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Generational Perspectives on Electronic Word-of-Mouth: An Examination of Motivational Drivers Across Age Cohorts

Author: Alessia Giardinelli
Student number: 620936
Thesis supervisor: Dr. Bojan Georgievski
Second reader:
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ABSTRACT

This qualitative exploratory research investigates the motivations behind electronic word-of-mouth (e-wom) across four distinct generational cohorts: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. Utilizing the Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation (FIRO) theory, the study focuses on how the psychological drivers of Inclusion, Affection, and Control influence e-wom behaviors. In-depth semi-structured interviews with eight participants—two from each generation—were conducted to capture detailed perspectives. The thematic analysis revealed that motivations for forwarding online content vary significantly among generational cohorts. Key themes identified include the use of e-wom for reconnecting and strengthening relationships, facilitating conversation, expressing altruism, asserting professional competence, and demonstrating leadership. Findings highlight generational differences in the motivations and practices of e-wom, with younger generations more inclined towards visual and immediate sharing on dynamic platforms like TikTok and Instagram, while older generations favor detailed and meaningful content on platforms like Facebook. The study provides insights into designing targeted digital marketing strategies that leverage generational preferences, enhancing the effectiveness of e-wom campaigns.

Keywords: electronic word-of-mouth, generational cohorts, FIRO theory, digital marketing, qualitative research, social media behavior

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

1 Introduction

In the digital age, electronic word-of-mouth (e-wom) has become an indispensable component of online consumer behavior, influencing perceptions, shaping brand images, and driving purchasing decisions, ultimately impacting the economic outcomes for businesses across various industries (Jalilvand et al., 2012). Recently, Babić Rosario et al. (2019) have defined e-wom as "consumer-generated, consumption-related communication that employs digital tools and is directed primarily to other consumers". Consumers are not merely passive recipients of information but actively use e-wom to confirm their choices or to influence others, thereby playing a critical role in the diffusion of information (Kozinets et al., 2010). Indeed, as the internet has evolved into a central hub for communication, the dynamics of content sharing, particularly through social media platforms, have significantly changed how information is disseminated and consumed (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

The dynamics of e-wom vary significantly across different digital environments. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok facilitate rapid sharing and feedback, while review sites like TripAdvisor or Yelp offer more detailed, narrative-driven content that can significantly influence decision-making processes (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). This variation underscores the adaptability of e-wom strategies to the specifics of each platform, highlighting the importance of platform-centered approaches in contemporary digital marketing strategies.

Furthermore, the generational differences in e-wom practices are particularly notable, with each cohort displaying unique behaviors and preferences in how and what they share online. For instance, according to Hunsaker and Hargittai (2018), Baby Boomers use social media less often than younger generations; however, they tend to share more significant and meaningful content when they do participate. Curtis et al. (2021) observe that while older generations, such as Baby Boomers and Generation X, tend to rely more on email and text messaging to disseminate information, younger generations- Millennials and Generation Z- are more inclined to use dynamic platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram, and TikTok. These platforms support quick, visual-based sharing and are aligned with the fast-paced, multimedia-rich preferences of younger users. As identified by recent studies, the motivations to forward online content are diverse, reflecting a blend of personal, social, and economic factors. Cheung and Lee (2022) articulate that these motivations can include self-expression, the desire for social interaction, seeking economic rewards, and information sharing, each contributing to the complexity of online user behavior.

The advent of digital technology has significantly altered the mechanisms through which information is propagated, particularly in the context of viral marketing and e-wom. According to recent studies, over 80% of all digital marketing campaigns now incorporate strategies specifically designed to encourage viral sharing, highlighting the pivotal role of e-wom in contemporary advertising efforts (Adeola & Evans, 2019). Viral marketing leverages the network effects of the internet to exponentially

increase online content dissemination, often transforming brands and products into household names overnight (Lin et al., 2023). Additionally, e-wom enhances the reach and authenticity of marketing communications, as endorsements from personal connections are perceived as more trustworthy than traditional advertising (Kahn, 2018). The impact of viral marketing is particularly evident in sectors like fashion and technology, where trends can shift rapidly due to the influential power of e-wom. Brands such as Zara and Apple have successfully harnessed these dynamics to launch products that quickly gain momentum through strategic e-wom campaigns, demonstrating the effectiveness of viral tactics in generating consumer interest and engagement (Lin et al., 2023).

A report by the Content Marketing Institute (2021) illuminated that content sharing is the second most common action performed by users on social media, suggesting that the urge to forward is not simply a recreational pastime activity but often a manifestation of complex social desires and cognitive stimulus. This research scrutinizes the intrinsic human motivations that initiate the forwarding of online content, commonly conceptualized as e-wom. Ho and Dempsey (2010) discuss that these motivations stem from three primary psychological drivers: Inclusion, the human desire for social involvement and group membership; Affection, the inherent altruistic impetus driving individuals to share and inform; and Control, an expression of personal efficacy and dominance within one's personal and professional opportunities (Schutz, 1966).

1.1 Problem Statement

Emerging trends highlight that Gen Z's shopping behaviors significantly diverge from those of older generations, with their online purchases increasing nearly twice as fast (Adams et al., 2024). The Pew Research Center's (2022) survey insights on U.S. Baby Boomers' internet use underline a significant demographic shift toward digital engagement among older generations. Indeed, since 2010, social media usage for individuals aged 65 and older has increased by 34%. Moreover, understanding the motivations for forwarding online content is crucial for marketers to design more effective strategies and campaigns that leverage e-wom to reach and engage with their target audience (Ho & Dempsey, 2010). Despite this, only Strutton et al. (2011) examined how e-wom motivations vary among generations, however focusing only on Gen X and Gen Y. Furthermore, other studies have considered solely Gen Z but applied it to specific contexts: Lina (2023) explores how e-wom influences hotel booking decisions among Gen Z in Jakarta, while Kuswardi (2023) investigates the role of e-wom in affecting the repurchase intentions of Gen Z consumers within online education platforms. This study aims to bridge this gap by systematically exploring how key motivations to forward online content like Inclusion, Affection, and Control (Schutz, 1966) influence e-wom across Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z. The goal of this exploratory research is to take the initial step in uncovering how motivational differences across diverse age groups can inform the creation of more effective and targeted digital marketing strategies aimed at making online content go viral.

1.2   *Purpose of the research*

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory research was to investigate the motivations behind electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) across four distinct generational cohorts with a focus on understanding how motivations such as Inclusion, Affection, and Control differ among these groups. Specifically, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to capture the subjectivity of human experience (O'Brien et al., 2014). This approach considered that the forwarding behavior of different generations may be initiated by different triggers despite being driven by the same psychological motivation, potentially revealing generation-specific insights. The population under study, geographically resident in Italy, was composed of individuals who frequently forward online content to their family members, friends, or colleagues. Indeed, judgmental sampling was employed to selectively focus on participants whose behaviors most closely align with the study's objectives, ensuring that their input would yield meaningful insights into specific motivational dynamics of e-wom. Moreover, to ensure the research provided a balanced perspective, reflecting the diversity of each demographic group—Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z—the sample included two people from each group: one male and one female, with one person born at the beginning and the other at the end of the respective generation's birth range. By identifying and understanding these motivational patterns, this research aims to provide valuable insights to aid future quantitative studies that could inform more targeted digital marketing strategies.

1.3   *Research Question*

1.3.1   Main Research Question

How do motivations of inclusion, Affection, and Control influence e-wom across generational cohorts?

1.3.2   Sub-research Questions

1. What differences exist in the perception of Inclusion as a motivation for e-wom among Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z?
2. In what ways does Affection motivate e-wom activities differently across generational cohorts?
3. How does the Control motivation impact the nature of e-wom among the studied generational groups?
4. What are the potential moderating effects of generational identity on the relationship between these motivations and e-wom behaviors?

1.4   *Significance of the Study*

The findings of this study are poised to offer substantial societal value, particularly in enhancing digital literacy and communication effectiveness among diverse age groups. By identifying specific motivational triggers for different generations, marketers and social platforms can tailor content that is

more meaningful and engaging, potentially leading to more responsible and impactful digital communication (Johnson & Zhao, 2022).

Furthermore, studying e-wom motivations is crucial because they directly impact how messages should be crafted and shared across social networks, influencing both the reach and effectiveness of digital marketing campaigns (Choi et al., 2018). For instance, campaigns that appeal to Affection motivation might focus on themes of community support and helping others, which are likely to encourage sharing among users motivated by altruistic reasons. Additionally, research by Narang et al. (2021) highlights that content tailored to specific motivational needs tends to have higher engagement and sharing rates.

Additionally, the choice of platform and timing for releasing marketing campaigns can be strategically aligned with the generational habits and preferences uncovered through this study. For instance, platforms that foster strong community interactions like Facebook may be more effective for Baby Boomers and Gen X, while Snapchat and TikTok could be better suited for reaching Millennials and Gen Z, who prefer quick, visual content. This is further supported by Wang and Chen (2022), who found that tailoring the platform and timing of campaign launches to the predominant usage patterns of target demographics significantly enhances the virality of marketing efforts.

2 Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 *Literature Review*

2.1.1 Strategy

The literature review strategy employed for this research was developed by Kumar & Jaiswal in 2019. The systematic approach the authors suggest is characterized by three steps, namely: literature quality assessment, extraction of literature, and reporting review results. By just selecting recent and peer-reviewed articles the first step was already covered. Furthermore, the extraction of scientific literature was carefully guided by the conceptual framework and the research questions. Indeed, each concept mentioned in the sub-research questions (i.e., e-wom, Inclusion, Affection, Control, and Generational Differences) constitutes a topic of this literature review. Furthermore, the topic of e-wom will also be reviewed focusing on the different types of online content that can be potentially forwarded.

Finally, the literature review section was outlined, serving both as a crucial foundation for the qualitative data collection process and providing the reader with a comprehensive overview of the key concepts central to this research. Figure 1, located in Appendix A, visually presents a mind map of the literature review, organizing the primary research topics: "e-wom," "Inclusion," "Affection," and "Control." This illustration clarifies the structure of the field of study, offering a detailed overview of the key subjects and their connections to the research question. Additionally, the figure aids in structuring the literature review.
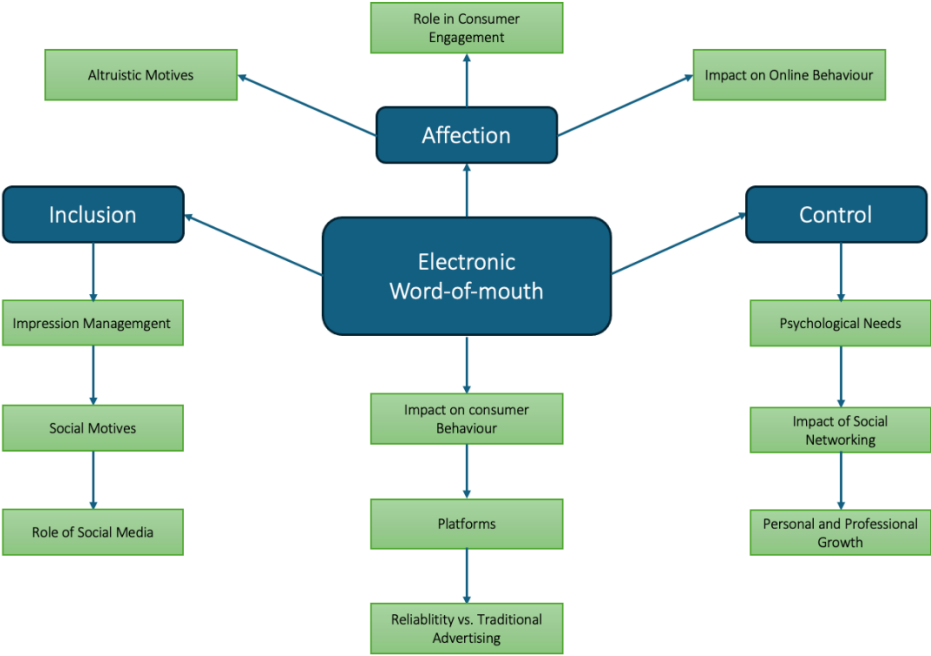

Figure 1 Literature Review Overview

2.1.2 Different types of e-wom

The advent of e-wom has profoundly impacted modern consumer behavior and marketing strategies (Virgilio & Antonelli, 2017). E-wom encompasses informal communications directed at consumers through internet-based technologies, discussing the usage, characteristics, or sellers of goods and services (Liu et al., 2021). The importance of e-wom is well-documented across various studies, highlighting its influence on numerous consumer behaviors such as mobile banking adoption, purchasing intentions, brand loyalty, and customer satisfaction (S & Chandra, 2023). For example, positive e-wom can enhance the adoption of services like mobile banking in emerging markets, while negative e-wom can significantly damage brand perception and customer satisfaction. Additionally, according to Azer and Ranaweera (2022), former customers tend to share more positive e-wom about goods compared to services, while they are more inclined to share negative e-wom about services rather than goods. Consumers heavily rely on e-wom when making purchasing decisions, often turning to review sites like Yelp, Mouthshut.com, and Google for feedback (Donthu et al., 2021) or to Social Networking Sites (SNS) for User Generated Content (UGC) like comments, likes, reposts, ratings, video testimonials and images (Roma & Aloini, 2019). This reliance underscores the credibility and trustworthiness of e-wom, which contrasts with the potential deception in traditional advertising (Handoyo, 2024). Indeed, unlike traditional marketing, e-wom must be free of any direct or subliminal marketing intentions to be considered authentic, as emphasized by SinaBeheshti (2021). This authenticity, coupled with the diverse forms of online content forwarded through emails and direct messages, significantly influences consumer perceptions and behaviors (Nam et al., 2020).

SNSs such as Facebook, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, TikTok, and Instagram serve as primary platforms for e-wom propagation due to their widespread use and connectivity, allowing users to create profiles, form relationships, and share their experiences with a broad audience (Tran & Strutton, 2020). According to Statista (2024), Facebook remains the most popular SNS, boasting more than three billion active users worldwide, followed by YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok, and WeChat. In the context of social media platforms, UGC's role in e-wom is further amplified, as SNSs provide a fertile ground for the dissemination of brand-related content (Roma & Aloini, 2019). Naeem and Okafor (2019) found that "social media platforms enhance the reach and impact of UGC, enabling brands to tap into broader audiences and foster a community of engaged consumers." Furthermore, companies often encourage e-wom generation by sending emails to customers or requesting feedback through short rating-based forms with open-ended questions, with the hope that these customers may share that same email with their network, facilitating the viral propagation of the content (Eelen et al., 2017; Rosario et al., 2020). This strategy not only creates valuable e-wom content but also enhances customer engagement and brand loyalty (Donthu et al., 2021).

The social nature of consumers drives them to share their opinions and experiences, significantly affecting traditional marketing approaches (Liu et al., 2022). Given the qualitative nature of this research, it is important to note that the production of e-wom can be driven by both reflective and impulsive processes (Wien, 2019). Kozinets et al. (2010) indicated that reflective processes are especially

prominent in online communication, as the nature of online channels allows consumers more time to formulate and plan their responses (Wien, 2019). In contrast, impulsive e-wom can occur mindlessly and emotionally, often driven by high arousal states that weaken reflective control (Blazevic et al., 2013; Strack & Deutsch, 2004).

2.1.3 Inclusion

Inclusion, as defined by Ho and Dempsey (2010), refers to the interpersonal need for individuals to be recognized as participants in social interactions. This need encompasses terms such as "belong," "join," and "togetherness" (Schutz, 1959). However, it also represents the desire to be identifiable or distinct from others, highlighting the dual nature of inclusion as both a need for social belonging and a need for individual recognition (Schutz, 1959).

Wien (2019) proposed that among the motives for e-wom, there are two major categories labeled impression management and social motives, which widen and describe the concept of Inclusion (Ho and Dempsey, 2010). Impression Management consists of motives such as individuation (Ho and Dempsey, 2010), self-presentation (Berger and Iyengar, 2013; Harnish and Bridges, 2016; Pasternak et al., 2017), self-enhancement (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), personal reputation (Cheung and Lee, 2012) and self-brand connection (Eelen et al., 2017; Thomas and Saenger, 2017). While Social Motives encompass social interaction (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), sense of belonging (Cheung and Lee, 2012), social bonding (Munzel and Kunz, 2014), and social identity (Arenas-Gaitán et al., 2018; Mousavi et al., 2017).

Recent studies continue to highlight the critical role of inclusion in e-wom behavior. Chu et al. (2021) found that the need for social belonging significantly influences consumers' willingness to share positive brand experiences online. This finding is corroborated by Zhang et al. (2022), who demonstrated that social identity and a sense of community on social media platforms enhance users' propensity to engage in positive e-wom. The interactive features of social media platforms, such as comments and likes, amplify the feeling of inclusion and encourage users to share content that aligns with their social identity and enhances their social status (Tang, 2022). The widespread use of social media on mobile devices and the shift towards more visual features have significantly enhanced real-time content sharing, including the posting of selfies and everyday experiences (Roma & Aloini, 2019). These activities make it natural for consumers to share brand-related content during personal events such as birthdays and holidays (Presi et al., 2016), reinforcing their sense of inclusion within social circles (Roma & Aloini, 2019). Indeed, Chu, Lien, and Cao (2019) assert that the sense of belongingness and the pursuit of self-enhancement drive consumers to share positive experiences about brands. Similarly, Hu and Kim (2018) identify self-enhancement and enjoyment as significant predictors of positive eWOM behavior, affirming the role of these motivations in fostering an online sharing culture (Donthu et al., 2021).

2.1.4 Affection

Altruism as a motivating factor in the context of e-wom has garnered increasing attention in recent research, particularly due to its impact on online consumer behavior and marketing strategies (Azer & Ranaweera, 2022). Ho and Dempsey (2010) proposed that Altruism can be a good indicator of a major motivation to forward online content namely, the need for affection and for satisfactory relationships. Altruistic Motives, which catalyze e-wom, stem from the demonstration of affection to help others make right and informed choices, also reflecting one of the fundamental principles of the Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Rosario et al., 2020). Indeed, recent e-wom research has supported the concept that, in this context, altruism can be intrinsically rewarding and persisting over time (Berger, 2013; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015), as many past customers continue to engage in e-wom even if they do not use the product or service anymore.

Moreover, altruistic motivations are pivotal in determining the engagement levels of consumers on online platforms, where they feel compelled to share their experiences either to aid or warn future customers (Chatzipanagiotou, & Christodoulides, 2020). This is particularly influential in sectors like tourism and hospitality, where decisions are heavily reliant on peer opinions and reviews. Indeed, a study has highlighted that the transition from being a passive reader of reviews to an active writer is often motivated by altruistic intentions, aiming to help other consumers make informed decisions (Llorens-Marin et al., 2023).

2.1.5 Control

In recent years, the exponential growth of Online SNS has transformed how individuals engage in communication, particularly in the context of e-wom. This digital era has highlighted the importance of personal growth and interpersonal needs, such as competence, achievement, influence, and accomplishment, in motivating individuals to forward online content (Ho & Dempsey, 2010). These motivations are deeply rooted in a variety of psychological theories and have been extensively studied in consumer behavior research.

He, Chen, Lee, Wang, and Pohlmann (2017) categorize motivations into three psychological needs: self-competency, self-belongingness, and self-autonomy. These needs are pivotal in driving individuals to share content online. Self-competence involves the desire to feel effective and capable in one's actions, self-belongingness refers to the need for social connection and acceptance, and self-autonomy emphasizes the importance of self-direction and independence. Together, these needs foster a sense of control and personal growth, encouraging individuals to engage in e-wom activities (He et al., 2017). Philp, Pyle, and Ashworth (2018) and Philp and Ashworth (2020) further explored the relationship between self-competence and content-sharing behavior. They find that customers' self-competence can reduce their propensity to share negative opinions, as individuals strive to maintain a competent and favorable image. Conversely, a high level of self-liking can increase the likelihood of sharing, as

individuals seek validation and reinforcement of their self-worth through positive feedback from their online audience (Philp & Ashworth, 2020; Philp et al., 2018).

Dwivedi et al. (2015), Kamboj et al. (2018), and Tamir and Mitchell (2012) describe the act of sharing in e-marketing contexts as fulfilling the natural human desire to see and be seen, to hear and be heard. This need for visibility and recognition is closely tied to self-enhancement, where individuals showcase their achievements and abilities to construct a positive self-image (Dwivedi et al., 2015). Furthermore, the concept of self-presentation, as discussed by Dunne et al. (2010) and Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), involves managing one's behavior to present a favorable image to others. Additionally, self-presentation can be a reflective and deliberate process or an impulsive, automatic behavior, depending on an individual's self-monitoring abilities (Wien, 2019).

The use of SNS for e-wom communication extends beyond individual psychological needs, embracing the broader concept of social capital. Vivekananthamoorthy et al. (2016) demonstrate that networking with professionals and seeking expert opinions on platforms like LinkedIn significantly enhance users' personal efficacy and social capital. This form of networking allows individuals to connect with a wide range of contacts, fulfilling their personal, professional, and educational needs. The study reveals that e-wom communication fosters student empowerment by enhancing their motivation and self-efficacy, ultimately leading to positive academic and social outcomes (Vivekananthamoorthy et al., 2016).

The desire to enhance one's social standing and the need for social connection drive individuals to engage in content sharing and e-wom. Mao-Ying Wu and Pearce (2014) examined the motivations of Chinese tourists who create influential and interactive travel blogs. They found that motivations such as positive self-enhancement through online social connection, achievement, self-documentation and sharing, and hedonic enjoyment of blogging were significant factors. The act of sharing content online can also be seen as fulfilling a natural yearning for self-presentation. Self-presentation involves managing one's behavior to present a favorable and appropriate image to others, which is a critical aspect of e-wom. This reflective thought process often leads individuals to engage in behaviors that showcase their achievements and abilities, thus fostering personal growth and enhancing their influence and accomplishment. (Tran and Strutton, 2020). The broader concept of social capital deeply intertwines with the need for control and personal growth, which motivates individuals to forward online content and initiate e-women. By leveraging the power of SNS, individuals can connect with a wide range of contacts, seek expert opinions, and enhance their personal efficacy. This process of networking and information sharing not only fulfills their personal and professional needs but also empowers them, leading to positive outcomes such as increased self-efficacy, motivation, and social capital (Vivekananthamoorthy et al., 2016).

2.2   *Gap in the Literature*

While the role of e-wom in influencing consumer behavior and business outcomes is well-documented, existing research primarily emphasizes general cognitive and behavioral aspects, often overlooking the intricate variations across different generational cohorts. As identified by Mishra et al. (2017), consumer e-wom intentions have been explored from various angles, including the influence of peers and gender, but there remains a scarcity of studies that dissect these intentions across generational lines, incorporating demographic variables like age, income, and level of involvement in purchasing (Donthu et al., 2021). This oversight in the literature signals a crucial gap, particularly as the digital landscape continues to evolve with increasing participation from diverse age groups.

Existing studies on e-wom, such as those by Strutton et al. (2011), have offered invaluable insights into generational differences in e-wom motivations, notably focusing on Generation X and Generation Y. These investigations have identified distinct patterns in how these cohorts engage with digital communication, particularly in their responsiveness to marketing efforts and peer influences online. However, a significant limitation of this body of literature and others like it lies in its narrow scope, omitting comprehensive analyses across all generational cohorts. For example, while Strutton et al. (2011) highlighted variations between just two generations, subsequent research, such as those conducted by Lina (2023) and Kuswardi (2023), although insightful within their contexts—hotel bookings in Jakarta for Gen Z and online education platforms respectively—remain similarly compartmentalized. These studies focus predominantly on singular generational cohorts and specific commercial contexts, which, while providing depth, fail to address the broader e-wom landscape across generations.

2.3 *Conceptual Framework*

This research utilizes the Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation (FIRO) theory proposed by William Schutz (1959) to analyze the motivations for electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) across different generational cohorts (Appendix B). This theory, originally developed to assess and measure key behavioral dimensions of interpersonal relations, posits three core dimensions necessary for understanding most human interactions: Inclusion, Control, and Affection.

In 1992, Schutz updated the FIRO theory, realizing that its original purpose of measuring the interaction between two people for research purposes had expanded to more general and non-psychological purposes. Nevertheless, in this research the first version of the theory will be employed, as its purpose lies in diving deeper into the psychological motivations for online users to engage in e-wom.

The same conceptual framework was applied by Ho and Dempsey (2010), who originally developed the idea to investigate the significance of the three interpersonal dimensions as motivations to forward online content on a sample composed of college-aged adults. The authors conceptualized e-wom essentially as a communication phenomenon and their intuition was correct as Inclusion- need for individuation- Affection and Control were shown to significantly affect the behaviors of forwarding online content (Ho & Dempsey, 2010).

Moreover, the study performed by Perera and Dharmadasa (2016) included the FIRO theory to examine the motivations driving Sri Lankan youths to participate in viral marketing, particularly in relation to political events on social networking sites (SNS). The authors leveraged Inclusion, Control, and Affection as analytical lenses to understand the motivations behind youths' participation in the digital political sphere. The study's analysis reveals that these interpersonal needs have a significant impact on Sri Lankan youths' behavior when it comes to forwarding online content related to political events, underscoring the role of psychological factors in political communication via social media. The findings suggest that strategies aimed at enhancing political engagement among youths on SNS should consider these interpersonal needs to foster a more engaging and inclusive online political discourse (Perera & Dharmadasa, 2016).
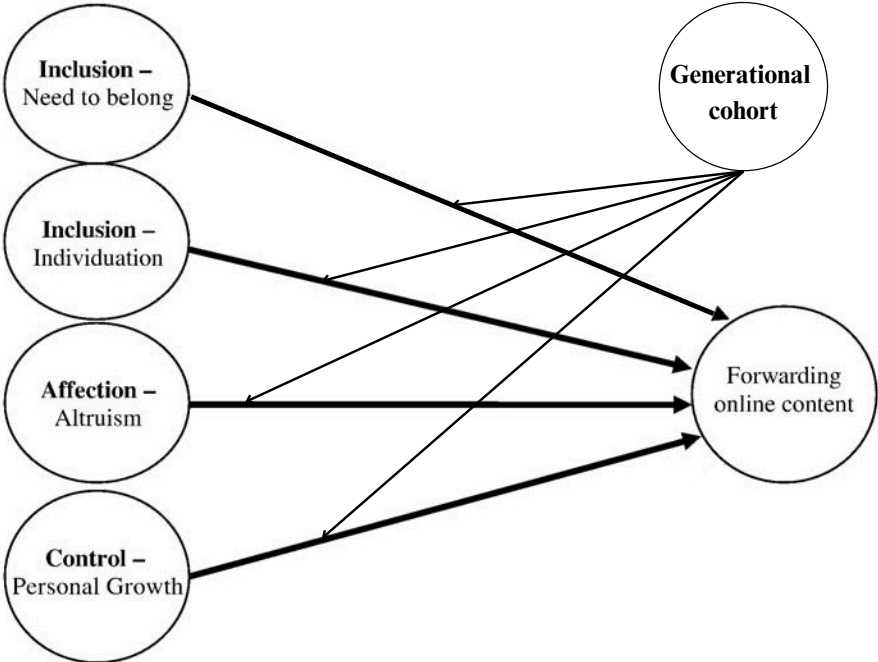

Figure 2 Conceptual Framework

3 Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was chosen for this study to deeply explore the subjective motivations behind electronic word-of-mouth across different generational cohorts. Qualitative methods are particularly suited to this study as they embrace the subjectivity of human experience, which is crucial for comprehending motivations that are inherently subjective (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Qualitative research is distinguished by its capacity to provide rich, contextual insights into complex phenomena, which quantitative methods might oversimplify or fail to capture (O'Brien et al., 2014). Furthermore, quantitative research seeks to determine if there is a causal relationship or a correlation between two variables, while the purpose of this study is to deeply explore personal and detailed experiences, perceptions, and interpretations, which are essential when investigating how different generations engage in e-wom behaviors (Conboy et al., 2012). Indeed, the application of qualitative methods in information systems research, similar to this study's focus on e-wom, supports the examination of dynamic and socially constructed phenomena through methods like interviews and thematic analysis. These methods facilitate an understanding not just of what behaviors occur but more importantly, why these behaviors occur, offering insights into the deep motivations and contextual factors that drive these behaviors (Conboy et al., 2012). Furthermore, the use of qualitative research aligns with the need to explore emergent themes and develop new theories in areas where existing literature may be sparse or evolving, such as the generational impacts on digital marketing strategies aiming at enhancing the virality of online content (Hammarberg et al., 2016). This study's focus on generational cohorts and their interaction with digital technologies and social platforms presents a complex social phenomenon that is best explored through qualitative inquiry.

3.1 Research Design

By conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews (SSIs) with participants from the four different generations, this research aimed to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences. This design not only allowed for the collection of rich, descriptive data but also provided the flexibility to explore unexpected themes that arose during the interviews, thereby enhancing the depth and breadth of the analytical framework (Conboy et al., 2012).

The researcher carefully considered other designs to ensure the best one was selected. Firstly, surveys were found to be a good alternative as they could have considerably reduced the time spent on data collection. However, surveys often fall short in capturing the depth of human experiences and the small details of personal motivations, which are central to understanding generational differences in e-wom motivations. This distinction was critical for this study, which seeks to delve into the complex, subjective reasons behind each generation's engagement with digital platforms and social media (Jain, 2021).

Furthermore, focus groups were also considered. For this research design, one focus group per generation would have been the best idea to highlight differences and similarities in the e-wom behaviors.

However, Guest et al. (2017), by comparing focus groups and individual interviews in terms of their ability to elicit sensitive and personal information, found that individual interviews are more conducive to obtaining detailed and personal responses. The study highlighted that while focus groups may encourage more interactive discussions, they may inhibit personal disclosures due to the presence of other participants, which can affect the openness of respondents (Guest et al., 2017).

Consequently, in-depth SSIs were chosen as the most appropriate data collection strategy, also considering the alignment with the research questions. Due to their unique ability to combine structured and flexible elements within the same interview framework, the semi-structured approach allows for a directed yet adaptable conversation, where specific topics can be covered consistently across interviews while still leaving room for participants to introduce new ideas or elaborate on certain points in greater depth (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). This flexibility is crucial when exploring areas with sparse existing literature or evolving digital behaviors, as it allows the researcher to probe emerging themes or unexpected responses that are not predefined in the research protocol (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

3.2 *Population under study*

The targeted population for this study consists of four generational cohorts—Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z—who regularly engage in electronic word-of-mouth. The age ranges for these cohorts are defined as follows to ensure clear generational boundaries: Baby Boomers were born between 1955 and 1964; Generation X between 1965 and 1980; Millennials between 1981 and 1996; and Generation Z between 1997 and 2012 (Beresford Research, 2024). The population under study has the habit of forwarding online content frequently via direct messages or e-mail and spends a considerable amount of time on social media. The second characteristic is connected to the findings of Ho and Dempsey (2010), which suggest that the consumption of online content positively affects forwarding behavior.

Furthermore, the population is composed of Italian individuals. With a high internet penetration rate, a large portion of the population actively engages in online activities, including social media and e-commerce. According to the Digital 2023 report (Datareportal, 2023), Italy had over 50 million internet users, which accounts for approximately 83% of the population. Additionally, the Italian context is marked by strong family ties and communal values, which can influence motivations such as the desire to maintain social connections and share useful information (Mussinelli, 2009). Understanding these motivations within the Italian socio-cultural framework supports the development of targeted digital marketing strategies that resonate with the values and behaviors of different generational cohorts, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of e-wom campaigns in Italy (Strutton, Taylor, & Thompson, 2011).

3.3 Sampling

To draw the population sample, the researcher employed a combination of two non-probability sampling methods deemed appropriate for research aimed at developing an understanding of a specific population (Datta, 2018). Specifically, convenience and purposive sampling were the methods selected. In the initial round of sampling, convenience sampling was utilized. The investigator selected five individuals per generation based on their availability and willingness to participate after thoroughly explaining the research purpose (APPENDIX C). However, relying solely on this sample could have introduced significant bias, as volunteers might have differed systematically from non-volunteers (HealthKnowledge, 2018). To mitigate this potential bias, purposive sampling was incorporated as a supplementary step. The researcher used her judgment to further refine the sample by selecting two out of the five individuals per generation (Datta, 2018). This selection was based on the participants' daily average time spent on social media over the past week, information readily available on their phones. Additionally, participants were asked about their propensity to share online content with their followers or connections and if they could show examples. This second round of sampling was conducted via videoconference with all 20 individuals, checking the requirements to access to the actual interview. After collecting the relevant information, the researcher chose participants who, in her judgment, were most likely to "represent" the broader population (Appendix E).

3.4 Sample Characteristics and Size

The study sample encompasses four distinct generational cohorts: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials (i.e., Generation Y), and Generation Z. Each cohort exhibits unique characteristics in terms of their relationship with social media usage and the forwarding of online content, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of e-wom behaviors across generations.

Baby Boomers typically exhibit a more conservative approach to social media, favoring platforms that facilitate detailed narratives, such as Facebook. Research indicates that Baby Boomers are less frequent users of social media compared to younger generations but tend to share more substantial, meaningful content when they do engage (Hunsaker & Hargittai, 2018). Their motivations for forwarding content are often driven by a desire to stay connected with family and friends, reinforcing social bonds and sharing useful information (Leist, 2013). Generation X users are versatile in their social media usage, balancing between traditional platforms like Facebook and newer ones like Instagram and LinkedIn. They are often motivated by both professional and personal reasons, using social media to enhance their social capital and maintain professional networks (Bolton et al., 2013). Their content-forwarding behavior reflects a mix of personal engagement and professional utility, often sharing articles, professional advice, and family updates. Millennials are highly active on dynamic platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter. They are known for their preference for visual and instant communication, often sharing content that reflects their personal identity and the social causes they support (Bolton et al., 2013). Their motivations include self-expression, social interaction, and information dissemination, with a notable

tendency to engage in content that enhances their online persona and social influence (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Generation Z users predominantly use platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, and LinkedIn valuing quick, visual, and engaging content. They are characterized by their adeptness at creating and consuming multimedia content and are motivated by a desire for entertainment, self-expression, and community engagement (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Their forwarding behavior is often impulsive and driven by trends, seeking social validation and engagement through likes, shares, and comments (Turner, 2015). By selecting participants from each generational group, the study ensures a diverse range of social media behaviors and motivations are examined, providing a complete view of how different age groups engage with and forward online content.

The study entails interviewing two individuals every generation, one born in the initial years of the generation's time span and the other born in the latter years, totaling eight participants. This decision is justified based on the qualitative nature of the research, which aims to gain in-depth insights rather than achieve statistical generalization. According to Vasileiou et al. (2018), qualitative studies often find that a smaller sample size can suffice for achieving data saturation, especially when the goal is to explore complex, context-specific phenomena in depth. Two interviews per generation allowed for a sufficient exploration of diverse perspectives within each cohort, balancing depth and feasibility (Appendix M).

To reach saturation, the study employs a three-level approach, which ensured the reliability and validity of the findings, as supported by guidelines in qualitative research methodologies (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The first level is data saturation, which involves ensuring that new data no longer brings additional insights. This is monitored through iterative data analysis during the interview process. The second level is theoretical saturation, achieved by ensuring that the theoretical categories are well-developed and densely filled. This involves cross-referencing the findings with existing literature and theories. Lastly, there is thematic saturation, ensuring that themes are fully explored and adequately illustrated with participant quotes and examples. This is achieved by continuously coding and analyzing the data until no new themes emerge.

3.5 *Data: Interviews*

The data collection for this study employed semi-structured interviews (SSIs) to gather in-depth insights from participants. While SSIs offer significant advantages, such as the ability to explore complex phenomena in detail and the flexibility to adapt to participants' responses, they also have disadvantages. The process can be time-consuming, requiring substantial effort in both conducting interviews and transcribing data. Additionally, the open-ended nature of SSIs can introduce interviewer bias if not carefully managed (Adams, 2015; Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Despite these challenges, SSIs were deemed the most appropriate method for this study due to their capacity to provide detailed insights into the motivations behind e-wom behaviors across different generations. The flexibility of SSIs allowed for a deeper understanding of the participants' unique experiences and perspectives, which is essential for addressing the study's research questions.

3.5.1 Interview Protocol

The SSIs technique involved several key steps to ensure thorough and effective data collection. Initially, an interview protocol was developed (Appendix F), which included a list of prepared questions and follow-up prompts. These questions were designed to align with the main research questions and conceptual framework, ensuring that the interviews remained focused and relevant (Arsel, 2017). The protocol facilitated a structured approach to the interviews while allowing for the flexibility to explore emerging themes and topics introduced by the participants, which were not included in the protocol.

The interview protocol included questions designed to obtain information related to the study's focus on e-wom motivations, particularly Inclusion, Affection, and Control. For instance, participants were asked about their general social media usage, their motivations to forward specific types of content, and how they perceive their actions in the context of their generational cohort and in comparison with the others. Follow-up questions were used to delve deeper into specific responses, ensuring a rich and detailed data set.

3.5.2 Interview Organization

The eight selected participants were contacted by email (Appendix E) and they were asked for a suitable day and time to conduct the online interview so that a Zoom meeting could scheduled. Each participant was required to be in a silent place when the interview took place, as any kind of distraction could have decreased the attention of the interviewee and the researcher, leading to less reliable or detailed data. Furthermore, the interview time ranged from thirty minutes to one hour. Each interview began with a brief introduction to the study, including its purpose and the interview process. Participants were reminded of their rights, including the confidentiality of their responses and their ability to withdraw at any time. Consent to record the interview was obtained before proceeding. The semi-structured format allowed the interviewer to guide the conversation with predetermined questions while remaining open to follow-up on interesting or unexpected topics raised by the participants. To enhance the trustworthiness of the data, a transcript review process was implemented. After each interview, the recording was transcribed, and the transcript was sent to the participant for review (Appendix K). This step allowed participants to verify the accuracy of their responses and provide any additional comments or corrections. Member checking, as this process is known, is a crucial technique for ensuring the credibility and validity of qualitative data, providing a robust foundation for the study's analysis and findings (Birt et al., 2016).

3.6 *Post-interviews*

3.6.1 Data Structuring

After all the interviews were conducted, the researcher transcribed the recording using the "Dictate" function of Microsoft Word (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Subsequently, any grammar or spelling errors were corrected. Additionally, participants' names were anonymized by assigning them

identifiers based on their generational cohort and relative age. For instance, the younger Generation Z participant, born in 2009, was designated as 'Gen Z 1,' while the older participant from the same generation, born in 2000, was labeled 'Gen Z 2'. Lastly, Deepl was employed to translate all the transcripts from Italian to English. Before beginning with the coding stage, it was found appropriate to group the interviews into 4 groups, one for each generation. Then, a word cloud for each cohort was generated by the researcher (Appendix L). This approach provided insights into how the four generations discussed the same topic, and importantly, it facilitated the identification of initial emerging words and concepts.

While analyzing the transcripts, distinct details and features of the text were examined and given codes, including ideas, assumptions, or conceptualizations related to the research question and major topics identified during the literature review process. These codes addressed both the explicit (i.e., semantic) and implicit (i.e., latent) content of the interviews as per Braun and Clarke (2006). The codes and their associated data were reviewed to identify patterns or categories, leading to the creation of various themes that highlighted significant aspects of the data in connection to the research question.

3.6.2   Thematic Analysis

In this study, the thematic analysis framework, as articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006), guided the coding and thematic development processes. Thematic analysis is recognized as a flexible and widely used qualitative analytic method within psychology, particularly tailored for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Atlas.ti played a critical role in the thematic content analysis of the gathered data, enhancing the coding, organization, and exploration processes. Soratto et al. (2020) note that Atlas.ti is particularly effective in handling large data sets, providing tools that facilitate the management and organization necessary for in-depth qualitative analysis, allowing researchers to engage deeply with their data, and focusing on emergent themes and structured analysis approaches. The systematic tracking features of Atlas.ti, such as the option to add memos or to group documents and codes, contribute significantly to the transparency and credibility of the research, as these tools allow for meticulous documentation of coding decisions and data manipulations (Soratto et al., 2020).

In this research, the preliminary stage of data analysis involved using Atlas.ti to pair the eight transcripts into couples, each corresponding to one of the four generational cohorts (i.e., Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Baby Boomers). Subsequent to this grouping, I began manual coding by first extracting quotations from the transcripts and assigning each between one to three codes. Following this, I reviewed the assigned codes to determine which could be merged based on their similar or identical meanings. According to Bardin's methodology, early coding is crucial to developing thematic frameworks (Bardin, 2011), and Atlas.ti's tools facilitated this by helping to identify preliminary sub-themes from the data, covering both semantic content and latent ideas. These initial themes were further refined using Atlas.ti's visualization tools, which are instrumental in revealing connections and patterns

among the data points. The iterative review and refinement of these themes ensured their alignment with the research questions, with Atlas.ti's query and modeling features playing a key role in validating each theme's relevance and depth. This involves a recursive process of returning to the data to refine each theme, ensuring they accurately reflect the meanings evident in the data set.

The essence of each theme was refined and clearly defined in a stage that also involved developing a detailed analysis of each theme, telling the story of each, and exploring the nuances and complexities within them, as suggested by Guest, Namey, and Mitchell (2013). The final stage involved building the analytic narrative with concrete examples from the data, contextualizing the analysis in relation to existing literature on e-wom, motivations across generations, and the conceptual framework underpinned by the Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation (FIRO) theory, highlighting the strong connection of thematic analysis with broad theoretical constructs (Schutz, 1958; Ho & Dempsey, 2010).

3.7 *Coding*

3.7.1 1st Round of coding

The first round of coding (Appendix N) began with identifying causal codes. Causation Coding is a method used to extract, infer, or identify causal beliefs from qualitative data sources, such as interview transcripts (Saldaña, 2021). This approach focuses on mapping out the reasoning behind participant actions, specifically looking at how they perceive the relationships between causes and outcomes. By applying Causation Coding, researchers can uncover the sequences and connections that participants believe lead to certain effects or behaviors, effectively answering the "why" behind their actions. This method should not be viewed as an infallible formula for determining the "correct" answers. Rather, it should serve as a tool for exploring or hypothesizing plausible causes of specific outcomes, as well as potential outcomes from certain causes (Saldaña, 2021). This this specific coding strategy was ideal to delve into the causal beliefs that each generation holds about why they engage in e-wom, providing insights into the deep motivations that drive their behaviors.

First, each transcript was coded individually and then a unique color was assigned to each generation (i.e., Black for Gen X, Red for Millennials, Green for Gen X, Light Blue for Baby Boomers), so that their citations could be distinguished (Appendix N) and the results could be differentiated correctly depending on the relative cohort. The first round of coding produced 79 codes.

3.7.2 2nd Round of coding

The second round of coding (Appendix N) consisted of organizing the individualized codes and merging together those with similar meanings. For example, "Forward online content to reconnect with people you no longer talk to" and "Forward serious online content to restart a relationship" were merged into "Forward online content to restart a relationship". This step entailed reducing the number of codes to

68. Furthermore, all the codes were categorically and thematically reviewed to create sub-themes, incorporating codes with a consistent pattern. Indeed, pattern coding was the last coding strategy involved (Saldaña, 2021), where the detailed codes from the first round were condensed into broader themes that represent the underlying motivations of Inclusion, Affection, and Control. This coding method was not just about grouping data but also about interpreting and understanding deeper meanings and relationships within the data. Lastly, a final name was assigned to each group of sub-themes and five major themes were created (Appendix O).

3.8 Data Trustworthiness

3.8.1 Dependability

Dependability is the measure of the research findings' stability over time and conditions, reflecting consistent results under similar methodologies (Singh et al., 2021). Dependability was assured by maintaining an audit trail (Appendix R), which typically documents the entire research process including initial data collection notes, coding activities, changes made during the study, and decision-making processes (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This comprehensive documentation allows for review and replication, ensuring that the research process is repeatable and consistent with the study's reported outcomes. Additionally, transcript reviews were performed to validate the accuracy of the data transcription.

3.8.2 Credibility

Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the research findings, which depend on the accuracy and believability of the data as reflective of the participants' original responses (Wood et al., 2020). To ensure credibility, the researcher conducted member checks (Appendix K) by sending the interview transcripts back to participants to verify the accuracy and interpretation of their responses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This process was fundamental to validate that the transcriptions and subsequent interpretations accurately reflect the interviewees' intentions and statements. Researcher triangulation was also performed to enhance credibility and validate the findings and the data analysis process.

3.8.3 Transferability

Transferability is the extent to which the findings of a qualitative study can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability was supported by the thick descriptions of the research context and findings, allowing readers to determine the applicability of the results to other contexts. Moreover, the audit trail allows for thorough examination by other researchers.

3.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motives, or interests (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure confirmability, detailed descriptions of the study's assumptions, limitations, and delimitations are included. Additionally, the

audit trail helped in documenting the research process details to confirm objectivity (Carcary, 2020). Lastly, the use of researcher triangulation (Appendix S) offered an impartial viewpoint on the methods of data collection and thematic analysis (Fusch et al., 2018).

3.8.5   Saturation

Saturation in qualitative research is defined as the point at which no additional data is found to develop information regarding any category, and all categories are well-developed in terms of their properties and dimensions (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). This concept is fundamental in determining when data collection can cease. To achieve saturation, this research implements a structured approach across three critical phases: data collection, data analysis, and data synthesis.

During the data collection phase, the semi-structured interviews continued until no new relevant information was being uncovered; that is, further conversations with participants did not yield additional insights into their motivations or behaviors concerning e-wom (Appendix M). This approach ensures that the range of experiences and perceptions across Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z are thoroughly explored.

In the data analysis phase, the coding process plays a pivotal role. Initially, open coding was used to generate a list of codes from the interview transcripts. As more data was processed, these codes were constantly compared and refined. Saturation in coding was deemed achieved when additional data did not lead to new codes (Appendix N) or subcategories, suggesting that the existing codes adequately captured the variations in the data related to the research questions.

Finally, during the data synthesis phase, the focus shifted to theme development. This involved integrating and summarizing the codes into broader themes that accurately reflect the motivations behind e-wom across generations (Appendix O). Saturation at this stage was reached when the integration of new data did not suggest new themes or alter the existing thematic framework, indicating that the constructed themes comprehensively covered the data collected.

This meticulous approach to reaching saturation underscores the study's commitment to rigor and depth, enhancing the trustworthiness and reliability of the conclusions drawn. The process aligns with the guidelines suggested by Fusch and Ness (2015), who emphasize the importance of saturation in qualitative research as a marker of completeness and depth in data analysis.

3.8.6   Triangulation

Triangulation is a strategic method employed in research to minimize potential biases by integrating multiple data sources, various methods, different researchers, or diverse theoretical frameworks to investigate a specific phenomenon or answer a research question (Fusch et al., 2018). This study implements investigator triangulation to ensure a robust examination of the data, involving a secondary researcher to review and provide feedback on the research process, which is instrumental in identifying strengths and suggesting improvements (Appendix S). Participating in this study is a fellow student graduating from Erasmus University Rotterdam who followed and mastered the elective course

Qualitative Research in Marketing. The responsibilities assigned to this researcher include reviewing the interview protocols, assessing the thematic analysis procedures, and evaluating the codes and themes developed.

3.8.7   Reflexivity

Reflexivity in academic research refers to the ongoing process by which researchers critically examine their own influence on the research process, including their biases, values, and interactions with the data and participants. This introspective practice is essential for acknowledging and mitigating the potential impact of the researcher's subjectivity on the interpretation and presentation of findings. Reflexivity encourages transparency and helps to uphold the integrity of the research (Finlay, 2002). The audit trail will be utilized to ensure reflexivity by keeping a comprehensive record, as it helps identify and reflect on any biases that might influence the research outcomes. This documentation not only aids in maintaining a reflexive approach but also allows others to understand and critique the research process. Furthermore, to further support a bias-free and context-aware reflexivity, investigator triangulation enhances the credibility of the research by ensuring that conclusions are not the result of a singular, subjective viewpoint.

3.8.8   Audit Trail

An audit trail in qualitative research is a systematic record that details the complete research process, documenting all significant steps, decisions, and actions taken by the researcher. This concept, as described by Carcary (2009), serves as a comprehensive trace of the researcher's work, enabling others to review and evaluate the rigor and validity of the study. The primary purpose of an audit trail is to enhance the transparency and accountability of the research process. It allows other researchers and auditors to trace the researcher's logic throughout the study, providing a clear path from the initial data collection to the final conclusions drawn (Carcary, 2009).

In this study, an audit trail was conducted at two critical points that were not extensively explained in the previous sections: during the participant selection and then during the data collection (Appendix R). While the researcher mentions using a combination of convenience and purposive sampling to select participants, the specific criteria and justification for choosing particular individuals over others within each generational cohort are not extensively detailed. The audit trail therefore documents the detailed criteria used for participant selection. Furthermore, by also focusing the audit trail on the data collection process is particularly crucial due to its direct impact on the integrity and validity of the data gathered. Documenting this process ensures transparency, enables reproducibility, and helps maintain rigorous standards by providing clear justifications for methodological choices (Carcary, 2009).

3.9   *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical considerations form the cornerstone of conducting responsible and respectful research, ensuring that all participants are treated with dignity and their rights are fully protected (Orb et al., 2000). To

prepare for the data collection phase, I filled out the Ethical Questionnaire provided by the Behavioral Economics Department (2023) and confirmed that my research does not present any known ethical challenges. In this study, participants were thoroughly informed about the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits through an informed consent process. This process involved providing participants with a consent form (Appendix D) that clearly describes the study and what their participation entailed. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions and were required to sign the form before participating, confirming their voluntary agreement to be part of the study (Sieber, 2012). Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. If they wanted to withdraw, they could simply contact the researcher using the provided contact details, and their data woud have been promptly removed from the study database and destroyed, ensuring that their decision to withdraw was respected and adhered to. To safeguard the participants' confidentiality, all personal information was securely stored and only accessible to the researcher. Identifiable information was anonymized or pseudonymized in the dataset, using codes instead of any personal identifiers. This ensured that personal data could not be linked back to the participants without specific inside knowledge, thus maintaining their anonymity (Resnik, 2011). Furthermore, all data collected is stored securely in locked facilities, and will only be retained for a period of five years post-collection, after which it will be securely destroyed. This practice aligns with ethical guidelines that recommend how long research data should be kept in order to allow for analysis and follow-up studies while ensuring it does not become a risk to participant confidentiality if data security were ever breached (Resnik, 2011). The informed consent form, a crucial document that outlines all the ethical considerations and participant rights, is included in Appendix D.

3.10 *Assumptions*

In qualitative research, assumptions are understood as the unexamined beliefs about the world and human behavior that researchers accept as truth without direct evidence (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). These underlying assumptions shape the design, methodology, and interpretive lens through which data are viewed. One assumption of this study was that the preferences and behaviors associated with social media and e-wom engagement remained stable throughout the duration of the research. This assumption is crucial as it underpins the analysis of data across time. If technological or social media trends change rapidly within the study period, the findings might not accurately capture or reflect the true, current behaviors and preferences of each generational cohort, potentially leading to outdated or irrelevant conclusions. Furthermore, the research assumed that participants provided complete and accurate accounts of their behaviors and motivations regarding e-wom. This assumption affects the validity of the findings, as inaccurate or incomplete self-reporting by participants can lead to biased results, which may have misrepresented the actual e-wom behaviors and motivations across generations. Lastly, it is assumed that researcher bias is reduced by employing reflexivity and triangulation.

3.11 Delimitations

Delimitations in research are the defined boundaries set by the researcher that specify the scope of the study, including what variables are included or excluded, the choice of methodology, and the target population (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In this research, one key delimitation was the selection of participants who are actively engaged in e-wom activities across different digital platforms. This study specifically targets individuals from four generational cohorts—Baby Boomers, Generation. This study specifically targets individuals from four generational cohorts—Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z—who are not only familiar with but also regularly use social media and other online platforms for e-wom. This focus allowed the study to deeply explore how habitual engagement with digital technologies influences e-wom behaviors and motivations. Consequently, those who infrequently use digital platforms or do not engage in e-wom were not included in the sample. This delimitation helps to ensure that the data collected is relevant to the study's aims but may limit insights into the perspectives of less frequent users who might also influence or participate in e-wom under different circumstances.

Another important delimitation concerns the study's geographical focus. By concentrating on Italy, the research leverages a specific cultural and technological context, which is crucial for understanding localized behaviors and attitudes toward e-wom. This delimitation adds depth to the study by allowing an exploration of cultural patterns, but it may restrict the applicability of the findings to other regions or cultures, where e-wom might be influenced by different social norms or technological access.

Furthermore, the study's methodological approach, using qualitative SSIs, delimits the research to in-depth, narrative data, foregoing broader quantitative measures that could offer additional generalizability. This methodological choice is intentional to capture detailed personal and generational insights but may also limit the ability to apply the findings across a larger population.

3.12 Limitations

Limitations in a study are factors that restrict the scope, range, or extent of the scientific investigation and its conclusions, which are beyond the control of the researcher (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016). The study is limited to a relatively small and culturally homogeneous group from Italy, which may not fully represent the diversity within each generational cohort. This limitation may affect the generalizability of the study's findings to broader or more diverse populations, potentially reducing the applicability of the results to other cultural or geographic settings.

Furthermore, the study relies heavily on self-reported data, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability or memory recall issues. Indeed, a major limitation could be that participants may have lied about their daily average usage of social media or about their frequency of online content sharing, during the cognitive interview. This can influence the accuracy and reliability of the data collected, potentially leading to conclusions that do not accurately reflect actual behaviors or attitudes.

Lastly, interviews are conducted in Italian, which could influence how concepts are understood or expressed by participants, especially complex ideas related to motivations and perceptions. This may affect the depth and accuracy of data interpretation and could lead to biases in understanding the motivations for e-wom if cultural differences in language use are not adequately considered.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

In the following sections, the five themes resulting from the thematic analysis (Appendix O) will be extensively discussed and evaluated, always framed within the FIRO theory and conceptual framework perspective.

4.1.1 Inclusion and Individuation

The psychological drivers, Inclusion and Individuation, were the main topic of the first major theme, which resulted in four sub-themes: Reconnecting and Strengthening Relationships, Facilitating Conversation and Interaction, Creating Social Engagement and Inclusion, and Building Personal Identity.

In the first sub-theme participants expressed that they use forwarding online content to restart or rekindle relationships. For Gen Z, forwarding videos helps start conversations with distant acquaintances: "*I use these videos to start a conversation with someone I don't have a great relationship with.*" Similarly, Baby Boomers use sharing to reconnect: "*I also noticed that sharing content reconnects me with people I no longer spoke to. With these people, you can meet again. An old friendship can be rekindled*". Forwarding also maintains connections; Gen Z noted, "*Sharing content can lead to conversations about the content, helping maintain the relationship, even if you can see the person in real life.*" Baby Boomers echoed this sentiment: "*I think forwarding online content is a great way to start conversations and share experiences even if we aren't physically together. For example, helping others discover something new or simply providing a moment of leisure allows me to feel closer to my friends and family*". On the other hand, Gen X participants, emphasized new interactions and relationships over existing ones: "*the goal isn't to share content for the sake of it but to build interactions, relationships, and eventually meet people in person to participate in activities together*" and "*We started by sharing posts, stories, reels on Instagram, and then met by chance at an event, and now we meet and call each other regularly*". However, not all the generations agreed that they forward online content to strengthen existing relationships. And if for Gen X "*It is not about strengthening existing family relationships. It's more about creating new friendships and contacts, not strengthening existing family ties*" and "*but maybe there are those points of contact ... of things that we both like and then you use it to maintain a stronger relationship with that person*" Millennials view sharing as a mutual gift, strengthening bonds: "*Sharing content provides a topic to discuss with the person, thus strengthening the relationship. It's like a mutual gift; you give something, and they give back, reinforcing the relationship.*" Furthermore, Millenials, like Gen Z, send content representing the relationship to implicitly express what that connection means to the sender "*There are content types that represent the relationship you have with the person, so sharing them implicitly strengthens the bond*". And even for Baby Boomers "*our bond inevitably strengthens through common interests and meaningful exchanges*".

In the second theme all the generations explain how they engage in e-wom to facilitate conversations and interactions with people. Specifically, Gen Z and Baby Boomers expressed how they

forward online content to create continuity in a relationship. For example, a Gen Z participant forwards content related to a past conversation in person to discuss it further online *"With work colleagues we share work-related, content like brand performance we discussed in person. Later, I might share related content to remind them of the conversation and have more to discuss."* Baby Boomers use shared content to project relationships into the future: *"when I share something like a TripAdvisor review with friends, I invite them into my mental space. We discuss, plan, and base our plans on this review. This creates a sense of unity and continuity in our relationship, strengthening our bond through shared memories or projecting into the future by planning something together."*Additionally, every generation but Baby Boomers sometimes is motivated to forward online content just to have a topic to discuss when they meet the receivers in person. Indeed, for Gen X *"forwarding content sometimes is just to anticipate what we might say when we see each other, whether it's a happy thing or news. So the particularity lies in the fact that the feeling I have is to want to anticipate what we will do or say when we meet."* Millennials use shared content to create shared moments, like a family laughing over videos and Gen Z forwards videos to use in future conversations *"when I send videos that talk about topics that interest me and share my ideas, I also use them to my advantage in future conversations, referencing them."* On the other hand, all the generations but Millennials share an online content because they know the other person would like it. For example, a Gen Z participant thought that *"Since I know that my friends and my sister also liked it a lot, sharing it was a way to create a conversation about the main theme of the video"* and Baby Boomers care about sending online content to someone who will appreciate it *"When I am online and see something interesting or moving, I often think about who among my friends or family might appreciate it."* Gen Z also forward online contents to ask for opinions and to feel part of a group with shared interests *"When I come across a similar type of video, I tend to share it, if not with my mother, then with friends to show it to them or to get their opinions and comments, to feel part of a group that shares my interests. So, it's also a way to chat with them and keep in touch by sending these links."*

In the other sub-theme, participants talked about how they forward online content to create social engagement and Inclusion. For example, Gen Z and Baby boomers forward an online content relative to an activity to propose a group gathering *"I recently sent a video to my group of friends about a new space opened in my city…By sending this video, I wanted to spark interest in my friends, and the following Saturday, we actually went and had a lot of fun."* All the generations said they forward to cause a laugh and to spark interest in a particular activity. While only, Gen Z, Gen X and Baby Boomers feel included when their role of "forwarders" is recognized by others *"Let's say it's recognized because they see I am very present in the group chat, proposing activities to do. So, this type of role is recognized. I feel very included in the group doing this because I feel my presence in the group is appreciated"* and *"Because in the end, I hope that what I shared added a special touch to their travel plans, and seeing their enthusiasm and knowing my suggestion was an integral part of their adventure was very gratifying"*. Additionally, Millennials and Baby Boomers mentioned that they forward online content to stimulate a sense of community *"In school groups* (i.e., school of her children)*, we discuss the shared content, 'nice*

video/post you shared that day,' 'I laughed/I reflected'" and *"I share a recipe in my Facebook cooking group, it's not just about the recipe itself; it's about stimulating a sense of community."*

Lastly, participants were asked if they ever used forwarding online content as a mean to build an image in the eyes of the receivers. Millennials agree that *"If I share content, it's because I'm interested in it, not to project an intellectual image. I share content that interests me, regardless of the image it portrays"* contrary to all the other generations that answered positively. On the other hand, a participant from the Millennials generation affirmed she uses online content to reinforce their character *"I share fashion content to reinforce my character or style, like if a content says "black will be the colour of this year", I forward it and say "see, I always wear black."* This pattern is also recognized for Gen Z which typically sends video representing them *"it has happened many times that I forwarded a video of a person with my characteristics, maybe saying 'This person resembles me' because, in this way, I show others what kind of person I am."* Baby Boomers acknowledge *"The content I forward definitely influences how others perceive me."* Gen X wants to be perceived as prepared and informed when forwarding online content *"I believe that those who know me well know very well who I am and what my passions are and so on ... I do not need to highlight it unless the other person asks me".* Similarly, Baby Boomers *"I don't send content that directly refers to myself, but at the same time, I think the content I forward somehow reflects who I am... I don't exclude that by sending a certain type of content, I am conveying something about myself."*

4.1.2   Altruism

The second major theme, Altruism, is also included in the conceptual framework, as it is one of the most influential psychological drivers of the forwarding behavior and the consequent e-wom phenomenon. This theme is composed by three sub-themes: Altruistic Engagement, Altruistic Assistance and Altruism born from Affection.

The first sub-theme refers to motives where altruism leads to active and emotional engagement with the person the content is sent to. For example, participants agree that they altruistically tailor the content they forward, adapting to receivers' tastes. Indeed, for Millennials *"there are contents I'm not interested in, but I share them with those who might be interested in reading or watching them."* But this pattern was also found for the other generations, like Gen X: *"let's say that fundamentally these ad hoc shares are made because there is something really very interesting to communicate to the other person and that you know they might like to receive them".* Moreover, when asking participants how they feel after forwarding a content moved by altruism, for Millennials *"I feel fulfilled when my shared advice or recommendations are adopted, like a specific product for a certain issue"*, while Baby Boomers *"I would say gratified to have been able to contribute. That's almost always the reason why I like sharing content—to be helpful."* Nevertheless, all the generations are moved by the need to do good and be helpful either by forwarding a content warning from a bad product or service *"Sending videos that warn about a certain product or something else is a way to show my altruism"*, or by informing others about

important news or an incredible event *"the content I forward ... often includes informational content. Through that article, I share to inform others about an event or situation",* or by spreading artistic creations and beauty *"When I see an artist creating their art, I share it purely to spread beauty without expecting anything in return. It's pure altruism, like offering a drink to someone."* However, Gen Z admitted that when they forward content moved by altruism there is also the desire to be perceived as altruistic by the receivers and therefore to be included *"I do it mainly to let others know new things or things that might help them. In this case, also to feel included, noticing that others appreciate me doing it".*

Altruistic assistance comprises motives where altruism is expressed through offering help or beneficial information. Gen X and Baby Boomers sometimes forward content just to do good and help, for example Gen X participants sent the link to a crowdfunding and also a post to organize a collection of clothes and food *"you use the channel to communicate, maybe forwarding content to organise a collection, you know, of clothes or a food collection".* While a Baby Boomer participant share practical advice and interesting health articles *"Not only do I share to keep company or pass time, but also to offer something useful to others, like advice on a good restaurant or an interesting health article."* Both Gen X and Baby Boomers expressed that they forward online content to improve receivers' daily lives *"everything we send each other is because it must then have a practical sense and a real impact on our daily life, sometimes precisely to improve it"* and *"If before I shared online mainly to be present, now everything I forward has a clear purpose: to improve someone's day a bit".* While only Baby Boomers said they forward to inspire *"I love sending articles that can inspire a friend in their personal projects or career, especially if they are in a phase of growth or transition."*

Lastly, the connection between affection and altruism and its impact on the forwarding behaviour has been discussed. Specifically, Gen Z forward to show affection and care without words *"By sending these videos, I try to show her my affection that I might not show by talking to her normally via chat, but I also do it with my best friend to show her my affection that sometimes isn't shown in words...being someone who doesn't show emotions through words, I do it using social media and sharing videos"* and *"I'm not very communicative with words, so sharing content is a way to express affection towards someone without words".* Also, for Baby Boomers *"Sharing a beautiful piece of music with my sister, who loves music, is a way of showing I care about her happiness and well-being. It's an act of care, affection, and consideration".* Similarly, Gen X also think *"The type of relationship you have with the people you forward these messages to is fundamental. So, at least for me, this also applies to friends with whom we are constantly in contact because there is a real affective value".*

4.1.3 Control over growth

The third major theme that emerged from the thematic analysis is Control over growth, including reasons where forwarding is used to enhance or affirm one's professional and academic standing or

leadership roles. Indeed, this theme comprehends subjects like Role Assertion, Professional Development and Competence, and Personal Development and Recognition.

In the first subject participants expressed how they establish or reinforce leadership through content. This is a constant pattern for all the generations. For Millennials *"We tend to read a lot on LinkedIn and share with colleagues, especially since my role requires me to stay updated and disseminate information."*, for Gen Z *"Let's say it's recognized because they see I am very present in the group chat, proposing activities to do. So, this type of role is recognized"*, for Baby Boomers *"Because in the end, I hope that what I shared added a special touch to their travel plans, and seeing their enthusiasm and knowing my suggestion was an integral part of their adventure was very gratifying"* and Gen X which mentions that *"if the content is particularly interesting or exclusive, it can lead to recognition"*.

The second topic includes reasons centered around enhancing one's professional standing, skills, or opportunities. It emerged that for Millennials relevance and reliability play a crucial role when they forward content to their professional network *"When sharing work-related content, I verify the source, confirm it through other sources, and then share the information."* For Gen X this is equally important *"There are many shares, but if you manage to share content characterized by unique information, it takes time but yields results in terms of strengthening the network ."* Most importantly Baby Boomers and Gen X participants affirmed that they use the forwarding tool to grow professionally and create new opportunities for themselves, therefore exercising control over their future growth. For Baby Boomers *"Sharing relevant content keeps us updated, showing engagement with industry trends and thought leadership. Professionally, it establishes credibility and authority in our field. Sharing valuable content makes us seen as informed resources, opening new opportunities and collaborations"*, but also for Gen X *"I don't hide from you that in a moment of difficulty that I experienced a few months ago with my company, I used the LinkedIn tool to look for new opportunities"*. A Baby Boomer also provided a concrete example to explain his view on the matter *"The manager appreciated these updates because they demonstrated not only my knowledge of the sector but also my commitment to staying updated on the latest trends and innovations. This, in turn, strengthened his trust in my company as an ideal candidate for the investment. In the end, sharing content played a decisive role in convincing the organization to collaborate with us, leading to a significant investment"*. This vision is also supported by Millennials *"In my previous job, I did it because my skills weren't enough for my superiors, so I added apparent knowledge by sharing constantly updated content to confirm my competence"* and Gen Z participants which acknowledged that *"sharing can certainly have an influence over how others perceive you and consequently over future opportunities. For example, if you send content of a certain relevance, you could be perceived as a knowledgeable person or professional"*, however this generation never directly forwarded content to their professors to gain opportunities. Gen X also added a new perspective to the mix mentioning that the forwarding behaviour and its benefit can also be used with clients *"I could use content sharing… maybe with clients to showcase my professional persona… To take advantage"*.

The last sub-theme focuses on forwarding online content for personal growth, inspiration, or specific non-professional rewards. Specifically, one participant from Gen Z said she usually forwards online content to distinguish herself from other peers in school and to grow her cultural knowledge *"Sometimes books don't contain things found on the internet. So, there are videos I use to understand better things I don't grasp well from books or the teacher. I send these videos to friends, for example, for group work, to make our work different from the others in the eyes of the teacher, showing we know alternative things outside the books, but I also do it to enrich my general culture."* Moreover, one Baby Boomer representative said that *"The desire for professional and personal growth can initiate sharing behaviour. Personally, it fosters deeper connections with peers, valuing our past achievements, initiating sharing behaviour for mutual benefit and continuous learning."*

4.1.4 Process behind Forwarding Behavior

The fourth theme rthat esulted from the analysis is the general process the sender goes through before forwarding an online content. The participants highlighted that they check certain criteria before forwarding and that they pay a lot of attention to the relevance and the reliability of the content.

Specifically, for a Millennial participant when sharing work-related content *"I verify the source, confirm it through other sources, and then share the information. Nowadays, anyone can write anything, so finding universally correct information is hard and needs verification… I filter a lot, sending only divergent or exceptionally relevant content."* while for content forwarded in the private sphere "it's different but still involves considering if the content is useful and interesting to both parties". On the other hand, for Gen X *"I start with the subject matter, if it interests me, then I check if the sources are reliable"* and for Baby Boomers *"if I think about the content I forward, I think first of its usefulness and then the reaction the other person might have after I forward the content".* Generation Z did not express many criteria to forward, however highlighted the importance of the level of confidence you have with the receiver *"I send funny videos to people I have a high level of confidence with".*

4.1.5 Dynamics of Digital Engagement Across Generational Cohorts

The final theme emerged from participants' responses to questions about perceived differences in forwarding behavior across various generations. This theme delves into the comprehensive dynamics of digital engagement, exploring participants' perceptions of the evolution of media platforms and their content, unique behavioral patterns in content sharing, and the motivations and preferences that shape their digital engagement.

First, when discussing the generational differences in forwarding behavior, participants shared their perceptions based on their experiences. Gen Z noted, *"Among us adolescents, there is a tendency to share more entertaining and leisure videos that don't tackle very serious topics. Among adults, this is less frequent. They also share such videos, but I know that, for example, my parents send us more serious videos that deal with more serious topics, such as news."* This view is also echoed by Baby Boomers: *"I often watch my younger nephews who are incredibly quick and adept with technology… For them,*

everything is very spontaneous and quick. I also notice a greater comfort in revealing more of their personal life online ... Unlike the current generations, I focus more on sharing content that I find educational, something that can give advice or add something to my interlocutor, the person I'm connecting with." Gen X also observed, "Well, it certainly differs substantially from previous generations. They don't have that ability or frequency that perhaps the younger generations have established." However, Millennials introduced a different perspective, stating, " older people forward more, and younger people less… in family groups with a wide range of generations, older adults share more content than teenagers nowadays." This was also slightly confirmed by a Baby Boomer who, after downloading social media, remarked, *"I must say that from that moment on, I became hooked as well because I think they help you detach from everyday life and occupy idle times. I too became hooked, unfortunately, haha. In fact, my daughter, who still lives with us, sometimes scolds me saying I use them almost more than she does".*

The second theme focuses on how the content and use of social media platforms have evolved, influencing the way content is shared and consumed across generations. Participants examined how their usage patterns have changed over time on various platforms, with a specific focus on Instagram and TikTok. From Gen Z perspective, *"You adapt to current trends, but if a platform loses interest, users stop using it… Currently, nothing interests me as much as the platforms I use now. I'm comfortable with them, but I won't exclude trying new ones."* This pattern was also reflected in Baby Boomers' answers: *"I am satisfied with how I use Facebook and LinkedIn to stay in touch and share interesting content. However, I am considering exploring new platforms like TikTok and Instagram. My nephews use these social media, and I want to engage with them in their world, sharing content that interests them. I want to be closer to them and interact differently."* Additionally, Gen X noted *"I encounter many new trends, but it takes me time to adapt. It's not as immediate for me as it is for younger generations or some in my generation. I need to metabolize these new trends. So, there are many I could use but don't fully exploit yet."* They also expressed expectations for the future: *"Here you would expect that instead, the social network continues to maintain its logical thread for which it was born and therefore to value, complicate, and push certain realities".* Gen Z envisions a future of more unprepared and raw content: *"Lately, social media is becoming more truthful. For example, there's this app called Be Real … It's called Be Real to be real, showing what you're really doing at that exact moment, a moment of simple everyday life. So, I think in the future, social media will be more real, showing more live content, not already prepared and organized."* Millennials share this vision, believing that *"TikTok is raw and real. I believe this shift from superficial to real content has brought back the desire to share … TikTok shows reality instantly, appealing more to today's users. We'll see more real content and highly curated content side by side."* Millennials and Gen Z participants also highlighted that Instagram has evolved over time *"Instagram has become more informative as a social network. If before I used it only to see funny or generally light content, now it is also a mean I use to inform myself about what is happening in the world."* Additionally, *"TikTok reintroduced virality, unlike Instagram, which had a social backstep."*

The third theme pertains to the factors influencing the frequency with which users forward content, the spread of content through forwarding chains, and its impact on e-WOM. A Gen Z participant clearly explained the factors affecting the frequency of her forwarding behavior: *"It depends on several factors. The first is the frequency with which I use the platform during the day. There are days when I spend only an hour on it, so the sharing frequency is lower. On days when I have more time and feel like spending it on TikTok, the sharing frequency is higher. The third factor is how the algorithm is performing at that moment. If the algorithm suggests videos that aren't relevant to what I want to share, the sharing frequency will be lower. It depends on usage frequency and the algorithm".* For Baby Boomers and Gen X, it is more centered around the quality and relevance of the content *"I am very reflective because when you send something, you feel responsible for what you are sending. You are recommending something or expressing disagreement with something, but in all cases, you are putting yourself out there."* On the other hand, Millennials mentioned *"Well, I don't do a lot of searches because my algorithm is well identified with my preferences, so I get content that interests me".* Gen Z added "*if I didn't like a series or a movie, it generally doesn't appear on my For You page on social media because by not showing interest, I don't get these videos, and therefore, I don't forward them."* This shows a trend where there is less selection of content, as social media algorithms already adapt to users' preferences. Older generations also discussed the creation of forwarding chains. For example, one Baby Boomer felt fulfilled when the receivers appreciated the content enough to send it to others: *"sometimes the content I send gets forwarded to others in their network because they found it relevant and enjoyable. This shows the shared content resonated, not just for the original recipient but was valuable enough to be shared further".* One Gen X participant mentioned another type of forwarding chain, one that exists only between two people: *"I have specific friends with whom almost every day we send each other something to laugh about and it is also a pleasant moment of the day because you almost expect that message to come from that specific person and you maybe respond by sending another one."*

The last theme emerged with all the generations and explores how and why the motivations for forwarding content evolved and will evolve in the future. Gen Z affirmed that her motivations and their importance will not change in the future. Millennials stated, *"Connecting with others is the first step. For this, altruism is necessary, putting others' interests first. Then, understanding their interests through content sharing, followed by expressing my own. I don't think this will change because it's almost selfish. I could share content that only interests me, but if there's no response, it's pointless. So, connection with another individual comes first, then the other two."* Gen X noted, *"My motivations might change because I'm someone who needs new stimuli. I need new goals and things to keep me interested".* Conversely, one Baby Boomer discussed the process he went through the years and the evolution of his motives: "*Looking back, I can say that the reasons I share things online have changed a lot over time. At first, I approached these tools mainly to understand what my children found so interesting about them… Over time, I began to discover the true value of these platforms—not just as a pastime but as a way to stay in touch… Not only do I share to keep company or pass time, but also to offer something useful to others. On a*

professional level, I noticed how useful it can be to share important and relevant content. It's a way to show that you are up-to-date and knowledgeable, which is crucial in the business world today."

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Inclusion and Individuation

The findings revealed that Gen Z participants predominantly used e-wom as a tool for restarting conversations with distant acquaintances, often leveraging entertaining videos to re-establish connections. Baby Boomers emphasized reconnecting with old friends, indicating a preference for e-wom that revitalizes relationships through shared experiences, aligning with findings by Hunsaker and Hargittai (2018) who noted that despite their less frequent use of social media, when Baby Boomers engage, they focus on substantial, meaningful exchanges. Gen X individuals distinguished themselves by focusing more on building new relationships rather than deepening existing ones. This aligns with Chu et al. (2021), who found that the need for social belonging significantly influences positive e-wom behavior, highlighting the role of e-wom in maintaining and rekindling relationships. All generations acknowledged using e-wom to foster a sense of community and propose group activities. However, Gen Z, Gen X, and Baby Boomers particularly felt an increased sense of inclusion when their role as content sharers was recognized, underpinning the social bonding significance found in studies by Munzel and Kunz (2014). The recognition of one's role as a content sharer contributes to a sense of inclusion and belonging within social groups, reinforcing the interactive and community-building aspects of e-wom.

The study also found that e-wom facilitates conversation and interaction among different generations. Gen Z and Baby Boomers used e-wom to create continuity in relationships, sharing content related to past conversations or future plans. Gen X often forwarded content to have topics for future in-person discussions, while Baby Boomers emphasized that sharing content can be seen as a bonding activity. This supports the findings of Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), who noted that social interaction is a key motivator for e-wom, underscoring the role of shared content in fostering ongoing communication.

Lastly, the research indicated that forwarding online content can also serve to build personal identity. Millennials generally do not use e-wom to project an image, while other generations do. Gen Z and Baby Boomers use e-wom to express their character and interests, reinforcing their identity through shared content. This behavior reflects the broader concept of impression management discussed by Wien (2019), where individuals use e-wom to shape how they are perceived by others. By sharing content that aligns with their personal interests and values, individuals can enhance their self-presentation and social identity.

4.2.2 Altruism

The findings indicated that altruism is a strong motivator for e-wom across all generations. Participants share content tailored to the interests of the receiver, often driven by the desire to be helpful and do good. The act of sharing informative or beautiful content is viewed as an altruistic gesture aimed

at enhancing the receiver's knowledge or experience. This reflects the findings of Ho and Dempsey (2010), who identified altruism as a key driver for sharing online content. This motivation is linked to the broader concept of social exchange theory (SET), which posits that social behavior is the result of an exchange process aimed at maximizing benefits and minimizing costs.

Gen X and Baby Boomers often share practical advice or warnings to help others avoid negative experiences or improve their daily lives. Baby Boomers also share inspirational content to motivate and support others. These findings align with the work of Chatzipanagiotou and Christodoulides (2020), who noted the importance of altruism in consumer behavior online. The practical aspect of e-wom, where participants share useful information, supports the idea that altruistic motivations drive e-wom behavior, as individuals seek to contribute positively to the experiences of others.

Gen Z and Baby Boomers use e-wom to express care and affection non-verbally, sharing content that they believe will make the receiver happy or feel cared for. This non-verbal expression of care through e-wom is consistent with the findings of Rosario et al. (2020), who highlighted the role of emotional engagement in e-wom activities. By sharing content that brings joy or comfort to others, individuals demonstrate their affection and concern, fostering closer interpersonal connections.

Altruism emerged as a strong motivator for e-wom across all generations, reflecting the broader social and psychological motivations underlying online content sharing. This finding underscores the importance of understanding the altruistic drivers of e-wom, as they play a crucial role in shaping how individuals interact and share information online.

4.2.3 Control Over Growth

The theme of control over personal and professional growth emerged as a strong motivator for e-wom. Participants establish or reinforce leadership through e-wom by forwarding valuable content that positions them as knowledgeable and engaged. Sharing relevant work-related content enhances professional standing and creates new opportunities. Baby Boomers and Gen X participants, in particular, use e-wom to stay updated and showcase their expertise. This behavior reflects the motivations identified by Ho and Dempsey (2010), particularly the need for self-enhancement and competence.

Gen Z and Baby Boomers use e-wom for personal growth, seeking to enrich their knowledge and distinguish themselves from peers. This use of e-wom for personal development aligns with the findings of Tran and Strutton (2020), who explored the role of self-presentation in online content sharing. By sharing content that enhances their knowledge and skills, individuals can improve their personal and professional prospects, leveraging e-wom as a tool for growth.

This theme also ties into the broader concept of social capital, where individuals leverage their online presence to build and maintain professional networks. The use of e-wom for establishing leadership aligns with Dwivedi et al. (2015), who discussed the importance of self-presentation in digital communication. The findings support the work of Vivekananthamoorthy et al. (2016), who noted that networking and information sharing on professional platforms enhance social capital and professional

growth. The desire for personal growth through e-wom is consistent with the broader literature on self-presentation and impression management. By sharing content that reflects their expertise and interests, individuals can enhance their social and professional standing, demonstrating their competence and engagement with relevant topics.

4.2.4   Process Behind Forwarding Behavior

Participants across generations emphasize the importance of verifying the relevance and reliability of content before sharing it. The level of confidence with the receiver also influences the decision to forward content. This careful consideration of content highlights the responsible nature of e-wom, as individuals seek to maintain their credibility and trustworthiness. This behavior aligns with the findings of Beheshti and Fethi (2021), who emphasized the importance of authenticity in e-wom. The emphasis on verifying content supports the work of Donthu et al. (2021), who highlighted the need for credible and trustworthy information in e-wom. By ensuring that the content they share is accurate and relevant, participants can enhance their reputation as reliable sources of information, reinforcing their social and professional networks.

4.2.5   Dynamics of Digital Engagement Across Generational Cohorts

Participants perceive significant differences in e-wom behavior across generations. Gen Z focuses on entertaining content, while older generations share more serious and educational content. Millennials and Baby Boomers believe older adults forward more content than younger people. These perceived differences reflect the generational differences in online communication noted by Curtis et al. (2021). Each generation's unique preferences and behaviors influence their e-wom activities, highlighting the need for tailored digital marketing strategies.

The focus on entertainment by Gen Z aligns with the findings of Anderson and Jiang (2018), who noted the preference for quick, visual content among younger users. The sharing of educational content by older generations supports the work of Leist (2013), who found that older adults use social media to share meaningful and substantial information.

5 CONCLUSION

This chapter provides a comprehensive synthesis of the research findings, discussing their broader implications and offering recommendations for future research and practical applications. The study examined the motivations behind electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) across four generational cohorts—Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. By exploring these motivations, the research aimed to provide insights that could inspire and aid future researchers to employ quantitative methodologies, thereby enriching the understanding and effectiveness of digital marketing strategies tailored to specific generational cohorts. This chapter reiterates the study's purpose, summarizes the methodology and key findings, and discusses the implications and recommendations based on these findings.

The primary objective of this qualitative exploratory research was to investigate the diverse motivations behind e-WOM across four distinct generational cohorts. Understanding these motivations is critical because it helps identify how different age groups engage with and share online content, which in turn informs the development of more tailored and effective digital marketing strategies. The main research question guiding this study was: *"How do motivations of Inclusion, Affection, and Control influence e-WOM across generational cohorts?"* This overarching question was further broken down into sub-questions to explore the nuances of each motivational factor within and across generations.

5.1   Answering the research question

To address the research questions, a qualitative research methodology was employed, specifically utilizing in-depth semi-structured interviews. This approach was chosen for its ability to capture rich, detailed data about the subjective experiences and motivations of participants. A total of eight participants, two from each generational cohort, were interviewed. The thematic analysis of these interviews revealed several key findings, which are discussed below.

What differences exist in the perception of Inclusion as a motivation for e-wom among Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z?

The theme of Inclusion and Individuation emerged as a significant driver of e-wom across all generations, though the specific behaviors and underlying motivations varied. Participants expressed that they use forwarding online content to restart or rekindle relationships. Baby Boomers and Gen Z often use content to reconnect with people they have not spoken to in a while, thereby maintaining and strengthening their relationships. For Millennials, sharing content is a way to strengthen bonds through mutual gifts and implicit expressions of the relationship. Generation X participants highlighted that they share content more for creating new friendships and interactions rather than strengthening existing family ties. Moreover, participants use content to facilitate conversations and interactions. For example, Gen Z and Baby Boomers forward content related to past conversations or future plans to create continuity in relationships. Gen X participants share content to anticipate future in-person conversations, while

Millennials create shared moments through content. Additionally, sharing content to create social engagement and inclusion was common, with all generations recognizing the role of forwarding content in proposing group activities, causing laughter, or sparking interest.

In what ways does Affection motivate e-wom activities differently across generational cohorts?

The theme of Affection, encompassing altruistic motives, was prominent across all generations. Participants expressed altruistic engagement by tailoring content to the receivers' tastes and feeling gratified when their shared advice or recommendations were adopted. This need to do good and be helpful was evident in all generations, whether it was warning others about bad products, informing them about important news, or spreading artistic creations. Gen Z participants, in particular, noted that they forward content to show affection and care without words, often to express emotions they might not communicate verbally.

How does the Control motivation impact the nature of e-wom among the studied generational groups?

The motivation of Control was evident in participants' desire to use e-wom to enhance their personal and professional growth. This theme included reasons centered around role assertion, professional development, and competence. For instance, Baby Boomers and Generation X frequently used content sharing to establish leadership and enhance professional standing by sharing relevant and reliable work-related content. Millennials and Gen Z, while also concerned with growth, focused more on using e-wom to build their social capital and gain social recognition. Gen Z participants noted the importance of distinguishing themselves in educational settings, while Baby Boomers emphasized the role of sharing content in professional growth and inspiration.

What are the potential moderating effects of generational identity on the relationship between these motivations and e-wom behaviors?

This study concludes that while motivations for forwarding online content, such as Inclusion, Affection, and Control, play a crucial role across all generational cohorts, the specific manifestations of these motivations vary notably among Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. These findings shed light on the complex dynamics behind e-wom behaviors and provided a detailed understanding of how different age groups engage with digital platforms to forward online content. This research, therefore, gave a comprehensive overview on how generational identity shape e-wom practices and offers valuable insights to eventually tailor strategies to enhance the effectiveness of digital marketing across diverse age groups.

5.2   Recommendations for future research

From this research, other scholars in the field of digital communication and marketing can obtain several key insights that serve as a foundation for further exploration. First, the qualitative framework

established here provides a robust starting point for numerous quantitative studies. By employing quantitative methods, future researchers can validate and expand upon these findings, testing the prevalence and impact of the identified motivational drivers on a larger scale including all the generation. This would offer statistical validation and broader generalizability to the population under study, enhancing the understanding of e-wom behaviors across a more extensive demographic and filling this emerging gap in the literature also from a quantitative perspective.

Additionally, longitudinal studies present a valuable opportunity for future research. Tracking changes in e-wom behaviors and motivations over time would provide dynamic insights into how digital engagement evolves with technological advancements and shifting social contexts. This would offer an interesting temporal dimension to our understanding of generational e-wom practices.

Practical implications for digital marketers are another significant aspect of this study. Future research can explore how marketers can effectively integrate these motivational insights into their campaigns, designing experimental studies to test the effectiveness of marketing messages tailored to specific generational motivations. This would not only enhance consumer engagement but also strengthen brand loyalty.

5.3 Practical Implications

The insights from this study on generational motivations behind electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM)- even if not already generalizable to the population under study- may already provide valuable guidance for digital marketers aiming to make online content go viral by influencing users to forward it. By understanding how motivations such as Inclusion, Affection, and Control manifest differently across Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z, marketers can craft targeted strategies to encourage content sharing effectively. To effectively target viral content across different generations based marketers should adapt their strategies to align with the distinct preferences and digital behaviors of each group.

For Baby Boomers, the approach should center on creating content that fosters reconnection and shared memories. They are particularly drawn to content that allows them to reminisce and reconnect with people from their past. Marketers should consider producing content that features historical themes or nostalgic elements that trigger memories of previous years. Additionally, practical content that provides value, like health tips or travel advice, can encourage forwarding as Baby Boomers look to offer useful information to their peers. Creating community-focused content for specialized groups, such as recipe sharing in cooking groups or gardening tips, can also boost engagement and sharing among Baby Boomers.

Gen X values content that not only helps them form new social connections but also enhances their professional and personal lives. Content that encourages new interactions and networking opportunities, such as invitations to webinars, industry meetups, or community events, can be particularly compelling.

Additionally, providing content that supports personal development, like detailed how-to guides or articles featuring industry insights, appeals to their desire for professional growth and recognition. Authenticity is crucial for engaging Gen X, so content should delve deeply into topics, avoiding superficial treatments.

For Millennials, marketers should focus on creating content that acts as a catalyst for engagement and discussion among peers. This generation appreciates content that feels like a mutual gift, helping to strengthen bonds through shared interests or concerns. They are drawn to content that supports social causes or community issues, which can serve as conversation starters or rallying points. Moreover, content that offers practical help or educational value, shared altruistically, resonates well with their desire to contribute positively to others' lives. Visual and interactive content, such as infographics, short videos, or interactive polls on platforms like Instagram and TikTok, can also capture their attention and encourage sharing.

Gen Z prefers content that is immediate, relatable, and reflective of their dynamic, fast-paced lifestyle. Marketers should tap into current trends and pop culture to create content that feels spontaneous and directly relevant to Gen Z's experiences. Content that proposes activities or social interactions, such as videos about new local hangouts or trendy events, can encourage sharing among friends looking to plan group activities. Since Gen Z values inclusion, content that enhances group identity and cohesion, like challenges or group chats, can be particularly effective. Focusing on video and other short-form content that can be quickly consumed and shared on platforms like TikTok will likely engage this group effectively.

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Appendix A: Literature Review Overview
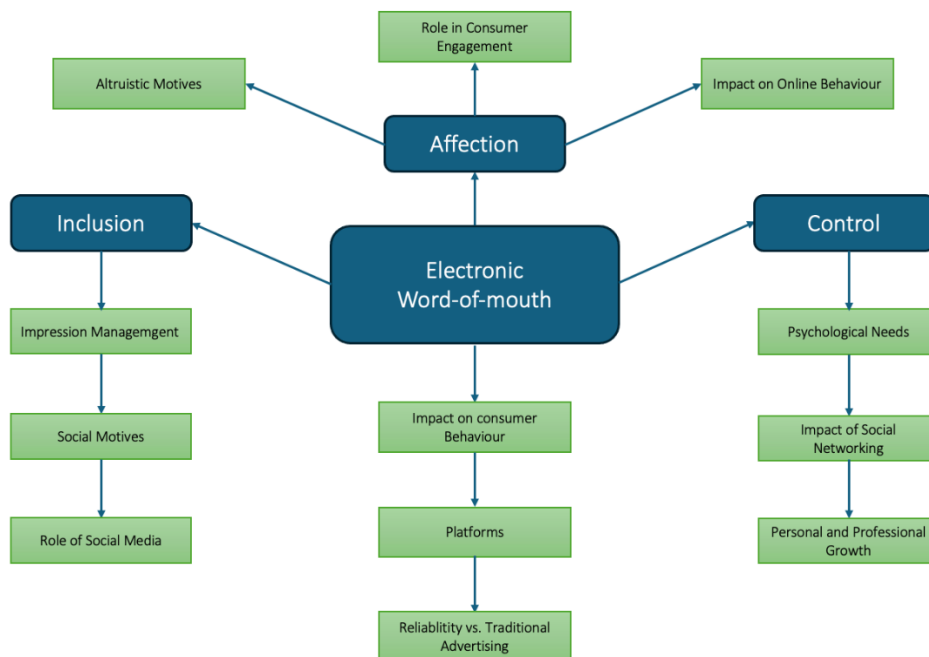
Appendix B: Conceptual Framework
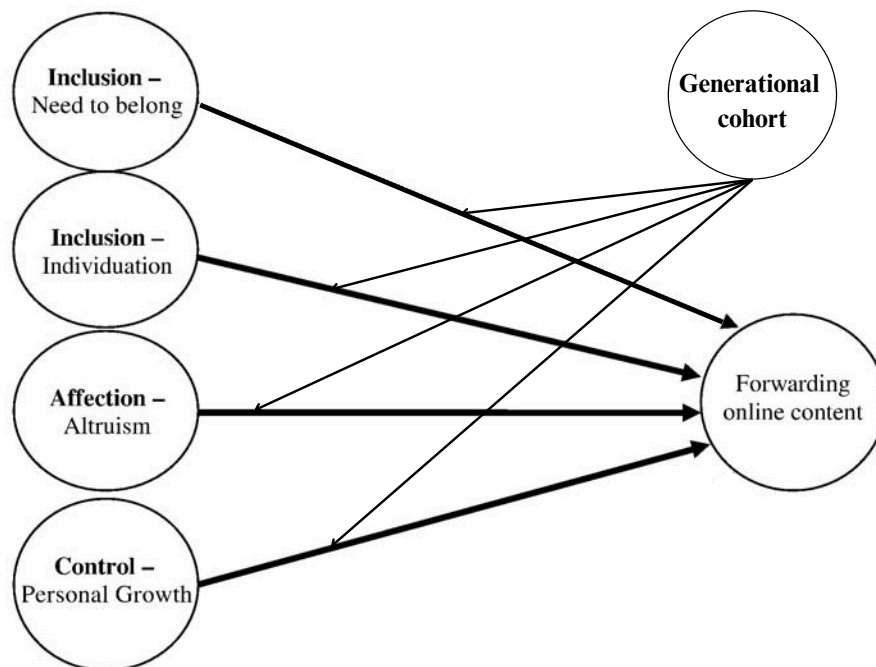
Appendix C: Pre-selection Call – Letter of invitation

Dear ,

My name is Alessia Giardinelli and I am a Bachelor student at Erasmus University in the Netherlands.

I'm currently conducting research to investigate the motivations why individuals forward online content, also known as electronic word-of-mouth (e-wom).

Based on my research, e-wom is a well-studied phenomenon in marketing, however few studies have covered the topic by making a distinction between the different generations (i.e., Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y and Gen Z) and how they may differ in the reasons why they decide to forward a social media post, a review, an URL or an email.

Hence, I would really be grateful if I could ask 20 minutes of your time to have an interview to know each other better and discuss if you are a suitable candidate for the actual interview, which will be used for this study.

If you are interested in the topic, your contributions would be much appreciated not only for researchers but also for marketing strategists.

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

Best regards,

Alessia Giardinelli

Appendix D: Interviews Consent Form

Title of Research: Generational Perspectives on Electronic Word-of-Mouth: An Examination of Motivational Drivers Across Age Cohorts

Principle Investigator, Affiliation and Contact Information:

Alessia Giardinelli

International BSc Economics and Business Economics, Marketing

Erasmus University Rotterdam

620936ag@eur.nl

Academic supervisor:

Dr. Bojan Georgievski, Erasmus University Rotterdam, georgievski@ese.eur.nl

Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to raise awareness on how motivations to forward online content differ by generations. The information gathered through the interview will be used as part of a bachelor's thesis for the program.

Description of the Research

Your participation will take the form of a semi-structured interview online.

Subject Participation

Participants of this study consist of individuals that forward online content frequently via direct message or e-mails and spend a considerable amount of their time on social media.

Interview duration:

The interview will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes.

Potential Risks and Discomforts

No known risks.

Potential Benefits

The findings may help marketers, and even managers, craft marketing strategies to initiate e-wom specifically tailored for each distinct generation.

Confidentiality

Each interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. Your identity will remain confidential. After the interview, I will store the audio recording under a designated code name and delete it once transcription is complete. Any personal details in the transcript that could reveal your identity will be omitted.

The research data will be kept until the completion of the Bachelor's thesis. At the end of this period, the data will either be deleted

Withdrawal from the Study and/or Withdrawal of Authorization

As a participant in this study, you are free to withdraw your participation at any time.

Authorization and confirmation	Initials
I authorization to audio record the interview	
I authorize the use of the output of my interview for further education, research and publication of the findings.	
Voluntary Participation and Authorization **I voluntarily agree to participate in this research program**	
I understand that I will be given a copy of this signed Consent Form.	

Name of Participant (print)	Signature	Date

Appendix E: Personal Interviews - Letter invitation to participate

Dear ,

Thank you for taking the time for our last interview. After assessing the information provided by you, I am pleased to invite you to the actual interview, which I will be using for my research. If you would like to continue to contribute to my thesis project, we can arrange a suitable day and time. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes.

Thank you again for your cooperation.

Looking forward to hearing from you,

Alessia Giardinelli

Appendix F: Interview Protocol

1) Opening / introduction (5-10 minutes)	
Establish rapport / introduce yourself	My name is…. I am currently studying… I am from…I live in…
Purpose of research / time frame	I would like to ask you some questions about your reasons to forward online content. The sharing of electronic content can be seen as part of an ongoing dialogue and as a potential space for personal communication, through email, instant messaging, or similar highly targeted communication channels. The Interview takes about 45 to 60 minutes (should be mentioned before already as well when inviting the respondent)

Ask again if respondent is OK with recording the interview.

Also ask the respondent to send you few examples of any online content they forwarded to someone before the interview and to already think deeply about the reasons why they did it. **Try to plan the interview at a quiet place (no background noise) as you might otherwise not hear the audio-recording well enough to transcribe. Also mention that your are coming with a co-interviewer for the respondent not to be surprised.**

Provide the respondent with the information sheet and the informed consent form. Summarize the key parts. You can consider sending the information sheet and consent form beforehand to the respondent; however, the consent form should be signed at the interview location when you checked if the information provided is clear. Discuss how you deal with the information given, data management, (i.e., deletion of recording after transcription and ethics, anonymous, no names mentioned in transcript, report or anywhere else

Turn on the audio-recording

(Transition: Let me begin by asking you some questions about …)

2) Main part (30-40 minutes)	

Background information

1. Demographic Information:
   - Age: "Can you please tell me your age?"
   - Gender: "How do you prefer to be identified in terms of gender?"
   - Occupation: "What is your current occupation, or if you are retired, what was your former occupation?"

2. Technology Usage:
   - Digital Proficiency: "How would you rate your comfort level with using digital and online technology?"
   - Platform Usage: "What types of digital devices and social media platforms do you regularly use?"

3. Content Engagement:
   - Online Activities: "What are your primary activities when you are online? (e.g., reading news, social networking, watching videos, professional networking)"
   - Content Sharing Frequency: "How often do you share content online?"

4. Historical Perspective on Media Usage:
   - Changes in Usage: "Have you noticed changes in your use of digital media over the years? How have your habits evolved?"
   - Adoption of Technology: "At what stage in your life did you start using digital and social media platforms? How did you adapt to using these technologies?"

(Transition: Next, I am curious to hear about the examples of online content you forwarded)

_____

Topic 1: Discussing Specific Examples of Forwarded Content

1) Please show me the content you chose to forward and explain what it is

Follow-up by asking:
- Recipient Involvement: "Who did you share this content with?"
- Context of Sharing: "Can you describe the circumstances or environment in which you decided to share this content?"
- Content Nature: "What is the nature of this content? For instance, was it informative, entertaining, humorous, or something else?"
- Actions Taken: "What actions did you take to share this content? For example, did you add a personal message or recommendation when you shared it?"
- Connection to Content: "Why did you feel connected or drawn to this content enough to share it?"

2) What motivated you to share this particular piece of content?

Follow-up by asking:

- Expectations of Sharing: "What kind of reaction or outcome were you expecting by sharing this content?"
- Receiver's Response: "How did the recipients respond? Did their reaction meet your expectations?"
- Frequency of Sharing Similar Content: "Do you often share this type of content? How frequently do you find yourself sharing similar things?"
- Decision-Making Factors: "What are the key factors you consider when deciding to share something online?"
- Impact of Sharing: "Do you feel that sharing this content has any impact on your relationship with the people you shared it with? How so?"

3) Let's talk about the process you go through when deciding to share content online.

Follow-up by asking:

- Criteria for Sharing: "What criteria do you use to decide whether or not to share a piece of content?"
- Influence of Social or Cultural Norms: "How do social or cultural norms influence your decision to share or not share certain types of content?"
- Generational Differences: "Do you think your approach to sharing online content differs from other generations? How might your practices vary from those of someone older or younger?"
- Changes Over Time: "Has your approach to sharing content changed over time? Can you describe how your sharing behavior has evolved with technological advancements?"
- Avoidance of Sharing: "Are there types of content you typically avoid sharing? What leads you to decide against sharing certain things?"

Summarize shortly

(Transition: Having explored these examples, let's now dive deeper into your motivations to forward online content)

_____

Topic 2: Motivations for Sharing Online Content

1. Inclusion Motivation - Need to be Part of a Group:

- Social Bonding:
    - Building Connections: "How does sharing content online help you build or strengthen connections with others? Can you provide a specific example where this was evident?"
    - Maintaining Relationships: "In what ways do you use online content sharing as a tool for maintaining relationships with friends, family, or colleagues?"
- Group Engagement:
    - Engagement Within Groups: "Can you describe how sharing content influences your engagement or status within specific groups or communities online?"
    - Role of Content in Group Dynamics: "What role does the content you share play in your social groups or networks? How does it affect your interactions?"
- Sense of Belonging:
    - Achieving Belonging: "What types of content do you share to feel a part of a community or group? Please describe how this content fosters a sense of belonging."
    - Feedback and Interaction: "How important is the feedback you receive from your shared content in enhancing your sense of belonging to a group?"
- Anticipation of Future Interactions:
    - Content Sharing as Preemptive Interaction: "Do you ever share content as a way to set the stage for future interactions? Can you give an example of when you did this and the outcome?"
    - Strategic Sharing for Future Benefits: "How do you strategize your content sharing to benefit future social interactions? Are there specific types of content you find more effective for this purpose?"

2. Inclusion Motivation - Individuation:
    - Identity and Self-Image:
        - Expressing Identity: "How do you use online content sharing as a way to express your individual identity or uniqueness? Can you give an example where this was particularly important?"
        - Content as Self-Representation: "How do you select content that aligns with or represents your personal image? What kinds of content best represent who you are?"
    - Status and Recognition:
        - Enhancing Status: "Can you describe a situation where sharing content online helped enhance your status within a group or community? What was the

content, and what was the reaction?"

- - Seeking Validation: "How important is it for you to receive validation or recognition from others when you share content online? Can you discuss a time when this was especially significant?"
- Differentiation from Others:
  - Standing Out: "In what ways do you aim to stand out from others when you share content online? What types of content do you think help achieve this?"
  - Impact of Uniqueness: "Has there been a time when your unique content sharing significantly impacted your social interactions or relationships online? Please elaborate."
- Influence Through Uniqueness:
  - Leadership Through Differentiation: "Do you think being distinctive in your content sharing has positioned you as a leader or influencer within any online communities? How so?"
  - Shaping Perceptions: "How does being different in the content you share affect how others perceive you online?"

Other questions:
- "When you choose to share content online, do you feel it helps you connect with others or feel part of a group? Can you give an example?"
- "Can you recall a specific instance where sharing online content led to deeper engagement or discussion within your community or social network?"
- "Do you share content to get recognition or feedback from your social circle? What kind of recognition are you usually looking for?"
- "What specific type of feedback do you seek when you share content online and why?"
- "How does the desire to be seen as part of a community influence what you share online?"
- "Describe a time when sharing content online brought you recognition or validation from your peers. What content did you share, and what was the response?"

3. Affection Motivation - Need to be Altruistic:
- Altruistic Sharing for Emotional Support:
  - Supportive Sharing: "Can you recall a time when you shared content online specifically to support or uplift someone else? What motivated you to share that particular content?"
  - Impact on Relationships: "How do you think sharing content to support others

affects your relationships? Can you share an example of how this has deepened a relationship?"

- Expressing Love and Friendship:
  - Content as Expression of Affection: "How often do you use online content sharing as a means to express love or friendship? What kind of content do you typically share for this purpose?"
  - Reactions to Affectionate Sharing: "What responses do you typically receive when you share content as an expression of affection? How do these responses influence your future sharing behavior?"
- Community Support and Engagement:
  - Community Help: "Have there been instances where you've shared content to help or provide value to a community or group? What was the situation and the outcome?"
  - Motivation for Community Involvement: "What drives you to share content that benefits a larger community? How do you select what content might be helpful or supportive?"
- Altruism and Personal Satisfaction:
  - Personal Gratification: "Do you find personal satisfaction or fulfillment in sharing content altruistically? How does this influence your sense of self and identity online?"
  - Balancing Self-Interest and Altruism: "How do you balance your personal interests with the desire to act altruistically when sharing content online? Are there conflicts, and how do you resolve them?"

4. Control Motivation - Personal Growth:
   - Personal Development: "Can you share a specific instance when sharing content online helped you grow personally or professionally? How did this action contribute to your personal or career development?"
   - Strategic Sharing for Career Goals: "How do you use online content sharing as a strategy to advance your career or educational goals? Can you provide an example of how this has worked for you?"
   - Leadership and Influence: "Do you believe that sharing content online enhances your influence or leadership within any community or group? Please describe a situation where this was evident."
   - Initiating Professional Relationships: "Have you ever used content sharing as a way to initiate or nurture professional relationships? How has this approach impacted your

career or academic opportunities?"

- Skill Development through Sharing: "What skills do you think you have developed through sharing content online? How do these skills play a role in your personal or professional life?"

Other questions:

- "Do you feel that sharing content online gives you a sense of control or influence? Can you provide an example where this was apparent?"
- "Describe a situation where you used online content to influence or persuade your audience. What was the content, and how did you present it?"
- "How do you decide what content is worth sharing? Does controlling the narrative or information flow play a part in your decision?"
- "Have you ever shared content to correct a misconception or provide an alternative viewpoint? Please describe the context and your approach."

Summarize shortly

(Transition: Now let's delve deeper into how these motivations interact with your everyday social interactions online.)

Topic 3: Interaction of Motivations with Social Behavior

1. Impact of Sharing on Personal Identity:
   - Identity Expression: "How does sharing content online help you express your identity?"
   - Misalignment with Identity: "Have you ever regretted sharing something because it did not align well with how you see yourself or how others perceive you?"
2. Social Feedback and Adaptation:
   - Feedback Reception: "What kind of feedback do you receive when you share content? How does this feedback affect your future sharing behavior?"
   - Adaptation to Feedback: "Can you share an example of how you have changed the type of content you share based on feedback or reactions from your peers?"
3. Influence of Digital Literacy:
   - Skill Level: "How do your skills with digital technology influence what and how you share online?"

- Adaptation to New Platforms: "How quickly do you adapt to new social media platforms or digital sharing tools? Does this influence your sharing habits?"

Author's note: Questions in "Background Information" about digital proficiency and platform usage could potentially overlap with the "Influence of Digital Literacy" in Topic 3. To avoid redundancy, ensure that when discussing digital literacy later in the interview, you focus more on how it influences sharing behaviors rather than re-assessing proficiency levels.

Summarize shortly

(Transition: Now we are going to the last part of this interview. I would like to understand how these motivations and behaviors have evolved over time)

_____

Topic 4: Evolution of Sharing Practices

1. Historical Changes:
   - Evolution Over Time: "How have your motivations for sharing online content changed over the years?"
   - Technological Impact: "How have advancements in technology influenced your approach to sharing online content?"
2. Predictions for Future Behavior:
   - Future Changes: "How do you see your online sharing habits changing in the future?"
   - Emerging Trends: "Are there any new trends in digital communication that you are excited about or planning to adopt?"

Summarize shortly

(Transition to closing: e.g., Well, it has been a pleasure finding out more about you. Let me briefly summarize the information that I have recorded during our interview.)

3) Closing (5 minutes)

Additional question	Ask if the respondent would like to add something that he or she finds important and that was forgotten to be asked "Is there anything else you think would be helpful for me to know?" or "What am I not asking you that I should?"

Summary	Shorty summarize de key points that you got out of the interview (1-2 minutes)
Thank you for participation	I appreciate the time you took for this interview.
Turn-off recording	

Probing questions as needed (apply to all questions):

What do you mean exactly?

Can you provide an example?

Can you describe what you mean?

Can you provide some more explanation?

Can you tell a bit more about this?

How do you deal with this?

Summarize what has been said to see if you captured it all and well after every section by asking for instance:

Did I hear you say…?

Did I understand you when you said…?

Did I hear you correctly when you said…?

Is this what you said…?

Keeping track of the interview:

Thank you for sharing this information me, but I would like to return to an earlier question / something you said…

Thank you, but we need to continue now with…

Appendix G: Schedule of Interviews

Participant's ID	Date of interview	Date of time	Duration	Place
Gen Z 1	10/06/2024	11:30	1 h 13 min	Zoom
Gen Z 2	14/06/2024	14.30	46 min	Zoom
Millennial 1	12/06/2024	18.30	50 min	Zoom
Millennial 2	18/06/2024	15.20	35 min	Zoom
Gen X 1	17/06/2024	19.45	1 h 20 min	Zoom

Gen X 2	16/06/2024	14.00	47 min	Zoom
Baby Boomer 1	18/06/2024	16.00	30 min	Zoom
Baby Boomer 2	15/06/2024	11.10	1 h 9 min	Zoom

Appendix H: Participants Profile

Participant's ID	Age	Occupation	Average Weekly time using Social Media
Gen Z 1	15	Student	5 h
Gen Z 2	24	Communication agency associate	4 h
Millennial 1	28	Marketing Manager	5 h
Millennial 2	36	University Student	3 h 35 min
Gen X 1	51	Commercial Director	4 h 45 h
Gen X 2	56	Project Coordinator	4 h
Baby Boomer 1	62	CEO	3 h
Baby Boomer 2	69	Retired Manager	3 h 30 h

Appendix I: Interview Transcript Example

Interviewer: Good morning, Baby Boomer 2. Before we start, can I confirm that you are comfortable with me recording this conversation?

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer: Can you tell me your age and gender?

Participant: I am 69 years old and I am a woman.

Interviewer: Perfect, thank you. I would like to know more about your background. What was your profession before you retired?

Participant: I was a manager at a bank for many years, supervising various branches and teams. It was a demanding job that required a lot of commitment and constant adaptation, especially with the increase in digital tools in the workplace. Since I retired, I enjoy a slower pace, but I find that staying connected online allows me to maintain a part of that dynamic environment in my life.

Interviewer: Perfect. How would you rate your level of comfort with using digital and online technology?

Participant: I would say my comfort level with digital and online technology is quite high compared to some of my peers. During my career as a manager, I had to keep up with various technological advancements. Even now that I am retired, I continue to use technology every day. In fact, I often use

Facebook and LinkedIn to stay connected with my network. I share content and updates on industry trends and personal interests such as cooking and travel. I don't consider myself as expert as the younger generation who grew up with this technology, but I definitely feel comfortable and confident navigating the digital world.

Interviewer: Primarily, what activities do you engage in when you are online?

Participant: When I am online, my activities are quite varied. I spend quite a bit of time on social networking sites like Facebook and LinkedIn. On Facebook, I like to follow friends and family, share recipes, and actively participate in my interests like cooking and travel. It is a wonderful way to feel somewhat connected, especially with those I don't see often. On LinkedIn, I focus more on professional networking. I like to stay in touch with former colleagues and peers, share articles on management and leadership, and stay somewhat updated on industry news. It is important for me to maintain these connections and the knowledge I built during my career even though I am now retired. Besides social networking, I also read news online to stay informed about current events. Occasionally, I watch videos, especially cooking tutorials and travel blogs that combine entertainment with learning something new.

Interviewer: Interesting, thank you for being so detailed. How often do you forward content online?

Participant: When I am online and see something interesting or moving, I often think about who among my friends or family might appreciate it. For example, if I find a great article on the benefits of yoga for seniors or a beautiful travel video about Sicily, I can't help but send it directly to a friend who just started doing yoga or to my cousin who loves traveling as much as I do. It is a bit like saying, "I saw this and thought of you." I do this quite often actually. It feels like I am chatting with them even when we are not together. And when they respond, it starts a little conversation about it, which is wonderful. It's like delivering them a part of my day and something that moved me or made me smile.

Interviewer: Perfect, so you do it often. However, looking back, have you noticed any changes in your use of digital media over the years? How have your habits evolved?

Participant: Yes, absolutely. There have been many changes. When I first started using the internet, it was mainly for sending and receiving emails and searching for information. It wasn't very practical, to be honest, it was also a bit intimidating. As technology advanced and became easier to master, I began to explore this new world more and more. Social media was a turning point for me. At first, I joined Facebook out of personal curiosity and to understand fundamentally what it was about. Gradually and rapidly, it became important to stay connected, especially with friends and family. I would say more with those family members or friends who live far from me. This was wonderful because I could share photos and updates, keeping the sense of community alive. As I grew in my role as a manager, the importance of digital tools in professional contexts also became increasingly important and evident. I started using the internet for research, to find industry news, and even for networking using platforms like LinkedIn. This professional use helped me be more methodical and targeted in how I interacted online. Now, I think it's very important to focus on the quality rather than the quantity of online content. I follow pages and join groups that align with my interests like cooking clubs, travel forums, and of course, some news sources to

stay informed.

Interviewer: I understand, you have been exhaustive. Before coming to this interview, I asked you to choose some examples of online content you have shared with someone to start delving into the matter. Can you show me what you chose for this question and maybe start explaining what it is about?

Participant: Yes, certainly, I did that. For example, one content I recently shared was a TripAdvisor review of a delightful seafood restaurant located on the Apulian coast. A charming place I discovered during one of my trips, a place that truly captured the essence of Italian seafood cuisine with its fresh seafood and, importantly, the breathtaking view of the Mediterranean Sea.

Interviewer: Interesting. Can you tell me what the review mentioned?

Participant: The review I shared was quite detailed, praising not only the food which included local fish and seafood dishes but also the warm and welcoming atmosphere of the restaurant. It mentioned the attentive service of the staff, especially the restaurateur, and recommended particular and specific dishes such as grilled sea bass and homemade pasta with excellent prawns. I shared this review with a couple of friends who were planning a trip there because I knew they would appreciate a reliable review. We share a common passion for culinary arts, and finding authentic places to eat good food is fundamental for organizing our trips.

Interviewer: Of course, of course. What actions did you take to share this content? For example, did you add a personal message or recommendation?

Participant: Yes, when I shared this TripAdvisor review, I added my personal touch. Initially, I sent the link via email to my friends and then added a small note to the email explaining why I thought of them when I found this restaurant. I mentioned how the place's atmosphere reminded me of a wonderful dinner we had together in Sicily and thought they would also appreciate the authenticity and quality of the food. I also suggested they book a table by the large window for a breathtaking sea view, based on the review's details.

Interviewer: Sure, and how did your friends respond? Did their reaction meet your expectations?

Participant: Yes, absolutely. Their response was quite unexpected. They replied to my email with enthusiasm and thanked me for the thoughtful recommendations. They were particularly excited to try the dishes I highlighted like the grilled sea bass and appreciated the tip to book the table with the sea view. They even sent me a message a few months later with a photo of the restaurant they had included in their travel itinerary. This showed me that they were looking forward to experiencing it, which certainly met my expectations. Because in the end, I hope that what I shared added a special touch to their travel plans, and seeing their enthusiasm and knowing my suggestion was an integral part of their adventure was very gratifying.

Interviewer: Do you often share this type of content? How often do you share things like restaurant or hotel recommendations and such?

Participant: Yes, I do share this type of content quite often, especially when it comes to travel feedback and culinary routes. Because I am passionate about both, whenever I find a nice place like the seafood

restaurant mentioned earlier, I can't help but pass it on to friends or family who share the same interests. This happens about 2-3 times a month, and I do it when I find something truly captivating or when I know someone is planning a trip and looking for culinary art and gastronomic routes. These shares are not just about passing information but also about keeping our enthusiasm alive by sharing what concerns travel and cooking. This has contributed to interacting more with friends or family, something we might not have done before. Keeping our conversations lively and our bonds strong while sharing experiences about our adventures and tastes fills me with joy and makes me feel enthusiastic because I feel useful and contribute to them enjoying their time even more.

Interviewer: We will certainly discuss this motivation for sharing such content better because here we are talking about pure altruism.

Participant: Exactly.

Interviewer: What criteria do you use to decide whether to share a piece of content? Do you think before sending if the content meets your requirements?

Participant: Absolutely. I usually consider key criteria. First, I try to understand how relevant the topic is, then I think about whether the content aligns with the interests and needs of the person I want to share it with. For example, I wouldn't send a restaurant review to a friend who isn't passionate about food or travel. So, I think twice. Another very important factor for me is the reliability of the content. I make sure it is reliable and not fake. Then, I prefer to share articles, reviews, or videos that come from credible sources or that I believe are well-researched and therefore provide truthful information. This is very important, for example, if I had to share content related to a topic like health or financial content, the accuracy and source of these topics are fundamental. I ask myself questions like "Is this topic I am about to share useful? Is it educational? Is it inspiring?" So, I try to share content that can positively influence and add value or something more to someone's day or life. For example, I love sending articles that can inspire a friend in their personal projects or career, especially if they are in a phase of growth or transition. So, something that helps them in some way in what they are doing. I also think a lot about timing. For example, I have to share something timely, something contextualized to the moment, like a festival review. I send this during the festival season and certainly not when the festival is not happening. Or I send work management advice when I know a former colleague is taking on a leadership role at that moment.

Interviewer: So, you look for the relevance of content.

Participant: The content must be contextualized, useful, and therefore appreciated by the colleague or friend who I know for sure will go to that festival.

Interviewer: Of course. This is a subjective question, everyone has their idea, but I'll ask it anyway. Do you think your approach to sharing online content differs from other generations, obviously the younger ones in this case?

Participant: Well, yes, certainly. I notice substantial differences between my approach to sharing online content and that of the younger current generations. For example, I often watch my younger nephews who

are incredibly quick and adept with technology. They use many platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, which are more visually oriented and conducive to quick consumption and sharing of content, so they are very fast.

Interviewer: Sometimes they tend to overlook content that requires greater involvement.

Participant: Exactly, they often share videos, memes, stories that disappear after 24 hours, so the content doesn't remain. For them, everything is very spontaneous and quick. I also notice a greater comfort in revealing more of their personal life online.

Interviewer: Yes, online, sure.

Participant: In fact, they document in detail and post a large part of their daily activities on these social networks. They almost express their feelings, so their entire life shows on these media. Instead, I, like my generation, tend to be more reserved and share only content on travel, cooking, etc. They put practically their entire life on social media. Unlike the current generations, I focus more on sharing content that I find educational, something that can give advice or add something to my interlocutor, the person I'm connecting with.

Interviewer: Of course.

Participant: Young people comment a lot, like, and share content almost instantly. We are much slower. They create conversations, this sense of community much more rapidly than us.

Interviewer: You see this from your nephews, I imagine.

Participant: Yes, yes. I observe my nephews who live daily with their smartphones always in hand, unlike us who take the phone to share much more sporadically than they do.

Interviewer: Of course.

Participant: And we tend to post much less than young people.

Interviewer: Yes, maybe they are more inclined because they grew up with technology, and you had to adapt.

Participant: Yes, yes, exactly. For us, it was an adaptation. They were born with technology.

Interviewer: So, we share only significant articles. They make very quick, impulsive exchanges.

Participant: And they are much faster.

Interviewer: Sure. Now, delving into the heart of the interview, especially the psychological motivations that drive you to forward content, I would like to ask some introspective questions. The first is this: How does sharing online content help you build or strengthen connections with others? You mentioned before that sending the TripAdvisor review further consolidated your friendship with your friends. Can you give another example or answer this question?

Participant: Sure. Unexpectedly, sharing online content has helped me build and strengthen connections with others. But it's not just about the act of sharing because there is a subsequent commitment. For example, when I share an article on work management on LinkedIn, it doesn't end with the act of sharing. It often leads to discussions among us former colleagues, and we delve into that shared content. So, we exchange opinions on how to apply our respective experiences and ideas. This keeps the professional and

intellectual relationship stimulating and alive. It maintains relationships because a simple piece of content opens a discussion with an exchange of information.

Interviewer: And on a personal level?

Participant: On a personal level, sharing travel research or advice with friends and family generates particular enthusiasm because it encourages the planning of future experiences. For example, recently, I shared a recipe for a traditional Italian dish on Facebook, and a group of us had a virtual cooking session.

Interviewer: Oh.

Participant: Yes, this came up.

Interviewer: But a varied group or just people of your generation?

Participant: No, people of my generation.

Interviewer: How nice, a real reason for sharing.

Participant: Exactly, this type of interaction brings us closer and creates new experiences that we share despite being physically distant. If we were close, this new experience might not have been born. I also noticed that sharing content reconnects me with people I no longer spoke to. An old friend might comment on a travel photo or an article related to travel or cooking, leading to a real conversation. This idea of conversation then leads to the idea of meeting again. What happens? With these people, you can meet again. An old friendship can be rekindled. How many times does it happen that in the same place we lived ten years ago, we had a strong friendship with someone, but now we don't meet anymore? Instead, with these means, you can…

Interviewer: Keep it alive.

Participant: Exactly, keep alive a friendship that might not rekindle with face-to-face relationships.

Interviewer: Do you think this motivates you to forward more content in the future? Does it drive you to share more because you've noticed that a sense of community is created even through content sharing?

Participant: Yes, certainly, even psychologically, sharing content is not just about passing information. It's about maintaining and nurturing relationships with acquaintances and family. May I explain this concept better?

Interviewer: Yes, yes, absolutely.

Participant: First, there is the aspect of affirmation and connection.

Interviewer: In what sense, affirmation and connection?

Participant: By sharing content that aligns with someone's interests, I am essentially affirming our relationship. I don't know how to explain it. Showing what I appreciate and understand about them. I don't know if I'm clear.

Interviewer: So, through online content, you strengthen the connection with the person, showing you care.

Participant: Yes, in a way, I show I appreciate their interest. And I appreciate what really matters to them. It's like I connect psychologically with them. It's not just about passing information. For example, when I send my young nephew an article on technology, it's not the article itself, but I show him I know

him, I understand him, and I care about his passions. This aims to share and strengthen the bond with him, affirming our mutual interests.

Interviewer: Showing you know him.

Participant: Exactly. I wouldn't send a travel review or cooking article to my nephew because I know it doesn't interest him. Instead, I send something on technology, showing I care about his interests.

Interviewer: Sure, perfect.

Participant: So, when I share something like a TripAdvisor review with friends, I invite them into my mental space. We discuss, plan, and base our plans on this review. This creates a sense of unity and continuity in our relationship, strengthening our bond through shared memories or projecting into the future by planning something together. Another relevant psychological factor is care and attention. For example, sharing a beautiful piece of music with my sister, who loves music, is a way of showing I care about her happiness and well-being. It's an act of care, affection, and consideration, fostering a deeper emotional connection compared to a lighter content like travel. Knowing someone thought of you and brought joy to your day can significantly strengthen emotional bonds.

Interviewer: Perfect, absolutely. Can you tell me more about how the content you share in your groups influences your interactions, especially in larger groups? You mentioned a Facebook group that led to a virtual cooking classroom. Can you elaborate on this?

Participant: Yes, the content I share online plays a crucial role in how I connect with my social network groups. As I mentioned, it goes beyond sharing information; it's about creating interactions and building stronger relationships. For example, when I share a recipe in my Facebook cooking group, it's not just about the recipe itself; it's about stimulating a sense of community.

Interviewer: And discussing something, right?

Participant: Exactly, yes. People comment, make variations, share photos, and even organize virtual cooking sessions. This creates a wonderful sense of togetherness, even if we are miles apart.

Interviewer: How important is the feedback you receive for these contents you forward? You mentioned comments, etc. Do you consider it important?

Participant: Absolutely, when I share something, and people engage, like, and comment, it's not just recognition; it gives me a true sense of connection.

Interviewer: Does it make you happy?

Participant: Psychologically, it gives me a sense of belonging. It's like we are all in this together, which is gratifying.

Interviewer: Sure, it helps you feel less alone, perhaps.

Participant: Exactly, it's beautiful to share the same interests because it's not always easy. These means allow us to unite with people who share our interests, which is gratifying and fulfilling. It's a sense of belonging that might not be found with people physically close to you because they might have different interests. This way, you connect with people who share your interests, which is wonderful because you only learn and it's really engaging.

Interviewer: Focusing on private sharing and the motivation behind it, do you ever share online content as a way to prepare the ground for future interactions? Can you give an example of when you did this and the result?

Participant: Yes, this often happens. It maintains a sense of connection, thinking about a future moment, a future meeting. This happens often with former colleagues. For example, I found a video about a new Italian restaurant that opened nearby. Knowing my former colleague Maria is a food enthusiast, I sent her the video on WhatsApp with a message saying, "This place looks fantastic; we should try it together sometime." She immediately responded, and we set a date for the following week. Sharing that video brought us together, and we planned something fun. We went to the restaurant together, enjoying the place.

Interviewer: This is a demonstration of what I am studying, a great answer.

Participant: I'm glad.

Interviewer: Sharing in this way allows you to create those moments of connection in advance and helps prepare the ground. Do you ever use content sharing to express your individual identity, highlighting your unique traits or characteristics?

Participant: Yes, in a way.

Interviewer: Can you elaborate on this concept?

Participant: Yes, I think sharing my passions, values, and experiences with others inevitably paints a picture of who I am. It's a way to express myself, even though there are more authentic ways to do so. It shows who I am because I don't send content online without thinking twice. I am very reflective because when you send something, you feel responsible for what you are sending. You are recommending something or expressing disagreement with something, but in all cases, you are putting yourself out there. So yes, I am very reflective, and this reflection shows a bit of who I am personally. I don't send things randomly; I think about them and ensure they are reliable. Yes, it might be my age, but I am very thoughtful. Unlike young people today, I reflect and think twice before sending.

Interviewer: Do you ever send online content intending to say something about yourself? If so, what kind of content?

Participant: Yes, to distinguish myself, I tend to share content that not only interests me but adds value or offers a unique perspective to my network. For example, I might send a lesser-known but impactful managerial strategy or an innovative fashion trend that hasn't reached the mainstream. These pieces allow me to show my knowledge and taste, distinguishing me from others who may share more common or popular content. I believe in the power of sharing content that stimulates conversation, not just as an end in itself.

Interviewer: So you highlight your areas of interest and expertise, showing who you are.

Participant: Exactly. Topics like business management that have always interested me, intriguing fashion retrospectives, I engage to create valuable discussions with my recipient.

Interviewer: Of course.

Participant: It highlights my interests and experiences, fostering a sense of community. It's important for me that the conversation is stimulating for both parties.

Interviewer: So, does the recognition or validation you receive from the person you share the content with matter to you?

Participant: Yes, it's important. I want to distinguish myself through the dialogue created, not just by following trends but by deepening the content of the dialogue. For example, when I send useful articles or insights, my peers often express appreciation for the thoughtfulness and relevance of the information. This is gratifying.

Interviewer: Like they say, "This article is interesting, I've never seen it before, thanks for sending it."

Participant: Exactly, it reassures me that the content I chose was useful and valuable to them. It's not just expressing an opinion on a trend, but sharing something that adds value.

Interviewer: Of course, clear. Talking about the most common motivation, we often consider altruistic acts as selfless or actions based on love and affection towards others. Do you ever forward online content driven by altruism?

Participant: Yes, certainly. The sharing of content comes from a genuine desire to make others feel good, which is the essence of altruism. For example, if I find an article on health or a tip that could help someone I care about, I send it immediately because I want to contribute positively to their well-being. I do this not for recognition but because I care about the other person.

Interviewer: Do you do this with many people, or is this motivation more focused on a close circle?

Participant: Yes, especially for health-related content, I send it to people close to me, family, friends, because I care about their well-being and want to be helpful.

Interviewer: And this shows that the motivation is genuine, right?

Participant: Exactly.

Interviewer: What responses do you typically receive when you share content as an expression of affection?

Participant: The responses are positive and appreciative. People often express their gratitude, and sometimes the content I send gets forwarded to others in their network because they found it relevant and enjoyable. This shows the shared content resonated, not just for the original recipient but was valuable enough to be shared further.

Interviewer: Oh.

Participant: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: That's not a small thing.

Participant: No, it's significant. This is what I'm studying, the virality of content and its spread. How does this feedback influence your future sharing behavior?

Participant: This type of feedback strengthens my idea that the content I chose had a broader impact than expected. It motivates me to continue selecting content thoughtfully, providing relevant and appreciated information. Knowing that the content I shared was significant enough to be forwarded makes me feel

useful, not just to the recipient but to others as well. This creates a chain reaction of sharing, involving more beneficiaries, and motivates me to make impactful, thoughtful choices for future content.

Interviewer: Sure, sure. You have been exhaustive. Nowadays, many university students focus on managing their future careers and see sharing electronic content as a strategic component of career development through platforms like LinkedIn or connecting via email. Do you think this applies to your generation as well?

Participant: For my generation, the approach was different. We are called baby boomers, and career management focused on traditional networks and personal interactions rather than electronic content sharing. We mainly met in person, had phone calls, and exchanged letters. There was no digital sharing like today. We connected professionally through face-to-face interactions, phone calls, and letters. The equivalent of today's digital sharing was exchanging physical articles, books, and business cards. We mailed these items to demonstrate our professionalism and keep up with industry trends.

Interviewer: But you have adapted to modern technologies in recent years.

Participant: Yes, we had to adapt as the digital world became more prevalent. We started with emails and professional networks like LinkedIn. The essence remained the same: sharing valuable information to build credibility and maintain professional connections. It was more cumbersome than now, but we managed.

Interviewer: And personally, how was it for you?

Participant: I adapted over time. Initially, my career involved in-person meetings and conferences to create direct relationships. As digital platforms became more widespread, I embraced tools like LinkedIn and emails to maintain connections. Although I didn't grow up with these technologies, I recognized their value in enhancing my professional experience. Sharing content digitally kept me involved in industry trends and active in my field, even after retirement. I continue to stay informed and connected in my former work area.

Interviewer: Sure. Has anyone ever sent you content on LinkedIn for career-related reasons, maybe a young person interested in your managerial experience?

Participant: Yes, my LinkedIn profile attracted young people who contacted me. Besides providing personal information and helping them, I connected them with currently active professionals. This altruistic action gratified me because, through LinkedIn, I helped young people professionally connect.

Interviewer: Would you say the need for personal and professional growth can initiate sharing behavior?

Participant: Absolutely. The desire for professional and personal growth can initiate sharing behavior. Sharing relevant content keeps us updated, showing engagement with industry trends and thought leadership. Professionally, it establishes credibility and authority in our field. Sharing valuable content makes us seen as informed resources, opening new opportunities and collaborations. Personally, it fosters deeper connections with peers, valuing our past achievements. This initiates sharing behavior for mutual benefit and continuous learning.

Interviewer: How do you see your online sharing habits changing in the future?

Participant: Currently, I am satisfied with how I use Facebook and LinkedIn to stay in touch and share interesting content. However, I consider exploring new platforms like TikTok and Instagram. My nephews use these social media, and I want to engage with them in their world, sharing content that interests them. I want to be closer to them and interact differently.

Interviewer: Perfect. My questions are finished. Thank you very much for this thorough interview.

Participant: I hope I was helpful...

Interviewer: Absolutely. I will send you the transcript for review to see if you want to modify, delete, or add anything.

Participant: Okay, thank you, Alessia. It was a real pleasure for me too.

Interviewer: Goodbye.

Participant: Goodbye.

Appendix J: Thank You Letter to Participants

Dear,

I want to thank you for taking the time to sit down for an interview and share your stories and experiences openly with me. I truly appreciate your willingness to support my research and your valuable feedback. You will soon receive the transcript to review the content and make any required changes. I am looking forward to analyzing the interview transcripts and discovering important insights from your experience.

Thank again for your contribution to the research.

Sincerely,

Alessia Giardinelli

Appendix K: Letter for Member Checking

Dear,

I hope this message finds you well. Thank you once again for the valuable insights shared during our interview in June. As part of our ongoing discussion, I have attached the transcript of our session for your review.

Please take a moment to look over the transcript to ensure everything has been transcribed accurately and feel free to make any additions or adjustments; your feedback is crucial to the accuracy of our data. The document may be lengthy, so please review as much as you are comfortable with—this is part of our formal member-checking process.

Should you decide to make any edits, kindly use the "Track Changes" feature in Word to help me identify the modifications. Please return the edited document to me. If I do not hear from you within a week, I will assume the transcript is accurate and proceed with the analysis.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation. I look forward to incorporating your feedback and will keep you updated on the progress of our research.

Best regards,
Alessia Giardinelli

Appendix L: Word Clouds

Word Cloud Generation Z

Word Cloud Millennials (Generation Y)

Word Cloud Generation X

Word Cloud Baby Boomers

Appendix M: Data Saturation Proof

Interview's Topics Summary	
Participant's ID	**New Topics Discussed**
Gen Z 1	Comfort using digital and online technology, Use of social media Platforms, frequency of forwarding online content, forwarding more often directly from the app where the content was found, evolution usage social media from adoption till now, Positive evolution of TikTok, evolution tastes of online content consumption, asking for a gift by forwarding an online content, Interest in TikToks about Fashion, forwarding an online content to friends to ask for their opinions and to feel part of a group with shared interests, forwarding an online content knowing the other person will like it, forwarding online content shown

	by social media algorithm, forward to warn, forward to express closeness, criteria to decide whether to forward or not, forward to warn from bad products, forward to express feelings, quick or thoughtful forwarding, difference forwarding habits of adolescents and adults, forward to restart a relationship, level of confidence and forwarding behavior, forward to propose an activity and to feel included, forward to know what you are going to talk about in person, forward to show who you are, content representing the sender, forward to build a certain image, forward moved by passion, forward moved by altruism, expressing feelings through the content shared, forward online content to improve academic image, future forwarding behavior, evolution social media content.
Millennial 1	Forwarding content only to people the sender knows well, role of patience and quality in consuming content, forwarding and leadership position, search for content to forward, bilateral sharing, forwarding divergent and exceptionally relevant content, forwarding to strengthen the relationship, forward relationships (do not) stop, Forwarding and leadership role, Criteria used before forwarding, Forward to show professional competence, Feeling fulfilled after forwarding content moved by altruism.
Gen Z 2	Factors affecting frequency of forwarding behavior, Forward content related to a conversation in person to discuss it further, Future forwarding behavior influenced by evolution of habits, Evolution Social Media usage in the future
Baby Boomer 2	Sharing more with people you cannot see, Stimulate a sense of community, Forward to inspire, Forward timely and approximately to a particular period, Forwarding to show the receiver you appreciate and understand him/her, Forward to create a sense of continuity and projection to the future, Forwarding chai, Future forwarding behavior influenced by broader impact of past forwarding, From traditional to online networking, Forwarding online content to enhance professional experience, Forward to grow personally and professionally
Gen X 2	Main criteria to forward, avoid forwarding if there is no time to check reliability, forwarding relationship leading to a new real relationship, Forwarding content helps removing any initial awkwardness in person, Evolution Motivation to forward.
Gen X 1	TikTok adoption to connect with younger relatives and to feel younger, Forward to cause a laugh, Avoid sharing tragic videos, Forward to do good, Forward to improve daily life
Millennial 2	Thinking about the value the content will give to the relationship, Forward to

	reinforce one's own character in the eyes of the receiver, Knowing who to target before forwarding
Baby Boomer 1	Forward online content to propose a group gathering

Appendix N: 1st and 2nd Rounds of Coding

Black citations are Gen Z's

Red Citations are Millennial's

Green Citations are Gen X's

Light Blue Citations are Baby Boomers'

Citation	1st Round of coding	2nd Round of conding
"I use WhatsApp to chat with my friends or to share links to content from other social networks. Besides this, I use TikTok and Instagram to watch videos or posts that contain information about more serious topics like politics or general culture." "Let's go in descending order from most to least used. TikTok is first, followed by Instagram, LinkedIn, and lastly, Facebook. Entertainment and scientific content definitely keep me most engaged. Also, funny content is very common. So, mainly scientific and funny content. For LinkedIn, it's very vertical, focusing on work-related content." "LinkedIn is about defining your professional persona through sharing. It's more about constructing your image professionally than privately. Public diffusion on LinkedIn is crucial for defining how you are perceived in the professional world." "Yes, LinkedIn and Twitter (which I use only for reading) are more informative, while Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook are for entertainment. There's a greater division in purpose." "I regularly use platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest, and LinkedIn. I use Instagram a lot for leisure, to see other people's content,	Use of digital media Platforms	Use of digital media Platforms

but at the same time, for information, following certain pages about society, work, and other interests. While TikTok is more for leisure, to pass the time."		
"On Facebook, I like to follow friends and family, share recipes, and actively participate in my interests like cooking and travel. It is a wonderful way to feel somewhat connected, especially with those I don't see often. On LinkedIn, I focus more on professional networking. I like to stay in touch with former colleagues and peers, share articles on management and leadership, and stay somewhat updated on industry news. It is important for me to maintain these connections and the knowledge I built during my career even though I am now retired. Besides social networking, I also read news online to stay informed about current events."		
"So, regularly, primarily Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn…Well, definitely watching posts and videos mainly related to my passion. And then also reading news about politics, current events, travel, and the whole enology part as well"		
"As for platforms, let's say the most well-known ones, from WhatsApp to YouTube and passing through Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn."		
"I use platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, you know, the current social media... TG Com app, I use official newspaper apps."		
"I mainly use social media like Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. I also read newspaper articles online, like Corriere della Sera, which I consider important to stay updated with current events."		
"The frequency with which I share online content is quite high; I spend many hours on social networks, so consequently, I send a lot of videos, averaging about 15 videos a day."	frequency of forwarding online content	

"I share often but not excessively. I try to select the content I share, both privately and professionally. So, medium-high frequency." "So, let's say that I use Instagram much less for sharing content because I spend significantly less time on it and mainly use it for information. Whereas on TikTok, I typically share about 5-6 pieces of content a day, depending on how much I use it." "it is the activity I do most online. If I find content particularly interesting, I automatically forward it either to my family members or friends."		frequency of forwarding behavior
"It depends on several factors. The first is the frequency with which I use the platform during the day. There are days when I spend only an hour on it, so the sharing frequency is lower. On days when I have more time and feel like spending it on TikTok, the sharing frequency is higher. The third factor is how the algorithm is performing at that moment. If the algorithm suggests videos that aren't relevant to what I want to share, the sharing frequency will be lower. It depends on usage frequency and the algorithm." "the informative category is the one I mainly forward because it is particularly important to me. However, if it is humorous content, I tend to forward it to my friends, perhaps more often on WhatsApp, so that a playful and enjoyable moment is created, and perhaps the conversation continues."	Factors affecting frequency of forwarding behavior	
"The links I forward are fewer than the videos I send directly from the app where they were made. For example, the links I send on WhatsApp that come from TikTok are fewer than the original TikToks that I send directly on the app." "If the video is shared directly in TikTok DMs, sometimes it doesn't need a caption because the video is	forwarding directly from the app where the content was found	forwarding directly from the app where the content was found

self-explanatory."		
"Instagram has become more informative as a social network. If before I used it only to see funny or generally light content, now it is also a means I use to inform myself about what is happening in the world." "TikTok reintroduced virality, unlike Instagram, which had a social backstep" "Initially, Instagram followed a similar format to Facebook with personal photos and videos in the feed, but with the introduction of Stories, posting in the feed became less frequent in favor of more frequent Stories." "Before, there was more sharing of thoughts and quotes. You'd see many group photos on Facebook. Now, the change is that people post selfies or travel days, less common things. Before, everything was shared."	Instagram Content Evolution	Instagram Content Evolution
"TikTok has also become quite informative. It used to have another name, Musical.ly, and you could mainly see dancing videos or videos where users were singing. Now, TikTok has become a platform that can have many different types of content, from informative to entertainment, so TikTok has also undergone a positive change." "TikTok is raw and real. I believe this shift from superficial to real content has brought back the desire to share." "TikTok reintroduced virality, unlike Instagram, which had a social backstep." "I've been using TikTok for about three or four years now. I started posting some content recently, but it's very light, pastime videos. I use the platform mainly for leisure, to escape the heaviness that might be found on other social media."	TikTok Content Evolution	TikTok Content Evolution
"Yes, nowadays, I notice there's very little patience in consuming content.	Patience in consuming online content	Patience in consuming online content

If the content doesn't get to the point quickly, I tend to skip it."		
"Previously, there wasn't as much focus on content quality, so there is much more selection now" "This professional use helped me be more methodical and targeted in how I interacted online. Now, I think it's very important to focus on the quality rather than the quantity of online content. I follow pages and join groups that align with my interests like cooking clubs, travel forums, and of course, some news sources to stay informed."	Selecting content of quality	Selecting content of quality
"Yes, I filter a lot, sending only divergent or exceptionally relevant content." "For example, if you send content of a certain relevance you could being perceived as a knowledgeable person or professional." "Another very important factor for me is the reliability of the content. I make sure it is reliable and not fake. Then, I prefer to share articles, reviews, or videos that come from credible sources or that I believe are well-researched and therefore provide truthful information…I ask myself questions like "Is this topic I am about to share useful? Is it educational? Is it inspiring?" So, I try to share content that can positively influence and add value or something more to someone's day or life." "to distinguish myself, I tend to share content that not only interests me but adds value or offers a unique perspective to my network. For example, I might send a lesser-known but impactful managerial strategy or an innovative fashion trend that hasn't reached the mainstream." "There are many shares, but if you manage to share content characterized by unique information, it takes time but yields results in	Forwarding divergent and exceptionally relevant content	Forwarding divergent and exceptionally relevant content

terms of strengthening the network and building a debate, definitely…Leads to a critical discussion, in a positive sense" "It happened a while ago. I read that a lack of vitamin D can be associated with a higher probability of cancer but mainly causes severe fatigue. Since it was a relevant article, I immediately shared it with family and friends."		
"In this case, I forwarded this video to my mother to express my interest in this type of item because I think it is a quite beautiful item, trendy, and I forwarded it to my mother to show her my interest and my desire to own this item."	asking for a gift by forwarding an online content	asking for a gift by forwarding an online content
"When I come across a similar type of video, I tend to share it, if not with my mother, then with friends to show it to them or to get their opinions and comments, to feel part of a group that shares my interests. So, it's also a way to chat with them and keep in touch by sending these links." "But it's not just about the act of sharing because there is a subsequent commitment. For example, when I share an article on work management on LinkedIn, it doesn't end with the act of sharing... we delve into that shared content. So, we exchange opinions on how to apply our respective experiences and ideas. This keeps the professional and intellectual relationship stimulating and alive" "For example, when I share a recipe in my Facebook cooking group, it's not just about the recipe itself; it's about stimulating a sense of community."	forwarding an online content to ask for opinions and to feel part of a group with shared interests	forwarding an online content to ask for opinions and to feel part of a group with shared interests
"Since I know that my friends and my sister also liked it a lot, sharing it was a way to create a conversation about the main theme of the video" "When I am online and see something interesting or moving, I often think about who among my friends or family might appreciate it.	Forwarding an online content knowing the other person will like it to spark a conversation	Forwarding an online content knowing the other person will like it to spark a conversation

For example, if I find a great article on the benefits of yoga for seniors or a beautiful travel video about Sicily, I can't help but send it directly to a friend who just started doing yoga or to my cousin who loves traveling as much as I do. It is a bit like saying, "I saw this and thought of you." I do this quite often actually. It feels like I am chatting with them even when we are not together. And when they respond, it starts a little conversation about it, which is wonderful." "But it's not just about the act of sharing because there is a subsequent commitment. For example, when I share an article on work management on LinkedIn, it doesn't end with the act of sharing. It often leads to discussions among us former colleagues, and we delve into that shared content" "There are many shares, but if you manage to share content characterized by unique information, it takes time but yields results in terms of strengthening the network and building a debate, definitely…Leads to a critical discussion, in a positive sense" "The type of relationship you have with the people you forward these messages to is fundamental. So, at least for me, this also applies to friends with whom we are constantly in contact because there is … the sharing of similar thoughts and values, this allows us to always maintain a balance and possibly also create those communication situations useful to also keep the relationship alive"		
"if I didn't like a series or a movie, it generally doesn't appear on my For You page on social media because by not showing interest, I don't get these videos, and therefore, I don't forward them." "The third factor is how the algorithm is performing at that moment. If the algorithm suggests	Forward pre-selected content shown by the social media algorithm	Forward pre-selected content shown by the social media algorithm

videos that aren't relevant to what I want to share, the sharing frequency will be lower." "Well, I don't do a lot of searches because my algorithm is well identified with my preferences, so I get content that interests me, like daily news, general culture news, recipes, articles on children, medical advancements, things like that. Fashion."		
"I mainly focus on sharing content I want to watch or search for at a given moment."	Sharing content found or searched	Sharing content found or searched
"It has happened to me to share such videos to inform friends or even relatives that a certain product might not be of good quality, to prevent them from buying it." "I don't send only positive reviews but also negative ones to inform others to be more careful." "More than anything I warn about fake news because unfortunately even creating fake news has become increasingly easy now even with artificial intelligence"	Forward to warn	Forward to warn
"My sister reacted by also showing her affection towards me and agreeing with what I wanted to show her, agreeing with my feelings" "I like jazz music, so sharing jazz-related content reflects my emotions and sentiments...I share it to express my feelings."	Forward to express feelings	Forward to express feelings
"Regarding the more serious videos, if we want to define them that way, there is a more rational process behind it because they may deal with more important topics. Instead, regarding entertaining videos, if I find it funny, I don't think much about it and share it with ease." "It depends on the type of content. If it's light and easy to consume, the sharing is very quick without much thought. For more thoughtful or informative content, especially if it's morally heavy, there's a more careful reflection. When sharing with close	Quick and thoughtful forwarding	Quick or thoughtful forwarding

people, it can be quicker, but if the group is larger or includes less close people, the reflection is more thorough."		
"However, if the content is culturally related to the US or another country, sharing isn't immediate because the people I share with may not understand the cultural context if it doesn't reflect Italy."		
"I notice substantial differences between my approach to sharing online content and that of the younger current generations. For example, I often watch my younger nephews who are incredibly quick and adept with technology. They use many platforms like Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, which are more visually oriented and conducive to quick consumption and sharing of content, so they are very fast... For them, everything is very spontaneous and quick."		
"I am very reflective because when you send something, you feel responsible for what you are sending. You are recommending something or expressing disagreement with something, but in all cases, you are putting yourself out there."		
"we prefer to carefully select what we are sending before sending it and there is no more instinctive forwarding like 'look what happened, look did you see,' we don't do it anymore"		
"Among us adolescents, there is a tendency to share more entertaining and leisure videos that don't tackle very serious topics. Among adults, this is less frequent. They also share such videos, but I know that, for example, my parents send us more serious videos that deal with more serious topics, such as news." "I think there is a different approach to sharing across generations. Newer generations tend to share more with their peers compared to ours. My	difference forwarding habits across generations	difference forwarding habits across generations

"Based on my parents' generation, they share very little content because they spend less time on social media. My mother doesn't have social media, so she shares newspaper articles. Their habits are different due to lifestyle or social media usage."

"I would say my comfort level with digital and online technology is quite high compared to some of my peers....I don't consider myself as expert as the younger generation who grew up with this technology, but I definitely feel comfortable and confident navigating the digital world."

"I notice substantial differences between my approach to sharing online content and that of the younger current generations. For example, I often watch my younger nephews who are incredibly quick and adept with technology… For them, everything is very spontaneous and quick. I also notice a greater comfort in revealing more of their personal life online... Unlike the current generations, I focus more on sharing content that I find educational, something that can give advice or add something to my interlocutor, the person I'm connecting with"

"Unlike the current generations, I focus more on sharing content that I find educational, something that can give advice or add something to my interlocutor, the person I'm connecting with."

"Well, it certainly differs substantially from previous generations. They don't have that ability or frequency that perhaps the younger generations have established. Compared to older

generations, I might place myself in a slightly higher bracket. Then it depends if we're talking about generation or just a few years' difference. There are definitely people much more savvy than me regarding the use of social media." "Yes, older people forward more, and younger people less… in family groups with a wide range of generations, older adults share more content than teenagers nowadays." "A year later, I downloaded them, and I must say that from that moment on, I became hooked as well because I think they help you detach from everyday life and occupy idle times. I too became hooked, unfortunately, haha. In fact, my daughter, who still lives with us, sometimes scolds me saying I use them almost more than she does."		
"I share videos primarily to stay in touch with a person because maybe if we don't send messages, sharing videos is a way to stay in touch. These videos show interests and can find some in common, so it's a way to interact and create bonds between two people" "Especially when there's physical distance, sharing content helps keep relationships alive, whether friendships or other types. Sharing content maintains the relationship and keeps conversations going that follow from the shared video." "For example, when I share a recipe in my Facebook cooking group, it's not just about the recipe itself; it's about stimulating a sense of community… This creates a wonderful sense of togetherness, even if we are miles apart." "maybe it happens that you don't see each other for a few weeks with these people but it's as if you had been together anyway and time has flown by, and you didn't even notice it. This is certainly one of the greatest	Forward to keep in touch	Forward to keep in touch

values these social tools have given, that is, the possibility of maintaining relationships with people you care about or with whom you enjoy interacting." "I realized that social media could also be a bridge to stay connected with loved ones, even those far away, like my son in London."		
"Or maybe when I don't write much to a person or don't feel close to them, sending videos is a way to restart the conversation and that relationship." "Sharing content can lead to conversations about the content, helping maintain the relationship, even if you can see the person in real life." "I think forwarding online content is a great way to start conversations and share experiences even if we aren't physically together. For example, helping others discover something new or simply providing a moment of leisure allows me to feel closer to my friends and family"	Forward to feel closer to a person you do not often talk to	Forward to feel closer to a person you do not often talk to
"I also noticed that sharing content reconnects me with people I no longer spoke to. With these people, you can meet again. An old friendship can be rekindled. How many times does it happen that in the same place we lived ten years ago, we had a strong friendship with someone, but now we don't meet anymore? Instead, with these means, you can… keep alive a friendship that might not rekindle with face-to-face relationships"	Forward online content to reconnect with people you no longer talk to	
"But if a video is interesting and more serious about products or information, I use these videos to start a conversation with someone I don't have a great relationship with." "It has happened. It helps rekindle the relationship" "So, I decided to send him the link to the ad I found on Facebook and propose my idea. In the end, we	Forward serious online content to restart a relationship	Forward online content to restart a relationship

went, and we rediscovered our friendship. In fact, today he is one of my closest friends, and we have started to cultivate our shared passions again."		
"Sharing content provides a topic to discuss with the person, thus strengthening the relationship. It's like a mutual gift; you give something, and they give back, reinforcing the relationship" "There are content types that represent the relationship you have with the person, so sharing them implicitly strengthens the bond." "Sharing content on a related topic, even humorously, helps me connect with people." "These shares are not just about passing information but also about keeping our enthusiasm alive by sharing what concerns travel and cooking. This has contributed to interacting more with friends or family, something we might not have done before. Keeping our conversations lively and our bonds strong while sharing experiences about our adventures and tastes fills me with joy" "For example, when I send my young nephew an article on technology, it's not the article itself, but I show him I know him, I understand him, and I care about his passions. This aims to share and strengthen the bond with him, affirming our mutual interests." "No, for me, it's not about strengthening existing family relationships. It's more about creating new friendships and contacts, not strengthening existing family ties." "it is clear that what I like, being 51 years old, is different from what a 15-year-old girl might like and I am fully aware of this, but maybe there are those points of contact like we were saying before of things that we	Forwarding to strengthen the relationship	Forwarding to strengthen the relationship

both like and then you use it to maintain a stronger relationship with that person." "For example, helping others discover something new or simply providing a moment of leisure allows me to feel closer to my friends and family. So, our bond inevitably strengthens through common interests and meaningful exchanges"		
"People with whom I have very close relationships, like my girlfriend, my brother, my sister, my in-laws, in general, people I have a strong relationship with." "It varies based on the person I'm sharing with. Content that is harder to share and where I'm not sure the other person will appreciate it is often social or political content. I tend to share this content with people I know share my views on those topics." "Initially, when building confidence with colleagues, it happened rarely. Now, with more confidence, content is shared more frequently." "especially for health-related content, I send it to people close to me, family, friends, because I care about their well-being and want to be helpful." "direct forwarding of political content was targeted more or less only to acquaintances or friends who had the same views as mine." "especially because the circle with whom I do this is quite small, and I don't forward content to people I don't know."	Forwarding content only to people the sender knows well	Forwarding content only to people the sender knows well
"I haven't sent these types of contents to teachers, only to friends or family, people with whom I have a personal relationship... Because it's like crossing a certain boundary that forms in certain environments, in this case, the school." "With professors, no, because there	Avoidance to forward to professors	Avoidance to Forward

isn't that level of familiarity. In Italy, professors don't create a personal relationship with students, aside from thesis advisors. Professors don't know you personally, so sharing content might feel forced."		
"Sometimes it's a matter of time. If I want to delve deeper… I check the source and understand what's behind it. So sometimes there are time constraints. The topic might be interesting, but it goes on hold, and the moment to share it passes, even if I found it interesting. It falls into the category of interesting content but not compelling enough to prioritise sharing"	Avoid forwarding if there is no time to check reliability	
"I tend to avoid sending tragic news or sharing gory videos" "Useful, informative, recreational, the content I forward can be anything that can generate interest, so interesting but always with a positive direction"	Avoid sharing tragic videos	
"If the other person is interested, it's mutual. If not, communication eventually stops" "because I don't expect anything. Even if they don't respond, I'll keep sharing because the circle of people I share altruistic content with is very small. Their reactions don't influence my choice." "Feedback is important to me, and the way people respond to my sharing matters. If I share content for a long time with someone who doesn't respond or responds in a way I don't like, it will influence my future sharing. I might reduce or stop sharing content with that person." "If responses are positive and affectionate, I tend to continue sharing similar content. If there's no reaction or interest, I stop sharing or change content type to understand what interests them and still receive a response."	forward relationships (do not) stop	forward relationships (do not) stop
"I recently sent a video to my group of friends about a new space opened in my city…By sending this video, I	Forward to spark interest in a particular activity	Forward to spark interest in a particular activity

wanted to spark interest in my friends, and the following Saturday, we actually went and had a lot of fun."		
"I shared this review with a couple of friends who were planning a trip there because I knew they would appreciate a reliable review. We share a common passion for culinary arts, and finding authentic places to eat good food is fundamental for organizing our trips."		
"On a personal level, sharing travel research or advice with friends and family generates particular enthusiasm because it encourages the planning of future experiences."		
"the goal isn't to share content for the sake of it but to build interactions, relationships, and eventually meet people in person to participate in activities together."		
"It is about sharing places or situations that can be an inspiration for something to do together next time or a concert, an art exhibition, or maybe just a water park to go to next summer, things like that."		
"if someone comes to tell you, look, there are also other realities, let's dialogue, maybe it is the basis for creating a conference, for creating a territorial event and so on, let's start talking about it on a social network"		
"I send funny content or DIY projects with my husband for a future experience"		
"So, I decided to send him the link to the ad I found on Facebook and propose my idea. In the end, we went, and we rediscovered our friendship. In fact, today he is one of my closest friends, and we have started to cultivate our shared passions again."		
"Let's say it's recognized because they see I am very present in the group chat, proposing activities to	Forwarding recognized role and inclusion	Forwarding recognized role and inclusion

do. So, this type of role is recognized. I feel very included in the group doing this because I feel my presence in the group is appreciated."		
"Because in the end, I hope that what I shared added a special touch to their travel plans, and seeing their enthusiasm and knowing my suggestion was an integral part of their adventure was very gratifying."		
"when I share something, and people engage, like, and comment, it's not just recognition; it gives me a true sense of connection."		
"if the content is particularly interesting or exclusive, it can lead to recognition, interactions"		
"Sending videos ensures a certain conversation when you see that person, so sending a video that interests both and will be the topic of conversation when we meet."	Forward to have a topic to discuss about when you meet	Forward to have a topic to discuss about when you meet
"when I send videos that talk about topics that interest me and share my ideas, I also use them to my advantage in future conversations, referencing them."		
"It's not only digital, via message, but also in person, like discussing the shared video to confirm they watched it."		
"We shared these endlessly for a month, and it became a shared moment of laughter during a family meal."		
"forwarding content sometimes is just to anticipate what we might say when we see each other, whether it's a happy thing or news. So the particularity lies in the fact that the feeling I have is to want to anticipate what we will do or say when we meet"		
"I share content and then say, "Did you see that video?" And it starts a discussion."		

"If I send a funny content to my son, we might watch it again and laugh." "I share content in groups for more responses and feedback when in company. In school groups, we discuss the shared content, "nice video/post you shared that day," "I laughed/I reflected." When others are around, there's more opportunity to talk about it."		
"I send content that reflects my interests and try to instil it in others. So, videos that express my personality, my interests, traits that define me. It's a demonstration of who I am." "Yes, I shared videos about my passion, dance. By sending these videos, people understand that I am determined, both in dance and in general studies, aiming for a significant career." "Sharing any content, even an animal video, can show my character and identity. Even a trivial video can reveal the personality and identity of the person sharing it." "I think sharing my passions, values, and experiences with others inevitably paints a picture of who I am. It's a way to express myself, even though there are more authentic ways to do so. It shows who I am because I don't send content online without thinking twice. So yes, I am very reflective, and this reflection shows a bit of who I am personally. I don't send things randomly; I think about them and ensure they are reliable. Yes, it might be my age, but I am very thoughtful." "I believe that those who know me well know very well who I am and what my passions are and so on and that I do not need to highlight it unless the other person asks me" "In school groups, I send funny videos about moms to share thoughts.	Forward to show who you are	Forward to show who you are

It shows I have a sense of humour." "I would say no because I don't send content that directly refers to myself, but at the same time, I think the content I forward somehow reflects who I am… I don't exclude that by sending a certain type of content, I am conveying something about myself."		
"it has happened many times that I forwarded a video of a person with my characteristics, maybe saying "This person resembles me" because, in this way, I show others what kind of person I am." "Sharing content feels like sharing parts of our lives, so if I share content with someone, I feel like I'm sharing my interests" "For example, sharing videos about university life, like a student stressed about exams. Sharing these with someone in the same situation or not helps me personify the video, making the other person see the content as a description of me." "I share fashion content to reinforce my character or style, like if a content says "black will be the colour of this year", I forward it and say "see, I always wear black."	Similarity between content and personality of the sender	Similarity between content and personality of the sender
"If I see a personality similar to mine in a person in a video, there is a rational process behind it that makes me think and ask questions like, "Does this person fully demonstrate my characteristics that I can show to others?" Mainly positive, to build a certain image." "Sending videos that warn about a certain product or something else is a way to show my altruism and who I am." "If I share content, it's because I'm interested in it, not to project an intellectual image. I share content that interests me, regardless of the image it portrays."	Forward (not) to build a certain image	

"to distinguish myself, I tend to share content that not only interests me but adds value or offers a unique perspective to my network. For example, I might send a lesser known but impactful managerial strategy or an innovative fashion trend that hasn't reached the mainstream. These pieces allow me to show my knowledge and taste, distinguishing me from others who may share more common or popular content." "Yes, definitely. I try to present myself as informed on certain topics. If you mean image not in a physical sense, but in terms of the uniqueness of the content. I don't like to come across as unprepared or sharing things just because they are popular. I prefer to share content selectively." "I also share … fashion trends when I've already worn or bought an item, saying "I already have it, so I'm fashionable"" "The content I forward definitely influences how others perceive me."		build and reinforce a certain image of yourself by forwarding
"I share fashion content to reinforce my character or style, like if a content says "black will be the colour of this year", I forward it and say "see, I always wear black."	Forward to reinforce one's own character in the eyes of the receiver	
"Yes, I shared videos about my passion, dance. By sending these videos, people understand that I am determined, both in dance and in general studies, aiming for a significant career."	Forward moved by passion	Forward moved by passion
"Sending videos that warn about a certain product or something else is a way to show my altruism and who I am." "I do it mainly for an altruistic reason and to teach others new things, which is part of my altruism and also a motivation for inclusion." "When I see an artist creating their art, I share it purely to spread beauty without expecting anything in return. It's pure altruism, like offering a drink to someone."	Forward moved by altruism	Forward moved by altruism

"because I don't expect anything. Even if they don't respond, I'll keep sharing because the circle of people I share altruistic content with is very small. Their reactions don't influence my choice." "the content I forward isn't just subjective. It often includes informational content. Through that article, I share to inform others about an event or situation." "I shared this review with a couple of friends who were planning a trip there because I knew they would appreciate a reliable review." "sending the link to the crowdfunding was a purely emotional act, and I had no personal gain, it was out of altruism. I don't share content for its own sake. If I do it, it's because I believe in it." "I like sharing content that can help others, like general culture or sports. For example, my sister likes painting, so I share new tutorials for small crafts with kids, or sports content…" "Connecting with others is the first step. For this, altruism is necessary, putting others' interests first. Then, understanding their interests through content sharing, followed by expressing my own." "Obviously, if I send a post or a link, it will definitely be to someone for whom I have some affection and esteem. So, it's inevitable that forwarding useful and relevant content is a consequence of my altruism and my desire not to expect anything in return. In fact, I often forward these contents and don't receive a response, but I continue to do so because, as I said, it's a selfless act."		
"it's something I do often with my sister who doesn't live with me." "There are content types that	Forwarding content representing a relationship	Forwarding content representing a relationship

represent the relationship you have with the person, so sharing them implicitly strengthens the bond."		
"By sending these videos, I try to show her my affection that I might not show by talking to her normally via chat, but I also do it with my best friend to show her my affection that sometimes isn't shown in words…being someone who doesn't show emotions through words, I do it using social media and sharing videos." "I'm not very communicative with words, so sharing content is a way to express affection towards someone without words." "Sharing a beautiful piece of music with my sister, who loves music, is a way of showing I care about her happiness and well-being. It's an act of care, affection, and consideration, fostering a deeper emotional connection compared to a lighter content like travel. Knowing someone thought of you and brought joy to your day can significantly strengthen emotional bonds." "The type of relationship you have with the people you forward these messages to is fundamental. So, at least for me, this also applies to friends with whom we are constantly in contact because there is a real affective value" "I would say I forwarded this video out of affection for my friends, to contribute to their well-being, in this case, during their trip." "Since I often search for content about the city for him or for myself, I almost every time forward it so he stays updated on what surrounds him. It's a concern for him driven by affection and parental care."	Forward to show affection and care without words	Forward to show affection and care without words
"I do it mainly to let others know something I learned at that moment because I'm not interested in showing others or boasting about what I know. It's not my interest	Forward moved by altruism and the desire to be included	Forward moved by altruism and the desire to be included

when sending videos. I do it mainly to let others know new things or things that might help them. In this case, also to feel included, noticing that others appreciate me doing it."		
"Sometimes books don't contain things found on the internet. So, there are videos I use to understand better things I don't grasp well from books or the teacher. I send these videos to friends, for example, for group work, to make our work different from the others in the eyes of the teacher, showing we know alternative things outside the books, but I also do it to enrich my general culture."	Forward online content to be rewarded in school	Forward online content to be rewarded in school
"I'm sure that in the future, I'll start sharing videos that deal with more serious topics than those I talk about with my friends now because I'll have different interests. So, maybe in the future, I'll join this app called LinkedIn that helps me share more professional content with my teachers or this type of thing."	Future forwarding behavior influenced by evolution of interests	Future forwarding behavior influenced by evolution of interests and habits
"I will probably share less content because I think I'll have less time for social media, because I will have a full-time job. The main change will be the reduced frequency of shared content."	Future forwarding behavior influenced by evolution of habits	
"Lately, social media is becoming more truthful. For example, there's this app called BeReal that sends you a notification to take a picture at that exact moment, showing others what you're doing. It's called BeReal to be real, showing what you're really doing at that exact moment, a moment of simple everyday life. So, I think in the future, social media will be more real, showing more live content, not already prepared and organized." "TikTok shows reality instantly, appealing more to today's users. We'll see more real content and highly curated content side by side."	Future evolution social media content	Future evolution social media content
"We tend to read a lot on LinkedIn and share with colleagues, especially since my role requires me to stay updated and disseminate information. We share a lot of this type of information, mainly from LinkedIn	Forwarding and leadership role	Forwarding and leadership role

or sector-specific blogs" "In some groups, people don't spend as much time on social media, so they don't share much content. In other groups, since I share frequently, I might be considered a leader."		
"There's a desire for bilateral sharing, almost like giving a gift." "These shares are not just about passing information but also about keeping our enthusiasm alive by sharing what concerns travel and cooking. This has contributed to interacting more with friends or family, something we might not have done before. Keeping our conversations lively and our bonds strong while sharing experiences about our adventures and tastes fills me with joy." "It's important for me that the conversation is stimulating for both parties."	Bilateral sharing	Bilateral sharing
"When sharing work-related content, I verify the source, confirm it through other sources, and then share the information. Nowadays, anyone can write anything, so finding universally correct information is hard and needs verification"	Criteria Professional Content forwarded	
"For private content sharing, it's different but still involves considering if the content is useful and interesting to both parties." "Yes, it must be content that doesn't offend the recipient. There must be an interest; I don't share with everyone, so I care about what the other person might think... it should be somehow connected to the recipient"	Criteria content forwarded in the private sphere	Assessment criteria content to forward
"I verify the sources to ensure they are reliable before sharing. I don't share impulsively. Like, "You are telling me this, it's very interesting, but let's see if it's true." So that's the main criterion...Then, of course, the topics covered. I start with the subject matter, if it interests me, then check if the sources are reliable."	Main criteria to forward	

"if I think about the content I forward, I think first of its usefulness and then the reaction the other person might have after I forward the content"		
"I send funny videos to people I have a high level of confidence with"	Criteria to forward funny online content	
"In my previous job, I did because my skills weren't enough for my superiors, so I added apparent knowledge by sharing constantly updated content to confirm my competence." "sharing can certainly have an influence over how others perceive you and consequently over future opportunities. For example if you send content of a certain relevance you could being perceived as a knowledgeable person or professional." "First, I try to understand how relevant the topic is, then I think about whether the content aligns with the interests and needs of the person I want to share it with…Another very important factor for me is the reliability of the content. I make sure it is reliable and not fake…I also think a lot about timing. For example, I have to share something timely, something contextualized to the moment, like a festival review. I send this during the festival season and certainly not when the festival is not happening." "Sharing valuable content makes us seen as informed resources, opening new opportunities and collaborations." "When it comes to sharing content related to my passion, which is also a job now, it's also about visibility and sometimes it leads to opportunities." "I could use content sharing… maybe with clients to showcase my professional persona… To take advantage"	Forward to show professional competence	Forward to show professional competence

"The manager appreciated these updates because they demonstrated not only my knowledge of the sector but also my commitment to staying updated on the latest trends and innovations. This, in turn, strengthened his trust in my company as an ideal candidate for the investment. In the end, sharing content played a decisive role in convincing the organization to collaborate with us, leading to a significant investment… These situations don't present themselves often, but this example shows that sharing relevant information can effectively advance one's career regardless of age or industry."		
"I feel fulfilled when my shared advice or recommendations are adopted, like a specific product for a certain issue."

"Exactly, it reassures me that the content I chose was useful and valuable to them. It's not just expressing an opinion on a trend but sharing something that adds value."

"I would say gratified to have been able to contribute. That's almost always the reason why I like sharing content—to be helpful."

"Honestly, I didn't expect that forwarding content could really do good, and I felt truly gratified and useful." | Feeling fulfilled after forwarding content moved by altruism | Feeling fulfilled after forwarding content moved by altruism |
| "It depends on the content. For social topics, I share with those interested in that content. For lighter, more general content, I share with people who might not be specifically interested but enjoy the general topic."

"I love sending articles that can inspire a friend in their personal projects or career, especially if they are in a phase of growth or transition. So, something that helps them in some way in what they are doing."

"let's say that fundamentally these ad hoc shares are made either because | Adaptation to receiver's interests | Adaptation to receiver's interests |

there is something really very interesting to communicate to the other person and that you know they might like to receive them also from the other person" "it is clear that what I like, being 51 years old, is different from what a 15-year-old girl might like and I am fully aware of this, but maybe there are those points of contact like we were saying before of things that we both like and then you use it to maintain a stronger relationship with that person." "I share recipes when requested, like for a dinner, saying "we could make this that day." I also share diet content with people who have the same tendency to understand metabolism mechanisms at a certain age" "there are contents I'm not interested in, but I share them with those who might be interested in reading or watching them." "I like sharing content that can help others, like general culture or sports. For example, my sister likes painting, so I share new tutorials for small crafts with kids, or sports content…" "At first, when I started using social media, I was very enthusiastic about everything I could find and tended to share a huge variety of things, from funny videos to current events articles. Over time, I noticed that not everything interested everyone equally…Essentially, I learned to better know my audience and adapt content to maintain relationships without becoming boring or sometimes even intrusive"		
"You adapt to current trends, but if a platform loses interest, users stop using it… Currently, nothing interests me as much as the platforms I use now. I'm comfortable with them, but I won't exclude trying new ones. Being in a related work field, staying updated is necessary, so I'll	Evolution Social Media Usage	

likely test new platforms."		
"Social media was a turning point for me. At first, I joined Facebook out of personal curiosity and to understand fundamentally what it was about. Gradually and rapidly, it became important to stay connected, especially with friends and family."		
"I am satisfied with how I use Facebook and LinkedIn to stay in touch and share interesting content. However, I am considering exploring new platforms like TikTok and Instagram. My nephews use these social media, and I want to engage with them in their world, sharing content that interests them. I want to be closer to them and interact differently."		Evolution Social Media Usage
"I encounter many new trends, but it takes me time to adapt. It's not as immediate for me as it is for younger generations or some in my generation. I need to metabolize these new trends. So, there are many I could use but don't fully exploit yet."		
"Here you would expect that instead, the social network continues to maintain its logical thread for which it was born and therefore to value, complicate, and push certain realities"		
"Maybe now I am also interested in videos that contain information, not only about politics but also about events that happen daily. Before, I avoided this type of video because I didn't find any interest in it, but now, growing up and maturing, if I happen to see a video that I think can enrich me culturally, I watch it."	evolution tastes of online content consumption	
"Gradually and rapidly, it became important to stay connected, especially with friends and family. I would say more with those family members or friends who live far from me."	Sharing more with people you cannot see	Sharing more with people you cannot see
"it's beautiful to share the same interests because it's not always easy.		

These means allow us to unite with people who share our interests, which is gratifying and fulfilling. It's a sense of belonging that might not be found with people physically close to you because they might have different interests"		
"This was wonderful because I could share photos and updates, keeping the sense of community alive." "Young people comment a lot, like, and share content almost instantly. We are much slower. They create conversations, this sense of community much more rapidly than us." "It goes beyond sharing information; it's about creating interactions and building stronger relationships. For example, when I share a recipe in my Facebook cooking group, it's not just about the recipe itself; it's about stimulating a sense of community." "I share content in groups for more responses and feedback when in company. In school groups, we discuss the shared content, "nice video/post you shared that day," "I laughed/I reflected." When others are around, there's more opportunity to talk about it."	Stimulate a sense of community	Stimulate a sense of community
"I love sending articles that can inspire a friend in their personal projects or career, especially if they are in a phase of growth or transition." "This way, you connect with people who share your interests, which is wonderful because you only learn and it's really engaging."	Forward to inspire	Forward to inspire
"I also think a lot about timing. For example, I have to share something timely, something contextualized to the moment, like a festival review. I send this during the festival season and certainly not when the festival is not happening. Or I send work management advice when I know a former colleague is taking on a leadership role at that moment."	Forward timely and approximately to a particular period	Forward timely and approximately to a particular period
"By sharing content that aligns with	Forwarding to show the	Forwarding to show the receiver

someone's interests, I am essentially affirming our relationship. I don't know how to explain it. Showing what I appreciate and understand about them… in a way, I show I appreciate their interest. And I appreciate what really matters to them. It's like I connect psychologically with them." "For example, when I send my young nephew an article on technology, it's not the article itself, but I show him I know him, I understand him, and I care about his passions. This aims to share and strengthen the bond with him, affirming our mutual interests." "I share content with my children just to show that I'm also interested in what they like" "I like sharing content that can help others, like general culture or sports. For example, my sister likes painting, so I share new tutorials for small crafts with kids, or sports content…"	receiver you appreciate and understand him/her	you appreciate and understand him/her
"So, when I share something like a TripAdvisor review with friends, I invite them into my mental space. We discuss, plan, and base our plans on this review. This creates a sense of unity and continuity in our relationship, strengthening our bond through shared memories or projecting into the future by planning something together." "It maintains a sense of connection, thinking about a future moment, a future meeting. This happens often with former colleagues. For example, I found a video about a new Italian restaurant that opened nearby. Knowing my former colleague Maria is a food enthusiast, I sent her the video on WhatsApp with a message saying, "This place looks fantastic; we should try it together sometime." She immediately responded, and we set a date for the following week. Sharing that video brought us together, and we planned something fun. We went to the restaurant together, enjoying the place."	Forward to create a sense of continuity and projection to the future	
	receiver you appreciate and understand him/her	you appreciate and understand him/her

"I have specific friends with whom almost every day we send each other something to laugh about, and it is also a pleasant moment of the day because you almost expect that message to come from that specific person and you maybe respond by sending another one. But it is a very restricted circle to two or three specific people with whom to play this way and have those ten minutes of healthy mental relaxation that make you think about absolutely nothing."		Forward content to create continuity in a relationship
"With work colleagues we share work-related, content like brand performance we discussed in person. Later, I might share related content to remind them of the conversation and have more to discuss."	Forward content related to a past conversation to discuss it further	
"People often express their gratitude, and sometimes the content I send gets forwarded to others in their network because they found it relevant and enjoyable. This shows the shared content resonated, not just for the original recipient but was valuable enough to be shared further." "I have specific friends with whom almost every day we send each other something to laugh about and it is also a pleasant moment of the day because you almost expect that message to come from that specific person and you maybe respond by sending another one. But it is a very restricted circle to two or three specific people with whom to play this way and have those ten minutes of healthy mental relaxation that make you think about absolutely nothing." "So, our bond inevitably strengthens through common interests and meaningful exchanges because it creates a kind of chain reaction. I send content to you, you send content to me—it's a continuous exchange."	Forwarding chain	Forwarding chain
"Knowing that the content I shared was significant enough to be forwarded makes me feel useful, not	Future forwarding behavior influenced by broader impact of past forwarding	Future forwarding behavior influenced by broader impact of past forwarding

just to the recipient but to others as well. This creates a chain reaction of sharing, involving more beneficiaries, and motivates me to make impactful, thoughtful choices for future content." "Honestly, I didn't expect that forwarding content could really do good, and I felt truly gratified and useful. This experience fueled my desire to forward this type of content even more."		
"we had to adapt as the digital world became more prevalent. We started with emails and professional networks like LinkedIn. The essence remained the same: sharing valuable information to build credibility and maintain professional connections. It was more cumbersome than now, but we managed."	From traditional to online networking	From traditional to online networking
"Although I didn't grow up with these technologies, I recognized their value in enhancing my professional experience. Sharing content digitally kept me involved in industry trends and active in my field, even after retirement. I continue to stay informed and connected in my former work area." "When it comes to sharing content related to my passion, which is also a job now, it's also about visibility and sometimes it leads to opportunities." "The company for which I now have the honour of being the commercial director published a search for agents on the national territory on the LinkedIn page of the company that I then re-shared on my page to amplify the volume of this communication and I forwarded the position also to some close connections of mine…I have more than 750 people I am connected with, it is clear that I become the amplification tool of the signal we are launching." "I think forwarding certain types of content related to the professional field can lead to certain opportunities. For example, a couple	Forwarding online content to enhance professional experience	Forwarding online content to enhance professional experience

of years ago, an opportunity arose for the development and growth of my company during a conference where the manager of an organization was looking for well-known companies to invest in… I often found myself sending him articles, for example, about new eco-friendly materials that could revolutionize the market. Through those articles, I demonstrated my interest and involvement in the project and potential investment. This certainly helped build and maintain a solid and proactive professional relationship."		
"The desire for professional and personal growth can initiate sharing behaviour. Sharing relevant content keeps us updated, showing engagement with industry trends and thought leadership. Professionally, it establishes credibility and authority in our field. Sharing valuable content makes us seen as informed resources, opening new opportunities and collaborations. Personally, it fosters deeper connections with peers, valuing our past achievements, initiating sharing behaviour for mutual benefit and continuous learning." "I don't hide from you that in a moment of difficulty that I experienced a few months ago with my company, I used the LinkedIn tool to look for new opportunities" "The manager appreciated these updates because they demonstrated not only my knowledge of the sector but also my commitment to staying updated on the latest trends and innovations. This, in turn, strengthened his trust in my company as an ideal candidate for the investment. In the end, sharing content played a decisive role in convincing the organization to collaborate with us, leading to a significant investment" "especially in a professional context where the right information at the right time can make a big difference,	Forward to grow personally and professionally	Forward to grow personally and professionally

I'm sure many in my generation see forwarding content as an opportunity."		
"Certainly, absolutely. Moreover, through sharing within the social network, real friendships can form. I've come to know these people personally, forming relationships that go beyond social media... the goal isn't to share content for the sake of it but to build interactions, relationships, and eventually meet people in person to participate in activities together." "With a woman from the wine industry, a bit younger than me. We started by sharing posts, stories, reels on Instagram, and then met by chance at an event, and now we meet and call each other regularly. We've formed a personal relationship, like checking on each other's health and family ... To think it all started from a social network and sharing common content to building a real friendship, inviting each other to events and activities." "The arrival first of cell phones, SMS, then the arrival of smartphones and everything that followed has certainly revolutionized the way we relate to others and at the same time also expand the circle of acquaintances."	Forwarding relationship leading to a new real relationship	Forwarding relationship leading to a new real relationship
"Sharing content helps pick up the conversation in person, removing any initial awkwardness.... it's a way to prepare. Sharing content helps you be prepared for discussions."	Forwarding content helps removing any initial awkwardness in person	Forwarding content helps removing any initial awkwardness in person
"My motivations might change because I'm someone who needs new stimuli. I need new goals and things to keep me interested." "Connecting with others is the first step. For this, altruism is necessary, putting others' interests first. Then, understanding their interests through content sharing, followed by expressing my own. I don't think this will change because it's almost selfish. I could share content that only interests me, but if there's no	Evolution Motivation to forward	Evolution Motivation to forward

response, it's pointless. So, connection with another individual comes first, then the other two." "Looking back, I can say that the reasons I share things online have changed a lot over time. At first, I approached these tools mainly to understand what my children found so interesting about them… Over time, I began to discover the true value of these platforms—not just as a pastime but as a way to stay in touch. I realized that social media could also be a bridge to stay connected with loved ones, even those far away, like my son in London. … Then I started seeing content sharing as an extension of my persona, both in personal and professional life. Not only do I share to keep company or pass time, but also to offer something useful to others.. On a professional level, I noticed how useful it can be to share important and relevant content. It's a way to show that you are up-to-date and knowledgeable, which is crucial in the business world today."		
"I use TikTok more than anything to make me feel younger too and allow me to stay informed about my daughter's tastes and be able to manage relationships with her better. In the end, you do it for that too." "At first, I approached these tools mainly to understand what my children found so interesting about them. It was a way to keep up with what they were doing, to enter their world a bit."	Social media adoption to connect with younger relatives and to feel younger	Social media adoption to connect with younger relatives and to feel younger
"Videos of LOL or certain comic situations like a joke by Uccio De Santis or Mudu or a clip from a Checco Zalone movie, situations that, for better or worse, lift everyone's mood a bit" "If I send a funny content to my son, we might watch it again and laugh." "Yes, but also light, funny content like jokes, videos, things to lighten the day…To make someone smile in	Forward to cause a laugh	Forward to cause a laugh

that moment." "if it is humorous content, I tend to forward it to my friends, perhaps more often on WhatsApp, so that a playful and enjoyable moment is created, and perhaps the conversation continues."		
"maybe you use the channel to communicate, maybe forwarding content to organise a collection, you know, of clothes or a food collection" "I would say gratified to have been able to contribute. That's almost always the reason why I like sharing content—to be helpful." "Not only do I share to keep company or pass time, but also to offer something useful to others, like advice on a good restaurant or an interesting health article."	Forward to do good	Forward to do good
"Clara (daughter) also plays tennis and since I can't give her direct advice, not having ever practiced tennis… I prefer to anticipate it through video messages or videos of famous coaches who use particular teaching methods that are really very appreciable. This is something that happens often with her, while with my wife maybe more on information related to what could be useful for her gym or she instead always sends me things to buy on Amazon. Let's say that fundamentally we are very practical, so everything we send each other is because it must then have a practical sense and a real impact on our daily life, sometimes precisely to improve it." "If before I shared online mainly to be present, now everything I forward has a clear purpose: to improve someone's day a bit"	Forward to improve daily life	Forward to improve daily life
"before sending content, I think about its value in my relationship with the other person. If I send a funny content to my son, we might watch it again and laugh. Or I send funny content or DIY projects with my husband for a future experience.	Thinking about the value the content will give to the relationship	Thinking about the value the content will give to the relationship

|		
Or I send my mom news about fake news to show she only watches fake news." "Content I forward out of altruism is content that the other person can use to their advantage, so regarding health or even reviews."		
"I share fashion content to reinforce my character or style, like if a content says "black will be the colour of this year", I forward it and say "see, I always wear black.""	Forward to reinforce one's own character in the eyes of the receiver	Forward to reinforce one's own character in the eyes of the receiver
"now I share Facebook posts about my children's school to reach my friends who are parents, showing the school's excellence. But for singles, I share more general content on Instagram, like travels. Each social media has a specific audience, and I know who to target." "Essentially, I learned to better know my audience and adapt content to maintain relationships"	Knowing who to target before forwarding	Knowing who to target before forwarding
"I recently sent a video to my group of friends about a new space opened in my city…By sending this video, I wanted to spark interest in my friends, and the following Saturday, we actually went and had a lot of fun." "Last month I sent the link to the outlet's Facebook page because they had the Spring Black Days and were offering additional discounts up to 50%. I immediately thought to notify the group, and at the end of the month, we all went together and had a wonderful day where we talked about how work was going and started planning our summer vacation. So, I would say that even with groups, forwarding content always leads to something."	Forward online content to propose a group gathering	Forward online content to propose a group gathering

Appendix O: Codes' Frequencies

Appendix P: Thematic Analysis Overview

Sub-themes	Themes
Reconnecting and Strengthening Relationships	**Inclusion and Individuation**
Facilitating Conversation and Interaction	
Creating Social Engagement and Inclusion	
Building Personal Identity	
Altruistic Engagement	**Altruism**
Altruistic Assistance	
Altruism born from affection	
Role Assertion	**Control over Growth**
Professional Development and Competence	
Personal Development and Recognition	
Criteria to fulfill before forwarding	**Process behind Forwarding Behavior**
Relevance and Reliability	
Generational Differences Forwarding Behavior	**Dynamics of Digital Engagement Across Generational Cohorts**
Platform and Content evolution	
Evolution of Motivations to engage in e-wom	

Appendix Q: Sankey Diagram
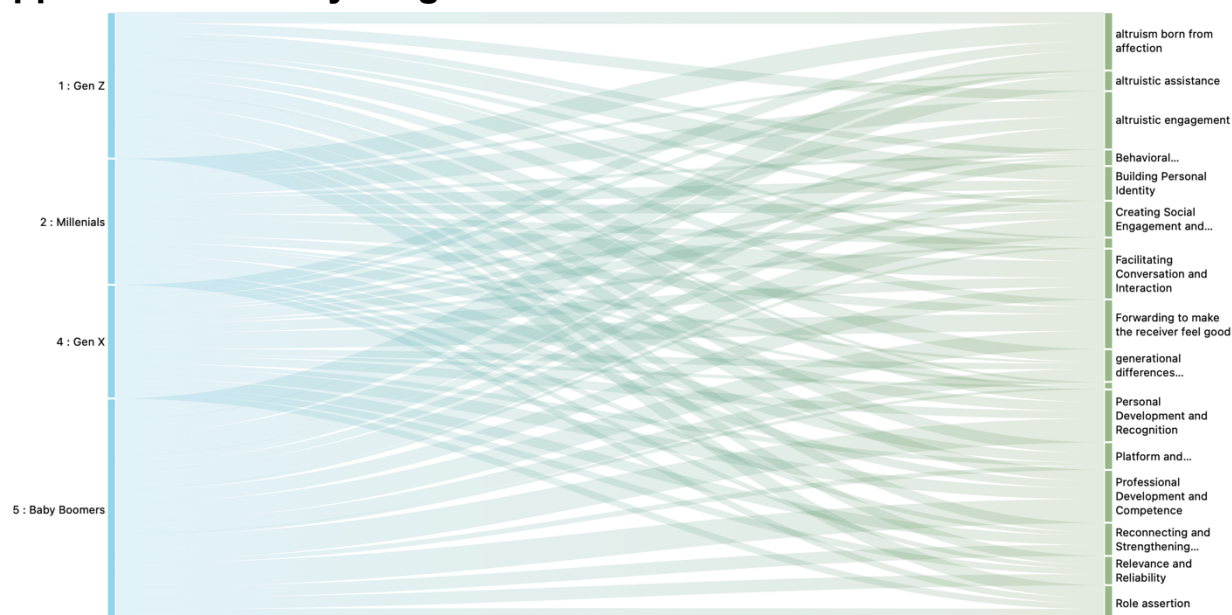
Appendix R: Research Journal Audit Trail

Participants selection
From July 5th to 8th, 2024, I conducted five calls per day with individuals selected through convenience sampling. Each day focused on five people from the same generation. During the calls, participants were asked to display the weekly average usage of their social media apps, as automatically calculated by their phones. Additionally, they were asked about the frequency with which they forward online content. If a participant reported forwarding content more than four times a week, I requested to see some examples. Using purposive sampling, I selected two participants per generation who had an average weekly social media usage exceeding three hours and a forwarding frequency above four times a week.
Interviewing process
The eight interviews were conducted from June 10th to June 18th. The duration of these interviews varied, with some lasting over an hour and others less so. This variation was largely due to how forthcoming the participants were; some eagerly delved deep into all questions, while others were reticent about discussing their deeper psychological motivations, even with probing. Nevertheless, each interview yielded a substantial amount of useful information for the research. It's important to note that all participants identified motivations linked to Inclusion, Altruism, and Control, though their expressions of these motivations varied significantly. For example, it was observed that Gen Z tends to use the forwarding of online content as a means of expressing affection, as they are less comfortable doing so verbally. Gen X participants are particularly cautious about the relevance and reliability of the content they forward. Millennials tend to forward content not to showcase themselves but rather to

express their feelings and personality to the recipients. The Baby Boomers provided the most surprising responses, thoroughly explaining their reasons and recognizing that there is always a purpose behind their forwarding behavior.

Appendix S: Investigator Triangulation Form

Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to raise awareness on how motivations to forward online content differ by generations. The information gathered through the interview will be used as part of a Bachelor's thesis.

Description of the Research

Your participation will take the form of a semi-structured interview online.

Subject Participation

Participants of this study consist of individuals that forward online content frequently via direct message or e-mails and spend a considerable amount of their time on social media.

Triangulation to Prevent Researcher Bias

Please review and critically analyze my thematic analysis for my bachelor thesis. The feedback will be divided into three sections interview questions, a set of codes and themes, and the thematic analysis process, and then into two categories:

Strength (Actions that yielded quality work)

Opportunities for improvement (Actions that require corrective measures)

Authorization and confirmation	Initials
I authorize the use of the output of the researcher triangulation for further education, research, and publication of the findings.	
Voluntary Participation and Authorization I voluntarily agree to participate in this research program	
I understand that I will be given a copy of this signed Consent Form.	

Name of Researcher	Signature	Date

Interview questions Feedback

Strengths	The interview questions are well structured and touch upon all the relevant topics of the research. They are also effectively designed to allow

	respondents the flexibility to introduce new topics that may not be explicitly covered in the interview protocol.
Opportunities	When asking questions to interviewees, I suggest to tailor certain queries, particularly those concerning personal growth, to the interviewee's specific circumstances. For instance, if the interviewee is currently enrolled in school, you could frame your question to explore how their educational experience could be enhanced by forwarding online content.

Set of codes and Themes

Strengths	The codes directly reflect the data collected from interviews, demonstrating a close alignment with the empirical evidence. The themes efficiently cover the underlying psychological motivations behind e-WOM across different generational cohorts, providing a robust view of the varied factors that influence digital engagement.
Opportunities	While the themes are comprehensive, it may enhance the study to more explicitly connect how each theme contributes to answering the main research question about generational differences in e-WOM motivations. This could involve a clearer explanation of how each thematic finding relates to specific hypotheses or questions.

Thematic analysis process Feedback

Strengths	The thematic development process is strongly linked to the FIRO theory, ensuring that the analysis remains grounded in relevant psychological frameworks. The method used for coding and developing themes is consistent, systematic, and well-documented, enhancing the reliability and credibility of the findings.

Opportunities	Incorporating more dynamic visual representations of the thematic connections and the evolution of the analysis could make the results more accessible and comprehensible to readers, particularly those not familiar with qualitative analysis.