M. Spagnolo, Edizioni LSWR, 2017, https://books.google.it/books?redir_esc=y&hl=it&id=Jqc5DwAAQBAJ&q=Taffo#v=snippet&q=Taffo&f=false

4.2 ANALYSIS TOOLS

1. Keyhole: <https://keyhole.co/>
2. Ninjalitics: <https://www.ninjalitics.com/>
3. Socialinsider: <https://www.socialinsider.io/>
4. Aida: <https://www.bvdinfo.com/it-it/le-nostre-soluzioni/dati/nazionali/aida>

4.3 SOCIAL NETWORKS WEBPAGES

1. Taffo Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/onoranzefunebritaffo/>
2. Taffo Instagram account: <https://www.instagram.com/taffofuneralservices/?hl=it>
3. Taffo Twitter account: https://twitter.com/taffoofficial?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor