



Università  
Ca' Foscari  
Venezia

Master's Degree  
in  
Management: innovation and marketing

Final Thesis

**Sharing the small moments:  
the ephemeral communication during the  
travel experience**

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**Academic Year**

2019 / 2020



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## **Introduction**

The thesis aims to analyze the newly emerging phenomenon of ephemeral communication in the tourism field, focusing mainly on one of the most widespread image and video-sharing platform in the world in recent years, Instagram. The thesis is divided into four chapters where the first is introductory, the second and the third are theoretical and more specific and finally the fourth is analytic. In the first section, it will be discussed the evolution of the Internet and how our society arrived at Web 2.0, highlighting how the communication process has changed over the years as a result of the advent of social media, placing the final user at the center of the attention. In addition to this, it will be discussed how smartphones have accentuated this process and, in turn, made the user experience more flexible and dynamic. The second chapter will focus instead on Instagram stories and how this new ephemeral communication channel has created a new way of interaction between users, highlighting its major peculiarities. Besides, it will be underlined the main reasons that drive users to use ephemeral content concerning the UGC and its characteristics. The third chapter will speak specifically about the role of social media in the tourism field, thus analyzing the effects of the destination image and how it can generate positive behaviours towards the places shared by the users. Moreover, it will be analyzed the motivations that nudge individuals to share their travel experiences on social media and how image sharing and its integrated tools, like geotags and hashtags, can represent a source of word of mouth and promotion of tourist destinations for other individuals. The fourth and final chapter, through the use of surveys, will cover the role of analysis trying to understand how Instagram stories can represent a tool for disseminating indirectly new visual knowledge in the tourism industry.

## **CHAPTER 1 *The advent of social media***

## **1.0 The golden age and the evolution of the Web**

Nowadays we live in a society where the Internet is not classified as a simple need but as a priority of our everyday life. As a matter of fact, the Internet provides a capability so powerful and general at the same time that can be used for almost any purpose, and it is accessible by every individual who connects to one of its constituent network that can range from a simple smartphone to any device equipped with an Internet connection (Kahn & Dennis, 2020). The origin of this architecture system date back to 1970s in the United States but did not become visible to the public until the early 1990s. Even though it is difficult to give a precise definition of it, Rose (2013) describe the Internet as the first communication tool which can include all the other media since it is based on a combination of text, audio and video. More precisely, it becomes a communication mechanism when the technology progress enabled the file sharing. Indeed, this peculiarity guaranteed the possibility to interact with other people. In doing so, firms and consumers can relate, communicate and exchange anytime with anyone regardless of the place where they are. On one hand, consumers gained a lot of capabilities (Erdem et al., 2016,):

- Use the Internet as the main source to seek information
- Collect information regarding products, services, brands and firms
- Communicate
- Tap into social media to share personal opinions on different topics and products
- Interact with firms and other users
- Receive digital ads and other marketing materials
- Compare prices and products in the market

On the other hand, firms gained a broad set of capabilities which enable them to:

- Use the Internet as an information and sale channel
- Obtain information regarding the market, costumers, competitors and new opportunities
- Tap into social media to convey specific messages
- Reach costumers on the move thanks to the mobiles
- Speed up and facilitate external communication among consumers

Having said that, it is easy to understand how the advent of the Internet has empowered both sides of the market, producing enormous changes. The main one concerns the branding strategies, more precisely the way in which firms communicate with their target. Indeed, if in a traditional model mass media were seen as the successful strategy, with the arrival of new technologies this was not taken for granted anymore. The majority of companies has become aware that the Internet is no longer a simple choice but a priority if they want to remain competitive in the market.

To tell the truth, the report published by We Are Social in partnership with Hootsuite reveals that more than 4.36 billion people were using the Internet in 2019 with an increasing rate of 11 users per second that means one million new users each day. The highest internet penetration rate, that correspond to the total population of a given county that uses internet, is represented by Northern America with a rate of 95% followed by Northern and Western Europe with a rate of 94%. On the other side, the lowest Internet penetration is recorder in Middle Africa with a rate of 12%. On average, nearly 60% of the global population is already online, spending more or less 6 hours per day using the Internet from different devices. (Kemp, 2019). From this scenario is understandable how the Internet is part of our everyday life becoming in this way the main information and connection instrument.

As a consequence, the Internet has changed the paradigms of communication. Starting from the beginning, the foundation of the communication process lays on the Shannon – Weaver model (Mahoney, 2016) which highlights important takeaways for an effective communication. The model draws the attention on eight concepts identifying them as key elements to transfer information: source, encoder, message, channel, decoder, receiver, noise and feedback. This model provides a linear framework to understand how the message flows from the sender to the receiver and how it can be misinterpreted in the process between sending and receiving the message. Regardless of the foundation importance of the model, researchers come to realize that the process of communication is much more transactional in nature rather than linear as it was illustrated by Shannon and Weaver. More precisely, instead of communicating through a linear process where one individual is the receiver and the other one the sender, the transactional model of communication posits all participants as senders and receivers in a fluid exchange at the same time. As a result, while the linear model gives limited power to the receiver, the transactional model sees the process



as circular and no longer linear, equalizing the roles of the participants. In this sense, is it possible to understand how the transactional model lays the foundation of the digital communication.

### **1.0.1 From Web 1.0 to Web 2.0**

As it is possible to understand from the previous discussion, the Internet has not always been the communication tool we know today. Over the years, it has undergone several transformations, especially related to technological progress, like the spread of the connection and the development of the devices. Specifically, the Internet has passed through three different stages that can be identified as Web 1.0, 2.0, 3.0.

As it has already been anticipated the advent of Internet date back to the 90s. The Web 1.0 was born with the aim of spreading information through the first websites, blogs and forums. This type of communication incorporates the concept of the traditional mass media one-to-many as the aim was to communicate to the widest possible audience, which remained anonymous and extremely heterogeneous. At this stage of web evolution, there was limited interaction between users and websites. Indeed, due to the restricted adoption of desktops and internet devices, the Web was under the control of a few people who were the only one capable to write and communicate. As a matter of fact, Web 1.0 was a simple portal where users passively received information without having the possibility to post reviews, comments and send feedbacks (WittyCookie, 2012).

The period that goes from the 90s to 2000 constitutes a transition interval to the Web 2.0. This was made possible by some events:

- The amplification of internet penetration
- Lower costs of internet connection
- Increase in the broadband
- The diffusion of the smartphone and other internet devices

These events enabled the creation of an environment where every single individual could access easily to the Internet without any particular skill or high cost. Unlike the Web 1.0, Web 2.0 encourages participation, information sharing and collaboration. As a result, Web 2.0 technologies have transformed broadcast media monologues (one to many) into social media

dialogues (many to many). Social media is the production of internet-based applications that are built on the technological pilaster of Web 2.0.

Social media content includes text, pictures, videos and networks. The text was the first type of social media which was initially in the form of blogs written by individuals who maintained the content constantly updated which could include text, graphics videos and links of other blogs usually presented in chronological order. Picture and video sharing websites allow users to post and share images and videos. Finally, networks created to establish relationships among users, send message to personal contacts and update personal profile.

As it is evident this type of web highlights the user-generated content, facilitating the interaction between users and websites and allowing individuals to interact more freely with each other. More specifically, there are four constructs that have enhanced the participation among users (Mahoney, 2016):

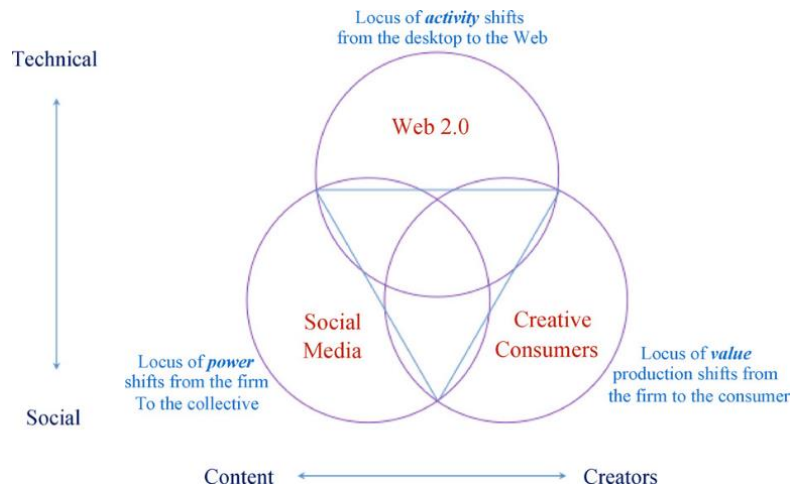
- Social networking
- Interaction orientation
- Customization/personalization
- User-added possibilities

Social networking consists of the ability for the users to get in touch with a personal community, including interpersonal content or interest-based network. Users are able to share contents like thoughts, pictures, and comments. Interaction orientation refers to the interactivity nature of Web 2.0 as the users can alter the media content. Customization/personalization means that the user has the possibility to pick up and choose the content that is more similar to his interests, giving more power to them. Finally, user-added possibilities transform the users in producers of content. Users do not just seek information but also create it through different platforms. In doing so, Web 2.0 shifts the attention from passive users to active users not only allowing them to have more control on the Web but also influencing the type of content available.

Based on the above characteristics of the second stage of the Web, it is intuitive to comprehend how Web 2.0 have caused three effects (Figure 1.1) (Berthon et al., 2012):

1. The activity shifts from the mere static desktop to the dynamic Web
2. The power shifts from the firms to the users
3. The value production shift from the firms to the costumers

Figure 1.1. Web 2.0, social media, and creative consumers



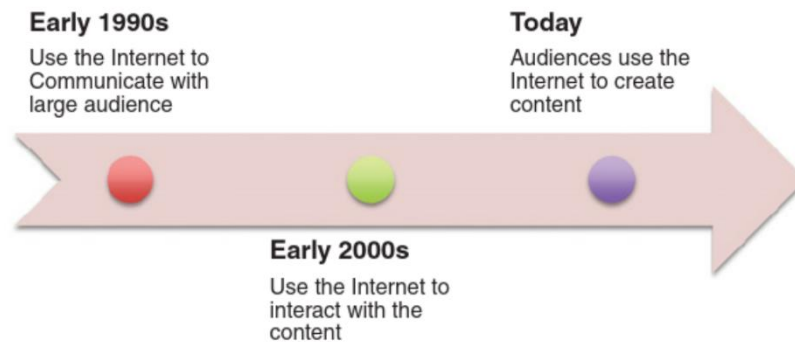
Source: Berthon et al. (2012)

### **1.0.2 Where are we going ? The advent of Web 3.0**

The next stage of the web evolution is represented by the semantic web or also known as Web 3.0. The additional characteristic of this type of web is that the computer can interpret information like humans and generate and deliver content adapted to the needs of the users. This new generation we are stepping into includes specific innovations and the main features are semantic web, artificial intelligence, 3D graphics, connectivity. Semantic web refers to the ability of the web to generate share and connect contents due to the interpretation of the words rather than only numbers. The employment of artificial intelligence is the capability to give something back that was not previously possible, understanding information like humans and providing faster results. 3D graphics consist of the three-dimensional design used in website and services like museum guides, computer games and e-commerce. Finally, the connectivity that enables the contents to be accessible from different applications enhancing the user experience and the information available.

As a matter of result, Web 3.0 is assumed to be more present in our everyday life (Figure 1.2.), giving to individuals the possibility to access to the Internet not only from computers and smartphones but also from home and on the move thanks to home automation and wearable technologies.

Figure 1.2. Timeline interactive progression



Source: Mahoney (2016)

## **1.2 Social media**

Social media employ web-based and mobile technologies to create interactive platforms through which individuals shares, co-create, discuss, and modify content (Kietzmann et al., 2011). Social media is used as an umbrella word to encompass all forms of exchange, participation and dialogue that take place online. Based on the features of Web 2.0, social media see the union between individuals and technologies allowing the user to participate to an extent not seen previously in traditional media. In doing so, it has been amplified the power of the users enabling them to create and share contents thus placing the user-generated content as the epicenter of this revolution (Freberg, 2018).

The ascent of this new tool has made possible due to the evolution of the web that has simplified the connection among individuals. Based on the report of We Are Social and Hootsuite it seems that the number of social media users registered in 2019 was 3.48 with an increase of 366 million (9 per cent) compared to 2018. In addition to this, if this data is compared with the number of people that generally use the Internet, and so 4.39 billion, it is

surprising as the 80% of the worldwide population use social media. Despite this data, social media use is still far from evenly distributed around the globe and the average penetration is 45%. This result is explained by the fact that the penetration rate is calculated based on the total population of a given country. Indeed, there are some factors that have to be taken into consideration in the overall analysis like the children prohibition, the Internet penetration and ban of some platforms in some countries.

After having given an overall picture of what social media are, it is intuitive to understand how it crosses the traditional boundaries of mass and personal media, allowing individuals to communicate with one or few people as well as with millions of others. There are a lot of channels through which companies and users can communicate together. Indeed, the social media environment is divided into 4 four main areas based on the usage, service offered and purpose (Tuten & Solomon, 2017):

- Social community
- Social publishing
- Social entertainment
- Social commerce

Social community refers to those social media that focus on relationships where people participate in with others that share the same interests or identification. As a matter of facts, social community features two-way communications, collaboration, conversation and sharing of resources and experiences. Even though all channels are built on network relationship, social communities focus upon the principles of interaction and relationships building and maintenance as primary sources of people engagement and participation. The social community area includes for example social network sites (SNS), forum and Wikis.

The second area is social publishing where fall all social media that are characterized by high dissemination of contents to an audience, allowing the audience, in turn, to share and participate. While social community meet the need of online community, social publishing focus on user-generated content, enabling individuals to produce their own contents without the barriers of the traditional media. The main distinction between the two areas is that the orientation of the former is networking, while the one of the latter is knowledge-sharing. This area includes blogs, video and photo sharing sites, music and audio sharing and news site.

The third area encompasses all the social media based on engagement-sharing designed to provide to the audience pleasure and enjoyment. In this zone also fall the social games that appear to be growing in popularity. This area includes social games, social music, video and social television.

Finally, the last area includes all the social media that works as online spaces for shopping, buying and selling products and services. Moreover, social commerce encompasses those tools that enable shared participation in a purchasing decision. In addition to this, social commerce enables both buyer and sellers to participate actively in the marketplace and specific communities. This area includes deal sites, reviews and rating sites, community marketplace and so on. It is important to make it notice as the boundaries of the 4 areas are not fixed since there are social media that can fall in more than one at the same time due to the services offered.

Regardless of the area in which social media operates, they have revolutionized the way in which users and firms communicate and vice versa. This development has created a sort of conventional markets where firms can enhance their brand awareness and recognition establishing strong relationships with their costumers producing, in turn, a strong brand loyalty that goes beyond the traditional methods (Alves et al., 2016). As a result, from the studies conducted by Alves emerged that the presence of the brands on social media has a strong impact on their market value. Indeed, social media enables firms to amplify the power of word of mouth and its capability to increase sales, but the presence is not a sufficient element because to succeed it is also important the activity of the brands and how they engage with their audience.

In this way, social media has maximized marketing opportunities to reach and interact with the final users. In fact, before the advent of the Internet, companies were used to apply strategies of outbound marketing, pushing advertising without understanding the audience. Pushing messages out is not effective anymore because the audience perceives it as intrusive and has options and way to avoid them. On the contrary, firms relay more on inbound marketing that consists of listening and understanding the audience to create a valuable customer experience. (Severstad E., 2020). As a matter of fact, social media enables companies to interact with costumers without being intrusive through a transactional communication process.

Finally, it is important to understand the motivations that nudge people to use social media from a sociological point of view. There are different theories that have been applied in this field to explain the high penetration rate of Social Media. The first one is the uses and gratification theory which identifies two orientations that explain why the audience uses social media (Mahoney, 2016):

- Instrumental media usage
- Ritualized media usage

The former refers to the usage of social media as a tool to seek information after having been stimulated by one message. On the other side, the latter refers to the usage of social media as a tool to kill the time in a ritualized manner. This theory can find confirmation in the exploratory study of Anita Whiting and David Williams who conducted 25 in-depth interviews with individuals ranging from 18 to 56 years old to understand their motivations in the usage of social media. Indeed, their study reveals that 88% of respondents use social media for social interaction. 80% of respondents reported using social media to search for information. In the end, 76% admitted using them to pass the time when they are bored and want to do something, while 64% of respondents declared to use them as a source of entertainment (Whiting & Williams, 2013).

The second theory is the selective exposure theory (Mahoney, 2016) which works as a complementary theory to the first one by suggesting that the audience uses social media based on personal characters, attitudes, values, opinions and demographic factors. More precisely, this theory underlines how personality can be considered as a predictor of social media consumption, reporting the personal traits that influence the use of social media (Mahoney, 2016):

- Openness: it refers to people willing to try a new experience. It is identified with the dichotomy creative/curious and consistent/cautious
- Conscientiousness: It refers to people who control impulses and act in a socially acceptable manner. It refers to the dichotomy efficient/organized vs careless/easygoing
- Extroversion: It is identified with the dichotomy energetic/outgoing and reversed solitary

- Agreeableness: It is identified the dichotomy compassionate/friendly vs unkind/cold
- Neuroticism: It refers to who is emotional stable. It is identified with the dichotomy sensitive/nervous vs secure/confident.

For example, anxious people tend to use social media as a way to escape while people that are curious and willing to try new things tend to spend more time doing pleasure reading or other things. (Ackerman, 2020). The frenetic world we live today, and the advent of the Internet, have amplified the need of people to receive feedback from the others as a way for self-acceptance and ego gratification.

### **1.2.1 Major players**

Concerning the social media areas described above it is crucial that marketers today understand where to operate in this vast environment. More precisely there are 5 main types of social media sites that are particularly widespread around the globe and marketers should take into consideration in their strategy: social networking sites, image sharing sites, messaging sites, video sharing sites and social community discussion sites.

Social networking sites encourage people to post share and respond to each other's content, directly connect with other users and discuss relevant topic within specific communities allowing marketers to understand the audience and their needs. Facebook has become by far the largest social network reporting in 2019 an estimated 2.4 billion monthly active users with an average per day of 1.6 (Stout, 2019). Image sharing sites, which record a higher level of engagement compared other type of social media, are those sites where both sides of the market, firms and consumers, communicate easily through the usage of visual content. (Mawhinney, 2020). The emblem of image sharing site is Instagram, with more than 1 Billion monthly active users, which saw the acquisition by Facebook in 2012. Messaging sites are those platforms which enable Internet users to exchange messages for human communication. WhatsApp is one of the most popular with 1 billion active users per day. Video sharing sites are dominated by video content which requires fewer efforts for viewers to take in. There is no reading or scrolling but just watching and it is an optimal tool from a company point of view to educate the audience or broadcast strong emotions. The top of mind in this category is YouTube where 300 hours of video are uploaded every minute and



with an average visit of 40 minutes. Finally, social community and discussion sites which replace the traditional forums and communities like Reddit and Yahoo. These types of social media sites tap into the Internet's never-ending thirst for questions and answers. (Barnhart, 2017).

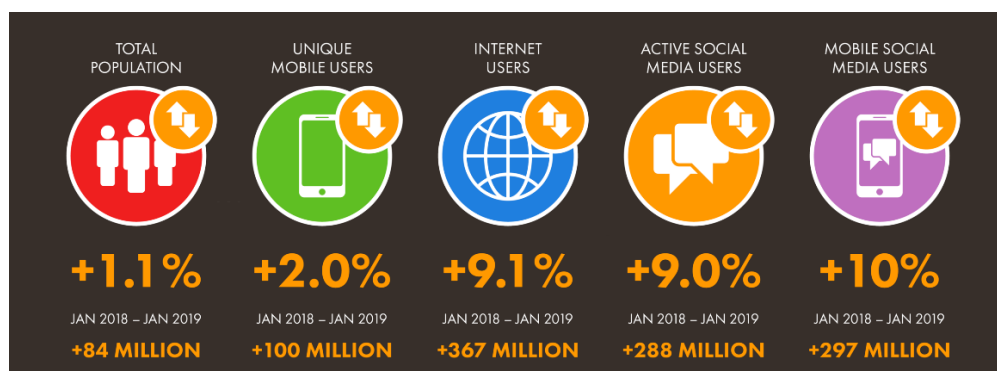
There are thousands of social websites and each of them differs in details and layout of the feature they offer. Further, they keep on adding new features and making changes to the existing ones. However, regardless of the type and the area in which social media operates there are some essential features which are common in every platform (Won et al., 2010):

- Personal profile: members create and manage personal profiles, that are, homepages which includes basic information. However, they differ in the type of information included.
- Establishing online connections: members can discover connections among current members ("friends"). They provide usually search engine to look up member' names.
- Participating in online groups: members can join groups or form new ones. For example, on YouTube, you can create groups named "channels".
- Communicating with online connections: social web sites allow people to get in touch and exchange message through private message or public bulletin boards.
- Share UGC: social web sites enable people to share personal content. For instance, Myspace allows members to share blogs, photos, videos, music content playlist etc.
- Expressing opinion: simply translated as leave comments. In fact, all social web sites allow individuals to express their personal opinions in the form of a written comment or like/dislike. For Example, Facebook enables members to express their opinion with the emoji.
- Finding information: social web sites allow people to seek information within the platform through search engine bars. For example, LinkedIn supports a keywords-based search for each category like people, jobs, companies, answers etc.
- Holding the users: features that are used to keep users on the sites and make them return frequently. For instance, YouTube displays thumbnails of 30 related videos, channels or playlist users maybe can be interested in.

### 1.3 The mobile era

If we take a macro perspective since the advent of smartphones social media has evolved into a phenomenon completely different than the one it was at its inception. Without prejudice to the availability of the internet connection, mobile devices have become almost ubiquitous in our lives, representing the most used media in a day. Consumers use their smartphone to carry out a lot of activities outside the ordinary communication considering the mobile device as a tool that can be consulted anyway at any time, from calling and texting to playing games, navigations and social networking. Mobile devices have reached a critical mass both in high growth economies and developed countries with a penetration rate of 94% in the United State, 97% Unite Kingdom, 99% South Korea and 97% in Italy. (Nielsen, 2013).

Figure 1.3. Annual digital Growth 2019



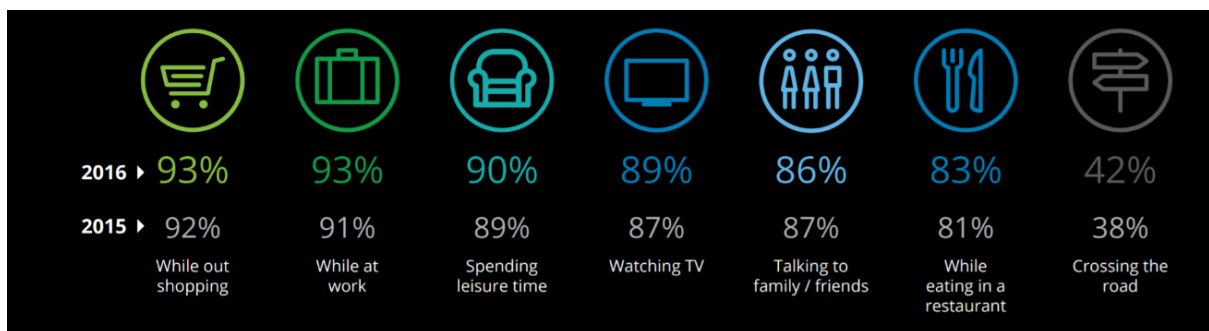
Source: We Are Social and Hootsuite (2019)

Based on the data reported by We Are Social and Hootsuite (Figure 1.3.) it is possible to understand how the Internet users (9,1%) and mobile social media users (10%) grow at the same rhythm, identifying the smartphone as the first vehicle in the social media context. If we take a look at how social platforms are making progress, in terms of simplicity and personalization, it is noticeable how these advancements are enhanced mainly by modern mobile technology. People are spending more and more time online connected to their devices becoming a permanent tool in modern society (Avery P. 2018).

The time it takes for us to pick up the smartphone continues to shrink: more than 40% of mobile users in the United States check their phone within 5 minutes and 73% within 30

minutes. Likewise, people have trouble to turn them off with over 30% of users constantly checking their devices 5 minutes before going to bed and a half doing so in the middle of the night. It also reported that Americans look at their phone approximately 47 times per day and the number is the double for people in the age between 18-24 years old. The total times Americans check their phone per day account for 9 billion, revealing a good opportunity for marketers to focus on strategies that consider the smartphone as a lever to reach their audience. (Deloitte, 2016) In addition to this, a study in 2016 reveals that for the first time the time spent on the web using mobile (51.3%) exceed the one using the desktop (48.7%) presenting one of the clearest pictures of how marketing and social media landscape is changing (StatCounter, 2016). As a result, 3.96 billion people use social media in 2020 and 80% of them access through mobile devices.

Figure 1.4. How often do you use your mobile phone while doing the following activities?



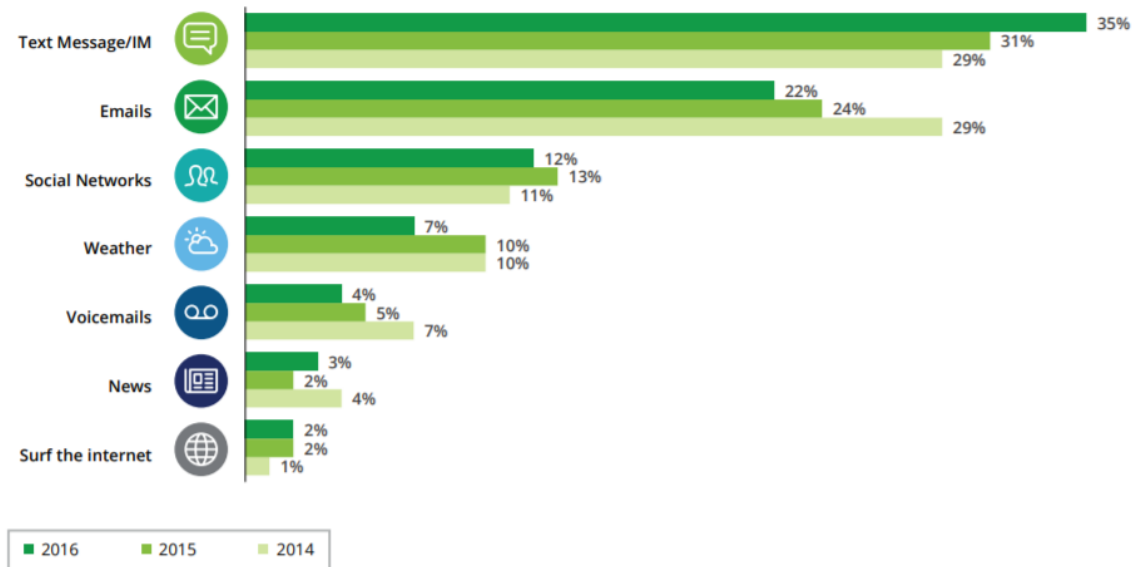
Source: Deloitte (2016)

As it was reported by a Deloitte survey in 2016 (Figure 1.4.) the vast majority of mobile users (93%) use their phone at work, while outside shopping still ranks as the first activity during which consumers use their devices (93%). Phone are becoming important tools for shopping to the point that 58% of interviewed said to use them to browse shopping websites or apps and more than a third do it at least once a week. Instead, leisure time and watching tv follow closely 90% and 89% respectively.

Mobile devices have become the essential point of connections among users and firms representing mobile opportunities for business to monetize this web connectivity. They represent a communication hub that allows individuals to stay connected to multiple sources

24 per day, maintaining far more touchpoints than was ever before possible. Despite the slight decrease between 2015 and 2016, browsing social networks was recorded as the third most performed activity that people do with their phones (Figure 1.5.)

Figure 1.5. What is the first thing you access on your phone every day?



Source: Deloitte (2016)

Social networks like Facebook were conceived to be used on desktops, but it is thanks to smartphones that it has become the hub of social networking. In fact, mobile devices with their features, make the user experience more versatile and flexible integrating virtually every aspect of our lives. This phenomenon affects more precisely the Millennials, that is the generation who is always connected and refuse to live without Internet defined as those aged 20-34. The Millennials know to adapt to every technological change representing the strongest purchasing power in the market. As a matter of fact, a study of Inmobi reveals that Millennials spend an average of 7.2 hours per day consuming media content and the majority of time is spent on mobile devices than on any other platforms. 56% of them claimed they have noticed mobile advertising while using mobile application rather than through other channels. Mobile ads also provide to be effective as 79% of interviewed admitted they have been introduced to something new via their devices, while 51% said they have purchased using their smartphone (Shamala, 2013). This means that there are multiple implications for

social media web. Practically speaking, marketers have to formulate their social media strategies considering at the same time mobile strategy, so that they can remain competitive in the market.

In doing so, the Internet revolution and the arrival of smartphones changed the nature of communication. Indeed, the sharing of contents through the smartphones acquired a more spontaneous and impulsive character resulting in a more continuous and mutual communication flow. As intuitable, the intrinsic features of the smartphone enhanced the phenomena of the real-time web, allowing users to create, share and use contents everywhere and at any time. Thanks to this, the conversations among social network users became faster, with the possibility to generate contents simply and instantly, thus feeding a continuous information enrichment for all individuals. This is particularly noticeable in the growing diffusion of the image and video sharing sites. As a matter of result, smartphones are equipped with cameras that allow individuals to share images and videos instantaneously. This has enabled, in addition to the already possibility to share photos and videos on the major players like Facebook and Twitter, the creation of further platforms that work with the same concept of social networks but are primarily devoted to the sharing of instant photos and videos. One of the most common platform that plays in this category is Instagram which was specifically developed to be used on the smartphone, and only later some functionalities were extended to the desktop. This characteristic draws the attention to the progressive importance of the usage of the mobile devices over the computer: in fact, it is noticeable as the software is firstly designed to work on the smartphone and only later conceived to be used on the desktop.

This new type of social media represents a visual communication that through images enhance the emotional aspect, broadcasting specific beliefs, attitudes and interests of users and brands. By posting photos on their Instagram profile, users create a sort of visual mosaics that express their identities. On the other side, companies have unique opportunities to be part of these personal mosaics, but they must be up to offer images that resonate with consumers at an authentic, and emotional level. In this manner, leveraging the power of images brands can establish a new way of communication, exploiting an emotional dimension to evoke deep meanings connected with the brands.

### **1.3.1 The power of the apps**

If we started speaking about how smartphones have increased the connectivity among users, building in turn stronger relationships with brands, now it is time to zoom in and to understand how the usage of apps have enhanced this process of interactions. Applications, or generally known with the abbreviation “apps”, are those software programs designed to run on a mobile device that has made the communication more and more direct and one to one with the final users with an unprecedented level of personalization. A study conducted by eMarketer demonstrated that the personalization of a mobile app was the first user expectation for the future of the smartphones. Yet, the survey reveals that in the US the average time spent on mobile is 4 hours, with 88% of that time within apps (Wurmser, 2020). Consumers downloaded 204 billion apps in 2019 worldwide and the top five are Facebook Messenger, Facebook, Whatsapp, Tik Tok and Instagram. It is interesting to notice as all of them are social or communication apps (MindSea Team & Ewen, 2020).

In order to nudge people to use an application, it should be provided an added value to the users in terms of usability and functionality, giving back the answers to their needs. In a study conducted in Turkey in 2015, Orahon Korhan and Metin Ersoy investigated why and how people use social network site applications and which factors make them particularly appealing, through a user and gratification theory approach. The idea at the background is that people are active users on various communication channels and they consciously choose the right channel in order to satisfy their perceived needs and desires. Based on this preamble usability refers to the extent to which an application facilitates users to utilize its functions in an easy and appropriate way. As a result, users tend to use functional and usable products more frequently. Navigation, learnability, ease of use, response time, memorability, efficiency and satisfaction were selected as factors that characterize the usability component. On the other side, functionality refers to the extent to which an application operates in the way it is structured and is expected to satisfy a user desire. Personalization, search options, differentiation, service and facilities and information types were selected as usability factors. From the result, it was observed that “easy to use” is the most important usability factor, especially among the younger generation (16-25), while personalization was observed to be the most important functionality factor. Moreover, all usability and functionality factors were

observed to be positively correlated, contributing significantly in the selection of social network applications that results mainly in those that enable a cheaper and faster communication and visual (photo, video) shares like, for example, Instagram (Korhan & Ersoy, 2015). Same results were also found in an article published by Forbers saying that the overall usability and the intuitive navigation are key factors which costumer look for in a mobile app (Shaoolian, 2017).

Based on the above analysis and the essential features among all social media sites, which has been discussed previously, it is now important to underline the trends and important attributes in the field of social media applications (Jadeja, 2018):

- **Easy connectivity:** the principal point of social media is to bring internet user together. For this reason, a successful app is one that requires little effort to the user to connect. This is for example one of the primary reasons why Instagram has gained so much success with its app. Instagram give to the members the easiest access to millions of people all over the world (Oza, 2017).
- **News feed:** any application should have the ability to compress all of the user's activities into a single view allowing individuals to easily discover the content.
- **Ability to extensive personalize personal profiles and individual experience:** as it was said before the personalization is one of the functionality factors mobile users look for. In this sense, for example, the possibility to use filters and background effects optimize their satisfaction and the user's engagement.
- **Instant messaging:** because social media is a synonym of new way of communication, it is logical to notice how any applications should provide to users the facility to get in touch with other people and brands. WhatsApp and Facebook messenger are designed with the purpose of instant messaging applications and they figure as the most download around the world. In this sense, all social media applications should provide instant message possibility as it is one of the main reasons why people use them.
- **Marketplace:** the possibility to sell and buy on social media apps is an increasing trend. Instagram has introduced this feature recently as visual content applications enabling firms to express better their products as users were in a virtual shop, replacing sometime the physical one.

- Ephemeral content: it one of the most popular trends that have brought a substantial revolution change in the way people communicate and interact. This new virtual storytelling approach has boosted the engagement of people allowing them to share their valuable moments with a personalized touch. In addition to this, social storytelling can receive immediate feedbacks that encourage users.

On the other side, companies can use social media apps for different purposes that represent good business opportunities (Srivastava, 2020):

- Better brand promotion: person access social media applications almost every second around the world constituting new touchpoints for companies. Furthermore, the introduction of the ephemeral contents has created new opportunities, facilitating the word of mouth and the brands and products exposition.
- Faster service and product demonstration: firms can easily promote their products directly and faster to their audiences with the possibility to spread the word about offers, discount and new arrivals encouraging costumers to share the news and others in their profile. Just think about influencers and how with a simple story or post can increase the visibility of a brand or products.
- Useful insights about the target audience: nowadays all social media provide the possibility to create a business account made for firms giving them powerful tools to gather valuable information. The usage of these insights allows firms to track the performance of their campaign and to adjust their marketing.
- Increase search engine ranking and conversion rate: it is quite interesting to know how single share, like or repost raise the Google search ranking. Basally, there are two factors that Google take into consideration to rank a website: in-site and off-site factors. While the former corresponds to the usage of the keywords in a website the latter refers to how people speak about a product, brand service etc.



## **CHAPTER 2 *Ephemeral communication on the Instagram platform***

## **2.0 An introduction to Instagram**

Instagram was founded by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger in October 2010, and nowadays it figures as one of the most used platforms in the social media field with more than 1 billion active users and 600 million per day (Stout, 2019). Instagram is one social media application designed specifically for visual content available for free in the application stores. It enables users to take photos and videos, use filter to edit pictures, and instantly share photos with other community members or in other social media like Facebook, Tumblr or Twitter. After the acquisition by Facebook in 2012 some features were extended to the desktop so that people can check photos on their PC but, Instagram is primarily designed to work on smartphones since the easiest and more practical way to generate content is through the mobile app. (Chen, 2017) As a matter of fact, Instagram is classified as the 3rd daily most downloaded app in the world (Chan, 2020) and the 4th most used social media platform with an average of time of 0.53 minutes spent per day on it by its users (Chen, 2020). These results are explained by three main factors (Cole, 2018):

- It works well on mobile: more and more people prefer to do things on their smartphone rather than on their laptop or any other mobile device because is easier, faster and always in our pockets. Moreover, not all features are available on the desktop version, that means users are incentivized to use Instagram on their mobile devices.
- It is a photo and video sharing app: people are highly responsive to picture imagery. Indeed, people prefer to use visual information than auditable cues or written posts. With its growing popularity and capability to reach a wider audience more and more brands are including it in their marketing strategies to communicate with their costumers, enhancing the return on investment. This is the reason why visual marketing has grown exponentially recently.
- It is user friendly: the interface is intuitive and clean, no matter the age of the users. It constantly lunches new features to improve the enjoyment and engagement of its members, like virtual reality, live streaming etc. According to the survey conducted by Cole (2018), Instagram feed is the first favorite feature (47%) while stories (43%), launched in 2016, represent the second one but with an increase in popularity.

Furthermore, the top-down slideshow design plus the quite absence of frustrating ads, like pop up and take over, improves the user's experience.

These advantages find a confirmation in the research conducted by Alhabash and Ma (2017, pp 7) who explored the social media uses and gratification across four different popular platforms: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. Their study showed that people tend to spend more time on image sharing sites rather than traditional social networks. In other words, it was recorded a greater intensity of use and a more favorable attitude toward Instagram and Snapchat than Facebook and Twitter. Moreover, results showed no association between the network size and the intensity of use. With regards to the motivations to use each platform, Instagram showed to be used primarily for entertainment, passing time and self-expression.

If the top of mind in the social media environment has been Facebook since his launch, the advent of Instagram and other social platforms have changed the playing field. Instagram differs from Facebook and other social networks in several ways. First of all, in contrast to Facebook, it requires the upload of photos and videos to generate new content, which is perceived as a more spontaneous action. Secondly, Instagram has empowered the user through the use of filters and other features enriching, in turn, their experience. Finally, users on Instagram tend to keep their profile open rather than private, thus allowing users to follow, view, like and comments photos easily, increasing the level of engagement and curiosity. (Chen, 2017). In addition to this, Instagram is a network of younger users compared to Facebook which counts only the 23.5% of members aged between 14 – 24 (Statista, 2020). As evidence, Sprout Social reported that 59% of Instagram users are aged between 19 – 29, while 33% aged between 30 – 49 followed by 18% over 50. Based on this statistic it is possible to understand that Instagram is mostly used by Millennials and the generation Z, which represent the purchasing power in the market (Chen, 2020).

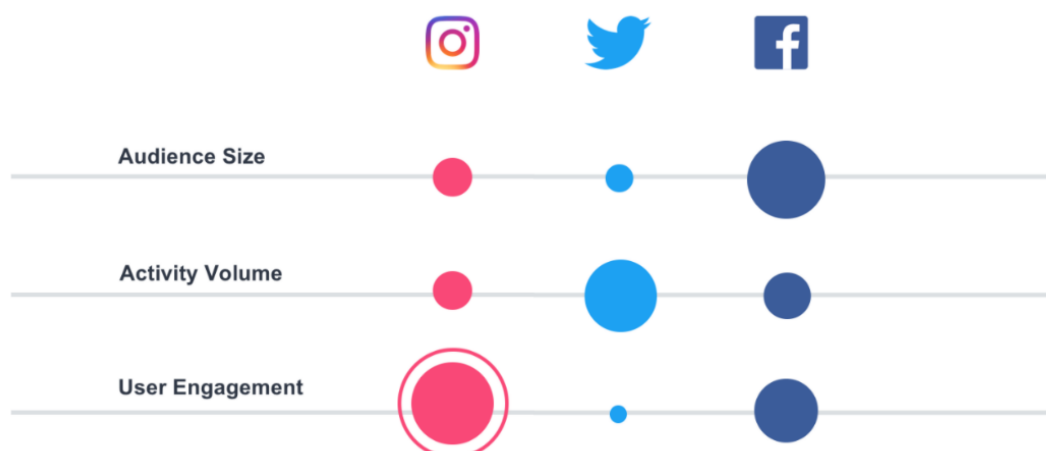
The growing popularity of Instagram plus the capability of the network to reach the firms' target are the main reasons why companies employ this platform in their social media strategy. Regarding this, research conducted by Omnicore agency highlights some data to explain why Instagram is attractive for marketers (Aslam, 2020):

- 70% of users turn Instagram for product discovery

- More than 200 million users visit at least one business profile per day
- 1/3 of the most viewed stories belong to a business profile
- 55.4 of influencers use stories for sponsored campaigns
- Instagram is the most used platform by Influencers (more than 500 million)
- User-generated content has a 4.5% higher conversion rate

These data are sufficient indicators to understand why Instagram is used in the communication strategy of a brand. Indeed, due to the aesthetic component, ease of usage and image centrality the platform guarantees a direct and efficient communication that turns in a higher level of engagement of the audience and better performance in terms of marketing results. As evidence of this, Sprout social reports that 80% of users follow at least one brand profile and 60% of them discovered new things through this channel. In addition to this, it has been reported that Instagram is capable to generate for brand 4x more interactions compared to Facebook. The median interactions of the former account for 438 million, while the latter registers much lower data, roughly 45 million (Buryan, 2018). In this way Instagram allows companies to respond to some marketing objectives like increase the brand awareness, spread the company culture, show new products and services, enhance the consumer's engagement, build a stronger community, and network of clients and share news and last trend.

Figure 2.1. User engagement on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook (sample: top 10000 largest brand pages and profile across IG, FB, TW)



Source: SocialBakers

This shows that there is no relationship between audience size and user engagement. Indeed, Instagram might not have the highest activity volume or bigger network size, but it is for sure a major interaction driver than other social networks like Twitter and Facebook (Figure 2.1.)

## **2.1 Visual communication and the burn after reading principle**

With the growing popularity of Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube etc. there has been a shift towards visual communication in the field of social media. Some of the most famous social media platforms have started to focus on images and videos in terms of usage. Other legendary players like Twitter and Facebook have followed the trend, adopting visual images in their services. As a matter of fact, sharing images and videos rather than simple words have become an integral part of our everyday life, and because social media platforms represent the hub for sociability this transition towards visuals has arguably transformed how individuals relate to each other and around the world, as well as how they build their sense of self. Therefore, visual communication adds further information giving a specific impression of the sender that otherwise, through mere words, would be not possible to capture (Russmann & Svensson, 2017). Having said that, the vogue of visual communication on social media platforms, which has made Instagram so popular, is justified by different reasons (Hertan, 2020):

- Images are easy to process: half of the human brain is devoted directly or indirectly to vision. With 70% of visual receptors in our eyes, humans are capable to recognize symbols within 150 milliseconds and to associate a meaning to it. In addition to this, our brain is able to process visual cues 60,000 times faster compared to words increasing the capability to store information.
- Individuals are attracted to colors: it has been tested that between 62% and 90% of initial judgment of what people see is based on colors. As a result, colors are capable to evoke faster feelings and emotions easily compared to texts. 82% of readers' attentions can be increased by the effective use of colors.
- Individuals like simplicity: because it is believed that people are lazy, images simplify the user's experience. Indeed, good images are self-explanatory, and they do not require too many efforts compared to the hundred words that otherwise would be

employed to explain the same situation, probably making lose the attention of the readers.

- Individuals respond better to faces: neuroscientists analyzed how the brain light ups when people see faces. Indeed, it has been found that neurons are highly active when we see pictures of faces and less responsive without them. Moreover, compared to texts, people are capable to understand details that otherwise would be misunderstood trough written words (Vieru, 2011).
- Images evoke emotions: the combinations of colors, as we said before, easily attract the attention of the reads. In doing so, pictures are a combination of details which if put together can evoke emotions. In addition to this, positive content is shared fasters among friends increasing the virality of the content.
- Easy to remember: our brain remembers 80% of what people see compared just to 20% of what they read. As a matter of fact, if we read a text without pictures after three days our brain can remember around 10% of the information. On the other hand, if a text is presented along with relevant pictures, our brain easily creates associations recalling more than 65% of the information we have read.
- Engagement: pictures attract the reader's attention enhancing the level of contraction and avoiding the problem of boredom. In fact, if we read a text without pictures we are more likely to lose the attention because of the poor involvement. On the other side, if a text is provided with imagines people tend to keep on reading because our brain is helped to pictures what we are decoding. (Gabe, 2015).

Despite the current society and the dominance of the languages, individuals still prefer visual communication as a faster and easier way to interact with others in this frenetic world. A research conducted by Torrez, Wakslak, and Amit (2019) reported that visual communication, and so the usage of photos, videos emoticons and GIFs, is preferred compared to the written communication which refers to the classic use of texts and messages. As an explanation of the growing popularity of the former type, it was discovered that people would use visual communication as a mean of distance reduction. Indeed, images and videos are worth more than one hundred words because they can broadcast more information that otherwise would be omitted with the written communication. This help to reduce the gap between the abstract

and real dimension making people feel closer despite the fact they are communicating far away.

Regardless of the type of communication, information such as pictures and texts were characterized by persistency, they were saved for an unlimited period of time and only the users could eliminate them. For example, if a photo is uploaded on Instagram, it persists from the moment it is uploaded until the user decides to eliminate it. Yet, when an email is sent it is stored until the user deletes it.

When content persists only for a limited period of time things disappear and cannot be retrieved. The automatic elimination of the content against the will of the sender and receiver is known as the burn after reading principle which has changed the paradigms of the communication in modern society. From the study conducted by Van Nimwegen and Bergman (2019) emerged that the accuracy to identify the pictures and the time spent observing the pictures by 2 groups of people were affected by the burn after reading principle. Participants who were aware of the ephemeral feature recognized more pictures compared to the other group who were aware of the persistency feature. The same result was reported regarding the time spent on watching the pictures: who were aware of the limited time frame of existence watch the pictures for longer time with more concentration. As a result, despite the nature of the ephemeral dimension the awareness that message disappears lead people to remember better what they saw.

## **2.2 A new driver of engagement: ephemeral content**

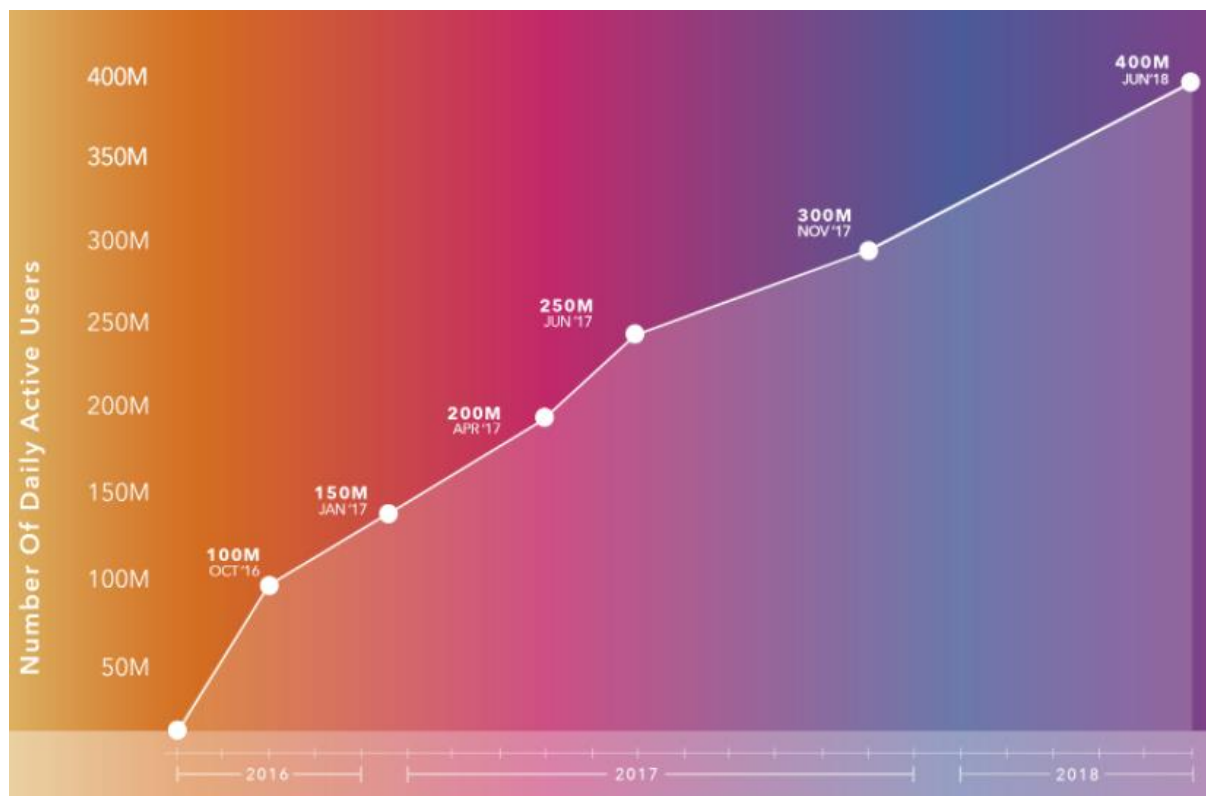
As it has already been said smartphones play a key role in our daily lives. The technological progress and the simplification of user's experience thanks to the apps has increased the social media consumption on our mobile devices. From how people record their daily lives, to how they share it, from how individuals remain aware of the world to how people entertain themselves within it. As a matter of fact, Deloitte global mobile consumer survey in 2019 reported that the most performed activity by smartphone users was to watch short videos, live posts, and stories, followed by share photos on social/instant messaging apps and check social networks (Durou, 2019). Based on this, it is understandable the growing popularity of Instagram as it embraces all these trend activities.

In particular, the level of engagement on Instagram and its growing success was boosted in 2016 by the introduction of a new feature which nowadays is widely adopted by all social media platforms: the stories. This new ephemeral dimension has revolutionized the landscape of social media, triggering a level of user involvement which had never happened before. The ephemerality does not only concern the creation of content that can be watched in a second or a minute, but it is also about content that can be viewed only for a specific period of time. Naturally, some forms of communication have always had the characteristic of being ephemeral, for example face-to-face interactions. Analogously, other synchronous types of communication, like voice and video calling, represent communication channels where no record is stored. This new feature shares some properties of synchronous communication such as face-to-face conversations, but they differ in the fact that they are typically asynchronous (Bayer, Ellison, Schoenebeck, & Falk, 2015,). Despite this distinction this new temporal bound logic has changed the paradigms of digital communication, turning in one of the essential properties of social media (Vázquez, 2019). Users can create short-video and share photos directly to their friend or add them to the section “My story”. In this section content plays in the order they were uploaded and last up to 24 hours. On the other hand, when content is sent directly to another person it will disappear as soon as the receiver views the photo or the video. In addition to this, Instagram stories gained a great success because they allow the user to edit the content before being published in my story section or sent privately to a friend. The wide editing options are different and range from simple text to GIFs, emoji, image filters, video effects and more. Moreover, the user can personalize the content with metadata in the form of hashtags, tags of other users or pages and geotag to mark the position. This has created a different perception of communication, thus allowing the user to make his content more personal, increasing, in turn, the level of participation and engagement among members.

The concept of Instagram stories was initially launched by its main competitor: Snapchat. Indeed, the primacy is due to the latter which after the adoption of this feature by the former saw a loss of three million users and its first decline. However, Snapchat is not obsolete yet, but it has been remarkably surpassed by Instagram which has triggered later a chain reaction effect in all other social networks like, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, WhatsApp etc.



Figure 2.2. Instagram stories user growth



Source: Mediakix (2018)

In 2017 it was reported that Instagram quickly accumulated 250 million active stories users within a year from its launch. At the beginning of 2018 Instagram stories were used by 400 million people and nowadays more than 40% of users are loyal to this new tool (Figure 2.2.) Since the launch of this new ephemeral feature, Instagram rolled out 20 new effects within Instagram stories. Since then, it has become a staple in the world of social media (Mediakix, 2018). There is not only one reason why Stories gained all this success in the Instagram platform. Above all, before the introduction of this feature Instagram users felt the pressure of sharing amazing content. People wanted to share more, but they did not want to keep them on their feed. In response to this need, this new feature allows people to alleviate this pressure felt when posting on their personal profile. Indeed, stories are more realistic and fun, but most importantly they are spontaneous. Stories include quick and casual photos or short videos which are taken directly with the Instagram app. Content can be unprofessional, raw and unpolished but because they are full screen in the native vertical format, they are

perceived more engaging. In doing so, stories nudge people to share easily everyday moments of their life, from the perfect meal to the new trip around the world, highlighting what was hidden in the background of a simple photo or video posted on the feed (Wagner, 2018). Studies about the behavior on social media demonstrated that 60% of Instagram users use the platform daily and over 80% of them use it at least once a week. This means that Instagram and its features like stories have increased the number of touchpoints where a large part of the global population can be interacted with (Villaespesa & Wowkowych, 2020, p. 3). Another benefit that Instagram stories had in comparison to Snapchat was the network of users. While the former takes the advantage of the fact that hundreds of people can watch temporal contents, the latter is felt more intimate since stories can be sent only privately. In addition to this, the stories section on Instagram is placed just right at the top of the app in order to make people watch it as soon as they open the platform. This new trend has increased the time spent on the photo-sharing app. In fact, before the growing popularity of the ephemeral dimension, Instagram recorded an average of time of 28 minutes spent by its members. Nowadays, thanks to the stories format smartphones users spend more than 53 minutes on Instagram, which represents almost the double (Villaespesa & Wowkowych, 2020).

Social media sites have become a fundamental tools for online consumption and distribution of contents due to their convenience and ease to use. The centrality of social media and this new ephemeral tendency has contributed to replace the traditional mass logic with a social media documentation approach. This has changed our routine, filling out all the empty spaces in our everyday life enabling users to share more pieces of their ordinary life. Extensive research has demonstrated that when individuals have positive emotions they are more likely to share content and interact with others. In addition, the action of sharing positive emotions increase the overall mood effects of an experience, in particular when the audience is excited in turn. In other words, the act of sharing triggers a positive echo among participants, increasing the level of satisfactions. (Lambert et al., 2012). In this way, this course is feeding more and more a constant connection between the real and virtual world which has been facilitated by the advent of the smartphones.

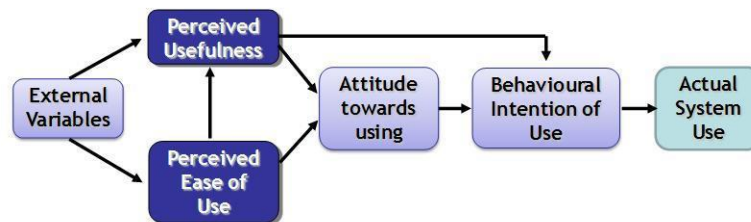
### 2.2.1 Ephemeral content under a technology acceptance model perspective

The ephemeral dimension in the social media field is a technological revolution that has changed how people communicate. The technology acceptance model, which is largely credited to Fred David (1989) is designed to analyze the user attitudes toward the adoption of new technologies, in this case, the Instagram stories. The actual system use is the final stage in the model, where people use the technology. The behavioral intention is affected by the attitude, which represents the general impression of the technology. The model states that attitude is measured based on two factors:

- Perceived usefulness
- Perceived ease of use

While the former represents the degree to which a person finds a specific technology useful for what they want, the latter refers to the degree of the efforts that a person has to put to use this new technology (Figure 2.3.). The more these two components are highly perceived, the more a person will be willing to accept and use the new technology.

Figure 2.3. The Technology acceptance model



Source: Fred David (1989)

The model was used as the basis for the research carried out by Vincent Valiant Coa and Johan Setiawan (2017) to understand the general factors that affect the interest in using Instagram stories. The two variables that were used to analyze the ephemeral dimension adoption were: perceived enjoyment and gratification and social presence

The two researchers defined the perceived enjoyment and gratification as the positive psychological experience that a person has towards Instagram stories. The more a person

engage with Instagram stories the higher is the level of enjoyment. On the other hand, the social presence was defined as the degree to which a communication technology promotes the communication and the interpersonal relationship during interactions among users. Digital content such as images and videos enhance this component. Indeed, according to the social presence theory (Ogara, Koh, & Prybutok, 2014), face to face communication has the greatest social presence followed by videos and audio, while the text is considered to have the lowest impact in terms of social presence. More specifically, social presence is enhanced by three main factors: user experience, the richness of technology and social influence. The former is the familiarity that users gain regarding a specific technology, which allows them to connect and communicate with other members. The second is associated with the ability to express meanings and personalness through non-written communication. The latter is the extent to which an individual make real changes to his feelings and behavior as a result of the interactions with other users.

The result that emerged from the study is that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and perceived enjoyment and gratification influence the attitude toward using the Instagram stories which, in turn, impact on the intention to use this ephemeral dimension. (Coa & Setiawan, 2017) Indeed, this new feature enhances the entertainment of the users raising feeling of love and towards the application. Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use significantly affect each other working, in turn, as mediators which enhance the enjoyment and gratification of the users, resulting in a higher attitude toward the usage of the application. Meanwhile, social presence affects indirectly the behavioral intention to use Instagram Stories, with ease of use and perceived usefulness as mediator. It is important to notice as the authors point out that the two external variables influence positively each other increasing the communication with the other members, thus enjoying more this new feature.

Based on this study, it is possible to observe as the easy interface of the Instagram application plus the enjoyment and gratification gained from this new feature, which alleviates the pressure of posting amazing photos, is remarkably accepted by Instagram users. This result finds confirmation in the great success that the application gained after the introduction of the ephemeral dimension.

## **2.2.2 The motivations that nudge people to use Instagram Stories**

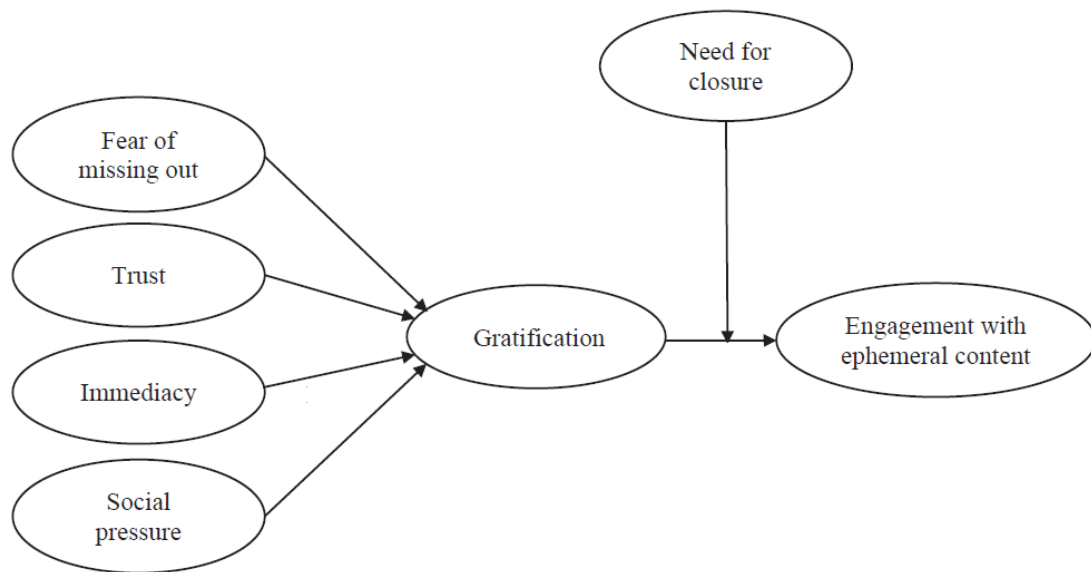
After having analyzed the positive adoption of the ephemeral content by Instagram users, it is important to understand the hidden motivations that nudge individuals to use this new method of communication. The uses and gratification theory formulated by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973) is an approach employed to delineate why and how people actively use specific media to satisfy specific needs. According to this theory, people are media users who use particular channels to obtain gratification and the ephemeral content provides multiple opportunities for information and interaction for the attention of the users, given the practical restriction and limited time. Under this lens, some socio-psychological mechanisms were identified as an explanation of the user's adoption of ephemeral content in the social media field (Chen & Cheung, 2019):

- Fear of missing out: it is defined as a need of belonging that individuals feel like a fundamental human motivation (Lai, Altavilla, Ronconi, & Aceto, 2016). In other words, the fear of missing out is driven by the desire to keep up with what other people are doing and it is conceived as a motivation. In particular, this feeling is generated by social exclusion which can cause an actual or potential disturbance between people or groups and can result in technology addiction called "social pain". People that experience this social exclusion tend to put in place actions of surveillances to monitor the environment for social interactions. This increases media use to satisfy their absence of inclusion in the community. Because Instagram Stories last for a specific period of time, this may lead to raising user's fear of missing out. Indeed, people that miss this type of content can feel to be excluded from their social circle. In response to this need, they will intensify the use of this feature to catch up with other members, spending more time on the social platform.
- Trust: it is defined as the willingness of a person (trustor) to let another person (performer) execute an action that could have an important consequence to the trustor. Individuals are likely to enter in a relationship with another individual when it is perceived to be trustworthy and beneficial. Because the communication in the digital world is not face to face, the establishment of a mutual trust relationship is

more difficult compared to the real world. Indeed, photos and videos can be saved or shared against the will of the person who posted it, resulting in actions of dissemination. This component works as a basis for the exchange of information among members in a virtual community. According to the nature of the Instagram stories, the content is not permanent, thus alleviating the pressure concerning privacy. The more trust users can gain from the use of ephemeral content, the higher is the level of gratification.

- **Immediacy:** The development of social media has sped up the way in which people interact, placing immediacy as the distinctive element in this new two-way of communication. More precisely, it is defined as the desire of the user for quick access, interaction with content and understanding. In addition to this, media richness theory suggest that immediacy increase the sense of involvement and the feeling of social presence. In doing so, the ephemeral dimension has created an authentic, lively and exciting experience improving the user experience. As a result, users can share small moments of their daily lives bringing the communication as it were face to face. In other words, the barriers of the digital environment are reduced leaving space to a faster communication which leads individuals to exchange information more spontaneously. Moreover, given the transitory nature of this new dimension, constantly consuming content could be essential to users that want to keep up with the others in order to achieve a sense of gratification.
- **Social pressure:** the constituting component of social media is the connectivity which can play an important role in influencing the users. Social pressure is defined as the need for popularity in a social media environment. Comments, like and share represent a measure of popularity which users may feel to accumulate to obtain satisfaction. The high expectation of being popular can increase the perceived stress when users are not considered. This could lead individuals to use Instagram stories to release this social pressure. In addition to this, due to the nature of ephemeral content people might urge to keep on checking for new updates increasing the frequency of use of this new tool. On the other hand, the repetitive use of Instagram stories to alleviate social pressure may result in a decrease of pleasure obtained from the use of temporal content. In other words, social pressure could negatively affect the gratification obtained by the use of ephemeral content.

Figure 2.4. motivations that nudge people to use ephemeral content



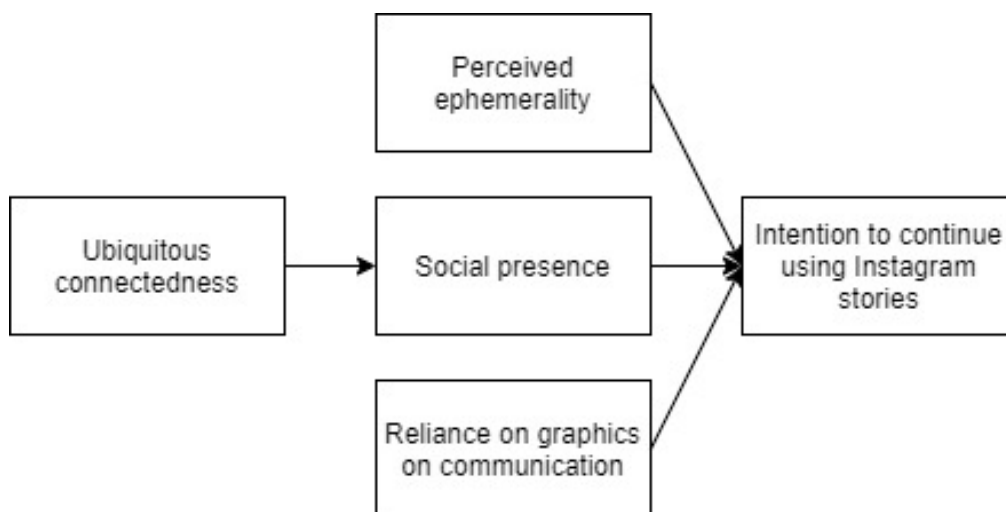
Source: Chen & Cheung (2019)

These motivational factors stimulate the adoption of Instagram stories obtaining gratification from using it, which further raise user's engagement generating enjoyment. The user's engagement is the final outcome resulting from an interactive and creative user's experience with the ephemeral content (Figure 2.4.). More specifically, online behavior is the combination of three layers of engagement: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The former refers to the thoughts of the user while consuming ephemeral content. The second refers to the emotional attachment of the user to ephemeral content. The latter is the extent to which users interact with the ephemeral content. Consequently, this may lead users to become addicted to this new feature. In addition to this, the need for closure could affect the decision-making process of user's that engage with ephemeral content. The need for closure refers to the motivations to find an answer to uncertain situations. This motivation is increased by the perceived benefit of obtaining closure, for example, higher control of the situation and predictability. Indeed, individuals with a high level of need for closure feel uncomfortable with an unstable and ambiguous situation. As a matter of fact, the need for closure incentivize activities with the result of achieving stability that is persistent to the extent to which users are attracted by the use of temporal content. This characteristic may lead individuals to create and consume content to gain a high level of predictability due to the fact content last for only

a specific period of time. In other words, the more a person, with a high level of need for closure, watches Instagram stories, the more he can compensate for the loss of control of the situation given by the temporal characteristic.

The next step, after having analyzed the motivations that nudge people to use Instagram stories, is to understand the elements that feed the intention to continue to use this new Instagram feature. A study conducted by Kircova, Pinarbaşı, and Köse (2020) identified perceived ephemerality, reliance on graphics on communication and social presence as the main drivers of the intention to use Instagram stories (Figure 2.5.). Perceived ephemerality refers to the individual’s perception that content is available only for a limited period of time. Reliance on graphics on communication refers to the usage of pictures, GIFs, edit possibility etc. that make stories enjoyable. Finally, social presence, as it has been defined before, is the capability of a media to establish a connection among users. Moreover, the authors underline the importance of the ubiquitous connectedness made possible to the advent of the smartphones which allow users to stay connected wherever they are. A more general result was found by Hsiu-Chia Ko (2019) who discovered that individuals continue to use Instagram stories to satisfy their need for entertainment.

Figure 2.5. Elements that nudge people to continue to use Instagram stories



Source: Kircova, Pinarbaşı, and Köse (2020)



### **2.3 User generated content on Instagram**

Thanks to the advantages of the technology, particularly smartphone, people have access to a wide selection of applications, social networks and messaging services which allow users to communicate thoughts at almost any time. The constant connectivity has important implications on how people experience their everyday life: mobile users are increasing inspired to generate content by expressing what they are doing, feeling, thinking thus providing a constant real-time record of their experiences. On the other hand, marketers encourage people to produce content to stimulate individuals to communicate with each other. For instance, companies provide branded hashtags to nudge people to promote and share their experiences regarding their meal, stay, hotel etc. The ease of use the smartphone and its versatility confirm that the creation of content is extremely frequent during experiences. Indeed, 48% of tourists check into a location, 70% update their status on social networks and, above all, 72% of people post photos while on vacation (Smart Insights, 2017). As a proof of evidence, it has been reported by a research conducted by Diehl, Zauberger, and Barasch (2016) that one of the major activities performed on social networks is to take photos and post them on platforms like Instagram and Facebook. The authors explain that the actions of taking photos and share it with friends increase the feeling of acceptance and support from the community, thus enhancing the level of enjoyment of the experience. A similar result was also found by Tonietto and Barasch (2020) who discovered that generating content leads people to be more immersed, increasing the sensation that the time is passing quickly. This increased immersion and accelerated time perception have positive consequences on people's enjoyment.

Having said that, it is understandable as user-generated content (UGC) is considered any content like videos, images, text etc. created by users. On the other hand, because of the popularity of social networks, marketers also create content (MGC) which aim to provide and to promote information regarding the brand or the products. For instance, marketers regularly updated content posting photos or videos to attract people using Instagram or Facebook. In addition to this, companies use social networks to keep a constant relationship with the audience and to communicate directly with their users, thus allowing them to ask direct questions. The first difference between the two types of content is the level of

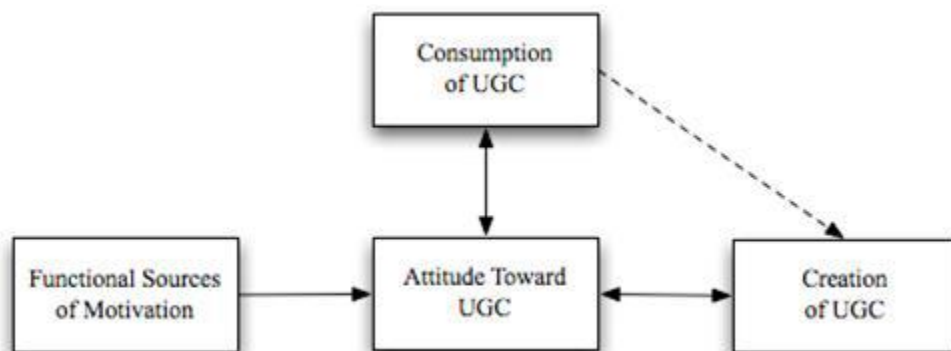
completeness. Indeed, while companies always tend to provide complete information regarding products or services, the content created by users sometimes lack professionalism. On the other hand, the second difference is the level of trustworthiness. Because UGC are created by users, opinions are released without any filter increasing the level of credibility which results in a rapid proliferation of electronic word of mouth (eWOM). As a confirmation of this, a research conducted by Choi & Lee (2017) showed that UGC has more influence in terms of emotional and cognitive customer's trust. The former refers to the user's confidence to rely on the others reliability and competence, while the latter refers to the extent to which users feel safe and comfortable. As a matter of facts, users believes that marketers overstated the benefits neglecting the weaknesses of their products to persuade costumers, whereas they perceive that other users have no motivations for false representation.

With the introduction of the ephemeral dimension in the social media field, the production of content by users has sharply increased. Unlike traditional permanent content, ephemeral content is easy to create due to no pressure for careful planning, editing or staging. Moreover, Instagram stories offer a wide range of tool which encourage the level of engagement. The temporal dimension combined with all these features creates a big space of experimentations for users which is translated in more time spent creating content (Hsiao, 2020). The generation of content encompasses different actions such as taking and upload videos and photos, generating questions and polls, creating live stories and use other features to enrich the content (Israfilzade & Babayev, 2020). This represents the ultimate level of engagement among the social media activities performed by users. The motivations that nudge users to produce content are personal identity, empowerment, social identity, interaction and entertainment (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011). Personal identity is the main driver of the generation of content which, in turn, include three sub-motivations: self-presentation, self-expression and self-assurance. Self-presentation refers to people who provide others with images and videos of their personality. For instance, individuals that picture themselves while doing sports activities to show they are in fit and proud of themselves. Self-expression concerns the use of brands to shape their identity and personality: who they are and what they stand for. Finally, self-assurance refers to people that post pictures and videos to gain the support and recognition from the audience. Similar results were also found by Daugherty, Eastin, and Bright (2008), who identified ego-defensive and social functional sources as the

main contributors that drive individuals to generate UGC. Indeed, the ego-defensive function recognizes that people try to minimize doubts about themselves through self-expression on social networks, while the social function nudges people to spend more time on social platforms to experience a sense of community. The second motive is empowerment, which refers to the capability of people to influence others. For example, people display their enthusiasm for a brand or product, enjoying convincing others that it is worth doing or using. Thirdly, social identity refers to the production of content to create a certain reputation among friends and in the community, while social interaction relates to the need of establishing connections with other members. Finally, the last motivation that leads individuals to generate Instagram stories is entertainment, which means that people create them to unwind the pressure of everyday life or to relax. In addition to this, entertainment is also a means of killing time to avoid getting bored.

The act of generating content therefore depends indirectly on previous exposure to UGC and the immediacy of the situation that involves its creation. In doing so, previous exposure to UGC, in addition to the sources of motivations explained above, creates a positive attitude towards the generation of UGC. In other words, the more users consume UGC, the more they are involved and inspired to generate new content (Figure 2.6.)

Figure 2.6. Users attitude towards the creation of UGC



Source: Daugherty, Eastin, and Bright (2008)

More precisely, at the base of consumption there are two main reasons: seek information and entertainment. The former motivation encompasses, in turn, three sub-motives: surveillance, knowledge and inspiration. Surveillance stands for observing the social environment to

monitor what is going online among the other members. Knowledge denotes people consuming content to profit from other people like friends, influencers, experts and brands. Finally, inspiration stands for people who are seeking new ideas.

More broadly, a study conducted by Ghose and Han (2011) highlights in particular some dynamics regarding the generation of the content by mobile users. Indeed, the authors emphasize that exist two opposed trends. From one side, the temporal and economical constraints, connected to the use of the smartphones, induce the users to make a selection between the activities of creation and consumption of content so that among the two functions there would be a reverse relationship: as the temporal and economic resources increase in favors of the creation of content the others employed in support of the consumption decrease and vice versa. On the other side, the authors explain as there is an opposite tendency: high levels of content consumption would correspond to high levels of content creation. This is justified by the greater sensation of belonging to the community, thus a higher stimulus to engage in the social platform like celebrities and influencers.

### **2.3.1 User type on the social media environment**

Based on the previous discussion if we zoom out, analyzing the entire social media environment, is possible to generally classify users depending on their level of engagement. The social technographic ladder, developed by Forrester, groups the users into six niches (Keep it social, 2016):

- **Creators:** they are identified as the most active participants on the social media landscape. This type of user upload videos, photos or music composition or other content.
- **Conversationalist:** this group fall at the same time in the group just mentioned, but only to facilitate dialogues and communication. They want to express themselves or start the conversation regarding a chosen topic or asking the audience what they think about something in particular.
- **Critics:** this group is the opposite of the conversationalist. This group is essential to maintain a high level of interaction.

- Collectors: they are those who use online resources to absorb information, get inspired by the content created and posted by others or simply keep up with the virtual world.
- Joiners: this group refers to those people that are present on social media just to maintain their profile and their relationship circle. They also collect information but not at the same extent as the previous group
- Spectator: this group refers to who are less active in the social world. They are present just to get information regarding friends, celebrity or specific topics. This group do not create a post or upload content.
- Inactives: because nowadays the vast majority of people are present online, this group represent those who are not interested in participating neither owning a profile, they just roam doing something else online.

Having said that, the social technographic ladder give a general understanding of the different behaviour of the users in the social media enviroment, where the incativies and spectetor represent the minimum level of intensity and the creators the utimate level of engagement. In accordance with this calssification and the previous discussion, the engagement degree of Instagram users with ephemeral content can be classified into three different levels of intensity (Israfilzade & Babayev, 2020):

- Consuming: it encompasses activities like watching stories, reading stories and exploring new features and accounts. It represents the minimum level of activity
- Contribution: it includes activities like answering questions and polls, replays to stories and sharing content that belongs to others. It represents the middle level of activity
- Creating: it comprehends actions like taking and upload videos and photos, editing content, creating question and polls, creating live stories and use other features to enrich the content. It represents the ultimate level of activity

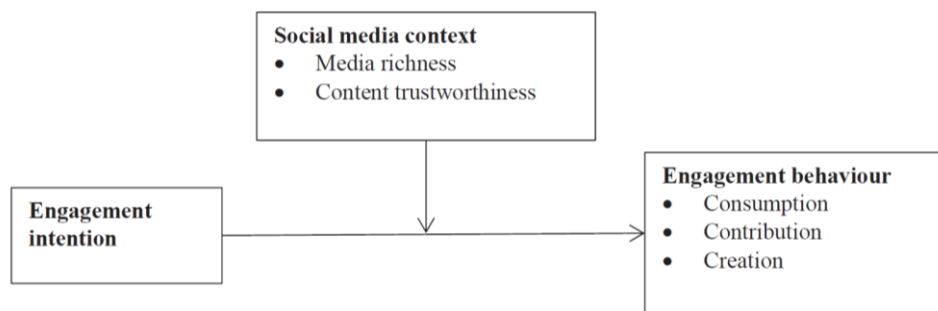
As it is possible to understand the creation level represent the generation of the content by the users (UGC), while the underlying levels work, as we said before, as indirect functions that increase the attitude towards the production of content. In other words, the UGC production can be identified as a system where the inpunts are represented by the sources of motivatiations to generated content plus the indirect effect of the exposure to UGC and the

output is the creation of the content by users (Daugherty, Eastin, and Bright 2008). To complete, regarding the generation of ephemeral content on the Instagram platform, a study made by Israfilzade & Babayev (2020) points out as the action is performed by both younger and older generations.

### **2.3.2 Media richness and trustworthiness as drivers of engagement**

Generally speaking social media engagement behavior include two key elements, namely, social media and engagement behavior. Social media are those platforms which enable the users to consume, contribute and create content, where consumption represents the lowest level of intensity while creation is the ultimate level of engagement.

Figure 2.7. Drivers of engagement behaviour



Source: Cao, Meadows, Wong, & Xia (2020)

As it is possible to understand from the above chart, (Figure 2.7.) there are two factors that shape the social media context and impact on how users behave in the social media field: (Cao, Meadows, Wong, & Xia, 2020):

- Media richness
- Content trustworthiness

Media richness stands for the level of information a media si capable to generate. Four factors affect the richness of a medium. The feedback capability of media, and so the ability of a media to respond quickly. The number of channels used, for example, visual or auditory. The source of information the media can provide and the language variety which can be verbal or non-verbal (e.g. text or photos). For instance, Instagram due to its high-quality visual content

appears to make users engage more intensively compared to traditional social media form. In doing so, media richness, and so the context in which a message is conveyed, play an important role in determining the level of engagement of users. On the other hand, trustworthiness is of vital importance to establish a credible social network site where users have the freedom to publish content

Based on the study conducted by Cao, Meadows, Wong, & Xia (2020) emerged that the richness level of a social media positively affects the consumer behaviour engagement at all the three levels: consumption, contribution and creation. Media richness contributes to enjoyment and social interactions with other members that share common interests in the social media environment, thus increasing the content productions. In other words, the relationship between engagement intention and actions is stronger when the medium is richer rather than poorer. The additional finding is that trustworthiness affects only consumption and contribution. Indeed, it encourages people to engage in interactive activities such as “follow”, “share” and “comment”.

## **CHAPTER 3 *Sharing the travel experience on Instagram***



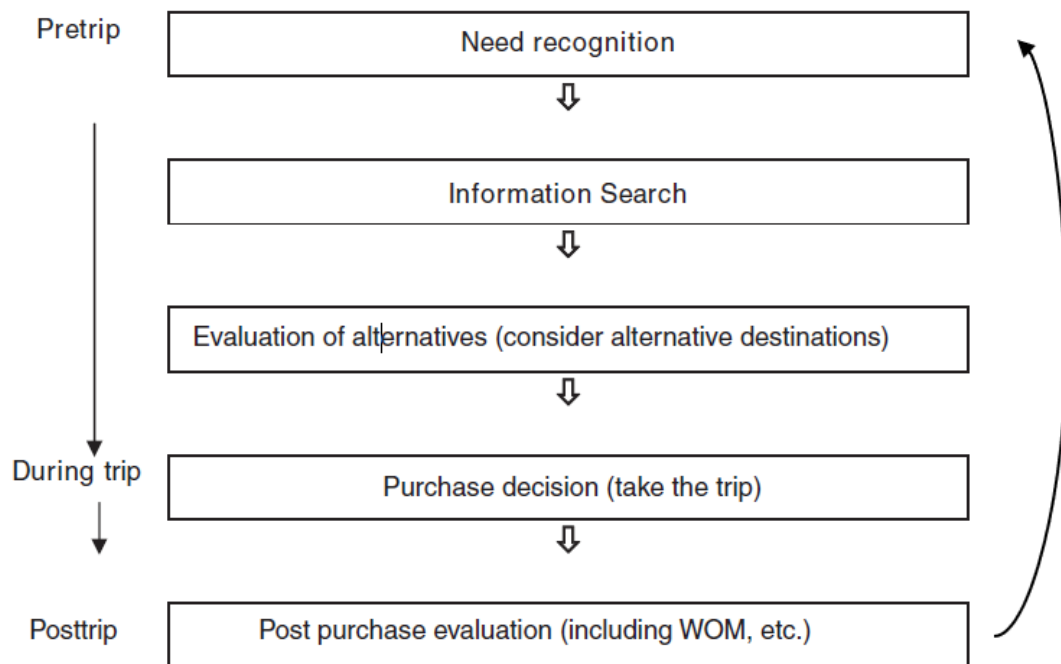
### **3.0 The role of social media in online travel information**

The constant technological progress and the advent of the Internet have changed how people plan their trips but also the way in which they share their experiences with family and friends. In particular, mobile technologies constitute the key role in taking the social dimension of Web 2.0 and social networks to an ultimate mobile level, allowing the experiences to be enhanced, co-created and intensified everywhere and anytime. Based on the research conducted by Neuhofer, Buhalis, and Ladkin (2013) there are 4 levels of tourist experience: conventional, co-creation, technology and fully technology experience. These four stages are described by an increase in the technology usage which results, in turn, in a higher level of co-creation content by the users in conjoint with companies. More specifically, the conventional level is the situation where the company creates a prefabricated experience and delivers it to passive tourists. At this stage the user's level of involvement, interaction and participation is relatively low and the technology does not constitute an integral part neither in the consumption nor in the production of content by the users. The second level is the situation where experiences are not passively staged but rather actively shaped and created by tourists in collaboration with the companies. However, co-creation lacks in the integration of technology. The third level is determined by a high level of technology use which remains predominant company-centric due to the low involvement level of tourists. Nevertheless, technologies are adopted by the companies for internal facilitation of delivering content to the audience. Finally, the fully-technology level represents the situation where the tourist is highly involved, actively participating and co-creating through the use of the technology which leads to a higher value of production for other users and companies. In other words, the higher is the technological development the higher is the rate of co-creation of content. This has led to an enormous amount of content created by users so that the social media environment is becoming increasingly important in the tourism industry. In doing so, travellers share more and more content online which become a source of inspirations for other users. In this field, previous research showed that social networks usually provide richer information rather than other sources, such as official websites or media-sharing sites, electing the former as the predominate tool for sharing travel experiences among friends and others (Wang, Kirillova, & Lehto, 2016). This enables any individuals to post their own content, opinions, videos, audios or photos to the Web for other users to see and respond to. The

sharing activities relate to holidays attributes such as, attractions, weather conditions, prices, restaurants or may include emotions and thoughts. In doing so, sharing travel information, stories, experiences are becoming a preferred information channel in the tourism industry.

More specifically, taking a social media perspective the tourism industry can be seen through two dimensions: before travel and after travel. In the pre-travel phase, tourists use social media to seek information when making travel plans. People usually find information about different destinations based on electronic word of mouth in the social environment. The creation of content by the users and the proliferation of the eWOM are credible sources of information that are believed from friends and family above all the other forms of advertising. Indeed, the reliability of an experience shared on social media highly influence future travel intention. On the other hand, in the post-travel phase, this form of communication continue to be generated as tourists generally keep on sharing their travel experiences on social networks. Tourists share their experiences in many different forms such as texts, images, videos and audios enjoying social interaction with friends and, at the same time, generating insightful online recommendations to increase their utilitarian beliefs. In doing so, the advent of the Internet has reshaped the decision-making process of people adding new touchpoints and sources of inspiration during the initial phase of consideration. The user-generated content has the potential to influence the viewer's decision at any of the key stages. For example, the images and videos that pop-ups on social networks posted by other users act positively on the thoughts of potential tourists. Indeed, the empowerment of users and Internet versatility allows individuals to indirectly consider further options while browsing online, which otherwise they would never take into consideration. In this way, the decision-making process is a more circular journey rather than linear like in the traditional funnel model (Court, Elzinga, Mulder, & Vetvik, 2018). In fact, the post-trip phase does not represent the end of the travel planning process, but a source of consideration and inspiration from the other users which could trigger possible travel intentions (Figure 3.1.)

Figure: 3.1. Travel decision-making process



Source: Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, & Buultjens, (2009)

As a consequence of the advent of the Internet and technological evolution, tourism has started to involve different mobile media-based applications and smart technologies which, combined with a gradually easier and cheaper online access to the smart destination, enable the users to share their memorable experiences also during their trips. As a result of this, some travellers' behaviors are moving from the pre-trip and post-trip phases to the on-going trip stage. This means that people use their smartphone while on vacation to document their activities. In fact, as reported by Sheldon and Bryant (2016) there is a positive relationship between high levels of social activity (travelling, going to sporting events, visiting friends, etc.) and being motivated to use social networks as a mean of documentation. This new tendency has made possible also thanks to the introduction of the ephemeral dimension in the social platforms which allows users to share instant moments of their life. This feature shifts the attention from the pre- and post-travel phase to the on-going trip phase due to the fact content can be shared instantly and only for a specific period of time. This has led people to share the on-going experiences and immortalize small live moments that otherwise would get lost, with a result in the increase of users generated content.

### **3.1 Destination image on social media**

Social media and the advance of the Internet are changing how information about experiences and leisure travel are disseminated. Social media enables users to digitize and share online opinions, experimental moments and emotions far more widely compared to the past. In doing so, virtual communities are being created allowing new forms of social interactions. A tourism experience can be defined as “an individual’s subjective evaluation and undergoing (affective, cognitive and behavioural) of events related to his/her tourist activities that begin before, during and after the trip” (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Experiences are subjective and depend on how people perceive and react to specific tourist places such as destinations, attractions, accommodations etc. The sharing of experiences includes not only knowledge-related aspects such as facts that are related to travel attributes but also communicating emotions, fantasies and imaginations about future travel experiences. In this way, it is possible to understand how tourism is deeply related to image-making media. Indeed, while information sharing is commonly related to narrative and textual communication practices, the sharing of experiences is particularly acknowledging the creation and sharing of visual and audio content (Lo & McKercher, 2015). Photographs and videos are increasingly assuming the role of traditional postcards. As a result, social media, and in particular those based on video and photos sharing like Instagram, provide new channels for the production and circulations of meaning in tourism experiences and imaginations. Moreover, web-based platforms allow for “real-time” recording and sharing of travel experiences and consequently add to advances personal virtual identities.

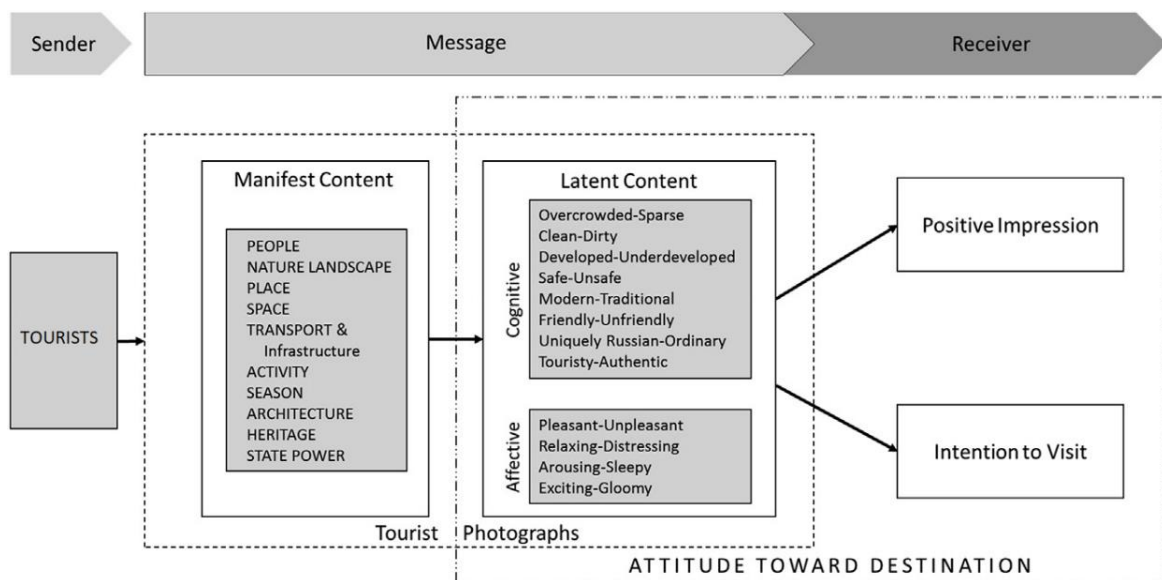
Photography and travel are connected intrinsically. Photographs both shape and document the travel experience and also provide many opportunities for tourists to share their experience with others. They act as a form of aide-memoire and visual communication tool which people use to capture what is worth to remember as evidence of “I have been there” (Lo & McKercher, 2015). Indeed, images enable tourists to transform intangible experiences into something tangible. In this way, images play a paramount role because tourism is a unique visual experience and, at the same time, because photographs tell desired stories about places.

One of the most radical changes brought by technological progress is the introduction of network media, which facilitates the aggregation of information from a huge array of sources that allow an enormous number of individuals to join virtual networks and gain valuable knowledge about places visited by other community members. This development has had and will continue to have an important and indirect effect on the promotion of tourist destinations. In addition to this, many users now see this type of content as more reliable, and unbiased than material posted by business organizations. The advent of a wide range of online photo sharing media has democratized the image creation and dissemination process. The case of Justin is mentioned frequently as a positive result. Indeed, Justin was a tourist who visited the Aegean Sea for the first time and posted online photographs on a popular website and within a few days he produced up to 60,000 visits per day (Lin & Huang, 2006). Further studies reveal that 89% of pleasure travelers take photographs and 41% post them online, confirming that social networks are one of the most used platforms where to share image destinations (Lo, McKercher, Lo, Cheung, & Law, 2011). In turn, this type of media generates the social need for the visual consumption of foreign places through photography, which constantly reminds people of the ordinariness of their everyday life.

Image destination is defined as the sum of beliefs, ideals and impressions that an individual has of a destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). In other words, the destination image is meant to represent and simplify knowledge and information associated with a place from the point of view of an individual. Taking as a base the sender-message-receiver communication framework, in the travel context the senders are tourists who take photographs while they travel and then post them on social networks or media sharing sites. Posted photographs, sometimes accompanied with title, description and tags represent a projected destination image which is decoded by the receiver at the end of the communication flow and, as such, contribute to generate a positive perception of the place represented or attitudes towards the destination. In doing so, user-generated photographs influence the perception of tourist destinations. More precisely, the message, which is the photograph, has two types of content: manifest and latent (Figure 3.2.). The former, as the name suggests, are all the signs embedded in the image that are decoded at their face value, such as an image of a natural landscape, people in traditional clothes, buildings etc. In other words, they represent the surface structure of the photograph which refers to the observable features that can be

recorded with a high level of reliability. In contrast, the latter is concerned with what the image signifies beyond the pure appearance alluding to a meaning that lies outside of the particular picture. For instance, the impression of a destination being relaxing is a possible result of reading the latent content of a photograph.

Figure 3.2. Manifest and latent content



Source: Kim & Stepchenkova (2015)

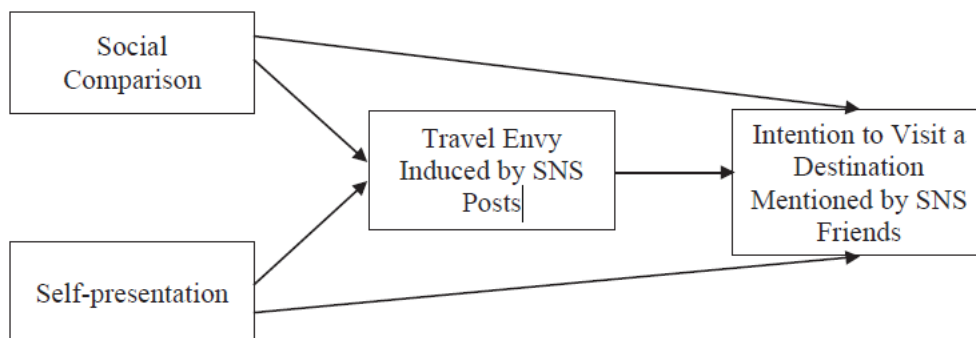
Regarding the latent component of a photograph, the destination image holds at least two different components: cognitive and affective. The cognitive factors refer to the belief and thoughts that are created in the mind of the viewer while the affective ones refer to the feelings, mood and emotions evoked by the picture. For example, crowdedness, cleanliness, level of economic development, the extent of commercialization, personal safety, friendliness, level of modernity and uniqueness fall in the category of the cognitive sphere. On the other hand, pleasant - unpleasant, arousing – sleepy, relaxing -distressing and exiting – gloomy represent the affective dimension. (Kim & Stepchenkova, 2015) Each of these components contains functional and psychological characteristics which influence the behaviour and perception of individuals toward travel destinations, resulting in positive impressions and intention to visit the destination. The research conducted by Kim & Stepchenkova (2015), who studied the effects of destination image related to Russia among different groups of Americans and Korean, demonstrated that images featuring tourist spaces

were associated with cleanliness, safety and friendliness as well as generating feelings of pleasantness excitement and relaxation which confirm their effect of image destination as a stimulus to visit new places, especially if seen for the first time, and positive impression toward travel destinations.

### **3.1.1 How user – generated content influence people in the tourism field**

The travel information produced by users on social network sites plays a crucial role in raising people’s awareness and influencing the intention to visit specific destinations and their behaviours. In doing so, social media content evokes envy sensations towards travel content posted by other users. Envy is defined as a negative emotional response to another person who experiences a superior position in which the envier desires the advantages that the envied person lacks. In the travel industry envy arises when a person sees photographs or videos of a destination from their friend’s tourism trips. The model developed by Hajli, Wang, and Tajvidi (2018) highlights how social comparison and self-presentation trigger envy induced by social networks sites in the tourism domain (Figure 3.3.)

Figure 3.3. Social comparison and self-presentation as drivers of envy



Source: Hajli, Wang, and Tajvidi (2018)

Social comparison is the process of thinking about information regarding one or more people in relation to the self. In doing so, people tend to evaluate their situation or status comparing themselves to others before marking positive or negative judgments. In addition to this, envy may be evoked when individuals compare themselves unfavorably with others and are

specifically keenly felt among people under 30 years of age. In other words, it is evident as the feeling of travel envy on social networks may be evoked by this social comparison preference which, in turn, trigger the desire to visit a destination previously mentioned by friends on social platforms. On the other hand, self-presentation is defined as the value that users derive from being able to improve their self-concept in comparison to others, using online social networks. Indeed, when users receive social information such as posts, photos, newsfeeds from other people, individuals tend to relate this user-generated content to themselves, and in some cases, may feel envious and thus change their behaviour to enhance their reactive self-presentation. This means that when users experience envy of their friend's activities and lifestyle on social networks, they are willing to improve their own status based on the belief that they can reach a better social position. In other words, self-presentation may evoke a desire to visit a travel destination when users perceive envy induced by travel information on social networks from other friends. Having said that, it is understandable as these two sources, social-comparison and self-presentation may alter the travel destination perception of online users influencing individuals to visit a specific travel destination.

Social influence is a powerful concept that has the potential to influence people decisions, changing their mindset even after they have made rational choices. In particular, social influence by friends and family is stronger when making decisions such as leisure travel. Indeed, leisure travel is usually that kind of choice that is pre-planned and discussed with friends and family to gain insights and recommendations. Nowadays, there is evidence of the growing participation and influence of virtual communities which increase the social influence, altering one's perceptions and actions. In this way, social media has fundamentally reshaped how people receive travel information and plan their trips. Previous research demonstrated that most people are keen to visit a destination because they were inspired by travel-related content showing their friends' journey on social networks and a significant proportion decide to go travelling out of envious thoughts (Sedera, Lokuge, Atapattu, & Gretzel, 2017). Similar results were also found by Pan, Rasouli, and Timmermans (2021) who discovered that the destination images from social networks allow people to update their existing knowledge towards travel destination, through which their choice behaviour is finally influenced. In addition to this, the authors found that the influence effect is higher when users have never come across the destination image before. The magnitude of influence of



destination image from social platforms depends on the proprieties of social networks. Moreover, people who use intensively social media are more likely to receive better UGC (Narangajavana et al., 2017). As it is possible to understand, social influence is defined as a force that creates change in an individual's feelings, thoughts, emotions, behaviour which result due to interactions with other individuals. This kind of alteration happens through, compliance, internalization and identification. In the travel industry, social influence can be argued through two primary positions. More precisely, social influence is stronger through word-of-mouth communications and when people are situated in unfamiliar situations. Those two characteristics were observed to be present in the travel and tourism environment, thus making social influence adequately prevalent. In addition to this, the influence of word-of-mouth has become stronger with the proliferation of social media. These platforms have made the interaction (and thus the influence) much stronger and frequent among individuals in the social circles. Further, social circle are becoming wider thanks to the use of social media. In doing so, these tools facilitate a fluid many to many communication processes also between people that do not necessarily share any social ties.

### **3.2 User - generated content as a source of electronic word of mouth**

UGC shares its many characteristics with the concept of electronic WOM. As most tourism products are intangible, people rely on others who have first-hand experiences to receive relevant information (Wang, Kirillova, & Lehto, 2016). In this sense, social media operates as an important source of eWOM. UGC created by tourists takes a variety of forms with the predominance of visual content in the tourism industry. Indeed, according to Munar and Jacobsen (2014) tourists work as virtual mediators between potential tourists and destinations by creating different visual and narrative content. Electronic word of mouth refers to a one-to-many communication types which messages are perceived as non-commercial and employs the use of digital platforms (Luarn, Huang, Chiu, & Chen, 2016). In doing so, eWOM is one of the most influential factors amongst the vast array of information sources people can turn to when panning the next travel experience.

Different factors determine user engagement in electronic word of mouth (Chu & Kim, 2011):

- Tie strength: it refers to the power of the bond between members of a network. Social ties can be classified as weak or strong. Weak ties are often among weaker and less personal relationships which are composed of a wide set of colleagues and acquaintances that facilitate the process of information seeking on different topics. On the other hand, strong ties, such as friends and family, represent stronger relationships that are within an individual's network and can provide emotional and relevant support. From a macro-level perspective (flow of communication across groups) weak ties allow information to be disseminated and spread among distinct groups assuming a crucial bridging function. At the micro-level (flow within small groups) strong ties are more likely to be activated for the flow of referral behaviour. For example, personal and sensitive information is more likely to be shared through strong ties than weak ones. In this way, strong ties exert a more significant impact at the individual and small-group level, while the connective characteristic of social networks allow weak ties to amplify their potential influence by extending user's personal networks to other groups.
- Trust: it refers to the willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom another individual has confidence. Trust plays a crucial role in information exchange and knowledge integration, as it allows users to justify and evaluate their decisions. It is considered an essential element for information sharing in virtual communities. In this sense, when connections are perceived to be more credible than unknown sources users tend to consider more the information received. With the procedure of mutual agreement to become friends and join each other social networks, users may increase the credibility of their contact and inspire a high level of social trust. In addition to this, the established trust may extend to other contacts in the network in general, thereby improving the overall sense of trust in the environment.
- Interpersonal influence: It is an important factor that plays an important role in influencing the consumer decision-making process. More specifically there are two types of interpersonal influence: normative and informational. The former refers to the tendency to conform to the expectations of others, affect attitude and values. The latter, on the other side, denotes the tendency to accept the information from knowledgeable others and to be guided. Individuals who are subjected to

interpersonal influence may follow the behaviour of other members, thus engaging in eWOM.

In reference to the tourism industry in the social network context Luo and Zhong (2015), found that travel-related eWOM communication finds its explanation in social relationships. Their results showed that eWOM affects the attitude and the decision-making of contacts with strong social ties since strong social ties were conducive to influencing others and building trust, while weak ties were conducive to transferring information and knowledge. More specifically, the authors found that the relationships with strong social ties were less relevant compared to the ones with weak ties suggesting that travel-related eWOM plays a more important role in information dissemination rather than influencing the attitude towards a destination. In addition to this, results found that the communication of travel-related eWOM on social networks is dominated by travel interests. Individuals who love travelling and have common travel experiences were more likely to follow travel-related content in relationship circles on social networks taking a more important role in information dissemination in the travel context.

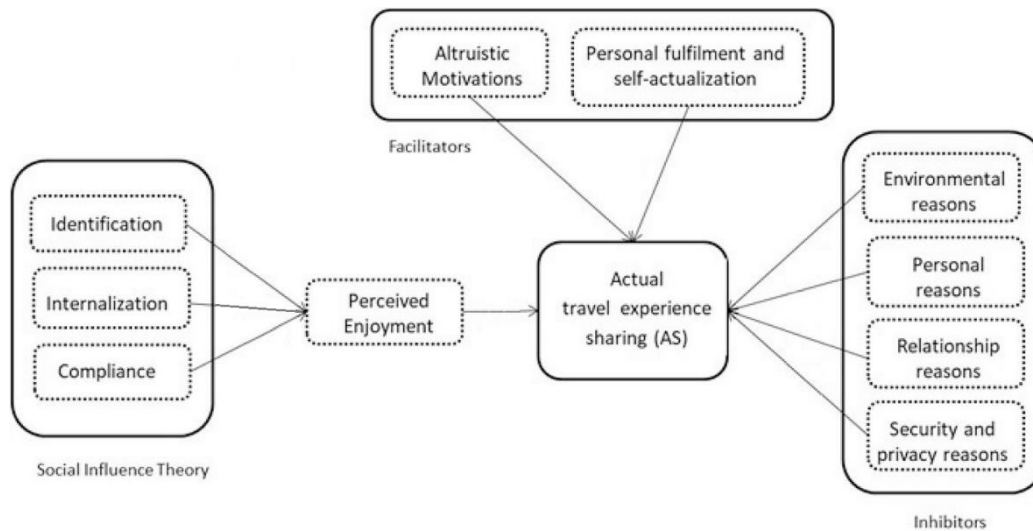
Regarding the destination image, the structural relationship individualized by Chen and Tsai (2007) indicates that trip quality, perceived value and satisfaction are those factors that not only influence the decision-making process of selecting one destination but also condition the after decision-making process. In other words, when the degree of these three components is high, tourists are more willing to recommend their experience generating form of eWOM. In general, the quality of the experience positively influence users to generate content and post them online

### **3.3 Motivations for sharing travel experience on social media**

Shared travel experience on social networks is one of the most important aspects of user's behaviour for travellers as well as tourist organizations. Indeed, through social media websites such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and TripAdvisor users are socially integrated and more engaged in an online environment. In the tourism domain, in which the amount of content generated by users is growing at a dizzying rate, the sharing of knowledge, experiences and interest has proven to be an important source of influence in travel-planning

data. The model proposed by Oliveira, Araujo, and Tam (2020) aims to understand the motivations that nudge individuals to share their experience in the social media environment.

Figure 3.4 Factors that influence the actual travel experience sharing (AS)



Source: Oliveira, Araujo, and Tam (2020)

The framework finds its roots in the application of the social influence theory and the concept of perceived enjoyment (Kelman 1958). Social influence theory is defined as the extent to which a person aspect a behaviour from other people close to him/her. Based on the scheme above it is possible to understand as the authors identified three main factors that influence perceived enjoyment which refers to the degree of enjoyment created by the usage of a specific technology. Identification refers as the adoption of a particular behaviour to maintain a relationship with a group or a person. Internalization is identified as the acceptance of the opinion of others as evidence of the truth and as part of his/her own beliefs and values. Finally, compliance stands for acceptance of influenced behaviour in expectation of approval and favorable feedback (Kang & Schuett, 2013). As a result, these three constructs influence perceived enjoyment that can be defined as the pleasant reaction of social media use which, in turn, have positive effects on the travel experience sharing (Figure 3.4.). In addition to this, there are two categories of factors that contribute (facilitators) and restrict (inhibitors) the motivations for sharing travel experiences in the social media context. In regard to the first category, the authors identified as facilitators the altruistic motivation, personal fulfilment and self-actualization. Indeed, the former relates to people who want to contribute in helping

others to make the right decisions or simply keep in touch with others, whereas personal fulfilment and self-actualization refers to people that share their content on social media to obtain recognition and gratification from friends and the community. Similar results were also found by Munar and Jacobsen (2014) who observed that community and self-centered motivations drive individuals to use social networks to share their travel experiences. In doing so, people gain respect and recognition, increasing social ties and the enjoyment of online activity gaining enhanced cooperation in return. On the other hand, the inhibitors are represented by environmental, personal, relationship and security and privacy reasons. Environment reasons are related to the type of social media used and its features which severely impact on the will of the production of content. Personal reasons are associated with the personal characteristics of the users, for example, introversion or lack of self-esteem, that restrain the users from sharing their experience on social media. Relationship reason represents the fear of making mistakes and low intimacy with other members. Finally, security and privacy relate to the fear of that sharing the content could damage their private information.

Based on the results obtained by Oliveira, Araujo, and Tam (2020) perceived enjoyment was identified as the most important variables in expanding why travellers use social media as a channel to produce UGC related to their travel experiences. In addition to this, people find compatible values on social media and share their content simply for pleasure because it is fun and entertaining above all any other reasons. Behind this, people use social media for personally meaningful and rewarding goals (internalization and identification), while compliance was found to impact negatively on the perceived enjoyment. Self-actualization, altruistic motivation and personal fulfilment confirm to assume the role of facilitators in driving people to share their travel experience on social media. In fact, users seem to want to help other travellers to make the right decisions while planning their next trip. Furthermore, a study conducted by Lambert et al. (2012) suggested that sharing something positive has the potential to improve the mood of the listeners and thus the user sharing may take pleasure in making someone else feel good, lifting the mood of the sharer in return. In addition to this, people share content related to their travel as a way to show off and gain social acceptance, thus receiving a sense of gratification. On the other hand, security and privacy reasons were found to be the most explanatory factors to why people do not want to share their

experiences. Finally, visual content, like photographs and videos were confirmed as the most common preference among social media users in sharing travel experience, reinforcing the saying that a picture is worth a thousand words. This represents another confirmation of the role of the Instagram platform in the tourism industry which stand out in the social media field for its visual focus.

### **3.3.1 The hashtag and its additional informative layer**

Social media facilitate the gathering and sharing of opinions and experiences. In particular, photo-based communication platforms, like Instagram, are more effective than text-based communication platforms in conveying emotional expression, demonstrating presence and exchanging information, especially in the tourism industry, which benefits from visual presentation. In other words, photos contain richer content for sharing travel experiences compared to text.

Regardless of the social network used, usually, photos are enriched by non-space words abbreviations or phrases following the sign # which add a new layer of information to the content. First developed as user-innovation on Twitter, the hashtag can broadly be defined as user-generated content which primarily serves a search, tracking or grouping function. (Erz, Marder, & Osadchaya, 2018). More precisely, users can click on any published hashtag to see and scroll through any pictures that have been posted in connection with a specific hashtag. Importantly, hashtags cover another function beyond their search scope: users can add hashtags to the picture they post to broadcast their content. In addition to this, users can choose between using a generic hashtag or hashtag that are completely new and self-generated. Generally, adding hashtag serves coordinating, connecting and promoting content making this tool a crucial currency which enables visibility to its users. Moreover, hashtags can serve a relationship-enacting function, for instance, by enacting evaluative meaning, such as communicating positive feelings that are assumed to be shared by others or directly addressing other users or pages in a hashtag. From an organizational level, a hashtag indicates a topic of a post which states what the post is about. From a descriptive level hashtags can also highlight a topic and contribute to the relevance of a content t by allowing the poster to make implicit or explicit meanings or contextual assumption accessible to a wider audience.

Further studies emphasize the promotional opportunity in the positive relationship between the number of hashtags and the number of followers. Attractive or popular hashtags in a post lead to a larger audience. The study concluded that the content spreads faster and wider with hashtags compared to those without, resulting in an efficient way to increase content visibility and ensuring that the content reaches a large number of users. As an example of this, a spokesperson for New Zealand's Department of Conservation said that the number of visitors to the Rosy Peak had increased more than the triple between 2016 and 2018 accumulating more than 60,000 photos under the hashtag #RoysPeak on Instagram fueling over-tourism especially to places which are not prepared to handle such flow of visitors (Moss, 2019). In doing so, these new tools represent a strong approach to attract attention to posts enhancing the content readability or accessibility (Ye, Hashim, Baghirov, & Murphy, 2017).

From a user point of view, there are different motivations for the use of the hashtags (Rauschnabel, Sheldon, & Herzfeldt, 2019)

- Amusing: this motivation reflects the desire to be funny, entertaining the followers. Research on humour shows that amusing and entertaining others can serve a different function in communication. For instance, humour can build a sense of community or elicit approval from others. In addition to this, humour can also induce positive feelings and thus trigger attraction and curiosity.
- Designing: it refers to the desire to generate unique and creative content. Social media users want to give more character to their content and make them visually appealing to other users. This motivation is related due to the need for self-presentation, which as previously mentioned is one of the basic motivation which could rise envy towards the content of other users.
- Endorsing: it underlines the hashtag as a support activity to other people, events, brands or, in the travel domain hotel, attractions and restaurants. Additional studies discovered that landscaped, tourism and outdoor activities are the second photo category on the social networks with more related hashtags (Dorsch, 2018).
- Reaching: it refers to the purpose of bringing one's message or opinion to a broader audience and address people interested in a specific topic. This motivation is part of the broader motivation, mentioned before, to develop a sense of empowerment which includes influencing and leading social opinion.

- Inspiring: it reflects the aim to encourage or stimulate others to think about the meaning of one content. The concept of inspiration has not to be seen from the viewpoint of the person who is inspired but from the view of the inspirator and so the person who proactively wants to inspire other users by using a specific hashtag

Further research on Instagram found that the use of hashtags during the tours has a positive influence on the travel experience, influencing indirectly traveller's satisfaction (Krisna, Handayani, & Azzahro, 2019). More precisely, the use of hashtags has become a part of uploaded ethics on Instagram.

### **3.3.2 The geotag use in smart tourism**

Nowadays, user-generated images can be considered a relevant element that influences the perception of tourist places. When people take photos, they close the hermeneutic circle of destination representation: consciously or unconsciously, people look for images and scenes which replicate their existing perception. This leads tourists to visit places that they have already seen online or shared on social networks by other users. In this way, tourists are no longer seen as spectators but as real actors who interact with the places that they visit and indirectly promote what they snap with their smartphones. In other words, photographs are becoming an important element for democratizing mobility. As a result of this, the growing diversity of how tourists act and the increasing ease with which photographs are taken have produced new results, highlighting what was previously ignored.

Based on a research conducted by Paül I Agustí (2018), who compared the user-generated images on Instagram and the official channels in regards to the promotion of local tourist attractions, emerged that the images shared on the Instagram platform were far more capable to support the promotion of tourist attractions rather than traditional sources. Indeed, the sources that contributed to the fewest attractions were brochures and travel agencies which highlighted 122 sights. On the other hand, the published material on the social network identified 366 different sights, which confirm the potential capability of social networks to promote tourism places, thus reaching a wider audience. This has made possible thanks to the geotag feature that is provided when a photo is published on a social network. Location tagging or also named geotagging refers to words or pictures that are connected to



a physical location enabling individuals to share their location-based information in real-time with other friends. (Hsieh & Lee, 2020). When users are ready to share content on Instagram, they are provided with an “Add Location” feature to search for their location, allowing the location to be added to the content. The location tagging function allows users to disclose their geolocation information on status updates, posts and stories thus facilitating social interactions, reinforcing social relationship and the discovery of new places. In support of this, web user communities contain numerous sources of geolocated information which has enormous potential for leverage in tourism research allowing the tourist to identify the hot spots regarding unknown destination (García-Palomares, Gutiérrez, & Mínguez, 2015). As reported by The New York Times there are some drawbacks to the geotagging behaviour in the tourism industry. Indeed, the journal asked to stop geotagging photographs on social media to protect the state’s Pristine forest and remote lakes because the landscape was under the threat from visitors drawn by the beautiful vistas on Instagram (Holson, 2018). Yet, results from the test conducted by Krisna, Handayani, & Azzahro (2019) proves that geotag positively affect its use on Instagram. Indeed, geotag enjoyment has a positive intention to influence tourist intentions to use geotag enhancing the ongoing trip experience.

Tagging is a classic way for users to annotate UGC. Generally speaking, the motivation behind tagging is twofold: the organization of content for personal means and the social contribution and the desire to share with others (Purves & Hollenstein, 2010). More precisely, the research conducted by Hsieh & Lee (2020) studied the different reasons associated with geotagging behavior of Instagram users:

- Public self-conscious: it is recognized as having the tendency to feel of being observed while in a social context. Publicly self-conscious people emphasize the impression they make on others, demonstrating they are more inclined to be concerned regarding the physical appearance. In addition to this, these individuals adopt self-presentation tactics to enhance the impression they make to others to obtain approval. In this way, sharing the location is embedded with meanings that communicate symbolic value. Thus, association with specific locations can be adopted to assist an individual in self-presentation.
- Impression management: location tag can be used as a lever for impression management in which people can manage their online image and identity by revealing

and showing their physical presence in some location over others. Impression management refers to people that aim to convey certain images to influence other people's impression of them. By checking-in the selected location, a linkage is created between the features of the location and the individual who is physically present in the place. In doing so, geotag sharing is a way to enhance impression management.

- Archiving: with the capabilities of smartphones, which enable individuals to upload photos and videos, people are starting to adopt social networks as a way to document their personal lives. Being physically present in one place at a specific time and place provides validation in the documentation, which enhances entertainment value and shows the tracks of temporal mobility. Location tagging provide a record of personal life experience promoting the benefits of perceived usefulness.
- Perceived usefulness: when a new technology is considered useful by individuals, positive thinking about the system is established, therefore people start using technology because they benefit from it. In the context of geotagging, perceived usefulness affects attitude resulting in continuous usage behaviour. Moreover, when an individual finds that geotag usage allow him or her to easily perform personal documentation, the location-based service is perceived as useful, which, in turn, improve the satisfaction and its continued usage.
- Social psychological benefit: social interactions are a fundamental part of social media use which satisfy the individual's social psychological needs such as friendship and social support. As a result, social platforms provide an environment in which people may feel a need to be accepted by the other members. In this context, geotag sharing may be perceived as a way to stand out and maintain social relationship with the others.

## **CHAPTER 4 *The user analysis***

## **4.0 Research question**

The previous chapters serve as a base for the current research which aims to provide insights into the mechanism underlining ephemeral content usage through the lens of four main theories: technology acceptance, user and gratification, social influence, and exchange. More precisely, this paper focuses on the Instagram platform as a mean of image and video sharing site with reference to the tourism industry. The selection of the social platform is reasoned by the predominance of visual content which appears an essential component for the dissemination of new knowledge due to the intangible dimension of tourism experiences.

Building on the literature, this research is designed to probe users' motivations for creating Instagram stories and how this new type of communication may enhance the visibility of new tourist places. Specifically, this study is divided into two parts where the former attempt to analyze the reasons for the production of Instagram stories by the users in the travel domain and the use of localization meta tag while, on the other hand, the latter aim to examine the consumption of this content. As a result of this, the final objective is to understand the relation between these two sides, generation and consumption, of ephemeral content and how it may affect the individual's intentions to visit new places.

## **4.1 Method**

An online survey was conducted through Google forms in an attempt to map and explore the research objectives. To collect data from actual Instagram users with experience using ephemeral content, the questionnaire link was posted on several groups across the main social media platforms in which users could easily fill it out.

The questionnaire contained a battery of pre-established scales that were selected from previous researches and some modified to align them with the context of this study (Figure 4.1.) In addition to this, a couple of screening multiple questions were asked at the beginning and during the survey to eliminate participants who did not use Instagram and ephemeral content. Then, as mentioned before, the survey was developed in two sections where the first part was composed of five questions regarding the generation of ephemeral content and the use of localization meta tag. Instead, the second part included two focus questions related to

the consumption of ephemeral content, one of which with the purpose to design an imaginary situation concerning the travel context. In total, the survey was composed of 15 questions with the final 3 left for the demographic purpose.

Figure 4.1. Studies used for the creation of the survey

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Theory</b>	<b>Model</b>
Coa, V. V., & Setiawan, J. (2017)	Intention to use ephemeral content	Technology acceptance	Original
Chen, K.-J., & Cheung, H. L. (2019)	Motivations for creating ephemeral content	Uses and gratification	Adapted
Oliveira, T., Araujo, B., & Tam, C. (2020)	Motivations for sharing travel experiences	Social Influence	Adapted
Hsieh, S. H., & Lee, C. T. (2020a)	Motivations for using glocalization	Social Exchange	Adapted
Alhabash, S., & Ma, M. (2017)	Motivations for consuming ephemeral content	Uses and gratification	Adapted

## **4.2 Measurement**

The purpose of the first two questions was to eliminate the participants who were not suitable for the survey. More precisely, the first question asked the average daily time spent on Instagram which was measured with the following scale: “more than 2 hours”, “between 1 hour and two hour”, “between half hour and one hour”, “less than half hour”, “I do not log in every day” and “never”, where “never” drove the participants directly to the demographic questions. The second question instead asked how often participants generate stories, which was measured with the following scale: “all days”, “at least one time per week”, “less than on time per week” and “never”, where “never” had the same function covered in the previous question.

After the preliminary questions, the questionnaire focused on the first part to test the generation aspect of ephemeral content. The first question of this part purposed to analyze

the general intention to use Instagram stories through the employment of a model developed by Coa and Setiawan (2017) based on the technology acceptance theory of Davis (1989) which was designed to analyze the user's attitude towards the adoptions of new technologies. The external factors employed in the model were the social presence and the perceived enjoyment. The former, which was defined as the capability to which a communication technology promotes the interaction among users, was measured by the following items: "creating Instagram stories make me feel connected to the others" and "creating Instagram stories make me feel at the center of attention". On the other hand, the latter, which refers to the positive and psychological experience that a person has towards a new technology, was measured by the following items: "the different editing features of Instagram stories amuse me" and "creating Instagram stories increases the perception of the experience I am living/I lived". In addition to this, the two internal factors were measured by the following items: "I believe that the creation of Instagram stories is easy to understand" and "I believe that the creation of Instagram stories is quick" concerning the perceived ease of use and "I believe that creating Instagram stories helps me to express myself" and "I believe that creating Instagram stories helps me to share special moments with others" concerning the perceived usefulness. All the items of the questions were measured with a seven-point range scale, where 0 meant "I cannot answer", 1 "I strongly disagree" and 7 "I strongly agree".

Then, the second question aimed at analyzing the motivations that nudge users to create Instagram stories. The factors employed were the same provided by the model of Chen and Cheung (2019) which was based on the uses and gratification theory of Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973) as it delineates user' motivations, psychosocial dispositions and media use effects holistically. More precisely, the factors used were trust, immediacy, social pressure, gratification, and engagement. Users' trust in social media context is related to the aspect of privacy which was measured by the following item: "I feel relaxed knowing that stories do not remain in my profile". Immediacy refers to user's desire for immediate access, understanding, and interaction with content on social media which was measured by the following items: "I publish Instagram stories because it allows me to know immediately what others think of what I share" and "I publish Instagram stories because it takes less time than traditional posts". Social pressure refers to the need of being popular on social media which was measured by the following items: "I have a nice feeling knowing that I have received so many

views ” and “when I am at an event of my particular interest I like to share it through Instagram stories”. Gratification refers to a source of pleasure which was measured by the following items: “I feel comfortable communicating through Instagram stories” and “creating Instagram stories makes me feel more spontaneous”. Finally, engagement is considered as an online behaviour resulting from interactive and co-creative user experiences with ephemeral content, including thoughts, emotional connections and intrinsic motivations which was measured by the following item: “I update the personal information through the use of Instagram stories”. A final item was included in the original model to understand the preference between the creation of ephemeral content and the permanent one which was measured with the following item “I prefer to create stories rather than traditional posts”. The only factor left was the fear of missing out which was separated and included in the other section as it refers to the consumption side. All items of the questions were measured with a seven-point range scale, where 0 meant “I cannot answer”, 1 “I strongly disagree” and 7 “I strongly agree”.

From the fifth question, the questionnaire started to concentrate on the tourism sector until the end of the consumption part. At this point, the survey included a series of general queries combined with 2 focus questions related to the motivations for sharing travel experiences on social media and the reasons for the localization tag use as a mean of an additional informative layer to the content creation.

Firstly, it was asked to the participants the travel frequency before the pandemic in one year which was measured by the following scale: “1 time”, “2-3 times”, “4-5 times”, “6-10 times”, “more than 10 time” and “never”, where “never” drove the participants directly to the demographic questions. Then, based on the motivational factors of pleasure travel identified by Crompton (1979), which are defined as internal motives or forces that cause tourists to seek activities to reduce their needs, it was asked to the participants to select, from a check box list, the reasons that push them to travel. The framework provided by Crompton (1979) included 6 different push factors, which were employed in the study that are: novelty, escape knowledge-seeking, fun and excitement, rest and relaxation, friends and family relationship. Novelty was measured by the following items: “experience new and different lifestyles”, “meet people from different cultures” and “meet new and different people”. Escape was

measured with the following item: “escape the ordinary”. Knowledge seeking was measured by the following items: “visit new places” and “increase my knowledge”. Fun and excitement was measured by the following items “find new stimuli”, “fun and entertainment” and “visit places my friends have not been”. Rest and relaxation was measured with “relaxing”. Finally, family and friend’ relationships, which was classified by Crompton (1979) as the less important among the motivational factors, was measured by the following items: “visit friends and family” and “meet people with similar interests”. In addition to all these responses, it was included the option “I do not like travelling”. Then it was asked to participants which was the most used social platform for sharing content during their travel experiences. The different responses available were Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, Whatsapp, TikTok and “others”. Lastly, it was asked to the participants the frequency to which they create stories while on vacation which was measured with the following scale: “always”, “often”, “sometimes”, “rarely” and “never”, where “never” drove the participants directly to the demographic questions.

To complete the consumption part, the survey points at analyzing two aspects: the motivations for sharing travel experiences on social media and the localization tag use. All items of the questions were measured with a seven-point range scale, where 0 meant “I cannot answer”, 1 “I strongly disagree” and 7 “I strongly agree”. Concerning the former, the inspiring model was the one designed by Oliveira, Araujo, and Tam (2020) which was based on the social influence theory and perceived enjoyment of Kelemen (1958) that is defined as the extent to which a person expects a behaviour from other people close to him/her. The factors employed which, if positive, generate enjoyment resulting, in turn, in a sharing behaviour of content on social media were: identification, internalization and compliance. Identification is identified as the adoption of a particular behaviour to maintain a relationship with a group or a person which was measured by the following items: “I share my travel experiences to give value to my personality as a traveler”. Internalization refers to the acceptance of the opinion of others as evidence of the truth and as part of his/her own beliefs and values which was measured by the following item: “the comments I get for the content I share influence the perception of my experience”. Compliance stands for acceptance of influenced behaviour in expectation of approval and favourable feedback which was measured by the following item: “if I did not get some level of gratification from others for



what I share, I would post less content". In addition to this, altruistic motivation, personal fulfilment and self-actualization were intended as facilitators which push individuals to share their travel moments on social media. Altruistic motivation refers to people who want to contribute to help others to make the right decisions, which was measured by the following item: "I share this type of content because I like recommending the places I am visiting". Personal fulfilment and self-actualization refer to people that share their content on social media to obtain recognition and gratification from friends and the community which was measured by the following item: "I like to convey what I want people think of me". Compared to the original model the inhibitors factors were excluded `since no relevant for the current study. Then it was asked to the participants to rate with a seven-point range scale, where 0 meant "I cannot answer", 1 "I strongly disagree" and 7 "I strongly agree" the different alternatives related to the motivations of use of the localization tag when content is published. The different responses were developed according to the model designed by Hsieh and Lee (2020) which was based on the social exchange theory of Homans (1958) as it delineates the interaction social behaviour concerning a cost-benefit analysis and an evaluation of the options with respects to the interaction. Specifically, the factors employed were: public self-consciousness, archiving, perceived usefulness, impression management and social psychological benefits. The other factors included in the original model, which were privacy and incentives, were excluded `since no relevant for the current study. Public self-conscious refers to the tendency to feel of being observed while in a social context which was measured by the following item: "I usually worry about making a good impression". Archiving is defined as the capability of storing content which was measured by the following item: "I use the localization tag function to record a special moment". Perceived usefulness refers to the benefit that new technologies can generate to the individuals which was measured by the following item: "I find that the use of localization tag helps me". Impression management refers to people who aim to convey certain images to influence other people's impression of them which was measured by the following item: "expressing where I am makes me feel socially desired". Lastly, social-psychological benefits refer to the need of being accepted and considered by others which was measured by the following item: "the use of localization tag makes me feel connected to others".

Finally, the last two questions focus on the consumption side of ephemeral content. More precisely it was asked to participants the motivations that nudge them to consume Instagram stories. Based on the models of Chen and Cheung (2019) and Alhabash and Ma (2017), uses and gratification theory, the factors used to design the responses were: fear of missing out, social interaction, entertainment, inspiration, relaxation, self-documentation and surveillance. The fear of missing out was measured by the following items: "I am attracted to watch the stories section when I see my friends who have posted something" and "I am afraid my friends have more rewarding experiences than mine". Social interaction was measured by the following item: "to interact with people". Entertainment was measured by the following item: "to pass the time". To measure inspiration and relaxation were employed the following items: "to get inspired" and "to relax". Self-documentation was measured by the following item: "to keep me updated on issues that interest to me". Finally, surveillance was measured by "to see what friends are doing". All items of the questions were measured with a seven-point range scale, where 0 meant "I cannot answer", 1 "I strongly disagree" and 7 "I strongly agree".

The last question of the survey aimed at understanding the possible relationship between the generation and consumption of Instagram stories. It was asked to participants to imagine a situation where they see a story of a friend in a specific place of their interest. Based on the question, the different alternatives were studied in order to see if this new method of communication can be a lever in the tourism industry to increase the visibility of new places and attractions. The model from which the alternatives were partially designed belongs to Hajli, Wang, and Tajvidi (2018) which aimed at analyzing the travel envy generated by the social media content created by the users. Part of the items employed was replicated from the previous research, the others were adapted based on the current study. The different factors used were: information finding, intention to visit a destination, travel envy, and consumption and production. Information finding were measured by the following item: "to find out better where this place is, I click on the place tag and look at the related photos" and "I write to my friend to obtain more information about where he/she is". Intention to visit a destination was measured by the following item: "if I have the opportunity to travel, I intend to visit the place mentioned by my friend". Travel envy was measured by the following items: "I am envious of where my friend is" and "right now I would like to be where he/she is".

Finally, the relation between the projected image and perceived image was measured by the following item: “if I have the opportunity to go to the same place I think I will post the same photo”.

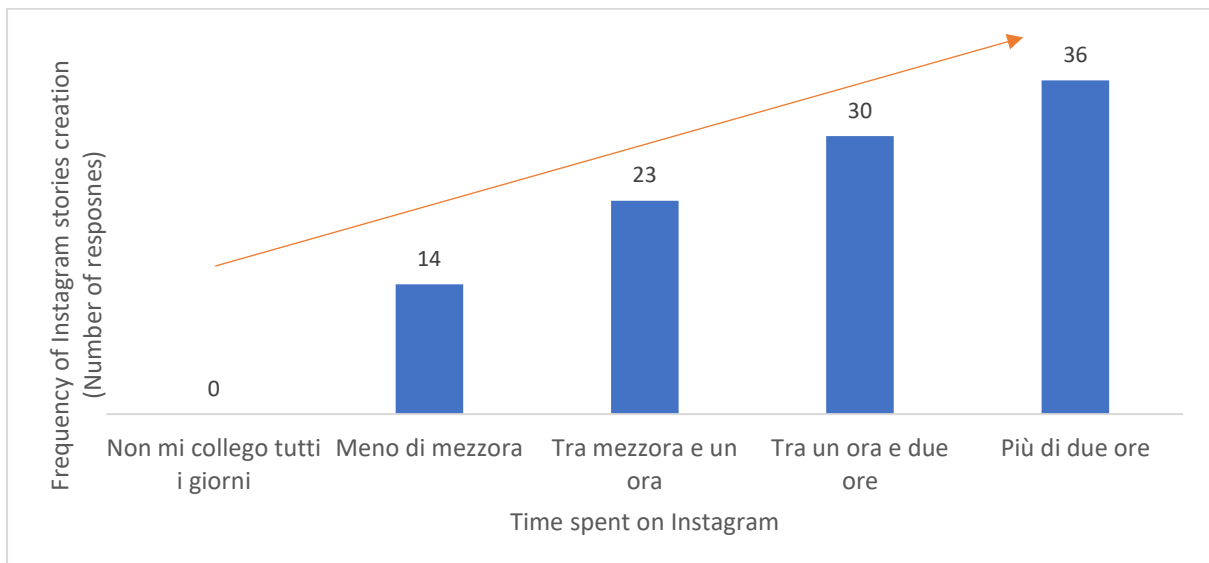
In regard to the demographic questions, gender age and number of active account on social media were asked.

### **4.3 Results**

A total of 223 people participated in the study. The sample comprised 63.2% of female and 36.8% of male, 31.8% aged between 18-24 and 65,9% aged between 25-35 with an average of 3 active account on social media. After deleting participants who did not meet the criteria (not an Instagram user and not a user of ephemeral content) and incomplete responses, the final sample of 183 participants was used for the data analysis.

What emerged from the first two screening questions was that 37.4% of the Instagram users daily spend on the platform between one hour and two hours, 27% between half-hour and one hour, 20.4% more than two hours, 12.8% less than a half-hour, while only the 2.4% do not access the social platform every day. In addition to this, based on the previous query, the second question indicated that 43.1% of participants create stories less than one time per week, 33.6% at least one time per week, 9.5% every day, while 13.7% never. Based on the data reported it is possible to understand as the daily time spent on the social platform is significantly high while stories are created less than on time per week. Then, to see if there might be a positive relationship between the time spent on the social platform and the stories creation attitude, data were filtered based on the daily time spent and the category “at least one time per week”, regarding the creation of the stories, was observed. What arises from the data was that proportionally speaking, people who spend more time on Instagram tend to create more stories (Figure 4.2.). In other words, a positive relationship between consumption and production of content might exist as it was previously tested by Daugherty, Eastin, and Bright (2008).

Figure 4.2. Relation between frequency of Instagram stories creation and time spent on Instagram



Then based on the technology acceptance model, a descriptive understanding of the positive attitude towards Instagram stories was conducted. After all the 0 values were eliminated, which meant “I cannot answer”, the data were ordered and analyzed.

Figure 4.3. Behavioural intention to use Instagram stories

Variables	Average value (From 1 to 7)
<b>Perceived ease of use</b>	
“Ritengo che la creazione delle stories sia di facile intuizione”	5.50
“Ritengo che la creazione delle stories sia veloce”	5.29
<b>Perceived usefulness</b>	
“Ritengo che la creazione delle stories mi aiuti a esprimere me stesso”	4.61
“Ritengo che la creazione delle stories mi aiuti a condividere momenti speciali”	5.05
<b>Perceived enjoyment</b>	
“Le varie opzioni di modifica delle stories mi divertono”	4.90
“Pubblicare stories aumenta la percezione della mia esperienza”	4.70
<b>Social presence</b>	
“Pubblicare stories mi fa sentire connesso agli altri”	4.42
“Pubblicare stories mi fa sentire al centro dell'attenzione”	4.31

Concerning the external variables employed, as it is possible to deduce from the table above (Figure 4.3.), it seems that perceived enjoyment is slightly more determinant compared to social presence. Specifically, it seems that Instagram users particularly enjoy the different editing features provided for the stories. Regarding the internal variables, high results were obtained for both perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness. More precisely, in reference to the latter, it seems that the creation of the stories is particularly useful for sharing special moments (5.05) rather than helping individuals to express themselves (4.61). It seems that participants have a positive attitude towards the usage of Instagram stories which, in turn, might trigger a positive behavioural intention to use this new method of communication. In addition to this, the high results of perceived usefulness and ease of use of Instagram stories might contribute to enhance the overall user experience of Instagram stories.

Figure 4.4. Motivations for creating Instagram stories

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Average value (From 1 to 7)</b>
<b>Trust</b>	
“Sapere che le stories non permangono nel mio profilo mi fa sentire rilassato”	3.98
<b>Immediacy</b>	
“Pubblico stories perché mi permette di sapere immediatamente cosa pensano gli altri di ciò che condivido”	3.12
“Pubblico stories perché richiede meno tempo rispetto ai post tradizionali”	4.12
<b>Social pressure</b>	
“Provo una sensazione piacevole a sapere che ho ottenuto tante visualizzazioni”	3.46
“Quando sono ad un evento di mio particolare interesse mi piace dividerlo con le stories”	5.22
<b>Gratification</b>	
“Mi sento a mio agio a comunicare attraverso le stories”	4.75
“Creare stories mi fa sentire più spontaneo”	4.29
<b>Engagement with ephemeral content</b>	
“Aggiorno le informazioni che mi riguardano attraverso l’ utilizzo delle stories”	3.28
<b>Overall preference</b>	
“Preferisco creare stories piuttosto che post tradizionali”	4.88

Then the user’ motivations for creating Instagram stories were addressed. As it is possible to understand from the table above gratification obtained the highest values in both the items employed, which means that participants identify Instagram stories as a source of pleasure

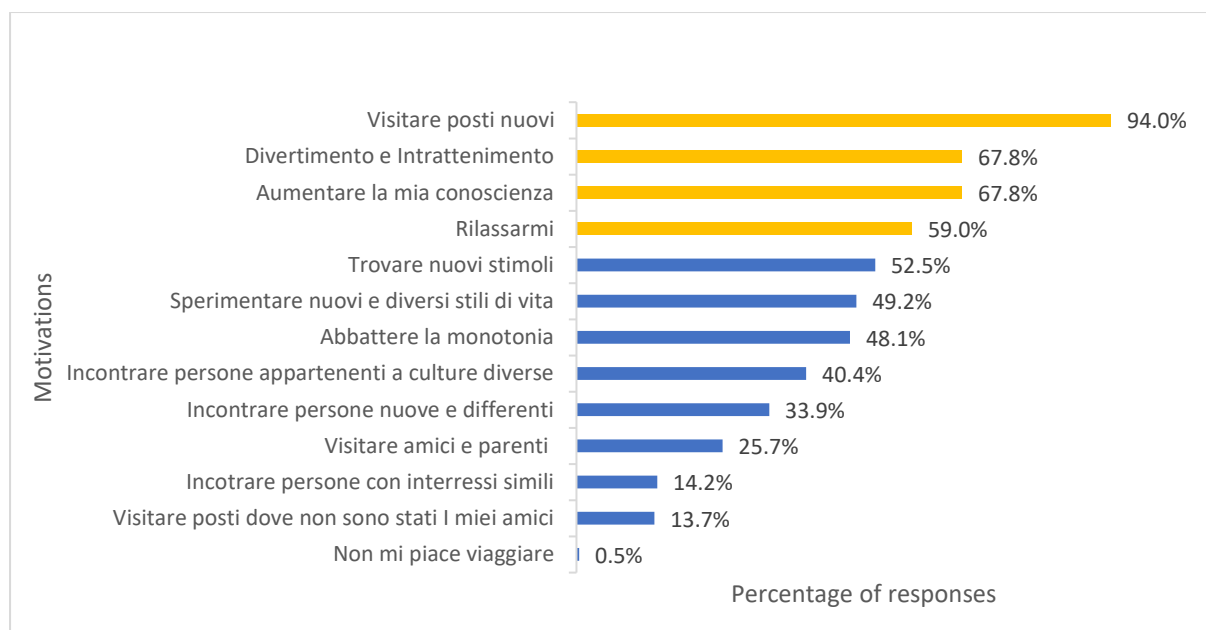
for creating content. More precisely, it seems that gratification is more related to make people feel comfortable rather than make them feel spontaneous. Then social pressure received special attention in particular concerning the sharing of distinctive moments (5.22). Beyens et al. (2016) have suggested that social pressure can influence people's decision making regarding the adoption of new technology. Since not having frequent interactions with other individuals or being neglected by others is stressful, such social pressure might lead people to adopt the new ephemeral content function to ease peer pressure. In addition to this, prior research has found that users feel obligated to spend more time socializing online because everyone seems obsessed with the instant documenting and uploading of every moment (Fox & Moreland, 2015,). On the other hand, the contradicting result obtained by the other item "I have a nice feeling knowing that I have received so many views " (3.46) might be justified by the fact that people have difficulty in admitting to themselves the dependence created by social networks (Sedera et al., 2017).

In addition to this, particular attention is also given to trust which might be seen as a key factor that might convince people to create Instagram stories. In fact, compared to the typical form of sharing in social media, in which content online can be saved, duplicated and recirculated anytime and easily after the initial post, ephemeral content is characterized by the feature of low persistency, which might ease the user's privacy concerns (Chen & Cheung, 2019). In other words, it might be possible that the more trust user receives by using ephemeral content the more they may be willing to use this new type of communication. In support of this result, it is observable as participants prefer to communicate with ephemeral content compared to traditional one (4.88). Then, despite the contradicting result obtained by the two items used to analyzed immediacy, it seems that stories are preferred compared to traditional posts for their immediateness. Concerning this, ephemeral content in social media provides users with an authentic, exciting, and lively experience and thus, improves and reforms the user experience because it enables users to stand in an intimate relationship with their desire content. For example, users can share images and videos immediately or even live stream with others through Instagram stories, as if they were talking face to face conversations. On the other side, it seems that the immediacy of receiving feedback is not relevant for the participants (3.12). Finally, it seems that participants do purpose Instagram

stories to update their personal information since “I update personal information through Instagram stories” receive the lowest result (3.28).

Following the same order of the questions in the survey, after having analyzed the motivations for creating Instagram stories, the consumption part started to focus on the travel experiences, as it represents the focus of the analysis. What emerged from the first general questions was that 39.4% of the participants travel 2-3 times per year, 23.9% 4-5 times, 22.2% one time, 10.0% more than 10 times while only 4.4% 6-10 times.

Figure 4.5. Travel motivations

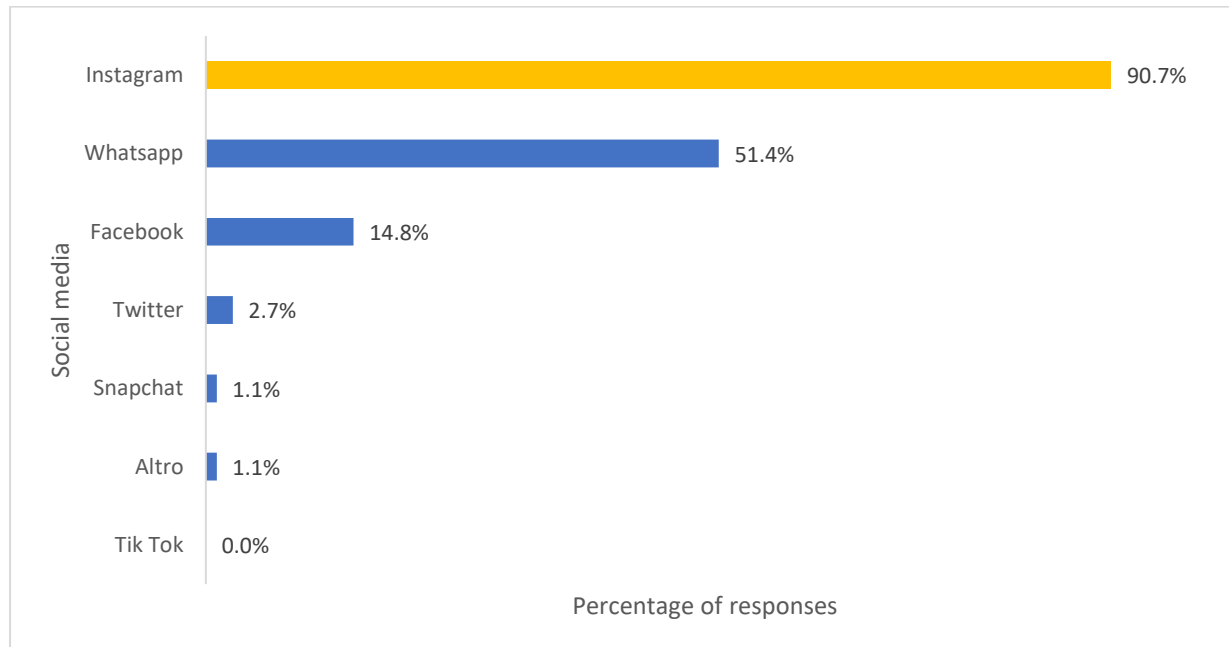


In addition to this, the travel motivations of participants were analyzed based on the framework of Crompton (1979). What emerged from the data collected (Figure 4.4.) was that “visit new places” (94%) is confirmed as the main motivation that pushes people to travel. Then, at the same position, as the second-highest motivations, there are “increase my knowledge” and “fun and entertainment” (67.8%), while the third-highest motivation is identified by “relaxing” (59.0%). More broadly, from this first analysis is possible to understand as the majority of responses usually travel between 2-3 times per year and the main motivations are represented by knowledge-seeking, fun and excitement and relaxation.

Then, the data collected from the next question put in evidence as the most used social platform where to share content while on vacation is Instagram. Indeed, 90.7% of participants

express that they prefer to share their content through the most famous image and video sharing platform, while 51.4% on WhatsApp and 14.8% on Facebook (Figure 4.6.)

Figure 4.6. Most used social platform in the travel context



Indeed, due to the intangible characteristic of the travel experiences, Instagram might represent the best channel where to share this type of content. This result might also reinforce the saying that a picture is worth a thousand words which, in turn, represents another confirmation of the role of Instagram in the tourism industry for its visual focus compared to the other social platforms. In addition to this, what might make Instagram so popular is that interacting through the platform has been made extremely easy. In our case, for example, the use of Instagram stories has been rated by the participants as extremely easy to understand and fast (Figure 4.2.). Moreover, the app does not only allow people to like and comment photos but also has its own private messaging system to chat, share posts and send links which partially cover the role assumed by instant messaging platforms like WhatsApp. Moreover, the number of young active members increase its popularity and the sharing of content. Indeed, Instagram might not have the biggest network size, but it is for sure one of the major interactive platforms compared to other social networks like Facebook.

Concerning the creation of the stories while on vacation the results obtained were the followings: 43.7% "often", 32.2% "sometimes", 13.7% "rarely", 8.2% "always" 2.2% "never". Since the majority of participants seems to usually share their travel experiences, which may



be classified as special events, it might be possible to confirm the same result that was obtained previously regarding the social pressure. Indeed, concerning the motivations for creating Instagram stories the highest value obtained was by “when I am at an event of my particular interest I like to share it with Instagram stories ” (Figure 4.4.), which is in line with the result that the majority of people “often” create stories while on vacation.

Next, the motivations for sharing personal travel experiences were analyzed. Based on the adapted model of Oliveira, Araujo, and Tam (2020) three motivations and so, identification, internalization and compliance, were used as factors to analyze the perceived enjoyment (previously analyzed) for using Instagram stories which, in turn, might influence the actual travel experiences sharing behaviour. In addition to this, the authors identified 2 factors that might directly influence this tendency: altruistic motivation, personal fulfilment and self-actualization.

Figure 4.7. Motivations for sharing travel experiences on social media

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Average value (From 1 to 7)</b>
<b>Identification</b>	
“Condivido le mie esperienze di viaggio per dare valore alla mia personalità di viaggiatore”	3.41
<b>Internalization</b>	
“I commenti che ottengo per i contenuti che pubblico influenzano la percezione della mia esperienza”	2.48
<b>Compliance</b>	
“Se non ottenessi un certo livello di gratificazione dagli altri per ciò che condivido, pubblicherei meno contenuti”	2.49
<b>Altruistic motivation</b>	
“Condivido questo tipo di contenuti perché mi piace consigliare i posti che sto visitando”	4.06
<b>Personal fulfilment and self-actualization</b>	
“Mi piace trasmettere quello che voglio che le persone pensino di me”	3.65

As it is possible to observe from the table above (Figure 4.7.) it seems that internalization (2.48) and compliance (2.49) do not play a significant role in determining the perceived enjoyment for using social media to share travel experiences. On the other hand, identification might be the only factor that might influence somehow the perceived enjoyment compared to the other two variables. However, perceived enjoyment, which has been already analyzed in figure 4.3., obtained high results. This means that people enjoy this

new communication method provide by Instagram and in particular the different editing features of the stories. Concerning the direct factors which might facilitate the actual travel experience sharing behaviour, altruistic motivations seem to dominate compared to personal fulfilment and self-actualization. This result might lead to the conclusion that people like to share their pleasure moments with others to advise what they are experiencing. In addition to this, altruistic motivations might be associate with the empowerment of the users and so the capability they have to influence others, which reflects one of the main motivations for creating UGC. (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011).

Then the survey focused on the analysis of the localization tag usage as a mean of an additional informative layer to the content publish through Instagram stories by the users

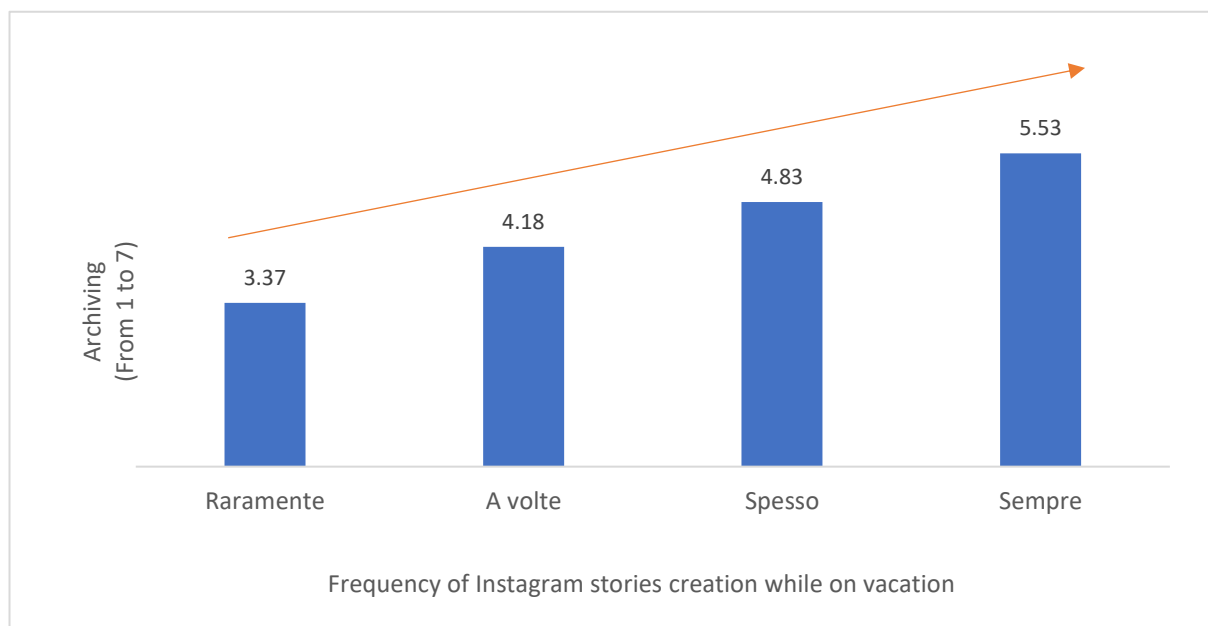
Figure 4.8. Motivations for using the localization tag

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Average value (From 1 to 7)</b>
<b>Public self-consciousness</b>	
Di solito mi preoccupo di fare una buona impressione	2.05
<b>Archiving</b>	
Uso la funzione di geolocalizzazione per registrare un momento speciale	4.57
<b>Perceived usefulness</b>	
Trovo che l'utilizzo della geolocalizzazione mi sia d'aiuto	3.96
<b>Impression management</b>	
Esprimere dove mi trovo mi fa sentire socialmente desiderato	2.07
<b>Social-psychological benefits</b>	
L'utilizzo della geolocalizzazione mi fa sentire connesso agli altri	2.20

The data collected from the participates did not confirm the expectations. Indeed, as it is possible to observe from figure 4.8. public self-consciousness (2.05), social-psychological benefits (2.20) and impression management (2.07) obtained the same low results, while only archiving, and so “I use the geolocation function to record a special moment ” (4.57), seems to be relevant among all the other motivations listed. More precisely, with the enabled possibilities of smartphones, which allow individuals to upload videos and photos, people are beginning to adopt social platforms as a new way to document their personal lives (Marshall & Shipman, 2014). In this manner, archiving might be driven by individuals’ desire to capture an exciting place or event or a special moment. Being physically present at a location at a

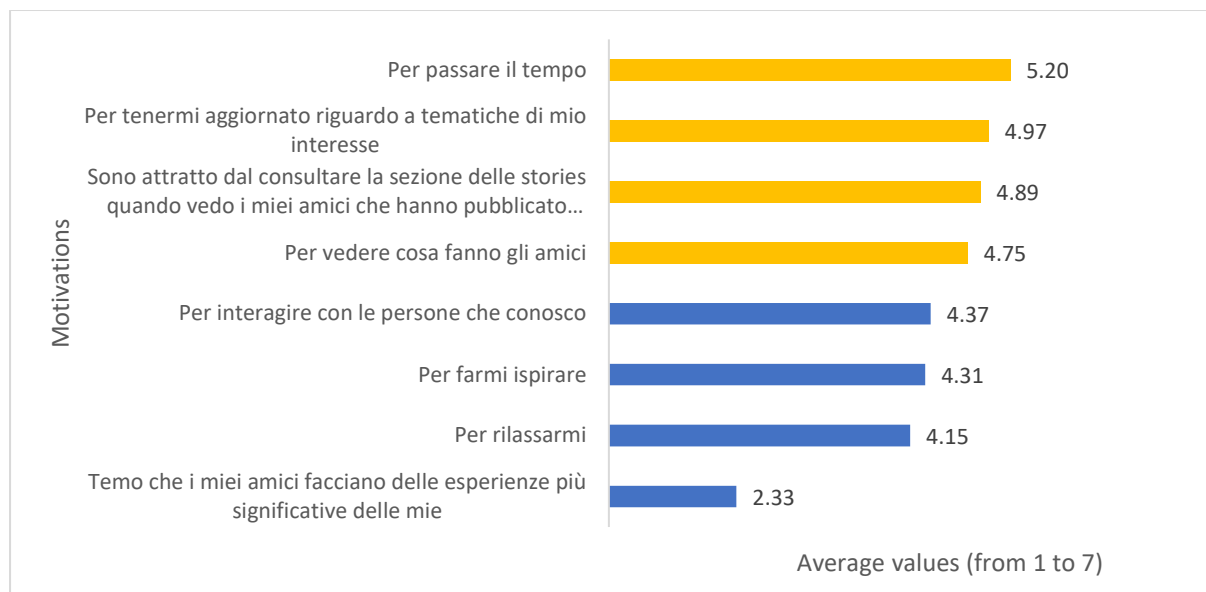
specific time and demonstrating it through the use of Instagram stories provide a real-time validation in terms of documentation. Thus, when a person uses location tags to execute information documents about his or her personal life, the ubiquity of this function might promote the benefit of perceived usefulness which obtained the second-highest result (3.96). In addition to this, as it is possible to observe from figure 4.9. below, there is a positive relationship between the usage of the geotag for the archiving purpose and the frequency of Instagram stories creation while on vacation. More precisely, this result might confirm the fact that the more a person perceives an event as special, like the travel experience, and tend to share it through the use of Instagram stories ( which was previously identified in figure 4.4.), the more people tend to use the function of localization tag to immortalize that event. More broadly, because travel experiences are unusual events, which broadcast positive sensation, people might be more willing to record them through the use of localization tag and share it with others on Instagram.

Figure 4.9. Relation between archiving motivation of location tag use and frequency of Instagram stories creation while on vacation.



The last two questions focused on the consumption part of the survey. The results obtained by the question related to the motivations that push people to watch Instagram stories were the followings:

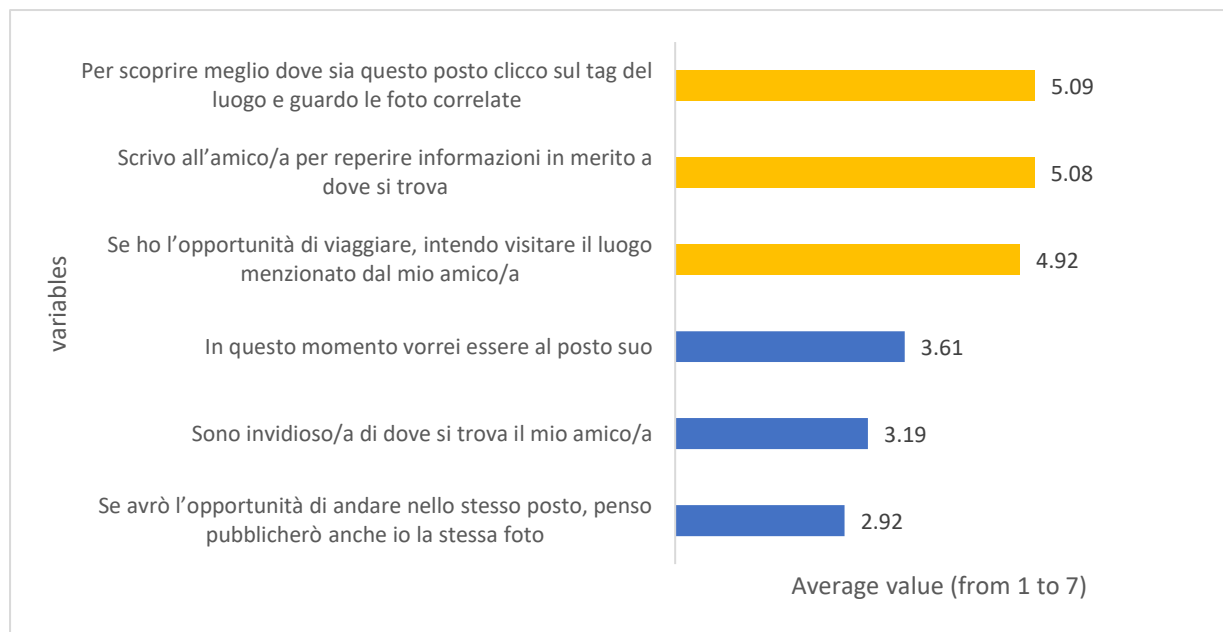
Figure 4.10. Consumption motivations of Instagram Stories



As it is possible to understand from figure 4.10. the strongest predictor of consumption intention of ephemeral content is represented by the entertainment purpose (5.20), which means to kill the time or to avoid getting bored. Then, information-seeking represents the second strongest motivation to watch Instagram stories. Indeed, through the use of this new method of communication news is shared in real-time and up to date even if it lasts only for a limited period, thus constituting a source of last-minute information for its users. Finally, despite the contradicting results, it seems that fear of missing out constitutes the third-highest motivation for consuming Instagram stories. Indeed, it appears that participants are attracted to watch stories when friends have published some content. More specifically, fear of missing out is a feeling invoked by social exclusion, an experience causing perceived psychological distance between individuals and individuals and groups that may cause technology-related anxiety called also “social pain”. Those who experience fear of missing out in response to social exclusion might activate an adapting social monitoring system to monitor the environment which finds confirmation in the fourth highest motivation that is “to see what friends are doing” (4.75). Accordingly, they are likely to increase social media usage to satisfy their needs for inclusion which, in turn, finds confirmation in the results obtained from the first question regarding the daily usage of Instagram. Indeed, the majority of participants admitted using Instagram between one and two hours per day (37.4%).

Lastly, the survey aimed at understanding the possible relation between the consumption and generation aspect of Instagram stories in the tourism sector and how it may affect the individual's intentions to visit new places. The results obtained were the followings (Figure 4.11.):

Figure 4.11 Stimulus generated by Instagram stories in the travel context



The expectations were partially confirmed. Indeed, what was demonstrated by the data collected is the high interaction rate between the consumer and the generator of the content. More precisely, the participants expressed a high level of agreement with the following items "I write to my friend to obtain more information about where he/she is" (5.08) and "to find out better where this place is, I click on the place tag and look at the related photos" (5.09). Specifically, the former indicates that participants exchange information because they are attracted by the place displayed through Instagram stories, which might work as a form of word of mouth and place review. On the other hand, the latter underlines the significant importance of the location tag which encourage consumers to obtain more information regarding the content displayed, amplifying, in turn, the knowledge obtained from the single content. The third highest result is identified by "if I have the opportunity to travel, I intend to visit the place mentioned by my friend" (4.92), which represents a positive attitude towards the destination displayed. In fact, this represents the indirect effect triggered by the user-generated content, reinforced by the elements of location tag and information exchange.

More broadly, attitude is generally understood as an evaluative judgment about a given object, in our case the destination image, which can be favorable or unfavorable. Attitudes are evoked as a response to stimuli, whether physically observable (related images showed through the function of localization tag) or verbal (information exchange between consumer and creator) (Kim & Stepchenkova, 2015). In this way, destination photography, disseminated through the use of Instagram stories, communicates images that shape and reshape people destination perception and, consequently, influence their decision-making process.

On the other hand, the items used to verify the envy degree induced by the content, and so “right now I would like to be where he/she is” (3.61) and “I am envious of where my friend is” (3.19), did not generate the results expected like in the study conducted by Hajli, Wang, and Tajvidi (2018). Finally, the lowest result is represented by “if I have the opportunity to go to the same place I think I will post the same photo” which means that there is no obvious relation between the projected image and perceived image. Nevertheless, because participants expressed a high intention to visit the destination displayed and the majority of them, at the same time, often generate Instagram stories while on vacation, there might be an indirect and unconscious promotion of tourist places.

#### **4.4 Summary and discussion**

In general, ephemeral content in social media is a relatively new phenomenon, which has received little attention in the academia. The current research explores the motivational antecedents that drive users to generate and consume ephemeral content. Specifically, the study focuses on the Instagram platform trying to understand how this new communication method may increase the dissemination of new knowledge in the travel context. Firstly, this research identified critical factors that strengthen users’ ephemeral content generation and delineate the extent to which these factors nudge people to use this new method of interaction. It was found that social pressure, gratification, immediacy and trust play a significant role in driving Instagram users to generate ephemeral content. Besides, the results could be explained by previous research (Chen & Cheung 2019) which suggests users feel imperative to adopt social media because of peer pressure that, in turn, generate gratification. Similarly, the result of Green et al. (2016) found that users’ trust influences the

extent to which they feel satisfied with media usage. Moreover, consistent with prior research findings, immediacy was found to be a necessary element in enjoying social media (Cao, Meadows, Wong, & Xia 2020). Specifically, concerning the travel context and the creation of Instagram stories, altruistic motivations play an important role in driving people to share their experiences on the platform compared to all the other factors employed in the study. Secondly, this study demonstrates the value of archiving in location tagging which provides a reflection of an individual's life. More precisely, the study identified the positive relationship between the location tagging intention and the importance of the moment experienced. Furthermore, archiving might facilitate the functional benefits of perceived usefulness, which in turn facilitates location tagging intention. Thirdly, the research addressed the consumption side of Instagram stories, identifying entertainment, information seeking and fear of missing out as the main drivers. Then, the study analyzed the relationship between these two sides. Above all, the research demonstrates the positive relationship between the consumption and the production of Instagram stories, in other words, people who spend more time on Instagram tend to create more stories. In addition to this, findings reveal that tourist photographs, delivered through Instagram stories, confirm to produce positive behaviour. More precisely, if interested, people respond to Instagram stories' friends to obtain or exchange more information concerning the destination and click on the location tag to absorb additional visual knowledge. As a result of this, Instagram stories related to travels produce a strong positive impression toward the places displayed and generate the desire to visit the destination.

In doing so, a word-of-mouth revolution has been growing in the strength since the advent of social media, which has been amplified by the advent of this new method of communication. Users are no longer passive and have themselves been producing their own content making it available online which may influence indirectly other people. The results of the current study are in line with those of previous researches which demonstrated that most people are keen to visit a destination because they were inspired by travel-related content showing their friends' journey on social networks and a significant proportion decide to go travelling out of insights gained from others (Sedera, Lokuge, Atapattu, & Gretzel, 2017). Similar results were also found by Pan, Rasouli, and Timmermans (2021) who discovered that the destination images from social networks allow people to update their existing knowledge

towards travel destination, through which their choice is finally influenced. More precisely, social influence is stronger through word-of-mouth communications and when people are situated in unfamiliar situations. Those two characteristics were observed to be present in the travel and tourism environment, thus making social influence adequately prevalent.

Finally, Instagram has been demonstrated to be the most used social platform for sharing travel experiences. Moreover, Instagram stories were confirmed to be preferred compared to traditional posts, which, due to their intrinsic nature, shift the attention from the pre and post-travel phase to the on-going trip phase resulting in a new tool for the dissemination of visual knowledge in the travel context.

#### **4.5 Limitations**

The findings, however, should be interpreted with caution regarding certain limitations. First of all, the study was conducted with a small sample size of young adults with a specific background in Italy. Although younger adults are considered heavy users of ephemeral content in social media, there is a growth in the use of this type of content among the older population with varied usage behaviour. In addition to this, the study was conducted in a situation of a global pandemic which may have led people to increase the time spent on social media in response to the need of being entertained. Secondly, despite the efforts to conduct this research in a rigorous manner, the descriptive analysis might be not accurate as of the statistical one which might have been more detailed. Thus, it is proposed that future research could gainfully focus on a different method and approach in order to better gain deeper and significant results. Thirdly, the discrepancy found between different items employed to test some variables, in particular, those concerning the social sphere (social pressure, impression management, internalization etc.) might be influenced by the difficulty that people have in admitting to themselves their addiction to social media as reported by Sedera et al. (2017).



## **Conclusion**

Social media and the advent of the Internet are changing how information about leisure travel are disseminated. This enables users to digitize and share online opinions, special moments and emotions far more widely compared to the past. Specifically, the sharing of travel content includes not only knowledge-related aspects such as facts that are related to travel attributes, but also communicating emotions, visual and intangible characteristics that otherwise would be difficult to convey. In this way, it is possible to understand how tourism is deeply related to visuals-sharing media (Lo & McKercher 2015). Similar results were also confirmed by Oliveira et. al (2020), which identified visual content, like photographs and videos as the most common preference among social media users in sharing travel experiences, reinforcing the saying that a picture is worth a thousand words. As a matter of fact, while information sharing is commonly related to narrative and textual communication practices, the sharing of experiences is particularly acknowledging the creation and sharing of visual content. Indeed, social media, and in particular those based on video and photos sharing, provide new opportunities for the production and circulations of content related to the tourism field. Moreover, the web-based applications allow more and more for “real-time” recording and sharing of travel experiences. In doing so, photographs and videos are increasingly assuming the role of traditional postcards in the social environment.

The current research provides insights into the newly emerging phenomenon of Instagram stories and its capability to disseminate new visual information in the tourism sector, thus analyzing the generation and consumption of this type of content by the users. Specifically, the study aimed at examining the reasons for the creation of Instagram stories in the travel domain and the role of the localization meta tag as an additional informative layer to the content. On the other hand, the research attempted to test the consumption of Instagram stories and how it may affect the individual’ intentions to visit new destinations. In addition to this, the selection of the social platform is reasoned by the predominance of visual content which appears an essential component due to the intangible dimension of the tourism sector.

Above all, the research confirmed the result obtained by Oliveira et al. (2020) who reported that perceived enjoyment is the most important motive in explaining why people use social

media. In fact, more than any other reason the usage of Instagram stories is perceived to be fun and entertaining. Specifically, the different editing options provided by the application play an important role in increasing the amusement of the users towards Instagram stories, thus making it preferred compared to the traditional posts. In addition to this, findings reveal as perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use contribute to enhance the enjoyment of the users, thus confirming the same results reported by Coa & Setiawan (2017) and Cao Meadows, Wong, & Xia (2020). Indeed, Instagram stories seem to help people to share their special moments in an simple and fast way.

Secondly, findings reveal as social pressure, gratification and trust are the three main motivations that nudge users to generate Instagram stories. The results find support by previous research which suggested that users feel imperative to adopt social media because of peer pressure (Fox and Moreland 2015). Indeed, the majority of participants admitted to like sharing distinctive moments through Instagram stories which, in turn, broadcast them a sense of gratification. Similarly, Green et al. (2016), found that user's trust influences the extent to which individuals feel satisfied with the media used. In particular to the travel context, altruistic motivations seems to play an important role in facilitating individuals to share their experiences on the social platform. On the other hand, the research did not totally confirm the results reported by Oliveira et al. (2020), which instead identified internalization and identification as the main drivers for sharing travel experiences on social media. This discrepancy is partially explained by the results obtained by Sedera et al. (2017) which confirmed that people usually have difficulty in admitting to themselves their addiction to social networks. In addition to this, results demonstrated a positive relationship between production and consumption of content. More precisely, it was demonstrated as the more people spend time on Instagram the more people are willing to generate stories. Similar results were also found by Daugherty et. al (2008) which confirmed that the act of generating the content, therefore, depends indirectly on previous exposure to UGC

Thirdly, location-based information sharing, which allows geolocation specificity and interaction on Instagram, has become a popular activity in the space of travel experiences. More precisely, archiving and perceived usefulness are the primary motivations that stimulate users to use this feature. Indeed, the study evidenced as the more the moment to share is perceived important, like tourism experience, the higher is the attitude towards the

use of this feature. Similar results were also reported by Sheldon and Bryant (2016) who identified a positive relationship between high levels of social activity (travelling, going to sporting events, concerts, etc.) and being motivated to use social media as a mean of documentation. In addition to this, results corroborate those of Hsieh and Lee (2020), which reported that archiving facilitates the function of perceived usefulness, which, in turn, facilitate location tagging intention. As a consequence of this, it is comprehensible how people use their smartphone while on vacation to document their activities. Specifically, this new tendency has been amplified thanks to the introduction of the ephemeral dimension on Instagram which allows users to share instant moments of their life (Cox, Burgess, Sellitto, & Bultjens, 2009). This has led people to share their current experiences and immortalize small live moments, thus shifting the attention from the pre-and post-travel phase to the ongoing trip phase due to the intrinsic nature of ephemeral content. Indeed, the majority of participants admitted to usually share their activities and location while on vacation through Instagram stories. As a result of this, the number of content created by the users has been increased, therefore increasing the exposition of travel destinations.

Fourthly, Instagram has been classified as the most used platform for sharing travel experiences among all the other social networks. This could be explained by its simplicity of use and its relationship with the tourism field as both are characterized by a high visual component, confirming what was previously explained.

Finally, findings reveals as tourist photographs shared through this new method of interaction, generate positive behaviour towards the destination image. The results of the current study are in line with those of previous researches which demonstrated that most people are keen to visit a destination because they were inspired by travel-related content showing their friends' journey on social networks and a significant proportion decide to go travelling out of insights gained from others (Sedera, Lokuge, Atapattu, & Gretzel, 2017). Specifically, the location tag plays a significant role in amplifying the visual knowledge related to the places displayed, consequently enhancing the intention to visit the destination. In addition to this, Instagram stories offer a new touchpoint for the exchange of information between users, thus identifying them as a novel source of immediate word of mouth. In fact, participants highly agree to comment Instagram stories which display interesting places to obtain more information and recommendation from friends. As a result of this, the research identified

Instagram stories as a new tool for the promotion of tourism destination which contribute to the dissemination of new visual knowledge in tourism field since finding reveal that the main motivation that push people to travel is to discover new places.

Understanding the power of ephemeral content also provides managerial insights for practitioners in the marketplace. The current research can be considered as a guideline for employing marketing strategies via ephemeral content in the tourism field. First of all, users could be nudged, by appropriating matching their motivations, to create Instagram stories in specific hot spots through the use of pre-designed creative hashtags. Secondly, the results encourage the tourism industry to be aware of the power of user-generated content through social media platforms and implications for all travel-related businesses. In addition to this, it has been found that perceived enjoyment and altruistic motivations explain why people share their travel experiences through Instagram stories, which indicates that sharing is possible to be associate with pleasure and fun. In doing so, offering pleasurable experiences and fun advantages may encourage more users to share their travel experiences. More precisely, when the degree of trip quality, satisfaction and perceived enjoyment and is high, tourists are more willing to recommend their experience generating form of eWOM (Chen and Tsai 2007). In other words, the quality of the experience positively influence users to generate content and post them online. Finally, the function of location tagging allows a model of communication that extends from speaking an individual's action to discussing and showing further information concerning the travel experience. Therefore, from an impression management perspective, practitioners can emphasize creating socially desirable situations which encourage individuals to perform tagging behaviour.

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## Appendix: Survey

Questions	Responses	Variables
Quanto tempo trascorri in media su Instagram al giorno? Per aiutarti puoi controllarlo nella sezione "tue attività" del tuo profilo	Più di 2 ore Tra 1 ora e 2 ore Tra mezzora e 1 ora Meno di mezzora Non mi collego tutti i giorni Mai	
Nel 2016 Instagram ha introdotto l'utilizzo delle stories, ovvero contenuti che si autodistruggono dopo 24 ore. Quanto spesso crei stories?	Tutti i giorni Almeno una volta a settimana Meno di una volta a settimana Mai	
Come valuti l'utilizzo di questi contenuti? Esprimi il tuo grado di accordo con le seguenti affermazioni. (dove 0 = non so rispondere, 1 = poco, 7 = molto)	Ritengo che la creazione delle stories sia di facile intuizione Ritengo che la creazione delle stories sia veloce Ritengo che la creazione delle stories mi aiuti a esprimere me stesso/a Ritengo che la creazione delle stories mi aiuti a condividere momenti speciali con gli altri Le varie opzioni di modifica delle stories mi divertono Pubblicare stories aumenta la percezione dell'esperienza che sto vivendo/ho vissuti Pubblicare stories mi fa sentire connesso/a agli altri Pubblicare stories mi fa sentire al centro dell'attenzione	Perceived ease of use Perceived usefulness Perceived enjoyment Social presence
Quali motivi ti spingono a creare stories? Valuta il tuo grado di accordo con le seguenti affermazioni (dove 0 = non so rispondere, 1 = poco, 7 = molto)	Sapere che le stories non permangono nel mio profilo mi fa sentire rilassato Pubblico stories perché mi permette di sapere immediatamente cosa pensano gli altri di ciò che condivido Pubblico stories perché richiede meno tempo rispetto ai post tradizionali Provo una sensazione piacevole a sapere che ho ottenuto tante visualizzazioni Quando sono ad un evento di mio particolare interesse mi piace dividerlo con le stories Mi sento a mio agio a comunicare attraverso le stories Creare stories mi fa sentire più spontaneo Aggiorno le informazioni che mi riguardano attraverso l'utilizzo delle stories	Trust Immediacy Social pressure Gratification Engagement Overall preference

	Preferisco creare stories piuttosto che post tradizionali	
Prima della pandemia, quanto viaggiavi solitamente in un anno?	Mai 1 volta 2-3 volte 4-5 volte 6-10 volte Più di 10 volte	Uses and gratification
Quali delle seguenti motivazioni ti spingevano a viaggiare?	Sperimentare nuovi e diversi stili di vita Incontrare persone appartenenti a culture diverse Incontrare persone nuove e differenti Abbatere la monotonia Visitare posti nuovi Aumentare la mia conoscenza Trovare nuovi stimoli Divertimento e Intrattenimento Visitare posti dove non sono stati i miei amici Rilassarmi Visitare amici e parenti Incontrare persone con interessi simili Non mi piace viaggiare	Novelty Escape Knowledge seeking Fun and excitement Rest and relax Friends and family
Quale delle seguenti piattaforme social prediligevi mentre eri in viaggio per la condivisione di contenuti inerenti all'esperienza che stai vivendo?	Facebook Instagram Twitter Snapchat WhatsApp TikTok Altro	
Rispetto alle esperienze che vivi in viaggio, con che frequenza le pubblichi utilizzando le stories?	Sempre Spesso A volte Raramente Mai	
In riferimento alla creazione delle stories quando viaggi, valuta il tuo grado di accordo con le seguenti affermazioni (dove 0 = non so rispondere, 1 = poco, 7 = molto)	Condivido le mie esperienze di viaggio per dare valore alla mia personalità di viaggiatore I commenti che ottengo per i contenuti che pubblico influenzano le percezioni della mia esperienza Se non ottenessi un certo livello di gratificazione dagli altri per ciò che condivido, pubblicherei meno contenuti Condivido questo tipo di contenuti perché mi piace consigliare i posti che sto visitando Mi piace trasmettere quello che voglio che le persone pensino di me	Identification Internalization Compliance Altruistic motivation Personal fulfilment and self-actualization
Quando pubblichi una storia, Instagram ti permette, per mezzo della funzione di geolocalizzazione, di	Di solito mi preoccupa di fare una buona impressione Uso la funzione di geolocalizzazione per registrare un momento speciale	Public self-consciousness Archiving

<p>associare il contenuto della tua storia al luogo in cui ti trovi. Quali sono le motivazioni che ti spingono a utilizzare questo strumento? Valuta il tuo grado di accordo con le seguenti affermazioni (dove 0 = non so rispondere, 1 = poco, 7 = molto)</p>	<p>Trovo che l'utilizzo della geolocalizzazione mi sia d'aiuto Esprimere dove mi trovo mi fa sentire socialmente desiderato L'utilizzo della geolocalizzazione mi fa sentire connesso agli altri</p>	<p>Perceived usefulness Impression management Social-psychological benefits</p>
<p>In riferimento alle stories, quali motivi ti spingono a guardare questo tipo di contenuti? Valuta il tuo grado di accordo con le seguenti affermazioni (dove 0 = non so rispondere, 1 = poco, 7 = molto)</p>	<p>Per interagire con le persone che conosco Per trascorrere il tempo Sono attratto dal consultare la sezione delle stories quando vedo i miei amici che hanno pubblicato qualcosa Temo che i miei amici facciano delle esperienze più significative delle mie Per farmi ispirare Per rilassarmi Per tenermi aggiornato riguardo a tematiche di mio interesse Per vedere cosa fanno gli amici</p>	<p>Social interaction Entertainment Fear of missing out Inspiration Relaxing Self-documentation Surveillance</p>
<p>Immagina che un tuo amico/a abbia pubblicato una storia su Instagram relativa a un luogo che sta visitando, di tuo interesse, e ti capita di guardarla. Valuta il tuo grado di accordo con le seguenti affermazioni (dove 0 = non so rispondere, 1 = poco, 7 = molto)</p>	<p>Per scoprire meglio dove sia questo posto clicco sul tag del luogo e guardo le foto correlate Scrivo all'amico/a per reperire informazioni in merito a dove si trova Se ho l'opportunità di viaggiare, intendo visitare il luogo menzionato dal mio amico/a Sono invidioso/a di dove si trova il mio amico/a In questo momento vorrei essere al posto suo Se avrò l'opportunità di andare nello stesso posto, penso pubblicherò anche io la stessa foto</p>	<p>More information Intention to visit a destination Travel envy Projected image vs perceived image</p>
<p>Quanti anni hai?</p>	<p>&lt;18 18-24 25-35 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+</p>	
<p>Genere</p>	<p>Maschio Femmina</p>	
<p>Quanti profili attivi hai sui social?</p>	<p>Libero inserimento</p>	