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Multimodality is the key: *A tourism-focused study on the effect of dynamic image and text overlays on consumer sharing*

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To my family
for being my standing point
yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

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Introduction

As a result of the outbreak of COVID-19 over the last two years, the significantly negative impact on the worldwide economic development has brought the tourism, hospitality and travel industry to a near standstill (Brouder 2020), both in terms of demand and supply, due to large-scale quarantines, travel restrictions and social-distancing measures. Despite this dramatic scenario, this is time to re-imagine the tourism sector (Brouder 2020) and its communication environment. Indeed, many researchers have viewed this pandemic as a unique opportunity to provide a new direction for the industry by reviewing the whole tourism system to work toward a more sustainable future (Brouder, 2020) and to "build back better" (Purcell et al. 2021). Thus, COVID-19 represents a 'teachable moment' for the Travel and Tourism (T&T) sector to accelerate sustainability, educate the traveler and drive fulfilment of the sustainable development goals (Purcell et al. 2021). In this respect, social media can play a crucial role considering that they can support companies in their listening efforts and affect tourists' behaviors especially in crisis management (Sigala 2011). Indeed, social media could potentially influence tourists' perceptions and attitudes towards "green" or "eco" activities, increasing the awareness of the impact of travel behaviors and sustainable alternatives (Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014). This may not lead to a direct change in travel behaviors, but it might influence attitudes and values that could change travel behaviors in the longer run (Kane, Chiru, and Ciuchete, 2012)

Thus, it seems imperative for tourism, hospitality and travel companies – including hotels, tour operator, Online Travel Agencies (OTA) – to adapt to new tourists' emerging needs after Coronavirus' global lockdowns, and adopt new innovative and creative communication strategies exploiting the growing interest on social media (+13%) (Dataportal, 2021). As a matter of fact, social media platforms have increasingly taken up a greater share of consumers' time spent online, thus becoming a larger component of firms' marketing budgets to use to strengthen interactive customer's relationships with products, brands, and companies.

As firms increase their social media activity and consumers' exposure to visual advertising grows as well, companies find it difficult – more than ever - to capture user's attention (Jutkowitz 2014) in a cluttered media environment. Therefore, the role of *content marketing*, which consists in creating customer value (i-SCOOP 2018) and sharing information (Ruffolo 2017), has become important to develop content that allows companies to stand out from the crowd to better engage their targeted audiences on social media in a trustworthy and valuable way (Patel 2016). Firms now operate in an environment, like social media, in which customers are actively participating in sharing their perceptions and experiences associated with brands (Liu et al. 2020), opening a window through which researchers and firms can hear the voice of consumers (Moe, Netzer, & Schweidel, 2017). Specifically, on well-known platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, consumer-distributed content can critically increase the reach of brand-generated messages (Napoli 2009). Thus, «the daunting challenge for companies is to produce appealing brand messages with content that is less likely to be buried and more likely to be shared by consumers»

(Villaroel, 2019, p. 989), whose main interest is to self-enhance, provide useful information (Li and Xie 2020), appear smart and helpful (Berger and Milkman 2012) in the eyes of others.

In the past decade, the popularization of smartphones and the improved mobile internet experience have enhanced visual-oriented experience on social media leading to a re-evaluation by social media marketers of the old idiom "a picture is worth a thousand words" (Li and Xie 2020). Nevertheless, growing evidence that visuals drive consumer engagement (Hutchinson 2016) requires companies to use visual content and verbatim (textual information) more strategically, as user-generated content is moving toward a diversification of content and formats where people tend to post text-embedded images, namely image-text posts (Soleymani et al., 2017; Yu, Qiu, Wen, Lin, & Liu, 2016). Therefore, it is critical to determine how to use available images and verbal elements to effectively compose dynamic messages that encourage consumer to share and facilitate business-to-consumer (b2c) communication on social media (Villaroel 2019). Indeed, advertising research affirms that images are powerful tools capable of persuading consumers to act or buy (Pieters and Wedel 2007), and an intricate interplay exists between text and pictorial elements in the same advertisement (Pieters and Wedel 2004), which requires a deeper investigation under the concept of multimodal content. In digital communication dynamics and multimodalities reflect and affect consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. The growing interest in methods to study text (Berger et al. 2012) and image data (Villarroel Ordenes and Zhang 2019) sheds a light on the potential impact of research that can address previously ignored facets of consumer behavior, especially in the social media

context. This last allows to create and combine visual and textual modalities in different and creative ways, which is also the focus of the research.

Previous articles in marketing research have concentrated on deriving brand information both from textual user-generated content and brand-related images, including Klostermann et al. (2018) who have investigated the integration of image, caption text and social tag data (#) to infer what consumers think and feel about a brand; Mazloom et al. (2016) have demonstrated that visual and textual features are complementary in predicting the popularity of multimodal and user brand-related posts on social media; Villaroel et al. (2019) have studied the complementary effect of text (directive, assertive and expressive acts) and visual acts based on the Speech Act Theory (SAT; Searle 1969), and how to effectively use available verbal and image elements to compose dynamic messages that encourage consumer sharing. Moreover, previous research has investigated the effects of picture–text congruence on consumer response (Van Rompay et al. 2010) and its multimodal framing effect (Powell, Boomgaarden, De Swert, & De Vreese, 2015) in the online environment. However, continued research is needed to gain a clearer understanding of the interplay of images and text. Recently, Villarroel et al. (2019) found out that the presence of readable text in social media images increases consumer sharing, but it was not explored the type of messages that can help firms to be more effective with their visuals on social media.

Therefore, this research, whose focus is on multimodal communication, empirically investigates how dynamic images and other textual information, particularly text overlays, interact in affecting consumer sharing of brand-related messages on social media. Moreover,

this study seeks to determine if the interplay between dynamic image and text overlays can be explained through consumer's mental imagery.

Recent studies analyze the combination of textual information and mental imagery in determining the extent to which and how consumers process and respond to ads. Specifically, Farace et al. (2020) studied the joint influence of ad headlines conveying motion and visual patterns on consumer product evaluation via mental simulation; while Zhang et al. (2020) investigated how product presentation dynamism interacts with contextual backgrounds and advertising slogans in a visual ad via imagery fluency.

Hence, the objective of the research is to test how dynamic images (more dynamic *vs* less dynamic) and text overlays (more salient *vs* less salient) interact in affecting consumer sharing of brand-related messages on social media, and if this interplay can be explained via consumer's mental imagery, especially in the tourism context, where tourists' vision of their future consumption experience may have a substantial influence on their level of product interest, their information search activities (Etzioni 1988; Goossens 2003; MacInnis and Price 1987; Miller, Hadjimarcou, and Miciak 2000) and the sensory experience associated with it (MacInnis and Price, 1987).

From a methodological standpoint, once verified the effectiveness of the manipulations of the independent variable (dynamic image) and the moderator (text overlays) through a pre-test on 75 participants, it has been conducted an online experiment with 233 respondents using a convenience sample. Employing a 2 (dynamic image: more dynamic *vs* less dynamic) x 2 (text overlays: more salient *vs* less salient) between-subjects design, each

participant has been randomly assigned to one of the four stimuli. Therefore, an English survey has been created on Qualtrics, and further distributed through emails, WhatsApp and Instagram *stories*, trying to cover the most varied age groups. Using two pre-validated scales found out in the grey literature, the survey aims at measuring the constructs of the research: mental imagery and consumer sharing. Once collected the primary data, these have been analyzed on the statistical software SPSS. First, a one-way ANOVA has been run to test the main - or direct - effect of the IV (dynamic image) on the DV (consumer sharing) under H1. Then, it has been investigated the mediation - or indirect - effect of mental imagery using PROCESS Model number 4 (Hayes, 2013) under H2. Afterwards, it has been studied the moderation – or interaction - effect of text overlays on the relationship between dynamic image and consumer sharing by conducting a two-way ANOVA under H3. Finally, a moderated mediation analysis has been conducted using PROCESS Model number 5 (Hayes, 2013) to test whether mental imagery could explain the whole model (H4).

The following study contributes to the rapidly growing advertising literature on social media content effectiveness, advancing knowledge on B2C content sharing and the theory of multimodality, with a focus on T&T industry, both from a theoretical and managerial point of view.

From an academical standpoint, first, the following research extends prior literature on social media as a dynamic activity (Stephen et al. 2017) demonstrating how a social media post depicting a dynamic image (more dynamic *vs* less dynamic) affects consumer sharing of brand-related messages on social media platform. Second, drawing from the literature of

mental imagery, this research offers more nuanced insights about the psychological process of mental imagery and its positive attitudinal consequences. Third, this study is among the firsts to chart a path to examine how social media content consisting of text-embedded images can be composed effectively to maximize consumer sharing.

For what concerns the managerial implications, much of the previous research has focused on social media and why users share their travel information and experience (Kang and Schuett, 2013), but little has explored the determinants for a firm-generated content (FCG) to be shared. As it becomes harder to engage consumers in the active distribution of brand-related content (Villaroel et al. 2021), first, this study offers guidance for companies' brand-related social media listening efforts to understand what type of FCG, with a focus on travel, is more likely to be shared by users. Specifically, it shows how to design successful social media content by using dynamic images, instead of static ones, which has been found out to be more effective in capturing observer's attention to visual stimuli as the viewer perceives to have a sense of movement (Cian, Krishna, and Elder 2014). Second, this research draws useful insights for companies, especially those working in the T&T sector such as hotels, travel agents, tour operators, etc., as it shows the importance of fostering tourist's imagination to obtain positive behavioral consequences. Indeed, correctly stimulating mental imagery will in turn increase consumer engagement, thus the likelihood of the consumer to share the brand-generated content. Third, as the combination of the type of image and text are crucial decisions for social media managers, this study sheds a light on compositional elements that reflect the interplay between dynamic images and text overlays. Specifically,

(social media) marketers should use a combination of a more dynamic image with a less salient text overlays to effectively enhance consumer sharing of brand-related messages.

In the next section, I begin by discussing literature pertinent to the research. I then build the conceptual framework for the hypothesized effects and describe the conducted study in detail and results. Finally, I conclude by addressing specific contributions of the research, both from an academical and managerial point of view, and presenting limitations and suggesting future research directions in the area.

Chapter 1: Literature review and hypothesis development

Given the wide range of narrative and visual communications, travel organizations and other types of businesses may be questioning how consumers perceive and respond to their brand-related content on social media. This chapter reviews academic literature relevant to study the main effect of dynamic image on consumer sharing, the mediation effect of mental imagery and the moderation effect of text overlays on the main effect. Finally, it is provided some evidence about the whole model.

1.1 Dynamic image and consumer sharing

With the proliferation of camera phones, generous data plans, and image-based social media platforms, sharing online content has become an integral part of modern life (Berger et al. 2012; Diehl et al. 2016). Consumer sharing is "a socially visible and undirected action as long as the shared content is pushed to all followers of the sharer without addressing anyone in particular" (Li and Xie, 2020, p.3). Today, consumers voluntarily turn to online social networking services and publicly share brand-related content (Klostermann et al. 2018), which can turn to be a major advantage for companies due to the potential virality that the message can reach at no cost to firms (Jalali and Papatla 2019). The reasons behind consumer sharing (i.e., retweet of Twitter, repost on Instagram, etc.) are multiple, including the related usefulness of the content, the reduction of dissonance, the willingness to deepen social connections (Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter 1956; Peters and Kashima 2007; Rime

et al. 1991), but also for self-presentation purposes (Wojinicki and Godes 2008). The challenging question, however, is how can companies induce consumer sharing of their brand-related messages on social media?

Social media platforms are becoming some of the main channels for companies to achieve a variety of key marketing objectives, from creating awareness, engaging with the targeted audience, facilitating sales, etc. (Batra and Keller, 2016; Kumar et al., 2013; Kumar et al., 2016; Colicev et al., 2018; Luo et al., 2013). As the amount of online firm-generated content (FGC) keeps growing and, consequently, users are daily subjected to content overload, a social media post needs to stand out from many others before any engagement takes place (Overgoor et al. 2020).

According to the extant visual advertising literature, the use of images in marketing materials can influence a host of important consumer outcomes, both from a cognitive (e.g., attention, attitude, preference) and behavioral (e.g., clicks, purchase intention, sales) point of view (e.g., Mitchell 1986), as they can alone convey meaningful information associated with the product (Liu Liu et al. 2020). As found out by Pieters and Wedel (2004), the mere presence of an image matters. Specifically, according to the mere presence effect suggested by Li and Xie (2020), the use of image content in a social media post helps the post stand out from the media clutter when most of online content is text-based (i.e., Twitter). Additionally, comparing social media posts with and without visual content, Adobe Digital Index (2014) found that posts with images perform the best in engaging the audience on social media. Consequently, I expect that the mere presence of an image in a social media post directly affects user engagement in terms of consumer sharing.

But what makes digital media so unique is its ability to incorporate dynamism as an element of design aesthetic (Mourey and Elder 2019). Indeed, as a consequence of the increasing time spent by consumers on digital media, the number of digital advertisings incorporating dynamic design elements has increased as well (Mourey and Elder, 2019). In marketing the concept of dynamism, independently if it is implied[1] (Cian et al. 2014) or actual (Brasel and Hagtvedt 2016; Kim and Lakshmanan 2015), consists in a movement integrated into the visual design of an advertisement or a product presentation (Mourey and Elder, 2019). Previous research, studying the dynamism as stemming from the product itself (Kim and Lakshmanan 2015), as design element (Cian, Krishna, and Elder 2014), or as visual pattern (Farace et al. 2019), showed that it can both enhance product evaluation and bolster consumer attitude toward the product featured in the content. Although the study of motion and movement is certainly not new (Gibson 1954; Cutting, Delong, and Brunick 2011), the focus of this research sheds a light on the use of dynamic images (more dynamic *vs* less dynamic), as they provide a sense of movement to the viewer, capture more the attention and are more engaging than images with no movement at all (Cian et al. 2014).

If the perceived movement in a static image is very effective in maintaining viewers' attention to a selected object (Cian, Krishna, and Elder 2014; Pieters and Wedel 2007), the dynamism of the focal object should lead to a more vivid and elaborate image of the movement depicted (Callow, Roberts, and Fawkes 2006). Therefore, in line with these findings, given that dynamism has been shown to increase engagement (Cian et al. 2014), I expect that the more the image used in the brand-related content is dynamic, the more the

[1] Implied dynamism corresponds to neuroscience research

consumer will be positively affected and engaged to share the post to his/her followers. Therefore, the first hypothesis states:

H1 *Consumers will be more likely to share a brand-related content embedding a more dynamic image rather than a less dynamic image*.

1.2 Mental imagery

As a mental activity that visualizes a concept or a relationship (Lutz & Lutz, 1978), mental imagery reflects the psychological process by which sensory or perceptual product is represented in an individual's working memory in terms of ideas, feelings, and memories (MacInnis & Price, 1987), thus facilitating the related experience. Mental imagery theory assumes that we mentally represent in our minds something that was presented to us before any experience took place or any information was provided (Lee and Gretzel 2011).

When consumers experience a high level of mental imagery, they may be able to acquire enough information to make a purchase decision without directly experiencing the product (Yo and Kim 2014). This holds particularly true in the context of tourism marketing and travel decision-making, as well as in online communication environments, where mental imagery was confirmed to be an important element of persuasive communication (Lee and Gretzel, 2011). Indeed, in online contexts like social media, there is not the possibility of directly touching a product as in a brick-and-mortal store, but consumers can only imagine the actual stimulus in their mind's eye (Lee and Gretzel, 2012, p. 1270). In this context, experience (*vs* search) products can benefit more from mental imagery (Maier and Dost,

2018) - as for example envisioning oneself at a vacation destination (Walters et al., 2007) - both inducing a stronger and more concrete sensory experience and increasing the desire for the product or service (MacInnis and Price, 1987). Past studies have addressed the importance of visually transporting the consumer of travel information to the destination to support the formation of concrete expectations (Lee et al., 2010; Rozier-Rich & Santos, 2010) and positive attitudes (Lee and Gretzel, 2011). Therefore, it is fundamental for providers of tourism products to encourage quasi-trial experiences to support and facilitate travel decision-making processes (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003; Walters, Sparks, & Herington, 2007) based on tourist's expected experience at the destination (Oh, Fiore, and Jeoung 2007).

Studies on marketing communications and mental imagery have investigated several individual forms of external stimuli and their effectiveness in evoking mental imagery, among which the use of pictures (i.e., artistic illustration *vs* photograph [Stoica and Mille 2003], concrete *vs* abstract images [Babin and Burn 1997], etc.). According to the picture superiority effect (Unnava and Burnkrant, 1991, p. 226), which refers to the phenomenon where pictures are superior over words when it comes to recalling and recognizing information, there is a dominance of visual over verbal cues as antecedents of mental imagery (White et al., 1977). Indeed, conducting eye tracking studies, Kroeber-Riel, W. (1984) found out that most consumers focus first on the dominant picture contained in a print ad before attending to verbal material.

The literature suggests that mental imagery, as an elaborate and focused form of cognitive processing, plays a significant role in mediating ad-evoked attitudes (Bone & Ellen, 1990; 1992; Burns et al., 1993; Mitchell, 1986; Mitchell & Olson, 1981). Since the attitudinal

consequences of mental imagery have been found out to be stronger, more stable over time and positive in valence (Bolls and Muehling, 2007; MacInnis and Price, 1987; Yoo and Kim, 2014) because of its high elaboration quality (Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992; Petty, Haugtvedt, & Smith, 1995), the second hypothesis predicts that:

H2 *Mental imagery will mediate the relationship between dynamic image and consumer sharing of brand-related messages on social media. Consumers experience greater mental imagery when exposed to a more dynamic image, in comparison to a less dynamic image*.

1.3 The interplay effect between dynamic image and text overlays

Generally, social media messages are multimodal meaning that they are made with various modalities, such as text and image(s), in order to convey information (Mazloom et al. 2016). If on the one hand in social media the caption and the image are visually represented separately in their own visual frames, on the other it might be the case in which the text and the image can be also offered in the same visual frame in text-image posts (Farace and Ordenes, 2022).

The use of images and text, in a world of ever-depreciating attention span, can allow brands to engage their audience and have a capacious creative potential (Manikonda et al. 2016). Even if unlimited combinations between text and image are possible, brands need to understand the right combination to compose social media posts (Farace and Ordenes) to effectively and positively affect consumer engagement. Specifically, the focus of this study

is on the composition of social media post with dynamic images and salient text overlays. The latter means that textual information embedded in an image can draw higher or lower attention to itself depending on the size, location in the foreground, color, tonal values, sharpness, etc. (Janiszewski, Chris 1998; Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). According to Luangrath (2017), these artifacts – the presentational, formatting, and stylistic elements of textual information – can positively affect brand-consumer relationship in terms of engagement. Recently, Li and Xie (2019) and Jalali and Papatla (2019) found out that the inclusion of user mentions (@) and hashtagged topics (#) has a significant effect both on consumer liking and sharing, contrary to the use of emojis. If sufficiently salient, the inclusion of visual stimuli primary driven by low-level features in the textual information allows to rapidly orientate the gaze in a cluttered media environment (Itti and Koch 2001).

According to the dual coding theory from cognitive psychology (Paivio, 1971), an individual's cognition involves the joint activity of two independent but interconnected systems: a nonverbal and a verbal system which stimulate each other's. As a result, people obtain more information when both visual and verbal information are presented than when only one is available (Yoo and Kim 2014). Specifically, when pictorial and textual information are both presented, people's comprehension is largely driven by text (Lee and Wu 2018; Schmidt-Weigand, Kohnert, and Glowalla 2010), which underlines the importance of textual information accompanying the image. Moreover, when there is congruity in the intensions communicated by an ad-image and the related text, this can result in enhanced consumer responses (Poor, Duhachek, and Krishnan 2013).

As suggested in the image-text fit effect by Li and Xie (2020), a similar image–text fit effect may also be present in the context of social media, otherwise less favorable attitude toward the ad may rise. Generally, in the social media context, it has been found out that textual content (e.g., words, tags) and visual content (e.g., images) are two major factors that influence consumer engagement (Jaakonmaki et al. 2017). Specifically, just as readable text in social media images has been found out to induce more consumer sharing (Villaroel et al. 2019), so does the viewing of a dynamic image has been found out to positively influence behavior (Poor et al. 2013) and consumer sharing (de Vries et al. 2012). As a consequence, I expect that the joint effect of dynamic image and text overlays in the same brand message will positively affect consumer sharing. In a work in progress research by Farace and Villaroel (2022), it has been found out that the joint effect of a narrative image, in which the concept of action plays an important role for consumer engagement (Bence Nanay 2009), with a less salient caption is more effective on consumer sharing. In the same way, I expect that combining a more dynamic image with a less salient text overlays will positively increase consumer sharing of the brand-related message. Therefore, the third hypothesis states that:

H3 *Text overlays moderates the relationship between dynamic image and consumer sharing. When we use a more dynamic image with a less salient text overlays, and a less dynamic image with a more salient text overlays, consumer sharing increases*.

1.4 Mediation with moderated direct path

Brewer (1988) claims that text genre can indeed be an important factor in encouraging mental imagery processing. The same argument has also been carried out by Babin and Burns (1997), who proposed that concrete words may in fact be more effective than concrete pictures alone in eliciting mental imagery, as with no picture present the individual has no choice but to imagine the objects/scenario described by the text. In psycholinguistic studies, the presence of concreteness in text or image is fundamental as it refers to the degree of ease involved in eliciting a mental image (Paivio, Yulille, & Madigan, 1968) and determining the extent to which and how consumers react to an ad (Farace et al. 2020; Lee and Choi 2019; MacInnis and Price 1987; Mazloom et al 2016). Particularly, this holds true in travel advertisement, where both concrete pictures and textual descriptions of travel destinations help improve the elaboration[2] and the quality[3] of mental imagery (Walters et al. 2007), thus, enhancing behavioral intentions (Miller & Stoica, 2003; Rossiter, 1982) and influencing cognitive, affective, and conative responses (Babin & Burns, 1997; Bone & Allen, 1992; Fennis, Das, & Fransen, 2012). Therefore, the fourth and last hypothesis predicts that:

H4 *Mental imagery will totally explain the joint effect of a more dynamic image with a less salient text overlays on consumer sharing of the brand-related message (H3).*

[2] It refers to the number of images evoked in one's mind

[3] It refers to their vividness, clarity, intensity, sharpness, and appeal

1.5 Control variable: the caption text

Pfau et al. (2006) showed that the text accompanying an image can play an important role, as previously mentioned. In a social media setting this is called caption, which is a statement that yields additional textual information to explain, contextualize and complement the subject of the posted image (Klostermann et al. 2018; Li and Xie 2020). For the following study, therefore, the caption has been included as a control variable for two main reasons. Firstly, the textual content of each post potentially consists of a set of a descriptive caption (Bashari et al. 2020), thus making more realistic the stimuli distributed in the survey. Secondly, it might be that the presence of a caption text affects consumer sharing of the brand related message, as it was found out by Mazloom et al. (2016), who stated that verbal information accompanying an image determines the extent to which and how consumers react to an ad and share the content on social media.

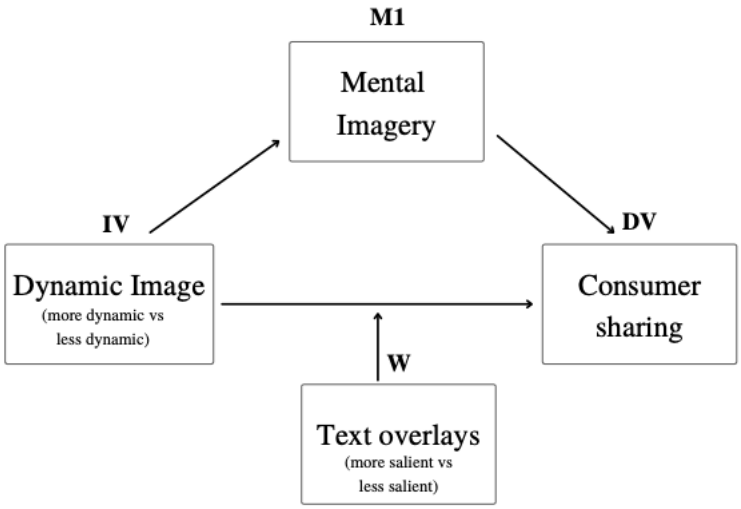


Figure 1: Conceptual model

Chapter 2: Methodology

In the following chapter I present the methodology of the experimental study conducted to test the hypothesis. Firstly, it has been conducted a pretest to verify the successfulness of the two manipulations: the independent variable (dynamic image) and the moderator (text overlays). Then, through the main study, the aim was to test whether the use of a more dynamic image (*vs* less dynamic image) in a brand-related content increases consumer sharing of the brand-related message (H1), especially in the case in which it interacts with a less salient (*vs* more salient) text overlays (H3). Moreover, the goal is to demonstrate whether mental imagery can mediate the relationship between dynamic image and consumer sharing (H2) and whether it can totally explain the whole model (H4).

For conducting the online experiment, it was used a fictitious Tour Operator (bike division) account on Twitter called @Su2Ruote to avoid potential biases in the responses.

2.1 Pretest and manipulation checks

A pretest with 75 participants aging between 12 and 59 (M_{age}= 29.5 years; SD_{age}= 12.37), where 53 of the respondents were females (*vs* 21 males *vs* 1 who prefers not to say the gender), was conducted to assess whether the manipulations of the dynamism of the image and the saliency of the text embedded in the image were effective. Moreover, of 75 respondents who completed the pre-test survey, none was excluded for not meeting study criteria or attention checks.

Participants have been recruited through a convenience sample and were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. They evaluated how much they perceived the image as dynamic, and how much they perceived the text embedded in the image as salient, on a 7-point bipolar scale ranging from "Strongly disagree = 1" to "Strongly agree = 7".

As expected, the results of the pretest of the independent variable (dynamic image) revealed that the more dynamic image was perceived as significantly more dynamic than the less dynamic image. Thus, the manipulation of the dynamism of the image was successful ($M_{moredynamic}$ = 5.00; SD = 1.639 vs. $M_{lessdynamic}$ = 4.08; SD = 1.707; F(1,73) = 5.686; p = .02). Similarly, the results of the pretest of the moderator (text overlays) showed a significant difference in terms of the perceived saliency between the two text overlays. Thus, the manipulation of text overlays was effective ($M_{moresalient}$ = 4.59, SD = 1.674 vs. $M_{lesssalient}$ = 3.68, SD =3.68; F(1,73) = 5.424; p = .023).

I thus proceeded to use the pretested manipulations for the main study.

2.2 Sample

A 2 (image: more dynamic *vs* less dynamic) X 2 (text overlays: more salient *vs* less salient) between-subjects experimental design was used to test the hypotheses. A total of 233 Italian people, recruited via email, Whatsapp and Instagram stories using a convenience sample, were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions. The sample was between the ages of 15 and 71 (M_{age}= 36 years, SD_{age} = 15,41), 67% of the respondents were female (*vs* 31.3% were male *vs* 1.7% prefers not to say). About 37.3% of the participants use

social media for travel inspiration "very frequently", followed by 30.5% of people that use it "occasionally", against a lower percentage (3.9%) who never uses social media for this purpose. Two attention checks have been implemented in the survey, such that participants who answered incorrectly have been excluded in the data analysis ($N_{EXCLUDED}$: 26).

2.3 Procedures and materials

For the study it was realized a survey to collect primary data. Participants were asked to imagine themselves in a scenario where they prioritized a Twitter post by @Su2Ruote, a Tour Operator (bike division) offering a wide range of bike trips to discover the Italian territory, meet the locals and taste local produce. They were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions representing a social media post on Twitter. On the one hand, the image stimulus was manipulated as followed: in the more dynamic condition two girls riding a bike have been photographed; such dynamism has been omitted in the less dynamic condition, where the two girls are standing on the bike. On the other hand, the textual stimulus was manipulated based on the size: in the more salient condition the text is bigger and occupies a larger portion of the image, while in the less salient condition the text is smaller and occupies a smaller portion of the image. Moreover, in all the four stimuli the background is represented by country roads between monumental olive trees and dense Mediterranean vegetation. The text caption of the post has been held constant in all the stimuli and states: "*For those who want to discover **#Puglia** slowly in the shade of monumental olive trees, crossing country roads and be surprised on a tour of local flavors. **#Su2Ruote** allows you to*

*live the essence of Puglia by **#bike**!*" which conveys additional information giving a rough idea about the featured sustainable experience (see Appendix to visualize the stimuli).

Following the stimuli presentation, participants have been subjected to two attention checks, one at the beginning and one at the end of the survey, to verify if they have carefully seen the stimuli. Therefore, it was asked what the social media post was about (correct answer: a tour by bike) and the gender of the two girls in the image (correct answer: female). Then, they completed a series of questions (see Appendix for measurements and sources) measuring mental imagery (Miller et al., 2000; $\alpha = .93$) and consumer sharing (Dubois et al., 2016; $\alpha = .91$). All measurement scales in this research used 7-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The items of the scales have been averaged to form an overall mean score: in the end Cronbach's alpha values were all above the cutoff point of 0.7 (mental imagery $\alpha = 0.941$; consumer sharing $\alpha = 0.917$). Finally, participants answered few socio-demographic questions about the age, the gender, the frequent use of social media for travel inspiration purposes (1 = never, 2 = very rarely, 3 = rarely, 4 = occasionally, 5 = very frequently, 6 = always) and were thanked for their participation.

2.4 Results and discussion

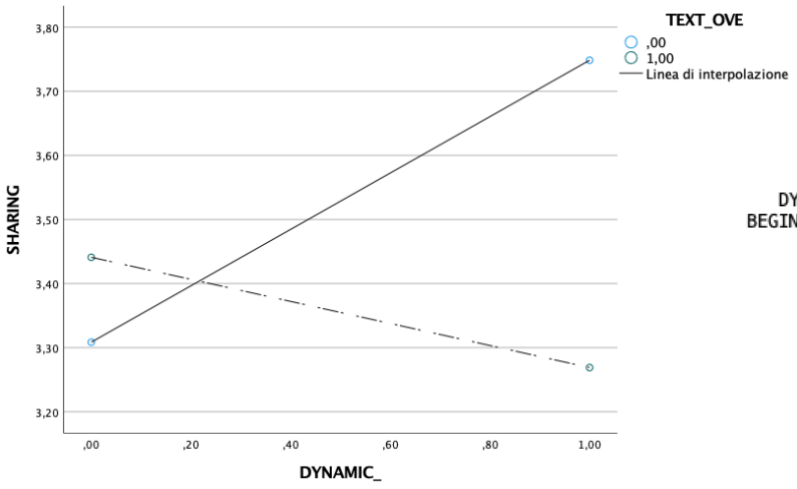
Dynamic image. Results of a one-way ANOVA on the mean score of consumer sharing revealed a non-significant main effect of dynamic image ($M_{more\_dynamic} = 3.58$, SD = 1.67 vs. $M_{less\_dynamic} = 3.38$, SD = 1.73; $F(231,1) = .327$; $p = .568$) on consumer sharing, thus rejecting H1.

Mental imagery. To test the predicted mediation of mental imagery (H2), it was estimated Model 4 of PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013), considering dynamic image as the independent variable (1 = more dynamic, 0 = less dynamic), mental imagery as the mediator and consumer sharing as the dependent variable. The results showed that dynamic image (IV) is not a significant predictor of mental imagery (M) (b = -.1163; t = -.804; p = 0.42). Moreover, when the mediator is in the model, the effect of dynamic image on consumer sharing is still non-significant (b = .217; t = 1.11; p = .26), whereas the effect of mental imagery on consumer sharing has resulted to be positive and significant (b = .769; t = 8.69; p <.001). Since mental imagery does not mediate the relationship between dynamic image and consumer sharing, H2 has been rejected.

Text overlays. Results of two-way ANOVA on the mean score of consumer sharing was run to examine the effect of dynamic image and text overlays on consumer sharing. In the corrected model, both the independent variables have no effect on consumer sharing (F(3,229) = .922; p = .431). The main effect analysis showed that dynamic image (F(1,229) = .359; p = .550) and text overlays (F(1,229) = .602; p = .439) resulted in no effect on consumer sharing. Moreover, the interaction between dynamic image and text overlays had a non-significant effect on consumer sharing ($M_{more\_salient}$ = 3.36, SD = 1.65 vs. $M_{less\_salient}$ = 3.53, SD = 1.76; F(1,229) = 1.871; p = .173). Since text overlays has no moderating effect on the relationship between dynamic image and consumer sharing, H3 has been rejected.

Moderated mediation. Finally, it was conducted a moderated mediation analysis (H4) estimating Model 5 of PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) that considers dynamic image as the independent variable (1 = more dynamic, 0 = less dynamic), text overlays as moderator (1 =

more salient, 0 = less salient), mental imagery as the mediator and consumer sharing as the dependent variable. The results showed that when the mediator is in the model, dynamic image is a positive and significant predictor of consumer sharing (b = .6103; t = 2.18; p = 0.03), particularly when the image is more dynamic. Moreover, dynamic image is a non-statistically significant predictor (b: -.1163; t = -.804; p = 0.4) of the mental imagery variable, whereas the direct effect of mental imagery on consumer sharing is positive and significant (b = .7838; t = 8.9; p = 0.000). Finally, text overlays alone does not have a significant effect on consumer sharing (b = .1165; t = 0.43; p = 0.66), but its interaction with dynamic image (dynamic_image*text_overlays) on the dependent variable is negative and significant (Int_1; b = -.7718; t= - 1.99; p = 0.04). This means that the regression slope from dynamic image on consumer sharing is moderated by text overlays. In other words, the slope for the relationship between dynamic image and consumer sharing changes across the levels of text overlays (more salient *vs* less salient).



DYNAMIC_	TEXT_OVE	SHARING
BEGIN DATA.		
,0000	,0000	3,2727
1,0000	,0000	3,8830
,0000	1,0000	3,3892
1,0000	1,0000	3,2277

As it can be graphically seen, there is a general tendency of the slope for the effect of dynamic image on consumer sharing to increase when the image is more dynamic (=1) and the text overlays is less salient (=0) ($M_{1,0}$ = 3,88), followed by the combination of a less dynamic image with a more salient text overlays ($M_{0,1}$ = 3,38).

2.5 Conclusions

In summary, results from moderated mediation analysis suggest that using a more dynamic image has a significant effect on consumer sharing (b = .6103, p = .03), corroborating the mere presence effect by Li and Xie (2020) and the dynamism as an aspect that increases consumer engagement (Cian et al. 2014). Moreover, the effect of dynamic image on consumer sharing has been found out to be even stronger when it interacts with text overlays (b = -.7718). These results support Villaroel et al.'s findings (2019) according to which text embedded in an image increases the likelihood for a user to share brand-related messages on social media. Specifically, a stronger effect on consumer sharing is given by the interaction of a more dynamic image and a less salient text overlays ($M_{1,0}$ = 3,88). Conversely, in the absence of mental imagery variable in the model, neither the dynamic image nor the text overlays nor their interaction (dynamic_image*text_overlays) have a significant effect on consumer sharing, thus rejecting H1, H2 and H3.

In short, the significant relationships exists only if the whole model is considered. Finally, it is to say that mental imagery does not mediate the relationship between dynamic image and consumer sharing at all, contradicting the picture superiority effect by Unnava and Burnkrant (1991) which reports a dominance of visual over verbal cues as antecedent of

mental imagery. To conclude, it was found out that the main effect of mental imagery (M) on consumer sharing (DV) when controlling on dynamic image (IV) is positive (.7838 > .769).

Conclusions

3.1 General discussion

As consumers' social media exposure to visual advertising constantly grows and managers and advertisers encounter more and more difficulties in capturing users' attention and engaging them (Jutkowitz 2014) with b2c content, the present research seeks to address this "daunting challenge" by proposing a novel visual to design social media posts such that they could effectively trigger consumer sharing.

Findings of the study demonstrates that using a more dynamic (*vs* less dynamic) image enhances consumer's likelihood to share the branded post with other users. Such positive attitudinal response can be strengthen combining a dynamic image with a less salient text overlays within the same post. However, mental imagery serves as a contextual mechanism for holding true these findings.

3.2 Theoretical implications and managerial contributions

The findings of this study provide theoretical and practical insights that will help both researchers and managers to understand how to maximize consumer sharing on social media. This research contributes to the rapidly growing literature on social media content effectiveness. Specifically, it extends previous literature on b2c content (Mazloom et al.

2016; Jaakonmäki et al. 2017; Villarroel et al. 2019; Li and Xie 2020) by enriching the current knowledge about the use of dynamism in visual content (Poor et al. 2013; Cian et al. 2014; Muorey et al. 2019; Farace et al. 2020; Zhang et al. 2020) and the joint effect of image and text (Pieters and Vedel 2004; Van Rompay et al. 2012; Mazloom et al. 2016; Jaakonmäki et al. 2017; Jalali and Papatla 2019; Villaroel et al. 2019; Li and Xie 2020) on consumer sharing from a mental imagery perspective. Thus, this research sheds a light on the importance of multimodal content to effectively engage consumers, especially providing support to tourism marketers as they should make an extra-effort to induce people to image what it would be like to experience a destination, a service and anything related to tourism (Lee and Gretzel, 2011).

First, while conventional wisdom suggests that the mere presence of an image helps the post to stand out from the media clutter (Li and Xie 2020), this study extends previous research on visual strategies for social media marketing by introducing a new image aspect, the dynamism. Findings revealed that the mere presence of a dynamic image, whether it provides more or less dynamism, does not have alone any significant effect on consumer sharing. This implies that the mere exposure to dynamism in a post does not engage the user as suggested by the literature. Thus, results suggest that decisions by marketers to use a more dynamic picture on a social media post, compared to a less dynamic one, will not affect the persuasiveness of the brand-related message on the propensity of the user to share the content with his/her followers.

Second, despite previous research found visual as antecedent of mental imagery over verbal (Unnava and Burnkrant, 1991, p. 226), this study reveals that mental imagery does not

mediate, neither partially nor totally, the relationship between dynamic image and consumer sharing. Nevertheless, mental imagery has been shown to have a significant and positive effect on consumer sharing, corroborating the evidence that attitudinal consequences of mental imagery are generally positive in valence (Bolls and Muehling, 2007; MacInnis and Price, 1987; Yoo and Kim, 2014). Thus, results suggest that in general it is extremely advisable for marketers to be better informed about the effectiveness of imagery processing in order to correctly stimulate it and obtain positive attitudinal consequences from consumers. Moreover, in the context of successful tourism marketing, with the rocketing amount of brand- and user-generated content about tourism, travel inspiration and resume of trips, a persuasive communication on social media may be crucial to seek to engage consumers. Indeed, since consumers evaluate experience products, tourism marketers should be always better «running a simulation-like scenario in one's mind to facilitate consumer engagement, build confidence» (Lee and Gretzel, 2012, p. 1277) and trigger positive attitudes.

Third, while previous research found out that a readable text embedded in an image increases consumer sharing (Villaroel et al. 2019), this research focuses on the saliency of the text, particularly on the size and the space occupied by the text on the image-post. It has been found that the saliency of textual information does not moderate alone the relationship between dynamic image and consumer sharing. Thus, results suggest that if marketers edit images including textual information on them, this will not have an impact on consumer sharing.

Finally, taking into consideration the whole model, few contributions can be somehow overturned. Indeed, considering consumer sharing as the outcome variable,

findings firstly (and implicitly) revealed that the mere presence of an image directly affects consumer sharing and that the use of a more dynamic image shows a significant positive effect on consumer sharing, higher compared to the use of a less dynamic image. Thus, results suggest the importance for marketers and content creators to use dynamism as an aspect to increase consumer sharing. Particularly, tourism marketers should use images strategically, as they can make a significant difference on consumer engagement; thus, decision to use more dynamic images instead of static ones, could be a smart choice to better engage consumers in experiencing non-tangible products, as a travel destination or a travel experience. As a practical suggestion, it would be advisable to feature a hypothetical scenario in which the consumers can look ahead as they are experiencing what they see in the social media post. Secondly, there exist a significant interaction between dynamic image and text overlays on consumer sharing which is even stronger than when dynamic image acts alone. Specifically, marketers should combine a more dynamic image with a less salient text overlays to positively influence consumers' sharing of brand-related messages. Thus, findings support the importance of the joint effect of text overlays and image to increase consumer sharing (Villaroel et al. 2019), revealing that if marketers correctly manipulate the saliency of textual information, this will be impactful on consumer's willingness to share brand-related messages. As a practical suggestion, it would be advisable to include a short textual description which can complete the image-post and facilitate the understanding of the visual content.

As a general rule, results suggest the use of a less salient text overlays in combination with a more dynamic image, and the use of more salient text overlays in combination with a

less dynamic image, enhances consumer's sharing. Thus, findings from the moderated mediation analysis offers evidence that mental imagery is the underlying mechanism - particularly in the context of travelling - that can better explain the whole model. Nevertheless, marketers should find a way to directly foster imagination about what it would be like to experience a service featured in a social media post.

3.3 Limitations and future research

Although this study offers new insights to the social media literature and multimodality theory, several limitations should be addressed in future research. First, it is not possible to generalize the main findings to all social media platforms, since it was used Twitter, which is a mainly text-based platform offering a content layout easily replicable on Facebook or LinkedIn, but not on Instagram, which is a more image-based social media.

Additionally, the findings of this study cannot be generalized as it was conducted on just one product category, the travel industry, and one type of product, hedonic ones. Therefore, future research could expand the scope of empirical analysis to other product categories (e.g., technologies), product types (e.g., utilitarian products) and social media platforms (e.g., Instagram).

Moreover, due to a lack of time it was employed a non-probability sample, which might not be representative of the population and might lead potential for bias. Future research should use a simple random sample to ensure representativeness.

Then, the research has focused only on one social media metric, consumer sharing. Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate whether the same conceptual model can be applied to other forms of social media engagement, such as liking or commenting, to provide other valuable and more impactful managerial contributions. Considering that significant relationships (IV on DV; M on DV; IV*W on DV) exist only when the whole model is taken into consideration, I would suggest future research to 1) manipulate the dynamic image (IV) visibly showing the dynamism of the subjects by choosing a closer camera angle; 2) implement a double mediation analysis where imagery fluency acts as a antecedent and prerequisite for mental imagery (Larsen et al. 2014; Maier and Dost 2018) which further affects consumer sharing as previously demonstrated. Indeed, only if an image can be visually perceived fluently, it is more likely to generate mental images which can further lead to positive attitudinal consequences (Maier et al. 2018); 3) manipulate the saliency of the text overlays in many other ways, for example considering the position of the text using the rule of thirds or the color of the text using the Itten circle. More in general, future research could study aspects, others than the saliency, as for example the text intention (e.g., assertive, expressive or directive), as it was already done on the post caption by Villaroel et al. (2019). It would be also interesting to complete the study conducting a (mobile) eye-tracking experiment to practically see how respondents react to the stimuli, what attracts their attention, and what they fixate mostly of the social media post, as it is the best technology to better understand consumer responses to content (Maslowska et al. 2021). Generally, and to conclude, more emphasis needs to be placed on studying mental imagery processing in context of tourism marketing and travel decision making.

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Appendix

A. Stimuli

More dynamic image & less salient text overlays

More dynamic image & more salient text overlays

Less dynamic image & less salient text overlays

Less dynamic image & more salient text overlays

B. Measures

Construct	Items	Source
Consumer sharing	so that the message recipient would like me to create a good impression about myself thinking it will have positive consequences on the message recipient's attitude towards me	Dubols, Bonessi and Angelis (2016)
Mental imagery	The mental images that come to my mind formed a series of events in my mind in which I was part of The mental images that came to my mind made me feel as I was actually experiencing the experience by bike This post made me fantasize about having the opportunity to experience the tour by bike I could easily construct a story about myself and the experience by bike based on the mental images that came to my mind It was easy for me to imagine myself experiencing the tour by bike Whilst viewing the post many images come to my mind The mental images that came to my mind were very clear and specific The images that came to my mind acted as a source of information about the featured experience by bike I could actually see myself in the featured experience by bike	Miller, Hadjimarcou, and Miciak (2000)

Executive Summary

Introduction Over the last two years, the pandemic had a significant negative impact on the worldwide economic development, particularly bringing the tourism and travel industry to a near standstill (Brouder 2020). Therefore, now more than ever, it is time to re-imagine the tourism sector (Brouder 2020) taking advantage of this historical moment as a unique opportunity to provide a new direction for tourism industry, for example, toward a more sustainable future (Brouder, 2020). Thus, COVID-19 represents a 'teachable moment' for the Travel and Tourism (T&T) sector to accelerate sustainability, educate the traveler and drive fulfilment of the sustainable development goals (Purcell et al. 2021). In this respect social media can play a crucial role, especially in crisis management (Sigala 2011), as they have increasingly taken up not only a greater share of consumers' time spent online, but also larger component of firms' marketing budgets used to share brand-related messages and strengthen interactive customer's relationships. As firms increase their social media activity and consumers' exposure to visual advertising grows as well, companies find it difficult to capture user's attention (Jutkowitz 2014) in a cluttered media environment. Therefore, the role of *content marketing* has become important to develop content that allows companies to stand out from the crowd and better engage their targeted audiences on social media in a trustworthy and valuable way (Patel 2016). Now, firms daily operate in an environment – as social media - in which customers are actively participating in communicating and sharing their perceptions and experiences associated to brands (Liu et al. 2020). Thus, «the daunting challenge for companies is to produce appealing brand messages with content that is less

likely to be buried and more likely to be shared by consumers» (Villaroel, 2019, p. 989). The growing interest in methods to study text (Berger et al. 2012) and image (Villarroel Ordenes and Zhang 2019) data sheds a light on the important impact of research that can address previously ignored facets of consumer behavior, especially in the social media context which allows to combine visual and textual modalities in different and creative ways. Previous articles in marketing research have concentrated on deriving brand information both from textual user-generated content and brand-related images, investigating the integration of image, caption text and social tag (Klostermann et al. 2018); studying the complementarity of visual and textual features in predicting the popularity of multimodal and user brand-related posts on social media (Mazloom et al. 2016); analyzing the effects of picture–text congruence on consumer response (Van Rompay et al. 2010) and its multimodal framing effect (Powell, Boomgaarden, De Swert, & De Vreese, 2015) in the online environment.

Therefore, the objective of this research is to advance knowledge on multimodal content and specifically investigate how dynamic images and text overlays interact in affecting consumer sharing of brand-related messages on social media via consumer's mental imagery.

Chapter 1: Literature Review and Hypothesis Development In the past decade, with the proliferation of camera phones, generous data plans, and image-based social media platforms, sharing online content has become an integral part of modern life (Berger et al. 2012; Diehl et al. 2016), which consists in "a socially visible and undirected action" (Li and Xie, 2020, p.3). Most of the times, consumers voluntarily share brand-related content which

of course provide benefits - such as creating awareness, engaging with the targeted audience, facilitating sales, etc. - at no cost for firms and brands (Batra and Keller, 2016; Kumar et al., 2013; Kumar et al., 2016; Colicev et al., 2018; Luo et al., 2013). The challenging question, however, is how can companies induce consumer sharing of their brand-related messages if users are daily subjected to content overload?

Dynamic image. According to the extant visual advertising literature, visual-oriented experience has been recently re-evaluated by social media marketers on the basis of the old idiom "a picture is worth a thousand words" (Li and Xie 2020). Indeed, the use of images can influence important consumer outcomes, both from a cognitive and behavioral point of view (e.g., Mitchell 1986). According to the mere presence effect (Li and Xie 2020), the image content in a social media post helps the post stand out from the media clutter. Indeed, images, compared to posts without visual content, perform the best in engaging the audience on social media (Adobe Digital Index 2014). Because of the increasing time spent by consumers on digital media, the number of digital advertisings incorporating dynamic design elements is drastically increasing (Kim and Lakshmanan 2015; Cian, Krishna, and Elder 2014; Farace et al. 2019), which consists in the integration of movement into the visual design (Mourey and Elder 2019). Given that dynamism has been shown to increase engagement (Cian et al. 2014), it is expected that the more the image used in the brand-related content is dynamic, the more the consumer will be positively affected and engaged to share the post to his/her followers. **H1:** Consumers will be more likely to share a brand-related content embedding a more dynamic image rather than a less dynamic image.

Mental imagery. In online contexts like social media, there is not the possibility of directly touching a product as in a brick-and-mortal store. Here it comes the important role of mental imagery, which facilitates the product/service-related experience through a psychological process that allows to represent in consumer's mind something that was presented before any experience took place or any information was provided (Lee and Gretzel 2011). This process is particularly important in the context of travel, where it was confirmed to be an important element to support and facilitate travel decision-making processes (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003; Walters, Sparks, & Herington, 2007), as it is based on tourist's expected experience at the destination (Oh, Fiore, and Jeoung 2007). According to the picture superiority effect (Unnava and Burnkrant, 1991, p. 226), there is a dominance of visual over verbal cues as antecedents of mental imagery (White et al., 1977), which can play a significant role in mediating ad-evoked attitudes (Bone & Ellen, 1990; 1992; Burns et al., 1993; Mitchell, 1986; Mitchell & Olson, 1981). Therefore, given that attitudinal consequences of mental imagery have been found out to be stronger, more stable over time and positive in valence (Bolls and Muehling, 2007; MacInnis and Price, 1987; Yoo and Kim, 2014), it was expected mental imagery to mediate the relationship between dynamic image and consumer sharing. **H2:** Mental imagery will mediate the relationship between dynamic image and consumer sharing of brand-related messages on social media. Consumers experience greater mental imagery when exposed to a more dynamic image, in comparison to a less dynamic image.

Text overlays. Nevertheless, growing evidence that visuals drive consumer engagement (Hutchinson 2016) requires companies to use visual content and verbatim

(textual information) more strategically to create multimodal messages. Indeed, user-generated content is moving toward a diversification of content and formats, where people tend to post text-embedded images, namely image-text posts (Soleymani et al., 2017; Yu, Qiu, Wen, Lin, & Liu, 2016). Advertising research affirms that images are powerful tools capable of persuading consumers to act or buy (Pieters and Wedel 2007), and an intricate interplay exists between text and pictorial elements (Pieters and Wedel 2004), such that the presence of readable text in social media images increases consumer sharing (Villaroel et al. 2019). Moreover, evidence suggests that when pictorial and textual information are both presented, people's comprehension is largely driven by text (Lee and Wu 2018; Schmidt-Weigand, Kohnert, and Glowalla 2010). Moreover, a similar image–text fit effect may also be present in the context of social media, otherwise less favorable attitude toward the ad may rise (Li and Xie 2020). Specifically, this study investigates the composition of social media image-post with salient text overlays, which refers to the (higher or lower) attention that textual information can draw depending on presentational, formatting, and stylistic elements (Luangrath 2017). Given that the joint effect of a narrative image, which incorporates the concept of movement, with a less salient caption leads to a higher consumer sharing (Farace and Villaroel 2022), it is expected that combining a more dynamic image with a less salient text overlays will positively increase consumer sharing of the brand-related post.
H3: Text overlays moderates the relationship between dynamic image and consumer sharing. When we use a more dynamic image with a less salient text overlays, and a less dynamic image with a more salient text overlays, consumer sharing increases.

Moderated mediation. Text genre can indeed be an important factor in encouraging mental imagery processing. (Brewer 1988). Concrete words may in fact be more effective than concrete pictures alone in eliciting mental imagery (Babin and Burns 1997). The presence of concreteness in text or image is fundamental as it refers to the degree of ease involved in eliciting a mental image (Paivio, Yulille, & Madigan, 1968) and determining the extent to which and how consumers react to an ad (Farace et al. 2020; Lee and Choi 2019; MacInnis and Price 1987; Mazloom et al 2016). This hold particularly true in travel content where concrete visual and verbatim boost consumer's mental imagery (Walters et al. 2007). Indeed, this study seeks to determine if the interaction between dynamic image and text overlays on consumer sharing can be explained through consumer's mental imagery. **H4:** Mental imagery will totally explain the joint effect of a more dynamic image with a less salient text overlays on consumer sharing of the brand-related message (H3).

Chapter 2: Methodology. From a methodological standpoint, a pre-test on 75 participants aging between 12 and 59 (M_{age}= 29,5 years; SD_{age}= 12,37) has been conducted to verify the effectiveness of the two manipulations: the independent variable ($M_{moredynamic}$ = 5.00; SD = 1.639 vs. $M_{lessdynamic}$ = 4.08; SD = 1.707; F(1,73) = 5.686; p = .02) and the moderator ($M_{moresalient}$ = 4.59, SD = 1.674 vs. $M_{lesssalient}$ = 3.68, SD =3.68; F(1,73) = 5.424; p = .023). Then, an online experiment with 233 participants (convenience sample) aging between 15 and 71 years old (M_{age}= 36 years, SD_{age} = 15,41), most of which were female (67% *vs* 31.3% male *vs* 1.7% prefers not to say), has been run. An English survey has been created on Qualtrics and distributed through emails, Whatsapp and Instagram *stories.*

Employing a 2 (dynamic image: more dynamic *vs* less dynamic) x 2 (text overlays: more salient *vs* less salient) between-subjects design, each participant has been randomly assigned to one of the four stimuli. Participants were asked to imagine themselves in a scenario where they prioritized a Twitter post by @Su2Ruote, a tour operator offering bike tours to discover the territory, meet the locals and taste local produce. Using the pre-validated scales found out in the grey literature, the survey aims at measuring the constructs of the research, namely mental imagery through Miller et al.'s (2000) multi-item scale (α = .93), and consumer sharing through Dubois et al.'s (2016) three, seven-point items scale (α =.91). Once collected the primary data, these have been analyzed on the statistical software SPSS. First, a one-way ANOVA has been run to test the main - or direct - effect of the IV (dynamic image) on the DV (consumer sharing) under H1. Then, it has been investigated the mediation - or indirect - effect of mental imagery using PROCESS Model number 4 under H2. Afterwards, it has been studied the moderation – or interaction - effect of text overlays on the relationship between dynamic image and consumer sharing by conducting a two-way ANOVA under H3. Finally, a moderated mediation analysis has been conducted using PROCESS Model number 5 to test whether mental imagery could explain the whole model under H4.

Results and discussion. Results of the study demonstrates that using a more dynamic (*vs* less dynamic) image enhances consumer's likelihood to share the brand-related content (b = .6103; t = 2.18; p = 0.03) with the others. Thus, this corroborates the mere presence effect by Li and Xie (2020) and the dynamism as an aspect that increases consumer engagement (Cian et al. 2014). Such positive attitudinal response can be strengthen combining a dynamic image with a less salient text overlays within the same post (Int_1; b

= -.7718; t= - 1.99; p = 0.04). Thus, this supports findings by Villaroel et al. (2019) according to which text-embedded image increases the likelihood for a user to share brand-related messages on social media. However, mental imagery, whose direct effect on consumer sharing has been found out positive and significant (b = .7838; t = 8.9; p = 0.000), serves as a contextual mechanism for holding true these findings. Indeed, taking individually the singular relationships, it was found out that there is no significant difference between using a more dynamic image or a less dynamic image in a social media post, such that it can affect consumer sharing ($M_{more\_dynamic}$ = 3.58, SD = 1.67 vs. $M_{less\_dynamic}$ = 3.38, SD = 1.73; F(231,1) = .327; p = .568). Moreover, mental imagery does not mediate the relationship between dynamic image and consumer sharing (b = .217; t = 1.11; p = .26), thus, contradicting the picture superiority effect by Unnava and Burnkrant (1991). Furthermore, text overlays has no moderating effect between dynamic image and consumer sharing ($M_{more\_salient}$ = 3.36, SD = 1.65 vs. $M_{less\_salient}$ = 3.53, SD = 1.76; F(1,229) = 1.871; p = .173). In conclusion, H1, H2 and H3 have been rejected, whereas results from the moderated mediation analysis partially verified the effectiveness of the whole model.

Conclusions. As consumers' social media exposure to visual advertising constantly grows and managers and advertisers encounter more and more difficulties in capturing users' attention and engaging them (Jutkowitz 2014) with B2C content, the present research seeks to propose a novel visual to design social media post that can trigger user's sharing. Findings of the study demonstrates that using a more dynamic (*vs* less dynamic) image enhances consumer's likelihood to share the branded post with the others. Such positive attitudinal

response can be strengthen combining a dynamic image with a less salient text overlays within the same post. However, mental imagery serves as a contextual mechanism for holding true these findings

Theoretical and managerial contributions. The following study contributes to the rapidly growing advertising literature on social media content effectiveness, advancing knowledge on b2c content sharing and the theory of multimodality, with a focus on T&T industry, both from a theoretical and managerial perspective. First, while conventional wisdom suggests that the mere presence of an image helps the post to cut the media clutter (Li and Xie 2020), this study extends previous research on visual strategies for social media marketing by studying a "new" image aspect, the dynamism and its nuances. Findings revealed that the mere presence of a dynamic image does not have alone any significant effect on consumer sharing. Thus, this result suggests that decisions by marketers to use a more dynamic picture on a social media post will not affect the persuasiveness of the brand-related message on the propensity of the user to share the content. Second, despite previous research found visual as antecedent of mental imagery over verbal (Unnava and Burnkrant, 1991), this study reveals that mental imagery does not mediate the relationship between dynamic image and consumer sharing, whereas it has been shown and corroborated that mental imagery significantly and positively affects consumer sharing (Bolls and Muehling, 2007; MacInnis and Price, 1987; Yoo and Kim, 2014). Thus, this suggests that in general it is important for marketers to be better informed about the effectiveness of imagery processing in order to correctly stimulate it and obtain positive attitudinal consequences from consumers. Moreover, in the context of successful tourism marketing, with the growing amount of brand-

and user-generated content on social media, a persuasive communication and a good content marketing strategy that stimulate mental imagery may be crucial to engage consumers. Indeed, since consumers mostly evaluate experience products in the tourism context, marketers should be always better «running a simulation-like scenario in one's mind to facilitate consumer engagement, build confidence» (Lee and Gretzel, 2012, p. 1277) and trigger positive attitudes. Third, this study is among the firsts to chart a path to examine how social media content consisting of text-embedded images can be composed effectively to maximize consumer sharing. While previous research found out that a readable text embedded in an image increases consumer sharing (Villaroel et al. 2019), this study shows that salient text overlays does not moderate alone the relationship between dynamic image and consumer sharing. Thus, if marketers compose images with textual information on them, this will not have significant consequences on consumer engagement (consumer sharing). Finally, taking into consideration the whole model, few contributions can be somehow overturned. Indeed, findings firstly (and implicitly) revealed that the mere presence of an image directly affects consumer sharing and that the use of a more dynamic image shows a significant positive effect on consumer sharing. Thus, results suggest the importance for marketers and content creators to use dynamism as an aspect to increase consumer sharing. Particularly, tourism marketers should use images strategically, as they can make a significant difference on consumer engagement. Thus, decisions to use more dynamic images instead of static ones (or less dynamic), could be a smart choice to better engage consumers in experiencing non-tangible products (e.g., travel destination, a local experience, a tour guide, etc.). As a practical suggestion, it would be advisable to always feature a hypothetical

scenario in which the consumers can look ahead as they are experiencing what they see in the social media post. Secondly, there exist a significant interaction between dynamic image and text overlays on consumer sharing which is even stronger than when dynamic image acts alone. Specifically, marketers should combine a more dynamic image with a less salient text overlays to positively influence consumers' sharing of brand-related messages. Thus, findings reveal that if marketers correctly manipulate the saliency of textual information, this will be impactful on consumer's willingness to share brand-related messages. As a practical suggestion, it would be advisable to create social media content which combine visual and verbal information. Particularly, the use of short textual description can complete and complement the image-post and facilitate the understanding of the visual content, thus enhancing content effectiveness. Generally, findings from the moderated mediation analysis offers evidence that mental imagery is the underlying mechanism - particularly in the context of travelling - that can better explain the whole model.

Limitations and future research. Although the current research provides important evidence, I call for future research based on social media to further expand the scope of empirical analysis to other product categories (i.e., utilitarian products) and social media platforms (i.e., image-based platforms like Instagram); to use a simple random sample composed by a higher number of respondents to ensure representativeness; and to investigate whether the same conceptual model can be applied to other forms of social media engagement (i.e., liking, commenting, etc…). Moreover, in order to overcome the lack of significant relationships in the main effect, mediation and moderation effect, unless all the model is fully taken into consideration, I would suggest future research to 1) explicitly show

dynamism in the image playing with a closer camera angle; 2) consider another antecedent of mental imagery, such as imagery fluency, using a double mediation where imagery fluency acts as a prerequisite for mental imagery (Larsen et al. 2014; Maier and Dost 2018) to affect consumer sharing; 3) alternatively manipulate the saliency of text overlays in many other ways, as for example focusing on the position of the text using the rule of thirds or on the color of the text using the Itten circle. It would be also interesting to complete the study conducting a (mobile) eye-tracking experiment to practically see how respondents react to the stimuli, what attracts their attention, and what they fixate mostly of the social media post, as it is the best technology to better understand consumer responses to content (Maslowska et al. 2021). Generally, and to conclude, more emphasis needs to be placed on studying mental imagery processing in context of tourism marketing and travel decision making.