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The importance of a Corporate Website from a B2B perspective, the role of usability.

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A chi mi vuole bene e ad un viaggio meraviglioso
tra Reggio Emilia, Bologna, Roma e Vienna.

Che bella vita!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Successful companies have a strong offline image and presence, but in an ever-changing market and unstable times it is crucial that the offline image travels hand in hand with the online one. In fact, having an internet presence has become crucial for any form of organization. The business models and reputations of non-digital native companies have been developed offline, through the development of solid partnerships with their partners and clients, the construction of production facilities in various nations, and the establishment of business touchpoints like showrooms and stores all over the world. This provided them the chance to be more rooted in their business and to be nearer to their clients at the same time. However, nowadays this strategy is insufficient. The consumers, who began to place an increasing amount of value on their online profile, were the ones who spurred the evolution in the first place. In fact, having a Facebook or Instagram profile has become standard practise for every one of us; it serves as our online ID. The same is true for businesses; would you trust a company that does not have a website? With a low price and an easy purchasing process, the answer can be not sure. Nevertheless, it is entirely another story, when we speak about a complex purchasing process involving numerous actors.

First, it is necessary to make a distinction. Two are the main types of market, the Business-to-Business market (B2B) and the Business to Consumer one (B2C). Both can be defined as commercial spaces. The significant difference is that B2B companies exchange products, services, or information with other companies, while B2C companies do the same actions with final customers. In this thesis I decided to focus my attention on enterprises involved in the B2B market. This is for two main reasons. The first reason is that, as we will see later, this sector has experienced a significant knowledge gap compared to the B2C sector. The second is because not all the industries in this sector, prior to the advent of Covid 19 pandemic, had fully realised the potential of having a strong digital presence.

Research done by McKinsey on the digitalisation of B2B market industries shows that, the number of B2B customers using digital self-service channels to research and evaluate products rose from 20 percent in 2016 to 30 percent in 2019 across industries. New or repeat orders made through digital B2B channels rose from 40 percent to 50 percent over the same period, representing trillions of dollars in value (McKinsey, 2021). Many companies have therefore realised the importance of developing an omnichannel business approach, but few yet, according to McKinsey, have really made an evolutionary effort in this direction. The differences between B2B and B2C have been made sharper due to Covid 19 Pandemic. Consumers are in fact accustomed to a B2C logic, which for definition is completely customer centric and free of inefficiencies. Covid 19 has forced all of us to explore the world and buy products from a computer screen. The pandemic has therefore required companies to rethink the way they work, interact with customers, and strengthen their presence on the web. The industrial sector has therefore had to accelerate its evolutionary process to meet the needs of its customers and partners.

Within a digitisation process, there are several assets that a company can optimise or implement. One of these is certainly the corporate website. I decided to focus on the website because I strongly believe that this is the strongest touch point that companies can use to build their online presence and get in touch with their customers. But what is a corporate touch point? A touch point is a contact point between an enterprise and its customers. Touchpoints may occur in any channel (e.g., via phone, the Web or direct contact with a salesperson) (Gartner). Therefore, a website is nothing more than a specific point of contact between the company and the consumer.

1.1 Why Every Business Needs a website.

A company's website is an essential tool. Customers and other stakeholders might use it as their main source of information about a company's goods and services, goals, and team members. A well-designed website may help a business stand out from its competitors, gain the trust and credibility of potential partners and customers, and provide a forum for interaction and communication with stakeholders. For big companies, having a functioning and up-to-date website is even more crucial, because they frequently need to connect with and engage a wider range of audiences. The company's operations, financial performance, social responsibility initiatives, and other information can all be found on the website, which can also be a primary resource for consumers, job seekers, investors, and other stakeholders.

Now let's look at how prevalent this information and communication channel is among businesses. Recent studies show that the vast majority of organisations have a company website. According to a 2021 survey by Statista, the 88.8% of medium business (from 50 to 249 employees) in Europe has a website or a landing page. The number is slightly lower for small business (from 10 to 49 employees), with 75,3% of enterprises that have an own website. These percentages in Europe have remained almost the same since 2015, with an increase of four percentage points for small businesses and only one percentage point for medium-sized enterprises. Also Clutch, conducted a survey in 2018 finding that among 351 small businesses (1 to 500 employees) in the US, only the 64% of them had a website. Across these small businesses, most (48%) had a website since before 2017. A more recent study from Forbes, confirm the indispensability of this asset for companies. The magazine's analysis shows that 71% of businesses have a website in 2023, pointing out that this number is increased since the last year and this increase can largely be attributed to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the trend of businesses establishing a web presence, and it is likely that this trend will continue (Forbes, 2023). The article focuses his attention also on the number of websites in the world, 1.3 trillion, saying that more than 82% of them are inactive. This data explains how a website is now the foundation of every business but also how it may quickly become outdated.

It is clear how much businesses rely on their websites to maintain their online presence regardless of the number of workers or the type of organisation. Some of them are even digital natives, according to Forbes, 28% of business is purely conducted online. Now that we realise how ubiquitous this asset is in every form of organisation and market, it is critical to comprehend why it is such a critical component for businesses.

The first fundamental concept to understand is that the website represents the company's reality on the web. The two sides of the coin, the offline and the online, must therefore always be aligned.

1.2 The role of the website in the customer journey

The quality and efficiency of the customer experience is a critical and fundamental issue for companies. According to a study conducted by McKinsey, measuring satisfaction on customer journeys is 30 percent more predictive of overall customer satisfaction than measuring happiness for each individual interaction. In addition, maximizing satisfaction with customer journeys has the potential not only to increase customer satisfaction by 20 percent but also to lift revenue by up to 15 percent while lowering the cost of serving customers by as much as 20 percent (McKinsey, 2014). Being consistent throughout the customer journey is therefore the key for a company to maximise conversion rates and improve customer loyalty.

Undoubtedly, a key part of the consumer journey is played by the website. A customer journey refers to the path of interactions an individual has with your brand, product, or services. The acquisition of goods and services between two businesses is a more complicated process than the route a customer takes to buy a consumer good, like a toothbrush. There are more participants, and the process is generally more rational (Rese, 2008). In this long process, the website may serve as a starting point for prospective partners and clients throughout this protracted process. A potential consumer can be directed to the website through a direct email marketing campaign and contact the business at an early stage of awareness. Nonetheless, a client might have learned about the business via world of mouth and visit the website to learn more. Also, if the website supports e-commerce, the customer will interact with it during the purchasing process. So, it can be assumed that the website tracks the user throughout their entire customer experience. Moreover, as reported in the Forbes article "The Successful B2B Customer Journey Begins at Their Door, Not Yours", most customers are 57% through their buying process before they meet with representatives of the vendors they are considering. Thus, it is essential that the consumer encounters high-quality material, digital and not, because this will provide the chance, for the company, to tip the balances in its favour or lose a potential customer. In fact, according to the "2020 B2B Thought Leadership impact study", led by Eldeman, an American public relations and marketing consultancy firm, and Linkedin, corporate decision-makers claim that 88% of the time, quality content can improve how prospect clients view a company, and 60% of the time, it can persuade them to pay more for services.

As mentioned before, the corporate website is an integral part of the user's customer journey. In particular, if we wanted to see its role within a marketing funnel, we can see how it acts at different stages. Even if it has been described in a variety of ways, the marketing funnel's fundamental components are an initial awareness phase, a second consideration period, a conversion phase, and lastly, at the bottom of the funnel, loyalty. To better explain the importance of a website within the funnel, it is useful to understand some of the main advantages the platform can bring to the company in the various steps.

According to a Forbes article from 2020 titled "Why Every Company Needs a Website.", it's possible to identify some of the main reasons why a website needs to be a must have for companies.

A corporate website's function in the marketing funnel is to act as a crucial point of contact for potential clients as they progress through its various stages. At the top of the funnel (TOFU), a potential customer comes into contact with the brand through different channels, such as social media, newsletters, word of mouth or the search engines themselves. Therefore, the website can be used to attract new visitors, as soon as they land on the website, visitors may utilise it to learn more about the company's goods or services and to develop confidence and credibility by reading customer reviews, case studies, and other types of social proof. However, the presence of competitors makes it necessary for the company to invest in its assets in order to differentiate itself. One method to stand out is to have a website that looks attractive and effectively provides valuable information to the customers. Without a website, customers could doubt your company's credibility. Having a website gives you the chance to make a good first impression and reassure potential customers that you are a legitimate company. Credibility is undoubtedly one of the most important factors at this point, as there may be a number of rivals providing services that are identical to ours. Online, a company's size and revenue are far less apparent than they are offline. If a small business' website is effective and of exceptional quality, it can rank top in Google search results, increasing its visibility. Also, if the UX and UI of the website are optimised, the user who visits it will probably stay there longer and obtain the information he or she is looking for, reducing the bounce rate. The bounce rate is the percentage of visitors to a particular website who navigate away from the site after viewing only one page.

Moving deeper in the funnel we arrive in the middle of the funnel (MOFU) or the Consideration phase. Engaging potential clients who have expressed interest in the company's goods or services is what happens at the consideration stage of the marketing funnel. At this step it can be developed another important reason why the website is a fundamental part of a business, the brand. One of the most crucial things that can be done is to present the brand to potential clients. A brand's chances of being noticed by potential customers are increased when it is obvious what it is, what it stands for, and who it is. It can be difficult to accomplish this without a website because customers find it difficult to locate accurate and trustworthy information about the company. Therefore, companies need to give potential customers more specific and focused information about their goods or services in order to advance them along the sales funnel.

Arrived at the bottom of the funnel (BOFU), the purchase phase, the user after having enquired about our company and our products decided to make a purchase or contact us. If a website is integrated with an ecommerce, then the purchase process will be direct, this is often the case in the B2C market. However, the trend to create ecommerce sites also in the B2B market is growing. According to recent research in fact, in 2023, an estimated 17 percent of B2B sales are expected to be generated digitally. Overall, U.S. B2B online sales are projected to reach 1.8 trillion U.S. dollars in 2023 _(Statista, 2021). However, in my thesis, I'll concentrate on showcase sites rather than e-commerce sites. The generation of leads in this instance serves as

the funnel's last stage. A lead is a person who has shown interest in a company's commercial offer, e.g., by sharing contact information such as email, phone number or connection on social networks. Although if there is no direct purchasing method, the consumer can contact the business by submitting his personal information on the website's contact page. The user can be later contacted by a sales representative using his data. Loyalty is the final stage of the funnel. At this point, the website will serve as both an informational resource and a tool for the user. Therefore, the business will be able to publish a variety of helpful information here so that the user may stay up to date on corporate changes including new goods, investments in progress, and events. Loyalty is the final stage of the funnel. At this point, the website will serve as both an informational resource and a tool for the user. The business will be able to publish a variety of helpful information here so that the user may stay up to date on corporate changes including new goods, investments in progress, and events.

1.3 User experience and website

Customers have no patience for slow, error-ridden websites whether they're using a mobile phone or a laptop. If the experience is poor, they'll leave your website without a backward glance (McKinsey, 2016). It is therefore in the company's interest to create and design a platform that is, as far as possible, able to meet the user's needs.

Don Norman, co-founder of the Nielsen Norman Group, coined the term "user experience" (UX) in the 1990s. From here onwards a true 'art' was born. The term user experience has in fact become a pivotal term in the technology industry and industrial design over the years. User experience refers to the experience a person has with a physical or digital product. The aim of this discipline is therefore to attract and satisfy the customer before, during and after their experience. In fact, when people use a product, they usually evaluate their experiences according to the following four main criteria: value, function, usability, general impression. These four variables express different feelings or questions that arise when the user uses the product. Value answers the question: is it useful? Usability: is it easy to use? Adoptability: is it easy to start using? Desirability: is it fun and engaging? The main value a product must therefore possess is utility; none of us would use a product that provides us with no advantage in our daily lives. The second most important value, however, is the usability of a product. A product must be easy to use. Indeed, what is difficult to use is usually relegated to being a working tool. If we think of complicated programming software, we immediately realise that this kind of product is less subject to UX evaluation. A qualification or training course and practice may be required to that type of software. However, if we think about something we use in our everyday lives, such as the light switch, we realise how much thought has gone into the design and functionality of this simple tool.

In the same way that a light switch is a product, a website is also one. The fact that one is digital and the other is tangible is the only distinction between the two. A website must pass the UX inspection because it is utilised everyday by thousands, if not millions, of people.

As was previously said, people don't have time for problems or loading difficulties that make it hard for them to complete their tasks. Therefore, user experience is a crucial component of website development and design. When people interact with a website or programme, it describes their general sense of satisfaction. Users should feel at ease and in control while they browse a website thanks to a solid user experience (UX) design. Visual design, navigation, content organisation, website loading time, and responsiveness are crucial components of effective UX. With an emphasis on fonts, colours, images, and overall identity, visual design aims to make a website look visually appealing. The home page, but also all other pages of the website must in fact be designed to limit the bounce rate phenomenon as much as possible. The ease with which users may move between pages, with easily understood headings and menus, is referred to as navigation. During his experience on the platform, the user must always be aware of where he is and what options he must move on to other content. Call to action, buttons and other features are essential to help the user find their way around quickly. The speed at which a page loads is crucial since people tend to leave a website if it takes too long to load. From a technological integration point of view, the website must therefore be absolutely in line with the parameters required by search engines. Not only that, visual content, such as images and videos, must be optimised so as not to create problems when loading the page. Finally, responsiveness refers to how well the website adapts to different screen sizes and devices so that users may enjoy the same wonderful experience regardless of the device they use to access the site. Due to the extensive usage of smartphones, UX designers now need to research items using a mobile-friendly logic. It's common practise to study a website mock-up first on a mobile device, then on a laptop.

It is necessary to specify that a website does not only and exclusively consist of a good user experience. It must also be optimised on the SEO (Search Engine Optimisation), that set of activities that allows to improve the position of a website among the results of a search engine. This is where the quality of the CMS (Content Management System), the choice of hosting, the integration of the DAM (Digital Asset Management) and many other factors, which I will not discuss specifically here, come into play. Saying that, the user experience is often a complementary factor of the elements mentioned above. For example, an effective user experience (UX) is crucial to a website's ability to rank higher in search results. When selecting where to rank a website in their results pages, search engine algorithms take the user-friendliness of the navigation into account. A website that offers customers a pleasant and straightforward experience will probably be ranked higher than one that is challenging to access. On the other hand, for example, not having an effective mobile version of the website can affect the results on the search engine. Especially in the development phase of a website, but also in the maintenance phase, the SEO, UX and tech teams must work symbiotically. Every sidebar and landing page on the website must be justified from an SEO and tech point of view to optimise the platform.

Firms must make significant investments in digital marketing to establish or maintain a strong online presence in the modern world. A great digital campaign considers a variety of elements, including as search engine optimisation, effective social media management, platform optimisation for the website, and much more.

However, if users are not engaging with the content of the company website, results will be limited. As was affirmed before, the website provides a crucial first impression of the company to the clients giving just a few moments to convert them or lose them. Delivering a website that is simple to use, understand, and enjoy will mean the difference between site visitor and the success found in a loyal customer.

Investing in user experience allows the enterprise assesses the effectiveness of site interactions, which in turn gauges the volume of conversions and success. So, both in-person and online interactions with customers must be coordinated in terms of the customer experience. A call to action put in the ideal location on a website can significantly improve the user experience, much as a company representative enjoys serving a coffee at the prospect customer. Furthermore, user interactions online can provide marketing with a lot more details than a contact at a trade fair or at a showroom. Business leaders can obtain critical insights of what customers are doing their web sites by observing and documenting user behaviour. This gives the unique chance to make preventative improvements that will ensure happiness because it enables to know precisely what clients are looking at, what they like or dislike, and how they are using the website. This information can then be transferred to all other marketing activities and used as a resource for the sales team. Any organisation that wishes to put a high degree of customer experience at the centre of its company must consider the data generated by user experience analysis. If used properly, this data may become a true company asset that enhances lead generation, customer connections, and the rate at which new customers convert.

1.4 The impact of usability

As also highlighted in the previous section, usability is the second of the criteria by which a user can evaluate his or her experience with a product. But which is the difference between usability and user experience? Usability refers to how successfully a user can use a product to accomplish a specific goal. User experience encompasses an end user's entire experience with a product not just how well the product worked, but how they expected it to work, how they feel about using it, and how they feel about the company overall (Hubspot, 2020). Usability is therefore a part of the whole, but a usable website does not guarantee a good user experience. The other values that must be considered are the usefulness of the product (Value), how easy it is to start using the tool (Adoptability) and the interest or enjoyment the product creates in the user (Desirability).

Hence, usability is a quality attribute defined by 5 components: learnability, efficiency, memorability, errors and satisfaction. Learnability and efficiency define whether and how quickly the user can complete certain tasks when first using the tool. In the case of a showcase website, is the user able to find technical information about a particular product, if so, how quickly? Memorability, on the other hand, refers to the ease with which the product can be used after a defined period. Errors and satisfaction are finally two timeless components, one measuring the errors made during the use of the tool and the other, satisfaction measures the overall satisfaction in using and performing the assigned tasks. The level of these five components is often tested before the tool goes online through usability tests. Therefore, user comments regarding a product's general efficacy and efficiency as well as the user's happiness with the product are required during usability testing. A

moderator will often ask participants to finish a series of tasks during usability test. The rest of the team will watch users as they go through these tasks and make notes on any issues, perplexity, or praise for the functionality of the product.

In sections 1.2 and 1.3 of this chapter, I explained the importance a website has for every business and what role it plays in the purchasing process. The first criterion of the user experience, the value, has therefore been met. As far as usability is concerned, it is easy to see how this value is indispensable for a website that aims to achieve excellent results. In fact, usability is a must for success on the Web. People leave a website if it is challenging to utilise. People quit a website if the homepage doesn't make it apparent what the company offers and what visitors can do there. Users leave a website if they become lost on it. If a website's information is hard to read or doesn't answer users' key questions, they leave. With respect to the issue of the ease of understanding information on the website, a theme that emerged from research conducted by the Nielsen institute using eye tracking revealed how people scan webpages and phone screens in various patterns, one of them being the shape of the letter F. Using this as an example, the text will need to be optimised in order to increase the platform's usability. How? Without a doubt, by aligning the text's layout to the right, breaking it up into paragraphs, and adding photos and bullet points to help the material stand out. This simple example represents how deep, and delicate is the analysis that the UX designer must perform in the development of the website.

As you can see the impact of usability within a website is a key element. Among the many benefits, three are the main ones. The first one is a positive effect on brand positioning. Poor usability on a website can harm a company's reputation in addition to obsolete looks. The results are extensive and can quickly affect a brand's financial performance. The second one is internal productivity. As was already said, the website serves as both a resource for customers and, more importantly, a tool for the company's partners and staff. The website serves as a clearinghouse for technical data, product catalogues, and more, and it can be used to demonstrate products to consumers or keep up with business news, particularly in the B2B sector. It was also found that employee who engage with a more usable interface are more likely to experience job satisfaction, complete tasks in less time and update content on a more regular basis (Forbes, 2019) . The last benefit is optimized conversion. A key element of usability is making sure that users can easily access visual and contextual clues, and the call to action (CTA) is the best way to do this. A call to action is a piece of content intended to induce a viewer, reader, or listener to perform a specific act, typically taking the form of an instruction or directive. Research shows that emails with a single call to action increased clicks by 371% and sales by an astounding 1,617%. This means that by simply offering a visual indication to help a user quickly locate what they're looking for, a business can increase engagement and income exponentially. A company can significantly expand its business with a few usability chang

Chapter 2: Literature review

As shown in the first chapter, the importance of digital marketing in the B2B sector has seen steady growth in recent years. More and more companies have equipped themselves with an office dedicated to this activity, realising its importance and potential return on turnover and corporate image. In the developed world, companies have realized the importance of digital marketing. Indeed, for businesses to be successful they need to merge online with traditional methods for meeting the needs of customers more precisely (Bala, 2018). As shown by industrial firms' growing investments in digital marketing activities, the role of digital marketing in a company's marketing strategy has been growing in the industrial sector. Investments in Digital Marketing are motivated by its benefits being easier to assess than those of traditional marketing, in addition to cost effectiveness and changes in customer behaviour (Järvinen, 2015).

As also highlighted in the first chapter, online presence has become more essential than ever for small and large companies in the B2B sector. Unlike in the offline world, however, where the distinction between a small company and a global one emerges at first glance, on the web this is less evident. This fact rewards investment in digital channels and ensures greater equity, as costs are more affordable than in the offline world. The perception of the brand type is also different online than offline, as the reality of what is being talked about becomes intangible and consumers can be driven in their choices by different characteristics of the brands (Bernritter, 2016).

Digital marketing is defined as "an adaptive, technology-enabled process by which businesses collaborate with customers and partners to jointly create, communicate, deliver, and sustain value for all stakeholders (Kannan, 2017). In new digital contexts, the adaptive process made possible by digital technologies generates value in novel ways. Institutions made possible by digital technology develop the fundamental skills necessary to cooperatively produce value for their clients and for themselves. Processes made possible by digital technologies add value through improved customer interactions and experiences.

The influence of digitalization is always going to have a beneficial impact on brand choice in all the industries. To allocate resources effectively on digitalization, it is becoming more crucial to understand consumers' preferred channels, how channels connect to one another, and how channels relate to consumers' purchasing intentions. Customer journeys highlight the many steps consumers take before completing a purchase as well as their pathways during those steps. At numerous points of contact, or touch points, along these channels, businesses and consumers can communicate with one another and interact (Koch, 2022). Businesses that grasp digital touch points will prosper greatly from the current digital transformation. Several adaptive digital touchpoints that cover the marketing activity, institutions, processes, and customers enable digital marketing. Significantly, as more offline customers switch to digital technologies and "younger, digitally oriented consumers enter the ranks of buyers," the number of touchpoints is rising by over 20% annually (Bughin,

2014). The digital touchpoints through which a company can interface with a possible customer are multiple. As already mentioned in the first chapter, in this discussion I have focused on one of them, the corporate website.

As highlighted in the first chapter, online presence has become more essential than ever for small and large companies in the B2B sector. Unlike in the offline world, however, where the distinction between a small company and a global one emerges at first glance, on the web this is less evident. This fact rewards investment in digital channels and ensures greater equity, as costs are more affordable than in the offline world. An important research on how people perceive and decide to endorse different types of brands online was made by Bertnitter et al. In this research, focused on social media consumer behaviour,

2.1 Websites characteristics and User Experience

The website is made up of several pages that are housed on servers connected to the World Wide Web. It is an information system that is presented in a unique language and offers a variety of features that anyone with an Internet connection can access (Lin, 2013). One of the first factors underlining the importance for a company to have a website is therefore accessibility. Accessibility understood both as the possibility of communication to different cultures and as the possibility of interaction anywhere in the world at any time. The cultural barrier is thus broken down by the multilingual system, a feature now presents on any website. Culture can be defined as a collective body of common information that a person has acquired through socialisation, media exposure, or membership in a cultural group and that is readily available to members of that cultural group is referred to as culture. Feeling comfortable while browsing also depends on how the website will be able to communicate with different cultures at the same time. Researchers have given a lot of consideration to the occasions and reasons when businesses gain from including cultural clues on their websites. Authors have concentrated on website cultural congruency (hence, WCC), which measures how much users believe websites are made to appeal to people from their own culture. According to studies, higher levels of WCC make websites easier to use and make it easier to categorise and analyse information, all of which may increase processing fluency (Bartikowski, 2020). The geographical barrier, on the other hand, is exceeded by the channel itself through which a website can exist, namely the Internet. Therefore, businesses can connect with clients, inform them about their goods or services, and get beyond old barriers to seize new chances for engaging in interactive business with them by using web technologies. Many traditional firms are setting up shop online because of the Internet's ability to give clients access and flexibility around the clock (Tung, 2009) .As a result, time and location restrictions are no longer a significant barrier to doing business globally. This trend is due in part to the growth of the Internet and the expanding adoption of network-intensive technology by businesses. As a result, technology is changing how businesses operate and interact with their constituent groups. Because computer networking and easy Internet connection are easily available, businesses of all sizes and sorts can use these tools to function in a global market (Robbins, 2003). The success and importance of websites is therefore inextricably linked not only to the expansion but also to the efficiency that the Internet has achieved

since its inception. This ease of use and global spread has made digital media the norm. The Internet now plays a significant function in many aspects of people lives. Over 3 billion people used the Internet in 2015, a growth of 826 percent since 2000. The development of Internet technology has altered web users' expectations and usage patterns as well as how businesses draw in new clients and keep hold of existing ones (Ageeva, 2018). The efficiency of the Internet has thus changed the way people live, and the website therefore serves as a bridge for companies to communicate between themselves and users who need to acquire information about the company.

After accessibility, online presence is another reason that makes a website a vital tool for companies. As highlighted in chapter one, the website is becoming one of the first points of contact between companies and potential customers. Not only that, for many firms, the corporate website has emerged as the main vehicle for inter-organisational and intra-organisational information exchange, as well as for sales and exchange of information, as well as for sales and promotion activities. The amount of commerce conducted on websites is significantly influenced by their ability to perform in terms of attracting and retaining visitors. Aware of this, companies in B2B are also increasing their investments in this touchpoint.

However, an online presence is not enough to guarantee a company's online success. The expectations of users have become more numerous and specific over the years, and the level of quality and efficiency of a company website must be able to meet these demands. Just as offline the company presents itself with a certain image, the same must happen online. The image on the website must be aligned with the corporate image, as must the quality. Websites must be built for easy usability and effective user interface. Websites are being used by businesses more frequently to connect with potential customers as well as to acquire their information. Therefore, it's crucial to have a clear understanding of how to create websites that work well for online marketing and customer service. Website performance has been identified as a key differentiator for energy companies. Moreover, firms should check to see if the site's design supports their strategic goals. Effective website design has become essential for retaining clients. The website design should reflect the company in a major and favourable way to capture the user's interest and stimulate their curiosity (Lin, 2013). Each company has its own business goals and peculiarities. Whatever they are, however, the user experience must be optimised, and the information provided must be in line with the message the company wants to convey. The online user experience is crucial, and customer, rather than producer, orientation should be paramount in the site's design. As a result, developing and maintaining a positive website is a key tactic for a business to succeed in the marketplace. Staying with the view that a company's website frequently serves as its primary and only point of contact with clients, its effectiveness and quality are fundamental. Firms are therefore working towards tendency to build strong website for users that will aid businesses in improving their integrated marketing communication strategies and giving them a competitive edge. Increase client loyalty and happiness while cutting expenses, fostering innovation, projecting the company's corporate identity, managing its reputation, and enabling financial reporting (Ageeva, 2018).

The quality perceived by the user will be the needle of the scales in evaluating not only the website he is browsing but often the entire company. While it is true that the website is only one of the available sources of information, it is also true that thanks to the Internet, finding an alternative has become a matter of seconds. Not only that, considering the user as a totally rational being willing to use his time to search for more information about the company, perhaps from different sources, would be a big mistake and would go against the principles of modern marketing. In fact, if the substance and determining factors of quality may not be clearly defined, its significance to businesses and customers cannot be denied. Wanting to give a definition, quality can best be defined as "conformance to requirements" (Garvin, 1983). This definition originates in the field of production of goods, but with due care can also be applied to services. Intangibility, heterogeneity, and inseparability are three well-established features of services that must be acknowledged. Most services are intangible, at start. Since they are performances rather than things, it is uncommon to be able to create precise production standards for uniform quality. Most services cannot be tallied, measured, inventoried, tested, or confirmed in order to guarantee quality prior to sale. This is particularly true for a service such as a website. Due to intangibility, the business may find it challenging to comprehend how customers view their offerings and assess service quality. Second, services with a high labour content are heterogeneous; as a result, they frequently operate differently from one producer to the next, from one consumer to another, and from one day to the next. Thirdly, the creation and use of many services are mutually exclusive. As a result, services' quality is not engineered at the manufacturing facility before being given to the customer intact. For instance, while providing labour-intensive services, quality happens throughout service delivery, typically during a client-provider encounter. Therefore, perceived service quality is a function of the direction and magnitude of the comparison of expected and perceived service (Parasuraman, 1985).

As web sites have grown more sophisticated, there has been some standardisation in the design, and de facto standards are starting to emerge, for instance, the usage of the fundamental catalogue of product presentations and navigation protocols. Changes in technology have also had an impact on design, but because these changes are typically not disruptive, fundamental design principles usually persist (Palmer, 2002).The quality of a website must not be an end but also functional to the purpose for which the website was created. If the site is a showcase site, aimed at informing the user about the products offered by the company, then design and interactivity must be a prerogative of the web designer. If, on the other hand, the website will have an e-commerce function, conversion rate and sales will be the main metrics. The website will then have to quickly refer the potential customer to purchase and recommend products like the one chosen, and so on. A complex artistic web design may have been aesthetically beautiful for online commerce, but it actually led to unhappiness because clients were discouraged from finding the goods and services they were looking for. A website can have many qualities and peculiarities, some that make it unique, others that reflect user interface standards dictated by common usage. An example of this concept is the download icon, on every website this is represented by a downward-pointing arrow. Changing this custom on one's own website could be

counterproductive. Another quality most of the websites presents is interactivity. This feature enhances the quality of corporate websites without adding new visual or textual contents. Web designers should be aware of how design influences the websites' quality and the company's reputation. The modern internet user expects to connect with websites in a personalised way and the company runs the danger of permanently losing a potential customer if it cannot deliver (Lin, 2013). For this reason, a website must be able to meet the user's expectations. There are therefore two main themes on which to base the quality of a website, web aesthetics and usability, both of which can be traced back to User Experience.

As already introduced in the previous chapter, usability refers to how successfully a user can use a product to accomplish a specific goal. I will elaborate more on this in the next section. Regarding the aesthetics of the website, it is easy to see how this is a fundamental element for the existence and success of a website. A website must be aesthetic as well as functional and capture the user's attention According to the American Heritage Dictionary of English Language, aesthetics refers to "an artistically beautiful or pleasing appearance". Two are the main dimensions, identified by the previous literature, that summarize essence of web aesthetics. one dimension of aesthetics is based on the functional quality and utilitarian value of a design (e.g., simplicity), and the other dimension is based on the emotional quality and hedonic value of a design (e.g., meaningfulness). Unlike usability, this discipline has no objective, mathematical value. Aesthetics can be perceived differently from subject to subject. Because consumers' motivational orientations can considerably affect their information processing patterns and emotions, various online users with different motivational orientations may respond to web aesthetics in different ways. Imagine in fact that the site of a B2B company is navigated by a user who already knows the company and is looking for the product he needs for his project, his attention to detail and his emotional involvement will be much less than for a new user. This type of user will be more focused on reaching his goal as quickly as possible. Ease of use of the site and clarity of content will therefore be his main evaluation parameters. This suggests that captivating and ornamental elements, such intricate graphics, and captivating photos, may improve a website's hedonic quality but do not directly give cues that help buyers implement their purchasing tasks in their minds. Even if the research made by (Wang, 2010) focused more on an e-commerce site, the research gives information on how to best control web aesthetics to give online customers better online service quality and satisfaction. They claim that company-controlled online aesthetic customisation is helpful in generating higher service quality. Findings also suggest that a website with a high level of aesthetic formality and high levels of aesthetic appeal should be used to draw internet users for new e-tailers who do not have client equity and need to increase the number of purchasers. The aesthetic appeal of the visual appearance should receive more attention because it contributes to the perception of the quality and level of pleasure of online services by browsers. On the other hand, well-established online retailers with a sizable market share ought to have a diverse website layout. They ought to designate high aesthetic formality and low aesthetic attractiveness on their e-commerce websites. This combination is

probably going to result in positive reviews of the websites and positive feelings among task-oriented customers.

From a business standpoint, the Web is made up of places, or sites, that businesses erect on servers and users visit. Consumer-oriented network navigation on the Web entails visiting several websites to look for information and/or advertisements about goods and services, consumer content (perhaps funded by advertisements), or to place an order for a good. Customers can visit a website by typing in its Web address straight into their browser or by clicking on an internal link from another website. Once there, customers "fill-out forms" by typing information into pop-up windows or utilising a series of point-and-click mouse movements to go about the website. The customer then decides where to go on the website. A nonlinear graphical menu or map of options is frequently used to convey the offerings to the customer. Only when a user clicks on another off-site hypertext link on the Web or leaves the Web altogether does the navigation process come to an end (Hoffman, 1996). This short description, taken from Hoffman's paper 'Marketing in hypermedia computer-mediated environments: Conceptual foundations', describes the user experience on a website in a simple and clear manner. To better understand the pioneering character of this extract, one only has to remember that it was only five years before the date of publication of the article. Navigation therefore ends the moment the user leaves the site. The time that elapses between opening the website and leaving it is dedicated to the user experience. It is during this time that a company's marketing must be able to offer an efficient service to the user, a service that is able to entertain him and satisfy his demand. From the previous literature, this is only possible by finding the right combination of aesthetics and functionality, customisation and standardisation.

2.2 The role of website in the customer journey

Costumer journey refers to the procedural and practical elements of customer-facing service processes. The recurrent encounters between a service provider and a customer, an "engaging story" about the user's experience with a service, or a "walk in the customer's shoes" are all examples of what is meant by this. The customer journey viewpoint is essential to the design procedures of reputable service design firms, is essential for involving clients in strategy work and business model development and has also found its way into reputable literature on service design (Følstad, 2018). As I also specify in the first chapter the customer journey is divided in different phase. The first phase is the prepurchase, which includes all the customer's interactions with the brand, category, and surroundings prior to a transaction. Practically, this stage includes the customer's journey from the time a need, objective, or desire is first recognised until the time they consider satisfying that need, goal, or impulse with a purchase (Koch, 2022). During this stage, customers carefully explore many possibilities and contrast alternatives during the consideration stage to discover the best solution that meets their demands. Websites have a significant impact on clients' decision-making during this crucial stage. Websites enable clients to make informed decisions by offering thorough and detailed product or service information. To help buyers, visualise and evaluate the characteristics and benefits of a product, high-quality

photos, videos, and interactive aspects can improve understanding and evaluation of products. By incorporating customer feedback and testimonials on websites, a brand's legitimacy and trustworthiness are further increased. This is because it offers social proof and insightful information from prior clients (Verhoef, 2010). Intuitive navigation, seamless user experience, and sophisticated search functionality facilitate customers' exploration and comparison of different options, ultimately leading them towards a decision.

Purchase is the second stage, which includes all customer contacts with the brand and its surroundings during the actual purchase event. It is distinguished by actions like ordering, paying, and making choices. The wide variety of business touchpoints and options the potential customer may come across may induce customers to stop searching and either complete or defer the purchase (Koch, 2022). The buying stage denotes the moment when buyers decide whether to purchase a good or service. Websites are essential in this stage because they provide a seamless and secure e-commerce platform that makes it possible for users to complete transactions quickly. Customers are guaranteed to find the needed goods or services with ease thanks to a well-designed, user-friendly website layout and clear navigation (Collier, 2006).Customers are given the knowledge they need to make an informed purchasing decision through clear and appealing product descriptions that are supplemented by high-resolution photos or videos. Customers can better comprehend the financial component of their purchase with the help of transparent pricing, which includes any discounts or promotions, decreasing uncertainty and boosting trust.

The third step is the post purchase. After making a purchase, a buyer will interact with a brand and its surroundings during the third stage, known as post purchase. Utilisation and consumption, post purchase interaction, and service requests are all included in this stage. Theoretically, this stage might last from the time of the purchase until the end of the customer's life, like the prepurchase stage. Practically speaking, this stage includes elements of the customer's post-purchase experience that are directly related to the brand, product, or service itself. In this stage, the product itself turns into a crucial touch point (Lemon, 2016). Within this step we can enclose two more specific steps of the customer journey in which the website plays an important role. The first is the retention stage, in this phase, maintaining long-term connections with customers becomes the priority. By continuing to offer clients value and help during this phase, websites continue to play a significant role. The relevancy and potency of a website's content can be increased by personalised recommendations and targeted marketing campaigns based on client preferences and previous purchase history. Customers are given the ability to autonomously resolve any issues or discover answers to their questions by using self-service choices like FAQs, knowledge bases, and customer support portals, which improves their overall experience (Wirtz, 2013). The second stage within the post purchase is the advocacy stage. The advocacy stage, where pleased customers turn into brand advocates and actively spread the word about the business, marks the apex of customer loyalty. Websites that include tools for social sharing and user-generated content can make a substantial contribution to this stage. Customers can simply share their great experiences, opinions, or suggestions with their networks thanks to integration with social networking platforms. It further enhances the

reputation of the brand and encourages potential customers to trust and interact with the company by including testimonials, success stories, or case studies on the website. Customers may be encouraged to recommend others via referral programmes or financially rewarded online efforts, broadening the brand's appeal and creating a network of devoted brand evangelists (Wong, 2022).

 Although this description leads to think that the customer journey is a smooth path, recent studies have shown instead that it is a non-linear process. The prospect client meets the company several times and in different ways, exiting and re-entering the customer journey. Customers may contact a particular point of contact, such as a website, at various stages of the customer journey, and depending on the phase at which it is contacted, the point of contact may have various effects on the purchasing behaviour. The points of contact are called touchpoints, these define the engagement and communication between a company and a specific customer. Different levels of involvement, such as rational, emotional, or bodily involvement, might be part of interactions at touchpoints. A touchpoint's power to influence consumer preferences and purchasing behaviour is indicated by the experience at that touchpoint. On the one hand, a touchpoint's perceived quality has an impact on the consumer experience. In a similar vein, user experience design is focused with developing specific touchpoints utilising visual components to support a natural and intuitive experience. The interaction and connection between various touchpoints during the purchasing process, on the other hand, has an impact on the customer experience (Koch, 2022).

It's also possible to categorize the touchpoints in four macro categories: brand-owned, partner-owned, customer-owned, and social/external/independent. In this discussion I will focus on the first category listed, but for the sake of clarity I will also define the other categories. Partner-owned touchpoints, which occur during the customer experience, are customer encounters that are jointly developed, managed, or controlled by the company and one or more of its partners. Marketing agencies and communication channel partners are examples of partners. Customer-owned touch point: these points of contact are client behaviours that are a part of the entire customer experience but are unaffected by the company, its partners, or third parties. Customers considering their own requirements or wishes at the prepurchase stage would be an example. Social and external touchpoint is the fourth category. These touchpoints acknowledge the crucial contributions that other people played in the client experience. Customers are constantly exposed to outside touch points that could have an impact on the process, such as other customers, peer influences, independent information sources, and settings. In all three phases of the event, peers may have an impact, whether requested or uninvited. Customers may be influenced by other patrons by extra-role behaviour or just by proximity, especially during the purchasing process or for goods and services that are consumed at or immediately after purchase. Brand owned touchpoints are the most important category because the firm has the completely control of these assets. These touch points are consumer contacts that take place throughout the journey and are planned, handled, and controlled by the company. They comprise every form of brand-owned media, including, for instance, websites, social media, and advertising. In particular, multinational corporations are using their company

websites to connect extensively with visitors from all over the world as a result of the globalisation of economic operations and the ubiquitous availability of Internet access worldwide. Marketing professionals can connect with potential clients, customers, and stakeholders globally via the Internet. The official website of a company frequently serves as a portal for visitors to discover crucial information that forms their perceptions of the organisation as well as the company's offers. If visitors don't find useful information's, they are likely to create an unfavourable opinion of the business and may ultimately visit and do business with rivals who offer the necessary information. Due to the financial risk and the complicated exchange procedure involved in normal B2B transactions, the informational features of a corporate website take on even more importance in a B2B setting (Chakraborty, 2005). This touchpoint is even more relevant if we consider that is frequently the first contact that stakeholders have with the company. As a useful tool for presenting the firm to stakeholders consistently, the company website is typically the first point of contact that stakeholders have with the organisation. Companies frequently use an internet presence to develop their business brands and establish connections with audiences. Since an increasing number of B2B organisations operate globally or desire to do so, the company website serves as a platform for corporate presentation that highlights its responsibilities to diverse publics. For its versatility and accessibility, the corporate website became a pertinent asset for express the corporate brand (Simoes, 2015). This touch point is therefore particularly suited to representing the company online as it consists of various elements and sections which, if well structured, make it a complete tool for communicating with the user. The main page, which serves as the website's table of contents and directs visitors to more pages and specialised information, is where users access the website, the homepage. The homepage is the landing point of most website visits. This part of the website is like a shop window, it must be up to date with the new collections, beautiful to look at and above all functional and function. From the homepage and the main menu, it is then possible to reach subpages, these sites typically contain details about a company's profile, list of services, testimonials, press releases, videos, podcasts, and live chats. Additionally, the website conveys information such as news, opinions, and industry knowledge, which are frequently given in conjunction with a web blog. Visitors anticipate dynamic contact options that facilitate effective engagement with the business and speedy resolution of straightforward questions, such as a form to fill out or chat functionality. As a result, marketers should carefully create digital content that contains pertinent information, keywords, and meta tags (information about the website's structure) to ensure that customers' search queries point them towards the business's website. Transactional websites, like e commerce websites also provide purchasing functionality, as contrast to informational websites, the focus of this discussion, which solely provide information about a subject, an organisation, or a good or service (Koch, 2022).

In conclusion, websites play an indispensable role in shaping all the three main stages of the customer journey. As the primary touchpoints for customers in the digital landscape, websites have the power to attract, engage, and convert customers through effective design, relevant content, and seamless interactions. By understanding the distinct stages of the customer journey and incorporating the key elements and design principles,

businesses can optimize the role of their websites in facilitating customer engagement and driving business success.

2.3 Usability

Website usability can be defined in terms of different factors. Most of the characteristics that distinguish usability refer to ease of use. How understandable is the structure, functions, and interface of the website to the user? Or does the user feel in control of what they are doing within the platform? Usability brings together all those factors that have as their focus the speed of operation of a platform and its ease of use (Belanche, 2012). A website that is easy to use makes it possible for visitors to find what they are looking for quickly and easily. Greater usability favours a better comprehension of the contents and tasks that the consumer must realise to achieve an objective, for example place an order, and ease of use of a computer system favours more thorough learning and a greater capacity to infer how the system will act. Additionally, a website's usability can assist visitors in successfully completing their online goals (Ageeva, 2018). It is therefore easy to understand how vital this parameter is for the development of a website. It is perhaps the most "altruistic" variable to which a company must pay attention when embarking on the creation or updating of its proprietary channel. Altruistic, because the colours, logos, fonts and in general the graphic and design appearance are decided according to the needs of the market and the company; usability, on the other hand, may be conditioned by the requests of the company, which may want users to click on a specific CTA, but it is still linked to the preferences of the user, who clearly expresses his or her status when browsing the website. It's also possible to connect usability to five quality components. The first one is learnability which refers to how quickly users can pick up using a certain interface and how simple it is for them to carry out more or less difficult tasks when using the interface for the first time; speed refers to how quickly do users complete various tasks once they have mastered the functionality of the interface design; memorability refers to how much of the functionality of the interface do users retain after using it infrequently for a while; errors is related with the amount of errors a user can do using the platform and if they readily handle them; satisfaction, probably the most important qualitative attribute, refers to the level of satisfaction of the user after he experienced the platform.

As already highlighted in the first chapter, three are the main advantages that a high level of usability can bring to the company. A favourable impact on brand positioning is the first. Along with outdated appearance, bad website usability can ruin a company's brand and reputation. This can have disastrous results on word of mouth, which within B2B companies is one of the most widespread communication channels by which a company can be known Internal productivity, the website functions as a tool for the company's partners and employees as well as a resource for customers. The last benefit is optimized conversion, an easy-to-use website can facilitates the quality and speed of user navigation by increasing the likelihood that users will place a product order.

Usability research typically takes an information technology perspective. This is because usability plays a fundamental role in the discipline of Human Computer Interaction (HIC). HCI is the study of how people

interact with computers, especially as it relates to technology design. Studies conducted in this perspective bring to light, new metrics, or parameters useful to web developers in building new websites. Several are the studies that have focused on this type of topic. (Palmer, 2002) developed a set of metrics that can help website managers and designers build more effective websites have been developed. He discovered that the proper sequencing, layout, and arrangement of Web sites can improve navigability. Once these factors have been standardised, developers can test the effectiveness of alternative site designs. For example, product information and a diversity of product presentations may improve the content of a website. Users should have the option to customise their interaction and experience with the website, according to designers. (Venkatesh, 2006) proposed a usability model based on the Microsoft Usability Guidelines (MUG), which investigates the relationships between five usability components, including content, ease of use, promotion, made-for-the-medium, and emotion, and website use and sales. Even after considering prior purchases and previous experiences with similar websites, they discovered that usability structures had a considerable impact on the use of websites and purchases. (Tung, 2009), following previous literature influence, found three important categories of attributes for web design in which usability could be applied. Web site content is the first category, in fact users are likely to place a higher value on information quality than information quantity. Ease of use is another important category, among all the values: easy navigation, downloading, access, browsing, finding information, finding Web sites, finding icons help the user orientate himself within the navigation. Especially navigation is a crucial component of design with the goal of giving consumers access to more information and making it easier for them to find that information. A good navigation system has enough links, clear descriptions of the links, is simple to find, allows for easy back and forth navigation, requires only a few clicks, and has a search option. Another important element of the ease-of-use category is the presentation of information. Superior presenting techniques might make it easier to interpret the data. Furthermore, Information shouldn't be shown in a way that makes consumers lose interest in the website. Another crucial component of the third category, the emotion category, is web users' confidence. Users of the Web won't be able to access online shopping and payment features without it. Users of the web should feel confident using the system's online buying features. That is why giving the possibility to leave feedbacks can help users to trust the platform more. (Lee, 2012) confirmed the existence of nomological networks between website usability parameters and online customer purchase intention that had already been emphasised in the earlier literature. Telepresence, navigability, interactivity, learnability, readability, information relevancy, and legitimacy, part of the network, according to research, all directly affect consumers' intent to buy. Then (Rahman, 2013), thanks to previous research, have summarised four factors that characterise a usable site. These are: usefulness that determines whether a website fulfils users' needs; effectiveness measures how simple it is to use to complete tasks; learnability measures how simple it is to learn an application and advance from being a novice to being a skilled user; and user satisfaction measures how much users enjoy using the website.

Unlike previous studies, (García García, 2017) focused on the study of usability from a communication strategy point of view. The research pointed out that a website's usefulness depends on the type and way product information is strategically incorporated, and that corporate material must also be shown with purpose because it gives a picture of the firm's goals at the time the page was built. The company must guarantee that the usability and content of its website advance its objectives. However, there hasn't been any research on how important it is for certain types of material to be on these websites, including any usability studies that would enable them to communicate successfully in strategic terms. Then the study defines three different types of website clusters: which differ in their level of usability.

From the analysis of the previous literature, research like (Ageeva, 2018) and (Chakraborty, 2005), emphasise the fact that usability is not the only variable to be considered when analysing a website. Information quality, visual design and informativeness are certainly other measures that can influence usability and are also fundamental can judge the user experience on platform. This concept was also highlighted by (Hernández, 2009). The article analyses the main factors that must be considered when designing a commercial website. Researcher have studied the features which determine website quality: accessibility, speed, navigability, content, and- they calculate the Web Assessment Index (WAI). Therefore, as also emphasised in the first chapter, usability is only one of the variables that are part of the user experience. However, usability is less subject to external influences and therefore more reliable and easier to replicate.

2.3.1 Measuring Usability

Regarding usability, previous literature has also been spent on measuring usability. Three main measurement methods have been identified by (Esmeria, 2017). Heuristic analysis and user testing are the two methods used to assess usability. The efficacy and efficiency of these approaches are compared while assessing websites. It is best to apply the two approaches at various stages of the user interface design process because they handle different usability issues. User testing can be carried out later in the design process than heuristic evaluation, which can be done at an earlier stage. Heuristic evaluation is substantially simpler to implement and less expensive than other ways. The procedure of choosing the experts and the right number of assessors is one of the problems that could come up while using heuristic evaluation. When evaluating websites, evaluators' expertise is crucial, for this reason the appropriate number of evaluators needed for a usability evaluation depends on the competence of the examiners. Evaluators must be categorized into novice, regular specialists and double specialists. Another crucial tool for usability measurement is the usability index. This tool establishes the links between various usability metrics when assessing websites. Without considering the relationships between various usability measures and calculating its usability index, the results of heuristic evaluation may be worthless. From usability metrics further researcher emphasized the limitations of traditional usability metrics. Common usability metrics were evaluated in terms of a standardized defect rate or quality level. Four usability metrics were converted into standardized forms: task completion, error rates, satisfaction scores and task times.

2.4 Research Gap

From the analysis of the literature above, the number of scientific research in the B2B field is significantly lower than the one in the B2C. As also highlighted in the study "The B2B knowledge gap" (Lilien, 2016), despite a similar annual transaction weight between the two sectors, the scientific effort in favour of B2B did not see the light of day until the late 1960s. This paper is therefore primarily intended to add to the literature on the industrial world. The previous literature prove that the company website is one of the main touchpoints for a company and that plays a fundamental role in the customer journey. However, this topic has mainly been covered from a B2C perspective in earlier literature. This is since the vast bulk of academic research has been focused on e-commerce websites. This special focus on e-commerce websites is because, in addition to business-to-consumer companies, business-to-business companies, following the pandemic period, are starting to implement B2B e-commerce sites. This trend, however, has left a gap in terms of searches conducted on showcase websites, which still account for a large proportion of corporate websites today. This essay seeks to contribute to the flourishing literature on the value of websites as touchpoints by offering a distinct perspective and focusing on a specific group of business websites. Additionally, earlier chapters discussed how important it is for businesses to consider the user experience. The user would leave the corporate website immediately and look for an alternative if they had a bad experience there. Therefore, the design must be effective, but the usability of the website must be prioritised. Although there are other factors that can affect a user's experience on a website, I have found that usability is the one that most closely resembles objectivity.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model
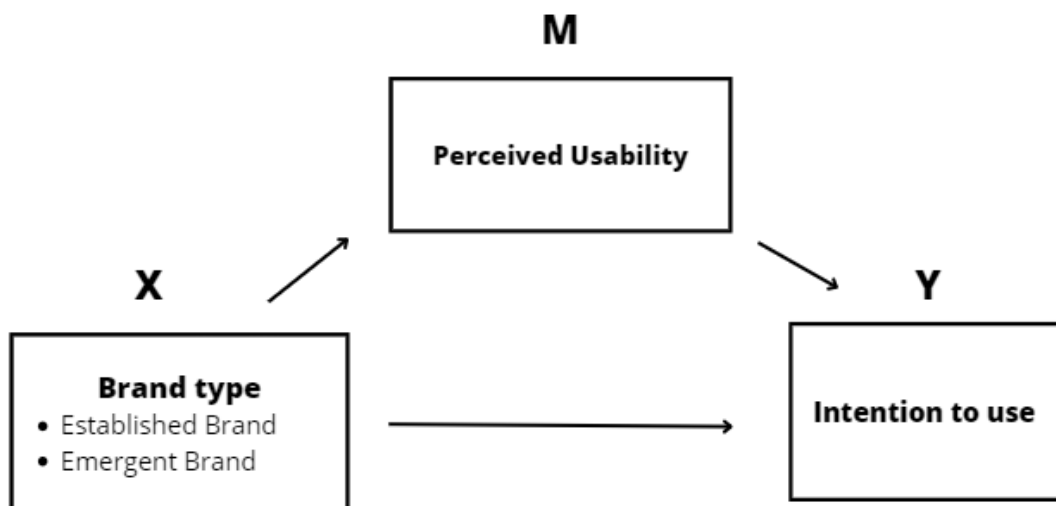
Following these considerations, the model above wants to answer the following research question that this thesis will try to solve: how do users decide to use a B2B website?

Having emphasised the importance of the website in the B2B world, it is important to understand what factors can influence the user's evaluation during navigation. This is to enable companies to understand which strategies to adopt to better qualify their presence online.

The independent variable is the type of brand and assumes two differentiated levels, established brand and emergent brand. This variable, already introduced by (Bernritter, 2016), was used to describe user behaviour on social media. In contrast to the previous literature, it is used here in a completely different context such as a B2B website. The two levels of the variable distinguish two very different type of businesses. On the one hand an historical and well-established company, on the other a new market player.

The other two variable in the model above are represented by perceived usability and the intention to use. In line with previous literature (Jongmans, 2022), usability is treated in this study as a mediator. The dependent variable is instead the intention to use, which had already been linked to usability in the study of (Belanche, 2012).

Therefore, the model above investigates a series of relationships that have not yet been explored, thus possibly bridging a gap in existing literature. In fact, Brand type is an exogenous variable to the website itself; it has no effect on usability or other technical aspects. Thus, determining if this characteristic of the company has an impact on the user, also in a field like B2B, where the evaluation of a business and the buying process is anything from impulsive, is of great interest.

From the study of the conceptual model, two are the hypotheses that I will go to verify:

H1: Users will be more likely to use established B2B brand corporate website than emergent one.

This first hypothesis of the model represents the direct effect of the independent variable (X) on the dependent variable (Y).

H2: The perceived usability mediates the effect of the type of brand (Established vs Emergent) on user's intention to use the corporate website.

The second hypothesis investigates the effect of the mediator (M) on the relationship between dependent and independent variable.

Chapter 3: Methodology & Data Analysis

3.1 Survey design

As already explained in the previous chapter, the theoretical model used in this thesis uses the typical structure of the mediator. As can be seen in Figure 1, the variable independent variable X is represented by the brand type (Brand Type). This variable has two levels: the first is represented by a strong and stable brand in the design industry, and the second by an innovative startup that has just entered the market. The dependent variable (Y), on the other hand, is embodied by the user's intention to use a website. Perceived usability finally takes the role of mediator (M) within the model, with the purpose of explaining how the relationship between the dependent and independent variable occurs.

To test the hypothesized positive effect of navigating the website of a large B2B company on the user's intention to use the website and the mediating effect on the model of the usability, a single factor two level (Established brand vs Emergent startup) between subject design experiment was conducted. The experiment, as a scientific research method, allowed me to randomize the effect of the relationships between the variables of interest.

The questionnaire participants were first introduced to the subject matter of the research, they were informed that they would have to browse a website of a 'mock company (mock-up website). The text of the introduction is as follows*: "You are about to navigate a mockup corporate website, of a firm involved in the design industry. Before entering the website, please carefully read the scenario"* (*Appendix A*).

In fact, two fully navigable mock-up websites were created for the proper conduct of the experiment, consisting of the following sections: homepage, company page, contact us page, and products page. The sites, respectively Next.Design for the Established Brand and Future design for the Emergent Brand, faithfully replicated any site of a B2B company operating in the field of design. In addition to possessing the "vital" pages for a satisfactory customer experience they possessed a design in line with industry standards. The two websites, available in Italian and English, were the same in their structure and functions; the only difference lay in the company name. The two companies and the two mock up websites were created to limit possible cognitive bias to questionnaire respondents.

After the first introduction the respondents were randomly exposed to a short description of the brand (Next. Design vs Future.Design), to be informed about basic information regarding the company in question. At the end of this description, participants were sent to click a link, which would redirect them to the homepage of the company website. Respondents were finally invited to answer questions about the scenario they had just seen and socio-demographic questions

As an example, here you read the description of the Established Brand: "You are an interior designer working on the opening of a chain of hotels in Spain and Portugal.

You have to propose to the investor, the company that will provide the furniture elements, such as tables and chairs, for the different hotel spaces. Browsing through the websites of companies in the sector, you come across Next. Design website. You have already heard of the brand but have never worked with it. The company is one of the industry leaders, has served projects all over the world and was founded more than fifty years ago. Please click this link and navigate the website, before continuing with the questionnaire."

To add to the sparse scientific literature associated with this field of study, it was necessary to establish two B2B businesses. It is challenging to do research that can be generalized and used at the managerial level in a field as diverse, subjective, and closed as B2B. Given the industry restrictions, it was decided to develop two fake businesses with contrasting size, one with more than fifty people and the other with fewer and another one formed more than 50 years ago, the other only a few years. This was done to highlight a very important difference in the B2B world. The decision-making process differs from company to company and involves different stakeholders. Just as a B2B company evaluates a possible customer differently based on their reputation, history, and size, so can a private customer be looking for information.

Respondents were asked to imagine being an architect looking for a possible supplier for an important project on internet. This was made to make them embody a typical situation of a research process in the world of design.

One of the stimuli depicted an established company in the design industry standard. The other model an emergent company and young company. Both stimuli then led participants to navigate the website of one of the two companies.

The stimuli were shown as follows:

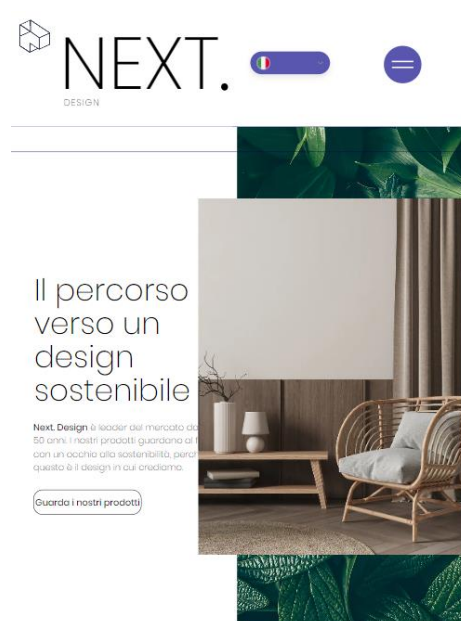*Figure 2. Established Company stimuli (Next.Design)*

Figure 3. Emergent Company stimuli (Future.Design)

3.1.2 Measurement scales

Regarding the scales to measure the user's intention to use the website after browsing it, a prevalidated scales taken from (Bartikowski, 2020) was used. The 7-point Likert scale, consisting of three items, focused on the user's future intention to reuse the website browsed just before. More specific, the scale was a 3 item-7 Linkert Scale (1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree). The items are as follows:

"I have the intention to use this website again in the near future".

"The likelihood of using this website again is high".

"If I had to use this website again, I will use it without any doubt".

Regarding the measurement of perceived usability, a pre-validated scale also from (Bartikowski, 2020) was chosen. This scale aimed to investigate the user experience while browsing regarding ease of navigation, orientation, and clarity of information contained within the website This scale was a 7 item-7 Linkert Scale (1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree). The items are as follows:

"In this website everything is easy to understand".

"This website is simple to use, even when using it for the first time".

"It is easy to find the information I need from this website".

"The structure and contents of this website are easy to understand".

"It is easy to move within this website".

"The organization of the contents of this site makes it easy for me to know where I am when navigating it".

"When I am navigating this site, I feel that I am in control of what I can do".

Instead, a multiple-choice question containing three alternatives was chosen to test the manipulation check. In case of an incorrect answer, the questionnaire participant was to be excluded from the research process. The text of the question introducing the three options was as follows: "The company whose website you've just visited is". The three options are as follows:

"An emergent startup in the design industry".

"A major company in the textile sector".

"A market leader in the design industry for over 50 years".

3.2 Data Analysis

To provide a simple and understandable layout and to encourage flow, the survey created on the Qualtrics XM platform was separated into sections. The data were then imported into the SPSS statistical package after the required number of survey takers on Qualtrics XM had been attained. In fact, this platform was used for all statistical analyses linked to the survey. The data were collected between August and early September and then analysed the same month.

3.2.1 Sample description

The sample analysed, consisted of 165 respondents, obtained through a convenience sampling. The respondents were mainly identified within a business environment of a large B2B company operating in the construction industry. This choice was made in order to strengthen the reliability of the responses, as those in the field are more familiar with this type of issue. However, it is not possible to say that all respondents came from this context; in fact, participants were left free to disseminate the questionnaire with their acquaintances. The total number of respondents was 165, (55,2% male; Mage = 29,33; SD= 9,54) (*Appendix B, 1*). As previously explained, the questionnaire scenarios were distributed among the volunteers randomly. During the survey, participants were also asked about their geographical area of origin. Almost all of the sample analysed came from Europe (94.5 %), while the remainder were equally divided between: North America, South America, Australia and Asia.

3.2.2 Reliability of scales

Although the scales chosen, were all prevalidated. A factor analysis was still conducted to prove the goodness of the item used. An initial factor analysis was first implemented to prove that the scales related to usability identified only one factor. The scale was prevalidated and the result was confirmed, all the seven items were attributable to a single factor (Eigen Value >1, 89.9% of the cumulative variance explained). The component matrix confirmed the result just enunciated, all items in fact exhibited a high correlation value with the membership factor and were therefore included in the analysis. (*Appendix B, 2*). A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO)

test was also conducted to assess the appropriateness of the sampling on the data set, the value found was excellent (0.94) (*Appendix B, 2*).

Instead, a second factor analysis was implemented for the scale items related to intention to use. The result confirmed expectations, all three items being attributable to a single factor (Eigen Value >1, 91,86% of the cumulative variance explained). The component matrix confirmed the result just enunciated, all items in fact exhibited a high correlation value with the membership factor and were therefore included in the analysis. (Appendix B,). A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was also conducted to assess the appropriateness of the sampling on the data set, the value found was adequate (0.77) (*Appendix B, 2*).

Tests were then conducted to prove the reliability of the scales used. For the two scales used in the survey, the reliability analysis refers to the Cronbach's alpha of the constructs used, which must be greater than the reference value 0.7.

The Cronbach's alpha values are equal to:

- 0.971 for the intention to buy scale

 - 0.989 for the self-brand connection scale.

Cronbach's alpha of the two scale is greater than 0.9 for all the two scales, therefore the two scales can be considered highly reliable. The result therefore does not exclude any factor from subsequent data analysis. The data are shown in the Appendix (*Appendix B, 3*).

3.2.3 Description of the main effect

First, an analysis was conducted to test the direct effect between the independent variable (X) and the dependent variable (Y). The main effect was intended to investigate the relationship between the Brand type (Estabilshed brand vs Emergent brand) and the Intention to use. In particular, in order to test) the first hypothesis under investigation (**H1***: Users will be more likely to use established B2B brand corporate website than emergent one*) an independent sample t-test was conducted.

As can be seen in the figure in appendix (Appendix C,) the average intention to use for participants who have used the website of the established company is higher than for those who have instead navigated the site of the emerging company. ($M_{strong-company}$ = 5.89, SD = 1.21; $M_{startup}$ = 2.41, SD = 1.67; t (150) = -15, p <.001).

This first analysis confirms the hypothesis that intention to use is higher in the case that users navigate the corporate website of an established brand instead of browsing the website of an emerging brand. Therefore the first hypothesis (**H1**: Users will be more likely to use established B2B brand corporate website than emergent one) is confirmed.

3.2.3 Description of the mediation effect

An analysis was then conducted to prove the veracity of the second hypothesis (**H2**: The perceived usability mediates the effect of the type of brand (Established vs Emergent) on user's intention to use the corporate website) and thus confirming the mediation effect.

A regression analysis was performed with Model 4 with a single mediator of the PROCESS in order to test hypothesis H2 (Hayes, 2022).

To carry out this analysis, each variable was initially assigned its own role:

Independent variable**:** Brand type (Conditio: 1= Established brand 0= Emergent brand).

Dependent variable**:** Intention to use (Mintent)

Mediator**:** self-brand connections (Musab)

The data imported directly from SPSS are in Appendix (*Appendix B,5*).

Checking the relevance of Pattern, A, thus the impact of the independent variable on the mediating variable (M), was the first step. In order to confirm that the coefficients have the same sign (i.e., that there is no zero within the range) and are both positive, the range of the coefficients was observed. It is possible to confirm that the effect is significant if both requirements are satisfied. In this instance, the independent variable had a positive and statistically significant impact on the mediating variable (b = 3.08, t = 12.41, p =.0000). Therefore, the results revealed that Brand type positively affect perceived usability.

Following thew same procedure was the analyzed Pattern B to study the effect of the mediator and the independent variable on the dependent variable. The positive coefficient confirms that the mediator in turn positively affects the dependent variable (b = 3.47, t = 15.23, p =.0000). This implies that, the more perceived usability increases, the more intention to use increases in the user. Moreover, the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable with the mediator in the model is also significant and positive (b = 0.57, t = 10.07, p =.0000).

Then, the total effect between the independent variable and the dependent variable is found to be statistically significant, (b = 3.47, t = 15,23, p =.0000). Since the coefficient of the total effect (3,47) is greater than the coefficient of the indirect effect (1,71) between the independent variable and the dependent variable, the usability has a partial mediating effect on the model. This result is confirmed by the check of the coefficient of the indirect effect between the independent variable and the dependent variable through the mediator. In fact, the coefficient is positive and significant as confidence interval does not contain zero (ab = 0.777; 95% CI [0.53; 1.02].

As a result of this, the analysis of the data and the indirect effect result confirms the second hypothesis under investigation. The perceived usability of a corporate website, experienced by the user mediates the relationship between Brand Type and Intention to use the website itself.

Therefore, the second hypothesis (**H2**: The perceived usability mediates the effect of the type of brand (Established vs Emergent) on user's intention to use the corporate website) is confirmed.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

4.1 Conclusion

As reported at the outset, this research aims to investigate how a user chooses to browse a website in the B2B context. The goal was to specifically investigate the relationship between brand type and user intent when it comes to website usage. Usability, which in this study aims to explain how the relationship between the two variables previously indicated becomes reality, also plays a significant part. The choice of the topic of this thesis was dictated by the growing importance, now consolidated, that the website is assuming as the main asset of communication for companies and beyond. In fact, a recent study from Forbes highlighted that 71% of companies will have websites by 2023, regardless of size or sector.

In the vast sea of possibilities that this type of topic offers, I wanted to focus on a particular sector. The B2B sector has often been put in the background from the point of view of research or has been the protagonist of very technical research. As also highlighted in chapter two, despite a similar annual transaction weight between the two sectors, which was also emphasized in the study "The B2B knowledge gap" (Lilien, 2016), the scientific push in favour of B2B did not begin until the late 1960s.

The second step after defining the area of influence was to comprehend how website users interacted with the tool and what factors might have an impact on how they behaved.

In light of this line of reasoning, the following research question has been developed:

RQ: How do users decide to use a B2B website?

To conduct the analysis and answer the research question, two hypotheses were developed based on the literature study. The first was presented as follows: "Users will be more likely to use Established B2B Brand corporate website than emergent one". While the second hypothesis was presented as follows: "The perceived usability mediates the effect of the type of brand (Established vs Emergent) on user's intention to use the corporate website."

As can be seen from the results of the third chapter, both hypotheses have been demonstrated. Nevertheless, there are several limitations to this study. The choices made in conducting the experiment, such as choosing to create two fictitious brands, inevitably lead to limitations that future research will overcome.

However, the following research has important managerial implications, which professionals and not only can apply to improve the effectiveness of the online presence of the companies they work for

4.2. Theoretical contribution

As highlighted by (Lilien, 2016) in her paper "The B2B knowledge gap" research in the B2B field still sees a large gap in terms of numbers compared to B2C. Therefore, the primary goal of this essay is to advance the body of knowledge about the industrial world. As buyers, we frequently concentrate on the select few businesses whose names and reputations we are familiar with. These businesses are those that produce supermarket staples, automobiles, sporting items, or perhaps the biggest technology companies in the world. What eludes us is that there is a planet of unknown businesses selling goods or services with other businesses hidden behind this veil of well-known corporations. Because they are frequently upstream of the production process and do not manifest themselves in the eyes of the ultimate consumer, this category of businesses, known as B2B (Business to Business), is unknown to most people.

The second contribution that this research offers to the existing literature is related to the user experience and the role that the website plays within the customer journey. As more B2B organizations become worldwide or aspire to do so, the firm website acts as a platform for corporate presentation that underlines its duties to various publics (Simoes, 2015). Previous research as: (Lin, 2013) and (Robbins, 2003) highlighted features of a website. Linked to the characteristics inherent in a website, an important role that the previous literature, like in (Parasuraman, 1985), highlights is the quality of the platform. As also defined by (Garvin, 1983) in his research, quality can also be seen as "conformance to requirements". A website that reflects the qualitative and technological dictates imposed by technological development, can become a fundamental business touchpoint within the customer journey of potential customers. To this positive attitude is connected an even negative one, highlighted by (Lin, 2013) in his report: "The modern internet user expects to connect with websites in a personalised way and the company runs the danger of permanently losing a potential customer if it cannot deliver". This is why the user experience plays such a fundamental role in this issue. Within the macro research stream that has developed on the user experience, this thesis is inserted by deepening a fundamental element, the usability of a website. Although there are other factors users can consider when assessing a company's online presence, like web aesthetics, usability is crucial to the user experience process. The definition of usability provides answers to various questions: How user-friendly are the website's layout, features, and user interface? Or does the user feel like they have control over their actions on the platform? (Belanche, 2012). In particular, a website's usability can assist visitors in successfully completing their online goals (Ageeva, 2018).

To contribute to the existing literature this treatise adds an element never considered to the whole of the analysis made on the effect of usability, the typology of brands. This choice shifts a variable, often the subject of studies in the Business to Consumer (Bernritter, 2016) into a completely new context. Usability therefore plays a different role as mediator of the relationship between a variable never considered in studies on the user experience and the intention to use the website. If it is true that the positive effect of a high perceived usability on the intention to use, had already been investigated. As for example in the work of (Jongmans, 2022), the type of brand, had never been considered. This combination of variables and the positive result of the research

carried out, allow us to say that the website of large companies will have a higher probability of being used than the website of an emerging startup. It is essential to highlight the role of perceived usability by the user, that mediates the relationship just described, thus becoming a point of reflection for all companies that want to create their online presence.

4.3 Managerial implications

Most customers are 57% through their buying process before they meet with representatives of the vendors, they are considering (Forbes, 2021). This research, suggests managers of companies operating in B2B to create or strengthen where present, the online presence of their companies. In a sector where the customer portfolio is often represented by historical partners and where the decision-making process is long and complex, experts forget that a website is a gateway to the world. Websites have the capacity to attract, engage, and convert customers through great design, pertinent information, and frictionless interactions since they are the main customer touchpoints in the digital realm. Businesses may maximize the contribution of their websites to encouraging customer interaction and fostering business success by recognizing the many stages of the customer journey and including the essential components and design concepts. The website, in addition to being the business card of the company all over the world, can be a tool to sell its products directly or indirectly, in 2023, an estimated 17 percent of B2B sales are expected to be generated digitally. Moreover, the corporate website can be and an endless source of information on the behavior of users and customers that the company can use to develop new products or create new advertisement campaigns.

As stated in the first chapter, simply having an internet presence is insufficient. Customers, whether on a mobile phone or a laptop, have no patience for slow, error-ridden websites. If consumers have a bad experience, they will abandon any website without looking back (McKinsey, 2016). This concept therefore advocates investing time and resources in the optimization or reconstruction of one's own digital assets, because it is easy to get in touch with a potential consumer while also being easy to lose it. Investing in user experience enables the organization to analyze the effectiveness of site interactions, which in turn gauges the volume of conversions and success. This research then offers a starting point from which industry managers can start to invest in user experiece. The impact of usability on a website is massive. Three of the many advantages were highlighted in this research. The first is a favorable impact on brand positioning. A website's poor usability, in addition to its outdated appearance, can affect a company's reputation. Internal productivity is the second factor. The website functions as a resource for clients as well as a tool for the company's partners and employees. Like also (Forbes, 2019) highlighted, employees who use a more user-friendly interface are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs, accomplish tasks in less time, and update content on a more regular basis. Finally, the last advantage is an higher conversion furing the customer journey. This research, thanks to an extensive bibliographic research and to the primary data obtained through the experiment conducted invites B2B professionals to invest in the company website and to consider the latter as one of the main assets of the company.

4.4 Limitation and Future research

Although the research thesis presented here seeks to fill some gaps in the literature, it has significant shortcomings that could be addressed by future research. If new research is recommended, the literature could benefit from comparing these findings to theirs, providing B2B managers with additional and more reliable data.

The first important limitation is linked to the sample analysed. The number of participants in the experiment is certainly a possible point of improvement for future research. In fact, although the number of volunteers is sufficient for research, a larger number would ensure a more meaningful statistical inference. Always linked to the sample taken into consideration, almost all the volunteers came from Europe. This then limits the result to a certain area of influence. As the website is a global tool, research that considers multiple areas of the world would contribute more to the scientific relevance of the findings. The last point concerning the composition of the statistical sample is the sampling technique. In this research a convenience sampling was used. This aspect limits the resonance of the information obtained because the sample was not chosen following a probabilistic process.

The second important limitation depends on the choice of variables, in particular the independent variable. To minimize possible exogen influences to the experiment, two fictitious brands have been created, together with the related websites. This choice was arbitrary and future research could instead take existing brands operating in the B2B sector. Another limitation to highlight, is linked to the choice of the dependent variable, the intention to use. This variable is one of the possible variables to investigate the behaviour of users of a website and the impact of user experience on the customer journey. Future research will be able to deepen the funnel and investigate customer satisfaction or willingness to buy.

A last important limitation is linked to the procedure followed for the creation of the experiment and consequently for the administration of the survey. In fact, it should be noted, that the websites used for the questionnaire were created from scratch. The user had no experience of these tools and even if they reflect the basic features of a company website, they represented mock-up websites. The two platforms were therefore limited in their functions and had few navigable pages. Future research can create or use existing, fully functional websites that offer a complete user experience to respondents.

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Appendix

Appendix A – Survey (Qualtricss)

Introduction

First scenario text – Next.Design

First scenario – Mock up website (Next.Design)
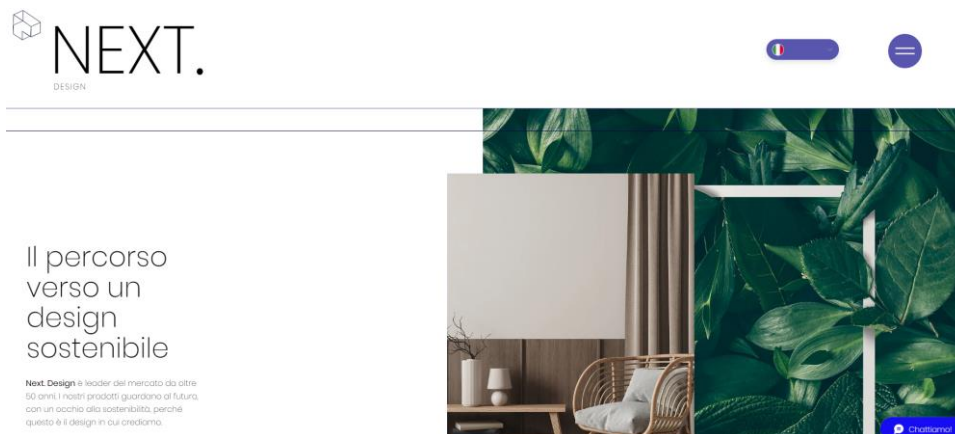
First scenario text – Future.Design

☐ Future.Design_intro1   •••

You are an interior designer working on the opening of a chain of hotels in Spain and Portugal.
You have to propose to the investor, the company that will provide the furniture elements, such as tables and chairs, for the different hotel spaces.
Browsing through the websites of companies in the sector, you come across **Future.Design website**. You have never heard or work with the brand. The company is emergent, is start working on some big projects and was founded in only five years ago.

Please click this **link** and navigate the website of Future.Design, before continuing with the questionnaire.

Second scenario – Mock up website (Future. Design)
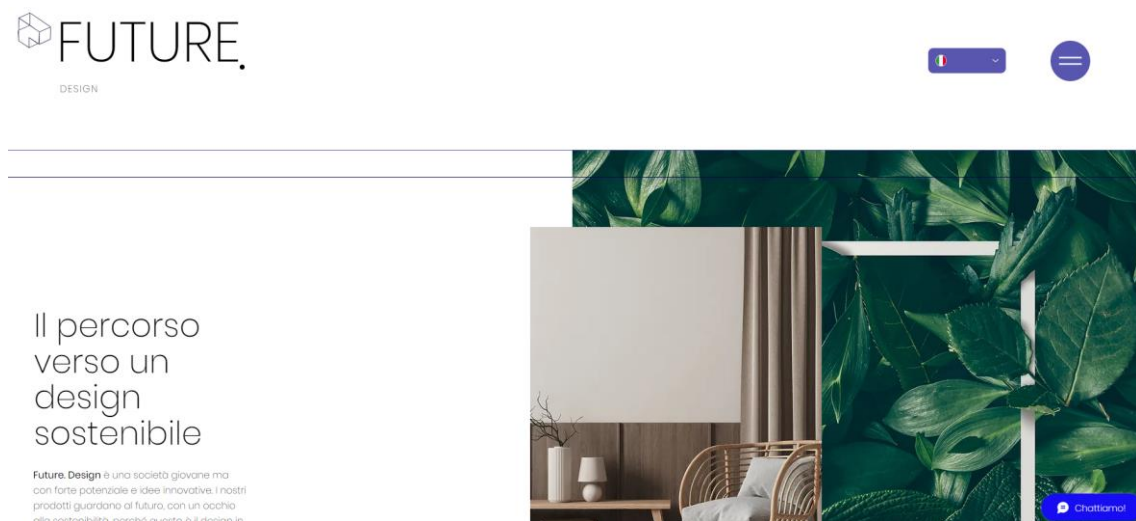
Perceived usability scales

Q2_USAB2

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
In this website everything is easy to understand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
This website is simple to use, even when using it for the first time	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is easy to find the information I need from this website	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is easy to move within this website	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The structure and contents of this website are easy to understand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is easy to move within this website	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
When I am navigating this site, I feel that I'm in control of what I can do	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Intention to use scales

☐ Q2_I USE2

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have the intention to use this website again in the near future	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The likelihood of using this website again is high	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
If I had to use this website again, I will use it without any doubt	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Survey flow

Show Block: Introduction (1 Question)
Add Below Move Duplicate Delete

Randomizer
Randomly present ⊖ 1 ⊕ of the following elements ☑ Evenly Present Elements Edit Count
Add Below Move Duplicate Collapse Delete

Show Block: Scenario_1_block (6 Questions)
Add Below Move Duplicate Delete

Show Block: Scenario_2_block (6 Questions)
Add Below Move Duplicate Delete

➕ Add a New Element Here

Show Block: Demographics (4 Questions)
Add Below Move Duplicate Delete

Show Block: Privacy Information (1 Question)
Add Below Move Duplicate Delete

➕ Add a New Element Here

Appendix B – Data Analysis (Output SPSS)

1. **Descriptive Statistics**

Tabella delle frequenze

Gender

		Frequenza	Percentuale	Percentuale valida	Percentuale cumulativa
Valido	Male	91	55,2	55,2	55,2
	Female	72	43,6	43,6	98,8
	Non-binary / third gender	2	1,2	1,2	100,0
	Totale	165	100,0	100,0	

Region

		Frequenza	Percentuale	Percentuale valida	Percentuale cumulativa
Valido	Europe	156	94,5	94,5	94,5
	Asia	4	2,4	2,4	97,0
	North America	2	1,2	1,2	98,2
	South America	2	1,2	1,2	99,4
	Australia	1	,6	,6	100,0
	Totale	165	100,0	100,0	

Year of birth

		Frequenza	Percentuale	Percentuale valida	Percentuale cumulativa
Valido	2006	1	,6	,6	,6
	2004	2	1,2	1,2	1,8
	2003	2	1,2	1,2	3,0
	2002	8	4,8	4,8	7,9
	2001	8	4,8	4,8	12,7
	2000	16	9,7	9,7	22,4
	1999	16	9,7	9,7	32,1
	1998	25	15,2	15,2	47,3
	1997	13	7,9	7,9	55,2
	1996	10	6,1	6,1	61,2
	1995	6	3,6	3,6	64,8
	1994	10	6,1	6,1	70,9
	1993	4	2,4	2,4	73,3
	1992	1	,6	,6	73,9
	1991	4	2,4	2,4	76,4
	1990	6	3,6	3,6	80,0
	1989	1	,6	,6	80,6
	1988	3	1,8	1,8	82,4
	1987	5	3,0	3,0	85,5
	1986	2	1,2	1,2	86,7
	1985	2	1,2	1,2	87,9
	1984	3	1,8	1,8	89,7
	1983	1	,6	,6	90,3
	1982	2	1,2	1,2	91,5
	1981	1	,6	,6	92,1
	1979	1	,6	,6	92,7
	1978	1	,6	,6	93,3
	1977	1	,6	,6	93,9
	1974	1	,6	,6	94,5
	1970	1	,6	,6	95,2
	1969	1	,6	,6	95,8

Istogramma

Media = 29,33
Dev. standard = 9,549
N = 165
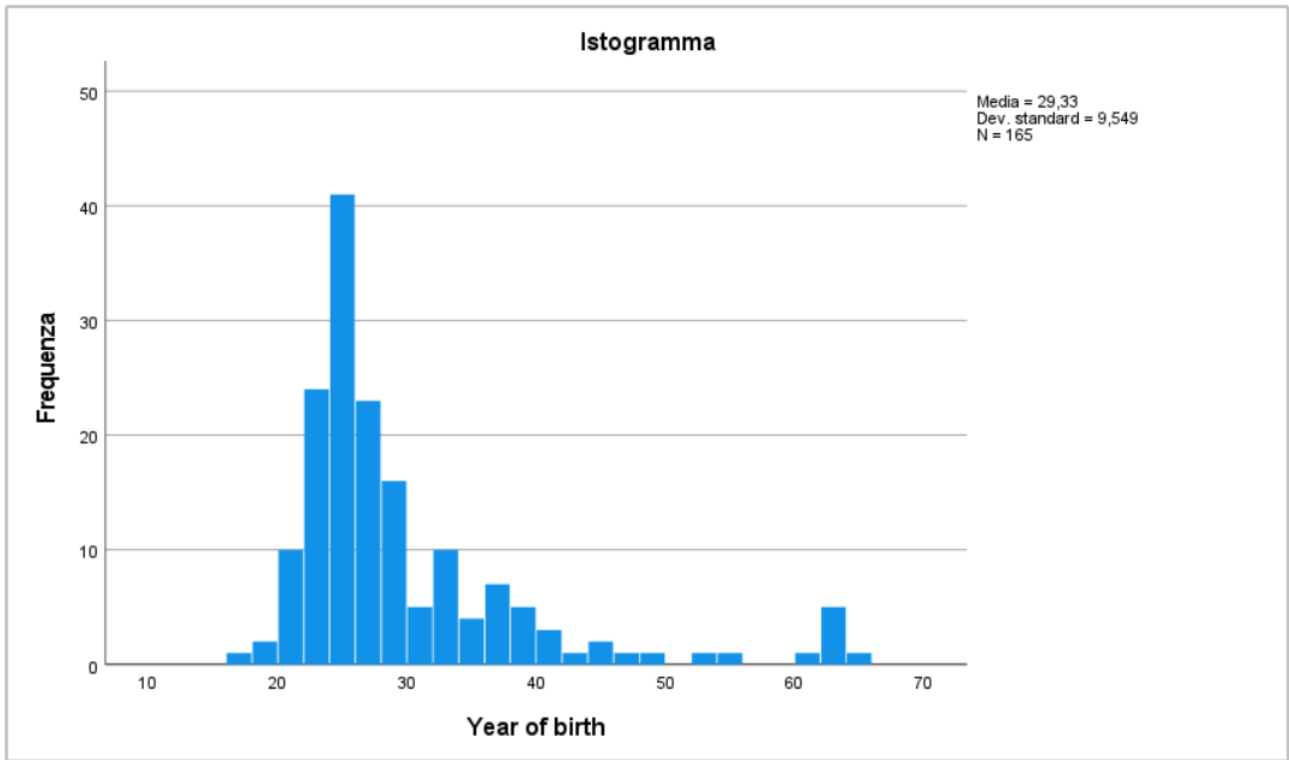
2. Factor and reliability analysis

Factor Analysis - Usability

Comunalità		
	Iniziale	Estrazione
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - In this website everything is easy to understand	1,000	,887
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - This website is simple to use, even when using it for the first time	1,000	,904
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - It is easy to find the information I need from this website	1,000	,901
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - It is easy to move within this website	1,000	,932
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - When I am navigating this site, I feel that I am in control of what I can do	1,000	,925
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - The organization of the contents of this site makes it easy for me to know where I'm when navigating it	1,000	,895

Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - The organization of the contents of this site makes it easy for me to know where I'm when navigating it	1,000	,895
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - The structure and contents of this website are easy to understand	1,000	,854

Metodo di estrazione: Analisi dei componenti principali.

Varianza totale spiegata

Componente	Autovalori iniziali			Caricamenti somme dei quadrati di estrazione		
	Totale	% di varianza	% cumulativa	Totale	% di varianza	% cumulativa
1	6,298	89,971	89,971	6,298	89,971	89,971
2	,246	3,509	93,480			
3	,136	1,945	95,424			
4	,097	1,389	96,813			
5	,089	1,269	98,083			
6	,077	1,093	99,176			
7	,058	,824	100,000			

Metodo di estrazione: Analisi dei componenti principali.

Grafico scree

Matrice dei componenti[a]

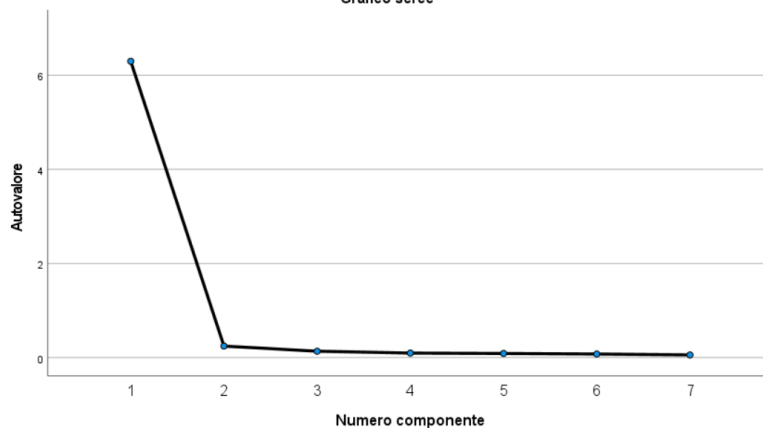|	Componente 1
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - In this website everything is easy to understand	,942
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - This website is simple to use, even when using it for the first time	,951
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - It is easy to find the information I need from this website	,949
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - It is easy to move within this website	,966
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - When I am navigating this site, I feel that I am in control of what I can do	,962
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - The organization of the contents of this site makes it easy for me to know where I'm when navigating it	,946
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - The structure and contents	,924

Factor Analysis – Intention to use

Comunalità

	Iniziale	Estrazione
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - In this website everything is easy to understand	1,000	,887
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - This website is simple to use, even when using it for the first time	1,000	,904
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - It is easy to find the information I need from this website	1,000	,901
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - It is easy to move within this website	1,000	,932
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - When I am navigating this site, I feel that I am in control of what I can do	1,000	,925
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - The organization of the contents of this site makes it easy for me to know where I'm when navigating it	1,000	,895
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with	1,000	,854

Varianza totale spiegata

Componente	Autovalori iniziali			Caricamenti somme dei quadrati di estrazione		
	Totale	% di varianza	% cumulativa	Totale	% di varianza	% cumulativa
1	6,298	89,971	89,971	6,298	89,971	89,971
2	,246	3,509	93,480			
3	,136	1,945	95,424			
4	,097	1,389	96,813			
5	,089	1,269	98,083			
6	,077	1,093	99,176			
7	,058	,824	100,000			

Metodo di estrazione: Analisi dei componenti principali.

Grafico scree

3. Reliability Analysis

Reliability of the usability scales

Scala: ALL VARIABLES

Riepilogo elaborazione casi

		N	%
Casi	Valido	165	100,0
	Escluso[a]	0	,0
	Totale	165	100,0

a. Eliminazione listwise basata su tutte le variabili nella procedura.

Statistiche di affidabilità

Alpha di Cronbach	N. di elementi
,981	7

Statistiche degli elementi

	Media	Deviazione std.	N
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - This website is simple to use, even when using it for the first time	4,64	2,277	165
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - It is easy to find the information I need from this website	4,59	2,337	165
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - It is easy to move within this website	4,65	2,358	165
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - When I am navigating this site, I feel that I am in control of what I can do	4,70	2,384	165
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - The organization of the contents of this site makes it easy for me to know where I'm when navigating	4,65	2,365	165
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - The structure and contents of this website are easy to understand	4,69	2,393	165
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - In this website everything is easy to understand	4,65	2,281	165

Reliability analysis of the Intention to use scales

Statistiche elemento-totale

	Media scala se viene eliminato l'elemento	Varianza scala se viene eliminato l'elemento	Correlazione elemento-totale corretta	Alpha di Cronbach se viene eliminato l'elemento
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - This website is simple to use, even when using it for the first time	27,93	179,739	,932	,978
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - It is easy to find the information I need from this website	27,98	178,329	,930	,978
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - It is easy to move within this website	27,92	176,590	,952	,977
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - When I am navigating this site, I feel that I am in control of what I can do	27,86	176,194	,947	,977
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - The organization of the contents of this site makes it easy for me to know where I'm when navigating it	27,92	177,785	,927	,978
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - The structure and contents of this website are easy to understand	27,87	178,661	,898	,980
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - In this website everything is easy to understand	27,92	180,285	,920	,979

Reliability analysis of the Intention to use scales

Affidabilità

Scala: ALL VARIABLES

Riepilogo elaborazione casi

		N	%
Casi	Valido	165	100,0
	Escluso[a]	0	,0
	Totale	165	100,0

a. Eliminazione listwise basata su tutte le variabili nella procedura.

Statistiche di affidabilità

Alpha di Cronbach	N. di elementi
,955	3

Statistiche degli elementi

	Media	Deviazione std.	N
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - I have the intention to use this website again in the near future	4,10	2,218	165
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - The likelihood of using this website again is high	4,07	2,385	165
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - If I had to use this website again, I will use it without any doubt	4,26	2,506	165

Statistiche elemento-totale

	Media scala se viene eliminato l'elemento	Varianza scala se viene eliminato l'elemento	Correlazione elemento-totale corretta	Alpha di Cronbach se viene eliminato l'elemento
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - I have the intention to use this website again in the near future	8,33	22,797	,885	,950
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - The likelihood of using this website again is high	8,36	20,768	,920	,922
Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: - If I had to use this website again, I will use it without any doubt	8,17	19,776	,915	,927

4. Main effect analysis

Medie

Riepilogo elaborazione casi

	Casi					
	Incluso		Escluso		Totale	
	N	Percentuale	N	Percentuale	N	Percentuale
meanusability * Conditions	165	100,0%	0	0,0%	165	100,0%

Report

meanusability

Conditions	Media	N	Deviazione std.
,00	3,1170	83	2,05052
1,00	6,2056	82	,93721
Totale	4,6519	165	2,22157

Riepilogo elaborazione casi

	Casi					
	Incluso		Escluso		Totale	
	N	Percentuale	N	Percentuale	N	Percentuale
Meanintentionuse * Conditions	165	100,0%	0	0,0%	165	100,0%

Report

Meanintentionuse

Conditions	Media	N	Deviazione std.
,00	2,4177	83	1,67060
1,00	5,8902	82	1,21835
Totale	4,1434	165	2,27190

Grafico
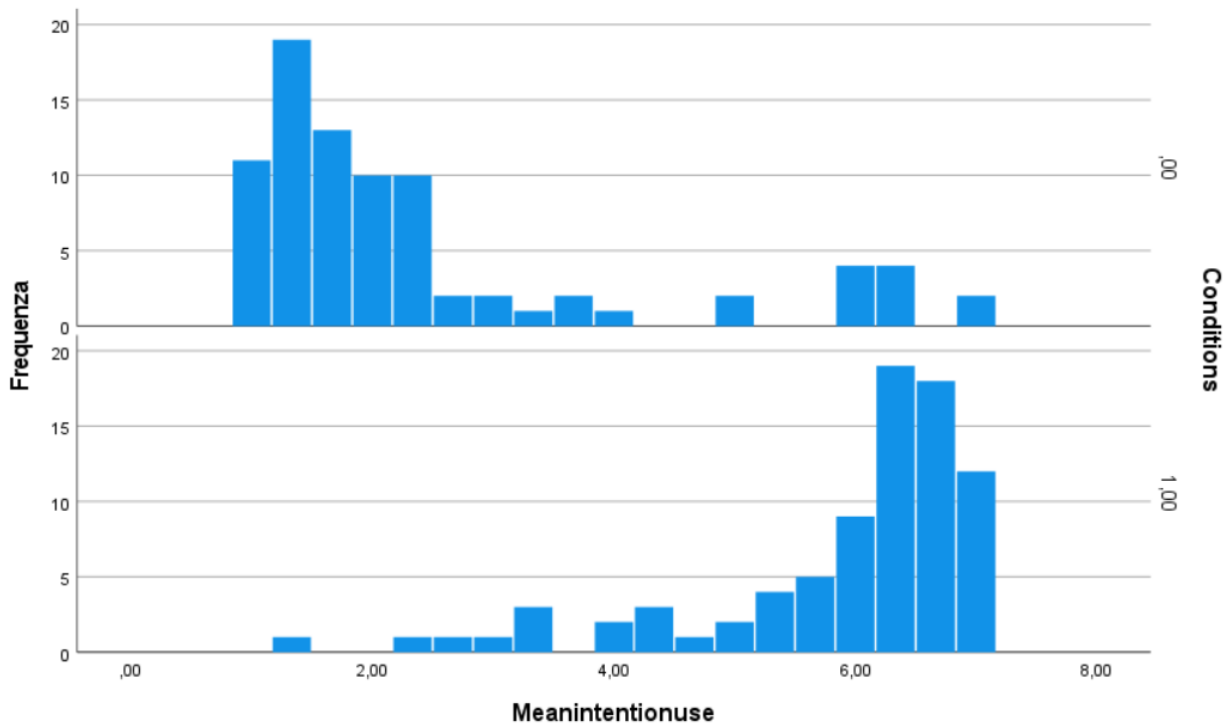
Test t

Statistiche gruppo

	Conditions	N	Media	Deviazione std.	Errore standard della media
Meanintentionuse	Startup	83	2,4177	1,67060	,18337
	Strong Company	82	5,8902	1,21835	,13454

Test campioni indipendenti

		Test di Levene per l'eguaglianza delle varianze		Test t per l'eguaglianza delle medie							
						Significatività				Intervallo di confidenza della differenza di 95%	
		F	Sign.	t	gl	P unilaterale	P bilaterale	Differenza della media	Differenza errore std.	Inferiore	Superiore
Meanintentionuse	Varianze uguali presunte	4,724	,031	-15,240	163	<,001	<,001	-3,47257	,22786	-3,92251	-3,02263
	Varianze uguali non presunte			-15,268	150,035	<,001	<,001	-3,47257	,22744	-3,92197	-3,02318

Dimensioni effetto campioni indipendenti

| | | Standardizzatore[a] | Stima del punto | Intervallo di confidenza 95% | |
				Inferiore	Superiore
Meanintentionuse	D di Cohen	1,46344	-2,373	-2,770	-1,971
	Correzione di Hedges	1,47021	-2,362	-2,757	-1,962
	Delta di Glass	1,21835	-2,850	-3,381	-2,313

a. Il denominatore utilizzato per stimare le dimensioni dell'effetto.
D di Cohen utilizza la deviazione standard raggruppata.
La correzione Hedges utilizza la deviazione standard raggruppata, più un fattore di correzione.
Il delta di Glass utilizza la deviazione standard del campione del gruppo di controllo.

5. Mediator Analysis

Matrice

```
Run MATRIX procedure:

***************** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.2 *****************

        Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D.        www.afhayes.com
    Documentation available in Hayes (2022). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

*************************************************************************
Model  : 4
   Y  : Mintent
   X  : Conditio
   M  : Musab

Sample
Size:  165

*************************************************************************
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 Musab

Model Summary
        R       R-sq       MSE         F        df1        df2          p
     ,6972      ,4861     2,5517   154,1993     1,0000   163,0000      ,0000

Model
            coeff        se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI
constant    3,1170     ,1753    17,7773      ,0000     2,7708     3,4633
Conditio    3,0885     ,2487    12,4177      ,0000     2,5974     3,5797

Standardized coefficients
            coeff
Conditio    1,3903

*************************************************************************
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
```

```
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 Mintent

Model Summary
        R       R-sq       MSE         F        df1        df2          p
     ,8640      ,7465     1,3244   238,5798     2,0000   162,0000      ,0000

Model
            coeff        se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI
constant     ,6449     ,2165     2,9780      ,0033      ,2173     1,0725
Conditio    1,7160     ,2500     6,8650      ,0000     1,2224     2,2096
Musab        ,5687     ,0564    10,0789      ,0000      ,4573      ,6802

Standardized coefficients
            coeff
Conditio     ,7553
Musab        ,5561

*************************** TOTAL EFFECT MODEL ***************************
OUTCOME VARIABLE:
 Mintent

Model Summary
        R       R-sq       MSE         F        df1        df2          p
     ,7666      ,5876     2,1416   232,2538     1,0000   163,0000      ,0000

Model
            coeff        se          t          p       LLCI       ULCI
constant    2,4177     ,1606    15,0509      ,0000     2,1005     2,7349
Conditio    3,4726     ,2279    15,2399      ,0000     3,0226     3,9225

Standardized coefficients
            coeff
Conditio    1,5285
```

```
************** TOTAL, DIRECT, AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y **************

Total effect of X on Y
     Effect        se         t          p       LLCI       ULCI       c_ps
     3,4726      ,2279    15,2399      ,0000     3,0226     3,9225     1,5285

Direct effect of X on Y
     Effect        se         t          p       LLCI       ULCI      c'_ps
     1,7160      ,2500     6,8650      ,0000     1,2224     2,2096      ,7553

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:
          Effect     BootSE   BootLLCI   BootULCI
Musab     1,7566      ,2832    1,2139     2,3190

Partially standardized indirect effect(s) of X on Y:
          Effect     BootSE   BootLLCI   BootULCI
Musab      ,7732      ,1255     ,5364     1,0286

*********************** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS ************************

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:
  95,0000

Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals:
  5000

NOTE: Standardized coefficients for dichotomous or multicategorical X are in
      partially standardized form.

------ END MATRIX -----
```

Summary

Chapter 1

Successful businesses have a strong offline image and presence, but in an ever-changing market and volatile times, it is fundamental that the offline image and presence work in tandem with the online one. The assets to be managed to have a strong online presence are many, and their proliferation does not seem to stop. Among them was chosen the website, as the main digital touchpoint for the company. This topic affects all sectors and all businesses, but in this paper, I decided to focus on the B2B (Business to Business) sector because it has a much lower number of scientific research than the B2C (Business to Consumer) sector. Moreover, the awareness of the potentialities for the development of the company of a strong digital presence is in the industrial world much inferior regarding the consumer world. On the other hand, consumers are looking at the B2B world in an increasingly digital way. According to McKinsey research on the digitalization of B2B market industries, the number of B2B customers using digital self-service channels to explore and assess items increased from 20% in 2016 to 30% in 2019. Over the same time span, new or repeat orders through digital B2B channels increased from 40% to 50%, representing trillions of dollars in value (McKinsey, 2021).

In this scenario the website is the main touchpoint through which the company can address the world around it. This tool can and must be integrated with other business touchpoints, such as social media to make communication exist across all channels and target different targets. Therefore, company's website is an essential tool. Customers and other stakeholders may rely on it as their primary source of information regarding a company's goods and services, goals, and team members. A well-designed website may help a company stand out from the crowd, win the trust and credibility of potential partners and customers, and serve as a platform for interaction and communication with stakeholders. Several studies include statistical data to demonstrate the value of a website as a corporate asset. Among others Forbes conducted an analysis that confirms the indispensability of this asset for businesses. According to the magazine's analysis, 71% of firms would have a website in 2023, an increase from the previous year that can be attributable largely to the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic (Forbes, 2023).

As a company touchpoint, the website is part of the customer journey that the customer makes by entering into contact with the company concerned. The quality and efficiency of the customer experience is a critical and fundamental issue for companies. A customer journey refers to the path of interactions an individual has with a brand, product, or services. As highlighted also by (Rese, 2008) . The acquisition of goods and services between two businesses is a more complicated process than the route a customer takes to buy a consumer good, like a toothbrush. Throughout this lengthy process, the website may function as a beginning point for new partners and clients. Through a direct email marketing campaign, a potential consumer can be routed to the website and contact the firm at an early stage of awareness., as reported in the Forbes article "The

Successful B2B Customer Journey Begins at Their Door, Not Yours", most customers are 57% through their buying process before they meet with representatives of the vendors they are considering. The website is therefore a fundamental step in the customer journey of a potential customer and its role takes place in all the different phases of the purchase function.

This exposes the company to risks. Customers, whether on a mobile phone or a laptop, have no patience for slow, error-ridden websites. If customers have a bad experience, they will abandon your website without looking back (McKinsey, 2016). It is consequently in the company's best interests to develop and design a platform that, to the greatest extent feasible, meets the needs of the user. It's in this context that the user experience comes into play. User experience refers to the experience a person has with a physical or digital product. The aim of this discipline is therefore to attract and satisfy the customer before, during and after their experience. Delivering a website that is simple to use, understand, and enjoy will mean the difference between site visitor and the success found in a loyal customer. Moreover, investing in user experience allows the enterprise assesses the effectiveness of site interactions, which in turn gauges the volume of conversions and success. Four different factors are taken into account when a person uses a website: value, function, usability, general impression. In this thesis I decided to focus on usability. Website usability can be defined in terms of different factors. Most of the characteristics that distinguish usability refer to ease of use. How understandable is the structure, functions, and interface of the website to the user? Or does the user feel in control of what they are doing within the platform? Usability brings together all those factors that have as their focus the speed of operation of a platform and its ease of use (Belanche, 2012). The usability of a website is crucial. Many are the advantages of a usable website. The first is a favourable impact on brand positioning. A website's poor usability, in addition to its outdated appearance, can affect a company's reputation. The outcomes are extensive and can have an immediate impact on a brand's financial performance. Internal productivity is the second factor. As previously said, the website functions as a resource for clients as well as a tool for the company's partners and employees. The website acts as a clearinghouse for technical data, product catalogues, and other information, and it can be used to display items to customers or to stay up with business news, particularly in the B2B sector. The last benefit is optimized conversion.

On this basis, the research question of this thesis is formulated accordingly:

RQ: "How do users decide to use a B2B website?"

Chapter 2

Online presence has become more crucial than ever for small and large businesses in the B2B sector, as was previously mentioned in the first chapter. However, in contrast to the offline world, where the difference between a tiny company and a big one is immediately apparent, this is less so online. Due to lower costs than

in the offline sector, this fact encourages investment in digital channels and ensures greater equality. Due to the fact that what is being discussed becomes intangible online and that different brand features may influence consumers' decisions, brand perceptions are perceived differently online than they are offline (Bernritter, 2016).

The website is one of it's one of the different touchpoints that make up the digital presence of a B2B company. Taking the definition from (Lin, 2013), the website is made up of several pages that are housed on servers connected to the World Wide Web. It is an information system that is presented in a unique language and offers a variety of features that anyone with an Internet connection can access. The website is able to overcome different limits of the offline communication as geographical or cultural barriers. However, a strong online presence is not enough to guarantee a company's online success. The expectations of users have become more numerous and specific over the years, and the level of quality and efficiency of a company website must be able to meet these demands. The website design should reflect the company in a major and favourable way to capture the user's interest and stimulate their curiosity (Lin, 2013). In fact, the user's perception of quality will act as the criterion for rating not just the website but frequently the entire business.

It's also possible to categorize the touchpoints in four macro categories: brand-owned, partner-owned, customer-owned, and social/external/independent. The website becomes part of the category of brand owned touchpoints. As such, it becomes part of several steps of a customer's customer journey, from the pre purchase phase, in which the potential customer is still in a phase of awareness until the actual purchase in ecommerce sites. For its versatility and accessibility, the corporate website became a pertinent asset for express the corporate brand (Simoes, 2015). Moreover, visitors typically use a company's official website as a portal to find important information that shapes their opinions about the firm and its products. Visitors who don't find valuable information are likely to have a negative opinion of the company and may ultimately visit and do business with competitors that do. The informational aspects of a corporate website assume an even greater significance in a B2B scenario due to the financial risk and convoluted exchange procedure involved in typical B2B transactions (Chakraborty, 2005).

Defined the importance of a website as a business asset to connect with potential customers, it is essential that the information and visual content on the website are not only correct and quality but also easily accessible. A high level of usability guarantees the correct use of the website by users. Website usability can be defined in terms of different factors. Most of the characteristics that distinguish usability refer to ease of use. How understandable is the structure, functions, and interface of the website to the user? Or does the user feel in control of what they are doing within the platform? Usability brings together all those factors that have as their focus the speed of operation of a platform and its ease of use (Belanche, 2012). A website that is easy to use makes it possible for visitors to find what they are looking for quickly and easily. Even if, from the analysis researches like (Ageeva, 2018) and (Chakraborty, 2005), emphasise the fact that usability is not the only variable to be considered when analysing a website, usability is less subject to external influences and therefore

more reliable and easier to replicate. Different are in fact the methods used to test just this parameter, among others I quote heuristic analysis and user testing.

From the analysis of the literature above, it can be seen that the number of scientific research in the B2B field is significantly lower than the one in the B2C. This paper is therefore primarily intended to add to the literature on the industrial world. Within this context, this research focuses on focusing on the importance of a B2B website. It is then identified as a key factor of the success of a site the user experience, i.e. the experience that a user has while using a product, in this case a site we company. A fundamental element of the user experience is the usability without which a platform, although aesthetic would be unusable. Usability is tested in this studty in the role of mediator. The research set is then completed by including within the analysis the type of brand as an independent variable and the intention to use a website as a variable employee. The result is the theoretical framework shown in the figure below:

Figure 4. Conceptual Model
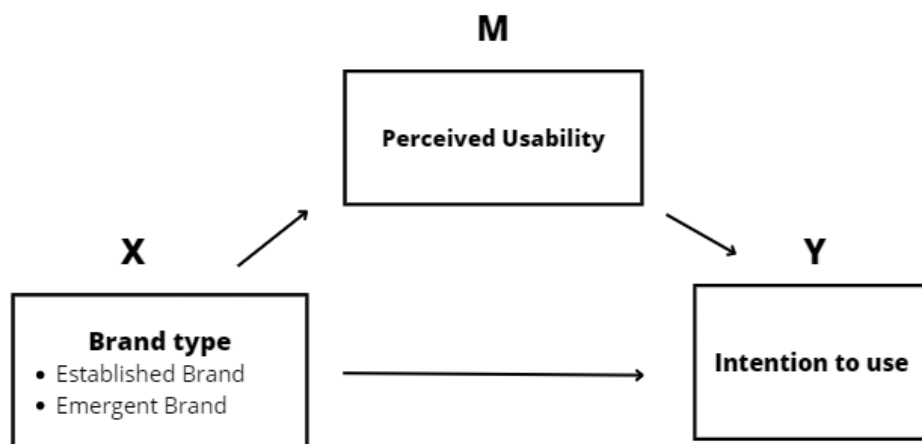
As a result, the model above 60 analyses a number of links that have not yet been investigated, potentially filling a gap in the body of knowledge. Brand type is actually an external variable to the website itself; it has no bearing on usability or other technological elements. Determining if this company trait affects the user is thus important, especially in a sector like B2B where a company's appraisal and the purchasing process are anything but spontaneous.

From the study of the conceptual model, two are the hypothesis that this thesis want to verify:

H1: Users will be more likely to use established B2B brand corporate website than emergent one.

This first hypothesis of the model represents the direct effect of the independent variable (X) on the dependent variable (Y).

H2: The perceived usability mediates the effect of the type of brand (Established vs Emergent) on user's intention to use the corporate website.

The second hypothesis investigates the effect of the mediator (M) on the relationship between dependent and independent variable.

Chapter 3

The model investigated in this research reflects the classic Chema of a Mediator model. To test the hypothesized positive effect of navigating the website of a large B2B company on the user's intention to use the website and the mediating effect on the model of the usability, a single factor two level (Established brand vs Emergent startup) between subject design experiment was conducted. The experiment, as a scientific research method, allowed me to randomize the effect of the relationships between the variables of interest. To do so it was created a questionnaire where participants were exposed to one out of two scenarios assigned randomly. The questionnaire consisted of three main arts: the introduction, the scenarios, consisting of a brief descriptive text of the type of company (Established company vs Emergent company) and two navigable mock up websites. The two websites, available in Italian and English, were the same in their structure and functions; the only difference lay in the company name. The choice to create two fictitious companies and the corresponding two mock up websites was made in order to limit possible cognitive biases due to the knowledge of an existing brand. The questionnaire was then completed with a part of socio-demographic questions. Respondents were asked to imagine being an architect looking for a possible supplier for an important project on internet. This was made to make them embody a typical situation of a research process in the world of design.

Regarding the scales to measure the user's intention to use the website after browsing it, a prevalidated scales taken from (Bartikowski, 2020) was used. The 7-point Likert scale, consisting of three items, focused on the user's future intention to reuse the website browsed just before. More specific, the scale was a 3 item-7 Linkert Scale (1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree).

Regarding the measurement of perceived usability, a pre-validated scale also from (Bartikowski, 2020) was chosen. This scale aimed to investigate the user experience while browsing regarding ease of navigation, orientation, and clarity of information contained within the website This scale was a 7 item-7 Linkert Scale (1=Strongly disagree, 7=Strongly agree).

Instead, a multiple-choice question containing three alternatives was chosen to test the manipulation check. In case of an incorrect answer, the questionnaire participant was to be excluded from the research process. The text of the question introducing the three options was as follows: "The company whose website you've just visited is".

Starting from descriptive statistics a series of analysis were conducted to test the hypothesis set in the second chapter. The sample analysed, consisted of 165 respondents (55,2% male; Mage = 29,33; SD= 9,54), obtained through a convenience sampling. Almost all the sample analysed came from Europe (94.5 %). The reliability of the prevalidated scales used in the survey were tested with excellent results. Then, an analysis was conducted to test the direct effect between the independent variable (X) and the dependent variable (Y). The main effect was intended to investigate the relationship between the Brand type (Established brand vs Emergent brand) and the Intention to use. In particular, in order to test the first hypothesis under investigation (**H1**: "Users will be more likely to use established B2B brand corporate website than emergent one") an independent sample t-test was conducted. This first analysis confirms the hypothesis. Finally, a second analysis was conducted to test the mediator effect of usability on the model (**H2**: "The perceived usability mediates the effect of the type of brand (Established vs Emergent) on user's intention to use the corporate website"). A regression analysis was performed with Model 4 with a single mediator of the PROCESS. As a result of this, the analysis of the data and the indirect effect result confirms the second hypothesis under investigation. The perceived usability of a corporate website, experienced by the user mediates the relationship between Brand Type and Intention to use the website itself.

Chapter 4

This research aims to investigate how a user chooses to browse a website in the B2B context. The goal was to specifically investigate the relationship between brand type and user intent when it comes to website usage. Usability, which in this study aims to explain how the relationship between the two variables previously indicated becomes reality, also plays a significant part. The choice of the topic of this thesis was dictated by the growing importance, now consolidated, that the website is assuming as the main asset of communication for companies and beyond. The lack of research in B2B field and the fundamental role corresponded to the corporate web site both from the previous literature and from more managerial sources have led me to elaborate the following research question:

RQ*: "How do users decide to use a B2B website?"

To conduct the analysis and answer the research question, two hypotheses were developed based on the literature study. The first was presented as follows: "Users will be more likely to use Established B2B Brand corporate website than emergent one". While the second hypothesis was presented as follows: "The perceived usability mediates the effect of the type of brand (Established vs Emergent) on user's intention to use the corporate website."

As can be seen from the results of the third chapter, both hypotheses have been demonstrated.

With respect to the first hypothesis, it is therefore possible to say that a user, with no prior experience of the brand, will be more likely to use a website of a historical and strong company in the industry than the one of an emerging company.

Taking the second hypothesis into consideration, it is safe to say that perceived usability has a mediating effect on the relationship between brand type and intention to use a website. Thus, website usability has an impact on a user's evaluation of a website.

As already mentioned in the second chapter, this research aimed to contribute to the scientific literature in the industrial field. In doing so, I focused on the digital marketing environment, highlighting the importance of a corporate website in the B2B field. The user experience and the perceived usability as parameter chosen to be analysed, play a fundamental role in the user experience and in the consequent evaluation of the platform and the company owner thereof. As seen, the online reputation of the company is now an added value, because it offers a business card recognized worldwide.

The results obtained at the experimental and theoretical level have a strong managerial potential, just think that most customers are 57% through their buying process before they meet with representatives of the vendors, they are considering (Forbes, 2021). This research, suggests managers of companies operating in B2B to create or strengthen, where present, the online presence of their companies. In a sector where the customer portfolio is often represented by historical partners and where the decision-making process is long and complex, experts forget that a website is a gateway to the world. Websites have the capacity to attract, engage, and convert customers through great design, pertinent information, and frictionless interactions since they are the main customer touchpoints in the digital realm. Businesses may maximize the contribution of their websites to encouraging customer interaction and fostering business success by recognizing the many stages of the customer journey and including the essential components and design concepts.

Despite the important contribution of this research both in the field of scientific research and management, it is essential to keep in mind the limitations that are intrinsic in this study and that future research can certainly overcome. The most important ones refer to the quality of the statistical sample. The main factors for improvement are size, heterogeneity of geographical origin and sampling methods. A second point to note is the procedure followed to conduct the questionnaire. It was in fact arbitrarily chosen to create two fictitious companies and the two related mock up websites. Future research will investigate similar effects on the intention to use users or perhaps on the intention to purchase, using websites of companies really existing or however more technologically advanced tools.