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New Mobile Visualities and the Social Communication of  
Photography: Instagram as a Case Study

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by

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'The camera is an instrument that teaches people how to see without a camera'.

Dorothea Lange.

*I dedicate this dissertation to my dear friend, Andrea. He never leaves my heart.*

*With love and gratitude to my family, Eva and Franco.*

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## Abstract

This research intends to show how visibility, through the mobility of Instagram (a social media platform designed for photo sharing), is modifying individuals' perception of the world and their mediated lives. It examines how Instagram transforms individuals' perception of interpersonal relationships, marketing, privacy and surveillance, identity and memory, and communication. It attempts a critical re-reading of the combined interrelations between the concept of mobility (smart mobile devices) and the thematic areas mentioned above. Conducting an empirical examination, it delineates the changing dynamics that digitality determines within the contemporary experience of visual communication. In order to understand visual practices it is important to consider how relationships develop among individuals, visual technologies, practices and images, society and culture (Pink, 2007: 35). A qualitative research method informed by netnography, computer-mediated interviews and visual analysis (Rose, 2007) is employed in this study. Findings show that the ubiquitous use of smart mobile devices guides us towards the development of new forms and conceptions of mobile mediated visualities.

The critical analysis of the (embedded) multiple-case study presents the innovative transformations that the mediation and mobility of Instagram bring into everyday relations between human-technologies. Findings show that now that daily life is experienced as a succession of photo opportunities that allow the creation of social networks but do not replace physical relationships. Images figure as a fair means of communication although they cannot fulfil verbal ones. However, the connections that images establish become a valuable part of new social media marketing strategies. With the widespread use of the platform, companies start to monitor users and influence their online behaviour without causing concern in relation to privacy and surveillance issues. The protection of personal information instead is related to the visibility that the contents of images acquire within the virality of the Internet. Within this, the voyeuristic spirit that animates the platform affects individuals' interest in disclosing self-identity through visual metaphors. The disclosure of visual narrations of the self, at the same time, models the sharing of new networked archives of personal and collective memories.

The ephemerality of digital culture is embraced by smart mobile technologies considering the importance that individuals give to the act of producing multimedia contents more than the content itself. Smart mobile devices represent the element of mediation in social instances and they strongly represent the foundation of a new mobile visualities aesthetic. Societies produce peculiar forms of expression and communication that are shaped by the co-presence of individual demands and the current typology of means of communication. Every alteration in the structure of societies has influence on individuals and on means of expression. This thesis shows that in contemporary life visualities have crucial functions in different environments such as business, leisure, and surveillance. Lastly, the triangulation of mediation-mobility-visibility produces a snapshot aesthetic, which radically transforms traditional functions of photography.



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# Chapter 1: Introduction, Theoretical Framework and Methodology

## 1.1 Introduction to Smart Mobile Devices and the New Mediation of Photo Sharing

The escalation of photo sharing through social networking sites is one of the most substantial changes within the interaction of mobile communication practices in recent years. The co-constitutive aspect of this mediation necessitates different ethical frameworks identified through ‘interaction and mutual becoming’ (Kember & Zylinska, 2012:155). This study analyses the significant features of the popular photo sharing platform Instagram (a smart phone app that enables users to capture, apply filters, and share photos on various social networks), identifying the key elements that shape contemporary mechanisms of visual communication and how images are used in all forms of communication (Lester, 2003). It explores the dimensions of visibility and mobility that determine user engagement with the platform. In particular, this study analyses Instagram as a case study to investigate how the platform mediates visual communication through the use of tags, hash-tags, and geo-locations that allow users to categorise and rapidly find contents and other users, rendering the experience of Instagram as more connecting and socially engaging to the online community. The combination of the ‘imperative of sharing’ (Van Dijck, 2013), the ever-present nature of smart mobile devices and the power of the publicity of the visibility of the everyday afforded by social media platforms like Instagram, are fostering the convergent notion of mobile visual communication. In this sense, the concept of ‘being-as-mediated’ (Kember & Zylinska, 2012: 40) makes the difference in approaching visual communication, considering that, mobile phones, in some ways, have affected individuals’ lives and the ways they relate to each other (Green & Haddon, 2009). The social exchange of photographs, called by Kember and Zylinska (2012) ‘visual objects’, are thought of as a point of departure for critically re-reading the structuring of forms of communicative media, because this social exchange can potentially elicit new theoretical patterns and unconventional cross mediations.

The relationship between visibility and current developments in research on social media and photo sharing is the focus of this study that envisions a large-scale discourse on images. Starting from the conception that there is not a single characteristic or practice that represents the essence of photography (Tagg, 1988) it is helpful to compare

the present study to a complex cubist art piece characterised by a variety of facets that merge together in a unique composition on canvas giving a multifaceted vision of all the various constitutive parts of the phenomenon. The subdivision of this thesis in thematic areas of analysis takes into account the representative moments of the conspicuous international debate in the fields of media, communication and visual studies that, since the 90s, has evolved beyond the original separate disciplinary connotations in the domain of social sciences.

The main question that this study interrogates regards the on-going alterations that the mediation of smart mobile devices produces on humans' visual experiences. From the issues raised by contemporary debates on the ontology of the image, this study progresses towards the contemporary imagery increasingly influenced by the images that we see and the media that we use. In turn, both pragmatically determine human existence and the mediated world that we are living in. The current lack of structural categories to interpret this combination of conditions does not help with the interpretation of the sociological phenomena that looks at the visualities of individuals' daily practices. This thesis corresponds with the necessity to advance thematic critical understanding around the complex sphere of mobile media studies (Herman et al, 2015).

The mobility of smart technologies represents a decisive moment in the production and observation of visualities, an ability that accomplishes the variety of social uses that its inclusion in the social media ecology permits. This progression is visible in different areas: business dynamics, spread of information, within the vernacular dimension of photography, and many others. Nowadays, visualities circulate naturally through the ephemeral supports of digits (binary code) easily classifiable in everyday mediated communicative practices. The deriving visual communication shows different practices that see the combination of human-smart technologies drawing new assets for contemporary sociality. In fact, since the arrival of photography visual communication is interpreted as a means to discover the unknown, placing connective bridges among cultures, societies and visions.

With this purpose, Martin Heidegger writes, in 'The Age of the World Picture' (1977), that in the modern age the fundamental event is 'the conquest of the world as picture' (Heidegger, 1977:134) delineating the approach to various unseen visualities as the determining position of humans in relation to the process of construction of knowledge

via images. The mobility and mediation provided by smart technologies opens up a vision of new scenarios with an elevated characteristic of reproducibility via online sharing, which expands the concept of mechanical reproducibility elaborated by Walter Benjamin (2008) in the 30s. Nowadays, Benjamin's concept of reproducibility is substituted by the potentialities of virality and connectivity to the Internet. Individuals share visualities online with the intent of also disclosing feelings, internal perceptions, and sense of the self. Since its widespread use among amateurs, new visualities have given to official broadcasters an additional way of documenting events and confronting ideas, such as photo promotional campaigns. Within this discourse, the principles of virality and connectivity are employed by individuals, because of the immediate visibility that they offer. Images can document events and happenings, which when shared online give to other users the sense of observing direct evidence.

However, all visual testimonies need to be considered as points of view, perspectives and, as Mitchell (1996, 1998, 2005) highlights, subjective interpretations of (not the) reality. Indeed, amateur photographers share images following their aesthetic guidelines, themes, and styles reflecting their personal ways of interpreting their surroundings. This characteristic that develops into the 'snapshot aesthetic' (Schroeder, 2008; 2013) enables visualities to enter into sociality in a more pervasive way. The vernacular practice of photography (spread immediately since the arrival of the first Kodak in 1888) brings, through technological advancements, smart mobile devices into almost all families of developed countries. Their extensive presence mightily establishes a personal relation with technology (almost one per person), transforming smart mobile devices into the human extension as theorised by McLuhan (1964).

In the particular case of visualities, smart mobile devices can become a vehicle for interpersonal connections, the projection of the self, and the extension of human memory. The ubiquitous presence of visualities is not limited to individuals' personal (private and public) spheres, but also to the connection established with business and consumer culture. Advertising has always made use of images and, since the arrival of the Internet, social media marketing strategies (such as consumer generated advertising and viral advertising) have made an extensive use of user engagement online (Tuten, 2013). Information, communication and advertising are robust producers of images and this is also the reason why around images there has been a critical debate that, going through social sciences, is formed by media, communication and visual studies. This

complex tangle regards the perception of images and their creation through the mediation of smart technologies. In fact, this discourse cannot only be addressed with the history of the image and semiotics, or with the description of equipment for visual representation.

The arrival of new smart mobile technologies significantly changes the theoretical approach to new media, opening new pages of the interpretation of the relationship between human-technology. Smart mobile technologies remove social barriers increasing connectivity and access to digital contents. Through their constant use they also increase the activity of taking photographs, altering the content of images, the way they are shared and the way they are edited. In addition, developments in smart digital technologies contribute to increase the numbers of photographs shared and their intense circulation through the Internet and social media. They also contribute to the hyper-representation of the world and people towards the predominance of visual elements in many daily practices. By investigating the ways in which it changes social behaviours, the conception of oneself and others, the connection to the environment and events, and the relation to memory, this study progresses the current debate on media, communication and visual studies. Through the innovative combination of three fields: mobility, mediation and visibility, it displays new insights that are in succession divided into five thematic nodes (Photo Sharing, Social Relationships, Political Economy, Privacy and Surveillance, Identity and Memory). The sectorial division into themes explained here as the architecture of this study articulates critical investigations that converge towards a unique interpretation of the phenomena.

In chapter 1, this study defines the context of analysis providing a pertinent theoretical framework circumscribing the analysis around media, communication and visual studies. The combination of these two disciplines is necessary in order to both delineate the existing interrelationship between human-smart technologies and to investigate how visibility fits into this relationship. Defining the area of analysis, this study exemplifies the critical approach that interprets smart mobile devices as objects of socio-cultural studies (Bauman, 1995; Bourdier, 1990; Wellmann, 2002), symbols of social identities and relationships, structures of daily life, and reflections of social norms. The critical understanding of the role of smart mobile devices leads to broader perspectives on mobility and visibility, which question smart mobile communications and their ubiquity (Bechmann & Lombrog, 2012). Indeed, by reflecting on technological innovations, the

peculiar elements that conduce smart phones to become socially embedded (Green & Haddon, 2009) testifies to the growing dependence individuals have towards such devices. Digitality completely changes the way individuals relate to each other and to media blurring the traditional boundaries between human experiences and digital technologies. This shift recalls some of the fundamental studies of semiotics and theory of the image (Mitchell, 1996, 1998, 2005; Boehm, 1994; Belting, 2005; 2011) to set the research question around the triangulation of mobility-mediation-visuality.

Chapter 2 “Photo Sharing on Instagram” recalls relevant theories in media and convergence (McLuhan, 1964; Jenkins, 2006) to engage with the practice of photo sharing (Van Dijck, 2008; 2011) and its capacity to make individuals perform, feel emotions, engage with each other, and remember (Van House et al, 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010; 2011). The basic functioning mechanism of Instagram shows how the practice of photo sharing goes progressively towards the direction of mediated photo sharing identifying the mediation and connectivity of the platform as a valid means to share visual stories. Photo sharing is experienced and practiced on a daily basis in different sectors. For some photo sharing is a daily habit, a way of working, and a personal *mise-en-scène* (Goffman, 1959) that follows precise guidelines breaking the idea of instantaneity of communication typical of social media smart mobile technologies. The general analysis of the practice of photo sharing discloses the common conditions present in various practices of online photo sharing, sociality (chapter 3), business (chapter 4), protection, disclosure and construction of the self (chapter 5 and 6), and the maintenance of memories (chapter 6). Indeed, photo sharing is the constant condition that shows different aspects of contemporary ways of communicating visually.

Expanding the considerations advanced in chapter 2, chapter 3 “Social Relationships on Instagram” questions the social potentialities that the practice of photo sharing determines. In this case, the intuitions advanced by McLuhan (1964) and Giddens (1991) combined together set the theoretical foundations to interpret human relationships and technological interactions. The increased population of social media shows how sociality is affected and mediated by new mobile technologies. This chapter begins with a review of the notion of community, discussing, on the way, the implications that the mediation of social media and mobile devices create. The theoretical frameworks of online communities (Baym, 1995; 1998; Wellman, 2001b;

Wellman & Giulia, 1999) and social networking theories (boyd & Ellison, 2007) support the investigation of the current state of virtual social relationships (Turkle, 1997, 2011; Bakardjieva, 2003). The consideration of the social uses of mobile devices (Lugano, 2009) helps to reflect on the motivations (Lakhani & Wolf, 2005; Sarvas & Frohlich, 2011) that push us to consider the exchange of images as a practice dedicated to the creation and/or maintenance of social relationships. As a photo sharing platform, Instagram is inscribable in the creation and development of communities of interest (Rheingold, 2000) that recognize their main social expression in offline meetings (InstaMeet and InstaWalk). The interest in moving the examination towards the combination of sociality and visuality comes from the intuitions that Van House's (2007) advanced studying photo sharing as valid practice for maintaining social relationships. Although the social potentiality of (visual) social relationships through Instagram itself does not offer a variety of verbal communication mechanisms for the development of mediated social relationships this encourages offline meetings or the relocation onto other social media.

Using Fuchs' (2012) analysis of the value of Facebook's friends and friendships, Chapter 4 "Political Economy and Social Media Marketing on Instagram" reviews the key theoretical concepts of the political economy (Herman & Chomsky, 2008; Mosco, 1996, 2008; McChesney, 2008) and its complex connection with the environment of social media. Critical interpretations of the political economy of social media and social networking platforms (Fuchs, 2012) moved the academic attention towards the dynamics that connect companies and users. From this consideration, surfaces the growth of social media marketing that sees in the management of consumer relationships (Pepper & Roger, 2004) and the use of consumer generated advertising (Campbell et al, 2011) at the base of new plans. One of the key points of online marketing strategies is in the principle of connectivity and virality that the Internet offers. Understanding the general strategies that move social media marketing helps to progress this study to the consideration of visuality as part of these new techniques. Advertising and promotional campaigns are well organised considering the power of images. Taking into account the engagement that brands intend to establish with users/potential customers, the necessity of reducing the distance between businesses and individuals emerges. The engagement between actors (user-user, brand-user) figures as the key aspect of social media marketing (Evans & McKee, c2010; Tuten, 2013). On Instagram this principle is recognised in photo contests, calls to action and promotional



photo campaigns. From this, the tendency arises for advertisers to create visual imageries close to users/potential customers developing what Schroeder (2008; 2013) defines as ‘snapshot aesthetics’. The co-presence of new social media marketing strategies and the progression of the snapshot aesthetic in advertising rely on users’ voyeuristic interest in watching and being watched that motivates the practice of photo sharing.

Following the “Big Brother spirit” that animates the majority of social media, chapter 5 “Privacy and Surveillance on Instagram” examines the delicate issues related to privacy (Debatin, 2011; Ellison *et al*, 2011; Nissenbaum, 2010), surveillance and visual communication online. It focuses specifically on the publicity and virality provided by the connectivity of the Internet (Sampson, 2012) that are aspects that constitute increased fragility for the majority of online services. The way in which businesses monitor and collect users’ personal data in marketing shows the controversial context of public and private presence online (Fuchs, 2012; Lyon, 2013; Miller, 2011). However, the compulsory agreement to terms and conditions necessary for the use of social media does not seem to cause any concern to Instagram users. The passive acceptance results from the general attitude that the Internet users adopt towards the awareness of the use of personal data and meta-data. Indeed the only concern that Internet users have regarding privacy and surveillance. Regarding this, the virality afforded by the Internet is the main issues. The concern of being subjected to the spread of personal and private images takes the place of other types of monitoring systems. The surveillance practiced by businesses is not perceived as excessively invasive as much as is the surveillance practiced by other users. From this manifestation, different typologies of surveillance, such as: lateral surveillance (Andrejevic, 2005), participatory surveillance (Albrechtslund, 2008), social searching (Lampe *et al*, 2006) and social surveillance (Joinson 2008; Tokunaga, 2011) denote the dynamics of watching and being watched on Instagram. However, the voyeuristic spirit (Mulvey, 1975; Denzin, 1995) that animates Instagram does not come from an interest in images related to sex or sexual pleasure (Calvert, 2000), rather it is more related to the curiosity and the pleasure in observing new visualities recognised in particularities and unordinary images. On Instagram the discourse on privacy and surveillance converges towards the virality of the Internet highlighting the potentiality of visual communication. The co-presence of protection and disclosure of images opens the discussion towards the intent of disclosing imageries related to identity and memory of the self.

The visual interest in watching and being watched is associated with the protection and disclosure of self-identity and memories, as chapter 6 “Identity and Memory on Instagram” illustrates. The ubiquitous use of smart mobile devices constitutes a significant cultural change towards an increased mediated visibility. The polycentric character of modern society (Giddens, 1991) directs us to consider the theme of identity through the notion of ‘fragmentized subjectivity’ described by Zygmunt Bauman (1995). The decentred and mediated nature of contemporary identities is discussed in relation to the presentation of the self (Goffman, 1959) through images and interpreted within the mediation of social media and social networking sites (Turkle, 1996; boyd, 2007; boyd *et al*, 2004; 2006). This self-representation is commonly associated with the exhibition of self-portraits that nowadays take the name of “selfies”.

However, the presentation of the self can take various forms, such as the portraits of objects that signify personal interests or the capture of events that are part of the construction of personal memories. Within this, the notion of memory is examined in its controversial relations with the ephemerality of digitality (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007; Lury, 1998; Reading, 2009; Van Dijck, 2007). José van Dijck’s *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* (2007) compares the different ways of divulging and maintaining memory through digital photography. Her contribution is useful for questioning the ways in which the mediation of social media restructures the general perception of visual remembrance. The disclosure of the self through images results in a process strictly connected to the creation of limited archives of personal memories. The publicity of the platform, in fact, does not encourage the sharing of private-personal spheres so excluding the presence of domestic and family photographs. Furthermore, the limitation of photo sharing is also perceived as an incentive to ponder and limit the number of images designated to be uploaded. Within this, photo sharing represents a pragmatic act that constitutes the dominant ingredient in mediated memories (Van Dijck, 2007) that directs us towards the reconsideration of photography towards new visualities.

The concluding chapter 7 summarises the independent conclusions of the five thematic areas analysed throughout this study in order to produce a critical interpretation of Instagram as a case study which can, to a certain extent, speak of the mediation and mobility of other platforms. Considering that, according to Miller (2011), ‘digital

culture now involves more than merely sitting at a computer terminal' (Miller, 2011:1). The mobility and mediation afforded by smart mobile devices seems to establish new ways for producing and sharing images that guide individuals to think visually of events, people, and the surroundings. Everything is perceived as a photo opportunity and this constant state of mind produces new forms of experiences of everyday life. The triangulation of mediation-mobility-visibility is conclusively rethought as a unique instance maintaining the polyvocality (multiple voices) of media and the current understanding of visibility.

In summary, this study comprises of the following chapters:

- Chapter 1 describes the changing digital technological context of the 21st Century and the Internet implications in media convergence. It contains a brief review of semiotics and the key theories regarding images and digitality. Then, it describes in detail the areas involved in the re-theorization of visibility including the variables that the notion of mobility and mediation produce. Finally, it illustrates the qualitative mixed methodological approach employed to analyse Instagram.
- Chapter 2 describes the context of analysis discussing the practice of photo sharing on Instagram;
- Chapter 3 examines visual media and sociality on Instagram;
- Chapter 4 illustrates the political economy of social media emphasising the development of new social media marketing strategies on Instagram;
- Chapter 5 exemplifies the implications that visual communication and the virality of the Internet produces in terms of privacy and surveillance issues;
- Chapter 6 investigates new visual expressions of identity construction and disclosure, as well as memory maintenance on Instagram;
- Chapter 7 summarises conclusions and advances new hypothesis for further developments in research.

## 1.2 Media Theories and Semiotics toward New Mobile Visualities

In order to contextualise this research, the present study starts by giving an overview of the current understanding of new media and Internet studies describing the principal features that characterise the crucial role of Internet connectivity within mobile

communications. Following, it recalls the founding studies of semiotics (Barthes, 1980; Eco, 1979), philosophy of the image (Baudrillard, 1988; Dubois, 1996; Benjamin, 2008), and further advancements in visual studies (Balazs, 1924; Bazin, 2005; Belting, 2005; 2011; Bohem, 1994; Mitchell, 1996; 1998; 2005) to focus on new mobile visualities. Starting from the conception of convergence (Jenkins, 2006) and producer (Bruns, 2008), in which information is networked in a shared setting, and where multimedia contents are “objects in progress” (never finished products), new media blurs the previous boundaries between ‘producer’ and ‘consumers’, so establishing a new user able to create and share contents online. The following description of common threads is useful to understand the key role that Internet connection plays within the analysis of smart mobile devices’ practices.

This study, using postmodern approaches (Foucault, 1991; Barthes, 1980, 1982, 2000; Deleuze, 1984; Derrida, 1981) enables a scrutiny and a contestation of understanding concerning several sides of contemporary society, challenging, interrupting and interrogating aspects of reality that are so central or entrenched in individuals’ understanding of what is ‘normal’ (Cheek & Gough, 2005:305). The employment of the term postmodernism for this research design takes inspiration from Patti Lather’s (1992) nomenclature. Lather uses the term ‘*postmodernism*’ to mean the shift in material conditions of advanced monopoly capitalism brought on by the microelectronic revolution in information technology [...]. Postmodernism is borne out of our sense of the limits of enlightenment rationality’ (Lather, 1992:90).

Further, considering that this study analyses the context of digital media, methodological implications of postmodernist perspectives, such as the concept of rhizome articulated by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), emerge in relation to the research design. Rhizome is the metaphor that Deleuze and Guattari (1987) used to describe a typology of organization that follows the principles of connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity and a signifying rupture. The botanical term exemplifies the contrast with traditional hierarchical organizations and that, as Eco (1984) underlined, ‘it can be structured, but is never structured definitely’ (Eco, 1984:57). Because of the constitutive elements of the Internet (such as hypertext, networking and so on) this concept was linked to describe the infinite networks.

This study opens up to scrutiny aspects of the combination between visuality and mobility that previously have not had a specific interconnected focus within the Internet and digital media studies. The Internet presents a complex ephemeral and developing area of study that likewise requires the deconstruction of previous static theorizations to move towards theories that support the dynamism of the subject. This study contemplates the critical theories of structuralism and post-structuralism to consider the complexity of the human sciences. ‘Structuralism sought a new language that would mirror the ‘true’ depth of things. Post-structuralism casts doubt on such projects, seriously modifies their ambitions and pretensions to clarity, challenges them as utopian, or eventually totalitarian in tendency’ (Miller *et al.*, 2005: 312). For example, through the theory of deconstruction, Derrida (1981) challenges the ideas advanced by structuralism, suggesting the existence of no univocal meaning of the world. The conception of multiplicity of signifiers fits into the development of this study that attempts innovative interpretations of contemporary phenomenon considering the no univocal meanings that visuality produces. Through his work ‘Deconstruction and Difference’ (1981), Derrida inscribes into post-structuralism his theory of signs. From the post-structuralist ‘breaking point’ this study considers the variety of convergent perspectives from the multifaceted presence of the variables of visuality (photo sharing platforms) and mobility (smart mobile devices) to interpret the phenomenon and how it changes and also in relation to the variable of mediation (the connectivity of the Internet).

Without the notion of media convergence (Jenkins, 2006) it is difficult to comprehend the parallel evolution of human behaviours in relation to the launch of new smart technologies. In *Convergence Culture: Where Old Media and New Media Collide* (2006), Jenkins explores the paradigmatic notion of convergence that describes the contemporary shift of communication systems and media environments. The increased interdependence among communication systems produces the collision between different media (old and new) environments. Computers and mobiles are concrete examples of media convergence. They bring together multiple functions and become phone, television, stereo, and photo-camera all in one device. Technological developments produce also visible modifications of ordinary human behaviours leading Jenkins (2006) to argue for the development of a new cultural phenomenon (Convergence Culture). The undeniable innovation of convergence is that multimedia contents and information shift across different media easily and quickly. The

widespread use of smart mobile devices is an example of this conduct fostering individuals to create, share, modify and move contents, stories and images from one means to another. Evident consequences of these possibilities are recognisable in the facility to alter existing aesthetic models, ways of telling stories, informing, communicating and entertaining.

An emblematic example of this alteration is dated April , 2004 when, during *60 Minutes*, the historic CBS television program disclosed, for the first time, services and images relating to Abu Ghraib tortures (see fig. 1). A series of amateur photographs, taken by digital cameras and mobile phones, testified to the scandalous happenings inside the Iraqi prison (Danner, 2004; Eisenman, 2007). This episode shows how the potentiality of media convergence brings new forms of collection, storing and sharing never seen before (Gaby, 2010). Camera phones are the central devices in terms of individual life style (Gaby, 2010). In fact, Gaby (2010,) taking as visual examples episodes captured with camera phones, describes how they break the unclear line between amateur and professional journalism bringing into discussion the idea of live streaming as a contemporary trend of sharing and visual communication.

In this case, the photography of the event lost its material supports (paper), surpassed the problem of its collocation (mobile phone and camera phone) finding in the Internet a new position as discussed during the program *60 Minutes*. Within media convergence theorization, the photographs of Abu Ghraib are a clear example of cross-mediality (Bolter & Grusin, 1999) of the potentiality of the Internet. In relation to this event, another example can be mentioned, Multi-National Forces in Iraq, according to Karatzogianni (2009), created an official YouTube channel attempting to censor videos coming out and block soldiers from accessing social media platforms. However, the abortive attempt to monitor and control soldiers' information traffic has been bypassed by the use of alternative means of communication such as closed systems or Internet cafes.

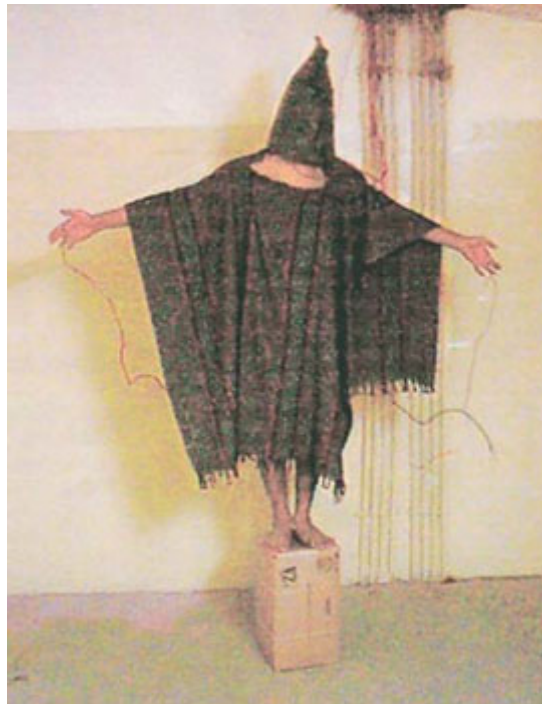


Figure 1. Abu Ghraib torture and prisoner abuse.

CBS TV program, 2004. SOURCE: <http://www.extrememediastudies.org>

In parallel to media convergence lies the concept of *Remediation* (1999) introduced by Bolter and Grusin that emphasises the possibilities offered by cross-mediality and hypermediacy. The potentiality offered by new digital technologies have also been witnessed through the London bombing event (July , 2005), during which fear and terror did not stop people in the underground and in the middle of the street from recording the tragic terrorist attack and promptly shared it over various social media platforms. Helen Boaden, BBC Director of News at that time, described the event in this way: ‘People were sending us images within minutes of the first problems; before we even knew there was a bomb’ (Allan, 2007). Through her speech surfaces the importance of the event. The photographs of the London bombing event represent an event coverage recorded and shared by amateurs’ smart mobile devices (see fig. 2). The photographs taken using smart mobile devices inside the London tube went immediately viral within global networks. This example amplifies further the significance of the conception of new media convergence towards the evolution of the use of media and smart technologies.



Figure 2. London Bombing, 7 July 2005. Attack on the London Underground.

BBC News, 2005. SOURCE: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4661059.stm>

Within the panorama of media convergence and remediation the real protagonists become hybrids (D'Amico, 2008) and mobile interfaces (Farman, 2011). Within the panorama of digitality, D'Amico (2008) emphasises the fusion between photography and other media, introducing the pioneering notion of *digitographies*. This new term classifies digital images through their material components: a numerical writing with an extraordinary characteristic of abstraction. In correlation with her discourse and in relation to the two photographic examples brought above, Farman's theorization of 'mobile interfaces' (Farman, 2011:62), mediating environments that make experiences and constitute individuals' experiences, exemplifies how mobile devices stimulate new phenomenon of communication and sharing enabling individuals to manage several practices through screens without physical connection to the surroundings. The notion of mobile interfaces (Farman, 2011), for instance, contributes to the critical progressive interpretation of the relationship between human-technology useful for this study to advance theorisations that attempt to understand emerging phenomena of smart mobile device communication.



Thinking of the developments brought by media convergence, the mobility afforded by smart mobile communication represents one of the latest subjects of interest in social sciences. In relation to the dichotomy of human-technologies, Sheller and Urry (2006) advocate the turn towards a 'new mobilities paradigm' that focuses on the dynamism of individuals, objects and information. The tight interrelation between individuals located in distant physical spaces is increased by the adoption of mobile technologies that also extend the ubiquitous access to the Internet and social media in everyday activities. As can be seen through the two examples mentioned above (Abu Ghraib and London Bombing), the element of mobility, in combination with the connectivity offered by the Internet, determines the key point of the reasoning. In fact, this combination shows the potentiality that the mediation of smart mobile devices produces. Shortly after the widespread of smart mobile devices, indeed, users begin to figure as single knots able to disseminate multimedia contents into a bigger system of contents (Granieri, 2005) that comprehends news, information, entertainment and social networking. Following the idea that the Internet overlies relationships between individuals, Granieri (2005) includes in the description of digital society the characteristic of reciprocity as a cultural constant that defines sociality on the Internet.

Early Internet theories (Bolter & Grusin, 1999, Granieri, 2005; Jenkins, 2006; O'Reilly, 2004) discuss the potentiality that the connectivity of networks produce setting the scene for further theorisation associated with the relation between human-technologies. Paradigmatic changes in social habits and in the use of the Internet generate incisive alterations that Gefter (2006), discussing everyday sociality online, perceives in the growing unclear distinction between real and mediated life. This is why the advancements in smart mobile technologies blur the boundaries between online and offline sociality offering a ubiquitous use of technologies that represent the core point of the development of new behaviours, cross-media and multi-site media experiences. By creating the condition in which individuals have easy access to the Internet and social media, smart mobile devices become endlessly 'online' and constantly in use generating connections and practices never seen before.

In fact, technological convergence manifests an increasing collective participation toward the *Liquid Life* (2003) described by Zygmunt Bauman where nothing is fixed, phenomenon change quickly and technology has never been so fast. The contemporary society discussed by Bauman is based on the conditions of constant mutability and

uncertainty. Introducing the term *Liquid Modernity* (2000) and re-questioning the notion of postmodernity, Bauman defines clearly the condition of mobility and transformation that contemporary society lives regarding relationships, identities, and economy. Within this discourse that emphasises the state of transition of phenomenon, the interrelation between human-technology obtains a particular position in eliciting new social dynamics that this study is interested in disclosing.

Following this line of interpretation, the two cases discussed above (Abu Ghraib and London Bombing), represent clear examples of how advancements in smart digital technologies introduces the conditions for the production of new phenomena. Considering Rubinstein and Sluis' (2008) assumption that mobile phones' pictures become contemporary visual speeches, that this study advances and investigates the triangulation of mediation-mobility-visibility (see fig. 3) as a turning point in terms of instant communications. Within this discourse, smart mobile devices provide new opportunities for capturing and sharing images, in particular online, transforming numerous individuals' communicative practices. The growing conception of the Internet as communicative platform also delineates the emergence of screen-mediated relations leading this study towards a semiotic reconsideration of digital images.

There is also the potential for social media photographic archives to question how social-images can affect the everyday and the emergence of history. Kunstman and Stein (2015) in their analysis of *Digital Militarism: Israel's Occupation in the Social Media Age*, examine images from Facebook and argue that the digital archive 'can unfold onto a set of histories, political processes, and structures of complicity that military Israeli communities have tried to obscure' (p.98). Bringing visual examples of soldiers taking self-portraits and posting them on the Internet, Kuntsman and Stein (2015) show how the ordinary use of social media platforms enhances the visual sharing of episodes and scenarios that before were difficult to disclose. In these difficult times, digital archives figure as an alternative database that documents and preserves contemporaneity. These digital archives, within a networked environment, share visual imaginaries that guide this study to also rethink the principle of connectivity.

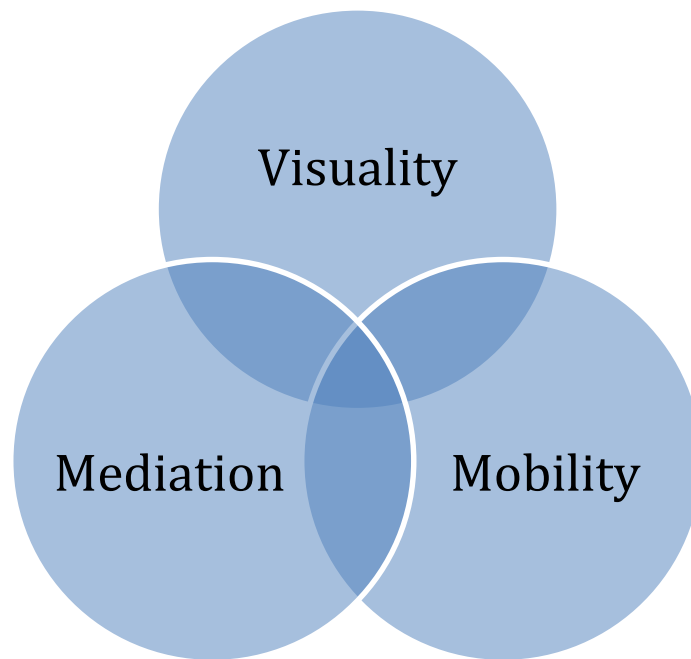


Figure 3. Triangulation of Analysis.

Even though the contemporary debate on visuality is almost exclusively discussed through media and communication studies, talking about images cannot exclude the foundations of semiotics, ‘a science *which studies the role of signs as part of social life*’ (Saussure, 1974:16). With Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce (1977) is another key theorist that developed this philosophical approach at its early stage. Following, Roland Barthes (1981; 1985; 2003), Christian Metz (1991), and Umberto Eco (1979) developed its late modern approach. Early theories on semiotics are fundamental for the progressive philosophical developments of contemporary theories on the image. The reason why this study reviews and interlaces them with media and communication studies is in the recognised interdependence of contemporary images by smart technologies. In this, the evolution towards visual semiotics moves the attention from a linguistic approach to the interpretation of signifiers and visual patterns. The works of semioticians is considered, indeed, as the base for subsequent critical considerations of digital images, which also involves the contemporary debate of visual studies.

An important methodological and mature interpretation of photography has been advanced by Roland Barthes’ book *La Chambre Claire* (1980). Through this book, Barthes suggests a phenomenological reading of photography. His interpretation of the image argues for the existence of a deep link between photography and the object represented in the photo. Barthes (1981) ascribes this link to the concept of *trace*, which

receives a particular interpretation and claims that photography reports the existence of a precise object that embodies the lifetime of the object itself. Thus, the essence of a photograph is recognised in the certification of presence of the object. It gives the possibility for thinking that a certain event (represented in the photo) really happened, somewhere during a precise moment. In this way, Barthes questions the peculiar features of the image and the effects and feelings that the image produces. Indeed, subsequently he investigates what there might be beyond the image. To do so, he considers the affective dimension of photography. The image, according to Barthes (1981), immerses the subject impeding him/her to take the right distance from it. In this way, he locates the image within a certain cognitive dimension. This is the reason why, almost always, individuals support images with explicative verbal language. Where the image refers to the affectivity, Barthes (1981) claims that it needs to be interpreted through phenomenological filters. This is the reason why Barthes (1981) believes that theorizing photography without considering socio-cultural variables is not possible. From his perspective, semiotics is useful mainly to explore the connotation of visual signs, in which images are signifiers of specific instances. This study does not follow Barthes (1980) line of reasoning related to the photography as trace of reality, rather it metabolizes the conception of the ephemerality of digitality to focus the discourse more on considering Barthes' idea that photographic production depends on socio-cultural dynamics and vice versa. Consequently, in this study the semiotic interpretation of images passes through the interpretation of human behaviours and relations to technologies expanding the discourse started with investigation of the *Photographic Image in Digital Culture* (Lister, 1995).

Umberto Eco is another theorist that contributes to the development of semiotics. According to Eco (1979), considering photography's iconic aspects (photography as icon), its ability to indicate also emerges (photography as index). Photography, as 'photosensitive trace', differentiates itself from draws and paints (mimetic signs) because it represents both objects and their trace. Photographs are not specular images but are read as such. Photography is located at the border between semiotics and extra-semiotics field, and between sign and no-sign. Then, Eco (1979) develops his theorisation of photographic image criticising this dichotomy. Reflecting on the relation between semiosis and perception, Eco defines the process of primary semiosis or perceptive semiosis. It does not develop when something figures for something else. In other words, it means that a certain object is reached per inference thanks to a set of

stimulus. The semiosis process is activated by sensorial stimulus emergent from things, from which it is possible to grasp some useful aspects as a base to construct the sign that will become the starting point for interpretations.

Following these distinctions, Eco (1979) identifies two macro categories: iconic signs (perceived through Alpha mode) and all the others (perceived through Beta mode). Objects perceived through Alpha mode could be paintings, photos, a movie's image, and all semiotic phenomena. Even if the observer is aware that it is a sign, before perceiving it as something else, the observer perceives it as a group of stimulus that create the effect of being in front of an object. These types of icons substitute the real stimulus in order to appear as a good reality approximation even if illusory. Alpha and Beta modes are linked and tangled one with the other without having a clear demarcation. From the mode Alpha (what substitute stimulus suggest) to Beta mode (interpretation of what a text communicates beyond the author's awareness) the observer perceives stimulus, substitutes, things, then he/she looks for a narrative coherence within their assemblage. This passage allowed the observer to pass from the natural perception to the sophisticated intertextuality. Through Eco's statement that 'semiotic is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign' (Eco, 1976:7), his theorisations expand towards not only 'signs', but what 'stands for' something else, such as photography. This study moves forward Eco's (1976) explanation to interpret images within socio-cultural systems, as Barthes mentions (1980), as signs that stand for something else such as social connectors, business makers and other various digital environment where images are nowadays experienced.

With the arrival of digitality the academic debate moves to questioning the new ephemeral nature of the image. In this, Philippe Dubois (1996) suggests an alternative interpretation of index model and referential realism. Dubois claims that if unavoidably the image refers to its referent because it adheres to the image, consequently it is necessary to interrogate, under other degrees of interpretation, the ontology of the image. Dubois also states that the statute of photographic index is grounded in a sort of 'conceptual complex' that involves the implication of the subject within the visual experience. Thus, the indexing essence presumes the generative modality of the sign itself that, following Dubois, emerges from the aesthetic act of relating oneself to the reality. The photographic image hence becomes inseparable from its referential experience. Following this reasoning, the attention moves onto the mode of production

and, consequently, the interpretative stage moves onto the procedure that Dubois defines *L'Acte Photographique* (1983), which involves the close relation between subject and object. He concludes by arguing that photographs do not have any meaning themselves. Their meaning, instead, is determined by their relationship with the object. The logic of photographic index uses the distinction between sensation and existence, the photo-index certifies the existence of what it represents (Barthes' 'has been'), but it does not say anything about the meaning of that representation, apart from considering the subject. Dubois (1996) explanation of the photographic act emphasises the importance that the individual fulfils in the production of images. Through Dubois' theorisation, this study stretches semiotics theories of signs in order to comprehend the existing interrelations of meanings between individuals and images.

Within digitality, it is evident that the contemporary discourse on photography interrogates whether its immateriality allows an authentic reproduction of the reality. This debate expands together with technological developments and reviews the traditional conception of photography as mirror of reality. In contrast to others means of reproduction, photography is a sign that paradoxically testifies the presence of the absence. The photographic index allows a temporary intrusion in the reality towards the universe of signs. A photograph shows the presence (the image) of the absence (the subject portrayed). From this co-presence, the digital nature of photography is, according Dubois (1996), the relation that it holds in the construction and maintenance of reality. In spite of this theoretical questioning, this study moves the attention from the presentation to consider the re-presentation of reality and the impact that this mediation has on the interpretation of visual signs.

Once theoretical issues of reference within the process of production have been surpassed, other philosophical debates have been developed, such as concerning the ontology of the photographic image. Regarding this, Bazin (2005), questioning the ontology of cinema, analyses the aim beyond the process of mummification explaining the substitution of something with its representation. The subject of the camera, in this discourse, represents the reality by creating an illusion of reality, i.e. its representation. According to Bazin (2005), the nature of photography is connected to the objectivity of photographic images, and he adds that the automatism of the image construction is not important because it generates similarity. Photography for its automatic genesis certifies the existence of the referent but it does not imply that it would look like it. The principal

characteristic of photography is, indeed, that it figures as trace of reality rather than its mimesis.

The photographic index allows a temporary intrusion in the reality towards the universe of signs. In his essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (2008), Walter Benjamin discusses the changes produced by technical improvement in the twentieth century. He emphasises the modifications that mechanical reproduction systems produce in particular on art works. In doing this, he introduces the pioneering conception of the 'loss of aura'. In the modern age, indeed, everything can be reproduced in infinite copies and it causes the loss of authenticity of objects. Developing this line of interpretation, Benjamin (2008) advances also the rise of new modes of perceiving images. In other words, systems of mechanical reproduction embody the fundamental characteristics of change in modern society. The reference to cinema and photography, the loss of aura translates technological improvements into the loss of authenticity and uniqueness. Benjamin's theorisation (2008), emphasising the repetition of mechanical reproduction, anticipates what later is considered the strength of digital technologies. Benjamin's theorisations (2008) of the reproducibility of photography does not limit the discourse to images, rather it is a model that exemplifies the emerging dynamics of contemporary society. Mechanical reproduction does not only destroy the aura of artwork, rather it leads to critical consideration towards the expansion of visual communication and image exchange. This study, through Benjamin's (2008) intuitions, extends the notion of mechanical reproduction to infinitive copies, alterations and uses that digitality affords and also the consequences that this produces at social level.

In light of Benjamin's (2008) contribution, Gisele Freund (1980) in the late 80s writes that in the Renaissance, it was said that an observant person 'has a nose [for something]', nowadays it is said that a knowledgeable person 'has an eye [for something]'. Freund, in *Photography and Society* (1980), brings this comparison to argue that the sight is the most stimulated sense in contemporary society, emphasising that its main characteristic is its relation to emotionality, which is directly connected to its immediacy. In fact, in her conclusions, Freund (1980), because of its link with human sensitivity, highlights the power of persuasion that photography owns and the following ways in which it is used as means of manipulation. This aspect testifies its strong use in advertising. Through Freund's (1980) analysis of photographic culture in

France, the contribution of photography arises in discovering the world under new visual angles suppressing previous conceptions of space and time. From this, indeed, this study expands the analysis of visual and photographic culture towards widespread social habits that nowadays see the employment of a personal means of communication redefining the cornerstone of visual analysis.

After the first semiotics studies, theorists such as W.J.T. Mitchell (1996, 1998, 2005), Gottfried Boehm (1994) and Hans Belting (2005; 2011) in the footsteps of Benjamin's loss of authenticity, move towards the intangibility of digital photographs. They start to consider the idea of visibility, on the whole, within social daily actions, defining in this way the importance of the context for visual experiences. Therefore, Mitchell (1996, 1998, 2005), Boehm (1994) and Belting (2005; 2011) theorise new understandings of the visual dimension that contemporary society is living in, necessary for elaborating significances, beliefs, identities and values (Pinotti *et al*, 2009). Within this, the mimetic conception of photography is replaced by the idea that reality is just 'impression' and that photographic images are instead a powerful tool of transformation and interpretation of reality.

For example, through his essay, 'What Do Pictures "Really" Want?' (1996), Mitchell proposes to contemplate images as animate subjects, endowed with personality, needs and desires. He does not question the meaning of images; rather he investigates what these images want. In his opinion photographs want to be observed as complex independent opuses 'occupying multiple subject positions and identities' (Mitchell, 1996:82). His reflections stem from the general attitude of considering photographs able to affect, fascinate and influence similar to the barthesian idea of photography as 'adventure' (1980). Mitchell elaborates a conceptual framework in which images need to be re-evaluated between what they signify and what their signification asks of the observer. He argues that images influence the observer's emotions and behaviours. Declaring in this way the power of images in having an effect over observers, Mitchell consequently locates the observer in a subaltern position compared with the image. Accepting the fact that it is the image that provokes effects on the observer, rather the observer who feels something in front of an image, it comes naturally that images own the meaning in the visual connection with the observer. From this interpretation, images arise as elements that depend on the producer and the observer to fulfil signification. In this way the direct interdependence with individuals, highlighted by Mitchell (1996,



1998, 2005) leads this study to move the focus towards a critical investigation of practices, how individuals experience images. The consumption of images through the mediation of smart mobile devices sets new connections between individuals and images. This study expands Mitchell's questioning including in the discourse the variable of mobility that in turn includes the production and consumption of new visualities within everyday life.

Mitchell's contribution is not too divergent from Boehm's one, who proposes a return to the visual culture. Both of them, in fact, speculate images to be subjects with their own individual identity. Boehm takes part of the debate that sees the intersection of different disciplines, such as theories of art, sociology of cultural processes, and aesthetic theories, which characterise later modernity. He contributes by introducing the definition of 'iconic turn'. Boehm (1994) demolishes the epistemological fundamentals interrogating the increasing 'illusionistic' use of images developing the idea of a polyvalent nature of images. Boehm claims that images are the post-modern cultural figuration, because of their ubiquity. Moreover, because of their ubiquitous presence, he describes images as seductive medium able to control and influence individuals' everyday lives (1994). Basically, Boehm's words anticipate the notion of multi-representations deriving from digital technology. Boehm, through the 'iconic turn', suggests a movement beyond the logic of languages, and considers the individuals' dependency on visuality. Overall, Boehm's assumptions undertake an epistemological position that consents this study to unify visual studies to sociology and cultural studies. In this way, he states the overlap of different disciplines for a proper analysis of post-modern phenomena.

Hans Belting (2005; 2011) is another theorist who contributes to enhance the critique on images, analysing that images are at a distance from the general fundamentals of the history of art. Differently from previous theorists, Belting (2005; 2011) proposes an anthropological approach to the subject presuming to comprehend adequately images using two fundamental angles: the medium and the body. He combines together the cultural history of the body with the perception of physical activities, presenting a parallel that figures as an anthropological approach of the diachronic study of images. His basic claim is that there is no image without support; in fact, mental images (memories) and material images (photographs) possess a medium that allows their visibility, otherwise they could not be perceptible. According to Belting (2005; 2011)

on the one hand, there is the medium 'body' that transmits mental images, whereas; on the other hand, the medium 'media' diffuses material images. Through his description, Belting (2005; 2011) affirms that the human body sets itself as fundamental anthropological prototype to comprehend the relationship between images and media. Following this, the notion that images live within media like we live within our body (Belting, 2005) makes it necessary to rethink the elements that concur in visual production and perception, where the perception tends inevitably to unify images and medium towards a real symbiosis. This theorisation recalls Mitchell's (1996) idea of dependence between the image and the observer, including in the discourse the presence of a medium. In the digitality, whether considering the ephemeral nature of images, the facility through which they move from the body of the individual (the mind) to other external media, such as contemporary mobile devices, the intangible nature of the images figures as bonding instance between the individual and the device recalling Belting's triangulation of image-medium-body. Considering that images 'live *in* our bodies' (Belting, 2011:306) archived in humans' brain external media, such as smart mobile devices, figures as their actual representation. Within this, images manifest between internal and external representations reminding also of the McLuhanian (1964) idea of media as the extension of man. This study, indeed, expands Belting's (2005; 2011) idea of the interrelation between images and body to explain the inclusion of smart mobile devices in contemporary debates. Opening Belting's ideas towards current technological developments, his critical reasoning helps us to understand the implications that the integration of mobile devices produces in this discourse.

The theories articulated by Mitchell (1996, 1998, 2005), Boehm (1994) and Belting (2005; 2011) are some of the fundamental principles for decoding the contemporary debate on visual studies. Following these theorists, this study proposes an oblique analysis that combines the triangulation of mediation-mobility-visibility shown in the methodology. Images reveal themselves through the aesthetization of the world that erodes their traditional boundaries through the mediation of smart mobile technologies. Moving the attention onto the processes of visual representation and visual communication, the mediation of new mobile technologies becomes the determining factor of the way through which individuals experience visualities. This line of interpretation considers the progressions of new media technologies as a crucial variable for individuals' perception and interpretation of screen-mediated images.

During the late 1980s, Jean Baudrillard, writes that ‘the most intimate operation in individuals’ life becomes the potential grazing ground of the media’ then, he adds that ‘the entire universe also unfolds unnecessarily on individuals home screens’ (Baudrillard, 1988: 21). Terming this evolution ‘ecstasy of communication’, he describes the fall of the society within technologies. However, nowadays individuals’ everyday life cannot just be considered a potential grazing ground of media. Enlarging Baudrillard’s (1988) intuition, this study observes that the ubiquitous presence of smart mobile devices leads individuals to unfold virtually in their hands mobile devices anywhere. Due to media convergence, the intensification of media processes sets the presence of the screens of smart mobile devices between individuals and surroundings creating a new state of mediation. They address also the current conceptual understanding of new forms of seeing, looking, and representing.

Given that the process of remediation is ongoing, Kember and Zylińska suggest combining the knowledge of media objects with individuals’ sense of mediating processes. This idea leads them to think *Life after New Media* (2012) through the notion of ‘mediation’ (Kember & Zylińska, 2012:19) rather than the notion of ‘re-mediation’ advanced by Bolter and Grusin (1999). Their assumptions propose to understand photography as an active practice of cutting through the flow of mediation at perceptive, technical and conceptual levels. They argue that ‘over the last half century, photography has become so ubiquitous that our sense of being is intrinsically connected with being photographed, and with making sense of the world around us through seeing it imaged’ (Kember & Zylińska, 2012:76).

This is the direction that, at the Software Studies lab, Lev Manovich and his team of researchers are undertaking with their projects. Using computational and visualisation methods, they advance new software to analyse large visual datasets. In ‘Zooming into an Instagram City: Reading the Local through Social Media’ (2013), Hochman and Manovich illustrate the analysis of users’ use of mobile applications offering social, cultural and political insights about individual activities. Their analysis aims to trace what visual social media can narrate about individuals considering spatial, temporal and visual levels. Their work focuses in identifying socio-cultural patterns centring the examination on big data. They advance the analysis of social and cultural dynamics leaving aside users’ personal experiences of photo sharing. Instead, this study reflects

individuals' interpretations considering individuals and images as equally important for a critical interpretation of phenomena.

Since the first camera had been embedded to a mobile phone (Kahn, 1997) this topic generated reasoning about the influence of different ways of experiencing the world would cause at a socio-cultural level. This study shows how Instagram, in shaping individuals' experiences of the world, is also modifying individuals' perception of their mediated lives. This is the reason why, this study focuses on the factors of mobility and mediation of Instagram that sets the tendency for new human practices. The functioning structure of social media platforms suggests specific ways of human interactions interpreted as expression via anonymity (Bolter, 1996) or as simulated real life in virtual environments (Turkle, 1995; 1997). For instance, early studies, such as Dominick (1999) and Papacharissi (2002), developed the analysis of the influence that social media platforms employ over individuals self-expression, ways of communication, and memory. Others, instead, investigated the structural elements of social media and the ways in which they are employed by users to foster interaction, sharing, and connections (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Donath, 2007; Ellison *et al*, 2007). Considering this environment of research, through an in-depth examination, five themes are considered: photo sharing, social relationships, political economy and social media marketing, privacy and surveillance, and identity and memory. This study examines the platform from different perspectives giving a broad view of the changing dynamics that smart mobile devices produce. The several key themes sketched above are structured into separate sections in order to propose a thematic analysis that combines together sociological interpretations with media investigation.

### 1.3 Methodology: Netnography, Mediated Interviews, and Visual Analysis

Smart mobile devices are intensively widespread and social media platforms are taking the place of previous means of communication. Undeniably, phone calls are decreasing dramatically and text messages are becoming shorter and more contracted. In other words, it seems that the time invested in each communication or connection is shorter and easier than before. Within this context, visual communication arises as one of the most widespread used means of communication. It follows that the concept of 'media convergence' (Jenkins, 2006) comes into account again to describe the major shifts that

digital technologies and new media afford in contributing to the richness of social communication. The notion of media convergence structures the context of analysis and is integrated in this chapter to justify the principles followed in the fieldwork. This chapter discusses the research method, the different sources that have been collected and it also explains the pertinence to the research question. This chapter illustrates the relevance of the sources and then describes how these sources are examined within the case study. Subsequently, it displays how, using the principles of validity and reliability, they support the following stage of data analysis. In its conclusion, this chapter advances preliminary considerations for further investigations.

In a nutshell, qualitative mediated interviews and visual data analysis formed the fieldwork. A sample of 44 Instagram users took part in this study. 29 participants have been interviewed via Skype and 15 participants responded to open questions that have been sent via email. Following, contents analysis combined users' responses with their photo sharing. Instagram was analysed considering five thematic approaches in order to bring the topic into in-depth level of analysis. Considering the objectives of this study, this section reviews the appropriateness of the research method, describes the sampling technique, and discusses the criteria involved in gathering the data. Following, this chapter starts by highlighting the theoretical framework undertaken to circumscribe the subject towards a precise critical analysis.

This study advances an innovative investigation that examines the context of new social media. In particular, considering the widespread use of smart phones, it confines the area of analysis to the use of smart mobile devices referring to the interconnections between mobility (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2000; 2007) and new media theories (Kember, 2012; Levinson, 2009; Siapera, 2012). Thus, the concept of mobility becomes particularly important. Sheller and Urry (2006) identified six bodies of theory underpinning the 'new mobilities paradigm'. This study considers their theorizations of the third and the fifth bodies that respectively conceptualize contemporary mobile societies. The third body of theory they present comes from the notion of spatiality where places are constantly in motion and subjected to constant reconfigurations (Sheller & Urry, 2006:216). Meanwhile, the fifth body of theory refers to complex patterns that information technologies produce within social life. Following these theorizations, the context of analysis combines the concept of 'mediation' (Kember &

Zylinska, 2012) with the ‘new mobility paradigm’ (Sheller & Urry, 2006) in order to advance a critical investigation that sees the interconnection of the two different areas.

The use of mobile communications has spread rapidly since the mid to late 2000s. At present, the rapid adoption of such technology is especially evident in the market penetration of smart phones and other mobile devices. The use of smart phones cannot be separated from the use of social media any more. Socio-technical transformations raise new substantives for social sciences, while also being conditional upon new theoretical and methodological approaches, such as ‘digital materialism’ (Manovich, 2001) that stresses the ephemerality of reality in new media or, in addition ‘New Materialism as Media Theory’ (Parikka, 2012). ‘New materialism’, according to Parikka (2012), is present in the way technical media transmit and process “cultures” (author’s stress). In order to move philosophical traditions forward, a new materialistic approach helps to understand mediated processes that are embedded ‘in much more ephemeral, but as real, *things* – even non-solid things’ (Parikka, 2012:96). Parikka’s new materialistic approach was employed in this study because it proposes a vision of media as multiplicity that enables an appropriate analysis of the phenomenon. Indeed, new materialism allows a questioning of solid and non-solid objects, and also processes. Moreover, new materialism needs to take into account the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller & Urry, 2006) that aims to include within the social sciences the implications of mobility (mainly in relation to migration studies, sciences and technology studies, tourism and transport studies, and so on). Their reflections develop into the ‘mobility turn’ that draws the main characteristics and effects of this phenomenon. Following the introduction of the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller & Urry, 2006), Sheller (2011) suggests the idea of ‘social mobility’ to explain the movements of individuals across social strata. In addition to her explanation of such social phenomenon, Sheller highlights the relevance of mobile devices. She claims that ‘to occur in new ways across a wide range of mobile devices and ‘smart’ environments, there is a new convergence between physical movement of people, vehicles and things; information production, storage and retrieval; wireless distributed computing and communication; and surveillance and tracking technologies’ (Sheller, 2011:1). Following these theorizations, this study designs its methodology taking into account the variables illustrated above, which include the consideration of the existing dichotomy between the immateriality of the platform and the materiality of the object mobile device.

Focusing on the dynamics, Urry (2007) underlines that research in mobilities encompasses not only the physical movement of objects, but also imaginative travels, virtual travels and communicative travels. Urry's emphasis on the dynamism of voyage that introduces a new attention into old sociological questions, bringing a more mobile sociology to the forefront of social theories. The emphasis on movements, mobilities and travels sheds new light on the purpose of research also bringing into account important implications. It opens new ways of evaluating the existing relationship between theory, observation, and engagement. Moreover, this new interest remarks on the theorization of the 'space of flows' (Castells, 1996) that Castells notably advanced to describe the cultural abstraction that the concepts of space and time has undergone within the digital age. He focuses on the 'complexity of the interaction between technology, society and space' (Castells, 1996:377) to present a new spatial contemplation. Distinct from the 'spaces of places', this new space is organized through movements. Its elaboration adequately describes the concurrence of mobility and dynamism that the subject of analysis presents.

Historically, social sciences have focused on the ongoing geographical proximities based on more or less face-to-face social interactions. Much social science presumed 'metaphysics of presence' (Buscher & Urry, 2009), proposing that the immediate presence of others becomes the basis of social existence. However, as it has been demonstrated through this section, the materiality of objects is surpassed by the dynamicity and ephemerality that new media manifests. In this context, the metaphor of 'liquidity' suggested by Bauman (2000) figures more appropriate whether attempting 'to grasp the nature of the present, in many ways novel, phase in the history of modernity' (Bauman, 2000:2). Under this light, the new conceptions of materiality, mobility and liquidity are viewed as extensive interpretations of the context in which new media are experienced. Following this, smart mobile devices are crucial variables in investigating the effect that the social media platform Instagram causes at social level. This is the reason why; the theorizations exemplified above are necessary in designing the appropriate research method for this investigation.

### **1.3.1 Qualitative Research Method: A Netnographic Approach**

Qualitative research is a type of scientific research that is interdisciplinary, interpretative, political and theoretical in nature (Brennen, 2013:4). In social sciences, in particular, the use of qualitative research methods helps to examine real-life situations even if the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined. This study uses qualitative research to reach an in-depth understanding of human behaviours in relation to new media. It investigates the reasons and the modalities in which individuals' experiences new media. As Brennen (2013) describes, the strength of qualitative research is the capability of offering an elaborated description of how reality is socially constructed (Brennen, 2013:4). It provides individuals' perspectives and, also, intangible information, such as emotions. Because of the complexity of the subjects, qualitative researchers 'tend to use a variety of different methodologies in their work' (Brennen, 2013:4). This is the reason why, following Brennen (2013), this study uses a multi-methodological approach that includes a *netnographic* analysis (Kozinets, 2010), the (embedded) multiple-case study research method (Yin, 2009: 46), qualitative interviewing techniques (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), and visual content analysis (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2000). For this study, a qualitative approach is able to measure the effects of different types of communication on various groups in society (Brennen, 2013:5). In fact, using a qualitative approach, this study comprehends in-depth individuals' actual behaviors, their rituals, beliefs, attitudes, actions, and stories in relation to specific social contexts.

To stay current, this research method must follow and adapt the traditional ethnographic guidelines to a *netnographic* approach, which includes the mediation of the Internet for the contemporary sociality. 'Netnography is a qualitative method devised specifically to investigate the consumer behaviour of cultures and community present on the Internet' (Kozinets, 1998). *Netnography* is also a specialized method for the unique computer-mediated contingency of today's social world (Kozinets, 2010). Initially it was created to help with understanding of the virtual world. It develops in the area of marketing and consumer research and subsequently applied to interdisciplinary fields. Social scientists, as Kozinets (2010) argues, are increasingly reaching the conclusion that they can no longer adequately understand many of the most important facets of social and cultural life without incorporating the Internet and computer-mediated communication into their studies. Nowadays, there is more attention on mediated experiences, as testified by Kember and Zylinska (2012). Indeed, through their volume *Life after New Media* (2012), they highlight the significant shift in the contemporary understanding of new



media. In doing so, they move the focus from the objects of the Internet onto the processes of mediation. Following their examination of the importance of multiple flows of mediation, this study concentrates on the diffusion of digital mediation and technology into social life.

In this study the concept of *netnography* (Kozinets, 2010) is necessary to delimitate the context of analysis: The Internet. It provides useful insights by analysing human behaviours in the interactive sphere of the Internet. Within this environment Bowler (2010) mentions the existence of a variety of approaches and nomenclatures, such as: online ethnography and virtual ethnography. In the end, *netnography* celebrates adaptability as a research method. For the purpose of this study, *netnography* is an excellent resource for a ground breaking qualitative research. As more and more individuals use the Internet, an increasing number of its use facilitates connections and information sharing. Bowler (2010) argues that online ‘ethnography refers to the online research methods which adapt to the study of communities and cultures through computer-mediated social interaction’ (Bowler, 2010:1270). Kozinets (2010) extends all ethnographies proposing to go beyond the mere observation of online cultures, phenomenon and individuals; rather it aims to deeply understand online communities and social interactions.

The mediation of new media characterizes the majority of daily social processes. Within this Kozinets, (2010), for example, says that ‘being in contact with an online community is increasingly a regular part of people’s everyday lives’ (Kozinets, 2010:14) and as such, these mediated lives need to be analysed and contextualised. An accurate coordination of *netnographic* fieldwork includes the analysis of online social behaviours. Kozinets (2010) discloses four key characteristics: *adaptation* to various technological media; participation under optional condition of *anonymity*; vastly enhanced cultural *accessibility*, and automatic *archiving* of exchanges. The list he makes is useful for creating a set of specific guidelines for planning a valid methodology. For this study on Instagram the *netnographic* approach is modified and adapted to combine together different areas of analysis (interviews and photos) conferring to this method a unique and innovative shape. Considering that Instagram is a smart mobile application, the research method design takes into account the variables afforded also by the mobility of devices.

Following Bowler (2010) and Kozinets' (2011) explanations, this study adjusts their approach to the specific case of analysis: Instagram, which brings into consideration the presence of visual materials. A *netnographic* approach is used to consider the mediation that the social media platform determines for the practice of photo sharing. Indeed, 'analysing visual contents is almost impossible without taking into account the context in which the visual was produced and finally received' (Bock *et al*, 2011:272). This study considers mediation as a crucial variable that determines social relationships and affiliations. Considering the fact that Instagram "lives" within the Internet and through smart mobile devices, the employment of a *netnographic* approach is considered vital for this study.

Before proceeding with the data collection, the context of analysis is examined separately to provide a precise description of the structure and the functioning of the platform. Following Banducci's (2013:159) criteria of analysis it is decided to apply those that can better fit the research question. The following principles are taken into account: design of the platform, whether and how the platform is part of a larger conglomeration; uses of the platform, content analysis, theme/s of the platform and its connections with offline relationships; technological features, and the role of the platform in a larger setting. Precisely, the analysis of the platform includes Banducci's approach that 'focuses on the interface (what we see on screen), the traffic coming and going, the stuff that gets produced (upload and accessed) on its own terms, the community using and running the site, or behind the screen functions' (Banducci, 2013:159). The current social world is mainly experienced online, with perhaps millions of people interacting using various social media platforms. This phenomenon produces consequently an increased use of online research, as Banducci (2013) reports, which brings into academic research the employment of digital tools as data gathering. The Internet represents the context of analysis where the case Instagram is located. The employment of this approach illustrates the use of Instagram across different areas, which are, at the same time, part of the overall conceptual framework.

### **1.3.2 (Embedded) Multiple-case Study**

The (embedded) multiple-case study designed by Yin (2009) identifies as the most appropriate research method for the study of Instagram. Considering the typology of

data expected this approach gains knowledge by gathering materials from the synergy of case based practices and qualitative research methods. The research method process that motivates this study is built using the existing literature from the diverse areas that this study covers, such as Internet, digital media, technology, communication, sociology, transmedia storytelling, identity, memory, social networking, political economy and social media marketing, privacy and surveillance, cyberculture and photography. Consequently, the interconnections among these disciplines result in a multiplicity of information, which is designed support the complexity of this study.

The (embedded) multiple-case design (Yin, 2009), as can be seen in Table. 1, presents the context (the Internet) that includes a main case study (Instagram) that, in turn, contains five embedded units of analysis: photo sharing, social relationships, political economy, privacy and surveillance, and identity and memory. The context of analysis relates to the use of the Internet, in particular through the employment of smart mobile devices. The analysis is limited to the use of the specific social media platform Instagram, which is examined considering the different questions that the general use of the platform arises. The co-presence of the different areas considered in the units of analysis do not require different methodological approaches. However, they are kept in separate sections because they involve different filters of interpretation. In all cases, Internet studies, media convergence (Jenkins, 2006), and visual studies (Pink, 2007; Rose, 2007) are the theoretical fundamentals taken into account to address the analysis and generate useful elements for interpretation.

Table 1. Organization of the study: (Embedded) multiple-case design.

CONTEXT: The Internet				
Case study: Instagram				
Embedded Unit of analysis 1: Photo sharing	Embedded Unit of analysis 2: Social relationships	Embedded Unit of analysis 3: Political economy and social media marketing	Embedded Unit of analysis 4: Privacy and surveillance	Embedded Unit of analysis 5: Identity and memory

As can be seen from Table 1, the (embedded) multiple-case study is broken down into five areas that aim to:

- explore the new dynamics of online photo sharing;
- identify users' social engagement and interaction;
- describe uses of visualities in new social media marketing strategies;
- question concerns related to privacy and surveillance;
- examine how the platform becomes crucial for the construction and disclosure of the self, and the new concept of visual memory.

Conducting the study towards a wide-ranging perspective, the five (embedded) units of analysis are conclusively brought together to recreate the fundamental crossroad of this study classifiable in three general objectives:

- examining the decisive role of mobility (smart mobile devices) in establishing new social practices, new conceptions of the self, others and surroundings;
- exploring and describing mediation as a crucial concept in establishing new social practices, new conceptions of the self, others and the world;
- identifying and theorizing the new concept of mediated visuality.

This approach justifies the sectioning of the thesis into thematic chapters. In fact, a cross analysis of the different components extends the general understanding of the subject towards a more critical one. This method is designed in this way to identifying constants in visual photo sharing resulting from the mobility of smart phones and other devices, interpreting the influence of the mediation of the social media platform, and investigating the modalities in which the co-presence of mobility and connectivity affects the human visual experience of the world.

(Embedded) multi-case study approach figures an appropriate research method to investigate the complexity of Instagram. Considering the multifaceted nature of the platform of the co-presence of different aspects, this method includes in the analysis a plurality of interpretations. This method figures as a useful exploratory tool in order to examine real-life situations, issues, and problems regarding Instagram in a more

appropriate way. The selection of the (embedded) multiple-case study approach enabled this study to *consider multiple experiments* (Yin, 2009). The interrelations between the different areas of enquiries involve multiple sources of evidences (Yin, 2003). Precisely, the plurality of data confers richness to the following analysis.

In order to avoid inaccuracy in the results this study approaches the subject from different angles using a mixed method. The (embedded) multi-case study method used for this study includes an innovative technique that combines together qualitative in-depth interviews and visual contents analysis. Its design is the result of a series of decisions made by the researcher regarding the modalities necessary in which the combination of different typologies of data (interviews and photos) can be decoded. Its design is closely associated with the general framework and guidelines that implement the study and it offers an alternative multi-methodological approach that might be applied for similar research projects. This blueprint conducts a study that maximises control over factors that could interfere with the validity of the findings.

This approach merges together qualitative in-depth interviews and Instagram photo sharing observation to develop narratives to describe connections and constants between individuals and the mediation of their smart mobile devices. Indeed, the purpose of this combination is to follow the principle of *reliability* described by Yin (2009:122, author's italic) that suggests maintaining a chain among the evidence gathered. Participants, in the intention of producing a fluid narration, can increase the validity of their responses and thus of the findings. This conception emerges also because, in relation to social organization, 'visual data encourage the construction of narratives that segue easily from one level to another' (Grady, 2008). In fact, interviews and visual data are interpreted as fluid developments from basic starting points toward more critical endings.

The concurrence of different typologies of sources (interviews and photos) determines the main strength in the data collection. This combination is chosen because interviews can be *targeted*, i.e. focused directly on the case study topic, and *insightful*, i.e. providing perceived casual inferences and explanations (Yin, 2009, my emphasis). Whilst direct-participants' observation of photo sharing on Instagram is particularly appropriate to this study because its strengths are *reality*, i.e. covering events in real time, *contextual*, covering the context, and also *insightful* into interpersonal behaviors

and motives (Yin, 2009, my emphasis). In fact, the combination of both techniques arose considering the potential weaknesses regarding responses' bias and reflexivity, i.e. interviewees provide what interviewers want to hear making answers partially reliable. The interconnection of different typologies of data generates a more complete picture where the potential bias of interviews can be integrated with direct observations of photo sharing and vice versa.

Indeed, the research method design follows notions of *Visual Ethnography* (Pink, 2007) that Sarah Pink advances in relation to qualitative social research. Pink (2007) argues that 'social scientists often complain that photographs alone do not represent, for example, emotions, social relations, relations of power and exploitation, but they need to be contextualized with verbal discourses or other knowledge in order to invoke such experiences' (Pink, 2007:125). The combination of interviews and visual materials draws attention to the importance of this aspect. The design of this study is fluid and flexible in order to follow the responses of participants and interpretation of visual content. The advantages observed in this research methodology designed for this study is identified in the following points: reduced cost of travelling for face-to-face interviews, the computer-mediation interviewing give both researcher and participants time to reflect on their responses and produce more accurate results, respondents appreciated the high degree of freedom in responding, respondents proved more likely to disclose personal information, emotions and feeling without facing the researcher (Bampton & Cowton, 2002). Mediated interviews and visual analysis give the researcher the opportunity to establish an active interaction with Instagram users, and comprehend emerging dynamics that might not have been considered in the first place.

### **1.3.3 Context of Analysis: Mobile Social Media and Netnographic Approach**

The sampling technique employed in this study follows a netnographic approach and it is accomplished entirely online. Considering the mediatic nature of this project, initially an online research is conducted for the purpose of identifying the fundamental information related to the Instagram users. Since Facebook bought Instagram (April, 2012) there has been witnessed the rise of Instagram users throughout the globe and, because of the visibility afforded by Facebook, it has been witnessed also the

development of a variety of Instagramers communities Facebook pages. Users' part of the Instagram communities Facebook pages can be categorized in Instagram active users and Instagramers, i.e. users members of online communities as well. Since the goal of data collection is to gather photographs, information and understand individuals' behaviors, Facebook groups are recognised as engaging platforms where both categories of users converse. So, the call for participants is spread out on the Internet within every single Instagramers communities Facebook official pages. After the first approach through the social network, participants (who have responded positively to the CfP) are approached via private email. The email that participants receive is formed by a general description of the study, the researcher contact details, and a consent form with the precise explanation of the treatment of personal data, which are detailed in the ethical considerations.

This study confines the investigation only within the Instagram users groups and owners of a smart mobile device. The target population of this study is formed by the group of subjects that meet the set of criteria needed to technically participate in the fieldwork. They should be Instagram active users. Indeed, for an adequate *netnographic* investigation, this study gathers participants who are 'active, relevant, substantial, heterogeneous, and data-rich for the research question' (Kozinets, 2010:89). This study collects the individuals who respond positively to the call for participants. Within this, the target population does not have particular restrictions in terms of gender, race, and education. The number of subjects involved is accomplished once, after a first analysis of the interviews and photographs, the research question is satisfactorily fulfilled. 44 participants from all over the world take part of this study. 29 participants response to the computer-mediated in-depth interview and 15 participants response to the open ended questions. All the 44 participants response satisfactorily to questions related to the different areas of analysis giving interesting insights about new dynamics human-technology, personal perspectives and common behaviors. Visual data collection is formed by general participants' photo sharing on Instagram with the specific photos brought as examples to support their answers. The innovative combination of participants' responses and photo sharing forms the overall data collected that aims to produce multifaceted qualitative insights.

### 1.3.4 Computer-Mediated Interviewing Technique

Following Yin's (2009) claim that argues that 'one of the most important sources of case study information is the interview' (Yin, 2009:106), this study used a qualitative interviewing technique as the main benchmark. Specifically, the reasons why an in-depth interviewing technique is employed is because, as Salmons (2010) describes it 'is a qualitative research technique involving a researcher who guides or questions a participant to elicit information, perspectives, insights, feelings on behaviors, experiences, or phenomenon that cannot be observed' (Salmons, 2010:40). Through online qualitative interviews, according to Rubin and Rubin (2005), it is possible to understand experiences and reconstruct events in which the researcher does not participate and, therefore, through the accurate description of social processes, they allow an additional understanding of modalities and reasons why things change (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Moreover, qualitative interviews, whether narrowly focused like the (embedded) units of analysis, are necessary to learn what happens in specific instances (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The main purpose of the employment of qualitative interviews in this study, as part of an *elaborated case study*, is to find out what happens, why and what it means more broadly (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, authors' italic). In relation to this, findings enable a generalization of the analysis toward broader processes, discovering causes, and finally explaining and understanding relevant phenomenon. Participants are asked to show, justify, and comment on photographs related to their responses. Additional questions are asked to explore critical themes to obtain further depth and details, which come together with visual examples to complete ideas and fill missing parts. It elicits more details without changing the focus.

Specifically, computer-mediated interviewing method is employed to honor the principle that 'research questions that explore an online phenomenon are strengthened through the use of a method of research that closely mirrors the natural setting under investigation' (Geiser, 2002:3). Computer-mediated interviewing allows a valid investigation of participants' mediated experience directly within the context of analysis. Computer-mediated interviews develop a critical progressive understanding about practices, opinions, and perceptions. The parallel leading of mediated interviews and visual analysis consents a general understanding of participants' position that consented the interviewer to ask additional explanations of why individuals behave as they do (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Within this, the visual analysis enlarges the



understanding focusing more on participants' disclosures and experiences. The intent of mediated interviews is to encourage participants to talk about their experiences, perceptions and understandings of the subject.

In this case, computer-mediated interviewing (Curasi, 2001) uses two methods: asynchronous and synchronous. The asynchronous method used was the email (researcher University account) and shared platforms (Facebook and Instagram) whilst the synchronous method was the video call (Skype). Even if a computer-mediated interviewing method could be considered incomplete because of its mediated nature, as Curasi (2001) highlights, the condition offered by online interviews provides benefits that the traditional face-to-face approach cannot offer. The strengths of computer-mediated interviewing can be mainly identified by the contemporary widespread familiarity that individuals have with media technologies. In both cases (asynchronous and synchronous online communication), the mediation of the device confers on the entire process of data collection a "conformable distance" that is maintained between the interviewee and interviewer. Doing so, participants do not perceive the interview as interrogatory, rather as a mediated discussion similar to other conversations experienced during everyday life. Indeed, both have the time to reflect, interpret questions and responses and to elaborate appropriate comments, and observations. Additionally, computer-mediated interviewing is not an aggressive and invasive technique, rather it intends to establish worthy relationships with participants in the most suitable way. The decision to include both asynchronous and synchronous computer-mediated interviewing gave the participants the possibilities to decide how to conduct the interview.

Considering that part of the sample population is more comfortable with text-based communication (Salmons, 2010) it is suggested the email asynchronous interviewing method to participants as a valid alternative for taking part in the study. A list of seven open-ended questions is sent to the 15 participants who preferred this option. In this case, participants are asked to provide general insights and support their responses through visual examples. The main reason why this approach is progressed is to prevent possible lack of data caused by the potential inability of recruiting participants willing to do an in-depth interview. So, the contribution of the responses received via email or Facebook needs to be considered as an additional source for the comprehension of the subject and as extra support. Instead, those 29 participants who express the interest and

availability to undertake an in-depth interview are initially approached by email or Facebook. The interviews are approached more as guided conversations than structured interrogations in order to follow participants' responses and unearth extra scenarios in a more natural way. Participants are also approached in line with their profile and role within Instagram (general users, part of the Instagramers online community, and so on). Indeed, an in-depth qualitative interviewing technique is flexible and it adapts as circumstances change (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Following the flow of participants' responses some questions are emphasized more than others. The computer-mediated in-depth interviews are executed using the software Skype. A smart phone device (Samsung 3G) to record all the interviews and an agenda to take notes.

All the interviews are recorded (Skype interviews), saved (email interviews) and, subsequently, stored into different places: an external hardware and an online cloud storage service, Dropbox. All the interviews are conducted respectively within private environments and outside working hours (Salmons, 2010) mainly for logistical reasons. This is the reason why this technique is considered similar to informal conversations. The list of questions asked are divided by thematic areas and followed the embedded units of analysis (See Appendix: In-depth interviews questions and open ended questions). The questions examined what happens in specific circumstances, explore the ordinary, the routine, the shared history, the taken-for-granted norms and values, rituals, and expected behaviours of a given group of people (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Therefore, participants are asked to describe a typical day, ordinary occurrences, and exceptional events allowing to portrait relevant issues (examples, norms, and common behaviors). In addition, hand written notes are taken to add observations for the following data analysis. Written to take instant notes about particular responses, stories or situations described by the interviewees. The immediacy employed at that stage is useful to catch first intuitions. This reading identifies essential categories that give a better structure to the findings (Yin, 2009). Key words are identified that represent the content of the response and, also, a potential interpretation to define fluxes. Indeed, the rationale for using computer-mediated interviewing approach combined with participants' photo sharing observation is used to explore the visual materials in depth.

### **1.3.5 Visual Data Collection**

The emphasis that this study has on images follows the ethnographer Sarah Pink (2007) in her observation that ‘each individual produces meanings by relating the image to his or her existing personal experience, knowledge and wider cultural discourses’ (Pink, 2007:82). Words can explain motivations, and feelings, meanwhile images can communicate what the words are not able to describe, such as: emotions and visions. It needs to be highlighted that for the participants’ photo sharing analysis is different between those participants who had replied only to the open-ended email interview and those who took part in the Skype in-depth interview. In fact, the first group of participants are asked to complement their responses providing explanations and concrete visual examples. Instead, for the second group of participants, responses and photo sharing are critically combined together following their examples and visual data collection. The opportunity to have participants’ photo sharing adds new dimensions for understanding both the context and the phenomenon. As the participants showed a widespread daily use of the platform, the observation of their photo sharing is undertaken within an everyday life use of social media.

In addition to the responses it is possible to fulfil the research with participants’ actual photographic activities on the platform. Participants are asked to provide their Instagram nickname in order to be observed (followed) online by the researcher. Considering the abundance of visual materials present on the platform and to cope with the concern related to big data (boyd & Crawford, 2012), it is decided to limit the visual data collection to two months for the 29 participants who respond to the in-depth interviews (for the other 15 participants are considered only the visual examples that they mention). The ‘two months’ period is as a fair amount of time. In fact, such length can include different events, such as: working days, leisure time, national holidays, vacations and so on, producing a more complete view of the variety of participants’ photo sharing. The photographs that participants have been sharing during the two months of observation are collected and stored at the same as the interviews. The modality of visual data collection takes place on a computer screen. Participants’ photos are captured through screen shots, saved and stored on external hardware and Dropbox.

Participants’ photo sharing observation is included in the data collection to increase the validity of the data analysis. Visual data, indeed, provides additional insights overall,

determining the dynamics of interactions among users, modalities of visual communication, and typologies of social activities. According to Kawulich (2005), participant observation allows the researcher to check definitions of terms that participants use in interviews, observe events and situations that participants explain and, eventually, evaluate distortions or inaccuracies. Observing participants' photo sharing is useful for a better understanding of the general context of interaction (Instagram) and the phenomenon of study (photo sharing). To observe participants' photo sharing it is decided to use the typology of participant observer proposed by Gold (1985). Considering the mediated nature of the entire study, *participant as observer* (Gold, 1985, author's italic) is identified as the most suitable stance that enables participants' behaviour to be monitored within the Instagram platform. In fact, a researcher account @Allydoc follows participants' Instagram accounts as member of the global community. Participants' photo sharing observation focuses principally on the typology of happenings (photo sharing, 'likes', comments and so on) and their reasons (Dewalt & Dewalt, 2002). Participant observation is a beneficial tool for producing studies that provide accurate representation of a culture (Kawulich, 2005) that, in the case of this study, investigates the embryonic field of visual mediated culture.

### **1.3.6 Data Analysis**

The data analysis involves semiotics combined with critical response analysis and visual content analysis (Pink, 2007). 'Semiotics is the study of signs that exist in our social lives' (Brennen, 2013:196) and images, words, objects and gestures that from it are recognised as signs that represent something else. Semiotic analysis does not advance unique interpretations, rather it aims to understand linguistic codes taking into account the specificity of contexts, cultures, places and time. However, semiotics is employed in this study to draw meanings of qualitative content analysis of interviews and images.

The critical response analysis starts after the computer-mediated interviews. In addition to the analysis that occurs throughout the data collection, a protracted period of examination takes place at the conclusion of the fieldwork. Qualitative analysis is a complex process that needs to be done in constant interaction with the data (and the

participants). The critical response analysis examines two different kinds of data. On the one hand, there are written responses received by email/SMPs while, on the other hand, there are the Skype interviews. In both cases, data analysis takes account of the mediated level of interaction with participants. It begins the critical response analysis from computer-mediated interviews to ensure a gradual development of familiarity with the data to identify additional investigations (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This is the reason why, visual contents are observed immediately after the mediated interviews. Once the fieldwork is complete data is organized to allow a combined interpretation of interviews and visual materials. During the critical response analysis, this study looks at '*concepts that interviews frequently mention or indirectly revealed, that emerge from comparing interviews, themes that suggest new concepts, typologies, figures of speech and symbols, stories and labelling*' (Rubin & Rubin, 2005:210-212). Instead, within participants' photo sharing observation data is interpreted through the classification of visual materials and the contextualization of participants' communicative acts (Bowler, 2010). This stage is necessary to drive the research toward a deeper understanding of visual content referred to in visual content analysis (Bock *et al*, 2011) in order to test the ways in which media represents individuals, events, and emotions. Furthermore, the qualitative content analysis offered the ability to translate the amount of visual data into categorizations, which precisely demonstrates the sharp sense of the results, identifying themes, discuss findings, and advancing new concepts.

It is important to emphasise the fact that images are not the only data taken into consideration in this study because what happens with images does not necessarily reflect the meaning of images. Key aspects of interpreting photographic images are not just critical analysis of visual contents, rather social behaviours before and after the photo exchange. Visual messages travel through different spaces. Photos are made in one place and displayed in another one; they are also very easy to capture and send, and their value or significance often changes through time and across platforms. For this peculiarity, photos' meanings are constrained by several socio-cultural contexts in which they are located, and these are different in different places and periods. It follows that contexts of experience are decisive in shaping the value of images. This reasoning conducted Thomas (1991) to emphasize the concept of re-contextualization of objects and, later Bolter and Grusin (1999) to talk about remediation. In social life objects pass through different cultural contexts and devices that may modify what they mean. 'What we are confronted with is never more or less than a succession of uses and re-

contextualization' (Thomas, 1991:29). From this starting point, the list of research questions makes sense in exploring a cyberspace, whereby individuals' mediated lives are progressively re-located, re-adjusted and re-interpreted.

Participants' photo sharing observation does not analyse photographs as evidence of the 'who', 'where' and 'what' of reality, rather as evidence of bias, ideologically colored interpretations of how their maker or makers perceived and (re-)constructed the reality. This study employs Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) method of visual content analysis in order to provide a basic framework for a descriptive analysis of the photographs. Precisely, visual content analysis, as an empirical (observational) and objective procedure (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2000), quantifies visual representations using reliable defined categories of semiotic studies (Barthes, 1980, 1982, 2000; Benjamin, 2008; Eco, 1984; Sontag, 1978; Metz, 1991). However, it does not provide a complete sociological interpretation of the photographs. In the light of this latent incompleteness the combination of computer-mediated interviews and photo sharing observation is chosen following Sarah Pink's comments about *Doing Visual Ethnography* (2007). She states that 'while the image alone reveals nothing, it is given ethnographic meaning when linked to other types of knowledge' (Pink, 2007:131). From Pink's (2007) assumption, this study grounds its strengths on the combination of the diverse typologies of data described and proceeds following a precise organization of data collection.

### **1.3.8 Ethical Considerations**

This study is conducted respecting principles of codes of research ethics in line with the basic human rights legislation in force in the UK (Human Rights Act (1998) c. 42). This study follows Banducci's principles (2013). Indeed, an informed consent is sent within which all participants apprise about the access, the observation, and the use and protection of their personal data in this research. Participants' identity is kept anonymous in order to protect their identity and privacy. Considering the presence of photographs that might portray individuals or recognizable private locations, it is communicated that in the case where photographs would be used, as evidence for conferences, publications and other academic purposes, participants would be informed with an additional note. Nevertheless, faces or information that might harm participants'

security are obscured. Moreover, the consent form reports that the use of any data gathered under its conditions are used exclusively for the immediate purposes of the project. Finally, it is explained that the researcher's duty is to guarantee 'transparency and liability' (Banducci, 2013:152) of data collected in line with the subject of the research.

As part of the developing relationship with the participants, the researcher takes on deep ethical obligations. This includes the responsibility to report the interviews accurately, to keep visual data shared under the researcher's control (providing a safe archive for photos and scripts), and the commitment not to harm participants' privacy and security. Photos and scripts are collected and archived following ethical procedures and assuring a fair treatment of personal data. They are, indeed, used only within the researcher's PhD project, through the presentation of accurate reports and papers. This study follows the precise set of ethical considerations illustrated by Wiles et al. (2008) regarding the conduction of a qualitative approach on visual research. During the entire study, the principles of anonymity, confidentiality, privacy, copyright, data sharing and archiving (Wiles *et al*, 2008) are followed ensuring the appropriate confidential procedure concerning participants' data. Indeed, the research report does not mention any personal details. Participants can choose to show their real name or to provide a nickname. However, in order to maintain the anonymity of participants a different criterion is applied. A number is assigned to all participants (a chronological order is followed in relation to the day participants filled out the consent form). Participants are treated respectfully and courteously at all times. No information obtained from the research is or will be reported in a manner that could possibly identify or harm the participants (See Appendix: Consent Form and Demographic).

Overall, the innovative methodology described precisely the several steps that formed the fieldwork illustrating the techniques adopted to collect the data necessary to elaborate a valid analysis and answer the research question. The mixture of computer-mediated qualitative interviewing (in-depth interviewing, email interviewing) and participants' photo sharing observation form the mixed method that analyses the Instagram phenomenon. This (embedded) multiple-case study learns from Instagram active users the instances that define how the use of the platform changes their lives and their ways of experiencing their surroundings. Additionally, the visual data collection combined what participants say and what they actually do within their daily use of the

platform. Indeed, the purpose of the following critical analysis is to show how the mediation of the Instagram social media platform is changing individuals' visual communication.



## Chapter 2: Photo Sharing on Instagram

This chapter investigates how the practice of photo sharing is changing the traditional concept of photography through the mediation of smart mobile devices. It considers how the mediation (Kember & Zylinska, 2012) of social media platforms and the mobility (Sheller & Urry, 2004) of smart mobile devices alter the conception of contemporary visual communication. Moreover, it engages with recent literature on material culture and mobile communication technologies by linking these theorizations to social practices of photo sharing in which the object smart mobile device is embedded. The modalities used for the ubiquitous exchange of imageries will be interpreted to approach critically the rise of mediated visual communication. Paradigmatic changes in social habits and in the use of the Internet generate incisive alterations, therefore, by considering the unclear distinction between real life and mediated life (Gefter, 2006). This chapter presents phases in the life course of photo sharing to examine different ways of using smart phones, explaining the present incorporation of mobile devices into individuals' life and the role they play in experiencing everyday sociality. An insightful analysis of motivations, organization, and transformations of the practice of general photo sharing is fundamental to extend the investigation towards specific areas of photo sharing, such as: sociality (chapter 3: "Social Relationships on Instagram), economy (chapter 4: "Political Economy and Social Media Marketing on Instagram"), privacy and surveillance (chapter 5: "Privacy and Surveillance on Instagram"), and identity and memory (chapter 6: "Identity and Memory on Instagram"). In its conclusion, this chapter illustrates the key principles that drive the practice of photo sharing on Instagram. It considers the implications created by the mediation that the use of social media produces. Additionally, it evaluates the condition of mobility that smart mobile devices elicit. The extent in terms of the use of mobile digital technologies shapes new human behaviours never observed before. This chapter examines the practice of photo sharing on Instagram, by defining the conditions and social dimensions of new mediated visualities of smart mobile technologies. It also produces useful methodological insights for developing contemporary research techniques in media and visual studies.

### 2.1 Media Theories and the Evolution of the Practice of Photo Sharing

Previous research explored widely the practice of physical photo sharing but, since the arrival of the Internet and social media platforms, the research moved its focus onto the cyberspace. What is important in this context started by the theoretical pioneering consideration of Marshal McLuhan (1964): ‘the medium is the message’. This approach fosters media studies to consider the system in which the content, the medium and the cultural matrix where a particular medium operates to form the new environment of social interactions (McLuhan, 1964). ‘This is merely to say that personal and social consequences of any medium – that is an extension of ourselves – result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology’ (McLuhan, 1964:1). McLuhan (1964) claims that, characteristic of all media, is that ‘the “content” of any medium is always another medium’ (McLuhan, 1964:2). Explaining this point, McLuhan (1964) uses the art movement of cubism as an instance to illustrate the innovation that his theorization was making, introducing new perspectives of evaluation of media. Cubism, by showing all the visual perspectives together on a two-dimensional canvas, provides the immediate sense of the whole. According to McLuhan, ‘cubism, by seizing on instant total awareness, suddenly announced that the *medium is the message*’ (McLuhan, 1964:5).

From McLuhan’s theorization, it is also helpful to approach the subject by considering the conception of ‘convergence culture’ (Jenkins, 2006). ‘Convergence’ is the expression that Jenkins uses to describe the union of the different components that characterize new media processes. He explains his argument saying that ‘convergence represents a paradigm shift – a move from medium-specific content toward content that flows across multiple media channels, toward the increased interdependence of communication systems, toward multiple ways of accessing media content, and toward ever more complex relations between top-down corporate media and bottom-up participatory culture’ (Jenkins, 2006:243).

Jenkins defines convergence as ‘flow of contents across multiple media platforms’ (Jenkins, 2006:3), suggesting that media users play a key role in the creation and distribution of digital contents and producing visible social changes within the society. Jenkins’ (2006) argument does not dismiss the role of old media; rather he claims that ‘their functions and status are shifted by the introduction of new technologies’ (Jenkins, 2006:14). Following Jenkins’ theorization (2006), it is safe to say that the practice of photo sharing could be considered an ongoing process between individuals and different

platforms are part of this phenomenon. Using the conception of ‘media convergence’ as a starting point, this study describes insightful interconnections between the current studies in visual communication, media and mobility.

Significant developments in the design of technologies can be observed since the launch of a photo camera that accomplishes the vernacular use of photography. Thanks to George Eastman and his company Kodak, as Sarvas and Frohlich describe (2011), at the end of the century snapshot photography was born. Combining the knowledge of technology and of the social demand for it, Kodak launched the first widely affordable camera that enabled photography to become a global product used by unskilled amateurs. Through the well-known slogan: “You push the button, we do the rest”, Eastman does not only sell a device, rather an entire assembly line for the production of photographs for the general public. Through this invention, photography overcomes its aristocratic condition to become a pastime for the middle classes. Since then a progressive increased production of photographs is observable. Sarvas and Frohlich (2011) identify ‘the *home* as the location for snapshots; *leisure* as the time of snapshots; and *family* as the people in the snapshots’ (Sarvas & Frohlich, 2011:48) as the foundation stones of the snapshot culture. Kodak launched a technological path that visibly changes the subjects of photography and conduces gradually toward instant photography and its use in every family.

Through his volume *Snapshot Versions of Life* (1987), Richard Chalfen discusses the crucial dynamics and practices that characterize the entrance of photography into domestic environments. From an anthropological perspective, Chalfen (1987) examines mainly family photography, examining the various situations and typology of photographic products (such as snapshots, slide shows, family album and so on). He focuses particular emphasis on the social practices of family photography uncovering common behaviours and social rituals that the snapshots of photography produce. Chalfen (1987) is one of the first scholars to show that the experience of photo sharing was a practice associated with social events (birthdays or family holidays) where the practice of sharing photographs was strictly connected to the stories about and with the images. Chalfen (1987), indeed, identifies in native life and tourism and otherness the three main areas where photography is socially consumed.

As can be observed, the practice of photo sharing was born with a social interest in sharing with others stories, events, and places. Images can be seen as an additional aid to support or explain stories. Moreover, the practice of photo sharing can be interpreted as a practice where the interest in sharing photos accompanied by stories figures as a social event. Since the arrival of the Internet and smart mobile devices the social practice of photo sharing (Counts & Fellheimer, 2004) encounters multiple variables, such as the mediation of digital devices and the connectivity of social media platforms. This combination produces easier modalities for the exchange of photographs never seen before. With the development of digital technologies the practice of photo sharing has witnessed the manifestation of new social habits that involve the use of digital photo cameras, camera phones and the approach to the Internet. By the late 1990s the arrival of digital technologies had moved attention towards new modalities of photo sharing (MMS, emails, and blogs for instance) that showed the introduction of two new variables in the debate on photography: mediation and ephemerality. As a consequence of digitality, the academic research moves its focus onto the effects that technological innovations have on the practice of photo sharing. With the development of digital photography the practice of photo sharing passes from physical to ephemeral image exchange. Progressively, with the rise of the Internet and social media, the practice of photo sharing seems to take place almost exclusively online. Flickr (part of Yahoo net) has been the first photo sharing website, which was subsequently taken over by Picasa, a web album linked to Google, Photobucket, SmugMug, Fotki, Zoomr and many others. They are the most popular websites for users to share and embed personal photos. They are widely used by users that share the same passion for photography and visualities.

Flickr.com emerges as one of the first most used websites dedicated exclusively to the practice of photo sharing. Through one of her studies on the subject, Van Dijck (2011) highlights that Flickr and similar photo sharing sites are spaces where general visions and experiences manifest as a consequence of mutual photo exchange. Moreover, Van Dijck, inscribing Flickr within *The Culture of Connectivity* (Van Dijck, 2013), illustrates the employment of media platforms as a potent social structure where daily connections are built through the practice of photo sharing. Further advancements in digital technologies include in this discourse the arrival of photo cameras and, subsequently, camera phones and smart mobile devices. In this regard, Miller and Edwards (2007) conduct a study on photo sharing employing Flickr.com as a case study to illustrate how the passage from the physical photographic exchange to the ephemeral

one could create new practices impossible to experience before digitality. Following their study, it emerges also that the use of camera phones develops ‘a *different sort of photographic communication* – one that involves telling stories *with* images’ (Miller & Edwards, 2007). Their pioneering contribution examines how Internet-based technologies could actually affect the practice of photo sharing bringing into account issues that through a physical photo exchange do not surface (privacy and social networking, for instance).

The advent of camera phones and smart mobile devices dramatically foster the exchange of images producing new social phenomenon that have been widely investigated by Van House *et al* (2005; 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009; 2010; 2011). The several studies they conducted of the practice of photo sharing focus particularly on the dynamics produced by the use of camera phones and photo sharing websites of individuals’ image exchange. Their studies touch a variety of aspects related to photo sharing, such as: identity, memory and social relations. In particular, they investigate the role played by the mediation of the platforms and the devices involved in the experiments. Through their global research, it emerges that the experience of photo sharing creates social connections, social interactions, and enhances multi-modal communications (Van House, 2007). Using Flickr.com as case study, they identify in memory, identity and narrative the ordinary increased social use of the platform. Precisely, their findings report that the main interests in photo sharing are circumscribable in three main purposes: *self-expression, self-representation and maintaining relationships* (Van House & Ames, 2007, authors’ italic). They testify, consequently, that both the mediation of Flickr and the camera phones duplicate and extend prior social uses of photo sharing.

Through additional studies, Van House *et al* (2005) state that the ‘ready access to imaging encourages people to see the world “photographically” ’ (as a combination of images) and to see more beauty in the everyday life. Indeed, they report that with a camera always at hand and easy viewing, uploading and sharing become for many a frequent, even daily, activity. In this, the camera phone embodies three main uses: ‘*memory-capture devices, communicative devices, and expressive devices*’ Van House *et al* (2005). As can be seen, from their studies there emerges a recurring connection between the use of photography and the issues linked to memory, identity, and communication. These correlations show the increased use of the mediation of

platforms and devices in the practices of photo sharing that causes modifications in relation to the social aspects and to the contents too.

A research group based in the Silicon Valley identifies the central role of photography in ‘telling stories’. Through the design of ‘The Story Track’ device, they demonstrate that digital photos can be used to support some of the same kinds of story sharing that people enjoy with photos’ (Balabanovic *et al*, 2000:571). They identify in sharing experiences, travels, family and friends’ moments the most common and enjoyable uses of photo sharing. They demonstrate the functionality of digital photography and the mediation of the device in ‘story sharing’ (Balabanovic *et al*, 2000). In relation to the contents, instead, Balabanovic *et al* (2000, authors’ italic) delineate two different styles of storytelling: *photo-driven*, where the individual explains every photo in turn and the *story-driven*, where the individual has the story in mind and gathers the appropriate photos to recount the story. The classification of photo sharing as *photo-driven* and *story-driven* demonstrates the significant combination between the story and the image. They also report a preference of ‘select then narrate’ over ‘select while narrate’. This data is helpful when considering the modalities in which a visual storytelling is displayed through screens on social media platforms as a way to socially share personal stories.

Regarding this, another study conducted by Van House *et al* (2004) on the social uses of personal photography highlights that using personal photos to tell stories indicates that ‘sharing events must be significant for the recipient’. From this statement, it emerges that the functionality of photo sharing serves to create meanings for the actors involved in the visual communication. Combining together the studies illustrated above on the practice of photo sharing there are common traits that display social intentions in communicating visually. During the course of the history of photo sharing the social aspect remains a stable variable. However, what really changes is the modality of the practice. Nowadays, individuals are living in a distracting and frenetic world where leisure time is reduced and where Internet connection increases the expectations that people have of their mediated experiences (Turkle, 2011). In fact, the enhanced use of social media platforms on smart mobile devices is taking the place of previous face-to-face general social practices. Indeed, this chapter considers previous research on the subject, identifying how contemporary conditions offered by Instagram alter mediated practices.

Moreover, Kuntsman, within *Digital Cultures and the Politics of Emotion: Feelings, Affect and Technological Change* (Karatzogianni & Kuntsman, 2012) introduces the notion of reverberation – as opposed to that of ‘representation’, ‘narration’ or ‘impact’ – (p. 2) to suggest thinking about the emotion and feelings that cyberspace conveys and mainly about the effects that the movements that multimedia contents in and outside the Internet produce. Although, Kuntsman talks about reverberation in the context of mediated war, violence and death her emphasis on the *touch* (Karatzogianni & Kuntsman, 2012:3, author’s italic) that multimedia contents can produce (even via computers and mobile screens) is useful to interpret the emotional effects produced by photo sharing. Images convey various messages according to the observer and they can be interpreted in different ways. This polysemy highlights the multiplicity of images and their enhanced online photo sharing.

The passage from physical (face-to-face and through prints) to digital photo sharing (through the mediation of digital devices) augmented the production and the exchange of imageries. Then, the transit to the Internet and the inclusion in social media platforms introduced additional modifications. The conveyance onto smart mobile devices boosts dramatically the exchange of images. As can be seen, since the arrival of smart phones, many social activities have been moved from computer screens onto mobile devices. Walking down the street and seeing the majority of people holding their smart phones and looking down is part of contemporary imagery. Then, it is possible to see individuals wondering about something, suddenly stop, take out their smart phone, snap a photo and go on. This common behaviour involves a series of variables (mobility and mediation) that indicates that the presence of smart mobile devices generates new habits and social practices. The majority of time that individuals stop by something to capture an image, photo sharing on social media comes along.

Regarding this it can be mentioned a concrete example. *Participant 13* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 18:24) is a young dynamic female university student living in Pisa (Italy). She commutes almost every day to Milan to attend her lectures. She is passionate about social media with a particular interest in Instagram. Talking about her use of the platform, with enthusiasm she describes how the usability of smart phones allow her to capture scenarios and moments in life that she considers worth sharing online. ‘I have a photo I shot at the train platform in Florence of a guy and a girl

where for sure she was leaving for far away. She got suitcases. He was crying like a mad [...] but this super passionate kiss... I swear! I could snap it at less than a meter away. My mobile was here and they were next to me, and this is something that with the camera it's not possible. [...] That is something you say: "I put it on Instagram now, or never!" ' (see fig. 4).

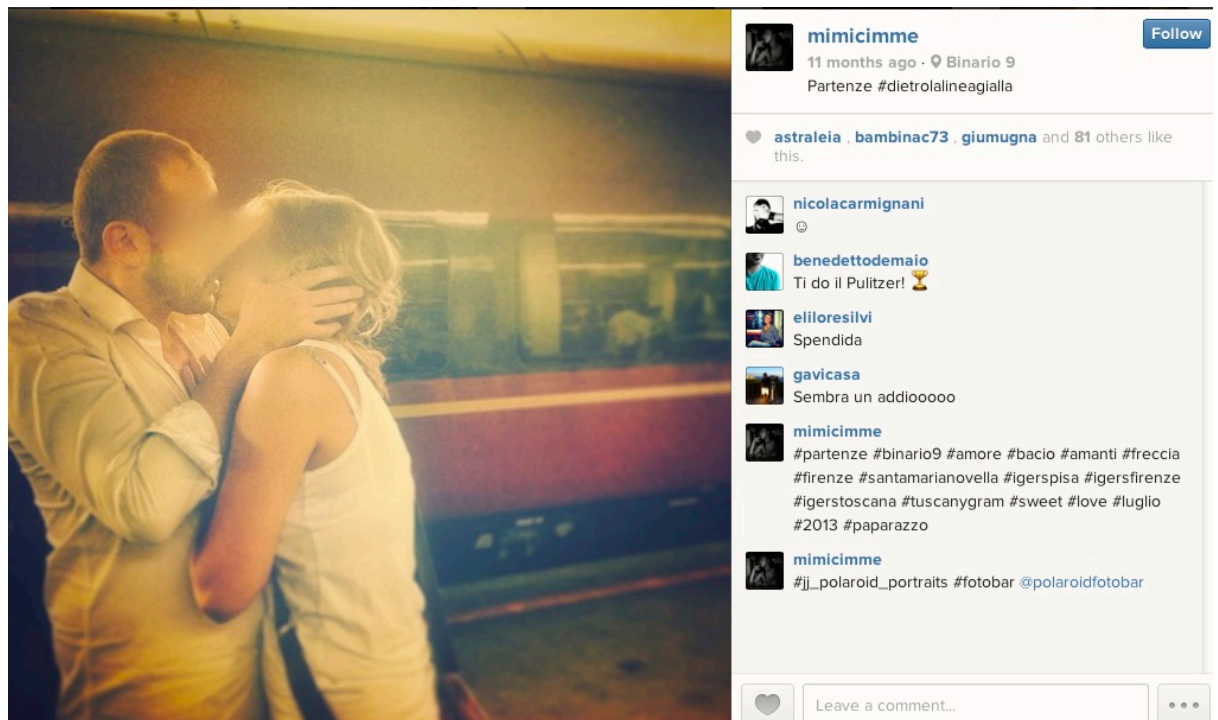


Figure 4. Kiss at the train station.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/mimicimme/>

As can be observed, the possibility of photographing events, situations that individuals come across are practices arising with the mobility of smart mobile devices. Individuals, during their everyday activities, include the use of smart phones in behaviours never examined before. The interest in investigating this phenomenon emerges from the emphasis that individuals put onto the need to take a photo and to post it on Instagram (as can be seen from the quote reported above) breaking a chat with friends, a lunch with the family and so on. Arguably, the use of smart mobile devices and direct access to social media platforms cause the type of behaviour observable through *Participant 13* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 18:24)'s example. In this case, the 'new mobilities paradigm' (Sheller & Urry, 2006) comes back into account. Sheller and Urry questioning century sociality, argue that travel and new communication technologies have enabled the proliferation of long distance connections, crucial in holding social life together. They argue also that technologies promote the capacity of engaging with other



individuals and, at the same time, with the physical environment. Moreover, they include the use of photography in theorizing human connections with machines and spaces. In fact, photographs are a helpful means to recreate memories of meetings and places. In moving this theorization onto the Internet, the practice of photo sharing acquires a different connotation. If considering the subject more broadly, the general characteristics of social media platforms need to be thought about in relation to new media considering, also, how technological developments determine dominant forms of social organization (Wellman, 2001). Following this, theorising new media, Siapera (2012) underlines how the concept of portability is a central element within this discourse. It considers how ‘taking our media with us allows us to be completely independent of locality’ (Siapera, 2012:199). Considering the wide flow of photos online this reasoning serves to consider the practice of photo sharing as a connector between individuals and places. This chapter, indeed, investigates the implications of the mobility offered by establishing new photo sharing dynamics disconnecting from the locality.

## 2.2 Analysis of Motivations, Organization, and Transformations of Photo Sharing on Instagram

This chapter illustrates the qualitative analysis of participants’ responses in combination with their photo sharing. Data analysis is broken down into three sections: motivation for photo sharing, organization of photo sharing, and modifications in the practice of photo sharing. Using the concepts of ‘mediation’ illustrated by Zylinska & Kember (2012) in combination with the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller & Urry, 2006), this analysis examines key aspects and common patterns of participants’ general photo sharing. Furthermore, the analysis keeps in consideration the state of connectivity described by Van Dijck (2013) fostered by Instagram and the social implications that occur. Considering the fact that Instagram collects an array of online communities (See chapter 3: “Social Relationships on Instagram”), it is safe to proceed the investigation including Lakhani and Wolf’s (2005) study on the motivations of individuals to participate in online projects. Even if their study focuses on the contribution to the creation of Free/Open Source Software, their findings can be generalized to examine the intrinsic motivations and the intrinsic benefits emerging from the activities of online communities. Their theorization lists enjoyment, commitment to the community, self-development, and reputation gaining as principal motivations that drive individuals’

participation in communities. Considering Lakhani and Wolf's (2005) categorisations, this analysis starts by investigating motivations that drive participants' general photo sharing.

This chapter extends the interpretation of the findings firstly towards a general understanding of the mediated practice of photo sharing. *Participant 2* (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) is an Italian male Instagrammer. His contribution to this study is particularly important because he is part of the Italian Instagrammers community and, specifically, manages several aspects of the Instagrammers Italia web site. *Participant 2* (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) is also a local community manager. He is involved in the community's activities, such as the organization of meetings and social events. From his responses his interest in the social aspect of the platform emerges particularly and, at the same time, the extrinsic benefits of photo sharing, such as the promotion of the territory and local food. The analysis starts by quoting *Participant 2* (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) in order to show that the general aim of this thesis goes beyond the mere analysis of photographs. Indeed, *Participant 2* (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) says: 'all those things that revolve around mobile photography are not just about Instagram. Let's say that Instagram is tip of the iceberg'. This response clearly shows the importance and the multiplicity of the subject. This statement strengthens the division of this study into thematic areas testifying that the practice of photo sharing on Instagram encloses a variety of applications (social and economic for instance).

This chapter discloses general dynamics to open the investigation of photo sharing towards more specific theorizations. Participants are asked to provide a detailed description of their practice of photo sharing. Almost all participants became aware of Instagram because of the combination of two precise reasons. One reason is identified as the technological developments of smart mobile devices. Indeed, the launch of the Apple iPhone4 smartphone is recognisable as the turning point for the advance of Instagram. In particular, through the new model Apple introduced the new high quality resolution 'retina display' (it is a brand name used by Apple to define screens that have a pixel density high enough to enable the perception of single pixels at classic viewing distance). The iPhone4 was also the first to include a front-facing camera.

Technological improvements towards better visual experiences are significant for the progressive movement from the use of digital cameras towards the more exclusive use

of smart mobile devices to such an extent that the following question has been asked: *Can you Make Phone Calls on that Camera?* (Bilton, 2011).

The increased use of smart mobile devices at the expense of digital cameras involves different aspects that can be recognized as the high-image resolution, easy mobility, and Internet connectivity. The convergent possibility of doing different things on the same device facilitates the process. Previously, mobile phones equipped with a camera did not have enough resolution to produce “good photographs”. Also, the photo editing was a process that required time and various elements of professional software available only for computers and laptops. So, the process of taking photographs, editing the images and uploading them on the Internet were processes that required the transfer of the images through two devices (from the camera to the computer), the use of specific photo editing software (such as Adobe Photoshop, Photo Explosion, and Photo Plus) and the final upload on photo sharing platforms like Flickr, other social networks, or storage in a personal computer folder. The iPhone4 enclosed all these movements into one single device.

Almost all participants declare that their personal passion for photography encouraged them to search for photo sharing and photo editing applications within the Apple Store (under the leadership of Ron Johnson), a chain of retail stores owned and operated by Apple Inc., dealing with computers and customers’ electronics. Within the ‘playroom filled with gadget’ (Clifford, 2010), participants claim that the reason why they started using Instagram was because it was the first application of the list. On April 2012, Instagram decided to launch ‘Instagram for Android’ phones and iOS devices, and afterwards for Blackberry 10 as well, so spreading its market. Considering the late approach to the Android operating system, participants who did not own an iPhone device say that they have been introduced to Instagram via ‘word of mouth’ or through the photos that their friends were sharing on Instagram via Facebook. Given that, it emerges that developments in digital technologies encourages individuals to use Instagram as a photo sharing platform rather than another one. The simple functioning is described as a positive quality. At a structural level Instagram is a fool proof photo sharing platform. It allows users to create personal profiles, to photograph, edit and upload photos. Users are able to see others’ photo sharing through the home page and it allows different types of interactions: ‘like’, comment, and following.

Participants report that being active users is ‘very rewarding’ especially when receiving social interaction such as ‘likes’, positive comments, and feedback. This type of interaction figures as similar to the motivations of self-satisfaction and recognition described by Lakhani and Wolf (2005). Regarding this, for example, *Participant 2* (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) says: ‘I am active because it gives satisfaction basically. Additionally, the mechanism of Instagram is the reason let’s say. It refers to lots of those principles, for which the ‘like’ exchange; all in all, it is the litmus test of how you are working. Many times I prefer more comments rather than ‘likes’ ’ [...] ‘it is like a retribution for a work. The more you take, the more you are happy, not just because you have more money in your pocket buy also because you are more satisfied’. It follows that sharing photos makes sense when there is social interaction and reciprocity afterwards (Granieri, 2005). Social responses, in fact, give the hint to continue the Instagram experience.

Participants’ social relationships figure as the main second reason for the approach of participants to Instagram (See chapter 3: “Social Relationships on Instagram”). So, for less loyal Apple customers Facebook and friends’ suggestions have been determinant. Indeed, according to participants’ responses, Instagram emerged through other social media platforms and their interest in what other friends and users were “having fun with” influenced the choice for trying the application. The lack of engagement with a new platform and personal curiosity were the two social factors that fostered the growth of Instagram users. It is not difficult to understand that the spirit of connectivity (Van Dijck, 2013) conducts individuals to follow their peers’ behaviours and, consequently, use of one social media rather than another one. In fact, following the question: ‘why did you choose Instagram rather than another photo sharing application?’ the general answer is related to the popularity of the platform among friends and social circles.

Nevertheless, participants report that their encounter with Instagram happened “by chance” through the combination of both technological developments and social relationships. *Participant 5* (Skype interview. September 7, 2013 h 16:24) describes the phenomenon stressing the innovative potentiality of the platform. *Participant 5* (Skype interview. September 7, 2013 h 16:24) is a Polish male at the beginning of his 30s. He is a marketing and graphic designer. He has always had a passion for images; indeed, he was working as an illustrator for a while. *Participant 5* (Skype interview. September 7, 2013 h 16:24) decided to engage with the Instagramers global community. He is a local

manager, but his community is still young and not very active. *Participant 5* (Skype interview. September 7, 2013 h 16:24) shares his opinion on the platform in this way: ‘Instagram is just a name. I like the all idea of the sharing of photos, right? Instagram is just a main stream. Almost the first idea of that kind, right? And the first product which opens people up to mobile photography’. Thanks to the invention of mobile cameras it can be said that individuals are more willing to capture what happens around them because now they have the possibility and, also, they have a place to share them (Cohen, 2005).

An example of this was explained by *Participant 23* (Skype interview. December 11, 2013 h18:02). She is an Italian female in the middle of her 20s. She works as social media manager. A background education and a personal passion for social media conducted her to use Instagram inside and outside her job. Her profile is particularly interesting for this study because it is possible to examine simultaneous and different uses of the platform. She describes her engagement with the platform in this way: ‘There are situations, moments, objects that make me say: “I need to be Instagramming this!”’, coining a verb’ [...]. One of the last photos I took was in Taormina three weeks ago. I went to Taormina when there was the lava rain. Basically, I was seeing pieces of lava. And that was a moment that I must share. Snap and share!’ (see fig. 5).



Figure 5. Lava rain in Taormina.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/erikarotella>

This response shows the existence of common interests towards situations and events that push individuals to consider an image in association with the platform. The use of a precise verb (to Instagram) connected to the act of sharing photos on Instagram leads us to think about the evident change that the platform makes. Indeed, there are participants declaring that the photos they post have a precise connection with the platform. Participants do not think ahead or plan when they take photographs, however when they put them on Instagram they follow precise guidelines on when and how they upload the photographs on Instagram.

Regarding this, many responses remind of the importance of the mobility of smart phones in order to capture worthy images. As *Participant 13* (Skype interview, December 4, 2013 h 18:24) says: ‘Many beautiful photos I have on Instagram, I have them because I went very close to the subject’. Her response reminds the inspiring and famous quote of the war photographer Robert Capa, which says: ‘If your pictures are not good enough, you are not close enough’. From this emphasis on closeness, the mobility of the device makes the difference in visual production, in the typology of photographs that can be uploaded on Instagram. Participants experience the mobility offered by smart mobile devices as a crucial element in capturing new scenarios. The chance of taking photographs at anytime and anywhere augments the possibilities of capturing situations, objects and moments that “must” be posted on Instagram.

Instagram allows users to share constantly and live concretely mediated lives in a way that is reminiscent of the principle of *Liquid Modernity* (2000) theorised by Zygmunt Bauman. From a postmodern base, Bauman argues for the existence of a meta-level of life using the metaphor of liquidity to analyse the phenomenon of globalization and all its aspects such as society, ethics, power, religion and so on. This study employs the parts of his theorization related to the new model of sociality. Social relations are managed almost exclusively online and through computers. The typology of connections that digitality affords is inscribable in the conception of liquidity that describes the majority of contemporary practices. Through Bauman’s (2000) theorization, human life is progressively going to be formed by what is temporary more than what is lasting, what is instantaneous more than what is longstanding, and the useful rather than the valuable. Through the conception of liquidity of everything, sociality, organizations, and concepts the ephemerality of online photo sharing brings

into account the fluidity that visual communication manifests on Instagram. Within this liquid panorama, photo sharing allows an overwhelming spread of images that Rubinstein (2008) describes as real contemporary visual speeches.

Photo sharing appears to be one activity that describes sociality within liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000) connecting individuals and their visual contents. *Participant 2* (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) describes this phenomenon as ‘a continuous telling in real time what you are doing many times, and that if you are not able to do these things.... It makes you miss out maybe some of what you’re doing, a bit of the value of the event that you are following’. Through his words, *Participant 2* (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) shows contemporary individuals’ engagement in the activity of photo sharing. There emerges a notable increased correlation between taking photos with a following upload on Instagram. From a general understanding of the practice of photo sharing, it emerges the presence of precise motivations, types of organization, and visual transformations that disclose common patterns useful to delineate critically how Instagram leads to new practices of mediated photo sharing.

### **2.2.1 Motivations of Photo Sharing**

At the first stage, participants are asked to explain the reasons and describe the modalities that drove their photo sharing providing, where possible, visual examples. Personal satisfaction, reciprocity, and experiencing new visions are recognised as the main reasons. Participants share photos on Instagram aware that the audience that they reach is formed by a variety of individuals, mainly strangers, who share the same passion for photography, which validate their connotation as community (Wellman & Giulia, 1999). This also means that their photo sharing is regulated by the principles that characterize online communities in general (see chapter 3: “Social Relationships on Instagram”). Participants report that, considering the visibility afforded by the platform, they aim to share “shareable images”, i.e. images that everybody can appreciate. The common idea of sharing “shareable images” follows the intent of reaching a high number of followers. This attitude goes back to the principle of ‘reciprocity’ (commitment to the community) (Granieri, 2005) and ‘personal satisfaction’ (self-development) expressed above (Lakhani & Wolf, 2005).

Photo sharing is analysed considering the theories on motivation built by Nov *et al* (2009). They identify the presence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that guide participation in a photo sharing community. They explain that the intrinsic motivation regards the satisfaction that participants achieve from the activity of photo sharing itself. Meanwhile, the extrinsic motivation regards the rewards that participants expect to gain from photographic self-development, which is useful to build a reputation in the community. Their study shows also the correlation between tenure and community. Using Nov *et al*'s (2009) study as a starting point, the following analysis of motivations consider participants interests in the employment of Instagram, such as: marketing purposes (see chapter 4: "Political Economy and Social Media Marketing on Instagram") or social networking (see chapter 3: "Social Relationships on Instagram"). In fact, motivations for photo sharing are directly related to the different interests of users. Nevertheless, it emerges that gaining a high number of followers on Instagram is seen a way to testify about self-development and it is considered the main common strong motivation in photo sharing.

Participants report that the main reason why they share photos on Instagram is to produce photographs that a wide number of users might appreciate. In addition by offering visual pleasure, they also expect to receive positive comments and feedback. Moreover, participants underline that the expectation is always to receive positive comments. Reciprocity and positive social interaction figure as common expectations. In relation to this the contribution given by *Participant 22* (Skype interview. December 10, 2013 h18:03) can be mentioned. *Participant 22* (Skype interview. December 10, 2013 h18:03) is an assistant professor in new media at UC Berkley Graduate School of Journalism. He is also well known as a Multimedia Journalist. He defines himself as a professional photo journalist and storyteller. And he also makes an important use of Instagram. Motivating his use of the platform, he says: 'One of the reasons why I started to share more was because other people who were sharing started to inspire me. I could honestly go to Instagram right now and see... I call them visual dispatches, but I mean, I can see photographs from Africa, Italy, Spain, Russia and others. I can see them from all over the world and see a tiny portal into someone's world. And I thought: "well, it's a kind of sharing/social thing you give me, I give something". So, for me this is just what motivated me to share back'.



The principles of reciprocity (Granieri, 2005) and self-satisfaction (Lakhani & Wolf, 2005) represent an incentive to share more photographs. Regarding this, *Participant 26* (Skype interview. December 19, 2013 h16:17) a male Swedish student who opened an Instagram account dedicated exclusively to his dog, Boss, describes his motivation in this way: ‘people started to notice me. I got very good comments and I spent the first six months trying to make good pictures and good captions. And people started to comment: “Your pictures make my day!” or “Your captions are really great!”. And all the comments encourage you to keep doing what you are doing’. As can be seen, receiving positive comments foster users’ engagement with other users and increase their visibility on the platform. Participants report that the more they receive positive feedback and comments the more they are motivated to share images too, potentially, receiving additional positive comments. This mechanism, in fact, testifies the presence of the principles of motivation described by Nov *et al* (2009).

In addition to the theorizations of Nov *et al* (2009), there emerges a general interest and expectation in positivity in the use of Instagram. In other words, the majority of participants connect the increased use of the platform with the positivity received from the comments of other users and, also, from the positivity of their personal mood. For instance, *Participant 1* (Skype interview. November 16, 2013 h 11:09) highlights particularly this aspect. *Participant 1* (Skype interview. November 16, 2013 h 11:09) is an Italian male at the beginning of his 30s working in London as a visual designer. He says: ‘when I am in a good mood I am more willing to post photos. Meanwhile, when I am more in a shitty mood it is unlikely I post something’. [...] ‘Generally, I post positive things derived from a good mood. I think to entertain the audience. I always try to post positive things. Fundamentally, never negatives’. Photo sharing can be motivated by the presence of a positive mood or particular emotions that occur with images. Several participants report that “being in a good mood” fosters their motivation in sharing photos and the spread of positivity over the platform comes across. This element can be connected to the responses related to share “shareable images”’.

Indeed, several participants declare their interest in positive visual messages as can be seen through *Participant 3*’s (Skype interview. November 22, 2013 h 18:56) response: ‘yes. I definitely see that happening. I find myself less upset with post on Instagram. I can walk away from looking at peoples’ posts on the positivity and feel ok and not feel like there is, you know, not a... I can look at the world more positively. I guess you can

say other than that my mind goes through others, all the other drama and other stuff that's going on other social media'. *Participant 3* (Skype interview. November 22, 2013 h 18:56) is a male American at the beginning of his 20s living in Germany and working for a Bible school. As an international person, he finds Instagram a potential means to create community and gather people. Throughout the interview his strong interest in using the platform to communicate positivity emerges and to engage with people. Indeed, he says that the main aims of his use of the platform are to share positive messages through images that mainly capture landscape, nature and other people (see fig. 6).



Figure 6. Nature and positivity. The word of God on Instagram.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/bandwagoneer/>

Participants recognise in their photo sharing the intent to share experiences and emotions through images that is reminiscent of the notion of reverberation discussed above (Karatzogianni & Kuntsman, 2012). Through this notion, photo sharing on Instagram can be interpreted as a way to conveying an individual's sensations. Even in this case, the intent to share experiences follows the principle of sharing "shareable experiences". *Participant 17* (Skype interview. December 8, 2013 h 16:08) is a Turkish male in the middle of his 20s living in Canada to complete his PhD. He is fairly engaged with the Instagramers local community. However, he does not actively take part in its events. He is interested in marketing and the use of the platform as pastime.

His photo sharing is formed mainly by urban minimalistic landscapes where a well thought out composition of colours, lines and forms manifests. For pleasing other users *Participant 17* (Skype interview. December 8, 2013 h 16:08) says: ‘on social media people don’t care about the photos but they care about the experiences, right? For instance, yesterday I went to a coffee tasting event in a coffee shop. People like things because they see themselves doing the same things. [...] If I am somewhere doing something and I think people like it I, will post it’ (see fig. 7).



Figure 7. Coffee break photo sharing.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/inayali>

*Participant 19's* (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h 16:50) response can also be mentioned. *Participant 19* (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h 16:50) is an Italian male working as an electronic engineer. He started using Instagram by chance and following his passion for algorithms and informatics he decided to enhance his visibility on the platform. Since he succeeded in the enterprise his passion and use of Instagram increased dramatically. His photo sharing is formed by a variety of scenarios, mainly landscapes, characterised by intense colorations and deep perspectives. Regarding sharing experiences that participants believe are unusual and worth sharing he says: ‘I was in the middle of fiords. I had the air soaked in humidity that wet my face. I had 360° sights. I had the absence of sound in the middle of these fiords. How can you tell all of this in a square photo of 612 pixels? [...] What were you feeling? It could be that

you, in that moment, with the emotions that you were feeling you would see that light differently. It might be a memory that you bring with you'. From this response the interest of *Participant 19* emerges (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h 16:50) in communicating through photo sharing the touching emotions that the Norwegian scenario produces on him testifying, following Karatzogianni and Kuntsman (2012), the capability that technologies have to convey and produce human sensations.

There is interest in sharing personal emotions and experiences with who is not physically present. Participants report that, in this way, images convey additional messages to the mere information of the visual. Most of the time photo sharing involves feelings as *Participant 7* (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 12:39) explains. *Participant 7* (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 12:39) is an Italian male university student in the middle of his 20s. His passion for Instagram emerges because of his passion for photography and, afterwards, his involvement with the Instagram Italia community. Indeed, he is an active local community manager who uses the platform mainly for its social aspect. Talking about his use of Instagram, *Participant 7* (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 12:39) says that: 'photography for me is emotion and passion and so I try to share the same the emotions that I felt in the moment I saw that particular shot. I try to share it with others. My aim is to try to make others empathize with my persona when observing my photo'. It can be said again that the intent in sharing "shareable images" is driven by the personal emotional engagement with the subject (see fig. 8) but also with the mere act of photo sharing. In this case it is visible how the changing structures of feelings and emotions within everyday digital culture (Karatzogianni & Kuntsman, 2012) manifest on Instagram through the sharing of visualities (signs) that aim to convey significations that go beyond mere visual pleasure.



Figure 8. Sharing empathy and emotions.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/giuliotolli>

In order to achieve these conditions, participants carefully plan their photo sharing in all its stages (i.e. shot, editing, caption, time of photo sharing, and so on) belying the instantaneity of the platform. Following this the precise guidelines that they follow to plan their photo sharing are taken into account. Regarding this *Participant 2* (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) says: ‘Instagram must be seen as a means of sharing, like a shop window for the work you produce or also for your daily life’. Indeed, the motivations of reciprocity (Granieri, 2005) and self-satisfaction (Lakhani & Wolf, 2005) in combination with the intent of reaching high numbers of followers illustrated above lead towards a careful organization of sharing emotions, which recalls the notion of reverberation explained above (Karatzogianni & Kuntsman, 2012), and experiences which other users can perceive as shareable images.

It can be observed that the practice of photo sharing on Instagram does not follow the basic principle of the platform, which is the instantaneity of sharing. Considering the name of the platform Instagram (a combination of Insta-, instantaneity and –gram, for photogram) the principle of immediacy should represent its basic identity. However, the emphasised principle of instantaneity of sharing loses its core position. From participants’ responses, indeed, a particular effort in the organization of photo sharing emerges. The most common guidelines can be summed up as good quality of

photography (i.e. similar to camera photographs), particularity and unconventionality of scenarios, creativity of the visual composition, and moving images able to convey emotions and feeling beyond the mere visual pleasure. Participants appear very careful in planning their photo sharing and it can be seen through different responses.

*Participant 27* (Skype interview. January 10, 2014 h10:15) is an Italian male in the middle of his 30s. He works as a web marketing consultant and he is actively involved with the Instagramers Italia community as a local community manager. His profile is of particular interest because it combines together his use of the platform for marketing purposes and, on the other hand, for personal use. He describes his personal, not instant, photo sharing in this way: ‘Essentially, I like sharing moments even if not always “live”, but I like expressing a visual part of me more in a visual manner than in words. I like giving others the vision of my points of view’. There is interest in sharing visual information even if disconnected by the principle of ‘here and now’. His photo sharing, alternated by romantic images of breakfast, coffee, landscapes and portraits, testifies to the unfollowed principle of instantaneity that, fundamental feature of smart technologies, is substituted by careful reasoning.

The most frequent responses that emerge in relation to the organizational aspect are connected to the frequency of photo sharing and of personal photographic style. As *Participant 7* (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 12:39) explains: ‘Initially, I was much more active both posting so many photos that at a certain point I said to myself “Oh my God! I need to stop because if I identify myself with others...” there could be someone saying, “this guy is annoying with all these photos!”. Indeed, slowly, slowly and growing and understanding a bit how the app works... By now I post a maximum three photos per day. I might shoot with the mobile and then I decide to post it later on, to not crowd the timeline and not to pass as that fellow who posts photos non-stop without giving any meaning. Instead, I prefer to give more sense to the photo I shoot in that moment, even posting it later on’. From this response it is clear that the interest in the point of view of other users that recalls the reciprocity (Granieri, 2005) and positive comments that users expect from others.

### **2.2.2 Organization of Photo Sharing**

Even following different motivations (business and pleasure) participants report careful photo sharing planning to ensure visibility of their visual message. For an effective

photo sharing plan, participants define their personal style and the majority of them report that they follow time bands and precise frequency of sharing. An additional modality of planning is observable in the careful choice of hashtags and geo-tags. This reasoning occurs when participants come across objects, individuals, and events that make them take photographs (just in case). *Participant 10* (Skype interview. November 30, 2013 h 12:54) is a female Italian at the beginning of her 30s. Her use of Instagram is not related to the sociality of the online community nor to social media marketing purposes. Indeed, her use of the platform is private and close to her best friends. Her photo sharing is clearly not aimed to archive visibility, but it is limited to the private exchange of photographs that are usually selfies and new outfits. As *Participant 10* (Skype interview. November 30, 2013 h 12:54) describes: ‘that photo was random that others took, with my mobile, observing I particularly liked it and I said: “Oh my God! This photo is for Instagram! [...] For example, I published a photo a while ago me and my female friends. We were all dressed in black and some of us had red polish and red lipstick so, in a photo during the night red polish and red lipstick stood out even because they were in the position...sending to hell [...] (see fig. 9) I discovered the hashtags and then I post all my photo under #fucknormality. So, we were in that position, sending to hell the world and thus I liked it for Instagram [...] I never take photos for Instagram. Those that follow my guidelines for Instagram, I will post them on Instagram’.



Figure 9. #fucknormality. A photo for Instagram.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: [https://instagram.com/pat\\_\\_](https://instagram.com/pat__)

As can be seen, the decision to upload photos on Instagram comes always afterwards. Producing a careful photo sharing is more important than the rapidity of the action itself. As *Participant 13* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 18:24) says: ‘since I pay more attention to who follows me and how to make others follow me I try to photograph more interesting things. So, things that make sense even for others not just for me’.

Preceding a functional organization, it can be observed that the majority of participants follow a temporal organization, frequency organization, and contents organization. The temporal organization regards the time bands of photo sharing. The frequency of organization regards the number of uploads per day, week, or month (in this case the photo sharing follows a precise routine). The contents organization, instead, follows an identifiable photographic style, such as themes or styles, storytelling, and particularities. Participants upload and observe photos during precise moments during their daily routine, i.e. they combine coffee breaks with Instagram, lunch with Instagram, waiting at the bus stop with Instagram. So, their way of experiencing Instagram becomes a routine in combination with other activities.

This modality creates in the followers a state of expectation and regular habits. As can be seen through *Participant 27*'s (Skype interview. January 10, 2014 h10:15) experience: ‘Talking about rituals, I don’t know if you know P. F. [...]. She does a lot tourism promotion. [...] Every morning she posts a photo about the sea or an area close to her place giving the “Good morning!!”. So, in the morning, very often, I wait for her picture. It’s a kind of ritual. She told me that very often she is late, in a rush and she doesn’t post it on time and there are people asking’. Regarding the contents organization, instead, participants report examples that follow a thematic organization, such as: animals, colours and objects; or styles such as: street photography, minimalist photography, urban photography, black and white, storytelling organization, and the research for particularities and unconventional scenarios. Regarding this *Participant 13*'s (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 18:24) experience can be mentioned: ‘In Milan I photographed a road sign. It was the “Corso di porta cinese” (Chinese door street). Above that road sign there was another one written over with “Corso di” (the street of) and then next to it there was a door, then a “T” and then a Chinese guy



standing there. I have been laughing like an idiot for ten minutes, and I photographed that because it made me laugh' (see fig. 10).



Figure 10. Chinese door street.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/mimicimme>

Another guideline that the majority of participants follow is related to the time band of their photo sharing. They report that this guideline is particularly useful to increase the number of followers. *Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) is a male Israeli TV producer at the beginning of his 30s working in the UK. His interest in Instagram surfaces from his interest in the potentialities of the platform. He uses the platform essentially for marketing. Since the beginning he started to plan his photo sharing in order to become a popular user and then engage with businesses. His photo sharing is well thought out and follows the style of storytelling. His first aim, indeed, is sharing visualities that narrate stories with the community. Even in this case the principle of sharing “sharable images” can be observed. *Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) describes the organization of his photo sharing in this way: ‘I post pictures at 12 pm, 2:30 pm and 5 pm, London time. Even when I was in Australia: 12 pm, 2:30 pm, 5 pm, London time. I was in Israel. I was in New York. Anywhere I go it would be the same time. Why? Because I consider as I am doing a magazine I am sharing the story of my life through a magazine. I am the publisher and I am the editor and I decide what I want to do and I do it at the same time, and I find it

amazing'. Another example is *Participant 24* (Skype interview. December 12, 2013 h17:29). She is an Italian blogger and social media manager. Her profile is part of those participants who use Instagram for work and for pleasure. In both cases, her photo sharing is well planned. For example, she says: 'now, I don't share more than one photo per day. Obviously, if I have something to say because everything is finalized to say something. I hate photos taken without any reason, you always need to narrate something'. The interest in narration is a common pattern that emerges from the majority of participants.

Content organization is not related to every single photo, rather the entire stream of images needs to present, indeed, a sense of continuity in order to render the fruition of the photographic stream fluid and visually pleasant. As can be understood from *Participant 26* (Skype interview. December 19, 2013 h16:17): 'there is not a single picture or a single caption that made me popular. The basic thing that made me popular has been constant posting every day over a year and always trying to keep the quality high. Telling others what they should do and posting pictures every day. That's the main thing'. This response is one example of how users combine together different guidelines. This is an example that shows the routinizability of the practice of photo sharing.

Given that *Participant 19* (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h 16:50) can be mentioned. He wrote a book about Instagram titled *Fotografia Smartphone. Scatta, Elabora, Condividi* (2013) (*Smartphone Photography. Shoot, Edit, Share*. My translation) describing fruitful strategies that Instagram users should adopt for better usage and experience of the platform. The guidelines he describes are identifiable in the majority of users' general practices. As the title reports, in his opinion, the most important aspects to keep in consideration are the shot, the editing and the sharing stages. Bringing concrete examples of his photo sharing, *Participant 19* (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h 16:50) illustrates key expedients to enhance the quality of images and their photo sharing. Indeed, he places particular emphasis not only on the photo itself, but also on the modalities of upload. His book is a summary of general photo sharing conduct. He firmly believes that for a good experience of the platform users should identify the objective of their photographic sharing, the type of story they intend to share with the platform. He named this: 'photographic project' explaining its importance in this goal: 'the photographic project is what allows anyone who gets

through your profile and understands your intent. [...] The principle is pretty easy out there; there are 180.000.000 active users per month. You, with your photographic profile need to catch the attention of those who like the kind of things you do, but the genre of things you do need to be very clear on for those who come across you'. This clear statement sends the analysis back to the conception of storytelling reviewed by Scolari (2009). Scolari develops the concept of 'transmedia storytelling' to describe the current status of convergence of media, languages and formats. Scolari (2009) reflects on the new multimodal narrative structures that characterise also brands and consumers. However, this study employs Scolari's (2009) theorization to define the organization of photo sharing even if, in this case, there is not the involvement of different media, and identifies specific narrative structures.

However, many participants do not present a proper visual storytelling, rather their photo sharing presents continuity and more fluidity in terms of photographic style. In this regard, indeed, even *Participant 19* (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h 16:50) remarks on the homogeneity of the entire stream, saying that flicking through photos there must be the perception of a recognizable style or goal. Moreover, a precise typology of visual storytelling can be observed defined by participants 'personal visual diary' that includes the sharing of photos that narrate special events and achievements. Several participants, indeed, consider their photo stream the visual version of the traditional diary, in which their photographs of objects or particularities alternate the photos of events. In this case, participants share different types of contents related to their everyday life. In addition to the development of photographic styles and themes, storytelling emerges as a common modality of contents organization.

The term 'organization' is employed to describe the phenomena because all participants report that they do not follow the fundamental principle of the platform of instant photo sharing, rather they follow precise guidelines that, often, are distributed throughout time. According to all participants, indeed, the principle of instantaneity of photo sharing is not always pursued. Part of the dynamics that guide the organization of photo sharing follow, in fact, the motivations of photo sharing. It derives that precise motivations drive toward a precise organization of photo sharing. From all participants' responses and photographs it arises that organization can be classified in three macro areas: development of personal photographic style or theme, visual storytelling, research of particularities. Following precise principles of organization produces modifications

in the general practice of photo sharing. Participants' responses, indeed, report that the progressive use of the platform and the observation of other users' accounts generate visible transformations in their practices of photo sharing.

The principle of storytelling figures as one of the most used modalities of organization of photo sharing, and it takes the form of a personal visual diary sharing visual fragments of personal stories and narrations. *Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) described his way of narrating stories for Instagram using a personal account and an additional account that he created for his dog, Izo (called @theizotime). *Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) explains this choice in the following way: 'I also know something thanks to the TV that I work for, to tell a story. I think that it is super important that when you are on Instagram you need to tell a story' [...] 'I opened Izo's account and again with Izo I decided to see like: "What is Izo's story? What am I trying to say?" [...] So, I tried to make Izo my alter ego [...] so, Izo is basically saying all those things that, maybe, I don't want to say'. From this participant, the principle of storytelling of organization of contents figures clear and well thought, considering also the involvement of the dog. Compared to other participants, *Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58), in order to produce visual stories, creates a dialogue between the two accounts producing a multiplicity of visions and situations. The co-presence of two points of view (he defines the profile of his dog his "alter ego") can be interpreted as a more complete version of *Participant 14's* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) personal visual diary.

Another common modality of organization of contents can be identified in the research for visual particularities. Participants report that their accurate Instagram planning includes specifically unconventional imageries. *Participant 28's* (Skype interview. January 14, 2014 h09:03) response can be mentioned. *Participant 28* (Skype interview. January 14, 2014 h09:03) is a female German working as a statistical researcher. She is a passionate Instagram user. Indeed, she is part of two different communities of Instagramers based in Berlin (IgersBerlin and the Happy Family, see chapter 3: "Social Relationships on Instagram"). She defines her photo sharing under the category of urban photography. The majority of her photos are black and white and portraits of people with cityscapes and urban views as background. In relation to the contents of photo sharing *Participant 28* (Skype interview. January 14, 2014 h09:03) says: 'It is boring to see the perfect Eiffel tower or the perfect building in New York. That is not a new photo

it is just a scan'. Sharing photos of unordinary situations, particular scenarios, and objects comes from the interest in arousing users' curiosity and making the personal account stand out among the multitude of others accounts. A significant number of participants disclose interest in what they are not used to seeing, such as: distant places and uncommon scenes. *Participant 29*'s (Skype interview. January 29, 2014 h16:01) account @peopleontheunderground is an example (see fig. 11).



Figure 11. London. People under the underground.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/peopleontheunderground>

*Participant 29* (Skype interview. January 29, 2014 h16:01) is a male, British living in the USA where he works as in PR managing five Instagram accounts (@andrew\_dearling; @crosswalkofNYC; @madeforinstagram; @peopleundertheunderground; @tubeinblackandwhite). In this case, it can be said that the use of Instagram is almost exclusively related to his job. He started his interest in Instagram because of the Instagramers London community. He does not have a precise photographic style, but each of his accounts follows carefully the guidelines explained above. As can be seen, in the majority of cases, participants consider particularities from those images a representation of their culture and countries, such as: traditional buildings, local food, and local habits that they consider new and interesting for others such as the photos that *Participant 24* (Skype interview. December 12, 2013 h17:29) posts about her home land (see fig. 12).



Figure 12. Puglia and territory promotion.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/emmanuelap>

### 2.2.3 Transformations of Photo Sharing

All participants recognise in the progressive daily use of the platform several modifications compared to their initial use. According to participants and from their photo sharing observation, the relevant transformations that can be observed are identifiable in the constant research for photo opportunities, seeing beauty in the surroundings, and framing images as squares. Participants assume that the transformations of their practice of photo sharing are not recognised with the use of the platform Instagram. Instead, they believe that real transformation originated with the invention of camera phones and, afterwards, of smart phones. However, the identification of common variables of photo sharing that do not appear outside Instagram seems to argue the contrary.

The substantial transformations witnessed in the progressive use of Instagram shows a continuous research for what participants define 'photo opportunities'. Participants report that their way of viewing the world has changed since their first approach to Instagram. It can be observed how Instagram alters visual perception and experience of

surroundings. The extended use of the platform makes visible alterations reported at two levels: one is related to the improvement of photographic skills and the other is related to the development of the connection individual-ambient. Participants highlight a modification in experiencing visually their surroundings, as *Participant 3* (Skype interview. November 22, 2013 h 18:56) says: 'It helps me to see things more in photo opportunities. Above and beyond just looking for Instagram photos. It is a really good medium. The ability to see even more beauty in the situations'. This research for beauty conduces also toward an increased capture of photographs, as *Participant 4* (Skype interview. November 24, 2013 h 16:08) reports. *Participant 4* (Skype interview. November 24, 2013 h 16:08) is a male German in his early 30s working as an Assistant Manager. He is also the Instagram Berlin local manager. He defines his photo sharing under the category of urban photography. His stream is formed mainly by the juxtaposition of people and architectures. *Participant 4* (Skype interview. November 24, 2013 h 16:08) is also passionate about mobile photography and describes the alterations that the use of smart phones produces in this way: 'I take more pictures of events now. This is definitely true. Not necessarily for sharing them because now I could share them. I must take pictures even if I don't share them in the end'. A more accurate observation of surroundings becomes apparent which can be interpreted as an immersive experience of the immediate surroundings.

Participants describe themselves in a constant research of imageries to draw out. For example, *Participant 7* (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 12:39) comments on Instagram in this way: 'It made a change in my way of watching things. I mean, before if I was in a situation thinking: "Ok, I am here" and stop. Now, finding myself in the same situation I could make 3.000 more thoughts and seek something to extract from it. Instagram helped me a lot in this precisely because I photograph, even mentally, a place. Before seeking to extract from that place emotions to share with others would never have happened'. Or the observation of *Participant 15* (Skype interview. December 5, 2013 h 14:44) can be mentioned. *Participant 15* (Skype interview. December 5, 2013 h 14:44) is a female Finnish publisher who manages the Instagramers local community. Her stream is formed by mainly black and white photographs portraying urban landscapes and people. In her photography the human figure is always set in the scene in relation to the background. *Participant 15* (Skype interview. December 5, 2013 h 14:44) says: 'Now going to events is a bit different. Maybe before I

was just looking and I was happy. Now I am looking and I am also looking if there is something that I can capture’.

All participants report that the use of Instagram changed since their first approach to the platform. Their daily use of the platform progressed towards different modalities of consuming and producing images. This transformation throughout the time shows also a progressive improvement in users’ literacy in photography and social media in a more general way. For instance, *Participant 10* (Skype interview. November 30, 2013 h 12:54) says about the platform: ‘at the beginning I didn’t know how it was working and I was posting photos without any reason’. *Participant 13* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 18:24) adds: ‘compared to the beginning, now I am able to give my stamp to the photo. [...] At the beginning, absolutely not! At the beginning it was seriously, photographing from the ice cream to the book I was studying, to the highlighter’. Following, *Participant 4* (Skype interview. November 24, 2013 h 16:08) describes the phenomenon in this way: ‘it is you who walks through the street and, as a photographer, you always look for interesting things everywhere’. *Participant 5* (Skype interview. September 7, 2013 h 16:24) additionally says: ‘I try to see something more in a scene, which people normally see, right? And try to bring it up. Try to show other people “look! There is something interesting in it”.’ The main changes that participants experience through the use of Instagram is related to the way they look at the surroundings and the increased visual attention they put in observing it (see fig. 13).





Figure 13. Beyond the mere image.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/ektara>

For instance, *Participant 13*'s (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 18:24) response can be mentioned: 'I swear, I have been passing by that 250 million times because I pass it by every day because going to catch the train I pass in front of it. That day, I had never seen until that moment. Among those men that you can see on the wall there is a woman holding a baby still with that style. I have never paid attention to it, but that day I photographed that tagging it with: #stophewomenicide'' (see fig. 14). How many times have I seen that, have I passed it by? But I have never thought about it'. From this response it emerges clearly how visual attention towards surroundings are augmented, because of the use of Instagram, compared to participants' initial approach.



Figure 14. Tuttomondo, murales in Pisa. #stopthewomenocide photo campaign.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/mimicimme>

This augmented visual attention towards surroundings also modifies participants' attitudes towards and within events. The actual experience of events consequently appears to be mediated by the device. In relation to this, *Participant 13* (Skype interview, December 4, 2013 h 18:24) brings another example: 'Goran Bregovic's concert comes to my mind. In front of me there were only mobiles. Everybody with the mobile! Indeed, I posted a photo: "Govan Bregovic in the time of Instagram". That was the tag I used. Then, enough! I put it back and I enjoyed the concert. Regarding events, Instagram did not change anything for me. It actually makes them worse. It makes my life worse because others annoy me with all these mobiles' (see fig. 15).

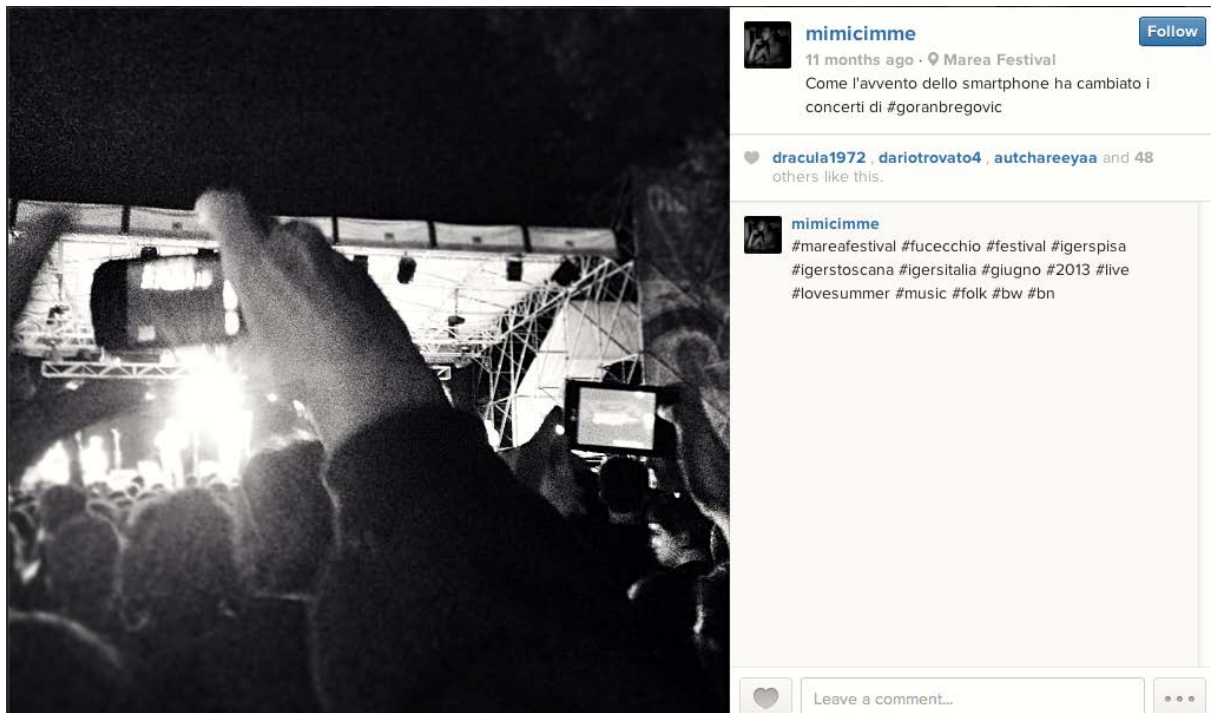


Figure 15. Goran Bregovic in the time of Instagram.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/mimicimme>

The presence of smart phones shows how their ubiquitous use changes incisively the way individuals experience events and the surroundings. The device appears to take a middle position between the individual and the object giving to individuals, arguably, a completely different experience of the event. The mediation of the device manifests in two moments: during the capture of the event and during the photo sharing. The mediation appears consequently during the experience of the event and during the communication of the event.

The increased visual attention towards the surroundings stimulates participants to identify the presence of visual particularities. Regarding this, *Participant 24* (Skype interview, December 12, 2013 h17:29) says: ‘when I see elderly people doing something particular or something unconventional I immediately think that it’s something to Instagram. [...] For example, Trulli of Puglia are particularities that you cannot find in other places. A monument in Italy, food, something that catches the attention mainly considering that the photo will be seen by those who are not used to seeing those things’ (see fig. 16).

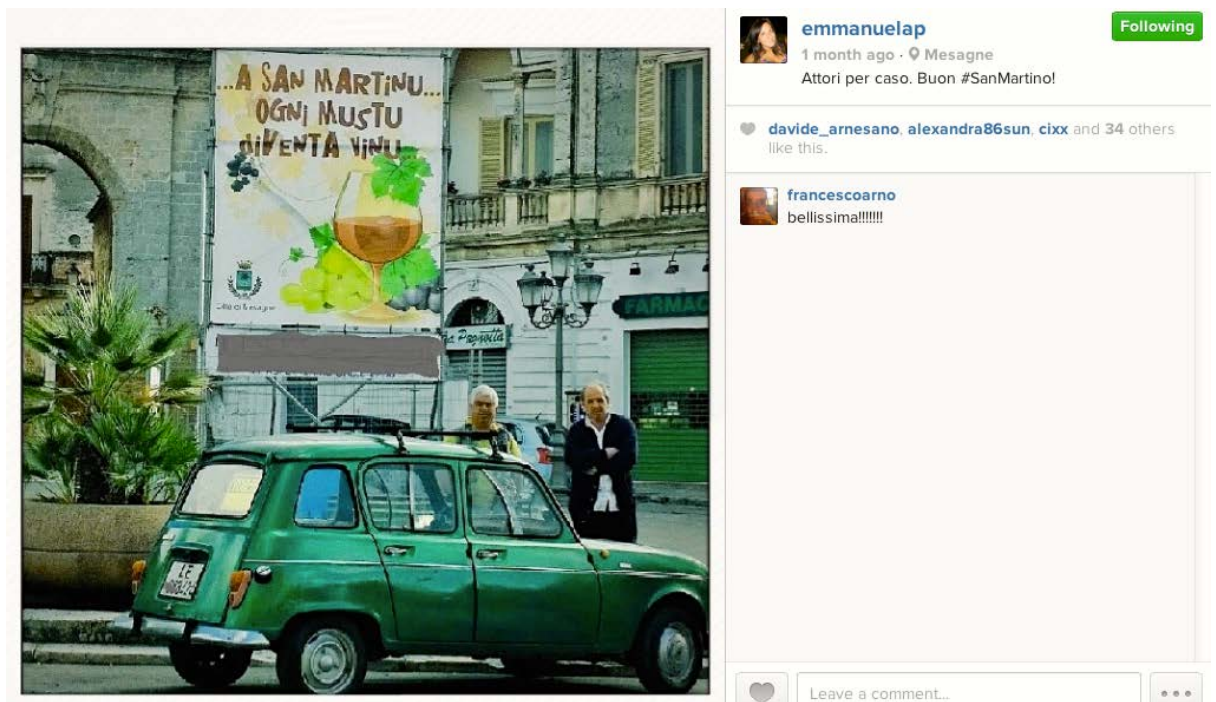


Figure 16. Particularities and elders.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/emmanuelap>

The attention derives from scenarios or events that participants consider interesting for others. Similarly, *Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 12, 2013 h17:29) brings an example: ‘one of my friends sent me a message today on a picture that I sent. I took a picture of a guy with a red shirt. He was running. And if you can see there are two red lights on the side and also like the red man as well. And I called the picture “red man”. One of my friends told me: “Only you can be there at that time, when someone with a red shirt would run and you would catch that in the same picture with the two red people (lights)”, but I don’t know how. I just try to see things differently and my perspective is different to others’. From this response, a general awareness emerges that an extended use of the platform produces observable modifications in the ways individuals visually perceive the surroundings.

Participants describe clearly the improvements in their photographic skills throughout the time, as can be noted following *Participant 2*’s (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) response: ‘my first photo on Instagram is a photo of feet on the bed with my girlfriend. I mean the photo of our feet in front of the TV. She lied down to watch a movie. Now, there is nothing “more Instagram” than this. I mean the photo of feet is the top’. [...] ‘If you browse the latest shots of my stream there is a photo of my feet waiting for the train that is qualitatively and emotionally completely different (see

fig.17 and 18). The problem is not the theme, rather it is probably how you decide to narrate, to what it is linked with, and even that makes the difference surely'. Or this, *Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58): 'check out my first pictures! Check out the pictures I took in Argentina. I wasn't that good photographer. I didn't really understand what I was trying to say, what I was trying to sell. Yes, they were nice photos but I didn't put any effort in and also thinking of what. In terms of my creativity, I started to have my style'.



Figure 17. Feet on Instagram (Beginner).

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/alefortuna>



Figure 18. Feet on Instagram (Expert).

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: [://instagram.com/alefortuna](https://www.instagram.com/alefortuna)

Moreover, *Participant 11* (Skype Interview. December 1, 2013 h 23:00) can be mentioned. He is a press photographer and he takes photographs for work and for pleasure. He uses Instagram more to promote himself and his photographic works. For this reason, he usually combines together the use of a professional camera and smart phone. He says: ‘yes, a different style to shoot pictures. I can see my pictures change from when I started because I tend to think in other ways. Again, Instagram itself has competitions every week (See chapter 4: “Political Economy and Social Media Marketing on Instagram”) where you pick a subject and you need to think about how to handle that and take a picture of that, and I think, it’s a great way to stay on track. Take pictures and stay creative. It’s not always the same thing. It keeps you going on’. This response illustrates an example of additional stimulus offered by the platform as a key factor for the improvement of photographic skills. From these responses, can be seen how the practice of photo sharing changes towards the creation of personal styles and new modalities of visualizing and visually sharing the world.

Participants’ report an additional critical transformation regarding framing photographs in squares. By tradition photography is generally experienced through vertical or horizontal rectangular frames. On the contrary, Instagram possess square frames that are

reminiscent of Diana and Polaroid cameras. The employment of a square frame conduces participants to think of the image in relation to the frame. It consequently changes the rules of composition. It means, as participants report that forms and objects need to be located in the photo in relation to the frame. Through Instagram, the composition of the image needs to follow different rules compared to the use of standard smart phones camera. *Participant 8* (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 14:02) describes this transformation in this way: ‘It changed my photographic eye in thinking of the photo in a square, because before I used to think it as horizontal or vertical and the fact that I need to think it in square makes you think in a different way, because what you can put in a square is different from a vertical area. So, even when I shoot a vertical photo, for example, I try to do it cutting in square. Every time I photograph I think: “this is rectangular, but then it needs to be at the centre of the square’. The majority of participants describe the use of a square frame as a significant change in their approach to photography. Participants report that the entire process of thinking about the photography needs to follow compositional rules that fit the square frame. This transformation arguably modifies the modalities in which users consequently experience their immediate surroundings and objects in order to fit the square frame. In this regard, indeed, *Participant 15* (Skype interview. December 5, 2013 h 14:44) says ‘some images in square do not really work’ and it causes a notable level of disappointment for the impossibilities of sharing those photos on Instagram.

As can be observed, data demonstrates the existence of compositional rules that govern the inclusion or exclusion from Instagram. The majority of participants adopt these guidelines and this determines identifiable common patterns in the practice of photo sharing. This entails the rise of the three stages of motivations, organization and transformations described above. Consequently, the practice of photo sharing on Instagram appears restricted by precise guidelines and it excludes the images, which do not abide by the rules. In this regard, the comment of *Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) can be mentioned: ‘(Hira) opened an account, which is called “Private hook”. You cannot find this account because it’s private, and she kept it private. On the video of the profile she calls it “Instagram as it used to be before”, because before we used to share a lot of selfies and we used to share lots of stupid pictures. We didn’t really, really, really care about the perspective of the picture, if it was telling a story, or if you really share it. As I told you, if you look at the first picture. My first pictures are bad. I did not take good pictures. My first picture is the picture of

my sister and I did not understand what I was doing'. [...] 'It is even sad. I do miss sometimes posting anything that I want. To share five pictures a day, not two pictures a day. I miss it. I really want to post pictures now of my messy house. [...] but now when I post a picture on Instagram I need to think: "What is my goal?" "What am I targeting?" "What do I want to achieve?'. According to this participant, the creation of a well thought out Instagram account erects inescapable limits in relation to the following photo sharing. However, this consideration can be extended to all participants considering the general development of common patterns and identifiable categorizations of photo sharing.

### 2.3 Conclusions: The New Mediated Practice of Photo Sharing

When cooperative activities become digital, existing modes of practice need be adapted to the new paradigms. The aim of this chapter was advancing a critical analysis of the new mediated practice of photo sharing experienced through the employment of the smart phone application Instagram. This chapter described the identification of three macro steps in the practice of photo sharing on Instagram: motivations of photo sharing, organization of photo sharing, and transformations of photo sharing. The first step, motivations of photo sharing identifies in personal satisfaction, reciprocity and expansion of visual knowledge the main reasons that motivate users' activity on the platform. The second step, organization of photo sharing, investigated the modalities and the reasons that drive users to plan carefully their mediated photo sharing.

Three modalities of organization have been identified, which follow: styles and themes, storytelling, and research for visual particularities. All participants reported a specific attention towards this step, which arguably brings Instagram away from the conception of instantaneity of photo sharing. Consequently, significant transformations have been witnessed. The progressive use of Instagram shows modifications in terms of individuals' experience of the immediate surroundings they live in regarding the photo sharing. An increased attention toward the surroundings and what participants define 'photo opportunities' has been observed. This constant research pushes participants to see their surroundings photographically, like every spot could be a potential Instagram shot. Moreover, this attitude guides participants to see more beauty in things. Another incisive transformation has been identified in the fact that the Instagram frame pushes



participants to think of images in a square shape rather than the traditional widespread rectangular one, consequently producing alterations in the visual perception of surroundings. The transformations caused by the use of the platform reports also substantial alterations in the relations between individuals and immediate surroundings. Instagram also produces an augmented perception and connection with the physical surroundings. This modification can be seen in the possibilities offered by the mobility of smart devices, which allow the capture of surroundings anytime and anywhere giving to individuals the opportunity to follow their personal photo sharing guidelines.

To conclude, this chapter showed how the expansion of the new mobile mediated platform Instagram transforms substantially the contemporary practice of photo sharing. It considered causes and consequences that conduces the consumption and production of images that become part of individuals' daily life. It unearthed alterations regarding general mediated mobile photo sharing in order to proceed towards more specific issues, such as: social relationships, political economy and social media marketing, privacy and surveillance, and identity and memory. The main question this chapter sought to address concerned the modalities in which the mediation of social media and the mobility of new technologies led to a different visual perception and sharing of the immediate physical surroundings. The examination of the practice of photo sharing on Instagram aims to be considered as a preparatory study for broader investigations that see the combination of media and visual studies to be fruitful for the interpretation of contemporary sociality.

## **Chapter 3: Social Relationships on Instagram**

The population of online social media is growing affecting human social relationships considerably. It represents a new phenomenon in which social networks are mediated by new mobile technologies. This chapter investigates theoretical and practical aspects of online social relationships. It considers the formation of online communities and how mobile mediated communication affects the creation and the maintenance of mediated social relationships. The chapter begins with a review of the notion of community, discussing the implications of the mediation of social media platforms. It also brings into account the concept of social networking, examining the mediation of the Internet and smart mobile technologies. Within this reasoning, this chapter considers how visuality in mobile communication affects the experience of mediated sociality. Interwoven within this, the practice of photo sharing will be considered by investigating modifications in traditional social theories in the light of new mobile technologies. This chapter focuses specifically on smart mobile devices and their widespread use for managing social relationships.

This chapter shows how Instagram creates new expressions of social connections and visual communication modes by demonstrating with empirical examples how the ubiquitous presence of these elements is shaping individuals' social lives toward new mobile visualities. Smart mobile devices set sociality into perpetual contact between family, friends, and the technologies. Within this perspective the theoretical construction of social relationships is re-thought through the mediation of new social media platforms and smart mobile devices. Instagram is analysed considering the behavioural alterations that leads individuals to employ photo sharing for the construction and maintenance of online social relationships, highlighting how Instagram affects the experience of sociality. Online social relationships move progressively towards an increased employment of imageries to generate and manage connections consequently changing the experience of (mediated) social relationships.

### **3.1 Mediation and Connectivity: Online Communities and Social Networking Sites**

Initially, most of the focus of Internet studies was on the development of online social relationships (Cummings *et al*, 2002). Since the arrival of the Internet, indeed, a particular interest in social sciences research is placed on the effects that mediation has on social relationships. This section highlights the basic concepts concerning social relationships before and after the arrival of the Internet. Starting by defining sociality, it describes the dynamics that structure the creation and the maintenance of social relationships. This section focuses on the affordances brought about by the arrival of the Internet and social media that changed previous experiences of modern sociality. Following, it illustrates the development of online communities and social networks as widely used means for social practices, questioning what forces shape individuals' online connections. This explanation intends to disclose the crucial elements that determine the development of contemporary mediated sociality that involve visuality as new means for social connection. Conclusively, it interprets critically the use of visualities as means for social relationships considering photo sharing as a social practice.

Through the volume *The Media and Social Theory* (2008), Hesmondhalgh and Toynbee advance a multidisciplinary set of theoretical approaches that place in a dialogue media studies and social phenomena developing a meta-theory of media in contemporary society. Considering that social theory is concerned with explaining social life (Hesmondhalgh & Toynbee, 2008), the fact that the presence of media generates unprecedented forms of social relationships guides their contribution to identifying the causes of why certain phenomena happen in society in combination with certain media. The theorizations of McLuhan (1964) and Giddens (1991) appear crucial in discussing the history of contemporaneity and interpreting the dichotomy of the development of media technologies and the evolution of new communicative systems. The impact manifested by new media on the dimensions of space, time and, human perception, which represent the 'extensions of man' (McLuhan, 1964), are the dominant motif of the theorisations that Marshall McLuhan advanced in the 1960s. Ensuing, Giddens (1991) argues the idea that identity is not a fixed notion, but an entity shaped by modern institutions through the principle of 'reflexivity' that defines the process of identity construction between unification and fragmentation of the self.

Calhoun, in 'Community without Propinquity Revisited: Communications Technologies and the Transformation of the Urban Public Sphere' (1998), discusses the initial effects

caused by the emergence of virtual communities advancing a reinterpretation of Melvin Webber's (1963) studies on communities. Calhoun (1998) underlines that Webber disclosed the notions of flexibility, multiplicity and transcendability of space-time dispersion even before the Internet and Giddens' theorisations (1991). Calhoun (1998) reports that 'community meant no more to Webber than clusters of personal relationships characterised by some common identity and perhaps a bit of emotional warmth', pointing out the weakness of that conception. In principle, communities were understood as an extension of people's personal relationships and Calhoun (1998), subsequently, explores them through the implications of computer networks interpreting how the presence of indirect relationships fosters multiplex and regular networks. Initially, physical proximity was considered an essential factor for the development of communities. Theorists (Jacobs, 1961; Konig, 1968; Tonnies, 1955) considered physical communities based on individual association via sameness and by the exclusion of individuals with dissimilar interests. However, Calhoun (1998) claims that electronic communication technologies produce an intense impact in enhancing mediated relationships and transformation in community activities. He believes that 'community life can be understood as a life people live in dense, multiplex and relatively autonomous networks of social relationships' (Calhoun, 1998).

The Internet and new media foster the loss of proximity in human contact in favour of mediated contact. The growth of social networking websites and online communities has emerged as a key theme in the study of new media. Individuals started to benefit from the Internet because of the increased number of potential social connections that it can establish and maintain. Rheingold (1993; 1994), discussing online sociability, rethinks the notion of communities in the age of the Internet considering the rise of virtual and alternative worlds. Rheingold (1993) defines virtual communities as 'social aggregations that emerges from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace' (Rheingold, 1993:5). Moreover, analysing social activities online, Rheingold (1993) states: 'People in virtual communities do just about everything people do in real life, but we leave our body behind' (Rheingold, 1993:3). Following, he acknowledges that 'fragmentation, hierarchization, rigidifying social boundaries, and single niche colonies of people who share intolerances could become prevalent in the future' (Rheingold, 1993:207) as an explanation of the possibilities of virtual communities against the dominant view of computer as an antisocial machine.

According to Rheingold's second intuition, an extended experience of virtual communities develops modifications in social dynamics. In fact, Rheingold argues, in *The Virtual Community Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (1993), for the existence of new forms of social relations of a broader population of Internet users and their importance within contemporary social life (See chapter 4: "Political Economy and Social Media Marketing on Instagram").

Baym (1995, 2010) analyses the development of online communities. Focusing on the dynamics that drive individuals to experience online communities, she develops a model of online communities. Baym's model describes five key characteristics that shape online communities: external context, temporal structure, systems infrastructure, group purposes and characteristics of participants. Baym's model of analysis is useful to understand the dynamics that structure the development of online communities determining consequently 'group-specific forms of expression, identities, relationships and normative conventions' (Baym, 1995:38). This model of analysis interprets online communities through the examination of events and individual practices.

Social networks have come to take on prominence in sociology after the wide spread use of the Internet. Concepts related to 'networking', 'six degrees of separation' (Guare, 1999), 'social capital' (Putnam, 1995; Coleman, 1988) have been adopted to address the academic research towards the emerging conception of social networks. By definition a social network is a 'structure of relations linking social actors' (Marsden, 2000: 2727). Additionally, Wasserman and Faust (1994) define a social network as a system formed by a 'finite set or sets of actors and the relation or relations defined on them' (Wasserman & Faust, 1994:20).

Within the Internet environment social networking sites are considered one of the most used means of interpersonal communication in terms of socialization (Kraut *et al*, 2002). Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Tumbler, Netlog, and many others, are social media platforms through which individuals establish connections, interactions and relationships. The enormous changes that the Internet brought to previous social habits are recognizable, according to Menduni (2011). Throughout the History of the Internet, indeed, an expansion of social networking websites has been witnessed. Menduni (2011) identifies three significant phases of the progress of social networks. The first phase is identified in the web 1.0 (1995-2001). The second phase is identified in the

web 2.0 (2001-2005). Cormode and Krishnamurthy (2008) summarize the essential differences between web 1.0 and 2.0 describing that web 1.0 is characterised by few contents creators and users acting as consumers of contents while, in web 2.0 websites encourage user-generated contents. Moreover, the web 2.0 is characterised by the growth of niches and groups where users exchange digital contents. O'Really (2005), describes that web 2.0, brings features that encourage these characteristics, such as social networking websites, blogs, file sharing websites, and so on. Then, before approaching the web 3.0, or even defined semantic web and the Internet of things (Berners-Lee *et al*, 2001), social networks represent an important element that structures the web 2.5 (Menduni, 2011).

Following Menduni's (2011) description, social networks figure as an empowerment of social relational capacities. Social networks offer the possibility to interact simultaneously with a multiplicity of subjects via different platforms. Menduni (2011) identifies three categories of social networks: profiles, file sharing, and virtual worlds (Menduni, 2011:9). In the case of profiles users need to construct their own page including information, images, user generated contents and so on related to define users' personalities. Users use their page to contact other users, communicate, and share contents. The typology of file sharing, instead, focuses on the sharing of contents (such as videos and images) and the interaction among users is circumscribed around the reciprocal exchange of contents. Finally, the typology of virtual worlds regards websites where users are immersed into three-dimensional virtual worlds where their identity is represented by avatars. All typologies of social networks show a common trait that is establishing connections among users. However, as Menduni (2011) states, social networks are a valuable resource for users who share the same interests enabling connections, discussions, and exchanges that can converge towards the establishment of online communities. Wellman (2001b) defines communities as 'networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, and information, a sense of belonging and social identity' (Menduni, 2011:227). The human tendency towards social aggregation and comparing is not a new practice, however social networks can be seen as the contemporary widespread and ubiquitous manifestation of this tendency.

One of the most important descriptions of contemporary society is provided by Manuel Castells in his information age trilogy (Castells, 1996/2000; 1997; 2001). His work attempts to discuss the 'information society' bringing into consideration issues related

to economy, society, politics and globalisation under the filter of social change. Castells' notion of the network society (1996/2000; 1997, 2001) synthesises those relationships into an articulate theory that considers the role played by networking and communication technologies. His theorizations argue that networks have replaced groups as basic socio-economic units. 'From the point of view of social theory, *space is the material support of time-sharing social practices*' (Castells, 2000:441.). The mobility of networks that smart phones allow produces the 'space of flows' theorized by Castells (2000). Individuals manage physical distances by accessing their smart mobile devices and connecting with each other. In this way the meaning of 'being distant' is reduced because of the connectivity offered mainly by smart phones. They offer, indeed, an extensive connectivity across the world. The result of this process is to interpret social relationships centred increasingly on the person rather than the place.

The arrival of smart phones in 2006 and smart mobile devices led to an increased ubiquitous use of social media platforms (Menduni, 2011). With the arrival of mobile devices that allowed an Internet connection, the progressive development of mobile social networks next to traditional social networking websites can be observed. 'Mobile social network can be defined as the user's patterns of interconnection with others emerging through the social use of mobile devices' (Lugano, 2009). Lugano (2009) examines mobile social networks understanding the implications in terms of social connectivity and interaction. According to Lugano (2009), the use of mobile phones is affected by the nature of relationships. However, it might be argued the contrary, i.e. the mediation of mobile phones affects the nature of social relationships considering the fact that social media brought changes in social relationships. It is true that 'social networks are inherently multidimensional' (Lugano, 2009), however, it is undeniable that the presence of mobile devices alters the perception and management of social connections. As described above, the extensive use of social media platforms generates single users or communities who experience their sociality online. Within this context, individuals become nodes of a broad network, enabled by the mediation of smart phones, which brings sociality towards an ever present status of connectedness.

Following this, there are several scholars who say that online networks function as an extension of offline networks (boyd & Ellison, 2007) guiding the interpretation of contemporary sociality as a combination of online and offline life. Within this discourse, mobile devices figure as extensions of individuals' lives implementing the

theorization of McLuhan (1964) because of the supplementary variable of mobility. Regarding this, Sherry Turkle (2011) introduces the concept of 'life mix' (Turkle, 2011:160) describing the interconnection between on- and offline life as a state of mixture. To the notion of physical mobility afforded by mobile devices, Turkle (2011) includes the notion of ephemeral mobility to describe the passage from the online life to the offline one. In fact, she stresses the fact that without mobile communication it would be difficult to comprehend the notion of 'life mix'. Following Turkle's argument, it emerges that, nowadays, the separation between on- and offline experiences is not well defined. Smart mobile devices, in this, make the difference producing an overlapping condition that indicates the development of a unique state that is the result of the dynamic combinations of both.

Hagar (2006), discussing the pervasive presence of the web, argues that part of the development of this phenomenon needs to be recognized by the fact that the ability of devices to connect to the Internet seem to be making it difficult for individuals to separate the use of a device (laptop, PDA, cell phone; phone lines, cable connections, wireless connections) from their use of cyberspace. This indicates that the connection between individuals and devices is going back to Turkle's (2011) argument, as something more and more essential.

Moving forward in this discourse, Bakardjieva (2003) introduces the notion of 'virtual togetherness' to interpret the contemporary status of permanent social connectivity. This term emerges from the consideration that online social networks, in social networking sites, are based on existing contacts, acquaintances and friends. Following, users compile these networks in order to maintain and reinforce social ties with people they already know. This assumption validates the consideration that sociality is pervasively experienced online, in particular, regarding virtual communities. Bakardjieva (2003) argues for the necessity to study online life within individuals' everyday life experiences. Indeed, in Turkle's (1997) footsteps, Bakardjieva approaches the analysis of virtual communities bringing into account the direct interdependence between online and offline life stating that both phenomena cannot be studied separately.

The first comprehensive treatment of virtual communities was advanced by Wellman and Giulia (1999). In contrast to the concept of physical communities, virtual communities consist of intimate secondary relationships, specialized relationships,



weaker ties, and homogeneity by interest (Wellman & Giulia, 1999). The extent to which virtual community affects new manifestations of sociality is also complex. The question that arises is how social systems are incorporated in terms of interpersonal relationships and the ways that they affect sociality in our broader understanding. In 'Net Surfers Don't Ride Alone' (1999), Wellman and Giulia highlight the interconnections between offline and online relationships suggesting that, nowadays, the notion of community merges with the notion of social networks. In this way, they argue that online social relationships do not necessarily require physical meetings because the Internet can take the place of and expand social relationships (within communities). Indeed, the Net is only one of many ways in which friends, acquaintances, and strangers can develop interactions. Human life is formed by several social aspects and ways of interacting with each other. Thus, online social relationships need to be interpreted as a different form of social experience, considering that significant aspects of personal history are, nowadays, shared online.

The diminished role of physical space, personalization and connectivity in space all contribute to a shift towards 'networked individualism'. In the concept of networked individualism formulated by Wellman *et al* (2001; 2003), via the advent of smart phones and wireless technologies, person-to-person connections take the place of place-to-place connections. Wellman's concept, however, shows that this shift shapes more specialized social relationships. Through Wellman's description of 'little boxes', geo-tags and networked individualism, it emerges clearly how networks, compared to previous modern socialities, have specific purposes. They do not exist merely by the fact of their locations; rather they follow individuals' purposes. It can be argued that the ubiquitous social connectivity afforded by smart mobile devices creates a network of individuals that, in some cases, rather than linking single individuals together, draws them together in online communities.

From this consideration, the interest in understanding the development of communities online as new modalities of socialization emerges. What motivates participation in virtual communities has been studied by Wasko and Faraj (2000). They found that participation is motivated by the perception of community interest, generalized reciprocity, and pro-social behaviour. Indeed, the French romantic philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau saw communities deriving from humans' personal perception of reality. Following his reasoning, the conception of the 'general will' (Rousseau, 1762)

depicts communities' common interests. This communal conduct, indeed, goes back to the foundation of 'communities of interests' theorised by Rheingold (2000) that arise online. In addition, self-improvement (through learning from others in the community and receiving feedback) has shown to be associated with knowledge sharing (Lakhani & Von Hippel, 2003) as a combination of practices useful for the development of social relationships.

In relation to communities of interest, a study on photo sharing conducted by Van House (2007) can be mentioned. Her study presents qualitative findings on users' social actions and motivations related to photo sharing on Flickr, identifying relationship maintenance (with known others) and photo exhibition (to the public) as two of the social factors that come into play in the community. In this case, the concept of online community does not involve the mediation of smart mobile devices because Flickr is a photo sharing website not a smart phone application. As was illustrated in chapter 2: "Photo Sharing on Instagram", the social practice of photo sharing is extensively experienced online and, only more recently, through the mediation of social media platforms on mobile devices.

Following the theorizations outlined in relation to online communities, the interest in conceptualizing online social relationships arises, considering how the use of mobile devices affects single individuals and communities. In particular, in the footsteps of Van House's (2007) work, the investigation approaches photo sharing as a social practice of connection. Visuality holds the core point of the analysis. To the best of my knowledge, the combination of social relationships and visuality has never been done before. In this regard, the following section presents the theoretical debates on the impact of visuality on social relationships to build a theoretical platform from which to launch the analysis of empirical examples in visual analyses, and interviews with participants.

### 3.2 The Mediation of Visuality in Social Relationships

Physical proximity is not a crucial condition for human connections and the development of social relationships. In the past, individual daily social life was determined by the connections that the immediate space could provide and friendships, according to Siapera (2012), were sustained by 'regular face-to-face contact, although

telephone calls and letters were used to keep in touch with those living elsewhere' (Siapera: 2012:191). However, certain elements of sociality change with the changes of the society itself. Today, the notion of social relationships is profoundly affected by the mediation of new media because they produce new environments (platforms) upon which individuals manage their sociality. Regarding this, indeed, Pescosolido (2006) highlights that social networks only recently achieved a relevant position in sociology. Pescosolido (2006) says that 'social relationships have always been at the heart of sociological understanding of the world'. From this conception, she advances a social networks perspective in order to investigate social structures and social interactions within postmodern societies considering advancements in digital technologies that have led to new ways of socialization.

Starting with Wellman's consideration that 'communities are clearly networks' (Wellman, 1999:2), this chapter illustrates how the mediation of new media affects the ways in which individuals aggregate and relate to each other. With the rise of cyberspace, Wellman (1999) moves the focus onto the implications of managing relationships online. Following the idea that 'communities are based on social exchanges' (Wellman & Leighton, 1979) a social networks perspective appears necessary to consider the new forms of socialization within computer-mediated communication systems. Considering the importance recognised in the mediation of social networks in the establishment of new social dynamics, the analysis includes the implications of the mediation of smart mobile devices.

To contrast with the common belief of loss of community, Poster (2001), argues that the term 'mediated' needs to replace Anderson's (1983) concept of 'imagined communities'. Even if the term was coined specifically to talk about nationalism, Anderson's theorisation has also been widely used in relation to an array of communities, such as the communities of interest mentioned above. However, Anderson's idea of 'imagined' can be stretched to denote the fact that, in this case, social relationships and online communities are a constructed idea, not necessarily embedded in physical instances. 'Imagined communities' are not based on everyday face-to-face social interactions, rather on imagined connections created by individuals who feel themselves part of specific groups. If interpreting the notion of 'imagined communities' in this way, the consideration of social relationships online cannot be translated in the concept of 'imagined relationships'. However, the fact that the

mediation allowed by social media platforms and smart mobile devices fosters the creation of new social ties and communities, but considering Poster's (2001) notion of 'mediation' as a key factor for online social engagement.

Understanding the impact of smart mobile devices on individual social life requires different types of evidence. Firstly, it is necessary to examine how social media and mediated communication affect the quality of social interactions identifying differences and similarities in relationships sustained online. Then, the analysis needs to examine the impact of visuality and photo sharing on social network practices as potential supplements to communication for the creation and the maintenance of social ties. This chapter questions the subject by analysing Instagram considering photo sharing practice as a social act, focusing particularly on the visual sociality that the platform generates. The comparison also considers the development of online communities, investigating the modalities in which sociality is experienced through the platform.

The following analysis investigates how visuality can generate, structure, and maintain social relationships online. Firstly, the analysis investigates the development of online communities in relation to Instagram, illustrating the structure and functionality of the communities. Then, the questioning of the creation and maintenance of social relationships follows, taking into account the mediation of the platform. In examining social relationships visual elements are considered crucial in the development of ties and aggregations. In its conclusions, the analysis brings together the different forms of sociality experienced through the platform Instagram in order to identify how the mediation of visuality seems to affect new forms of sociality.

Analysing the chronology of Instagram there are two moments during which the platform changes its original identity of mere photo sharing application, according to participants, into a "different social network". The first important moment occurred on April , 2012 when Facebook bought Instagram (Stern, 2012). It was speculated that the main motivation of such a purchase was because Instagram is a mobile application. In fact, this partnership allows Facebook constant access to data and metadata produced by the mobility of Instagram (geo-tags, for example). The increased photo sharing is also fostered by the fact that photos can be shared on Facebook simultaneously to enable Facebook friends to see the Instagram photo sharing. This trans-platform photo sharing contributes to modify the initial Instagram identity of photo sharing smart phone

application into a “different social network”. As *Participant 2* (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) says: ‘It is different in relation to the other socials, but even on Instagram can be created this relation of participation in someone else adventures’. The direct connection, as it was observed in chapter 2: “Photo Sharing on Instagram”, makes Facebook users aware of the existence of Instagram. Considering the social networking nature of Facebook, the analysis questions whether the consequent interconnection with Instagram conducts users to approach the photo sharing platform as a visual social network.

The majority of participants report that they consider Instagram an unordinary social network considering that social relationships can be based mainly on visual communication. *Participant 4* (Skype interview. November 24, 2013 h 16:08) describes the use of the platform in this way: ‘Today, I always take the camera with me and I always can watch what other people are doing and I can comment, and people can see what I am doing and I can interact, and it’s really nice’. As can be seen from this response, Instagram is perceived as a mobile extension of the traditional concept of social networking that used to see individuals sitting in front of a computer screen. The mobility afforded by mobile phones, instead, allows a constant possibility of social interaction that, in this case, becomes visual interaction. As *Participant 4* (Skype interview. November 24, 2013 h 16:08) describes, the mobility of mobile phones gives the possibility to visually experience sociality online essentially ‘on the move’. This condition determines the perception of the ubiquitous sociality online seeing places in the present through social connections on the platforms.

Another important moment was the modification that Instagram photo sharing brought to the conception of locality and social connectivity, which can be recognised with the introduction of the ‘Geotagged Photo Maps’ on August 16, 2012, as explained within the Instagram blog. Essentially, Photo Map can showcase where users take photos and explore where others have taken photos on a map, and the geo-tag allows the sharing of the precise position. This feature does not allow the adding of unreal locations, indeed, the geo-tag sorts the latitude and the longitude of individuals’ current location with their photo through Wi-Fi or 3G signals. The GPS device collects this data (if it is turned on). This feature is important because it has been recognized as a useful tool to create social connections, as can be seen through *Participant 2*’s (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) experience: ‘we shared some shots in the same moment and they were

500 meters away from me. So, then we met and we said hello to each other. We were taking that shot 10 minutes before... yes... basically the place was the same'. This shows how the combination between the mobility of mobile phones and the mediation of Instagram can create social connections that, afterwards, are experienced offline thanks to the fact that mobility allows social connections 'on the move' breaking the boundaries of physical distances.

Bringing into account the 'new mobilities paradigm' theorized by Sheller and Urry (2006), the use of smart mobile devices cannot be disconnected from the use of social media applications. Considering the combination between mobility and Internet connectivity produced by Instagram, it is relevant to attempt a new interpretation of the mobile phenomena through the lenses of new visualities. If considering the subject more broadly, the general characteristics of social media platforms need to be thought of in relation to how technological developments determine dominant forms of sociality. Following this line of interpretation, Siapera (2012) emphasises how the concept of portability is a central element within this discourse giving consideration to the modalities in which 'taking our media with us allows us to be completely independent of locality' (Siapera, 2012:199) and, arguably, capable of establishing and maintaining mediated social relationships.

### 3.3 Analysis of the Mediation of Visuality on Instagram: Online Communities and Offline Sociality

Through the qualitative analysis of participants' responses, this section illustrates how the increased use of Instagram produces alterations in the everyday experience of sociality. The concept of sociality on Instagram is examined following the different modalities of the social conditions described by all participants. Two macro areas of social interactions are identified. They are recognizable in the individuals' part of the online Instagramers communities and general users. Analysing online Instagramers communities an additional subdivision between community managers and community members emerges. The analysis follows Lakhani and Wolf's (2005) theoretical framework related to the motivations that drive users' participation in online communities (as explained above). In this specific case, the analysis of individuals' social behaviours on Instagram is combined together with the employment of photo sharing as a socially binding agent. Participants disclose the modalities in which they

experience the platform socially. The analysis examines how the mediation of the platform and the practice of photo sharing affects the creation and maintenance of social relationships.

Sarvas and Frohlich, through *From Snapshots to Social Media* (2011), a study conducted on the changes in domestic photography, report that the use of the camera phone regarding social relationships can be illustrated through six motivations that can be listed in: individual personal reflection, individual personal task, and socially mutual experience, socially absent friend or family, socially mutual task (functional images in support of a task. Plumbing problems for instance), and socially remote task (functional images to accomplish a task. A picture of a goldfish to remember to feed) (Sarvas & Frohlich, 2011). These variables are kept in consideration when combining the analysis of participants' responses with their photo sharing. In its conclusions, the analysis reassembles the diverse variables (general users and online communities' members) in order to comprehend the role played by Instagram to advance critical interpretation of the new visual social relationships.

Participants are asked to describe, bringing concrete examples, of whether and how Instagram impacts on the modality of mediated socialization. Particular attention is placed on the potential alterations that the mediation of the platform produces on relationships. Where applicable, additional questions are asked in relation to the role of the Instagramers online communities. Moreover, in addition to the mediation of the platform and the device, the visual mediation of photographs is considered as the main focus of the entire enquiry about social relationships. *Participant 22* (Skype interview. December 10, 2013 h18:03) comments on this phenomenon in this way: 'what is happening is that people daily are sharing their cappuccino. It looks like photography, it smells like photography, but it is not photography. I make a clear distinction. That is not photography!'. From this response a clear statement emerges in contrast to the basic structure of Instagram. Following this line, indeed, the McLuhanesque interpretation of the mediation of the medium comes again into account conducting the analysis to argue that the use of the smart mobile device and the social media platform as the key combination for rethinking sociality, more than the practice of photo sharing itself.

### 3.3.1 Sociality within Instagram Communities Online

The Internet presents different opportunities for socialization and the creation of communities. The analysis of Instagram shows that the platform provides to the users the opportunity to socially interact with each other and create relationships of interests. The majority of participants consider Instagram as belonging to the family of social networking platforms. As *Participant 7* (Skype interview, November 25, 2013 h 12:39) states: ‘it is a real social network. It is not just a photo gallery. It is a social network based on photography, and I like it exactly because of this, there is interaction and so users’ engagement with each other. Indeed, I use it for this reason, to share and to try to socialise with other people’. Structurally, Instagram does not own a list of friends similar to other social networks. Instead, it offers a different type of connection among users, the ‘following’ button. In fact, the typology of connections offered is the possibility to follow other users’ photo sharing, which allows users to like and comment on photographs. These types of interactions are publicly visible to all users by default, but they can be changed making the appropriate modifications to the privacy setting (see chapter 5: “Privacy and surveillance on Instagram”). Regarding this, it is reported that, because of the wide visibility, the platform publicity influences the type of connectivity that users might intend to create or to not create.

In addition to the conception of Instagram as social network site, it is considered as belonging to communities of interest. ‘*Communities of Interest* bring together participants who interact extensively about specific topics of interest. Participants not only carry out transactions with one another, but their interactions are generally focused on specific topic areas’ (Armstrong & Hagel, 2011). Instagram users can be clustered into three macro groups: general users, Instagramers community managers, and Instagramers community members. The presence of different participants groups report different conceptions of the experience of sociality. Participants who are not part of the Instagramers online community report that they consider Instagram as a potential social network but they declare that they do not use it as such. From their personal experiences, it does not represent a social network, rather it is considered a platform for sharing visual contents and observing others photo sharing. Nevertheless, they report that Instagram can be used as a good ‘ice breaker’ to create social relationships. However, for participants who are part of the Instagramers communities, Instagram is



considered as an actual social network that uses visuality as social “currency” and as a valid point of engagement.

Among participants who are not part of Instagramers online communities, coming from different countries, photography represents a fair means of social interaction going beyond linguistic barriers. For example, *Participant 3* (Skype interview. November 22, 2013 h 18:56) describes his experience in this way: ‘I’m so very engaged in Instagram [...] I’ve recently moved from America to Stuttgart, Germany, and I’m trying to use the platform of Instagram as a way to build community with people and get to know people who in the city are also working with Instagram’ (see fig. 19). In this case the use of Instagram as a “good ice breaker” clearly emerges. Indeed, the platform is employed as a way to create social connections and to engage with new people using photography as a common interest and topic of exchange.



Figure 19. Nature and togetherness.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/bandwagoneer>

In addition, *Participant 11*'s (Skype Interview. December 1, 2013 h 23:00) response can be mentioned as it underlines the importance of using the common topic of interest of photography as a valid social ice breaker. He says: ‘you connect with may be new Instagramers that you didn’t know. [...] When you go on Facebook and you want to meet new friends. That’s kind of awkward to just poke someone and say: “Hey, what do

you do for living?’. The fact that there is the photography thing in common fosters the social connections because users have excuses to approach other users’. Following this line, *Participant 29*’s (Skype interview. January 29, 2014 h16:01) experience can also be mentioned: ‘I actually met my wife through Instagram. We were chatting one day and then we decided to meet up, and then we got married’ (see fig. 20).



Figure 20. Instagram made us married.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/andrewdearling>

In particular from the last response, it is reported that the actual relationship was created once the two subjects met offline. This is another element that surfaces from participants’ responses. They strongly consider Instagram as a good way to approach individuals and start potential social relationships. However, they report that, in order to nurture the relationships they need to move the interaction onto other social networks like Facebook (the most frequently mentioned) or moving offline in order to extend the social interaction. The reason for this move is commonly recognized as the lack of a proper private communication system. *Participant 13* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 18:24), for instance, strongly disagrees with the potentialities offered by Instagram as a social network. She claims: ‘to maintain social relationships absolutely not, even because you cannot talk’. Additionally, *Participant 17* (Skype interview. December 8, 2013 h 16:08) says that ‘there is always this messaging gap [...] at some point you need to get in touch in a real way. Even Facebook is not a replacement. It is

just a tool'. Despite the negative comments, Instagram is still seen as a fair social activator.

Participants believe that the connections that they establish on Instagram cannot be considered as actual social relationships as long as they are experienced only online. In fact, they report that comments and message exchanges are strictly related to photography, so the level of conversation remains superficial and in relation to circumscribed subjects of common interest. In this regard, *Participant 23* (Skype interview. December 11, 2013 h18:02) says: 'On Instagram there is not everybody. There are people with the passion for photography; meanwhile Facebook is a melting pot. [...] Yes, I see it as a social network but not that social'. This response is an example of how participants consider Instagram in relation to their visual productions. Even though it can be experienced for social relationships, it is always not perceived in this way. The reason why some participants recognize the social face of Instagram is because they see in its trans-mediality with Facebook the way to manage relationships. As "ice breaker" Instagram allows users to move social conversations onto the messaging feed present on Facebook that allows private conversations.

Instead, high level of social engagement emerges from all participants who are part of the Instagramers online communities. The profound level of engagement is justified by the direct connection to the common interest in photography that bonds all community members. From the side of Instagramer community managers and members, a particular engagement emerges from the potentialities of being part of a group and the sense of belonging, the main characteristic of the online communities in general, as can be seen from the following responses. The sense of engagement is experienced at two levels: on the one hand, participants feel engaged with other users. Indeed, *Participant 2* (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) describes it saying that 'there is always an engagement mainly with people who I had a chance to meet in person, but even with those who I had chance to meet exclusively on Instagram, I need to admit'.

Additionally, *Participant 4* (Skype interview. November 24, 2013 h16:08) says: 'Instagram to me is mostly, as I mentioned above, about getting to know new people, exploring the world, getting around' (see fig. 21).



Figure 21. Instagram and new encounters.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/brainyartist>

On the other hand, several participants report a particular engagement in experiencing the platform itself, as can be observed through *Participant 4*'s (Skype interview. November 24, 2013 h16:08) response: 'I would miss the people, the relationships, the pictures they take, and the stories they tell. That's something I would really miss, if they were not on Instagram. That is like an emotional moment I would say'. In addition *Participant 2*'s (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) experience can be quoted. He says: 'something will always finish on Instagram because I edit the shot I like the most, I share it and, however that may be, it is a means to tell where you are, how you've done it, when you've done it, and why. It is also, as I said before, it is a social network in the end'. From these responses the social engagement afforded by the platform emerges in terms of the specific interest, in this case, in photography and photo sharing. So, the social aspect is fostered by the common activity promoted by the communities of Instagramers.

Following, it has been reported that, within the Instagramer communities there are several ways, promoted in particular by communities' managers, to engage with the other members. The modalities of engagement manifest online and offline. Online there is the photo contest (or even called "call to action"), a photographic competition played on the platform. It describes the online activity of posting photographs using a precise

hashtag created, usually, by communities' managers. Without any physical meeting, users post photographs from any geographical location around the world writing in the caption the hashtag previously given, which allows the contest organizer to cluster all the images posted and declare a winner or winners. The organiser declares the contest winner or winners reposting the photo online. This type of competition determines a winner without giving any material award but it represents a way in which other members get involved in the communities' activities. Participants report that it is a nice activity and they do it frequently with pleasure. Indeed, members use this to maintain an active presence within the community mainly because it does not involve any cost or any physical movement.

### **3.3.2 Sociality within Instagram Communities Offline**

Instead, the Instagramers offline social activities are identifiable in the InstaMeet and InstaWalk. The InstaMeet is a meeting that sees community members meeting and taking photographs together. Whilst the InstaWalk involves a precise itinerary along which photographs are taken. Participants report that both activities are considered as actual social meetings. Participants say that they enjoy these activities because they involve a variety of occasions of interaction with other users, such as giving and receiving advice, support, having a simple chat, and so on. Meanwhile, participants claim that these meetings do not allow proper social contact because they consider photography as a solitary activity. Nevertheless, it has been reported that these meetings finish by gathering together all participants in a pub or coffee shop. As can be observed from participants' responses, in terms of social relationships Instagram can only be considered an activator. The functionality of the platform does not allow a valid means for maintaining social relationships. The majority of participants report that physical and virtual worlds need to have a crossroad point, as Castells argues, discussing *The Rise of the Network Society* (2000), and a persisting dependence from one world to the other. Castells (2000) stresses the interdependence between technological advancements (the Internet and devices) and the network society pointing out how new expressions of sociality are multifaceted.

In relation to the InstaMeet, the feedback from the participants are equally divided as either positive or negative regarding the sociality of this activity. *Participant 11's*

(Skype Interview. December 1, 2013 h 23:00) response can be considered as an example of a positive feedback: ‘It’s not like Facebook. You don’t get too many messages about dogs, cats, or “see my new baby” and such. You can just scroll pictures and if you don’t like them, just scroll away. I can see the new way of communicating with people also because you just meet people you have never met before. You go and do things, and the fun thing is that everybody is taking photographs. So, you go to meet people you want to take pictures with. It’s not like Facebook. People here want to take pictures’. The positive response emerges again from the presence of the common interest in photography and photo sharing. In addition, *Participant 7*’s (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 12:39) consideration can be mentioned: ‘Regarding the InstaMeets [...] something is “meeting online” and something else is the “meeting offline”. The InstaMeet allows exactly the meeting offline that for me is crucial’. These two responses are provided as examples of the importance of face-to-face meetings. However, these responses need to be considered by taking into account the messaging gap highlighted by the majority of participants that, consequently, declares the necessity to set offline meetings to certify the actual social connection.

Other participants, instead, describe the experience offline in a negative way. For example, *Participant 13* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 18:24) reports that ‘last year in Florence there has been the meeting Instagram Tuscany [...] we had the pass for a museum underground so without the mobile Internet connection so: two people went out to chat, Instagramming, doing... Then, there was a guy next to me who was taking and uploading photos, taking and uploading photos. At a certain point I asked: “Excuse me, the Internet doesn’t work here...” He had a modem in his pocket! He had an iPhone like mine. “How do you manage to post photos?” (Pause) I was... I swear... These are crazy people!’’. Comparing *Participant 13*’s (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 18:24) experience with other responses, it can be summarised that the majority of Instagramers who join InstaMeets and InstaWalks are particularly engaged with photography but, specifically, with the use of the platform itself. Indeed, several participants complain about the fact that being part of InstaMeets is not as social as expected and that people are so addicted to smart phonography to leave out the social purpose of the actual encounter. However, in both cases (positive and negative experiences of offline meetings) Instagram communities bring Instagramers offline in order to enhance social activities.

In this regard, the experience of *Participant 28* (Skype interview. January 14, 2014 h09:03) can be mentioned. This describes how, from the official Instagramers community in Berlin, there was created a new one precisely with the purpose of being more social and supportive, gathering a smaller group of individuals. *Participant 28* (Skype interview. January 14, 2014 h09:03) says that ‘it is called “Happy Family”. It is a nice name for our community. It is family including people with ten followers, private accounts, big shots like @Thomas\_K, @JN (see fig. 22).



Figure 22. Instagram and the “Happy Family”.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/uwa2000>

Just meet and go for a walk. It doesn’t matter how many followers you have, what kind of photographer you are, just meet and go for walks and enjoy the company and of course talk about Instagram. [...] Living the strictly mobile photography and going about the everyday life’. [...] ‘At the beginning we went for a photo walk in a park, it was Sunday and somebody said: “Oh! It’s just like spending a Sunday afternoon with your family” ahahah “Happy Family”’. From this example, it emerges clearly that participants do not join official communities meetings or they find alternative ways to meet in order to reach a deeper level of social interaction.

Beside these considerations that can be done in relation to the meetings organized by the communities’ managers, a particular attention needs to be placed on the spontaneous

offline meetings that Instagram generates. Indeed, it emerges that Instagram figures as a binding agent validating the importance of the mobility afforded by the means. The only circumstances in which visualities are considered a good social connector is in relation to long distance networks because it permits visual closeness. Participants consider Instagram as a valid connector between individuals from distant places. *Participant 11*'s (Skype Interview. December 1, 2013 h 23:00) experience can be mentioned: 'I got some friends in US, Italy and UK, which I communicate through Facebook, but mainly through Instagram, because I can see what they post, the pictures so I don't need, in some way, think to contact them every month by I can but I can still see what they are doing. [...] Instagram is a different look from lives'. In fact, the interaction is not based on individuals but on the imageries, so physical locations and distances are not considered a problem for potential connections. Actually, participants report that one of their main interests in using the platform is observing photographs that portray distant places. The variable of mobility, in this case, is the element that, producing new visualities, sets (long distance) social relationships. Participants report that Instagram is a connector for face-to-face meetings with people interested in travelling. Several participants reported that they had been approached by other users because of their interest in travelling to places seen in the photo sharing. They also add that the reason of the undertaken trip came after having seen an image on Instagram. In some cases, the approach was related only to receiving advice for travelling in terms of hotels, restaurants, and so on. Meanwhile, in many cases, it involved individual physical encounters.

Regarding this the experience of *Participant 26* (Skype interview. December 19, 2013 h16:17) can be cited. He manages an account only about his dog. He describes his experience in this way: 'I met up with two American girls that were in Stockholm two weeks ago. For half an hour/an hour I wanted to meet them. They have been following me for half a year. And they said: "You are better than other dogs on Instagram!" [...] It is the recognition and the confirmation that you are doing something good'. This response exemplifies clearly the effects that the theories of self-satisfaction and recognition (Lakhani and Wolf, 2005) produce at social level (see fig. 23).



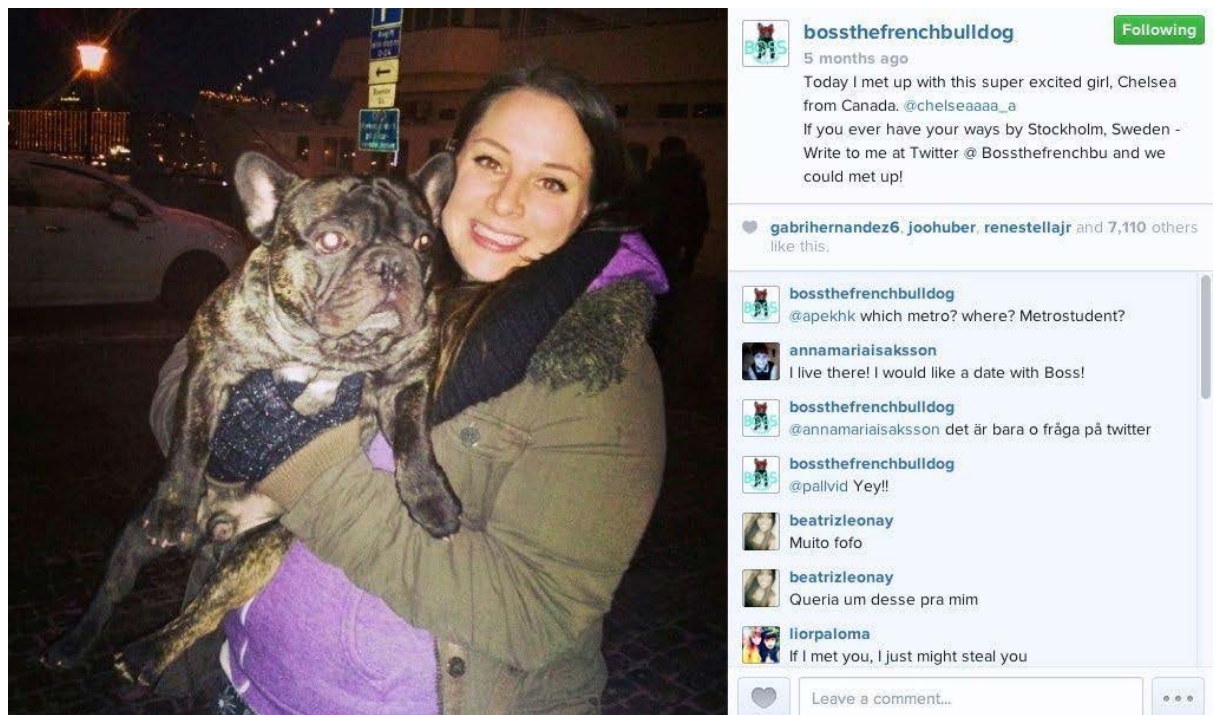


Figure 23. Boss the French bulldog and its American fun.  
 Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/bossthefrenchbulldog>

As can be seen, the principle of reciprocity appears at the base of the resulting social interaction on Instagram. In addition *Participant 3*'s (Skype interview. November 22, 2013 h 18:56) experience can be mentioned. He says that: 'there is one person who got in contact with me. They are an Instagramer and they are from... I want to say they are from Canada or from somewhere in the north of United States and they have, they are in a relationships with someone who is in Stuttgart, Germany. They are there and they message me through Instagram instead... "Where in Stuttgart is your church?" they want to know where my church was because they want to come to the church whenever they come and visit it. So, they are planning on coming to the church to the actual service time where it's located and it was really cool, really cool'.

Moreover, there is the experience of *Participant 16* (Skype interview. December 6, 2013 h 18:06). She is the manager of the Instagramer community in Bologna, Italy. Her house is part of Airbnb, a community marketplace where guests can book spaces from hosts, connecting people who have space to spare with those who are looking for a place to stay all over the globe. She reports the experience in this way: 'Through Airbnb you can see if there are Facebook friends in common and it happened to me that I received a request from the manager of Instagram San Francisco 2 (laugh). [...] Thanks to Instagram, we had some common friends on Facebook and she came over to Bologna

during the ceramics fair so there were events connected to Instagram, a photographic exhibition inside a historical building and I brought her and her boyfriend to this event and she was super happy. So now, if I go there would find... I hope to keep in touch'. These responses are examples of how, outside prearranged InstaMeets and InstaWalks, Instagram can be used as spontaneous social connector. It needs to be noted that the online approach still figures only as starting point for potential relationships that eventually move offline.

Overall, from participants' responses there are more positive experiences in relation to offline meetings that are not organized by the official communities. It can be argued that potentially the Instagramer communities are more focused on the importance of photography, as communities of interest, rather than the social aspect of gathering people together. Moreover, several participants, who are not actively part of the communities, say that they had been part of InstaMeets, InstaWalks and other communities' events, but their perception of social interaction was low compared to their expectations. For this reason, they decided not to repeat the experience. However, it needs to be highlighted that in both cases, through diverse modalities, photography is the core element that creates social interactions. However, even if the community is not recognized as a comfortable social environment, participants report the will to find alternative modalities of social connections. To summarise, at a general level the practice of photo sharing through the mediation of the platform, according to most of the participants' responses, cannot be considered a valid means to manage social relationships. Furthermore, visuality figures as an incomplete means of communication.

### 3.4 Conclusions: Visual Perspectives of Social Relationships

In this chapter, some typical uses of Instagram in relation to social relationships were examined. Mere online interactions are not considered as good as face-to-face meetings particularly for maintaining social relationships. Indeed, physical proximity is recognised as a crucial factor for establishing a sense of belonging (Delanty, 2003). Connections formed primarily over the Internet do not usually grow as long as they are experienced only online. The physical meeting, in fact, is widely identified as a validation of a social relationship, which allows the potential for the relationship to develop. Data has shown that Instagram is less effective than other platforms (such as

Facebook) and means of communication (such as WhatsApp) because of its communicative limitations.

However, it is a notable platform for establishing social relationships that, consequently, move onto other platforms or offline (such as InstaMeets and InstaWalks). The widely debated blurred line between online and offline social relationships is, within Instagram, defined clearly. The mediation of smart mobile devices is considered as a fair means to activate relationships but not enough to maintain them. Nevertheless, it has been highlighted that, within this discourse, visuality represents a connecting point. Among general users and online community members, photography is experienced as an element of social connection. From participants' responses, a growing use of visualities emerges at the expense of text messages or phone calls, but without taking their place. The technological convergence represented by the combination between the photo sharing platforms and the use of smart mobile devices manifest an increasing collective participation towards the 'liquid life' described by Bauman (2003) into different social media experiences. However, it is not possible to talk exclusively of visual social relationships.

The necessary dichotomy between physical and virtual worlds pushes the conception of contemporary socialities towards hybridization into the status of mediation. One does not exclude the presence of the other; rather one enhances the presence of the other to have a more complete social experience. Within this discourse, mobile technologies progress the creation of new forms of online human interactions through the use of trans-media/co-presence of multiple platforms (Facebook for friendships and Instagram for imageries to share with friends). Visualities, within this discourse, fulfil an additional layer of connectivity and mediality. Following *Participant 22*'s (Skype interview. December 10, 2013 h18:03) experience, it is possible to summarise individual perceptions of changes that Instagram brought into account; 'for me it has been a great social network. I met people all over the world and I have the opportunity to meet them when I go to New York or I go to a place I have never been. I just go to Instagram and I say: "Hey! I am here who wants to go for a photo walk?" It has been a good, positive thing. I think that photography often forces you outside of your shell you cannot stay in your office, your house and take pictures. You need to get out and move, and look at the world and it forces more social connections'.

Instagram is an example of how visual communication through, the mobility of smart mobile devices and the mediation of social media platforms, figures as a means of ubiquitous connectivity between individuals from distant places bringing images within the 'space of flows' (Castells, 1999), which may produce physical encounters. It can be argued that visual communication on Instagram represents a fair social connector that can activate users' curiosity towards the exploration of places and individuals. Considering that social relationship validation has been reported as a face-to-face experience, identity emerges as a crucial factor within the discourse of social relationships.

## **Chapter 4: Political Economy and Social Media Marketing on Instagram**

The advent of social media provides a new challenge to previous marketing methodologies, generating, at the same time, the rise of different power dynamics among the various agencies that are part of the social media marketing environment. This chapter, following Garnham's (2000) discussion of new media and politics, investigates how power is structured and differentiated, where it comes from and how it is renewed (Garnham, 2000) in the specific area of social media. It explores how the mediation of new media and the dynamics of its relative political economy cause changes at social and economic levels (McChasney, 2008). This chapter explores how the rise of the exchange of contents online contributes to the development of a sociological interest in studying new media through a political economy perspective. Mansell (2004), quoting Golding and Murdock's (1987) theories of communication and society, argues for the urgency to revitalize the political economy of media and communication identifying the emerging dynamics of consumption and production. To do so, Mansell (2004) argues for the need to follow Golding and Murdock's pre-internet observations that highlight the necessity to analyse 'the social processes through which they are constructed and interpreted and the contexts and pressures which shape and constrain those constructions' (Golding & Murdock, 1987:72). Through an ethnographic study conducted in Jamaica on mobile branding, Horst (2014) highlights that visuals and aesthetics play a significant role for marketing campaigns in which online, mobile and social media establish social intimacy with potential consumers. From this starting point, this chapter develops a research that frames the political economy of media within a sociological approach.

This chapter starts by providing a structural analysis of Instagram considering that after Facebook's acquisition of the platform, the political economy became more complex. Because of the interconnections and the cross-photo-sharing between the two platforms, Instagram became the mobile extension of Facebook allowing an ever present social media experience and the constant activity of photo sharing. Instagram allows users to share constantly and live mobile practices, and these features have become the key to intensify the daily use of Instagram. In this specific case, this chapter studies the political economy of Instagram emphasizing a critical investigation of its services and the systems of power that are embedded. Major changes in the political economy of

Instagram emerge due to the fact that modifications, improvements, co-operation, and business deals changed Instagram's initial status of a mere photo sharing platform into a business machine. This shows how the power of photography, through the 'imperative of sharing' (Van Dijck, 2013), drives users' socio-economical connections and online behaviour. The instantaneity of sharing afforded by Instagram makes photo sharing inscribable in the 'snapshot aesthetics' theorized by Schroeder (2013).

'The snapshot, a straightforward, generally unposed photograph of everyday life' is, according to Schroeder (2012:132) an important technique in strategic communication. Through a study conducted on six companies, Schroeder (2008) states that the use of snapshots (out of focus, eyes closed, poorly framed and so on) is increasing in recent commercials in contrast to the traditional highly posed studio shots. Snapshot aesthetics appears consequently as an increasingly prominent style of advertising imagery (Schroeder (2008). The quality of snapshots aims to invoke the "average consumer" that determines similarities and closeness between brands and regular customers' imageries. In fact, 'snapshot aesthetics offers a way into a *participatory* (user generated images), *sincere* and *less directive* (more ambiguous and flexible, perhaps) strategic style' (Schroeder, 2013). Schroeder's (2008; 2013) discussions about the developing of snapshot aesthetics in advertising testify to the crucial role that vernacular photography has on users/potential customers drawing the attention to the various photo sharing practices expressed on Instagram.

In its conclusions, this chapter considers how the political economy of Instagram generates the development of new connections between the mediation of the platform and the production and consumption of images. This process also produces dynamics of power among companies (such as Facebook and Instagram), businesses and brands, as can be observed through the analysis of the terms of use of Instagram. The development of new co-operation points out the extensive advancement of strategies for social media marketing involving the practice of photo sharing. This chapter codifies the knowledge in the field of social media marketing and it examines the routes undertaken by businesses and brands that decide to employ Instagram in their marketing plans. Then, it shows how the employment of photo sharing for marketing purposes acquires an innovation as powerful as disputed position producing interesting insights that see the political economy of media generating new social behaviour.

#### 4.1 Political Economy of Media and Online Marketing Strategies

This section brings into consideration the burgeoning political economy literature on new media that has witnessed a progressive interconnection between social media and business processes. Brands innovative use of social media shows an expansion of traditional marketing strategies. Indeed, this section identifies how this development affects daily use of social media. Particular attention is given to the development of the discipline of social media marketing as a strategy employed by businesses to engage with users/potential customers. The relevant literature about the political economy of new media is subsequently applied to interpret the dynamics of power and control that businesses lay on users/potential customers' use of social media. Furthermore, this section combines research on the political economy of new media and social media marketing using the analysis of the various strategies applied to photo sharing on Instagram including the importance of the variables of mobility and of the mediation offered by the platform.

This chapter, at first, defines the theoretical concept of the political economy and its connection with the complex environment of new media in order to delve, subsequently, into the specific social media. The political economy, according to Herman and Chomsky (2008), is mainly interested in tracing the routes by which money and power are able to leave out, filter and marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their message across to the public. The main key points of their volume *Manufacturing Consent*, first published in 1988, are about the mass media system in America and its power relation structures discussing, in particular, the system of propaganda imposed by media. Chomsky (2008) counterposes official systems of indoctrination with the understanding of ordinary people highlighting the necessity to build independent minds. Even if Chomsky's theorisations are circumscribed to USA territory and related to mass media, the idea of extended power and control over information is still applicable to all media studies. Chomsky's argument is stretched towards the new social media environment bringing into account the key presence of user generated contents that flank the official media production. However, within social media and the presence of user generated contents, the discourse becomes more complex.

Internet users are considered a key factor in the political economy analysis in view of their active participation to the consumption and cooperation in creating information, marketing trends and public opinion. During the time that users spend online, they produce profit for large corporations like Google, News Corp. (which owns MySpace), or Yahoo! (which owns Flickr) and many others through great tangles of advertisements that, in the Internet, are customized. This mechanism is actually made possible by observing, storing, and assessing users' activities with the help of computers (not only) and databases (Winseck & Yong, 2011). Moreover, the constant real-time surveillance of users' activities is also achieved through the proliferation of privacy agreements that guarantee that personalized advertising can be operated on web platforms (Winseck & Yong, 2011). Privacy agreements are, in other words, under the exclusive control of corporations (See Chapter 5: "Privacy and Surveillance on Instagram") which, in order to provide the "free" use of online services, manages users' information, data and metadata.

Subsequently, the political economy of media also captures the interest of the European scholars and, in relation to these theories there emerges a significant debate on the unbalanced fluxes of communication. In this context, the studies in political economy continue to develop and, in his article 'On the Political Economy of Communications' (1960) Dallas Smythe defines the main interest of the political economy of communications as 'the effects of communication agencies in terms of the policies by which they are organized and operated' together with the analysis of 'the structure and policies of these communication agencies in their social setting' (Smythe, 1960:564). The basic mechanism that drives the material aspect of communication is that individuals' free contribution is exploited and sold to advertisers. Quoting Garnham (1990) and Smythe (1960), Fuchs (2012) moves the attention of the political economy from ideological insights towards the analysis of the "economic role" in surplus value generation and advertising' (Fuchs, 2012:695).

In order to advance the reasoning of the exploitation of users' presence online, Fuchs (2012) argues that 'the means of communication that Facebook and Twitter provide to its users are not simply means of survival and should not be analytically treated as such, but are rather also means of production for the creation of value and profit' (Fuchs, 2012:704). Through the consumption of social media services (Facebook and Twitter, in this case) users/potential customers produce labour time and data commodities that



companies like Facebook and Twitter sell to advertisers. Nevertheless, within social media, as Fuchs (2012) argues, advertisers are not only interested in the time users spend on online services, rather on the active creation of contents, user generated contents. Within the Internet, users' creativity and activities are sold as commodities. Following this, Fuchs (2012) highlights that, compared to the audience commodity on traditional mass media, on the Internet 'users are also content producers, there is user generated content, the user engage in permanent creative activity, communication, community building and content-production' (Fuchs, 2012:771). The permanent active role of users on the Internet leads Fuchs (2010) to define the figure of the 'Internet prosumer commodity'. This is the reason why, the chapter moves to consider the implications that the political economy of new media has on users' online conduct.

Since its launch, Instagram has been progressively changing its appearance, structure and policies. Adding features, feeds and partnerships it enlarges its areas of action and increases its economic value becoming a different entity. Understanding its regulation it is possible to analyse how users' contents (data and meta-data) and practices are used by the platform and by other agencies. Instagram has a legal section that contains terms of use divided into before and after January , 2013. In fact, that date emerges for the company as a rupture into two different periods. It also embodies a notably attempt of change regarding the political economy of Instagram. Through the publication on the blog of the post 'you agree that a business or other entity may pay us to display your username, likeness, photos (along with any associated metadata), and/or action you take in connection with paid or sponsored content or promotions, without any compensation to you' (Instagram, 2013), Instagram activated the concern of public opinion about the use of personal data and reactions of cancellation from users.

Even if the Instagram team declares that they do not rent or sell users information to third parties without users consent, it can be observed that a kind of sharing does exist. Instagram declares to "potentially" use users' contents and information including log files, devices identifier, location data, and usage data with businesses that are legally part of the same group of companies that Instagram is part of (affiliates). Furthermore, it declares that affiliates might use users' information to help to provide, understand and improve the services for a better and more relevant online experience. However, Instagram reports that affiliates honour the choices that users make about who can see their photos (Instagram Policy, Share of your information, bullet 1). Instagram also

states that part of the data that could make users recognizable might be removed or combined with other information no longer associated with the same users (Instagram Policy, Share of your information, bullet 4). Nevertheless, since Instagram announces that Facebook acquired the photo sharing platform, as part of the new collaboration, Instagram starts sharing insights and information with Facebook, as reported in the privacy policy section on the Instagram website. Partnership and business deals increase the progress of marketing strategies that includes a wide employment of social media, which means an active engagement with users.

With the rise of user generated contents, free access to social media that draws profit by online advertisement, businesses develop strategies to foster users' activities online. Considering the marketing process that estimates individuals' value in everyday life, as Fuchs (2012) widely discusses, the political economy of new media moves its attention onto social media technologies. This shift witnesses the birth of social media marketing. 'Social media marketing is a term that describes uses of social networks, online communities, blogs, wikis or any other online collaborative media for marketing, sales, public relations and consumers service. Common social media marketing tools include Twitter, blogs, LinkedIn, Facebook, Flickr and YouTube' (Baker, 2013:3). Specifically, 'social media marketing (SMM) uses social media portals to positively influence consumers toward a website, company, brand, product, service, or a person' (Baker, 2013:3). In different ways its main goal is to foster consumers towards desirable actions and practices to do online.

Through social media brands spread their promotional campaigns to a wider range of potential customers, developing a typology of social media marketing that Chi (2011) describes as the 'connection between brands and consumers, [while] offering a personal channel and currency for user centred networking and social interaction' (Chi, 2011:46). The methodologies that brands employ to approach and engage with customers have changed significantly since the rise of social media. Brands now aim to plan and refine profitable modalities to use social media in harmony with their business plans (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). This phenomenon shows how brands exploit the potentialities of the virality of the Internet through the various strategies applicable with social media marketing.

Social media marketing is characterised by three fundamental features: consumer behaviour, user generated content, and viral advertising. The key point of social media marketing is mainly to define the factors that affect user/potential consumer behaviour. Baker (2013) distinguishes traditional marketing from social media marketing firstly by the aspects of control vs contribution. Baker (2013) explains, indeed, that the main goal of traditional marketing was being in a dominant position in order to control the contents seen by potential customers. On the contrary, she describes that social media marketing emphasises customer contribution and figures more like influence than actual control. Following, Baker (2013) identifies in trust building the second significant element. Whereas in traditional marketing they based the importance of trust as one-way (from the brand to potential customers), social media marketing aims to build a reciprocal conversation between brands and customers, which is recognizable in users' engagement.

An example of users' engagement is the call to action, which 'is simply the action that you want someone to take at each stage of your marketing campaign' (Baker, 2013:39). Photo sharing represents a relatively new practice to include in social media marketing strategies. Photo sharing sites and applications follow the basic functioning systems of other social networks. They are formed by online communities interested in observing, sharing and commenting on images. According to Baker (2013), the advantages offered by photo sharing practices, from a marketing standpoint, can be identified in the fact that 'photos can be used to showcase a product, document, offers, and influence buyer mood' (Baker, 2013:165). Photos can also generate interest and leading sales. Baker emphasises the importance of photo sharing in social media marketing strategies supporting the validity of the old saying 'a picture is worth a thousand words' (Baker, 2013:166). On the Internet photos can be more effective compared to traditional modalities of data management. Baker (2013) recognises several benefits produced by the use of photo sharing, because photos can be tracked by search engines, which facilitates their gathering and management. Then, the employment of a photo sharing strategy produces low cost, it is easy to undertake and it requires less demand compared to other social networks.

The knowledge of what affects consumer behaviour is vital for an effective social media marketing strategy, in particular, considering that the stream of contents about brands and products, as Heinonen (2011) underlines examining the motivations behind users'

online activities, are not anymore controlled only by businesses. Indeed, being familiar with online consumer behaviour becomes crucial to design efficient social media marketing strategies, considering that users' online activities of participation and production achievement and so on are caused by a variety of factors (Heinonen, 2011). This is the reason why social media marketing strategies need to develop specific plans in order to deal with contemporary consumers' presence online, in particular, in relation to practices and activities that produce user generated contents. Everyday users produce and share online a significant numbers of contents. In relation to this, brands identify in user generated contents the key element that can facilitate their engagement with users/potential customers. Brands presence within individuals' everyday lives has been strengthened through their inclusion on social media. Through social media marketing, indeed, they attempt to create connections and engagement to produce additional promotion or consumer generated advertising (Zinnbauer & Honer, 2011).

Evans (2010), discussing social media marketing, identifies in the activity of engagement a critical aspect in social technologies compared to traditional media. Indeed, Evans argues that 'engagement is redefined by consumers when acting in an open, participative social environment' (Evans & McKee, 2010:11). Considering the basic functioning principles of social media and social networking website, connectivity and engagement surface as crucial factors to understand within social media marketing. Evans and McKee (2010) identify four stages of the process of engagement, classifiable as: consumption, curation, creation, and collaboration. The first stage 'means downloading, reading, watching, or listening to digital contents. Consumption is the basic starting point for nearly any online activity, and especially so for social activities' (Evans & McKee, 2010:16). 'Curation, is the act of sorting and filtering, rating, reviewing, commenting on, tagging, or otherwise describing contents. Curation makes content more useful for others' (Evans & McKee, 2010:17). The creation stage is essentially recognised in the creation of multimedia contents. For instance, in relation to online community, as Evans and McKee (2010) argue, content creation is the underlying theme and reputation management is what encourages the creation and sharing of contents with a larger community. Finally, there is the stage of collaboration that Evans and McKee (2010) recognise as the core social-business building blocks. In fact, 'collaboration is a key inflection point in the realization of a vibrant community and the port of entry for true social business' (Evans & McKee, 2010:19). Considering that online 'participation is driven by passion' (Evans & McKee, 2010:55) by

understanding the passions, lifestyles, and causes that are relevant to users, according to Evans & McKee (2010), it is possible to identify the best social way through which to manage connections and engagement with potential customers.

Pepper and Rogers, through their book *Managing Customers Relationships* (2004), emphasising the developments in technologies, define the contemporary time 'era of interactivity' (Pepper & Roger, 2004:15). The development of customer relationship management aims to make a brand stand out among competitors establishing personal connections with users/potential customers. Within the social media landscape, this strategy evolves into social customer relationship management with the specific aim to manage interactions through the mediation of social media platforms. Social customer relationship management is conceptually similar to the traditional customer relationship management (data driven and operating on a feedback loop), but according to Evans, 'is extended across [your] the entire business and wraps the entire customer's experience, including external influencers' (Evans & McKee, 2010:38). Evans and McKee (2010) describe the 'influencer' as a subject who is influential among specific groups of customers and who is at the center of specific conversations, arguing that understanding the dynamics that make this subject influential, businesses should develop the conversations with their users/potential customers and try to encourage the production of contents related to specific brands.

Consumer generated advertising is a typology of user-generated contents that produces precise instances where consumers promote brands (Campbell *et al*, 2011). Regarding this, a study conducted by Taylor, Strutton, and Thompson (2012) on the motivations for sharing online advertising, reports that consumers trust consumer generated advertising more than ads produced by brands and that they are willing to spread the message. This type of behaviour is similar to the interest that individuals show in snapshots more than in traditional advertising. In fact, consumers are willing to share messages related to brands they feel they belong to and through which they can show their identity (see chapter 6: "Identity and Memory on Instagram"). Consequently, sharing contents related to brands means sharing more about themselves than about the brand itself, and that is more likely to make the message go viral.

Facebook is an example that shows how brands, through the use of user-generated contents, can become part of social media experiences. In fact, social media are seen as

ordinary information containers and potential trusted sources. This is the reason why, according to Chu (2011), Facebook (similarly to other social media) provides new opportunities for brands to engage with consumers via viral advertisement. Porter and Golan (2006) define viral advertisement as ‘unpaid peer to peer communication of provocative content originating from an identified sponsor using the Internet to persuade or influence an audience to pass along the content to others’ (Porter & Gola, 2006). Viral advertisement differs from user-generated contents because of the origin of the message. Viral advertisement follows precise guidelines (according to its targeted audience), in order to entertain and engage users/potential consumers. Social media marketing strategies suggest showing not only the product or the brand itself rather, presenting an entire experience connected to the brand that becomes a story. For instance, the strategy of ‘selling experiences’ (Sorescu *et al*, 2011) has been identified as one of the fruitful strategies to engage customers.

According to Scolari (2008a), in this phase of the world economy, businesses do not attempt to sell products or services exclusively via persuasive advertising any more. Currently, businesses aim to produce symbolic universes endowed with meaning: brands (Scolari, 2008). From a semiotic perspective, Scolari (2009) adds, brands are methods to produce a specific discourse to communicate with the audience. The discourse that characterises brands is formed by the brand identity and the series of values that customers might accept. Consequently, brands mould narrations of appealing worlds and standards of living. Following this, Scolari (2009) considers semiotics to interpret brands as *narrative worlds* (author’s italic) that can be inscribed within the digital storytelling method that Alexander (2011) defines as the practice of ‘telling stories with digital technologies’ (Scolari, 2009:3). Scolari claims that in digital media, ‘*the interactive experience that the Internet user lives is a fundamental component of the hypermedia cocktail and occupies a central position in the brand-building process*’ (Scolari, 2008:182).

In relation to Scolari’s statement, Robin (2008), emphasising UGCs, describes digital storytelling as ‘a technology application that is well-positioned to take advantage of user-contributed contents’ (Robin, 2008). The increased accessibility to mobile applications moves the creative processes (as capture, editing and sharing) almost exclusively onto mobile devices. Storytelling production and consumption, through smart mobile devices, figures as one of the widespread strategies for telling stories.

Arguably photography is part of this change. Users look at the world with different eyes, and everything they experience can be captured and transformed into social sharable events and stories. Schroeder's (2013) theorization of snapshot aesthetics and the strategic imagination can be correlated with visual storytelling as a method of communication and engagement with users.

#### 4.2 Analysis of Social Media Marketing Strategies on Instagram

In relation to the subject of this study, the inclusion of political economy as 'the study of the social relations, particularly power relations that mutually contribute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources' (Mosco, 2009:24) discloses the existing policies and power dynamics located behind the conventional use of the platform. Understanding the political economy of Instagram brings the analysis to unearth the existing relations of power between Instagram and Facebook, and other businesses. Moreover, following Mosco (1996) saying that the political economy 'concentrates on specific set of social relations organized around power or the ability to control others, processes, and things' (Mosco, 1996:25), the analysis of the political economy of Instagram essentially shows how the platform drives towards the commodification of users' photo sharing.

In order to achieve this understanding it is helpful to start from a general knowledge of the political economy of the older brother Facebook because, since their partnership, a relevant influence on the progression of Instagram can be observed. The co-operation between Facebook and Instagram has resulted in a significant number of modifications that the photo sharing platform undertakes to follow the conduct of Facebook. In 'The Political Economy of Privacy on Facebook' is this a chapter on a book or what? If book title should be in italics (Fuchs, 2012), Fuchs describes the modalities through which Facebook collects and sells users' data and metadata to advertisers clients. The modalities followed are the same described by Evans (2010) when illustrating the new mechanisms of social media marketing. The main focus of Fuchs' argument is that 'users are unpaid, and therefore infinitely exploited' (Fuchs, 2012:144). Fuchs (2012) strongly states that this type of capitalist presumption is an extreme form of exploitation, in which prosumers work completely for free. Following his utterances, Instagram users, when uploading photographs, are part of this mechanism and they also

constitute an audience commodity that is sold to advertisers. Using the platform, users are engaged in a permanent creative activity, communication, and ubiquitous presence that also extends towards other social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and Tumbler.

Taking into consideration what Fuchs says about Facebook, concerning social media marketing strategies making the world a 'more commercialised place', the same reasoning applies to Instagram. So, following Fuchs assumption that 'Facebook and Google are only the two best known examples in the contemporary economy' (Fuchs, 2012:155), it is arguable that, considering the partnership with Facebook, even Instagram is part of this evaluation. Consequently, the various social media marketing strategies (such as brands' accounts, photo contests, promotion campaigns, and user generated contents) present on the photo sharing platforms can be viewed as the visible part of this economic machine. Considering the social media marketing strategies explained above, this chapter proceeds to illustrate how businesses and brands employ Instagram in their business plans and the users/potential customers' responses.

This section depicts the two crucial innovations that characterize Instagram development of its apparatuses that social media marketing employs within brand communication strategies. An important moment can be recognized with the introduction of 'hashtags' as a new feature (November , 2011). Hashtags are technically words or phrases prefixed with the symbol # and provide a means of grouping messages, since users are able to search for precise hashtags and get the set of images that contain them. On Instagram, hashtags can be used to post pictures with words or phrases that contain the subject or words with particular connection with it. Also, this apparatus can help users to categorise and rapidly find contents. Instagram's blog reports that the intent of launching the hashtag apparatus was to render user experience of the platform more connecting and engaging. The other important moment occurred on April , 2012 when Instagram joined Facebook. In relation to this discussed purchase, Systrom has always declared that Instagram was supposed to keep its own separate identity and that the co-operation with Facebook would have been useful for the development of new features in order to propose better mobile photo experiences. However, both Instagram's own features and the Facebook purchase brought a significant impact over users/potential customers and businesses.



Within this discourse, it is important to highlight the changes that the partnership with Facebook conveyed to Instagram. The partnership increased Instagram users from 15 million to 100 million (Shively, 2012). This exponential growth pushed brands to consider the photo sharing platform as an essential part of their social media marketing strategies. Indeed, from August , 2012 (26%) to November , 2012 (34%) a considerable growth of brand accounts on Instagram has been registered. Moreover, the partnership allows users to upload photos on Instagram passing through Facebook, making the Instagram photo sharing visible to Facebook friends. This cross-platform sharing obviously increases the visibility of Instagram contents. Indeed, it has been reported that after the acquisition ‘more than 90% of Instagram photos (posted by brands) were also posted on Facebook’ (Shively, 2012). This data shows clearly the interest of businesses and brands in using the virality and visibility afforded by the Internet to engage users.

#### **4.3.1 Brand Marketing and Users’ Engagement on Instagram**

During contemporary times when societies are becoming more and more *liquid* (Bauman, 1995 – my italic) unidirectional systems of communication are not enough anymore, but it is necessary for establishing engagement with customers. Whether, traditional branding was mainly constructed with iconic elements, such as logotypes or company graphic images, now according to Scolari (2008), online branding is based on the interactive experience of users. The aim of this section is to examine the various social media marketing strategies used by brands on Instagram to show their products and to engage with users/ potential customers. The uniqueness of the employment of Instagram is recognizable in the sharing of visual storytelling. Indeed, on the one hand, brands, through official Instagram accounts tell the story of their product showing an array of aspects that users do not find in general advertising. Meanwhile, on the other hand, through the use of photo contests brands invite users to share images of their everyday lives in connection with the brand to show how products actually exist with customers. A list of brand accounts is analysed as evidence: LG, Pizza Express, Issey Miyake Parfums, Vitamin Shoppe, Pumpkin, Australian best car Hyundai, BRP Sea-Doo, World beer tour, Pilot Pen USA, and Neil Kelly home. The core point of this discourse is that brands in the first place show unconventional sides of themselves and the products they sell and they encourage users to create visual contents that show similar scenarios.

Marketing strategies need to face different challenges, such as the increasing distraction of people during their everyday lives. In doing so, brands aim to find the best strategy to engage with customers through social media. Within this discourse, storytelling, as Scolari (2008) argues, represents one of the most used strategies that brands employ to engage and share economic, social and political values with people. '[Transmedia] storytelling is a particular narrative structure that expands through both different languages (verbal, iconic, etc.) and media (cinema, comics, television, video games, etc.)' (Scolari, 2009) giving to brands broad visibility and the possibility (as discussed above) to develop a fluid narrative around and about the brand. So, brands start to tell stories. Their products become stories and marketing becomes narrative. Brands push users to tell stories about their products. However, within this study, the transmediality of media is not taken into account considering that the area of research is limited to the platform Instagram and imageries that are shared over the platform. In fact, the conception of storytelling is analysed only referring to one platform.

The combined analysis between brands and participants' accounts understands how and why people involve themselves with these narrations. Brands' Instagram accounts do not show the products themselves, rather they disclose unordinary contents that follow the snapshot aesthetic described by Schroeder (2008) (such as: employees, old ads, backstage shots, bouncy castles, piles of T-shirts, so on and so forth). Following Scolari (2008), brands sell possible worlds, meanings and values in order to accomplish effective social media strategies. This can also be seen through the brands' photo streams as whole. In fact, brands structure their streams alternating photos of products, as can be seen through the fig. 24, 25, and 26.



Figure 24. LG Nordic.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: [://instagram.com/lgnordic](https://instagram.com/lgnordic)



Figure 25. Pizza Express UK.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: [https://instagram.com/pizzaexpress\\_uk](https://instagram.com/pizzaexpress_uk)



Figure 26. Vitamin Shoppe.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/vitaminshoppe>

With photos representing unordinary moments, in which people are protagonists of the scenes with the brand, as can be seen through these photos:



Figure 27. LG Nordic, leisure time.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: [://instagram.com/lgnordic](https://instagram.com/lgnordic)



Figure 28. Pizza Express and friends.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: [://instagram.com/pizzaexpress\\_uk](https://instagram.com/pizzaexpress_uk)



Figure 29. Vitamin Shoppe and Super Heroes.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/vitaminshoppe>

The brands' Instagram accounts taken into consideration show common patterns that replicate the social media marketing principles of 'simplicity and persuasion, insight and personalization, partnership and involvement, openness and authenticity' described by Seldey (2010). In particular, the principle of user engagement can be recognised in the brands' attempts to alternate brand/product promotion with users' entertainment. In this way, users are able to follow new launches and, also, the "real life" of their

favourite products. In this case, it can be argued that the decision of using a storytelling strategy to disclose the real life of brands is related to the intent to reduce the distance between brands and consumers. To do this, brands strategically share images of leisure time:



Figure 30. Pumpkin patch kid, leisure time.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/pumpkinpatchkids>



Figure 31. Hyundai, leisure time.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/hyundaiaius>



Figure 32. Brpsea-Doo. Leisure time.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/brpseadoo>

Backstage, which show the production and employers:



Figure 33. Pizza Express and the backstage.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: [://instagram.com/pizzaexpress\\_uk](https://instagram.com/pizzaexpress_uk)



Figure 34. Brpsea-Doo and the backstage.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/brpseadoo>



Figure 35. Hyundai and the backstage.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/hyundaiaius>

Overall, it can be observed that the social media marketing strategies illustrated above (Evans, 2010; Tuten, 2013; Scolari, 2008a, 2009; Schroeder, 2013; Heinonen, 2011; Sorescu *et al*, 2011; Sedley, 2010) are widely employed by brands that intend to include Instagram within their social media marketing plan. The evolution is recognized in the strategic use of visualities to engage with users. The examples described above show



how Instagram is driving visual communication towards a progressive union with social media marketing. Brands on Instagram do not show a pure form of advertising; rather they use a means more connected to users and so more social.

With the purpose of analysing user engagement it is helpful to start from the effective analogy that Tuten (2013) gives about this principle. Talking of brands, she states: ‘when you turn your perspective around to the viewpoint of your customers, the mechanics of engagement change. From the perspective of the fish, it is not the lure that is “engaging”. Rather, it is the act of eating, driven by a more fundamental interest – like the instinct of survival – that results in the fish being “engaged”. The lure looks like a meal, and fish think a lot about eating’ (Tuten, 2013:205). Following this statement, the analysis of user engagement proceeds considering what Tuten describes as ‘the act of eating’. Following Tuten’s (2013) principle that ‘from a customer’s perspective, engagement is all about the simple act of spending time in activities that are relevant, of interest, or otherwise satisfy a purpose or desire’ (Tuten, 2013:221), Instagram photo contests can be likened to fish grazing and the consequent contribution as users’ engagement. Photo contests are good examples to observe how this phenomenon of emulation and reproduction is manifested. According to recent statistics, it has been reported that one of the most common tactics for starting conversations with users and driving up follower numbers is holding a ‘photo contests’ (*Simply Measured*, 2013). Generally, it involves a wide dispersal of branded hashtags that are followed by asking users to upload images related to particular themes. The winners are selected at the end of the competition, which involves a material prize or only “5 minutes of fame” within the net (Tuten, 2013). Photo contests launched by the brands are examples of the interest in establishing connections with the users.

Through the examination of brand Instagram accounts and user engagement in photo contests, it can be argued that social media marketing strategies influence the user generated contents production from the conception to the upload. Following the requirements listed by brands, user participation in photo contests can be interpreted as the continuation of brands stories where users are the main characters. Extending the interpretation of user generated contents, it can be advanced that observing brands’ accounts and participating in a photo contests also modifies users’ ordinary photo sharing. As *Participant 8* (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 14:02) says, participating in photo contests requires a particular attention that pushes users to think

critically about their photography. This process, *Participant 8* (Skype interview, November 25, 2013 h 14:02) says, consequently affects the rest of the photo sharing (see chapter 2: “Photo Sharing on Instagram”). In particular, brand Instagram accounts and the photo contests they launch inspire creativity, attention to detail, and creation of meanings that general users incorporate within their everyday lives.

User participation in photo contests involves the act of photo sharing as a means to tell stories of users’ relations with the brand, as can be seen in the following examples:



Figure 36. LG and the photo contest #express yourself.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <http://iconosquare.com/contests-open.php>

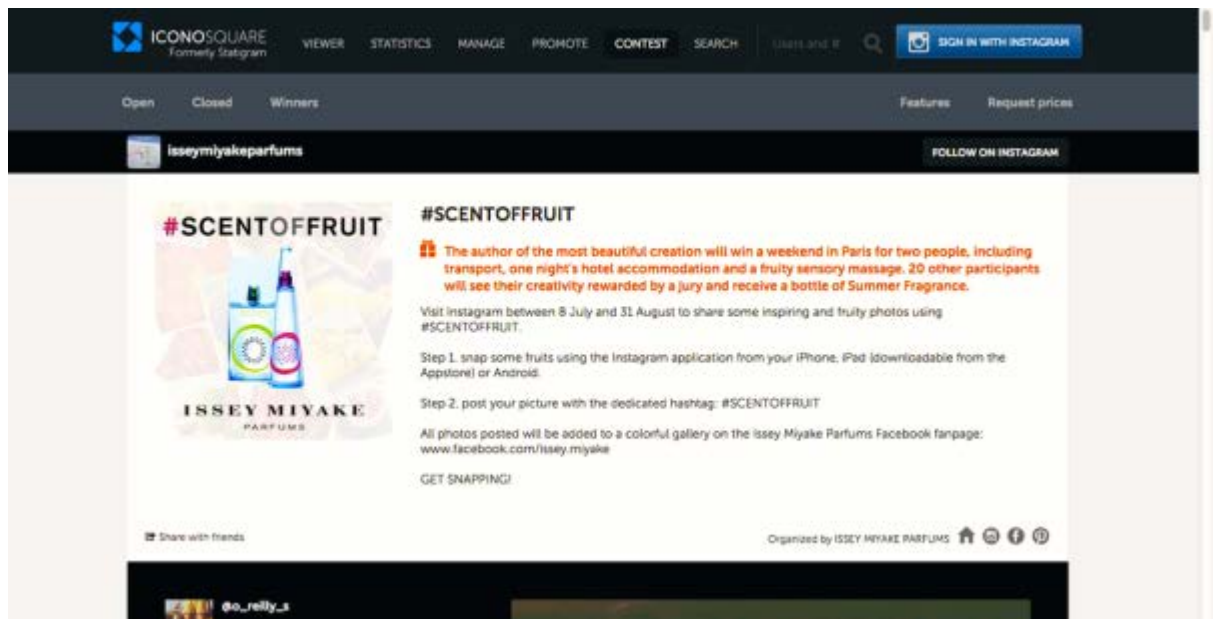


Figure 37. Issey Miyake Parfums and the photo contest #scentoffruit.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <http://iconosquare.com/contests-open.php>

As something observable, sharing photos, which shows the experiences that users have with brands, emphasises the sale of ‘worlds and meanings’, as stated by Scolari (2008a), translated into visualities. For instance, in the first case, LG brand invites users to picture themselves, and participants responded by uploading an unconventional selection of self-portraits showing the effort that users invested in creating a creative image that could represent their visual *identity* (my emphasis). In the second case, Pizza Express brand encourages kids to cook at home launching the photo contest #GettingKidsCooking (see fig. 38). In this case, the brand invites users to upload photos regarding the *activity* of cooking at home. In response, users uploaded photos portraying happy faces of kids with the result of their cooking. Then, the third example shows the brand Issey Miyake Parfums launching a challenge that invites users to create original fruity images inspired by the new summer fragrance.

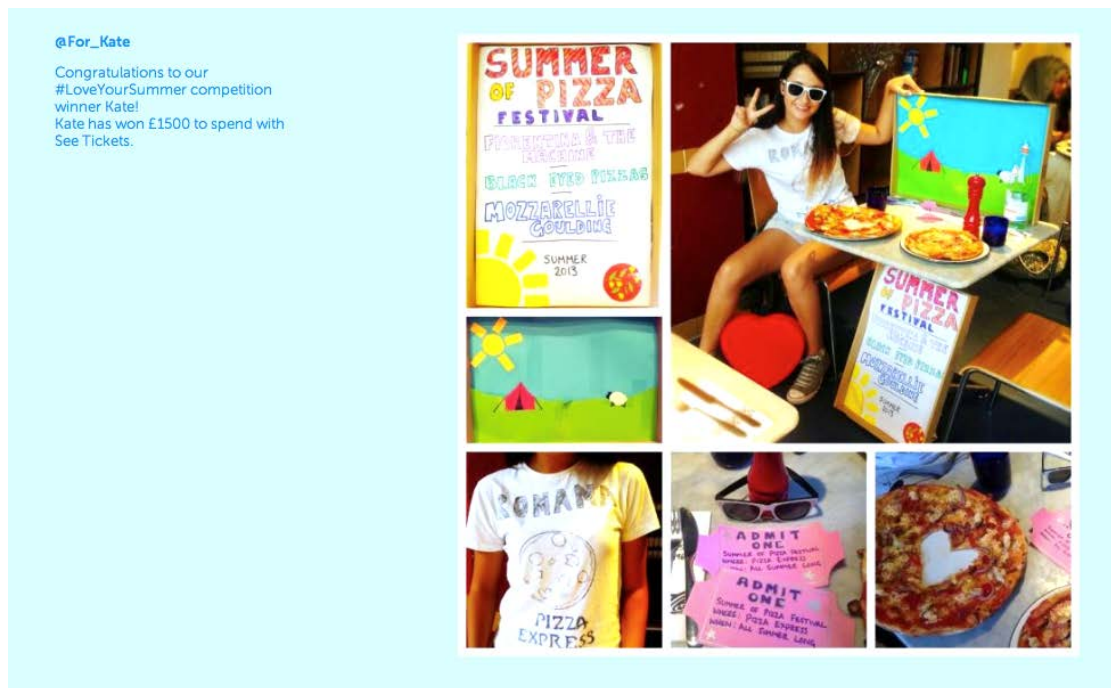


Figure 38. Pizza Express challenge with kids.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <http://iconosquare.com/contests-open.php>

Clearly users are encouraged to contribute to the construction of the brand image showing scenarios inspired by the brand. As can be seen from these three examples, brands use photo contests to foster users' creativity around products, through an actual 'call to action'. Participating in photo contests gives users a sense of greater connection with brands. On the one hand, users feel rewarded by the brands' interest in their contents and contribution; and, on the other hand, they are interested in getting benefit from being associated with specific brands. When ordinary people appear with a well-crafted call to action, and other users engage with that, 'Instagram will have done its job: delivering a highly targeted contextual advertisement to a highly targeted socially-influenced audience' (Heaton, 2012). Considering the analysis advanced in chapter 2: "Photo Sharing on Instagram" as a community of interest, the development of connections with communities also emerges within this discourse. In addition, brand collaboration with Instagram communities figures as another way to engage users. Social media marketing exploits the Instagramers interest in the activities offered by the communities to enhance their marketing strategies.

The following section examines how Instagram communities, freelance users and private communication agencies use Instagram as a means of visual communication for social media marketing strategies. Through the observation of Instagram brands'

accounts and promotion campaigns, the similarities and divergences among different bodies (Instagram communities, freelance users and private communication agencies) are shown in terms of how they approach the platform and develop strategies that move towards the (almost) exclusive use of visual communication for marketing purposes. However, it arises that the maximum number of online communities' social media marketing strategies attempt to reach the maximum number of users/potential customers. It means that the connectivity and visibility afforded by communities is in one way or another considered for strategic plans. This is the reason why this section emphasises the analysis of Instagramer communities. Starting from a detailed analysis of the dynamics of Instagram communities this section moves afterwards to illustrate the modus operandi of freelance users and private communication agencies observable mainly in promotion campaigns and visual storytelling.

### **4.3.3 Social Media Marketing and Instagram Online Communities**

According to participant responses and photo sharing observation, it emerges that Instagram as community is actively developing in four European countries: Spain, Germany, England and Italy. Within these countries the shattering potential of visual communication via Instagram is combined within social media marketing in different modalities and manifestations. Within these countries a strong connection between Instagram and brands can be observed. The core point that bonds them is, as *Participant 11* (Skype Interview. December 1, 2013 h 23:00) states that in order to achieve an objective users do not need to make beautiful pictures. Indeed, *Participant 11* (Skype Interview. December 1, 2013 h 23:00) says: 'you need to make something. I can see the use of Instagram as a medium for a lot of things rather than pictures'. From this statement, the principle of engagement described by Tuten (2013) and Evans & McKee (2010) emerge again. This is where the connection does not arise through the sharing of high quality imageries, rather through the action of sharing.

This section considers, on the one hand, policies and rules that regulate community members' conduct in relation to businesses. On the other hand, it considers the core aspects that determine user engagement with brands and the motivations that characterise their active attitude towards brands. Through a deep observation of Instagram communities, in addition to the social enjoyment of being part of a

community of interest, it emerges that businesses are involved with Instagramers social activities. This section starts by understanding the general characteristics and structures of Instagram communities to develop a critical reasoning towards the development and extensive use of social media marketing strategies.

However, it needs to be clarified that the Instagram community is a separate body compared with the company Instagram. Regarding this *Participant 21* (Skype interview. December 10, 2013 h16:09) says that the relationship that Italy, for example, has with the company Instagram is love and hate. *Participant 21* (Skype interview. December 10, 2013 h16:09) says: 'it recognizes that without us it would have not reached so high and so quickly. We have a closed group on Facebook where communities' managers and the Instagram founders can read. They hardly ever interact with the group. They talk directly with Phil. We know that if some businesses that we are cooperating with have problems we can contact, in one way or in another one, Instagram team, and we know that they will have a special care. On the other hand, we have never ever been helped by Instagram as community neither as individuals'. According to participants' responses, the Company Instagram does not exert an exceptional control over Instagram communities' activities (See chapter 5: "Privacy and Surveillance on Instagram"). In this regard, *Participant 19* (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h 16:50) strongly believes that where there would be something the communities do that Instagram does not like, Instagram would adopt specific measures to stop the phenomenon.

Businesses have recently development an enhanced interest in online communities. In fact, they recognise businesses' success can be also created through groups of individuals sharing common interests and doing similar practices. From this awareness, it emerges clearly the interest in communities of interest and communities of practices (Rheingold, 2000). Both provide, in fact, intangible benefits, but equally important. Businesses, according to Armstrong and Hagel (2011), consider online communities economically attractive because they gather a large number of participants and keep them online through a variety of practices (photo contests, for instance). The time users spend online represent the apparent intangible benefit that, as discussed above in this chapter, businesses work for. However, before analysing in the specific the dynamics that guide the inter-relationships between businesses and online communities, it is helpful to understand first communities functioning systems and subsequently their connections with businesses.

The Spanish Instagramers community, more commonly called Igers, was born on January 2011, as reported on the official website. The Spaniard Philippe Gonzalez founded the Igers community with the main objective of helping others to understand and use the application, and create a social community of people interested in mobile photography and social networking. As Gonzales says: 'In December 2010, on a lazy Sunday morning, while I was in bed, I read users wondering about Instagram's best practice. I suddenly thought I could help new users with my knowledge regarding social networks and apps. Since then, I have never stopped! I first started the blog with tutorials, apps reviews and interviews of highlighted users around the world. Soon people started to write to me and ask me to help them to launch local groups with the Instagramers brand. It was a crazy idea. [...] [But now] there are more than 350 groups in the world so far'. Gonzales declares that the Igers community has not a tied relationship or stable cooperation with the company Instagram. Indeed, they coexist as independent bodies. The Company Instagram manages its business as global social media platform, meanwhile the Igers community enjoys, as Gonzales says, the application as hobby, taking the best part of it, but without any economic pressure. However, findings show that, even if Instagram communities' managers declare that the main purpose of communities is fostering social engagement, co-operation with brands and businesses appear as a prominent use of the platform.

The creation of Instagramers gallery in Miami has been the following step that Gonzales, with the designer and expert in social innovation Jorge Martinez, made to develop and spread the community. On December 2013, he launched Instagramers gallery to promote the artistic work of the most creative Instagram users from all over the world. The main purpose of this project was creating, as reported on the official web site, a 'democratic gallery' devoid of the identification of "followers" and "followed" in order to allow access to any image present in the showcase. The gallery intends to be an exposition of talent, high quality and original photos. Indeed, as underlined within the website the 'Instagramers gallery is a photo gallery, not a social network'. From that statement, it arises that the founders are interested in the dissemination of social photography based on artistic merit to encourage the selection of high-quality images.

The Igers community in Spanish emerges as a starting point for the subsequent growth of the other Igers communities. From the official web site and the founders'

declarations it can be said that Igers was born with the intention of creating a 'community of interest' (Lesser *et al*, 2000) of people with the passion for mobile photography and, along the way, it has grown exponentially producing interesting implications. Within the Instagramers, a particular interest towards the social aspect of using Instagram emerges (See chapter 3: "Social Relationships on Instagram"). The main characteristics of it are recognizable in the sense of support and belonging typical of communities (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2005) that, considering the global distribution, deal with online (photo sharing) and offline (InstaMeets, InstaWalks, and so on) social relationships. Regarding this, Gonzales says: 'I dedicate around two or three hours each day to the Igers Community. Even my life as a mobile photographer suffers from my dedication to this worldwide network, but I think it's worth it! Today we organize around 50 InstaMeets each month around the world and dozens of exhibitions around mobile photography and Instagram'.

As reported by several participants, since Instagram has been acquired by Facebook (2 years after the launch of Instagram) its initial status of photo sharing platform dedicated to the fruition of 'high quality mobile photography' turned into a social network 'full of rubbish' (as *Participant 5* (Skype interview. September 7, 2013 h 16:24) claims). In fact, the establishment of the Instagramers gallery website can be interpreted as the will for creating a niche for high quality photography and photographers, a way to bring back the standard of images that initial users were used to sharing. However, this phenomenon does not exclude relationships with businesses within the Instagramers; rather it displays the modality in which the different partnerships have been established (such as the partnership between the Instagramers gallery and Fundacion Telefonica). The Instagramers figure as the benchmark for the succeeding Igers communities all over the world.

Igers Berlin figures as another important body to keep in consideration in relation to the growth of Instagram. In Germany, Instagram takes its roots particularly in Berlin, wherein there have been founded three different bodies, identifiable in: Visumate (social media marketing agency), Igers Berlin (Instagramers community), and the Happy Family (independent group of Instagramers). In this case different purposes for using the platform have established the rise of different bodies. This is the reason why the relationship between social media marketing and Instagramers needs to be analysed and interpreted as an independent subject.



Visumate (see fig. 39) is a private communication agency founded by Oliver Brugmann and Thomas Kakarenko with the goal of taking advantage of the power of visual communication. It works on social media strategies and viral marketing campaigns. Visumate's team is formed by visual communication experts based in Berlin and cross-linked around the world with the Instagram communities. They manage clients' accounts and they take care of product promotion. They provide visual contents and photo influencers, work on events coverage, photo contests, and PR campaigns. As can be seen, Visumate is an advertising agency that focuses its social media marketing strategies exclusively on visual communication in social media. It identifies in Instagram an efficient means of communication for marketing purposes. Where on the one hand, the team works to show brands' identity and new products, on the other hand, it proposes photo contests to engage Instagram users in sharing photos and to connect with brands.

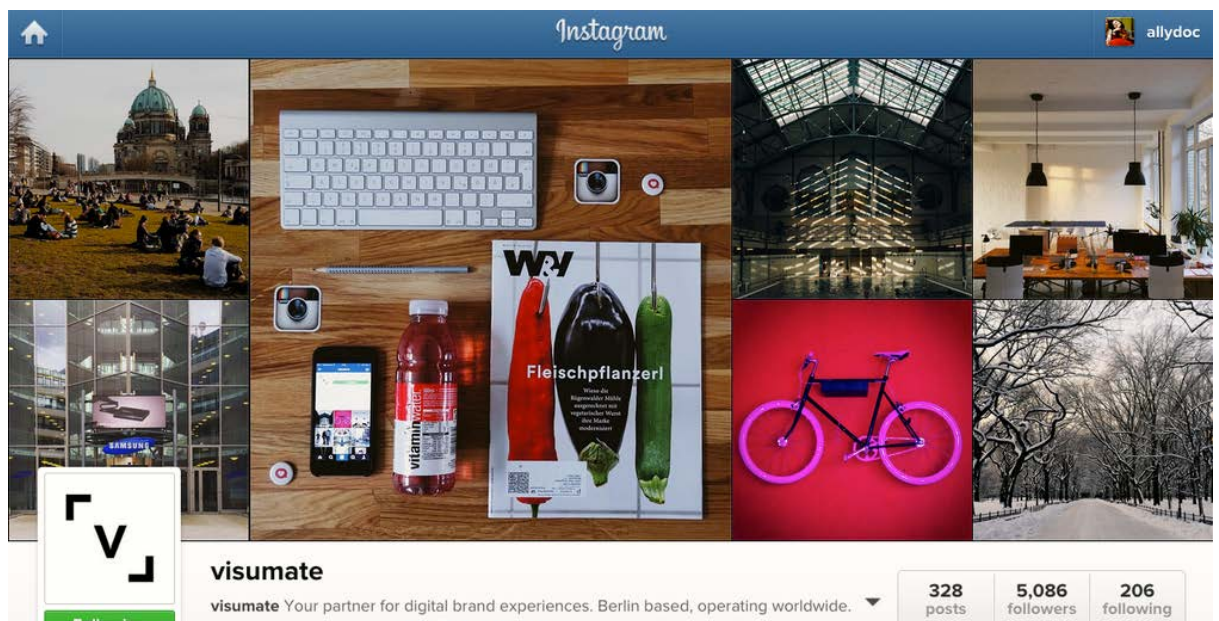


Figure 39. Visumate. (visual) social media marketing.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/visumate>

The other body that animates the German landscape is Igers Berlin. According to *Participant 4* (Skype interview. November 24, 2013 h 16:08) the local manager, there is not stable cooperation between community and businesses. However, Kakarenko is connected with Igers Berlin as user part of the community, but without any precise and stable profitable intent. *Participant 4* (Skype interview. November 24, 2013 h 16:08) is

aware that other countries' experiences with brands are positive. As *Participant 4* (Skype interview. November 24, 2013 h 16:08) says: 'You can get brands and local brands to get involved and to support your PhotoWalks or whatever you are doing'. The community in Berlin proves to be currently more focused on social relationships and social activities (see Chapter 3: "Social Relationships on Instagram"). However, *Participant 4* (Skype interview. November 24, 2013 h 16:08) manifests the intention of creating future co-operation with businesses and brands as other Instagram communities are already maturing.

The "Happy Family" is the other agent that developed in Berlin. As *Participant 28* (Skype interview. January 14, 2014 h09:03) describes: 'it is a family', part of Igers Berlin but it is a smaller group where people's friendly company counts more than the quality of the members' photography. As *Participant 28* (Skype interview. January 14, 2014 h09:03) reports: 'at the beginning we went for a photo walk in a park, it was Sunday and someone said: "Oh! It's just like spending a Sunday afternoon with your family" ahahah! So, "Happy Family" '. This small group is private and potential members need to apply to be part of it. Indeed, as *Participant 28* (Skype interview. January 14, 2014 h09:03) says, they communicate through mobile calls. Compared to Igers Berlin, their organization of Insta Walks usually counts no more than 10 people. The reduced number of participants allows more interactive experiences with the other Instagramers. The sociality is precisely the main characteristic that *Participant 28* (Skype interview. January 14, 2014 h09:03) highlights about the "Happy Family" in comparison to Igers Berlin.

In Italy the Instagramers' community named 'Igers Italia' developed, but in a different modality compared to the communities in Spain or Berlin. Since March 2013 Igers Italia became a national no-profit association (unique among the Igers communities) oriented to the literacy and diffusion of the Instagram application and mobile photography skills through social public events and challenges (the Italian term for photo contests). The main goal of the association is to organise and promote activities throughout the national territory through social events online and offline, such as photo challenges, InstaMeets and InstaWalks aiming towards the progressive improvement of the quality of photo sharing. Igers Italia approaches the platform in a totally unique way compared to other communities. They combine together business and sociality. To direct members' conduct, Igers Italia follows precise guidelines listed in a document

available online. The rules listed within the document are mandatory to all members and, in particular, to local and regional managers (such as Igers Roma or Igers Tuscany) once they decide to be part of Igers Italia. In this case, the community is a unique stance that sees community members equally enjoying social events and operating as influencers and social media promoters.

The managing board identifies specifically the following guidelines for potential local and regional managers: Personal candidacy with a program of activities in the territory and at least 1.000 followers, co-managed credentials for a new Igers accounts (open account from the team Igers Italia or regional), organisation of at least two InstaWalks per year, organisation of at least four InstaMeets per year, and daily retweet of national initiatives (advised use of automatism for self-publications on Facebook and Twitter of Igers Italia posts through feed rss or others).

Specifically, Igers Italia focuses its photographic activities around the territory promotion as clearly the Business Unit plus Marketing and Communication Director *Participant 21* (Skype interview. December 10, 2013 h16:09) states: 'For sure the territory promotion is the most natural thing. Especially for a group so well organized throughout the territory, it is the most immediate and logical thing. In fact, this means turning Igers into a significant block for Italian tourism. It is the direction that we are going to undertake. Even our recent participation in the BTO (Buy Tourism Online), the partnership with Italia.it, and the fact that we have relationships with several realities for the incoming. They are all aspects that, in our country, indicate what our strategy is'. Clearly Igers Italia employs the platform for marketing purposes following a well-structured conduct based on the widespread territorial presence of active Igers local and regional communities.

From an organisational point of view, the association of Igers Italia follows a hierarchical structure. There is a directive board (9 members) and local and regional bodies (managed by one or more managers). The guidelines illustrated above are necessary to manage the national life of the community in relation to social activities and for potential cooperation with businesses and brands. Local managers must inform the directive board in order to have the approval for challenges or similar activities. At a local level, Igers own the freedom of meeting and organizing events in relation to their local communities. In fact, everything needs to be clearly related significantly to local

realities. Other types of cooperation must be discussed with the directive board. As *Participant 21* (Skype interview. December 10, 2013 h16:09) describes: ‘In Italy to do projects with the logo ‘Italia’ there needs to be the ‘ok’ from the directive board. Without the directive board approval the logo ‘Italia’ will not be used. It can be done at local level. This limits but does not stop the problem. [...] In Brescia, near my home, they have done a Christmas challenge, but not ‘Christmas in Brescia’. It was ‘Christmas’ decorations’. When they launched it, I asked: “Guys, what is the pertinence to Brescia? None! So, why did you do it?”, “to make them loyal”. Let’s rethink the concept of loyalty’. As can be observed, the directive board scrupulously supervises local and regional Igers Italia conduct particularly in connection to those activities related to promotion campaigns and advertising. Through the ‘Christmas decorations’ example can be seen how Igers activities need to follow precise territorial roles to follow the official Igers Italia statute.

For instance, the photo campaign promoted by Igers Bologna manager can be mentioned. As *Participant 16* (Skype interview. December 6, 2013 h 18:06) describes, they have been contacted by Amaro Montenegro aperitif (amaro traditionally distilled in Bologna): ‘the brand itself asked to work in cities in which it was more interested in. Maybe in Bologna there is more nightlife. They asked to cooperate and then, with pleasure, we helped to organize the challenge. We attended the party. We took photos with the product, and it has been very nice. We have been able to involve many people. It was a well-known event itself. Additionally, there was this brand thingy. The challenge on Instagram made everything more interactive and playful. [...] Everything aimed to show the party in which the main character was the new drink. Plus we had the duty to photograph the bottle in different ways’. As can be observed in fig. 40, the brand asked them to use the hashtag #vistagecontemporaneo (contemporaneous vintage, my translation) to cluster the photographs of the new drink named Rosso Antico.

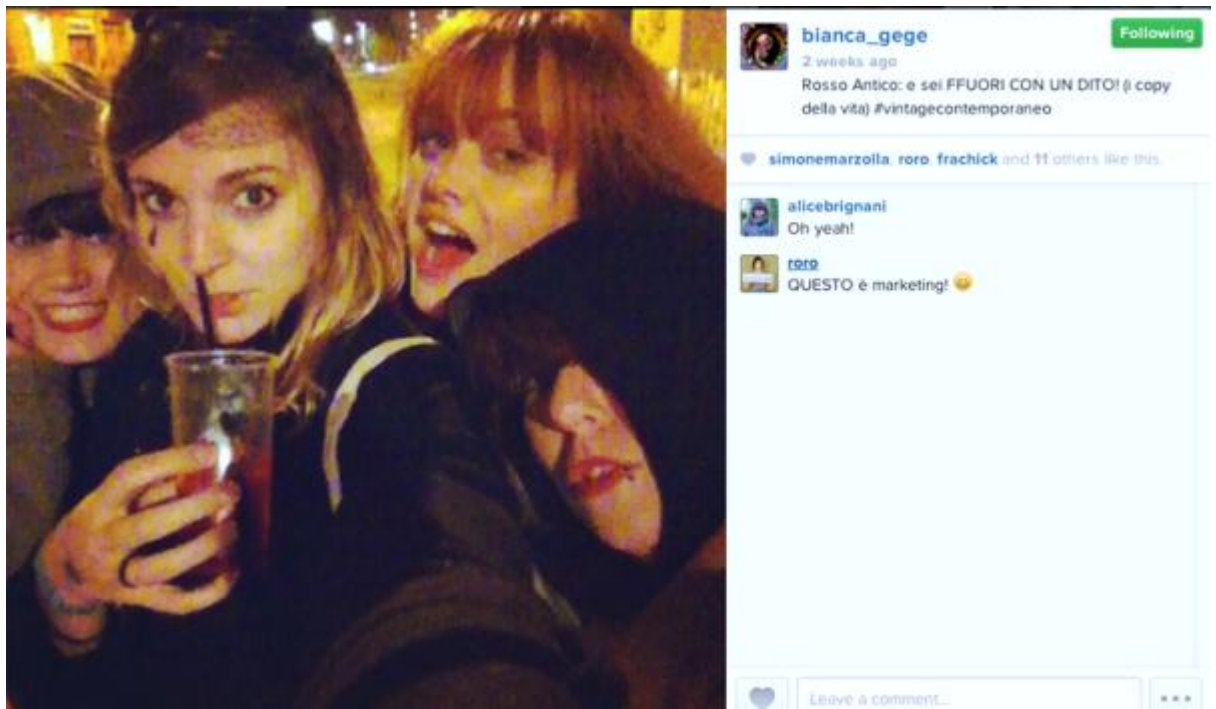


Figure 40. Igers Bologna and the photo contest #vintagecontemporaneo.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: [https://instagram.com/bianca\\_gege](https://instagram.com/bianca_gege)

From *Participant 16*'s (Skype interview. December 6, 2013 h 18:06) description, it can be seen how the Amaro Montenegro Aperitif is an example of the modalities in which Igers Bologna cooperates with brands following, on the one hand, the principles of social media marketing and, on the other hand, enjoying the sociality of the photo challenge event (see chapter 3: "Social Relationships on Instagram"). The overlapping of the two aspects produces the type of promotion described by Tuten (2013) and Evans (2010) based on user engagement. The photo challenge, regarding in this specific case the Amaro Montenegro, represents the 'act of eating' as prized by Tuten (2013) as fruitful principle of engagement to encourage users/potential customers to share photos and extend visual conversations about the brand. Igers Bologna received the request directly from the Montenegro Company. Following, they informed the directive board through email about the challenge they were going to set. Once the approval was received, Igers Bologna launched the photo challenge event that was based on social engagement and entertainment.

Instagram has also developed an interesting scenario in the United Kingdom with particular resonance in the capital. Essentially, the community established its organisational core in London on March 2011. This community aims to connect Igers based in and around the British capital. Igers London organises InstaMeets and

InstaWalks like other communities and it is often involved with brands in promotion campaigns, event coverage or other special events, such as exhibitions to engage offline with users and supporters. Indeed, *Participant 29* (Skype interview. January 29, 2014 h16:01) reports that (as can be seen on the official website) Igers London has stable partnerships with businesses and other bodies. Although the community counts Igers groups throughout the UK, Igers London figures as the most active in terms of social and marketing events. Igers London shows a particular interest towards the sociality of being part of the community.

As can be seen from the four online communities, private agencies and freelancer marketing promoters analysed above, for businesses the most important elements that are presents in communities are the participants, the places and the things (Lesser *et al.*, 2011: viii). Communities' members play the active in any community effort. In fact, through the participation to photo contests or calls to action users/potential customers produce the virtual traffic around brands. Through social interactions users/potential customers share interests and experiences creating discourses about brands and this behaviour increases brands' visibility. The second element, the places, is recognisable in the organization of InstaMeet and InstaWalk, through which participants develop their relationships offline. As it was discussed above through the example of the call to action #vintagecontemporaneo, the places play a crucial role in the growth of communities. In this specific case, the call to action represents the offline manifestation of Instagram as a community of practice. Through this example, it can be exemplified also the importance of things in communities. Indeed, the call to action, which represents the community interest in the practice of photographing, involves the presence of objects (Amaro Montenegro, as well as other brands) that conveys the purpose of the promotional photo campaigns.

However, findings show that, in Igers Spain, Igers Berlin, Igers Italia, and Igers London, the relationships between businesses, brands and communities manifest in independent ways. In different modalities several profitable co-operations have been created. Businesses and brands identify the potentialities of Instagram. Visual communication is recognised as the core of the immediacy feature. Additionally, the mobility of smart phones fosters the distribution of users throughout territories. The mediation of smart mobile devices allows a worldwide engaging experience with brands and with other Instagramers. In this particular case, the concepts of 'mobility' and

'mediation' are crucial for understanding new phenomena related to the connections that link brands to visual communication. The mobility of smart phones and the mediation of Instagram render, as findings show, visual experiences more engaging, profitable and worldwide.

#### **4.3.4 Popular Users and Influencers on Instagram**

Findings show that only four of the participants have no relationships with the Igers community. They show the awareness of the presence of communities around Instagram but do not express interest in their activities. They report an independent use of the platform that is related only to personal passion for mobile photography. Regarding all the other participants, they indicate a fair engagement with the platform and with communities' activities, online and offline. Eight participants report occasional independent involvement with brands and businesses, and five participants describe their professional use of Instagram for work. As can be observed, different users embody different uses of the platform that produce a variety of approaches and styles. Three out of three participants whom describe themselves as partly connected to the Igers community identify themselves as not active Igers (i.e. not active, but part of the community), and the other five declare their active involvement with the Igers community and their social/economic activities.

In addition to the employment of the brands official Instagram account and photo contest businesses, following Schroeder's snapshot aesthetic (2013) involve popular users or influencers in their marketing strategies. In these cases it emerges that brands contact them (independently from the community). It emerges that brands contact directly the user whom they are interested in to include Instagram in their marketing strategies. In these cases, the typology of cooperation varies according to the business, the brand or the marketing plan.

It can be observed that the Instagramers that are approached directly by brands are vernacularly defined as 'popular'. As *Participant 19* (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h 16:50) reports, the reason of this appellation derived from the 'Instagram popular page', a section in which arise those users who collect a certain amount of

“likes” in a certain amount of time (as many likes as possible within the shortest time possible). The algorithm that produces the list of users present on the popular page, following the explanation of *Participant 19* (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h 16:50), defines the potential most followed user of that moment. So, those users who have been on the ‘popular page’ can be considered Instagram influencers because of the wide visibility that they achieve being on that page. Being part of that page gives them a high level of visibility over the platform. Indeed, these users might count from 146,981 (*Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) ) to 193,399 (*Participant 26* (Skype interview. December 19, 2013 h16:17) ) followers. In other cases, users without such high number of followers can still be considered influential but only for their niche and community, as *Participant 28* (Skype interview. January 14, 2014 h09:03) says. In these cases, participants report that brands approach them to launch photo campaigns, product promotions or event coverage as part of their ordinary photo sharing conferring a sense of authenticity reminiscent of snapshot aesthetics (Schroeder, 2013). Participants also report that brands’ requests are always based on a free cooperation. Indeed, brands ask users to share as they typically do, plus adding the brand within the image. Details of brands approaches are not specified. Only *Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) reports to have being contacted by brands via email. However, participants report that there are no precise guidelines to follow from brands. Indeed, the most common sentence they report is: ‘do what you usually do and include our brand in your photo sharing’.

Storytelling can show visually the story of the experiences related to the product and it is a technique adopted by freelance social media marketers and popular Instagramers, as *Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) says: ‘we started and we called it “the Kaplan experience”. So, the Kaplan experience hashtag basically shows my experience at the Kaplan international school in New York. [...] It became part of my world. I was studying in that school. [...] I posted the experience. [...] It makes sense it was not a direct commercial’ (see fig. 50). As can be seen, participants report an interest in sharing experiences in order to create more connections with users.





Figure 41. @Kaplaninternational promotional campaign.  
 Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/ido8all>

Overall, the usage of social media marketing strategies appear similar both between active and non-active Igers community members and both among professionals and influencers. Following an accurate plan the photo sharing shows the visual storytelling of products where individual emotions and experiences are widely employed. Following Schroeder's (2013) idea that 'authenticity presents itself as a critical component of many contemporary branding campaigns' it is arguable that the use of Instagram is part of the interest in blurring the boundaries between brands and customers. Use of the platform for business purposes, influencers (or vernacularly called 'Instagram celebrities') and professionals, follows mainly the line of visual storytelling in which the product is shown as part of users' ordinary life experience. The visual inclusion of products is part of daily social events that fill the users and brands' photo streams. In all cases, products are accurately labelled through a strategic use of hashtags and geo-tags in order to be easily findable.

### 4.3.5 Private Advertising and Communication Agencies on Instagram

Other participants, working for private advertising and communication agencies, report a professional use of Instagram as part of social media marketing plans. In this case, participants describe their strategic approach to the platform as guided by the brand

interest in including visualities in their brands promotion. They disclose an in depth knowledge of social media and communication theories and practices that derives from their educational background (as *Participant 18* (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h 13:03), *Participant 19* (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h 16:50), *Participant 20* (Skype interview. December 10, 2013 h 14:58), *Participant 23* (Skype interview. December 11, 2013 h18:02), *Participant 24* (Skype interview. December 12, 2013 h17:29), *Participant 27* (Skype interview. January 10, 2014 h10:15) underline) which in general pushes them to maintain separate Instagram accounts for work and leisure. In fact, when worthwhile, they manage brand and business accounts maintaining client identity without letting their presence out, as *Participant 23* (Skype interview. December 11, 2013 h18:02) and *Participant 24* (Skype interview. December 12, 2013 h17:29) strongly highlight. In this case, they report a daily use of multiple accounts in order to manage the array of social media marketing strategies and their personal ones. In the case of private agencies four Instagram accounts are taken as evidence to illustrate how professionals manage clients' social media marketing on Instagram. The accounts are the following:



Figure 42. Livello 11/8 and social media marketing.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/livelloundiciottavi>



Figure 43. Ford Italia and brand promotion.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/forditalia>



Figure 44. Fun Mob a type of brand Instagram account.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/funmob>



Figure 45. Social lab TTT and social media marketing.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/socialabttt>

Through these examples, similarities in the strategic use of the platform can be delineated. Storytelling figures again as the main followed guideline. The principle of entertainment (Tuten, 2013) emerges also as part of the storytelling plan as can be seen through the following responses. For example, Ford Italia and the Land Rover Campaign (still in process) as *Participant 18* (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h 13:03) reports: ‘try to valorise the product under the perspective of storytelling. We try to valorise the entire history of the brand starting from its fundamental steps: its successes, challenges, and enemies, let’s say competitors (laugh) to find new and renewable sources of stories as ways to narrate contents, events or launch of new products’. In this case, the brand account is totally managed by Wunderman (network of advertising, marketing and consultancy companies) that plan the entire photo sharing and other potential user involvement, such as challenges or event coverage’. This can be seen by the event that Ford Italia organises to promote #guidasicura (safe driving) (see fig. 45). From this photo campaign it can be seen how the brand, through the later disclosure of the brand (indeed they use the ‘safe driving’ topic rather than the car itself), engages with users and at the same time enhances the brand visibility.



Figure 46. Ford Italia and the safe driving promotional campaign.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/forditalia>

In conjunction with the event that was photographed and shared on Instagram, Ford Italia launched a challenge in relation to it inviting users to post photos that could show how they drive safely using the hashtag #guidasicura (safe driving) #FordDSFL. As can be seen in fig. 46, fig. 47 and fig. 48 the brand fosters users/potential customers to create online visual conversations about the brand Ford. This stimulus, as discussed above, represents the principle of engagement widely undertaken by businesses (Evans & McKee, 2010; Tuten, 2013).



Figure 47. #guidasicura (safe driving).

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: [://instagram.com/marielladagata](https://instagram.com/marielladagata)



Figure 48. #guidasicura 2 (safe driving).

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/claudiascuderi>



Figure 49. Ford Italian and promotional campaign 2.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/forditalia>

In other cases, agencies limit their intervention to giving clients professional advice and support, as *Participant 20* (Skype interview. December 10, 2013 h 14:58) describes: ‘There is a Wine Bar, for example, we have opened an Instagram account because they tell the story of the entire grape harvest, and they tell it through Instagram. Every day they shoot the most typical photos of the process that it lasted a month and a half, and it has been beautiful’. In this case, for instance the agency designed the marketing strategy for the client (the Wine Bar) giving to them advices about how to use the platform to promote their business. Once launched the Instagram account the Wine Bar was able to proceed the promotional photo campaign without the direct action of *Participant 20* (Skype interview. December 10, 2013 h 14:58) and her agency.

However, photo sharing does not mean only bringing onto Instagram pure advertising, rather it means transferring into visualities the story of the product into emotions. Similarly, *Participant 23* (Skype interview. December 11, 2013 h18:02) underlines: ‘in the majority of cases what we do is a work of storytelling: telling the brand through photography on Instagram. If I work with a Hotel I will tell of all the aspects that the customer will find in the Hotel. The experience that the client can have within the Hotel. [...] If you want to see the room there is the Hotel website. For the brand, I need Instagram to tell a story and the emotions of the product’ (see fig. 49). As can be seen from the photograph, there is not a direct advertising message that shows the product

Hotel room, rather there is the involvement of the social media marketer as human figure that renders the picture closer to amateur snapshots. The social media marketer, in this case, works for the creation of a situation in which personal emotions and an intimate atmosphere emerge as a communicative strategy that tells the story of the person (the social media promoter) in relation to the brand (the Hotel).

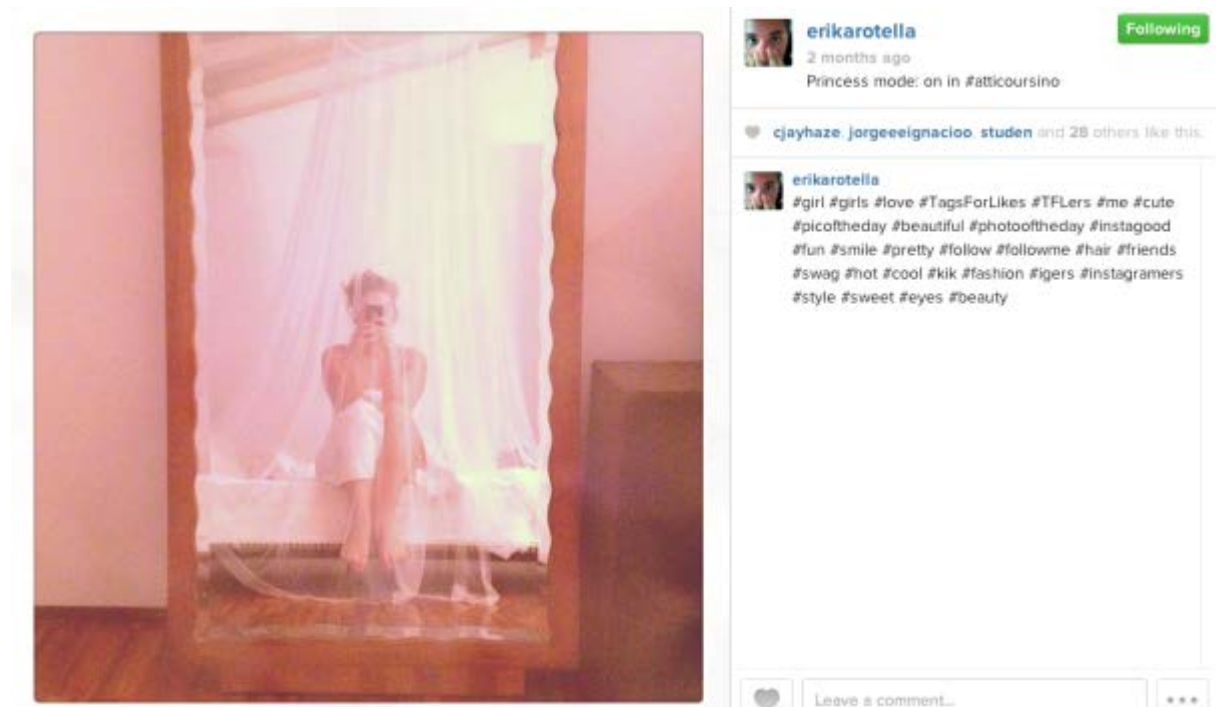


Figure 50. Promotion and emotions.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/erikarotella>

#### 4.4 Conclusions: New Strategies for Visual Social Media Marketing

The world of advertising has shifted substantially in the last 2 - 3 years, towards an increased employment of social media. As Heaton (2012) claims, the core point of Instagram value is not the photographs themselves, rather the amount of data and meta-data associated with users' photos because through them brands can contextualise digital advertising. Every time users share a photo through Instagram, they upload not the photo itself, rather other meta-data, such as: the list of hashtags, geo-location, list of comments with details about comments, authors, date and time of the caption, link to view the photo on the web in different sizes, count of likes with the details of users who liked the photo, details of the users who posted the photo (username, website, bio,



profile picture and full name) and so on. Social media marketing have the goal to encourage social media traffic around specific themes, the brands.

Findings show that the employment of Instagram within social media marketing strategies produces alterations in the ordinary practice of photo sharing. The evidence discussed throughout this chapter shows how user engagement with the platform, experienced through the act of following brand accounts, Instagramer communities and private communication agencies goes beyond the mere visual experience of brands and products. The regular observation of Instagram accounts produces imagery literacy that influences general user photo sharing in constructing visual stories that sees the combination of individual everyday lives with brand following by emulation of the typology of images they require through photo contests. Visual storytelling figures as the predominant style of snapshot aesthetic theorised by Schroeder (2011). Through the accurate analysis of brand accounts and participant responses, visual storytelling style can be extended towards the general photo sharing practice on Instagram, which is the ordinary combination of the two areas (visual storytelling and snapshot aesthetic). The interrelation between the mediation of the platform Instagram with the mobility of smart mobile devices also fosters alterations in the modalities of thinking, experiencing and producing visualities (as it has been discussed within chapter 2: “Photo Sharing on Instagram”). The observation of brand accounts conduces users to become familiar with the storytelling typology of visual photo sharing.

## Chapter 5: Privacy and Surveillance on Instagram

In the context of the Internet, the publicity and visibility afforded by the ubiquitous use of social networking sites and social media raises contradictory positions in relation to the protection of personal data online. The basic functioning systems and activities experienced on social networking sites and social media show the existing paradox between interest in the disclosure of the self and the protection of personal information. The use of social media entails the controversial co-habitation of both (disclosure and protection) driving users towards the passive acceptance of this. The functioning systems of online services are based on the observation and collection of users' data and metadata. Within this, the concept of Internet surveillance is pushed towards the normalization of the violation of personal privacy in order to access online services. In this way, the everyday use of social media and other platforms leads users to consider their presence online as a personal responsibility. However, the Internet services basic business functioning reveal that users' management of their presence online goes beyond their direct control. In adopting a privacy and surveillance studies approach, this chapter examines Instagram from the two different perspectives of businesses and general users. On the one hand, it analyses how Instagram monitors and manages user data and meta-data. Following, on the other hand, it investigates how users experience the act of watching and being watched. The modality of observing the photo sharing is further analysed considering how visual communication is perceived and virally spread.

This chapter surveys contemporary theorizations about privacy and surveillance in media studies in order to provide a theoretical framework for analysing the potential crossroads that the mediation of photo sharing conveys. Within the digital age, the concept of privacy is difficult to classify clearly considering the overlapping of online and offline environments. However, according to Miller (2011), privacy can be defined as part of the 'demand of private space [that] derives from the romantic notion of only being able to be oneself, by oneself' (Miller, 2011:113). Its meaning is largely discussed within the Internet sphere especially considering, for example, Miller's statement: 'contemporary conceptions of private life and personal space simply do not exist' (2011:113). Starting from this initial evaluation, this chapter advances critical re-evaluations of the current understanding of privacy and surveillance considering the inclusion of smart mobile device communication afforded by Instagram.

## 5.1 The Paradox of Privacy on Social Media

Within social media the notion of privacy shifts into an unclear setting, Mills (2008) compares contemporary advancements in technologies with the evolution of legal theory of privacy, suggesting the existence of four categories: the freedom of personal autonomy, the right to control personal information, the right to control personal property and the right to protect personal physical space (Mills, 2008). Considering Mills' understanding of today's intrusive world, the concept of privacy is experienced following the principle of 'self-violation of privacy' (Menduni, 2011:114, my translation). Through this definition, Menduni (2011) describes how individuals, using online social networking sites, in spite of the common suggestion to avoid disseminating personal data, feel themselves involved in a collective 'self-violation of privacy' through which they show themselves, their daily lives, presenting private data, addresses and contact details. Social media has become, in this way, the public extension of private life, producing the virtualization of fields that before were extremely concrete and separate. Individuals' presence on social media has consequently become more difficult to regulate.

Since the imaginary world described by George Orwell through *1984* the concept of surveillance has been seen as an invasion of privacy and an abuse of power by the nation-state. Nowadays, surveillance has become more widespread and the act of 'watching others' takes place in many daily activities between businesses and social lives. The postmodern conception of *Liquid Surveillance* (2013) advanced by Lyon and Bauman emphasises individuals' awareness of permanent visibility (Miller, 2011) that media produces arguing that the ubiquitous access and participation in social media modifies in a more flexible and fluid way the dynamics between watchers and watched. As Lyon (2013) claims, it is not possible to evade the complex dialectics of 'watching and being watched' because it is still central in the general regulation of human life, as can be seen by the theorizations advanced by Mulvey (1975) on visual pleasure that underline, through the inclusion of psychoanalytic theories, how the dynamics of vision are embedded in human nature. Social media and social networking sites basic functioning foster users' interest in watching other users' online activities. The connectivity afforded by networks makes possible the viral spread of digital contents.

Within the network society (Castells, 2000), crowd behaviour is explained describing the empathy of the masses, where the empathy becomes the means of contagion from the behaviour of individuals. Following this, Tarde (2000) identifies in the law of imitation a universal rule applicable to social and natural sciences. The principle of imitation orders social cohesiveness and it is followed by the principles of opposition and adaptation. These principles describe individuals' widespread attitude of imitating and resembling each other. Additionally, Tarde (2000) argues that the law of imitation leads towards social developments and innovations thanks to the general phenomenon of repetition (Berger, 2011), the visible manifestation of social dynamics. Essentially, Tarde's theorization exemplifies the relationships cause-and-effect that regulates social events. The employment of Tarde's (2000) law of imitation within Sampson's (2012) theory of contagion can explain the majority of social media practices such as sharing someone else's content, likes for someone else's Facebook page, retweets and so on. The viral spread of human behaviours (see the following example of the Gothenburg episode) embeds the dichotomy of watching and being watched as crucial factors that implement the principle of imitation (Tarde, 2000). The existing paradox between the protection and disclosure of users' data (privacy) is a daily experience on the Internet. The visibility offered by social media makes users' data sharing observable (surveillance) and, potentially, re-sharable. The imitation of other users (Tarde, 2000) consequently actualizes the viral spread of contents (communication) online.

On the Internet, the concept of privacy deals with moral and ethical issues related to how information about individuals should be processed, who should have access to data, and how this access should be regulated (Tavani, 2008). In relation to this, Fuchs (2012), through the critical examination of the political economy of privacy and surveillance on Facebook, illustrates how the monetising system on Facebook (as explained in chapter 4: "Political Economy of Instagram") displays the exploitation of user data and meta-data. Fuchs (2012) describes the application of privacy and surveillance strategies, exemplifying the purpose of capital accumulation. 'Capitalism protects privacy for the rich and companies, but, at the same time, legitimates violations of consumers and citizens' privacy' (Fuchs, 2012:141). However, through the monetising functioning system of Internet services, Fuchs (2012) states that corporations' interests and power should become more visible to the general public.

Hellen Nissenbaum (2010), expanding the concept of privacy into ensuring the appropriate flows of personal information, argues that the concept of privacy should be considered as contextual integrity. Contextual privacy is ‘preserved when informational norms are respected and violated when informational norms are breached [...] whether or not control is appropriate depends on the context, the types of information, the subject, sender, and recipient’ (Nissenbaum, 2010:140,148). Nissenbaum’s concept of contextual integrity helps to understand that privacy plays different roles within the same platform. Disclosing and protecting data online involves different conceptions of privacy in the same context. This is the reason why the conception of users’ privacy online follows different dynamics for different relationships such as between businesses and users or between users and users. Privacy does not mean only the indiscriminate control of users’ data and metadata, but also the various practices of sharing information depending on different contexts.

The use of social media erodes the traditional notion of privacy bringing into discussion the coexistence of personal protection and interest in self-disclosure. Even if, within this discourse, the notion of privacy becomes too complex to define through a single and universal description, Debatin (2011) defines it as the individuals’ control over personal circles of intimacy. When the notions of intimate and private come to terms with social media and social networking sites the oxymoron of privacy manifests. In fact, the main purpose of participating in social practices online is the mutual sharing of information and the management of the personal social network. Debatin (2011) describes the presence of two dimensions of privacy risks on social media: horizontal axis and vertical axis, which respectively represent the risks represented by social interactions among users (horizontal) and risks represented by the collection and use of data by networking companies (vertical). In order to face potential privacy risks, the approach that can be employed is the voluntary *ethical self-regulation* of privacy (Debatin, 2011:49, author’s italic) where users limit the visibility and disclosure of personal information driving the conception of privacy online towards an ethics of self-restraint. Where on the one hand, social media and social networking sites advance into a vast public space where individuals connect in a variety of social interactions, issues concerning privacy and personal data protection increase.

Defining social networking sites, boyd and Ellison (2007) argue that they are formed by three fundamental elements that differentiate them from others web sites. These

elements are recognised in the possibility that users have to construct a public or semi-public profile, the existence of connections that users have within the system, and the capability to access other users' information such as, the list of friends and other personal data. Indeed, considering the basic functioning of social networking sites, the public display of social connections and personal interests is mainly what differentiates them from other social media platforms (Donath & boyd, 2004). Privacy, in this context, regards also the ability that users have to control and manage their presence online. The existing paradox between the protection and disclosure of the self demonstrates how social media and social networking sites alters the value of privacy.

Ellison *et al* (2011), discussing privacy online and the use of social networking sites, believes that issues related to data protection cannot be limited only to the consideration of privacy settings, rather they include user behaviour, self-disclosure and other strategies that can be adopted to control user visibility and content sharing. This co-presence is a significant topic that Ellison *et al* (2007) analyses using Facebook as a case study taking into account not only the negative aspects of privacy online. In the specific case study, Ellison *et al* (2007) examines the benefits gained by users' disclosure of personal data in the formation and the maintenance of social capital through Facebook friends (Christakis & Flower, 2011). Regarding this, Ellison *et al.* (2011), describes the existing degree of negotiation between the interest in publicity to gain social capital and, at the same time, the intent in avoiding privacy risks given by the co-presence of an array of audiences, such as colleagues, family, and friends, but also of businesses and brands.

Regarding this, Spinello (2011), considering that Facebook's controversial privacy policy exposes prominently users to online surveillance, claims that the social networking sites business model is based on a clear misunderstanding: 'millions of people expose highly personal information about themselves in exchange for the ability to communicate with their friends, family members, and colleagues' (Spinello, 2011:43). Considering that social networking sites architecture is structured to encourage self-disclosure, privacy and data protection remain complicated issues to regulate. Users' temptation towards self-disclosure persists next to the expectation of a fair level of privacy. The concurrence of social and business interests bring again into account Fuchs (2012) study on privacy on Facebook that shows that 'students are willing to take the risk of increased surveillance although they are very well aware of

surveillance and privacy risks' (Fuchs, 2012:61). It follows that issues related to privacy and surveillance online appear problematic when considering the widespread general awareness of lack of privacy and its passive acceptance.

## 5.2 Surveillance Theories and the Panopticon in the Contemporary Society

Picturing the digital age, Miller (2011) identifies three macro areas of surveillance application: *governments, individuals, and businesses* (Miller, 2011, author's italic). Considering the complexity of the subject, this literature review leaves out the area of government, investigating the contemporary status of privacy and surveillance laying particular attention on the dynamics that watching and being watched cause at a social level. It considers the unstable nature of privacy within the Internet and the amount of surveillance present in mediated environments. Several theorists investigate the controversial topic of surveillance defining the different typologies of its manifestation, such as: lateral surveillance (Andrejevic, 2005), participatory surveillance (Albrechtslund, 2008), social searching (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2006) and social surveillance (Joinson 2008; Tokunaga, 2011). Discussing the contemporary practices of surveillance provides a better understanding of how social media and social networking sites complicate surveillance.

Privacy and surveillance studies find their foundation in the work of Jeremy Bentham (1791) and Michel Foucault (1977) (see fig. 51). Theorising social control, Bentham designed an architectural structure called the panopticon, a circular structure built with cells (it was proposed as a prison). Located in the middle of the structure is a central tower occupied by the watcher, the person who can see all the cells simultaneously without being seen by the individuals in the cells. The sensation of being watched from the watcher in the central tower has the purpose of pushing all the individuals to behave appropriately. This situation of uncertain potential control has been the starting point for all the following theorizations on privacy, surveillance, control and power.

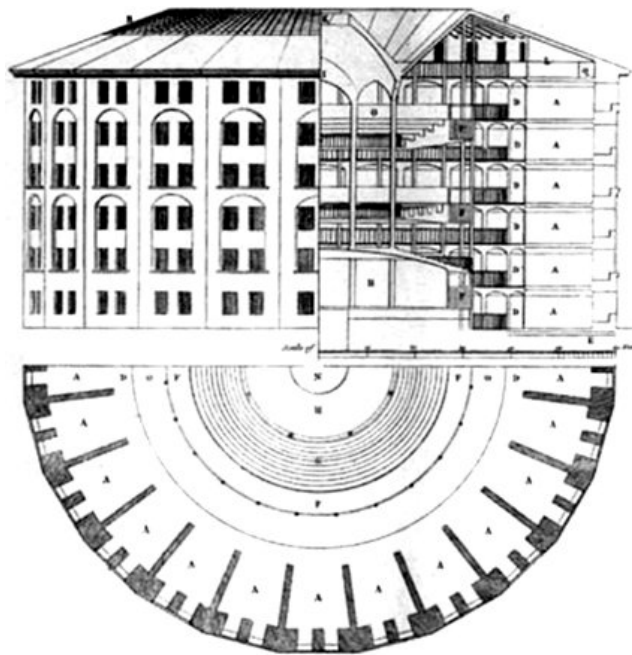


Figure 51. Panopticon, Jeremy Bentham (1791).

Bentham's panopticon has subsequently been analysed by the French philosopher Michel Foucault within his volume *Discipline and Punish* (1977). In Foucault's analysis, Bentham's architecture could be adopted as a model of power applied in society to an array of institutions, such as hospitals, schools, and so on reminiscent of the form of prisons. He places particular attention on the creation of the idea of discipline in order to create a pure community. From this, he advances the necessity to design institutions to supervise precise categories of individuals (the plague). The panopticon introduces the new idea of permanent visibility that certifies the execution of power. In fact, the power is pictured as visible (the tower) and impossible to confirm (vision from the cells). In Foucault's argument, the panopticon embodies the modification of disciplinary programmes and relations of power and control extended towards everyday life. Foucault's critical interpretation of the existing interrelation between power and visibility lays the processes of surveillance. Their considerations have been employed to interpret contemporary society where surveillance is present in a multitude of environments, such as businesses, governments, streets (CCTV), space (satellites) and so on (Bogard, 1996). The conception of ubiquitous surveillance becomes an ordinary reality. Indeed, it is not difficult to recognize the structure of Bentham's panopticon in the numerous contemporary systems of observation (Boyne, 2000).



Foucault's interpretation of Bentham's architecture has been stretched until the arrival of the Internet that brings into account the innovative elements of openness and connectivity, which determine the exponential growth of surveillance. Since then, the disciplines of Internet and computer studies cannot exclude the presence of observing systems. Indeed, Robin and Webster (1999) argue that in what they define cybernetic society 'the computer has achieved [...] the extension and intensification of panoptic control; it has rendered social control more pervasive, more invasive, more total, but also more routine, mundane inescapable' (Robin & Webster, 1999:180 see also 118-122). Through this line of interpretation, the Internet and the use of computers are interpreted as 'panopticon without physical walls' (Webster, 2002:222).

Similarly, Poster (1990) defines the circuits of communication and databases as a 'super-panopticon, a system of surveillance without walls, windows, towers or guards' (Poster, 1990:93), accentuating the amplified amount of visible information. The Internet cannot simply be considered 'super' (Poster, 1990), as an augmentation of the human sight. Rather, the concept of panopticon, as 'seeing without being seen' (Foucault, 1983:223), needs to be interpreted as a flux of information that simultaneously is panoptic and synoptic, i.e. not only the few can watch the many, but the many can watch the few (Mathiesen, 1997:215). This interchange again represents the mechanism of social surveillance present on the Internet that, in the majority of cases, is translated into 'monitoring people' (Haggerty, 2006:30).

When discussing surveillance, the work of David Lyon (1999; 2001; 2006; 2007; 2012) comes into account. According to Lyon (2001) surveillance has always had two faces. Literally the word 'surveillance' (French) means to 'watch over'. To explain the meaning, he describes two examples that clearly outline its double connotation: 'I may ask you to 'watch over' my child to ensure that she does not stray into the street and risk being hit by a car. In this case, I have protection primarily in mind so that the child is shown care in a context where she can flourish. Or I may ask you to 'watch over' the same child to ensure that she does not get up to mischief. Now I am appealing to moral criteria, where other elements enter the picture, to do with direction, proscription, perhaps even control' (Lyon, 2001:3). What emerges clearly is the presence of a paradoxical dichotomy that sees 'surveillance – watching over – both enables and constrains, involves care and control' (Lyon, 2001:3). In *Surveillance Studies: an Overview* (2007) Lyon defines surveillance as 'the focused, systematic and routine

attention to personal details for purposes of influence, management, protection or direction' (Lyon, 2007:14). In this case, the most critical questions arise on the relationships between sociality, new digital technologies and how they have to deal with the disclosure and protection of personal information. The key concepts that Lyon develops, such as 'social sorting' (2007), sets the springboard for innovative approaches to this subject, which increasingly involve the social aspect rather than only governments and institutions.

Developments in digital technologies and the arrival of smart mobile devices expand the variables related to surveillance driving Lyon to claim that 'now we turn to the matter of how 'public and private' might be conceived in the world of mobility' (Lyon, 2001:19). In this regard, Lyon believes that 'the environment can be perfectly controlled. Indeed, it no longer requires control; the environment *is* control' (Lyon, 2001:118). The mobility afforded by smart mobile devices blurs the traditional boundaries between private (closed places) and public (open spaces). The connectivity that smart mobile devices provide allows individuals to experience simultaneously the presence and the absence, and individuals can reach others information anywhere, without the necessity of physical co-presence. Indeed, Lyon states that 'the rise of surveillance society has everything to do with disappearing bodies. Bodies disappear when we do things at a distance' (Lyon, 2001:15). Raising this factor, Lyon brings into account the new conception of spatio-temporal in relation to the use of the Internet. The awareness of instant connectivity and ubiquitous visibility influences and shapes individuals' attitudes and actions towards privacy and surveillance online. However, expanding this concept, the metaphor of the panopticon can also be applied to other typologies of surveillance that do not regard only control, but also the pleasure in the act of observing.

Menduni advances a provocative statement saying that 'anything people do on social media platforms is public, so it can be used against them' (Menduni, 2011:115, my translation). Using the warning that police usually read in a crime scene, Menduni (2011) emphasises how individuals' online lives overlap public and private spheres. The data users produce because of their ubiquitous presence online seems to acquire importance in terms of the debate on privacy and surveillance on social media. Users presence online is precious data for the services that the Internet offers. Indeed, the mechanism that Internet services use to monetize users presence online deals with the management of their data and meta-data to businesses. For instance, Lawrence Lessig

(2008), talking about Google, explains that user activity on the research engine is a gift for the company Google as much as something valuable for the user. The company provides the product to the user and, at the same time, efficiently, learns something during the process (Lessig, 2008). He defines this system that traces users' tastes for marketing as 'little brother' (reminiscent of the well-known Big Brother), fundamental node of the new economy based on the exchange of benefits: where users use services online giving access to their information. This mechanism shows how the concept of privacy is strictly linked to the concept of surveillance, as was discussed in chapter 4: "Political Economy of Instagram".

Another aspect to keep in consideration is the employment of systems of surveillance in capital accumulation. According to Fuchs (2012), the mechanisms of surveillance present within web 2.0, following the principles above-mentioned, can be defined as a 'mass surveillance' (Fuchs, 2012:48). Arguing this, he focuses particular attention on surveillance in relation to social media and commercial logic. Indeed, he explains that 'with the help of legal mechanisms (terms of use, privacy policies) most web 2.0 corporations acquire the ownership rights to use and sell user-generated contents and to analyse users data and behaviour for implementing third-party operated targeted advertisements' (Fuchs, 2012:53) (see chapter 4: "Political Economy of Instagram"). In this case, Fuchs' claim confirms the initial argument that surveillance is mainly related to issues of power and control.

However, within the Internet these two concepts are not only related to business systems, rather, according to David Lyon (2001), the nature of surveillance as individual interaction is changing and becoming a common activity. Where in the past the conception of relationships was based more on physical presence and face-to-face interaction, in postmodernity the advancement in communication technologies facilitate and, at some point, replace, long distance relationships (Miller, 2011). In this respect, Miller assumes that the movement from a co-presence to telepresence causes an alteration, at the same time, of the concept theorised by Lyon. Indeed, the act of 'watching' and 'witnessing' experienced by physical proximity is now replaced by what Lyon (2001) calls 'personal traces'. Following Lyon's (2001; 2006) theorisations about surveillance in everyday life the concept of surveillance is experienced within social media as the act of tracing individuals' activities, watching where people are, what they are doing, what they ate and with whom.

On Instagram users watch other users' photo sharing for different reasons: for visual pleasure (Mulvey, 1975), for imitation (Tarde, 2000), and for entertainment. Meanwhile, businesses watch users for other purposes, such as boosting their brands and engaging with customers as explained by Tuten (2013) and Evans (2010). On the one hand, to approach privacy and surveillance on Instagram from the point of view of general users and, on the other hand, from the perspective of businesses. From the two different perspectives it is possible to observe contrasting modalities of interpreting and implementing privacy and surveillance. This is because the act of watching changes according to the purpose of the watcher and the subject being watched. The following analysis attempts to engage with the general questions about privacy and surveillance on social media. It questions the modalities in which the coexistence of the protection of personal information and the desire of self-disclosure manifest online. Indeed, it considers the act of sharing and publishing, the basic functioning of social media platforms, as typical characteristics of information exchange (Trottier & Lyon, 2012). Considering that 'today surveillance is no longer confined to controlled and arranged spaces and no longer requires the physical co-presence of the observer' (McCahill, 2002:185), this examination keeps into account the crucial consideration that the mobility of smart mobile devices contribute to the alteration of the conception of privacy and surveillance through the mediation of social media.

#### 5.4 The Pleasure of Watching and Being Watched Within the Everyday Life

Surveillance has not always had the negative connotation of control, indeed, since Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1949), the concepts of scopophilia, and voyeurism have been part of the modern interpretation of visuality. Literally 'scopophilia means the love of looking' (Lyon, 2007:48) and, since its theorization, has been combined with expressions of sexuality, sexual pleasure and, in particular, with the development of voyeurism and the male gaze in cinema (Lacan, 1977) and gender studies (Mulvey, 1975). Building on psychoanalytic theories (Freud, 1949; Lacan, 1977), the concept of scopophilia has been widely employed to describe the process of pleasure that the spectator feels watching films especially within conditions of darkness and apparent isolation offered by the cinema environment. Through her influential essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', Laura Mulvey (1975) advances a critical

analysis of Freud's essays, to describe how the act of looking turns into 'voyeurism' (Mulvey, 1975:7), sexual gratification deriving from observing others in secret. In this case, the observer (the voyeur) does not present a real interaction with the person being observed and the viewer gains satisfaction from watching in an active controlling sense. In cinema, the activity of watching films has been widely analysed as a voyeuristic practice and, since the proliferation of social media, the Internet has also been included in the field of scopophilia and voyeurism.

Developing this discourse, Denzin (1995), highlights how the conditions offered by the cinema contributed to the growth of voyeurism and the voyeur gaze as commonplace aspects of contemporary culture. Denzin argues that the interest for peeking into other people's lives existed long before the rise of reality TV shows and Big Brother. He claims, reminding of Mulvey's argument, that voyeurism begins in the early 1900s with the arrival of the cinematic gaze. At that time, the audience was physically located within dark theatres recreating an environment similar to the keyhole part of a voyeuristic secret imagery. A similar condition can be seen in the use of the Internet, where personal devices serve as keyholes or windows through which observation can take place. Regarding this, Calvert (2000) advances the notion of 'mediated voyeurism', 'the consumption of revealing images of and information about others' apparently real and unguarded lives, often yet not always for purposes of entertainment but frequently at the expense of privacy and disclosure, through the means of the mass media and the Internet' (Calvert, 2000:2). According to Calvert (2000), voyeurism is not necessarily connected to sexuality as has been widely argued since its first theorisation. Following this line of interpretation, voyeurs are interested merely in what they cannot see and seeing what is otherwise not supposed to be seen. This interest steers Internet users to prolong their presence online consequently increasing businesses' interest in monitoring their mediated practices.

The mechanism of surveillance present within the web 2.0 develops fruitful connections in relation to businesses and capital accumulation that Fuchs describes through the concepts of 'panoptic sorting, mass self-surveillance and personal mass dataveillance' (Fuchs, 2011:134). He explains that 'with the help of legal mechanisms (terms of use, privacy policies and so on) most web 2.0 corporations acquire the ownership rights to use and sell user-generated contents and to analyse users data for implementing third-party operated targeted advertisements' (Fuchs, 2012:53). As has already discussed in

the chapter 4: “Political Economy of Instagram”, Fuchs’ claim confirms again the initial argument that surveillance is mainly related to issues of power and control. Following this, Stalder (2002) adds that those who hold access to large data sets of personal information have a crucial tool that allows them to influence behaviours of those whose data is being held.

Furthermore, there can be identified another category of surveillance that Turow (2006) defines ‘consumer surveillance’. This categorization can be understood as a form of surveillance that aims at ‘predicting and, in combination with (personalized) advertising, controlling the behaviour of consumers’ (Turow, 2006:282). This type of surveillance is one of the most popular forms of controlling by businesses and, recently, a fundamental aspect of Internet services. It also involves one of the latest categories of surveillance: mobile phone surveillance, which captures digital communications, real-world locations and movements [geo-tags] (Miller, 2011). Moreover, according to Andrejevic (2002), surveillance online is employed in the creating of fruitful ‘techniques to stimulate consumption’ (Andrejevic, 2002:235). In this case, the productivity of surveillance focuses on the exploitation of self-disclosure more focused on users’ monitoring and data gathering driving him to define it ‘the work of being watched’ (Andrejevic, 2002:230).

Mark Andrejevic (2004) introduces the concept of ‘lateral surveillance’, describing it as mutual relations where awareness dampens users’ ethical concerns about covertly watching others. Lateral surveillance is understood as the use of surveillance tools by individuals. He states that its purpose is to ‘keep track of one another and it covers (but is not limited to) three main categories: romantic interests, family, and friends or acquaintances’ (Andrejevic, 2004:488). Lateral surveillance characterises the use of the Internet through the development of the ‘do-it-yourself information gathering technologies’ (Andrejevic, 2004:489) as a widely used investigative tool. Apart from considering the social aspects of surveillance, Andrejevic (2007) also examines businesses. Considering social media surveillance, he coins the notion of ‘digital enclosure’ (Andrejevic, 2007:2) to interpret the virtual essence of the state of surveillance that consumers experience constantly on the Internet. As he suggests, ‘interactivity promises not a return to the relative lack of anonymity of village life, but rather to a state of affairs in which producers have more information about consumers

than ever before, and consumers have less knowledge about and control over how this information is being used' (Andrejevic, 2007:27).

The banality of individuals' everyday lives, individuals' connections and interactions are also part of the establishment of new surveillance practices. Albrechtslund (2008), for instance, argues that online social networking sites seem to introduce a participatory approach to surveillance, which can empower – and not necessarily violate – the users. A person under surveillance figures as a passive and powerless subject, but when looking at social media and social networking sites it raises the idea of mutuality and this practice that becomes 'part of the *building* of subjectivity and of making sense in the life world' (Albrechtslund, 2008). On the Internet, this typology of participatory panopticon (Cascio, 2005) represents a common practice that users voluntarily accept and produce when observing users' online activities.

The actions of observing and being observed bring into account the factor of identity and self-disclosure as part of the process, where 'self-disclosure has been defined as *'the process of making the self-known to other persons'* (Jourard & Lasakow, 1958:91). Where observing has been defined as the pleasure of watching others and being observed as the pleasure of disclosing the self, it can be argued that surveillance builds a bridge towards the construction of the self-identity. Regarding this, Jenkins (2012) claims that 'identity is not a thing or an essence; it is not something that we *have*. It is, rather, something that we *do*, a process of identification [...] we should always remember than when we talk about "identity" we are actually talking about processes of *identification*' (Jenkins, 2012:159). Considering that 'identification is an open-ended process' (Jenkins, 2012:162) the various processes of surveillance online, in combination with users' self-disclosure, can be interpreted as the interest in watching with the objective of knowing the others.

The correspondence between watching and being watched in social media is framed by Marwick (2012) as social surveillance. Individuals create contents with the expectation of being viewed by others, whether that means editing their own self-presentation to appeal to an audience, or doing something controversial to gain attention. Social surveillance, following Marwick (2012) exists along three axes: 'power, hierarchy, and reciprocity, which are constantly shifting and changing' (Marwick, 2012:382). Through case studies, he demonstrates how individual understanding of social roles, disclosure,

and publicity are altered through the lens of social surveillance. Individuals strategically reveal and conceal personal information to create connections with others and protect social boundaries. These processes become normal parts of day-to-day life relationships that are highly connected and mediated through social media.

Interpersonal social media surveillance renders users visible to one another in a way that warrants ‘the care of the virtual self’ (Whitson & Haggerty, 2008), including both self-scrutiny and watching over what peers upload. Surveillance is more than data collection because it relies on mediated relations, profiling, and asymmetrical relations of visibility. Users experience interpersonal surveillance as a violation, but also as a pervasive condition of mediated social relationships, suggesting a further quotidian normalization of surveillance (Wood & Webster, 2009). ‘Many people also want to be watched so they can feel like they are a part of something. People post to Facebook and respond to others to create community. [...] For better or worse, this desire to be watched, read, or heard is a fundamental element in the evolution of the surveillance society. It drives us toward voluntary disclosure and desensitizes us to outside scrutiny’ (Gilliom & Monahan, 2013:136). This is the reason why the notion of surveillance holds within social media the double connotation of pleasure in watching and being watched that inevitably produces alterations in relation to online social behaviours and the protection of personal privacy.

Following Bruno (2012), where the ‘Internet Eye constitutes an “open circuit television” monitored by different collaborative eyes, combining surveillance, entertainment and business in one product’ (Bruno, 2012:347), the purpose of this chapter is to combine the existing theorisations, about privacy and surveillance online explained above, with the rising ubiquitous mediation of smart mobile devices. Moreover, this chapter investigates the interrelation and conflicting aspects between privacy and surveillance issues in relation to the wide use of social media. The co-presence of the concepts of publicity and preservation of personal data is critically analysed in order to define how the permanent visibility afforded by platforms like Instagram alter daily users’ behaviour online.

## 5.5 Analysis of Privacy, Surveillance and Virality on Instagram



This analysis investigates the controversial issues of privacy and surveillance within Instagram considering users' awareness of social media and social networking sites basic functioning systems and how terms of use and privacy policies affect their online behaviour. It also considers the modes in which participants watch and are watched. Then, it develops a base of knowledge with reference to the implementation of the mobility and usability brought about by smart mobile devices using Instagram. This analysis identifies the different modalities in which social media users understand and deal with privacy and surveillance. It follows by illustrating the role of photo sharing placing particular emphasis on the political-economic dimension of surveillance strategies and the development of a voyeuristic spirit raised by the presence of visualities. Participants are asked to answer the following questions: How and why they choose the accounts they follow. Subsequently, they are asked to illustrate what kind of personal visual information they are willing to share. Then, they have been asked to describe how and why they observe users photo sharing. Finally, participants were questioned on their use of hash tags and geo-tags in relation to the fact that both are tools used to monitor and categorise users' online practices.

As discussed within the chapter 4: "Political Economy of Instagram", since September 2012, Instagram data is also observed by Facebook, as can be read on the privacy policy section. Instagram writes, indeed, 'as part of our collaboration, we've learned that by being able to share insights and information with each other, we can build better experiences for our users'. Through this update, Instagram describes essentially the typology of control that the cooperation with Facebook brings over users' information. Instagram, within the privacy and policy section, displays the efficacy of the terms of use of the service before and after January 19, 2013. The section discloses the modality in which data and metadata are collected, used, stored and shared by Facebook and Instagram with third parties. It also underlines the fact that, once users agree with Instagram terms and conditions, they agree with all the points expressed. Indeed, the use of Instagram depends on the agreement. If users do not agree with the terms and conditions, the use of the platform is not allowed. In relation to this, all participants confirm a complete awareness of the exploitation of their personal information by the Internet services.

For instance, *Participant 22* (Skype interview. December 10, 2013 h18:03) shares his point of view in this way: 'personally, it is part of the game network plain even if I

don't agree with the roles, the Terms of service. How many terms of service have we just clicked yes to? Because we want to use this product. We don't read them. I have been doing that for years. I think there should be a reasonable expectation of privacy but at the same time if you sign up for a social open network how much privacy are you expecting? It goes both ways. [...] I know that they are probably selling my habits, my information. I know that. It is part of the game. It is what they do; it is how they stay in business. This is how they provide the services they provide me'. This is just one of the many examples of the general considerations of privacy online. Participants confirm a general and blurred awareness of the conditions that they need to accept to use the platform. Nevertheless, they declare that, considering that in order to use the service they must sign the agreement, they do not pay careful attention to the document they agree to. As reported above by *Participant 22* (Skype interview. December 10, 2013 h18:03), the majority of Internet users never read any terms and conditions when they sign up to a new service. Users show a vague awareness of the contents of terms and conditions admitting that they have never actually read the entire document. The interest in using the service is therefore stronger than the potential consequences that the agreement produces.

Considering the carelessness shown by participants towards policies and legal terms, this analysis examines the consequent behaviours they acquire to manage the photo sharing. This analysis considers particularly whether the awareness of publicity of the platform produces modifications in relation to the subjects captured and the location where the photos are taken and shared. Foucault's (1977) theorizations on panopticon architecture are applied to social media assuming that the awareness of being watched alters users' online behaviours. Participants state a wide consciousness that businesses and brands observe their photo sharing and that they have access to their personal information. This data does not seem to show users' concern. However, to avoid over exposure and publicity, participants declare an online behaviour of self-regulation according to the personal perception of what type of behaviours might be considered dangerous. Indeed, in order to overcome the ubiquitous online surveillance, participants say that they place particular attention to subjects (to protect the people they love) and locations (to protect private places).

All participants show a careless attitude towards the protection of personal privacy online. Regarding this, *Participant 7* (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h12:39)

says: ‘well, regarding privacy I am totally convinced (laugh) that once you are on the Internet, just from the first time you get into it your privacy falls down, falls totally. So, I am not one of those obsessed in posting photos that privacy is needed so I do not post photos of me, there must not be photos of you, if I want post photos of you I need to ask for approval. I mean, since the moment I signed up on Instagram I have an open account even because otherwise it just doesn’t make sense to me. I say... I am not interested in privacy’. As can be observed, from this response emerges a passive acceptance of the consequences related to privacy policies and what the use of the Internet implies recalling the idea of normalization of surveillance advanced by Wood and Webster (2009).

Another example can be observed in *Participant 8*’s (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 14:02) response. He states his lack of concern in this way: ‘honestly, the problem doesn’t arise for me, because I have public profile and intentionally I post things that are open to everyone. So, the problem of privacy doesn’t touch me. I don’t put photos of people so. The problem would arise for me on Facebook where more personal information is shared’. From this perspective, Instagram is perceived as a type of social media platform where users share only photos and, consequently, less personal information compared to other online services. Again, self-regulation of photo sharing emerges as the most used system to adopt on Instagram. Indeed, participants underline the fact that they decide personally what and who is ethically shareable online. Participants do not report precise rules, but personal independent guidelines that they follow when photographing and sharing people’s images.

The majority of participants report a high level of consideration and respect for individuals. They declare that they do not share on Instagram photographs of relatives and, in particular, young ones. This exclusion was justified as an act of protection towards children and loved ones. Only one participant, *Participant 24* (Skype interview. December 12, 2013 h17:29), reports a wide photo sharing of her nephews saying that it is connected to the affection she feels for them and the amusing time they spend together. In general, in relation to individuals, the majority of participants do not report the same attention and protection, although they do show attention. For example, *Participant 15* (Skype interview. December 5, 2013 h 14:44), produces street photography (see fig. 52); photographs of individuals during their everyday life.

Nevertheless, she underlines that the situations that she captures never show individuals in embarrassing and bad scenarios justifying this as an act of respect towards people.



Figure 52. Street Photography.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/ektara>

This is an example of personal conduct that the majority of participants follow on Instagram. The example described by *Participant 5* (Skype interview. September 7, 2013 h 16:24) can be mentioned. He says: 'I don't know if you even heard about this band Trigger Finger. I was at their concert and the day before the concert I came to this club and asked if I could make some photos using my DSLR and they told me, the owner of the club told me "well, for us it's not a big problem but the band manager does not allow any photos". Right. So, I was only able to make photos with my mobile phone. But I have respected the request of the band members to make only photos of up to 3 or 4 songs during that concert, all right? I have seen that many other people didn't care about it. They just started to take photos and after the fourth song, well there was no chance for the manager to stop that. But, it wasn't nice, right? Just respect the artist, respect their request and both sides would be satisfied and the other thing is that I always carry some forms about privacy'.

As can be observed, *Participant 5* (Skype interview. September 7, 2013 h 16:24) shows particular respect towards the event and the individuals. However, he reports the

careless behaviour of the rest of the audience towards the unwritten rule that the manager tried to set before the concert. In relation to sharing images of individuals without signed consent, participants report contrasting opinions. The majority of participants declare that individuals are part of their photography and the modalities in which they decide to photograph them are related to the situation, the location and the gesture. *Participant 5* (Skype interview. September 7, 2013 h 16:24) is the only participant that mentions the use of photo consent forms. Even though the majority of participants do not report a wide interest in portraits, there can be observed a fair presence of individuals (consenting or not consenting) within their photo sharing.

Another issue related to the self-regulation of privacy on Instagram is the geo-tag or sharing of physical locations. By default (as long as the GPS on the smart phone is switched on) Instagram shares the geographical location where photos are shared. Even though all participants do not show privacy concern in relation to the use of the platform itself, the majority of them declare that they never share photographs from private locations such as home or relatives and friends' places. *Participant 8* (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 14:02) describes it in this way: 'I don't use geo-tags for private locations, I prefer not to set them'. This is only an example of the majority of responses related to the connection between geo-tags and privacy. On the contrary, participants report a particular interest in setting the geo-tag when travelling in order to show their actual presence in certain places.

### **5.5.1 Routinized Voyeurism on Instagram**

The use of Instagram is examined considering the contrasting aspects of sharing and protecting and the modalities in which images are observed. The majority of participants manifest a precise description of the moments of the day, location and modes of observing photographs on Instagram. The accuracy used in such description conducts to classify their practice as regular ritual. Considering the mobility of smart mobile devices, participants describe several situations (some of them involving movement) during which they observe photos and use the platform. Participants generally access their account many times per day usually during their free time. The time they access the platform can be divided in standing stable or moving moments. The standing still moments are described as meal's breaks (such as coffee break, lunch

break, and dinner time and so on). The moving moments, instead, are identified in travelling or waiting for public transport. Other moments of the day during which participants observe photos are the greeting and wishing moments (such as a “good morning” or “good night”, “enjoy your meal”, “Happy mother’s Day” and so on). They also describe the way of observing photographs as regular rituals that must happen during those precise moments.

Regarding this the description of *Participant 6* (Skype interview. November 22, 2013 h 12:48) on his intense use of Instagram can be mentioned. *Participant 6* (Skype interview. November 22, 2013 h 12:48) admits that observing photos is his first thought of the day and in his breaks. He describes it in this way: ‘it’s the first thing after getting up during having the coffee. Then, on my way to work I use my phone check my emails, look at Instagram again [...] Well, if I get another fifteen minutes time between a couples of patients, I have... I usually first thing is looking at Instagram and check my emails’. Additionally, *Participant 7*’s (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 12:39) response can be mentioned. He describes his ritual in this way: ‘I have always said that Instagram for me has become a lullaby. Before going to sleep I go back to see all the Instagram photos of the day, I observe the hash-tags I am interested in, like this. Anyway, mainly if I have more interest in the photos I do it during the free time, just when I have ten minutes, I go there and I observe the photos’. These are only two examples that cluster the majority of responses to this question that show the presence of voyeurism without any interest in sexual connotation, as theorised by Calvert (2000).

According to participant responses, moments of break and wait figure as the length of time during which they observe photographs on Instagram. From this rituality of observation a state of expectation also emerges from users towards other users’ photo sharing. As described in the chapter 2: “Photo Sharing on Instagram”, the guidelines users follow for their photo sharing also includes the respect of a precise timeline that, in this case, can be recognized in the periods of time participants use to observe photos. A mutual correspondence between the moments of photo sharing and the moments of observation can be observed, a simultaneous virtual presence on the platform. Consequently, in the majority of times, the visual contents of photo sharing come from the above-mentioned length of times (breaks, the wait, and free time).

However, regarding the relation between voyeurism and the pleasure of watching sexual typology of contents, only two (male) participants shared a particular interest in observing models and women's lingerie. *Participant 2* (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) describes his interest in his way: 'this is a very good photographer [...] seriously good! And you can see it from the captions he uses He has his own label of products that is called Visual. Basically he includes in his photos T-shirts and skateboards and snowboards. [...] Additionally, he takes other photos. The principal themes of his photos are photo models and mainly porn stars (pause). If you scroll the page you can notice it even if there is nothing pornographic. Even in this case I reach him by chance, for the way he shoots not only for the theme. It's necessary to say that sometimes I click on the girl's caption to see some shots [...] over the model/porn star's profile. I admit it frankly because... anyway, there are pretty girls. However, apart from that... This is one of few cases where I could talk about my personal case of a minimum of voyeurism'. Meanwhile, the other, *Participant 1* (Skype interview. November 16, 2013 h 11:09) is interested in observing Victoria's Secret Instagram account. These two examples express the typical principle of scopophilia and voyeurism (Mulvey, 1975; Lacan, 1977), where the smart mobile screen represents the private key hole through which please the male gaze.

In both cases, the interest in the subject (women) can be observed and, at the same time, in the high quality of the shots. Indeed, the two accounts follow the guidelines illustrated in the chapter 2: "Photo Sharing on Instagram", where it has been argued that users are more willing to follow accounts that present a recognizable theme and style. Following this, it cannot be said that, within Instagram, a voyeuristic interest in others photo sharing does exist but, as Calvert argues (2000), it does not regard only sexual related contents. Regarding this, *Participant 2's* (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) response can be mentioned as it summarises the point of view of the majority of participants. In fact, *Participant 2* (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) expresses it in this way: 'all of this private life. Actually, there is, but... [...] I am not looking there for it, rather if I need to put my nose in someone else's business, a person I know, it is easier on Facebook, rather than Instagram'. This type of response arises from the majority of participants justified from the fact that the structure of the platform does not allow a satisfactory voyeuristic experience within someone else's private lives. On Instagram there is a different typology of voyeurism that is more related to the curiosity to see what cannot be seen otherwise.

Participants disclose a moderate voyeuristic interest in observing individuals on Instagram. When considering individuals, their intent goes beyond visual photo sharing. In that case they are interested in interpreting the person and the personality behind the photos. This typology of voyeurism manifests as the interest in interpreting other users' identity through their photo sharing. For instance, *Participant 16* (Skype interview, December 6, 2013 h 18:06) explains it in this way: 'the group of people I already know. Only for the reason I know them in real life I want to know them better. It's just to know people better. Through his/her eyes I can see his/her perception of the world, when he/she has photographed that thing in that way when I would have done a totally different thing. It makes me understand many things about the person. There, there is more a psychological interest. Instead, if I follow random users there are themes'. As can be noticed from this response, the voyeuristic interest arises only in relation to people that she knows offline. The same practice is discussed in the Chapter 6: "Identity and Memory on Instagram", where the majority of participants recognise the power of images and social media as the stage for the disclosure of self-identity recalling Goffman's role theory (1959).

In this case, voyeurism moves more towards the protection of the self (privacy) and the observation of the other (surveillance). Considering the above-mentioned dichotomy, between watching and being watched, and following participants' responses, there emerges a wide interest in observing people already part of the personal circle of connections because they have the perception that the photos they share can communicate more aspects of the person otherwise hidden. However, outside the interest in watching and knowing people through images, there emerge a particular attention towards photography as a visual means of communication. The interest in comprehending information is followed by curiosity in gaining knowledge through photo sharing.

### **5.5.2 Viral Photo Sharing and Visual Information on Instagram**

The act of watching, developing the concepts advanced by Calvert (2000), involves basic curiosity towards the unknown, which includes the interest in being informed through images. Photographs on Instagram are part of an array of categories and a



significant number of them are identifiable in information and communication accounts that cluster official institutions such as National Geographic, BBC News, brands such as Nike, Top Shop, and independent users who intend to spread their messages through the Internet and have identified in Instagram a viral means of communication (such as *Participant 14*, *Participant 3* (Skype interview. November 22, 2013 h 18:56), and Nadina using the Instagram name @fotomaedchen). Going beyond mere visual pleasure, images convey messages that are observed, perceived and interpreted. This section, indeed, discusses the typology of information Instagram users are more willing to observe on the platform. The potential virality of the platform is taken into account in relation to the spread of information.

The notion of virality theorised by Sampson (2012) can clarify the dynamics that guided the expansion of information on the Internet. He places particular emphasis on the dependence of online communities on networked communication and information platforms. Sampson starts by clarifying Gabriel Tarde's (2000) conception of the three principles of sociology: imitation, opposition and adaptation, in order to explain the ways in which individuals behave and socialize. Considering Tarde's statement that 'the unvarying characteristic of every social fact whatsoever is that it is imitative' (Tarde, 2000:24), Sampson develops the theoretical foundations of virality. He considers the ubiquitous presence of the Internet to interpret the age of connectivity. The growing number of connections and platforms leads Sampson (2012) to re-evoke a contagion theory to interpret, in the light of Internet studies, the current social processes afforded by network technologies. Considering the potentiality of virality of the Internet, this analysis examines how the power of visualities is experienced through the platform. This will include the concepts of visual protection and disclosure as determining elements of the virality of Instagram.

According to the majority of participants, being informed on Instagram means observing images that can empower users' knowledge in relation of their personal interests (accounts they follow). For example, *Participant 7* (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 12:39) expresses his interest in places in this way: 'observing photos of other users far from me. Observing their photos I happened to think about: "Uh, I wish I would be there!" in that particular moment'. *Participant 17* (Skype interview. December 8, 2013 h 16:08) describes it in this way: 'places to eat maybe places to see when I go to San Francisco. There is this tree hashtag [...] it is a kind of

Instagram monument [...] so, you discover new places'. As can be seen, in both cases Instagram represents an actual window on the world. Although this was an overused metaphor, it portrays precisely the functioning system (photographs) and the spirit of looking out of the window (reaching the information). Moreover, the theme of travelling was already mentioned within the chapter 2: "Photo Sharing on Instagram". The concurrence of this theme can be observed from the users in both dimensions of disclosing and observing, so creating continuity between the producer of photo sharing and the consumer/observer of it. In this case, the interest in watching described above can be translated in the interest towards the type of information that users can gain through the visual observation of photo sharing.

Considering the famous expression: 'use a picture. It's worth a thousand words.' (Birsbane, 1911), Instagram is analysed in relation to the potential that photo sharing has to convey and spread visual messages throughout the platform. From the majority of participants, Instagram does not figure as a platform widely used for communication and information purposes. Although a conspicuous number of official media accounts are identified (such as televisions, radio, newspapers, magazines, and so on), participants do not show a particular interest in watching news from photo sharing. The majority of accounts that participants follow cannot be clustered in official media; rather they are identifiable in fashion brands and (often) celebrities.

A first comment on the widespread communication of visual messages emerges from the concurrence of visibility and popularity. Talking about *Participant 26*'s (Skype interview. December 19, 2013 h16:17) road to success, visibility emerges as a key factor of his popularity. *Participant 26* (Skype interview. December 19, 2013 h16:17) reports his opinion with the following example. 'Before you get 25,000 followers your account will not get to the popular feed, and it's when you reach the popular feed that your pictures get seen by everyone for three hours. All Instagram sees you for three hours. So, if you want to do any political thing like that you have to get a lot of followers first, and it's the first 25,000 that is really hard, annoying and a lot of people won't make it'. From this response, the close relationship between popularity and visibility appears (as was discussed also for social media marketing strategies within the chapter 4: "Political Economy of Instagram") as the key factor for an effective communication and spread of information. Indeed, *Participant 26* (Skype interview. December 19, 2013 h16:17) continues saying that the *Times*, after his success, decided

to offer him co-operation. The deal consists in giving to the *Times* the possibility to share photographs on his account under payment.

This data shows the importance of the principle of connectivity (Van Dijck, 2013) for an effective communication and spread of information. Indeed, according to the majority of participants the functioning structure of the platform does not work for real information and broadcast. The reason for such difficulty is given by the fact that the principle of visibility purposes is fulfilled only under the condition of popularity (see chapter 4: “Political Economy of Instagram”). Both conditions of visibility and user popularity are necessary for an effective communication strategy. The simultaneous presence of both conditions is required in order to subsequently activate the principle of virality (Sampson, 2012) afforded by the connectivity of the Internet to spread any message. However, the effectiveness of visual communication is an element that, according to the majority of participants, does not fulfil the expectations of the traditional concept of information, which is recognized in official broadcast systems.

The story of *Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) can support this line of argumentation.. Like *Participant 26* (Skype interview. December 19, 2013 h16:17), *Participant 14*'s (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) relation with Instagram started by chance and proceeds toward the goal of popularity. His account has been already analysed in the chapter 4: “Political Economy of Instagram” because of his co-operation with brands and businesses. As an Israeli he migrated to the UK; *Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) recognizes the potentialities of the platform and, in November 2012, launched an anti-war photo campaign on Instagram (see fig. 53 and fig. 54). He describes the story in this way: ‘when I started the campaign again after few days I was contacted by *CNN*, *American Post* and then they created a big bug and I was interviewed [...] in Israel and all over the world. I think four days after I was contacted by two Italians and they were offering to open for me a web page for all the pictures from #StopTheTerror you can see basically eleven thousand pictures of the campaign over there’.

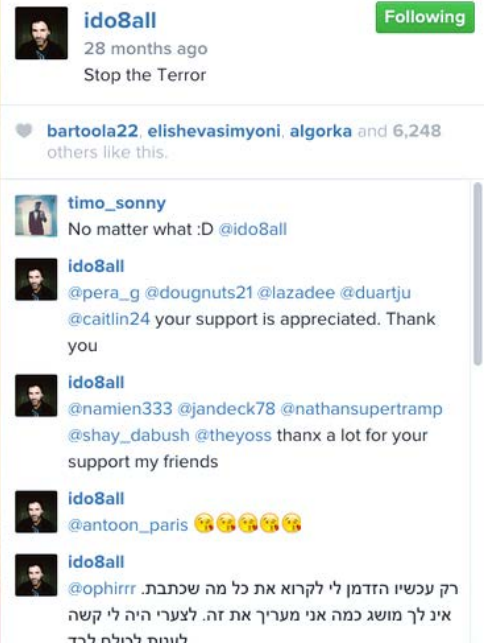


Figure 53. #StopTheTerror photo campaign.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: [://instagram.com/ido8all](https://instagram.com/ido8all)



Figure 54. #StopTheTerror photo campaign 2.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/ido8all>

Following the guidelines illustrated in relation to his co-operation with brands and businesses, it can be said that the success of *Participant 14*'s (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) photo campaign comes principally thanks to the popularity (the high number of followers) and visibility that his account already possessed at the moment of the launch. The contagion effect, theorised by Sampson (2012), materializes,

in this case, illustrating the contemporary market of online information exchange. Bringing into account also Tarde's (2000) law of imitation, the general principle of repetition that describes the social practice of imitating each other, his law explains the visible similarity of the photos shared within #StopTheTerror campaign. The resulting virality of the message figures as a progressive mechanism for the sharing of similar images.

Progressing with the story, *Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) describes the consequent reaction in response to his photo campaign. *Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) continues in this way: 'I got contacted by the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They were a little bit upset about this campaign. At the beginning they were upset, because this campaign said "Stop the Terror" [...] to them was too general. They said: "You are not helping us. You are even causing problems, because now we need to say that Israel is not a terror country. And it's causing problems because people are supporting your campaign but they think we are terrorists as well. [...] I explain to them: "I am not going to change the campaign". Some people even told me: "Change the campaign to "Stop the Hamas" or "Stop the Palestinian" or "Stop the terror in Palestine, in Israel". And I said: "No! I am not going to change it" because I believe that you as Italian, you will never feel for me, or you will never engage or feel solidarity if I say Palestinian or Israel, because for you I would be "Oh, again! That conflict. Again the Israeli and their conflict" [...]. To be honest, if you ask me, it was really hard because this is my country and when you get the call from the Minister of the Foreign Affairs: "Please help us we are in a kind of war, you can help us and you are not helping us. You are even causing troubles". It is really hard to tell them: "No, I am not going to do it. I am going to do my way and not your way. My way is to be like this", and they did something. They took all the pictures of #StopTheTerror and they created one-minute video with lots of people doing Stop! Stop! Stop! And then they made a collage of these pictures with terror pictures, with people and terrorists' attacks. And they said: "Terror because Hamas". That's it'.

As can be observed from *Participant 14's* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) happening, the potentiality of the virality of the Internet emerges clearly. The visibility of *Participant 14's* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) Instagram account, from where the photo campaign #StopTheTerror started, activated a viral mechanism of emulation that recalls the theorization advanced by Tarde (2000) where sociality is

based principally on the principle of similarity that produces innovations and developments. The fulfilment of the ‘law of imitation’ (Tarde, 2000:12) produces, in this case, an initial social behaviour of repetition (Instagram general users) that was subsequently followed by a reaction of opposition (Israel Minister of Foreign Affairs). The connectivity afforded by the platform accelerates the process of social emulation also fostering the creation of the above-mentioned one-minute counter video on YouTube that used the photographs shared under the hashtag #StopTheTerror but, according to *Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58), given other meanings.

A similar example can be observed in the photo awareness campaign on International Women’s Day 2014 mentioned by *Participant 7* (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 12:39). He mentions the related hash tag #IWD2014, created to cluster photos shared from all over the world in support of women’s rights. In this case, Instagram also shared the event directly on the official blog quoting big names (such as: Michelle Obama (@michelleobama), Stella McCartney (@stellamccartney), Condoleezza Rice (@condoleezzarice), Jenny Jones (@jennyjonessnow), and Laura Mvula (@lauramvula)) of influential people who have promoted the photo campaign independently. This is an additional example that testifies how the virality of visual messages and information on Instagram depends strictly on the principle of popularity. Indeed, in both cases (#StopTheTerror and #IWD2014), the photo campaign was activated by Instagram accounts considered widely visible.

However, where on the one hand, the open visibility offered by the platform produces information and bonding, on the other hand, it can produce mediated conflicts that are battled on the platform among users or with Instagram moderators. Other participants mention the presence of child pornography, drug and guns markets, and racism and so on. The typologies of conflicts present on Instagram are about the contents of single images or accounts. Even though the majority of participants do not report significant episodes, few of them share the presence of accidental visual conflicts. Nevertheless, in both cases, all participants report satisfactory comments in relation to the moderators’ job. Indeed, many participants, including those calling themselves “addicted users” (such as *Participant 13* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 18:24) and *Participant 6* (Skype interview. November 22, 2013 h 12:48) ), believe that if they have never come across visual conflicts, it means that conflicting contents are not present or they are

mostly kept away. However, where the vision of unethical contents is reported, participants report a satisfactory dialogue with the users involved in the issue and with Instagram moderators.

### **5.5.3 Virality and Visual Conflicts on Instagram**

However, examples of the problematic implications that the virality of the Internet and the power of images cause on Instagram can be observed. On December , 2012, it was reported by *The Local* (Sweden newspaper) that several hundred teens had assembled outside the Framtidsgymnasiet high school in Gothenburg (Sweden) in a tense situation. The same scene was already seen on December , 2012 in front of the Plusgymnasiet high school. The reason for these gatherings was the attempt to find the owner of an anonymous Instagram account named @gbgorroz (“gbg” is a short way to say Gothenburg, and “orroz” is the swedification of a Turkish word meaning “whore”). Within the Instagram account young boys and girls were shown with posts and comments about their sexual lives. Followers were also invited to upload and disclose additional information. As reported by local media, on December , 2012 the protests spilled into acts of vandalism and the local police arrested 27 “rabble-rousers”. Teens’ assemblies turned into dangerous riots (firecrackers were also used) that were violently placated by the police.

Lawyer Arash Raoufi notified *The Local* that ‘one of the worst things for these victims is that their honour is still violated. Through the Instagram account, they triggered a mean mechanism that garnered 8.000 followers after 24 hours of its activation. Even though the account is from December, Internet violation never stops’ (June , 2013). Raoufi’s assumption about the happening calls into question issues related to privacy and surveillance on Instagram. On June , 2013 two girls, aged 15 and 16, were convicted for aggravated defamation for collecting and publishing information about teens (mostly girls) and their alleged sexual behaviour. Moreover, it has been reported by one of the victims, Irma (sixteen years old), that the behaviour has already appeared on Facebook in a jokey way, but when it moved onto Instagram it become coarse. The two teen girls have been sentenced to pay a total of \$85,370 in damages to the victims. They could not have been sent to prison because of their age.

Considering the contemporary debate on privacy and surveillance online the notion of virality appears useful to interpret the various phenomena that animate the platform. The paradoxically co-presence of disclosure and protection of personal information online needs to face the widespread Big Brother attitude and the pleasure of watching others (Baruh, 2010). The curiosity in watching others is contagious and affects social behaviours on social media. Whether in some cases, such as the spread of information, virality is good, in other cases the potentialities of the connectivity of the Internet can spread conflicts (see the Gothenburg event). Sampson (2012) presents the notion of contagion as a way of thinking and way of perceiving sociality today. Extending his interpretation of the age of network, virality appears directly connected to privacy and surveillance issues. It seems, recalling the Gothenburg event, which the conflicts that arise because of the virality emerge by the invasion of one privacy or because of the spread of information not in line with someone's conduct. In both cases, the problems caused by virality manifest for the visibility that some contents might reach.

Within this, the conceptualization of 'suggestibility' (Sampson, 2012:170) allows to comprehend the effects that the virality of photo sharing on Instagram produces in relation to privacy and surveillance. Following this line, suggestibility figures as perception of emotions through images. In this case, a particular attention needs to be placed on the social aspects that the virality of photo sharing has in relation to the practices of watching and being watched online. The widespread social use of the Internet displays the existing paradox between protection and disclosure of personal data online, deconstructing the traditional conceptions of privacy and surveillance. Considering the openness and visibility offered by social media these two concepts represent one of the most discussed paradoxes of postmodern society.

The ubiquitous status of social (Marwick, 2012) and participatory (Albrechtslund, 2008) surveillance brings the visual conflicts caused by virality at several levels of significance. Regarding this, *Participant 1's* (Skype interview. November 16, 2013 h 11:09) event can be mentioned. *Participant 1* (Skype interview. November 16, 2013 h 11:09) is a web graphic designer living in London. He sometimes shares his digital works on Instagram to share with the online community his products and his working life (fig. 55). He says that he is also interested in following creative accounts that share similar images and innovative digital art products. In fact, his use of the platform is



practically related to his job. His photo sharing alternates between digital images and glimpses of personal life. The juxtaposition of both caused his experience of visual conflicts. He shares the episodes in this way: ‘regarding my experience, once I have been in trouble because I was working for a company. I posted some images related to some work I did and the company had suspended me for more than a week because it was violation of the internal code. I think I had posted a fragment of a digital image that I had created because they could have seen what I was working on and imaging. Even if there was not the brand of the company I had to face this problem because the competitors could have seen what I was doing and thus copy or get the directions that the company was taking from a graphic design point of view, and also the company is quite famous so... It is the Thompson Reuters news. Let’s say that I have been a bit naïve to not think about it... I paid my dues with two weeks of suspension... It was a quite serious thing’.

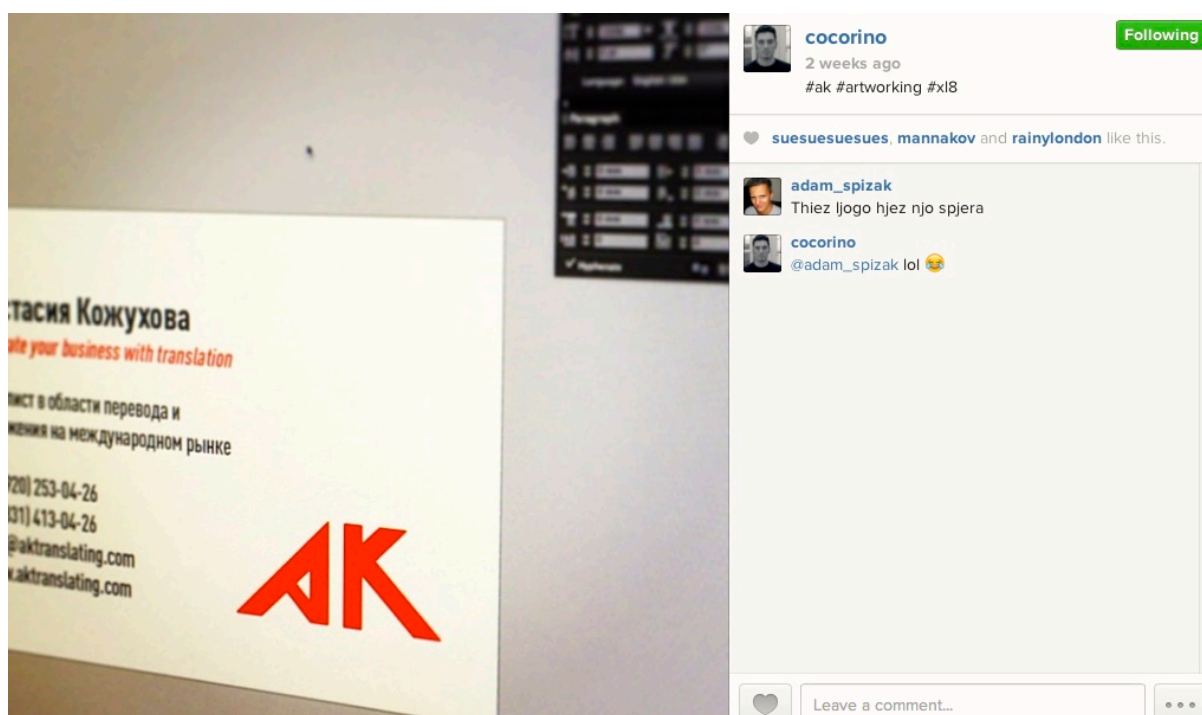


Figure 55. Photo sharing and conflicts at work.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/cocorino>

From this response, it can be observed that *Participant 1* (Skype interview. November 16, 2013 h 11:09) broke the company’s internal code of conduct disclosing a conspicuous amount of visual information. The connectivity of the platform made his contents visible to Instagram users and, at the same time, to the surveillance of his company. In this case, the visual conflict does not originate from the sharing of

unethical contents. Nevertheless, this episode certifies the link that the viral visibility of visual contents manifests on Instagram with the interest in monitoring others. This is not the only example that involves legal issues. Despite that, the majority of participants report a fair resolution of the problem. The strategy adopted for facing inappropriate contents (i.e. that do not respect the guidelines of the community) is, as described on the Instagram blog, reporting the user directly on the user's Instagram account following the instruction on the platform. Considering this procedure, the majority of participants say that when they come across inappropriate contents they also ask other users to report the user in question facilitating the suspension or the cancellation of such an account.

Moreover, the episode of the account dedicated to the spread of the word of God can be mentioned. According to *Participant 3* (Skype interview. November 22, 2013 h 18:56), this Instagram account, aims to be an encouraging page that, through the photo sharing of Bible verses and positive messages, tries to explain Jesus. *Participant 3* (Skype interview. November 22, 2013 h 18:56) illustrates the event in this way: 'they got shut down because they were sharing religious views, i.e. 'his purposes were...' to share their religious view. Not to call any demons, not to call anyone wrong. They were just sharing what they believed and the guy shut down as a result so they made a new page and Instagram shut it again and so they turned out a third page and they have been going through this a while now, a few months'. Following *Participant 3's* (Skype interview. November 22, 2013 h 18:56) story and Instagram guidelines, there is not apparently a fair reason why the above-mentioned account is supposed to be shut (firstly called @jesussavesbro and then @jesussavesbroresurrected). However, the account can be suspended or cancelled where there are a high number of users reporting it.

Participant 23 reports another episode of how monitoring and users' co-operation contribute to the cancellation of suspension of Instagram accounts (Skype interview. December 11, 2013 h18:02). 'Once I saw a photo that was racist, violent, anti-Semite, a little bit everything. There was a black guy on his knees and an Aryan guy, Aryan because it was written in the caption, who was beating him with a hammer. I do not remember exactly what he was holding on his hands. Yes! Like this! On Instagram! In a very relaxing way. I reported the photo and I asked some friends to do the same, reporting the photo but mainly the user'. As can be seen, users actively collaborate to maintain the platform as clean. This is only one example of a typology of visual content

that Instagram regulation does not accept. Following participants, all visual contents they report are promptly removed. And this is the reason that pushes them to define Instagram as a ‘clean platform’. This behaviour puts into practice the principle of ‘participatory surveillance’ advanced by Marwick (2012).

However, the contrasting opinion of *Participant 2* (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) can be mentioned. An active Italian Instagrammer, *Participant 2* (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01), shares his disagreement through this example: ‘I do not understand the reason why someone should tell every time he/she is high/overdone over a social network or, at the same time, if you go on Instagram and you look for #ak47 (see fig. 56) you find a series of Americans who receive guns as presents for Christmas, because they receive them from parents, friends, grandpa or things like that. This thing of posting weapons, posting the use of drugs or things like that, and considering it part of human nature. It is so absolutely understandable to me from a certain point of view’. Following, he compares that typology of contents with other photo sharing. *Participant 2* (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) decides to bring as a contrasting example a visual metaphor of life. He explains his opinion in this way: ‘if someone posts a photo of a new born on Instagram it does not bother me because, basically, it is a moment of your life that you decide to share with people you know that follow you and you would do it anyway, maybe in another way. Of course, there it is visible to anybody’.

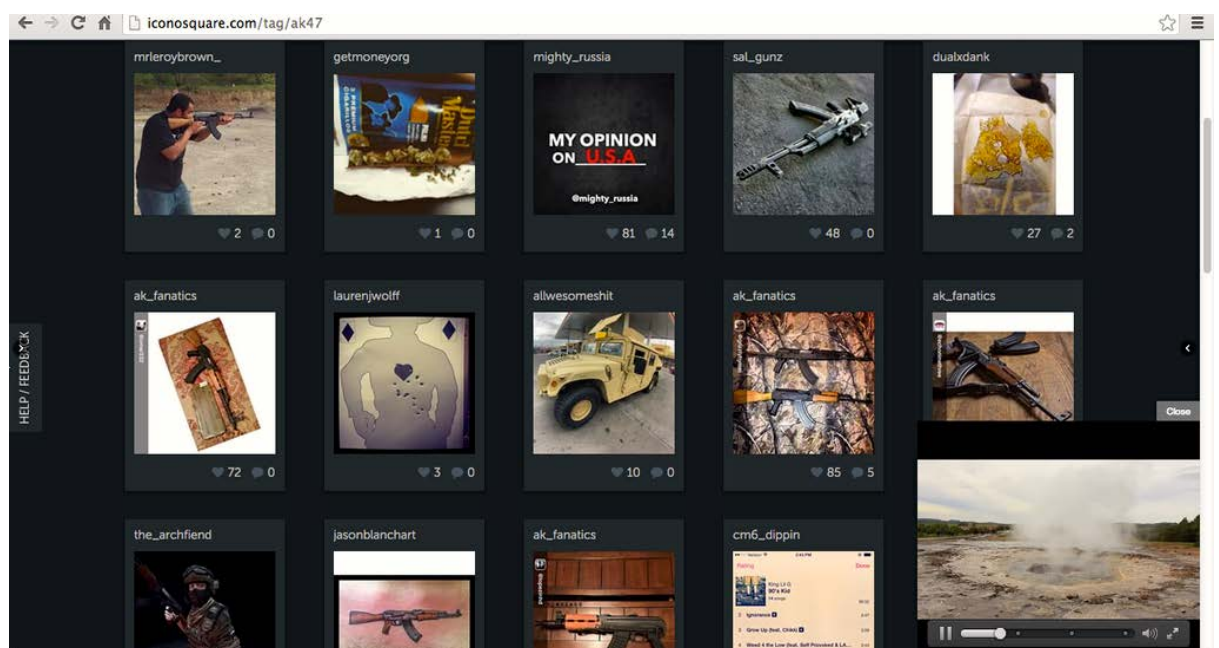


Figure 56. Photo sharing and ethical conflicts (selling drug and guns on Instagram).

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <http://iconosquare.com/>

Following the line of thematic Instagram accounts, *Participant 26's* (Skype interview. December 19, 2013 h16:17) account can be mentioned again. He describes the episodes in this way: 'I posted some pictures that made people mad. I posted a picture where he puts his head in a pizza carton this summer. And some people who do not have dogs and do not know dogs think he has been forced. A lot of people thought he was forced to put his head there. They think he was not happy about doing that. Sometimes people see the pictures and they put their own emotions to the pictures in some kind of way and they get mad' (see fig. 57). Furthermore, another related example could be recognized in *Participant 11's* (Skype Interview. December 1, 2013 h 23:00) response: 'I met some people who were taking pictures for a magazine and posted some pictures. It was a hunting trip they had gone on and some vegetarians just got hate that particular person for showing the pictures but again it was a hunting trip everybody knows what goes on during a hunting trip so. It was just the subject to talk about. Why are you making a big mess out of it?'

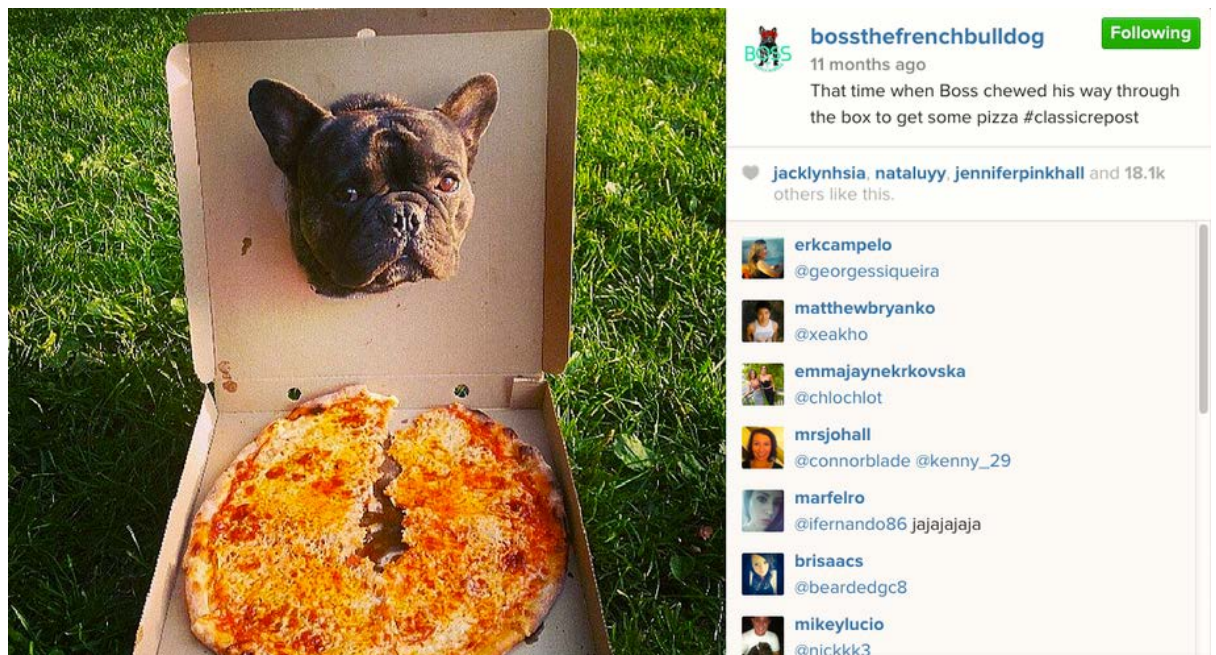


Figure 57. Ethical Treatment of animals and conflicts.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: [://instagram.com/bossthefrenchbulldog](https://www.instagram.com/bossthefrenchbulldog)

From these responses the presence of personal visual conflicts emerge in relation to the contents of users. Following the functioning system of Instagram and its potential virality it needs to be highlighted that users have access to the general photo sharing

available on the home page or otherwise through users' independent research of contents via precise hashtags. In both cases, the discovery of contents, which are personally appreciated or not, happens through the surveillance and observation of photo sharing. So, users reach visual information by chance (scrolling the home page stream) or the search feed. The disagreement reported by several participants towards specific contents manifests at a personal level and connote those users that *Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) calls 'the haters'. With this term he defines the type of users willing to use the platform with the aim of activating conflicts. However, it is testified that if users or contents are not reported by a significant number of users or are not against Instagram policy they will not be removed. In these cases, the conflicts remain on the platform expressing independents like or dislike.

## 5.6 Conclusions: Self-Restrain, Observation and the Power of Visibility

This chapter has discussed the alterations that the concepts of privacy and surveillance have undergone through the contemporary widespread use of smart mobile devices and the ubiquitous use of social media platforms. Mobility and ubiquitous connectivity afforded by smart mobile devices are considered as crucial variables within this discourse. Findings show a general passive acceptance of the lack of personal privacy that the use of social media platforms causes. Considering that the use of the services on the Internet require the agreement of terms of use, issues related to the protection of personal information are necessarily overcome steering users towards self-regulation and self-protection.

The conceptions of privacy and surveillance within the digital age consider a variety of aspects that mainly concern users' data protection and security. From Foucault's theorizations on the panopticon and surveillance, it is clear the impact that technological developments advance on individuals' conception of watching and being watched. The normalization of this status leads, as participants have responded, to issues related to privacy and surveillance online regarding only the contents of the material that users share on a daily basis. Even though there has been witnessed a wide awareness of the functioning mechanism of online services, users recognize in the management of user generated contents their only concern in relation to data protection. The Big Brother spirit has become such a widespread activity fostered by the presence of social media

and the ubiquitous connectivity of smart mobile devices, potentially turning everybody into Big Brothers.

The practice of watching and being watched manifests as part of the daily rituals that users practice as necessary to be socially part of communities (Gilliom & Monahan, 2013). The co-presence of both establishes a mutual dialogue between the curiosity in observing and the interest in gaining self-satisfaction and recognition (Lakhani & Wolf, 2005), as was discussed in the chapter 2: “Photo Sharing on Instagram”. Photo sharing, in this case, emerges as an important means through which users perceive and communicate to the world. Following the motivations that drive photo sharing on Instagram, an innovative conception of ‘pleasure of watching’ comes into account. The combination between the structure of the platform and the mediation of smart mobile devices figures as an innovative representation of the panopticon where the users (the observer) can observe simultaneously all the cells (photographs) of the architecture (photo stream). In this case, the evolution of Bentham’s architecture is recognized in the mobility afforded by the devices. Including the ubiquitous connectivity afforded by smart mobile devices, the practice of surveillance is experienced without constriction in terms of time and locations. This condition also transforms photographs on Instagram to a kind of keyhole recalling the theorizations of Mulvey (1975) regarding the pleasure of watching where, next to voyeurism and scopophilia, it is experienced to gain knowledge of new images.

On Instagram as analysed, issues related to surveillance and the control of users’ data and metadata by companies, it emerges that the main use of the platform is connected to the paradox of watching and being watched. Once passively accepted the ubiquitous control by businesses and brands, users focus the issue towards its social meaning reminiscent of the spirit of Big Brother. The voyeurism that the platform develops among users, on one side, figures strictly connected to the typology of voyeurism described by Mulvey (1975) where the interest in watching is not always related to sexuality, rather it is related to contents that users cannot see (Calvert, 2000). Following the co-presence of watching and being watched in combination with the principle of reciprocity, present in online communities (Lakhani & Wolf, 2005), generates a widespread interest in the existing interconnections between photography and identity. This curiosity concentrates the attention towards self-disclosure through the mediation of images.

## Chapter 6: Identity and Memory on Instagram

With the growing daily use of social media platforms and social networking sites, the traditional notions of identity, construction and disclosure figures are altered by the mediation of new technologies. Starting from the theorizations of Deleuze and Guattari (1980), Goffman (1959), Turkle (1996), boyd (2007), boyd *et al* (2004; 2006), and Elliot (2014) this chapter reflects on the decentred and mediated nature of contemporary identities. This chapter classifies structuring features at the core of postmodern society in order to reinterpret the notion of identity advancing a critical reasoning that includes the context where the identity is experienced, namely the Internet. The use of social media, in particular, conducts theorists to repaint the contemporary conception of identity considering the mediation of smart mobile devices (mobility and ubiquity). Giddens (1991), for instance, identifies the Internet as the ideal environment where the 'openness' and the 'pluralisation' of self-disclosures and identity expressions are articulated. This approach reaches the contemporary necessity to lead a '*plurality of life worlds*' (Giddens, 1991:83), where multiple identities are negotiated.

Within this panorama of changes, diverse theorists are examined identity online. Sherry Turkle, one of the first scholars interested in web-identity, identifies the *Life on the Screen* (1997) as a specificity of the contemporary age. According to Turkle (1997), digital technologies permit one to take advantage of an additional life beyond the physical world. In this state, the Internet represents the ephemeral world where *The Second Self* manifests itself (2005). Thus, the fictionalized Pirandellian identities presented on stage and in literature now become concrete on the screen through the multiple representation of the self. Thus, the splitting Pirandellian identity, told by novels and theatrical performances, is now concretised on the screen through the multiple representation of the self. Turkle's (1997; 2005; 2011) considerations introduce a discussion that fuses together individuals' identities and the Internet, where the contemporary individual is decentralised and reshaped.

The proliferation of smart mobile devices produces significant modifications also in individuals' conception of the flux of time and how the time is recognised in the realm of sociality. Many thinkers, such as Bergson (1911), Proust (1913-1927), Joyce (1975) and Einstein (1933) question time in numerous ways, from the individuals' perception of flow of time to the correlation between time and memory, and its relativity

establishing the foundations of the existing theories on this subject. When digital technologies and mobile communications come into question the conception of time is subjected to transformations fostering the reconsideration of previous theories. For example, Manuel Castells (1997), talking about telecommunications, advances the new concept of temporality of '*timeless time*' (Castells, 1997:465) arguing that individuals' experience of time change as result of their interactions with new mobile technologies that are experienced within the ubiquitous state of 'simultaneity and timelessness' (Castells, 1997:491). These fluid variables also characterize the mediation of smart mobile technologies that are produce in the process of information exchange.

Currently, the use of smart mobile devices to capture and keep memories of individuals' everyday lives plays a crucial role in understanding how the notion of time changes through the digital flow and how individuals' evaluate and manage their 'mediated memories' (Van Dijck, 2007). Van Dijck defines mediated memories as 'the activities and objects we produce and appropriate by means of media technologies, for creating and recreating a sense of past, present, and future of our selves in relation to others' (Van Dijck, 2007:27). Using smart mobile devices and social media platforms, individuals replace the collection of their everyday experiences and shape new practices of individual and collective remembrances. In particular, the implications of sharing and publicity afforded by social media blur the boundaries between private and public, personal and collective.

Initially photography, following Sontag (1979), was considered a practice restricted to family photography. Photography was considered a cultural ritual connected to the family roots and belonging to the family . Although photography's dominant duty is keeping families' visual memories, it has since turned into a popular communicational means, and come to incorporate other functions as well. In *On Photography* (1979), Sontag dedicates one of her essays 'Melancholy Objects' (Sontag, 1979: 51-82) to the exploration of the remembrative function of photography in mass culture. Throughout the essay, Sontag (1979) emphasises the rise of melancholy objects with the distance in term of space, time and so on. The distance produces an effect of melancholia given by the lack of the presence of something or someone. The experience of melancholia in relation to photographic objects is, following Sontag's (1979) interpretation, referred to an image of something or someone that is experienced as separated from the actual



current reality. In her argument, the photographic object replaces a certain lack and so, a potent tool to evoke emotional responses (on the contrary of Proust).

Recently, taking photographs are not limited to a mere aid to memory, but it is becoming progressively more of a means of communication. Digital cameras, smart phones and other smart mobile devices appear to use images as a widespread idiom for new digital generations. Following this, José Van Dijck (2004; 2005; 2007; 2008; 2011; 2013), who dedicates large part of her studies to analyse the relationships between digitality and the capture of memories, suggests that digital cameras indeed appear to foster interpersonal relationships. In the article 'Digital Photography: Communication, Identity and Memory' (2008), Van Dijck argues that younger generations seem to utilize digital devices in their everyday interactions because they are fast and easy use. She also adds that this combination promotes photography as a favourite youth language for 'live' communications (Van Dijck, 2010). This change, within the social uses of photography, represents the substantial passage of photography from means for remembrance to means for communication. Technological changes are mainly identified in the four categories of photo-taking, photo-storing, photo-viewing and photo-sharing that have changed substantially in terms of the use of photography as a mnemonic resource (Keightley & Pickering, 2014). Following this line of interpretation, it is easy to perceive that the contemporary generations are oriented more to utilise images, through the practice of photo sharing, as daily social connectors. Even this practice follows the alterations brought by the digitality, indeed, it moves from the sharing of visual memories to the constant sharing of visual experiences.

In fact, for Van Dijck (2008), images are considered much more as a temporary visual incitation, rather than permanent remembrance. Images acquire value as 'moments' lose the importance of memories. Following this, it is not difficult to perceive that the notion of remembrance evolves into the fragmentation of memories, impermanence of memories, and memories of episodes. Sustaining this idea, Van Dijck (2008) affirms that memory does not disappear from the spectrum of social uses, but it gets a different form. By thinking digital memories through new social behaviours, she observes a progressive shift in the increasing use of digital photographs in place of the analogue ones showing the normalization of the intangibility of memories. Van Dijck's theorizations about the evolving concept of memory within digitality, emphasise the ephemerality of memories. Through the mediation of social media and smart mobile

devices these fragmented and episodic memories figure as sequence of snapshots, as can be seen through the Instagram stream. The presence of photo sharing on Instagram presents a juxtaposition of episodes (translated into images) that fosters the impermanence of memories within the flow of the photo stream. This existing shift promoted by the use of social media leads this chapter to re-think the traditional relation between photography and memory.

This chapter analyses how the use of smart mobile devices and the mediation of social media participates in the postmodern notions of self-identity memory maintenance. Giving attention to the practice of photo sharing, this chapter examines how the visuality contributes to the construction and disclosure of the self. Through the sharing of photographs, individuals disclose visual expressions of their selves during their everyday life. This continuity creates a chronological narration of individuals' lives that is used to understand the construction and disclosure of the self-identity but it is also to cluster personal visual memories. The concurrence of identity and memory is given by the fact that identity is not a stable instance. In this progressive construction, the memories of the past become helpful to understand changes and development of the person, and also to maintain memory of what is temporally or spatially distant (Sontag, 1979). Following these considerations, the proceeding section illustrates the existing relevant studies on identity and memory, and their relations with new media and mobile technologies. This section defines the interrelations between the two subjects and subsequently identifies how the development of smart mobile technologies modifies their traditional conceptions and current interrelations.

## 6.1 Representations and Memories of the Self: A Theoretical Approach

When talking about identity, the relevant literature that has investigated the nature (Freud, 1949), the mode of construction, presentation of the self (Goffman, 1959; Giddens, 1991; Butler, 1990; 1993; 2007) and its relations with new technologies (Foucault, 1988) become important. Issues related to identity have been also widely discussed and illustrated throughout history and from different perspectives. However, the relation between the image of the individual and the self-identity figures as a stable constant within novels. For instance, it can be mentioned the *Myth of Narcissus* that tells the story of a hunter, Narcissus, well known for his beauty. Once, Narcissus sees

his reflection in a pool, he falls in love with it. Without realizing that it was just an image, he drowns into the water. From this myth takes origin the term 'narcissism' that has always been connected to the obsession with oneself. In addition, it can be mentioned the novel by Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (2005), which tells the story of Dorian, Victorian beautiful aristocrat, who decides to sell his soul to ensure that his portrait ages, rather than he, absorbing and showing the signs of his corrupted soul.

The interrelationships between identity and the self-representation, as can be observed in the work of Jacques Lacan (1977), have always been at the base of the self-identity construction. Following the foundations of Freud (1949) and the theories on psychoanalysis, Lacan (1977) advances the idea of the 'mirror stage', arguing that infants pass through a stage in which their external images (reflected in a mirror) are perceived as the mental representation of the 'I'. This is the stage in which infants start to develop awareness of their selfhood through their own image. Through the 'mirror stage' Lacan (1977) testifies the interdependence between the self and external objects that can be recognized in mirrors, paintings and photographs. This intuition justifies the use of visual means to construct a self-image that enters into the everyday social relationships. Furthermore, the self-image is necessary to develop the presence of the self, the individual in relation to the society and the others.

Describing the existential conflicts between the self and the others, the Italian novelist Luigi Pirandello writes *Uno, Nessuno e Centomila* (1994, *One, No One and One Hundred Thousand*), the story of Vitangelo Moscarda and the decomposition of his life into one, no one and hundred thousand. Once Vitangelo discovers that, in his mind, the *persona* that he has constructed about himself does not correspond to all the personas that other people have of him, his awareness about his image and his identity disintegrate. The novel discloses the falseness of the social existence and the awareness that there is not a precise and univocal knowledge of the self, rather multiple selves that coexist together according to the different perception that others have of someone (Pepe *et al*, 2012). Pirandello uses Moscarda's conflicts to advance the ideas of the eternal movement of becoming and the continuous transformation of the self. Moreover, Pirandello employs the metaphor of the mask to explain the ways through which individuals present the various selves to the society, which recalls Goffman's (1959)

theorization of the presentation of the self using the metaphor of theatrical performances to describe social everyday interactions.

The most noteworthy theorists who commented upon the perception of the world in relation to one selves are Barthes (1980, 1982), Lacan (1977; 2001), Foucault (1988), Deleuze and Guattari (1988). Postmodern theorists, after Freud's introduction of the Id, Ego, and Superego (1974/1923), began to reinterpret the self as fragmented agency that 'no longer conceive of the 'individual' in terms of a whole, centered, stable and completed Ego or autonomous, rational 'self'. The 'self' is conceptualized as fragmented and incomplete, composed of multiple 'selves' or identities in relation to the different social worlds' (Hall, 1996: 226). Miller (2011) says that they explore the essential notions of identity, suggesting that it is a constructed entity that is created and maintained through relational processes. Then he adds that identity changes in relation to different contexts and conditions. Conclusively, combining previous considerations, he remarks that identity is a dynamic and changeable entity (Miller, 2011). It is exactly through the last principles that postmodern theories interpret the relationships between the individual and the society, setting the critical starting point for the following debates on the new conception of the self in relation to new technologies and the Internet.

When reflecting about identity online, the theoretical contributions of Sherry Turkle become relevant. Her entire body of work focuses on human relationships with technologies and, in particular, to computational objects. In *The Second Self* (2005) Turkle argues that computer technologies need to be considered actual part of human social life because of the ways in which they change the way individuals think and relate socially with their surroundings. Considering the ubiquitous wide spread use of digital technologies, her analysis moves to investigate how technologies affect humans. To discuss this phenomenon, in 1996, Sherry Turkle published *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. With this volume, she brings into account the position that the cyberspace has in relation to identity arguing that the boundaries between the two environments are not well defined anymore. Her work on individuals' experiences of virtual environments (MUDs in particular) helps to understand the implications that the mediation of digital technologies have in the daily process of identity construction and disclosure online toward s new sense of the self as decentred and multiple.

In *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (1959) Erving Goffman argues that identity is a contextually related entity that requires a socially acceptable presentation of oneself. His approach suggests that the self-presentation involves a performance of the self. To explain his argument, Goffman advances the idea that theatrical performances take place during individuals' everyday lives, in which individuals play different roles within different contexts. Goffman argues that the social world is like a stage where everybody performs a specific role and the places of human life represent the backstage where individuals prepare carefully their social presence. Goffman (1959) distinguishes between the expressions that individuals disclose through explicit verbal communication (give) and implicit expressions through visual appearance (give off). Human life figures so projected into this theatrical performance where everybody decides how to present their selves to the social online community (Cover, 2012).

An example of this can be recognized in Guy Debord's (1983) work. He describes the rise of *The Society of the Spectacle* (1983) where it can be witnessed a wide proliferation of images and individuals who are the consumers of these images. The wide variety and high number of images produce fragmented individuals that consequently cannot be recognised in one single image – rather it needs to be thought as a multiple combination of visualites. The concept of multiplicity that Debord argues for, recalls Goffman's theorization (1959) in which the presentation of the self-offline is added to the presentation of the self-online. However, the presence of decentered identities (online and offline) does not conduct to consider both as independent instances, rather as “all-in-one”. Indeed, identity nowadays needs to be thought as a fluid and changeable body that is expressed through different levels of presentation. SNSs represent the virtual space in which individuals stage their online identity. The online identity figures as a projection of the self that individuals intend to create and show to the social networks on social networking sites.

According to Giddens (1991), identity is experienced as a narrative, a combination of class, religion, location and gender narratives. Within this, the self is determined by daily practices. It is seen as a ‘work in progress’ that comes from the combination of life styles and daily choices. Giddens (1991) argues that individuals' everyday life is constantly revised and recreated on the basis of connections and interactions with the surroundings. Information of lifestyles is exhibited by media through magazines, comedies and dramas, which contribute to form the social world. Within this, the self-

identity is interpreted as a condition that needs to be regularly ‘created and sustained in the reflexive activities of the individual’ (Giddens, 1991:52). This idea of identity as reflexive phenomenon moves the focus from the persona toward the process, the ongoing actuation of the project of the construction of the self.

Indeed, according to Bauman (2001), instead of talking about identities, it would be more appropriate, considering the contemporary globalized world, talking of ‘*identification*, a never-ending, always incomplete, unfinished and open-ended activity’ (Bauman, 2001:152). For Bauman the perspective that sociologists need to address nowadays is questioning the various and augmented ways in which individuals tell stories of their lives. The mobility of smart mobile devices and the connectivity afforded by social media platforms allow individuals to use the time they spend (in apparent isolation) in mediated connection with others, as Turkle claims using the term *Alone Together* (2011) as title of one of her latest works. Bauman (2000) argues that modernity loses its solid form toward unknown and uncertain liquid state. Applying Bauman’s conception of the liquidity of the modern society conduces to theorize the flow of contents that travel through the Internet as part of the contemporary identity construction.

Part of the project of the construction and disclosure of the self is articulated over time. Within this, Buckingham (2008) points out that the narrative principle of performative selfhood is developed by users through the websites profile management as an archive. In this case, the memorialization of the past, using the mediation of the profile, works as an autobiography and reflexive construction and disclosure of the self. Through a backwards narration, profiles online justify the development toward the current disclosure of the self-identity. Profiles give in this way the sense of instability of the self-identity showing various moments as part of the configuration of the past.

Throughout his critical interpretation of photography that sees the necessity to look at the past to see its impact on the present, Roland Barthes (1980; 1982; 2000) emphasises the close connection between identity formation and memory maintenance. Through this connection, photography shows the self in relation to the photograph that has been taken in the past. The interconnections between these agencies have been subject of interest from the analogue (Barthes, 1982) to the digital (Van Dijck, 2007; 2008; 2009; 2011) considering the mutual dependence of one to the other. Barthes (1981), argues

that photography ‘establishes not the consciousness of *being-there* of something, rather the awareness of its *having-been-there*’ (Barthes, 1982:34, my translation), combines together the ‘be’ (identity) and the past of that (memory). Through this, Barthes (1982) highlights how photography is located between the individual and the flow of time in the process of identity construction and disclosure. Even if social media platforms seem to conduct individuals toward the presentification of actions, according to Van Dijck (2007), the new roles for identity construction do not totally annihilate the traditional commemorative function of photography. In fact, due to the networked environment, the definition of personal memories gravitates nowadays progressively toward distributed presences (Van Dijck, 2008) over multiple settings.

Whether considering memory within the contemporary discourse on media, the philosophical reflections of the philosophers Henri Bergson (1911) and Gilles Deleuze (2005) come into account. Deleuze follows Bergson’s idea that the connections between time and memory form a constant production of internal circuits (linking past and present) that produce the individuals’ perception of duration. Deleuze (2005), building his theories on Bergson’s assumptions, advances considerations through the critical comparisons on cinema and time theorizing the embodiment of the film camera into the human brain in order to explain memories as a projection. Memory materialises through a sensory-motor mechanism or through pure memories that surface unintentionally as images of past. According to Deleuze (2005), memory is always in a ‘state of becoming’. The contemporary individuals’ life style is dynamic, fast, and projected toward the future.

Regarding this, the writer Marcel Proust in *A La Recherche du Temp Perdu (In Search of Lost Time, 1913-1927)* sustains the existence of involuntary memories whose can be activated by accidental feelings. He bases his theoretical claims upon the notion that there is no logical correspondence between present and past. In making this point, Proust strongly believes that memories can be stimulated particularly through smell and touch. Indeed, Proust does not consider photography the most functional object to perceive the past; rather he considers it an object in which the past has been captured as an aesthetically perceivable snapshot. This is the reason why he contemplates visuality as a superficial relationship with the reality. Proust states that the sight, compared to the other five senses, gives incomplete memories because activated by what he defines the technique of voluntary memory (Proust, 1913-17). The photograph of the church in

Combray would not have the same taste of the madeleine dipped in the tea. However, Proust does not claim that photography does not keep memories; rather he believes that it does not confer the real essence of it (Sontag, 1979). Nevertheless, photography remains a popular means used to re-experience the lost time. Indeed, Sontag (1979) claims that Proust misunderstood the basic function of photography because photography is not a means of memory; but it is a memory substitution.

In contrast with Proust there are the theorisations advanced by Henri Bergson (1911). He considers photography an active force in its relation with memory. He argues that it is not possible to think about it as successions of memories, because memories progressively blur. Bergson (1911) claims that the past has a dynamic connection with the present in a constant interconnection without having a defined temporal distance. In *Time and Free Will: an Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (1921) Bergson writes that nothing is very far. In fact, he does not suggest a clear distinction between close and distant memories. Memory of places happens in fluid way and the past surfaces as set of visual memories. Bergson believes that individuals need to do experiences in continuous jump from the past to the present. Each experience is formed by the combination of subsequent instances that form a continuous duration. For Bergson the duration is similar to a flow, meanwhile for Proust it is similar to a series of moments that the mind remembers on and off. However, the main differences that distinguish their philosophies are between the voluntary and involuntary memory. Bergson argues that memory can be recalled voluntarily (active memory) meanwhile, on the other hand, for Proust memory surfaces suddenly in the wait (passive memory). From this, it can be seen how the invention of tools (photography first and of the cinema after) equipped the human being of techniques capable to preserve the past. These tools show how that conceptions of the flow of time and how keep memory of it advanced by Proust and Bergson need to be rethought in particular in relation to the presence of new technologies that modify the human perception and experiences of time.

Instead, Philippe Dubois (1996) in *L'Atto Fotografico*, investigates issues connected to the relation of visibility with space and time. Dubois advances the notion of *cut*, arguing that at the moment of click, an image is pulled out the *continuum* of spatial-temporal reality (Dubois, 1996:146, author's italic). Within this discourse, Dubois presents photography as a cut, a slice of space-time cut from the actual reality. These two levels signify the image as an instant part of the past. Contrary to other means of the visual



reproduction of reality, photography is a sign that ‘indicates’ (Charles Sanders Peirce would have said) that preserves a particular relation with its referent. Starting from the critical consideration of space-time advanced by Dubois (1996), it is possible to approach the modifications that gradually the ephemerality of digitality brings into the social expediencies of photography. The combination between the fluidity of time (Proust, 1913-1927; Bergson, 1911) (between past and present) and the capture of singles cuts (Dubois, 1996) helps to understand the current way to theorize digital memories.

For example, Olsson *et al* (2008) design guidelines for sharing digital life memories on mobile services. They conduct an empirical study on individuals’ need of digital representations of memories of life. Through this study, they investigate how individuals need to manage their personal photographic memories on their mobile devices. Their study reports that, with the recent growth of online sharing platforms, individuals face the management of their *life memories* (Olsson *et al*, 2008, authors’ italic). Their findings show that users’ online memories can be categorized in three classes: happy moments and life history (long term memory), and details to aid taking care of their errands (short term memory). Furthermore, their study reports three-fold motivations that push individuals to save photographic memories: personal growth and identity, strengthening social ties, and expressing/getting attention. Conclusively, it reports that online photo sharing involves images that record moments that produced emotions to the users. Through this analysis, Olsson *et al* (2008) increase the knowledge of users’ needs regarding sharing visual life memories. Through their guidelines, it is possible critically enhance the *life memory management* (Olsson *et al*, 2008, authors’ italic) including functionalities offered by particular platforms.

## 6.2 Fragmented Ephemerality of Identity and Memory Online

Early research on online self-presentation is mostly focussed on the identity construction and discourse within anonymous virtual environments (Second Life) and MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons) (Turkle, 1996; Boellstroff, 2010). The employment of photography as identity construction within social media has been widely investigated, in particular, since the arrival of Facebook (Zhao *et al*, 2008; Strano, 2008; Ellison *et al*, 2007). An interesting point made by Zhao *et al* (2008) within their analysis on identity

on Facebook, suggests three ways of identity construction. They are recognizable in the visual representation of oneself, the cultural representation of oneself identifiable in the lifestyle disclosure and, finally, the explicit description of oneself within specific sections. This study considers the first category as useful starting point to interpret the ways through which social media encourage users to employ visuality for their identity construction and disclosure. According to Ellison *et al* (2007), individuals act differently in relation to the online setting and it conduces to think the online self-presentation as a dynamic and varied instance in relation to the where it is experienced. The use of smart mobile devices extends the possibility to have ubiquitous access to social media for a constant update and disclosure of the self-identity.

Throughout all Van Dijck's work (2004; 2005; 2007; 2008; 2011; 2013), the connection between the preservation of memory and the construction of the self-identity emerges as a strong constant of interpretation of media phenomenon. The modalities in which technologies are used to locate the past and the present reshape also contemporary images of the individual and the self throughout the course of life. (Mediated) Memories, according Van Dijck (2007), play an important role in the construction of individual and collective identity, arguing that 'they are creative acts of cultural production and collection through which people make sense of their own lives and their connection to the lives of others' (Van Dijck, 2010). Van Dijck highlights new tendencies of maintaining remembrance of the past through the use of media. Following the steps of McLuhan (1964), she equally investigates media and memory.

Pioneer scholar in media theories, McLuhan (1964) interprets media as extension of the human body suggesting that the medium employed in the everyday behaviours affects human practices. Indeed, Van Dijck lays particular emphasis on the development of personal cultural memories and individuals as 'active producers and collectors of mediated memories' (Van Dijck, 2007:49). Van Dick extends McLuhan's theorizations discussing the ways in which the mediation of media changes the experience of memory. Considering that media have effects on the society and social practices, it is arguable that the shift from the use of social media from computer screens onto the almost exclusive employment of smart mobile devices affects the conception of identity and memory in a more pervasive way extending further Van Dijck's intuitions.

Jose' Van Dijck (2008) asserts that digital photography fulfils a particular position in the self-identity construction. Along the same line of Goffman (1959), Van Dijck (2013) describes how users take care of their online self-presentation handling specific styles in relation to specific audience. Van Dijck (2013) illustrates the existing differences between personal *self-expression* on social networking sites like Facebook, and professional *self-promotion* on LinkedIn. In both cases, she identifies similar principles of 'connectivity and narrative to stimulate the composite persona display' (Van Dijck, 2013:200). She proceeds arguing that 'the 'connective turn' in social media comes through a noticeable shift in the organization of platforms from *database* structures into *narrative* structure' (Van Dijck, 2013: 203). Through the analysis of Facebook as social networking site, the co-presence of *self-expression* is observed with the sharing of memories and emotions, underlining how the timeline feature, on Facebook, is organized as a narrative telling backwards users' story. Under the light of Van Dijck's intuitions, the principle of storytelling comes again into account and it is used to describe users' way to express their online self through the visual contents that they share with other users, as it has been also reported by several studies on the identity formation on Facebook (Zhao *et al*, 2008; Strano, 2008; Ellison *et al*, 2007).

Different from Facebook (self-expression), LinkedIn (self-promotion) and other social networking sites, Instagram offers the almost exclusively presence of photos for the self-identity construction and disclosure. Following Van Dijck (2013), a different typology of identity construction on Instagram is expected. Differently from Facebook users, whom are primarily looking for friendships and romantic relationships (Van Dijck, 2013), on Instagram the use of photos is more connected to users' everyday life as a combination of passions, events, hobbies, and views. Combining photography and identity construction, Instagram figures as mediation where users construct and disclose their self-identity through the employment of photo sharing, and where the entire photographic stream could be interpreted as a fluid narration of the person. The visual self-described by Ellison *et al* (2007) becomes, in this case, 'self as social actor'. Indeed, Ellison *et al* (2007) claim that identity 'is a social product, the outcome of a given social environment and hence performed differently in varying contexts. This is the reason why boyd and Heer (2006) argue that 'photo sharing, for instance, teams with persistent non-textual examples of constructing context, marking identity, and sustaining dialogue with varying levels of public visibility. In relation to identity formation, smart mobile devices and social media platforms are considered also a visual

source to capture individuals' memories. The traditional commemorative function of photography takes on social media different forms more connected to daily experiences and instantaneity of captures.

Throughout the history of photography, advances in mobile and camera technologies have had a profound impact on the way individuals view and use photos. Photography has always been employed to capture memorable moments and the propagation of smart mobile devices permit to take photographs anywhere and anytime making possible the creation of what Huang and Hsu (2006, authors' italic) define *digital personal daily memories*. This fluidity defines memories as narratives and mediated cultural traces of the present and the past. Discussing memory in relation to photography, the contribution of Sturken (2008) highlights the act of capturing images in order to preserve moments as an active practice. Keeping memory is an activity that engages with, produces, reproduces and invests meaning in memories, whether personal, cultural or collective' (Sturken, 2008:6).

Following this principle it is not difficult to interpret the online photo sharing as a visual narration. Huang and Hsu (2006) claim that 'while doing experience, sharing photos are indeed the most popular and convenient media we use today to translate daily happenings and tell life stories'. In fact, 'every photo tells a story. A collection of photos may tell a more interesting story spanning across time, location, and people' (Huang & Hsu, 2006). The active practice of keeping memories manifested clearly through individuals' daily activity of snapping and sharing photos online. This practice gives rise of what Van Dijck defines 'distributed memories' (Van Dijck, 2007:68). Individuals' everyday experiences are so distributed on the Internet increasing communicative mediated experiences.

Andrew Hoskins (2009) questions the idea of collective memory introducing the terms 'networked' and 'connective' memory (Hoskins, 2009: 96) to describe the modification that technologies and media brought into the structure of traditional memory systems (such as archives) but, also, into the formation of memory structured within digital networks and involving the connection technologies and humans. Regarding this, Hoskins (2009) suggests the notion of 'networked memory' to describe the individuals' expressions of memories within digital environments. Indeed, he talks about a 'new mediatised age of memory' (Hoskins, 2009:96). The pioneering aspect of Hoskins'

reflexions highlights the rise of a typology of memory that brings a new connection between past and present. He proposes to rethink memory in relation to the ubiquitous contemporary state of permanent connectivity. Theorizing this, Hoskins remarks Van Dijck's (2008) concept of 'cinematic hindsight' that considers the visual capture of the present for future memories, setting the temporal conjunctions as a perpetual present.

Hoskins (2009) proposes the term 'new memory' to the range of the late modern phenomena related to the context of digital temporality because of its 'continually emergent state propelled through the metaphors and media technologies of the day' (Hoskins, 2009:93). Hoskins uses the metaphor 'on-the-fly' (Hoskins, 2009:94) to describe this phenomenon as a productive type of memory that is progressively and constantly changeable. He supports the imposition of visual and aural immediacy of the contemporary mass media, the television broadcast arguing, in particular, that they conduct toward a continuous and ubiquitous state of present. Hoskins describes the Internet as a 'temporally dynamic networked archival infrastructure' (Hoskins, 2009:98), which brings into consideration a different mechanism of memory where digital objects might always be altered, changed and updated.

In addition to this, Van Dijck (2011), analysing Flickr and its functionalities, applies the notion of 'connectivity' as filter of interpretation, identifying three notions that photo sharing leads: *collective perspectives*, *experiences*, and *memory* (Van Dijck, 2011, author's italic). In particular, the third function is referred to the capacity of Flickr to work as 'collective memory' (Van Dijck, 2011:2) tool. Indeed, she conceptualizes the platform within a connective environment. Using the adjective 'connective' rather than 'collective' is a more adequate description of the notion of memory online. Considering the shift from the notion of 'collective memory' to 'connective memory', the interpretation of SM platforms brings to the surface a more dynamic view of the subject that reminds Struken's (2008) idea of activity and mobility. Indeed, connective memories give the sense of placing in connection different agencies in a cooperative work of mediated remembering.

In summary, this chapter investigates how the mediation of social media and the employment of smart phones alter individuals' practices of identity construction and disclosure in conjunction with the maintenance of memories specifically through visual

communication. It identifies categories that allow a deeper comprehension of visuality as a valid mean of identity construction and disclosure and as a memory keeper.

### 6.3 Analysis of Representation, Objectification of the Self and Visual Memories on Instagram

This section examines the ways in which Instagram's photo sharing contributes to the creation (identity) and maintenance (memory) of an online persona. Photography is, within this, considered a spontaneous tale of life that formalizes a strong tie between the visual experience of daily life and the Internet. The reason is that the concept of *life-sharing* (Mizzella, 2009) is useful to describe the interpenetration of both. In relation to identity, participants are asked to answer questions related to their conception of Instagram as a means for the self-construction and self-disclosure. They are asked to provide precise descriptions of the modes in which they share their online identity on Instagram. It also investigates participants' awareness of the latent connection between their persona and the images that they share. Through these questions, participants give their self-interpretation of how the mediation of photo sharing can be experienced in relation to the self and memory. Then, participants are asked to provide concrete examples of objects, situations, colours, shapes, and so on, in which they identify themselves.

#### 6.3.1 Visual Representation of the Self

The visual presentation of the self represents the first type of identity disclosure that users give and receive online. Indeed, uploading a photo profile is one of the first actions required when setting up a social media or social networks profile. *Participant 22* (Skype interview. December 10, 2013 h18:03) describes his point of view in this way: 'that is what it is: a way for me to tell you what I think, what I feel. It allows me to create a persona about who I am, what I am in a social network, in a virtual representation of us. It is open to whatever we want to be. In one way, I am what I want to show. I can be very restrictive about it or I can be completely open book, or I can pretend that I am an eight years old master of photography and I am a forty-three years old mid-career journalist'. In particular, the last sentence sends back to the idea of

identity construction. Through images, indeed, individuals can re-invent themselves using different modes and techniques. Regarding this, it can be mentioned the well-known adage that began as a cartoon caption by Peter Steiner published by *The New Yorker* (July 5, 1993), ‘On the Internet, nobody knows you are a dog’, and the following YouTube video.

The YouTube video shows a dog using a dating website for cats where, faking his identity and pretending to be a cat as well, approaches a cat and ask her out for a date. For the dog, the actual purpose of the date was meeting a cat and makes it his meal. In the end, unexpectedly, the date turns into a cats’ riot against the dog and taught him a lesson. Through this brief video it emerges clearly one of the distinctive characteristics of the conception of identity online. As a mediated environment, the Internet offers an array of ways to construct and disclose the self-identity. The example offered by the YouTube video displays the facility through which identity can be altered behind a computer screen. Even the simple choice to use one image (female cat) rather than another one (male dog) as profile pictures makes the difference in terms of identity disclosure and the following types of social connections that might rise. The dichotomy is considered as a critical starting point to question the visual identity construction and disclosure online.

Instagram enables users to display a nickname and a small profile picture in a circle on the top left of the personal home page. What makes Instagram different from other photo sharing platforms is the fact that it is a smart phone application and so capable to offer the physical mobility that Flickr does not have, and the virality that the connection with Facebook produces. Still from the personal home pages, it is possible to see the entire photo stream organized chronologically backwards (from the most recent photo sharing to the oldest). Instagram’s layout is very simple and the information that can be observed about users is limited to the profile picture and the stream of photos. Even if there is a communication function that allows users to write personal descriptions, the photo sharing remains the main modality of identity disclosure.

Participants, who report a total absence of self-portraits, say that they their identity can be observed through their employment of thematic styles rather that the disclosure of their faces. They say that photos can ‘disclose a lot about who you are’ (*Participant 10* (Skype interview. November 30, 2013 h 12:54), *Participant 13* (Skype interview.

December 4, 2013 h 18:24), *Participant 23* (Skype interview. December 11, 2013 h18:02), *Participant 2* (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01), for instance) even if they do not show individuals' faces. They recognise in the photo sharing on Instagram the visual expressions of themselves, where expressions involves an array of genres: themes, styles, storytelling, and particularities (new visualities). Participants' responses show that Instagram represents a significant means to express the self-identity. They consider the visual presentation of themselves a fundamental part of their persona. In despite of the selfie phenomenon (Coulthard, 2013), participants do not report that they make wide use of self-portraits to share their identity. Indeed, when they are asked to describe modes of identity disclosure they indicate, but rarely self-portraits. Participants identify again in photo sharing the presence of precise styles and themes, as it has been discussed within the chapter 2: "Photo Sharing on Instagram". A common denominator of general photo sharing is the interest in sharing imageries that can be observed with interest even by the other users. To do so, participants share images that express personal interests, particular scenarios and objects as metaphors. For example, *Participant 3* (Skype interview. November 22, 2013 h 18:56) describes it in this way: 'I usually post pictures of things I'm interested in. I remember one time I posted a picture and it was a kind of like a collage and it had a picture of a bible, my favourite band and the Boston Bruins which is a hockey team, my favourite. I love. I am very much in love with hockey say our go to Boston and I were to see something that were really nice and then in the Boston Bruins I post it because it reflects part of what I am, or normally if I post a picture it has to do with something spiritual, something to do with Jesus and I acknowledge the fact that it's related to as a part of who I am. You know, most people who go into my feed and see the things that I post in and as a result they can get the idea that I am'. In this case, *Participant 3* (Skype interview. November 22, 2013 h 18:56) makes a clear connection between the objects photographed and the fact that those objects signify part of his identity. It can be observed also that the act of photo sharing is employed as an instance of disclosure of the specific belonging.

Identity disclosure through objects is a common modality of self-presentation online. Participants recognise in photographing objects they like a disclosure of a portion of their personality. Photographing objects rather than faces is practiced as a way to show aspects of the person that goes beyond the surface of the self-images but that touches and expresses other sides of the person. *Participant 16* (Skype interview. December 6, 2013 h 18:06), for instance, recognises the representation of her personality in objects



that represent an imaginary world. She describes it in this way: ‘I like a lot Japanese dummies (laugh) [...] they are not real animal. They are totally invented. I recognise that style in everything. Imaginary objects, manufactured items. When I see an object that reminds me a realistic form but that is not real. I like a lot invented characters. Grown fond of objects as they would be real (laugh). This is my illness (laugh)’ (see fig. 58).



Figure 58. Self-presentation and imaginary objects.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: [https://instagram.com/bianca\\_gege](https://instagram.com/bianca_gege)

In addition, it can be mentioned *Participant 17*'s (Skype interview. December 8, 2013 h 16:08) conception that situations and scenarios help to construct the self-identity. He describes it in this way: ‘Intentionally or not you always create an image. You go to a coffee shop. You have an option. You can post a photo over there. It means you want people know that you are at the coffee shop. That builds you’.



Figure 59. Self-presentation and coffee breaks.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/inayali>

Moreover, sharing objects, situations, scenarios that represent the individuals go to construct the self-identity through the juxtaposition of photographs that all together form the narration of the self that reminds Bauman's (2001) idea of identity as a never-ending process whose find its concretization in the narration of individuals stories. Through the exploitation of the mobility of smart mobile devices Instagram allows an ongoing visual construction and disclosure of self-identity (at the coffee shop, for instance).

Whether considering identity in relation to the development of individuals' stories of life, it can be mentioned *Participant 29*'s (Skype interview. January 29, 2014 h16:01) response in relation to his entire photo stream: 'I think it represents me quite well. It is a kind of visual in-depth of...no my life, maybe where I have been, what I do, and what I am interested in. [...] I reflect it and it reflects me and [...] it has to be a nice photo, an interesting shot otherwise I won't post it'. In this case, the visual self-presentation is perceived more as a stream that is formed by the combination of different facets of the participant's life. Identity is interpreted through a flow of experiences and events combined together. Identity is perceived as a fluid combination of different sides translated into images. This interpretation of self-presentation reminds the storytelling style theorised by Scolari (2008) and described in chapter 4: "Political Economy of

Instagram”, where the meaning of photo sharing is perceived as a whole rather than single independent shots.

Sharing photos on Instagram expresses the desire to exhibit the self through the extension of the private sphere into the public one. Instagram figures as a hybrid in which individuals disclose and let others view personal information. This attitude is based on individuals’ intention of showing, telling and sharing personal stories (narration and storytelling) and *visions* of the world (objects, scenarios, and styles). Participants disclose themselves through a sequence of images following the typology of a photographic diary. Within this, smart mobile technologies contribute to render the identity construction an operation distributed over several layers. It includes the concept of mobility (Sheller & Urry, 2006) for different reasons: one type of mobility is experience within the platform because of the fluidity of the photo sharing in the cyberspace. It allows users to navigate across different accounts and view streams of photos. Furthermore, another type of mobility is experience through the use of smart mobile devices. Findings show that on participants share moments of life creating, including talented and creative visual diaries.

Photo sharing on Instagram figures as a practice of putting in common personal ideas, visions, and experiences in order to create the story of the person. Regarding this, it can be mentioned *Participant 4*’s (Skype interview. November 24, 2013 h 16:08) response: ‘I use storytelling in terms of ok I share a brief things I’ve seen in my life passing, my camera, my mobile phone and telling a story about myself or just about the situation [...] There are pictures where I post a picture and I write really a story about how I am feeling like, I don’t know, maybe I lost keys, for instance and I write a long comment about how I experience it. [...] Yes, the visual story of images. I try to connect with what I am writing and I need a picture’ (see fig. 60).

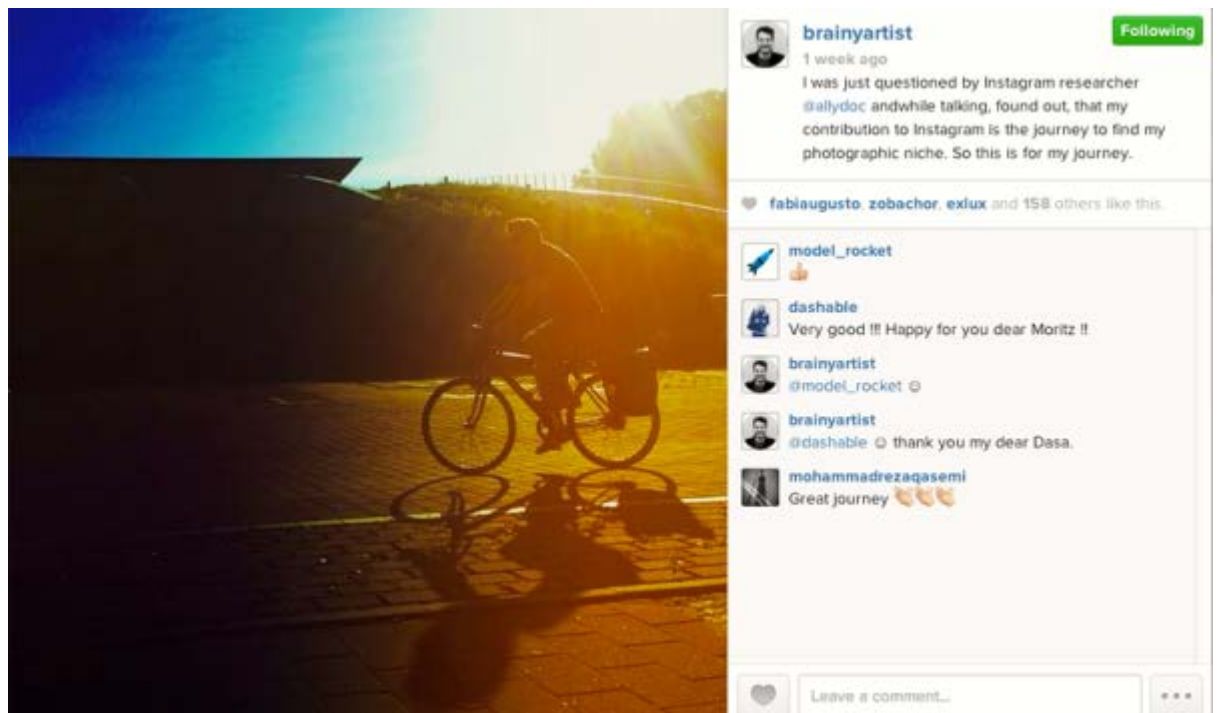


Figure 60. The story of the self.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/brainyartist>

From this response the emotional aspect emerges as important element of the connection between the individual and the photographed scenario, identity is not recognised in a specific object, rather in the emotions that a particular circumstance produces. Images are uploaded on Instagram because the emotions that the scenes captured are recognized as part of individuals' identity self- construction and disclosure.

### 6.3.2 Selfies and the Other Self

Another significant phenomenon that relates together photography and identity is the wide spread sharing of selfies. The term has become part of the Oxford dictionary in 2013 and it describes 'a photographs that one has taken of oneself, typically one with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media'. The developments of this modality of expressing oneself through self-portraits create an out-and-out trend widely practised among the general public. In despite of the dominance of this practice, all participants do not report a habitual production of selfies. Participants' stream also confirms the limited sharing of selfies. Three quarter of them, however, says that whether they share a selfie on Instagram it is never a mere self-portrait; rather it is connected to the scenario

and the meaning that they give to it. In this case, the scenario is the protagonist of the photograph and individuals' 'being there' is reported to testify their actual presence in the scene that establishes the connection between individual-ambient. The self-presentation meant as self-portrait does not figure as an important element to disclose the self-identity, rather it can be argued that is related more to the need to take memories of the self-presence to a precise event or place.



Figure 61. Self-presentation and "being there".

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/giuliotoli>

Only two participants report that during their initial use of Instagram they were using this application almost exclusively to share selfies. One, *Participant 10* (Skype interview. November 30, 2013 h 12:54), admits that her production of selfies was related to fashion and the photo sharing of particular outfits, hairs styles, makeups and so on. She was using the platform to display her passion for these specific areas and the act of sharing photos was related to the personal intent of showing her personality. She says that everybody flicking through her stream can see that she is into fashion and that she is stylish (see fig. 62).



Figure 62. Self-presentation and the daily outfit.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: [https://instagram.com/pat\\_\\_](https://instagram.com/pat__)

Additionally, *Participant 7* (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 12:39) describes his initial sharing of selfies in this way: ‘I did not understand what use makes out of Instagram. [...] And the majority of those [photos] were of myself maybe because I was the only predominant subject in all situations. It was becoming a little bit egocentric and I did not like it at all. [...] It was connected to Twitter, instead of writing, I do not know, “Tonight I am going to eat pizza!” I was posting the photo of me eating pizza. It was more something like that, than a promotion of myself’. From this response, it emerges the word “egocentrism”, which is an adjective that participants mention repeatedly about selfies. From *Participant 10*’s (Skype interview. November 30, 2013 h 12:54) response it emerges the use of photo sharing as a technique to present the self through the connection with brands and showing thus a persona related to a precise status symbol. *Participant 7* (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 12:39), instead, connects the presentation of the self with the presentation of his self-story. This emerges clearly by the sentence “tonight I am going to eat pizza!”. The principle of storytelling, in this case, is connected to the *visual-self narration* or *visual-self diary*. The self is here presented through situations and events. And the disclosure of the individual surfaces from the juxtaposition of the person onto the scenario through the connection between individual-ambient afforded by the mobility of smart phones.

The negative connotation that participants give to selfies' photo sharing comes from the belief that Instagram's users are generally interested in high quality images and not interested in seeing someone else face/body posing or doing activities typical of ordinary social networking sites (a part from celebrities). Regarding this, indeed, *Participant 19* (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h16:50) says that 'if you are a celebrity you can even show that you are on the toilet bowl and it is super ok!' because users follow celebrities precisely to spy what they do during their (un)ordinary lives reminding the 'Big Brother spirit' (See chapter 5: "Privacy and Surveillance on Instagram"). However, participants report a robust lack of interest toward the no-thought photo sharing of self-portraits. This discourse goes back to the precise guidelines listed in chapter 2: "Photo Sharing on Instagram" that participants follow. This is the reason why a literate use of the platform reports that whether participants share their self-image it is more connected to other factors and meanings that the mere image of the person (that signifies the person).

The strong disagreement toward the upload of selfies emerges also from the fact that Instagram does not have a proper list of friends. Indeed, it is more considered a public space. The platform is thought similar to a public square where individuals sharing their art works, receive 'likes', recognition and positive comments (as discussed in chapter 2: "Photo Sharing on Instagram"). Unlikely, participants report that users are not willing to give 'likes' to selfies posted by strangers. Indeed, they say: 'If I want to see people's faces, I will go on Facebook!'. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that on Instagram there are not self-portraits or that they are not totally appreciated. It can be argued instead that, considering the general interest in 'beautiful photos', the sharing of self-portraits, in order to be appreciated, needs to find an eye catching contextualization and follow the guidelines explained in chapter 4: "Political Economy of Instagram". In fact, whether following the guidelines discussed before, self-portraits are not considered inappropriate.

For instance, *Participant 7* (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 12:39) describes his evolution of selfies' sharing passing from mere photos of his persona to putting himself into, what he defines moments. He describes this development in this way: 'even now I post photos of myself but when I post photos of myself they are always connected with the ambient and the situation that I am living. I mean, it's not "I am eating pizza", "I'm going to have shower", "I'm going to the seaside", etc etc anymore. It's never a photo

taken by myself to myself. It's never a selfie. So, it's a moment that someone else captures for me and allows me to share with others. Indeed, I try to focus the attention not on the character 'me, *Participant 7*' (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 12:39), rather on the circumstance that I am living and where I am. [...] More than telling why my presence matters in that moment, I want to tell the moment in general' (see fig. 63). From this response it emerges clearly the concept of 'episodic identities' theorised by Bagnara (2009), in which the individuals embody the situation photographed and shared. The story of his persona rises from the episodes of life that he shares and, as he stresses repeatedly, the stories he tells.



Figure 63. Episodic identities. Sharing the moment.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/giuliotolli>

### 6.3.3 Branding Identities

Users' embodiment of brands' names and labels is another significant aspect that shows how businesses' presence on the platform results pervasive and influent also for individuals' identity. It is witnessed a massive use of Instagram for marketing purposes. Several participants report that they have been approached by businesses to conduct photographic promotional campaigns and photo contest. As it has been discussed within



the chapter 4: “Political Economy and Social Media Marketing on Instagram”, social media marketing must follow precise communicative strategies in order to be effective. Consequently, users involved in online promotional campaigns need to deal with those strategies. Participants say that they have not been asked to change their photographic style, rather to proceed in the same way but showing brands. There can be seen some example from the photo sharing of *Participant 19* (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h 16:50) (see fig. 64), *Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58), *Participant 16* (Skype interview. December 6, 2013 h 18:06) and *Participant 21* (Skype interview. December 10, 2013 h 16:09). Their experiences report that co-operations with brands are significant in their visual identity construction and disclosure. It needs to be highlighted that brands approach the so called ‘Instagram celebrities’ in order to have high impact online. They are defined as popular users and influencers (see chapter 4: “Political Economy and Social Media Marketing on Instagram”).



Figure 64. “Pan di Stelle” photo campaign and branding identity.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/giariv>

‘Instagram celebrities’, or well known as ‘InstaStar’ are users with a relevant high number of followers. There is not an official univocal role that declares a celebrity on the platform. As it is discussed previously (see chapter 4: “Political Economy of Instagram”), these users own a recognisable photographic style that is crucial for the growth of the number of followers. In order to do not betray their Instagram audience,

they need to abide by the style that made them popular. The combination of the presence of a precise style plus brands' approach solidifies the photographic style used. Once users define their personal photographic style it is difficult to find in their stream images that deviate visibly from it (see fig. 65 and fig. 66).



Figure 65. Instagram stream and photographic style.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/ido8all>



Figure 66. Instagram stream and photographic style 2.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/giariv>

*Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) describes it in this way: ‘when you build a community you are getting the news to something. You are selling them something. So, they expect something, to see something. [...] We are not following you. We are following you because you sell a story through pictures [...].

*Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) is one of the most famous ‘Instastar’ and his experience shows visibly the combination of photography and storytelling. At the time of the interview, his Instagram account counted 145,256 followers. He strongly states that his success on Instagram comes from his ability to sharing photos following a personal style. Because of his popularity on Instagram, he has been approached by brands and businesses to work on photographic campaigns sharing on his personal Instagram account images showing products and labels. Even though brands did not ask him to modify his photography, he says that his photo sharing now is different compared to the past. Indeed, as soon as he becomes an influencer on the platform, his photography has been altered.

For example, *Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) reports that the element of storytelling produces visible modifications to users’ general photo sharing by limiting their sharing to the narration of specific events: ‘now I know that only on the of December I will post a picture of me, because this is a personal date. This is my personal way to tell the story’. Identity construction and disclosure, in this case, does not appear natural, rather it respects and follows marketing strategies putting the user in the position of clinging to the customised style. This phenomenon can be compared to Goffman’s interpretation of *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) where individuals need to share their behaviours in relation to the different circumstances like they are performing a theatrical play. Indeed, he talks about audience. As can be seen, the cooperation with brands results misleading and limitative. Co-operations with brands constrict users within a precise attitude that are experienced as limitation for self-expression. Indeed, he reports lack of “sharing without thinking”.

*Participant 14* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58): ‘for example, she (Hira) opened an account called “Private Hook”. You cannot find this account because it’s private, and she kept it private. On the video of the profile she calls it “Instagram as it used to be before”, because before we used to share a lot of selfies and we used to share lots of stupid pictures. We didn’t really, really, really care about the perspective of the

picture, if it was telling a story, or if you really share it' [...] I do miss sometime to post anything that I want. To share 5 pictures a day, not 2 pictures a day. I miss it. I really wanna post pictures now of my messy house. [...] Now when I post a picture on Instagram I need to think: "What is my goal?", "What am I targeting?", "What do I want to achieve?". This response confirms Goffman's (1959) principles of self-presentation that again can be advanced and combined together with Turkle's description of MUDs (1999) and online role-play games, in which users can play many selves and where MUDs blur the boundaries between the self and the role. Whether applying Turkle's theorization of the 'multiplicity and flexibility' (1999:643) of the identity online, it is arguable that the creation of photographic styles represent the visual exhibition of users. Also, for instance, they support the necessity that *Participant 14's* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58) friend feels in creating a private account where sharing other sides of herself. It can be argued that the careful organisation of the construction of the self affects the type of memories that progressively from the personal identity.

The mobility afforded by the use of smart mobile devices produces an increased capture of individuals' experiences and places conducting toward the dynamic identification of individuals with ambient and episodes of life. With reference to the mobility of smart mobile devices, it can be mentioned *Participant 22's* (Skype interview. December 10, 2013 h18:03) considerations. He thinks: 'photography often forces you outside of your shell. You cannot stay in your office, your house and take pictures. You need to get out and move and look at the world'. It can be said that smart mobile devices accompany individuals in their exploration of the world and in their research of new visual opportunities. Smart mobile devices are considered technologies that help individuals to identify and share images within the flow of time the events and objects that better can embody their visual identity.

#### **6.3.4 Networked Memory and Instagram as Online Photo Archive**

The documentary intent of photography has a long history, but within digitality the conception of memory appears visibly altered. This analysis investigates how Instagram modifies the traditional combination photography and memory. It interrogates the contemporary use of the platform to capture and maintain visual memories. Whether

before the arrival of digital technologies, photographs were generally stored in photo albums or within shoe boxes, nowadays-visual memories are located mainly within digital archives (Van Dijck, 2007) and shared online. *Participant 22* (Skype interview, December 10, 2013 18:03) describes the passage toward digitality in this way: 'I think this is the foundation of photography. For me this it is always been so. Instagram is only amplifying that, which one of the reasons why I photograph is to solidify memory, to remember things in this world'. Participants perceive the solidification of memory through the mediation of social media as a natural continuation of the human literacy and adaptation to technologies previously argued by McLuhan's (1964). The majority of participants, indeed, disclose a positive consideration of digital photography as 'memories keeper' and they describe the attachment to images that they share online with empathy. In this case, photo sharing online is seen as the intention of giving an additional importance of validation to the subject portrayed. Since the partnership with Facebook, Kevin Systrom Instagram CEO draws Instagram as a photo sharing application that allows users to share creative artwork, get connected and keep their memories using the present tense, rather than the past tense. Essentially, he claims that photography and photo sharing can nowadays keep social contacts through their visual memories (see chapter 3: "Social Relationships on Instagram").

Participants are asked to evaluate Instagram as helpful means to maintain memories and a potential online visual memories archive. Expanding Van Dijck's (2007) work on mediated memories, they are asked to comment Instagram as digital archive. They are also asked to compare the modalities in which they use the platform compare to other storage systems, such as computer folders, external hardware, memory sticks, so on and so forth. In this case, the relation between photography and memory is investigated considering the habitual interest in taking photographs in order to keep visual memories. The ephemeral nature of the Internet is considered to comprehend whether the mediation of Instagram causes alterations in the traditional practice of keeping visual memories.

Instagram by nature is structured to function as instant photo sharing mobile application. However, it has feeds that simplify and support the fruition of visual memories. Instagram presents a simple interface and organization of photo sharing. As can be seen from the 'home page', when users upload images, the latter are going to be part of a publicly available stream of photos. They appear within the 'home page' as a

flux of images that follow the chronological order of their upload appearing as dense sequences of images. In addition, Instagram has hashtags and geo-tags as a customised modality of photographs organization. As it has been discussed within chapter 2: “Photo Sharing on Instagram”, these feeds are useful ways to group photographs under specific names (hashtags) or specific locations (geo-tags). These two feeds are considered important apparatus to group public and personal images. They also facilitate users in the research of specific contents (personal memories).

Instagram does not allow users to save photographs within separate and thematic folders and this can be perceived as confusing archiving system. Popular hashtags and geo-tags, such as #newyork, #party, and #friends might group thousands of images that complicate a more specific research. Whether users intend to find an image, they need to search, through the specific tool ‘find’, for a specific hashtag or specific location and then they have access to a restricted group of photographs. The considerable number of photos and the publicity of the platform, customized hashtags can be used to cluster personal memories. As open cyberspace, hashtags and geo-tags are used by all Instagram users. It means that potentially everybody has access to everybody’s photographs and that under hashtags and geo-tags there are photos collected by all users. This open access (that follows Google functioning system) shows to the users the overwhelming amount of images that includes personal and collective memories.

In relation to the cluster of personal memory, *Participant 2* (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) describes the use of hashtags and geo-tags’ strategy of storing bringing a clear example: ‘it’s pointless putting a tag #barcelona2012. Why? Because, probably, someone else is going to use a tag like that as well. And so, there would not be there only my photos. If I use a very personal one, it is not going to be used by anyone else ever, and there I will find only mines’. From this response, it can be seen how the hashtag apparatus is an efficient way of archiving that allows users to employ the cyberspace to collect high number of images in a customised categorizations. *Participant 2* (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) continues describing the practicality of the hashtags apparatus in this way: ‘we created a tag on purpose in order to find all photos 50-60-100 photos that we shared when we were in Barcelona in couples. They are collected under a unique tag. That one becomes a memory book’. Indeed, *Participant 2* (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) stresses on the point that Instagram gives him the possibility to keep and share virtually

photos with friends under a customized use of hashtags as sharing memories (Churchill, 2002). *Participant 2* (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) tells the story of his holiday in Barcelona with his girlfriend and another couple. All of them own a smart phone and use the Instagram application during their staying in Spain. At the end of the trip, they decide to collect all their best photos under the same hashtag having so the possibility to access the photos individually after their return. From his story Instagram figures as a digital networked memory book shared with peers reminding the concepts of ‘networked’ and ‘connective’ memory advanced by Hoskins (2009).

A less personalized use of hashtags give a wider and collective access to photos that can be part of the collective memories. As discussed within chapter 2: “Photo Sharing on Instagram”, the memory of users are interested in viewing ‘shareable’ images. So, arguably general users would not be interested in viewing *Participant 2*’s (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01) holiday’s photos of Barcelona, rather they would be keen on images of general interest. Regarding this, it can be mentioned *Participant 19* (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h 16:50). The Italian ‘Brigata Ariete’ (Aries Brigade) contacted *Participant 19* (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h 16:50) to do a “media tour embedded”, pre-established and arranged with other photojournalists. He went to Lebanon between June and July 2012 to document the Italian Army’s experience and share on Instagram the first Italian InstaReportage. According to *Participant 19* (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h 16:50), the purpose of that request was telling the story and the experience lived in Lebanon through the eyes of an amateur photographer. In this episode the employment of Instagram shows the progressive interest in considering the mediation of the platform as a potential means of communication and, as second instance, a system that allows users to have access to the sharing. *Participant 19* (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h 16:50) decided to use an easy recognizable hashtag #lebanonmediatour to collect all the photos he took in Lebanon. In this way, those photos are easy accessible as an online collective memory book that documents that, shows the story of an experience currently shareable.

The connection between hashtags and visual collective memories is displayed in this case by the potential future access to the virtual memory book. *Participant 19* (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h 16:50) describes it bringing as example a photo posted recently saying: ‘I shared this one one year later. That one was memories from “Lebanon Media Tour” but I put the tag (#lebanonmediatour). So, putting the tag. You

click the tag and you see all photos of the “Lebanon Media Tour”. [...] I did it one year later to commemorate the “Lebanon Media Tour”. I put a precise tag so you can go back and see all the photographs of the “Lebanon Media Tour” (see fig. 67).



Figure 67. Memories from #Naffakhya and #LebanonMediaTour.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/giariv>

As can be seen, *Participant 19* plays with the use of hashtags and the principle of connectivity (Hostkins, 2009; Van Dijck, 2013) creating a multilayers digital networked collective memory book.

### 6.3.5 Memories of Emotions and Journeys: Instagram as Mobile Memories Tool

Emotional involvement with events, scenarios and objects is what foster participants to share visual memories on Instagram. They recognize, indeed, those images as concrete part of their lives and, consequently, worth to be saved. *Participant 7* (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 12:39) depicts his connection with the platform in this way: ‘I write it in my biography, it is the photo story of my life. So, it’s exactly a photographic archive of my life’. From this response, it emerge a precise consideration of the platform as a means to maintain memories as Van Dijck (2008) claims. The strategy of (trans) media storytelling (Scolari, 2009) is combined with the capacity of the media to



maintain and share visual stories. The empathy with the photo sharing is given precisely from the use of the platform as a daily memories keeper. The act of photo sharing is perceived as a supplementary capture. Thus, the actions of photo sharing and memories maintenance overlap into the concept of ‘networked memory’ that Hoskins (2009) illustrates.

For example, *Participant 7* (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 12:39) strongly states his emotional engagement with the Instagram photo sharing defining precisely the differences between photographs taken with a photo camera and those ones taken with a smart phone. He illustrates the differences in this way: ‘regarding the memories, I like more going to have a look at Instagram because there are situation and situation connected with the emotion. Whereas, the folders that I have on my computer are more a photographic tales rather than emotional tales, memories. That is more a photographic narration of an event I’ve been part of. But regarding exactly memories and emotions I am much more linked to Instagram’. The emotional affection described by *Participant 7* (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 12:39) is reported also by the majority of participants. It is widely shared, indeed, that sharing photos on Instagram gives validation to the scene portrayed. Participants, indeed, sharing photos to keep memory of scenes portrait the notion of mediated memories theorized by Van Dijck (2007), where experiences of the past appear through the ubiquitous mediation of the platform.

The act of photo sharing seems to determine the significance of the moment that was captured testifying so the importance of ‘making a mental note’ of it instantaneously. For instance, *Participant 8* (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 14:02) draws the emotional attachment toward his photo sharing in this way: ‘the photos I post on Instagram are those ones I want to share more. Those one through which I want to express more the emotion of the moment’. Through his definition of a photograph as ‘emotion of the moment’, it can be argued that he refers to what Deleuze (2005), following Bergson’s theorizations (1911), defines ‘affection image’, which can be expressed through faces but also through spaces using colours, lights and so on. Indeed, *Participant 8*’s (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 14:02) sharing is formed mainly by landscapes, architectures and food. Even without sharing convivial moments or portraits, he states an emotional involvement with his photos. So, shared photographs acquire importance for the moments that they remember rather than only for the subject.

Photo sharing gives validation to the moment also for the production of 'future memories' (Van Dijck, 2008). As Van Dijck (2008) argues, individuals capture moments of life in order to have memory of those specific moments in the future. This is a kind of behaviour that happens in the present but is projected toward the future. In relation to this, the majority of participants declare that the range of photographs that they decide to share on Instagram hold emotions that they intend keeping for long. For instance, *Participant 27's* (Skype interview. January 10, 2014 h10:15) example describes it in this way: 'it is a sort of capturing and stopping the time in that moment, in that memory, and there I remember what I was doing, who I was with. A sort of digital romanticism'. As can be seen, in particular from the use of the term 'romanticism', it emerges the intention to emphasise inspiration, subjectivity and the privacy of the individual. Also, mediated visualities are used as a means to show a scene and visually freeze emotions that cannot be communicate verbally adding so other layers of communications and interpretations. Instagram users often use editing applications and filters as a way to let emotions surface from images. Regarding this, it can be mentioned again *Participant 19's* (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h 16:50) experience in Norway. During a cruise, he describes the visual experience and his intention to portrait a scenario trying to include into the photographic frame also ephemeral instances, the emotions that the photographer was feeling in the moment of the shot.

Only three (*Participant 6* (Skype interview. November 22, 2013 h 12:48), *Participant 11* (Skype Interview. December 1, 2013 h 23:00), and *Participant 28* (Skype interview. January 14, 2014 h09:03) ) out of twenty-nine participants state that there is no connection between photo sharing, emotions and visual memories. This assertion emerges from the fact that these participants share mainly images that (they state) do not have any involvement with their personal life. Consequently, they do not show any interest in keeping memory of them for the future. *Participant 6* (Skype interview. November 22, 2013 h 12:48) and *Participant 28* (Skype interview. January 14, 2014 h09:03), for example, identify urban photography as their personal style. Urban photography is a popular style that documents modern life attempting to capture the everyday life that generally includes city skylines, metropolis, architectures, and people (see fig. 68, fig. 69 and fig. 70).

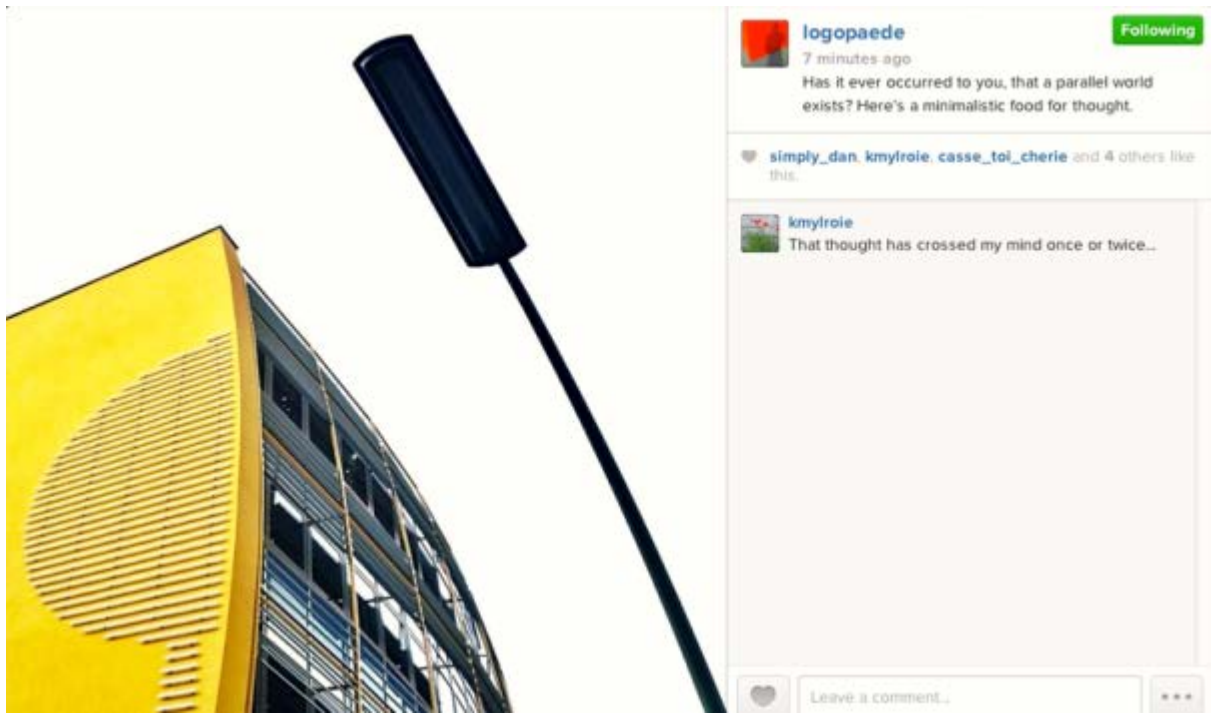


Figure 68. Urban Architectures.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/logopaede>



Figure 69. Music Concert.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: [https://instagram.com/ara\\_foto](https://instagram.com/ara_foto)



Figure 70. Urban Cityscape.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/uwa2000>

Instead, *Participant 11* (Skype Interview. December 1, 2013 h 23:00) identifies himself as press photographer. Press photography is synonym with photojournalism that describes that typology of photography that tells a news story though photographs. The term “press” refers to the printing press. *Participant 11* (Skype Interview. December 1, 2013 h 23:00) works for a magazine and he does not display any emotional engagement with his photographic production. In both cases, participants declare that the lack of emotional engagement with the scenes portrays determine the disinterest in keeping their memory for the future.

Historically, one of the main applications of photography has been documenting unknown, hidden, or difficult-to-access places in order to share visualities with who was not able to travel and see the world and the other. Even now, in combination to the desire of knowledge, photography is used to maintain memories of what is about to disappear, such as natural and cultural heritages. Both these motivations are strongly connected with theme of travel and mobility. Indeed, sharing photographs comes with the interest in testifying the experience of travelling and keeping memories of it; the mobility afforded by smart mobile devices facilitates the documentation of journeys and gives individuals the possibility to photographing new scenarios ‘on the move’. This

section illustrates how the element of mobility determines the capture of new visualities that individuals are willing to preserve.

The majority of participants mention the conjunction between photography and memory in relation to travels. The theme of journey is not new; indeed, it has a constant presence within the entire history of photography. Whether at the beginning photography was experienced within ateliers, with technological developments and the arrival of smart mobile devices the link between photography and travels find its completion.

Participants, indeed, confirm the intention to document and keep memories of their explorations. Travellers and commuters describe common behaviours and visual themes in photographing the surroundings. In addition to images of the new or the others, there is the theme of *wait*. During their travels, participants usually photograph new and particular scenarios in relation to the place that they are visiting producing touristic images (Sheungting *et al*, 2011). In addition, fostered by the efficacy of smart mobile devices, participants report that waiting periods related to public transportation systems foster the production of photographs. Consequently, this behaviour produces a range of images that are not part of the traditional traveller's journal, such as the series of photos at train stations shared by *Participant 27* (Skype interview. January 10, 2014 h10:15) using the hashtag #DietroLaLineaGialla ('behind the yellow line', my translation) as can be seen in fig 71.



Figure 71. #dietrolalineagialla. Behind the Yellow Line.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/mimicimme>

Participants perceive the theme of the travel as experiences that need to be remembered. The employment of Instagram shows that the intent of keeping memories of places is connected to the intent of sharing the experience. *Participant 24* (Skype interview. December 12, 2013 h17:29), for instance, describes it in this way: ‘photographic images boost the memory. Instagram and memory is a good combination especially for travellers. Nowadays, no one prints photos anymore and if we don’t share photos immediately, they will remain within our hard disc and no one will ever see them again. Instagram became our memory box’. Following the same line, it can be mentioned *Participant 29*’s (Skype interview. January 29, 2014 h16:01) response: ‘I have a kind of record. [...] I am using it (Instagram) more than anything else to keep track on what I am doing. I basically only use that’ (see fig. 72). The existing connection among travel, memory and photo sharing does not appear altered compared to the past. However, what can be identified is the diversification of images produced. Participants share a relevant number of images related to the *wait*, as can be seen from their photo sharing.



Figure 72. A day in IKEA. Instagram and the everyday record of life.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/andrewdearling>

The newness in this discourse is recognised in the fact that participants consider Instagram the new cyber memory box of their travels, where sharing photos becomes synonym of keeping memories. This consideration sends back to the concept of

‘connective memories’ mentioned by Hoskins (2009), where users share their visual memories and observe someone else memories. The emotion of ‘connective memories’ on Instagram acquires a double connotation. Visual memories can be interpreted as connective elements among individuals or can be connective between the individuals and their own memories. Following *Participant 24* (Skype interview. December 12, 2013 h17:29) considerations, it seems that sharing photographs online ‘keeps memories alive’. They can be considered starting point for mediated social interactions, such as comments and ‘likes’ and also they can constantly be accessed. Regarding this, it can be mentioned *Participant 27* (Skype interview. January 10, 2014 h10:15) use of the platform: ‘sometimes, when I share photos, I am a bit naïve. I don’t think about my followers. That is a part of me. It is like a memory box. I know that it is visible to many people, but I feel I want to do it and I do it’. The conception of Instagram as visual memory box concretizes the theorizations advanced by Van Dijck (2007; 2008) that see memories, within the digital age, becoming increasingly temporary and ephemeral means of communication.

However, participants still strongly think Instagram as a photo sharing platform where uploading high quality images. This choice consequently affects the sharing of memories. Combining together this consideration with the further conception of Instagram as a cyber-memory box, it emerges the fact that only a selected amount of photographic memories are actually uploaded. The careful photo sharing that participants operate conduct toward the upload of what the majority of defines ‘best memories’. Consequently, photos on Instagram are ‘selected memories’. Regarding this, *Participant 27* (Skype interview. January 10, 2014 h10:15), who travels a lot for work and for pleasure, says that on Instagram each photo ‘is a single moment. They remind you a trip with one or few photographs no 200 like we are used to. In few photos. Now I have 1800 photos and I remember 1800 different moments. [...] It is an archive well finished and more meditated’. The selection that participants operate seems facing the high number of images that digital devices produce and store leading to contain memories of travels in few high quality images and so easy to be remembered.

Instagram has several feeds that allow users to tag photographs geographically, thanks to the GPS, and gather them on a world map (Photo Map) that showcases the places visited. This service is considered part of the way participants organize their visual memories. The most frequent explanation of the use of geo-tags has been: ‘So, I will

remember where I have been'. In combination with the use of hashtags, geo-tags represent a supplementary useful way to structure visual memories by locations. As discussed within chapter 3: Social Relationships on Instagram", the uses of hashtags and geo-tags help to categorise and find easily contents of interests. The geo-tag, in fact, works only if the GPS signal is on, and it means that faked location cannot be tagged. The geotag must be set in loco. Sharing images on Photo Map gives the precise documentation of places and locations that users have seen. For instance, *Participant 11* (Skype Interview. December 1, 2013 h 23:00) uses geotag considerably. He describes the combined use the two means in this way: 'If I got a new spot or something and I know I am going to go there in the morning or something, I take my camera with me and take pictures that you will view on my blog. When I am on the spot I also take picture with my phone just to show where I am and what I am doing right now. [...] Just documenting what I am doing'. It emerges the interest in documenting and keeping a visual record of places.

In addition, participants consider Photo Map a helpful means for remembering by location. *Participant 13* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 18:24), for example, commutes every day to go to the University from Pisa to Milan. She admits that, since travelling has become part of her daily life, she photographs much more compared to the past. Visiting different places pushes her to take more photos capturing more views. Her hometown does not give her stimulus to take many photographs. Indeed, 'except if Tower of Pisa falls down', in her opinion there is not much to capture there. On the contrary, she finds travelling a good incentive to keep record of different scenarios. She describes the connection between the use of Photo Map and her visual memories in this way: 'the map is something that works a lot. I click on "Map" and I see that in Milan I took 190 photos. Let me see which ones and, Bam! I remember that last year or two years ago I went to that place'. Even if *Participant 13* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 18:24) gives a positive opinion, the activation of memory, does not recall the Proustian's madeleine dipped in tea, which refers to 'involuntary memory' as a container of the essence of the past. However, Photo Map is widely used as a 'voluntary memory' activator where images remind the memory of the past via clusters of photos organized by location.

Following the techniques used by the participants to cluster and categorise their photographic memories (hashtags and geo-tags), Instagram becomes a type of digital



visual memories archive. This reflection surfaces considering that participants' use of smart mobile devices take the place of all the other digital devices because of its portability, mobility and connectivity. The concept of media convergence (Jenkins, 2006), in this case, produces a mediated space within which visual contents are shared and stored. Within this discourse, even if all participants agree with the use of Instagram to maintain visual memories, its consideration as an online archive does not provide the same responses. Given that, the conception of using Instagram as an online archive divides the participants in positive and negative responses. On the one hand, positive conceptions come with the selection of visual memories; meanwhile, on the other hand, negative responses come with the anxiety of losing memories because of the ephemerality of the Internet.

Positive considerations emerge from participants' interest in posting their best memories. Therefore, Instagram figures as online archive of users' selected best memories. Regarding this, it can be mentioned *Participant 16's* (Skype interview. December 6, 2013 h 18:06) response. She considers herself a social media addicted (mainly because of her educational background). She describes her technique to archive photographs in this way: 'Instagram is enough for me for all the photos I take. Instagram is my unique archive. All the photos I don't post do not represent myself. So, I am not interested in saving them. I am not interested in the quantity, three hundreds photos of a travel? I would rather choose those ones that represent more the travel. So, they are all on Instagram'. From this response it emerges again the concept of selected memories and the relation between memories and travels. This combination reminds to the theme of the journal of the traveller and the technique of visual storytelling described in chapter 4: "Political Economy and Social Media Marketing on Instagram".

The intention of keeping memories of travels goes to be part of individuals' personal visual diary. For example, *Participant 13* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 18:24) describes her spontaneous archiving in this way: 'it happened to me once to photograph a shoe, horrible shoe, because I was in London with my camera phone. There was this shoe that I like a lot and I put it on Instagram spontaneously because I really would remember it forever. Considering that the roll in my iPhone was full [...] I didn't think at that moment: I shot it and I posted it'. The conception of Instagram as cyber memory saver, *Participant 13's* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 18:24) story shows a spontaneous reliance on the Internet and the mediation of social media platforms to

preserve places and objects. In this case, Instagram represents the container of visual memories precisely in the modality that Van Dijck (2008) uses to describe individuals use of digital technologies for future memories. Whether the majority of participants consider Instagram as a useful archive for personal memories, there are few that report its limitations. Some responses bring into account the lack of family photography. Indeed, the majority of participants do not mention family images in their photo sharing.

Considering the general lack of family photography, Instagram can be interpreted as a limited archive because of the selection that users make in sharing photos. Whether many participants consider the selectivity a positive practice to restrict the sharing to few and high quality memories, for others this restriction has a negative connotation. For *Participant 15* (Skype interview. December 5, 2013 h 14:44), for instance, the selectivity forces to keep intimate and personal images (such as family photographs) away from the platform. Consequently, part of her memories is missed out and Instagram cannot be considered a complete archive. The fast and distract perception of mobile means of communication locates the notion of photography in a position of rupture compare to the analogical fruition of visual memories. The photo sharing on Instagram relocates photographs within the mediation and ephemerality of the Internet.

### **6.3.6 Instagram for Connective Memories**

Participants recognize Instagram photo sharing as a concentration of collective memories. This reflection, in fact, does not consider the platform as a repository for private personal memories. *Participant 15* (Skype interview. December 5, 2013 h 14:44) describes her point of view bringing into account her affections: ‘it is an archive, but there are not personal photographs of me or my family. So, it is not an archive that way. But also socially and world-wide if you want to look at some photos or happenings or maybe a catastrophe or something, you can use the hashtag that brings to that photo. So, in that way it’s an archive if I want to look at what happened in New York or Seattle’. Similarly, *Participant 4* (Skype interview. November 24, 2013 h 16:08) responds in this way: ‘for an intellectual point of view yes, sure it is. I mean, there are so many images, so many stories of people and I think it’s going to be interesting. I mean a 100 years from now to see what a 2011 was really like’. In particular,

*Participant 4* (Skype interview. November 24, 2013 h 16:08) emphasises on the visual heritages that Instagram gathers.

Regarding this it can be mentioned the project ‘Law and Disorder: A People’s History Of The Law In Pakistan’ carried on by the journalist Asim Rafiqui. This project aims to experiment forms of narratives on Instagram under the name of @pakistanjusticeproject. Instagram collects no facts, but the photographs part of the personal diary of the journalist. Instagram is his personal daily speak and, as Asim emphasise, it is not phot journalism. Rafiqui’s main idea is that users, from his photo sharing can go to the official website of the project to achieve more information about the photos they see on the main stream. The @pakistanjusticeproject Instagram account collects portraits of Pakistanis people. Each photo has a brief description in the caption that, according Rafiqui, should arouse users’ curiosity toward the official web site. Similar to the technique of selective memory followed by the participants Rafiqui equally aims to develop a selection of images and stories. ‘I am trying to give them a consistent bite-sized consciousness experience. So, instead on 100 of 100 different things of 100 days. I am giving them a 100 photographs around the theme issue in 100 days and so every photograph is just, take a bite-sized one day, but they will kind of constantly be thinking, or at least at that time: “Oh, Yeah! I remember this photograph!” is the same guy who is working on in justice issue in Pakistan’ (see fig. 73).



Figure 73. #pakistanjusticeproject and collective memories.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/pakistanjusticeproject>

Nevertheless, *Participant 4* (Skype interview. November 24, 2013 h 16:08) was talking about events to remember, in Rafiqui's contrasting opinion is that 'memory is not about remembering, memory is also very much about forgetting. Memory as we describe, memory as human function is also about imagination. Our best memories are not perfect, so your happiest moment is not a literal read out of the moment or documentation of the moment. It's an emotional imaginary remembrance of certain feelings, a certain sensation, a certain touch of intangible things'. Conclusively, Rafiqui comments the use of the platform in this way: 'I think what we do in Instagram is not memory, I think is more recording of some data point facts'. Even if in the @pakistanjusticeproject there are stories of people and their families they are not related to the journalist Rafiqui. Instead, his goal is using the platform as a mean for storytelling and documentation that, as he said, are not collected to his vision of memory that involves feelings and emotions.

However, according to participants' responses and their photo sharing, it can be observed a positive conception of Instagram as a mediated photo sharing platform for maintaining visual memories. There were identified specific categories of images that participants are interested in: travels and images that hold specific emotions that participant intend to remember. The mobility of smart mobile devices foster the practice of documenting travels, places and events to capture insights for future memories, as Van Dijck (2008) discuss in relation to cinematic hindsight. Moreover, smart phones mobility and the ubiquitous use of social media platforms allow individuals to have access to their photography anywhere, giving so the opportunity to observe memories anytime. The presence of organizational apparatus, such as hashtags and geotags consent users to have easy and organized access to their memories in particularly considering that the print is no longer the main method to preserve photographic memories.

#### 6.4 Conclusions: Visual Fragmented Identities and Ephemeral Memories

Main objective of this chapter was investigating the evolution of the notion of identity and memory within the practice of photo sharing considering the substantial modifications that the social media platform Instagram and smart mobile devices

determine to this social practice. It identified the nodes that are at the crossroad between identity, memory and photography considering the use of Instagram one of the factors that changes the traditional status of photography. The analysis considered the practice of self-presentation and maintenance of memory within the online photo sharing. Instagram was investigated in relation to the disclosure of visual narrations used within the processes of identity construction, disclosure and remembrance. Instagram was analysed considering the concomitance between the two areas of interest that shown a mutual dependence. Findings show that identity disclosure and memory maintenance find their natural location in the intensification of life experiences and that new mobile technologies are integrant part of this transformation.

Connectivity, mobility and usability of smart mobile devices promote an increased adaptation of the practice of photo sharing to the mediation of the Internet and social media. Nowadays, thanking photographs does not seems any more a practice dedicated to the maintenance of family and domestic memory, but it is turning progressively into a means of identity disclosure and communication, as Van Dijck argues (2007). Instagram shows the new functions of photography in relation to identity and memory toward a sort of photographic *Insta-Pictorialism*<sup>1</sup>.

As pictorialists in the past used to employ specific manual techniques to render photographs like draws so Instagram users employ filters and edit their photos to produce images that follow the steps of the impressionism art movement, where artists abandon studios in favour of open spaces to better capture the light and the spirit of nature. Impressionism aims to rediscover the landscape to emphasise colours rather than drawing. It aims to disclose the artist's subjectivity and emotions creating so new incentives that touch the interest in representing the daily life. As impressionists reproduced feelings and visual perceptions on canvas so Instagram users photograph objects, landscapes, particularities to portray feelings that their presence (identity) in the images that are worth to capture and preserve (memory). Photography, other than sharing visualities, is employed in the construction and disclosure of the self-identity. The process of this is recognizable in the modalities in which individuals choose, shape, organize and upload their photos. In this, photo sharing involves a constant re-

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<sup>1</sup> 'Pictorialism was an artistic movement developed at the end of the XIX century. It was born to elevate photography as art equal to painting and sculpture. Pictorialists' main aim was, indeed, to generate the necessary aesthetic sense to render photography as an artwork comparable to other major arts'

evaluation of personal memories in the presentation of the self through the externalization of inner visions (Van Dijck, 2010).

Photography is becoming a means of communication, experience and identity disclosure walking away from the traditional conception of mere means of memory. Nevertheless, new practices do not annul completely its remembrative function. Smart mobile devices give life to new social practice for the self-construction, disclosure and memories maintenance toward the consideration of photo sharing as *re-representation* of the contemporary individual. The definition of 'episodic identities' given by Bagnara (2009) describes how the technological developments display the adaptation to the networked individualism (Welman *et al*, 2003), and memory becomes a narrative personal networked diary. Individuals share episodes of their lives telling stories about themselves. The memories they share online undergo a continuous daily update shaping so new forms of social visual interactions. This phenomenon changes photography as a binding agent that structure a "day by day" visual heritage.

Images, within the identity construction process, stimulate individuals' memory of past event, situations or people that throughout the time help them in the self-identity construction and disclosure. The interconnection between identity and memory surfaces in the choice of specific photographs. Going back to the concept of *life-sharing* suggested by Mizzella (2009), it is observable a key aspect of the contemporary use of the Internet. As findings reveal, within social media platforms users do not share only documents anymore, rather traces of personal life. This concept can be extended towards an overlapping tie that unifies the online and offline life experiences. This intersection is unveiled from the ubiquitous use of the Instagram platform and the emotional engagement that participants' reports with their photo sharing. Individuals in general are not willing to buy a mobile without camera anymore. Nowadays, a remarkable number of individuals cannot do without maintaining visual relationships with the events that characterise their life (identity and memory).

The use of smart mobile devices push individuals toward a new communicative distribution of contents based on the connection between individuals, rather than the mere preservation of the real. Images are, indeed, considered more as temporary solicitations than permanent memories. Following this line, sharing photos enhances new ways to manifest the self. The contemporary notions of identity and memory are

equally inscribed within the ephemerality of the Internet and in harmony with mediation and mobility of smart mobile. On the strength of the data collected, it is safe to argue that the increased converged use of social media platforms and mobile devices modify substantially individuals' practice of identity construction, disclosure, and memories maintenance toward a natural adaptation to the ephemerality and immateriality of the Internet where eternal indiscretions of individuals' everyday life are collected.

## Chapter 7: Theorising New Mobile Visualities

This thesis explored the triangulation of mediation-mobility-visibility within the multifaceted environment of smart mobile technologies using Instagram as the main case study. This includes the analysis of functioning structures and social interactions. At first, a qualitative research method was employed to identify the social effects that the mediation offered by the platform affords as well as the mobility offered by the use of smart mobile devices. Social behaviours online materialise and change in correspondence with the development of media technologies and social media platforms reflecting consequently the interdependence of human-smart technologies. This study kept in consideration the unstable and ever-changing character of the object of analysis. Media convergence, indeed, produces continuous phenomena of relocation that sees users experience new cyber dynamics. Within this environment defined by continuous movements of negotiation between professional and vernacular forms of communication, smart mobile technologies offer the possibility to shape new visualities through a sort of participative labour.

In chapter 1 a general introduction discussed the subdivision of the present study into thematic chapters (Photo Sharing, Social Relationships, Political Economy and Social Media Marketing, Privacy and Surveillance, Identity and Memory) highlighting the complexity of the subject. A qualitative methodological approach was demonstrated to be exhaustive for an in depth understanding of individuals' visual mediated experiences. An in depth qualitative interviewing method provided satisfactory data for the qualitative interpretation of participants' responses and, furthermore, addressed the semiotic evaluation of their photo sharing. The combination of participants' responses and photo sharing observation in a consequential order certified the validity of the analysis giving the possibility to explore the subject from different angles.

The theoretical conceptualisations applied in this study combine the current research in mobile, media and communication, and visual studies. This theoretical framework was further enriched with theories in each of the following sectors: social networking theories, online community theories, political economy theories, social media marketing theories, privacy and surveillance theories, online identity and memory theories that, per each thematic area, were combined with the general conceptions. However, the three critical categories of mediation, mobility and visibility enabled this thesis to



circumscribe the context of analysis to the ever-present condition of triangulation. This subdivision was useful for analysing the specific thematised interactions and focusing on different issues.

The findings from the empirical analysis were discussed considering the fundamental theoretical concepts of the three major objectives of the present study: the examination of the decisive role of mobility (smart mobile devices) in establishing new social practices, the new conceptions of the self, others and surroundings, the exploration of the mediation as a crucial concept in establishing new social practices identifying the new concept of mediated visibility. Following, within each chapter, was reported a more detailed literature review per each thematic investigation: Analysing the transformation of the practice of photo sharing, exploring users' social engagement and interaction, describing, through the understanding of the political economy, the uses of visualities in new social media marketing strategies, questioning concerns that visual communication brings in relation to privacy and surveillance, examining how the platform becomes crucial for self-disclosure and self-construction, also changing the traditional concept of visual memory.

In chapter 2 the practice of photo sharing on Instagram was investigated. This chapter started by providing theoretical background on the practice of photo sharing necessary for comprehending how the implications of mobility and mediation afforded by Instagram affected the social aspect of sharing photography on a social media platform. Moving from a structural description of the basic functioning systems of the platform, this chapter identified the presence of common traits in relation to the motivations that push users to use Instagram and the typologies of daily organisation of photo sharing. The co-presence of these two variables revealed the form of storytelling as one of the main techniques followed by the users. Finally, relevant transformations in the practice of photo sharing are presented.

Chapter 3 investigated the presence, development and the maintenance of social relationships through the mediation of photo sharing on Instagram. For this purpose, online communities and social networking theories were reviewed to set the academic debate towards new conceptions of the mediation of visualities as social connectors. It examined the precise motivations that guide the development of visual social relationships. It argued that visibility itself does not figure as a social agent, rather only

as a valid activator of social relationships. This claim does not negate the presence of mediated or virtual social relationships; rather, as findings demonstrated, it states a shift onto different social media (Facebook, for instance). Indeed, chapter 3 illustrated the various forms of social connections that Instagram may generate, such as the online and offline activities that online communities promote. Visuality does not seem to satisfy individuals' ways of socializing, rather it is perceived as an agent of completion. Observing users' photo sharing appears, in fact, as a widespread conduct used to know and understand individuals' personalities from a different perspective, the photo sharing.

Chapter 4 exemplified the political economy of media in order to have a broad understanding of the functioning system of Instagram. Proceeding, it illustrated the strategic forms of social media marketing and user engagement that displays new manifestations of the potentialities of visual communication. It argued that the strategic use of images produce alterations in relation to the general practice of photo sharing, but specifically to the practice of photographing and visualising individuals' everyday experiences. The constant inclusion, during ordinary activities, connecting visually with brands and product, push individuals to think of photography as a means for also advertising their ordinary activities even if not in direct connection with brands. Advertising is by nature a persuasive activity especially considering the advancement of the 'snapshot aesthetic' (Schroeder, 2008, 2013). Even in official promotions, it exhibits a consequent visual adjustment toward popular visual models.

In chapter 5 the initial interest was to investigate users' perceptions and concerns about issues of privacy and surveillance online in relation to the use of their data and metadata. The main concern was questioning the functioning systems of Instagram behind the mere photo sharing and more connected to the unethical use of individuals' information. On the contrary to previous expectations findings show the complete passive acceptance of use and abuse of personal information online. Taking this aspect for granted, within visuality, issues related to privacy and surveillance are perceived because of their direct connection with the dichotomy of "watching and being watched". Taking the form of the keyhole part of the voyeuristic imaginary Instagram figures as the opportunity to observe the other, the new and the unusual. It is viewed like a window on the world through which can be watched what it is not possible to see otherwise. From this perspective, Instagram enriches individuals' visual knowledge of

landscapes, food, colour, and shapes and so on. Photographs show different perspectives and unexpected visualities that exploit the property of the virality of the Internet.

Chapter 6 investigated how, within the current society dominated by the mediation of smart technologies, visuality responds to the urgent individuals' need to give expression to their individuality and their memories. It was argued that sharing photographs appear as the exteriorization of personal feelings through visual creations. Identity construction and disclosure on Instagram is different from identity construction and disclosure within social networking sites, virtual worlds and offline environments. Based on the extent of visual techniques of identity construction, and disclosure, there are a range of modalities of self-presentation on Instagram that, as Zhao *et al* (2008) argue in relation to Facebook, are implicit identity claims. The range of implicit identity presentations involves the visual-self projection via the presence of selfies, objects, themes, styles, and stories. By "showing without telling", Instagram shows implicit identity claims that figure as metaphoric disclosure of oneself necessary to build personal mediated limited memory archives that leave out, for the protection of private spheres, domestic and family photographs.

Overall, this study proposes a critical understanding of Instagram mediation and the areas mentioned above conducting towards an empirical examination that illustrates the changing dynamics that digitality, smart mobile technology and social media determine within contemporary sociality. Findings show that people modify the way they see photographically. New forms of visual representation emerge thanks to the mobility of new technologies. Elements of innovation, in addition to social media platforms, were identified in the various practices and motivations that involve the practice of photo sharing. The ephemerality of digital culture is embraced by smart mobile technologies considering the importance that individuals give to the act of producing multimedia contents more than the content itself. Smart mobile devices represent the element of mediation among social instances and they strongly represent the foundation of a new mobile visualities aesthetic. Societies produce peculiar forms of expression and communication that are shaped by the co-presence of individuals' demands and the current typology of means of communication. Every alteration in the structures of societies has influence on individuals and on means of expression. Finding shows that in contemporary life visualities have crucial functions in different environments such as business, leisure, and surveillance. The act of photographing is so integrated into the

sociality that individuals do not realise the radicalness of the phenomenon. A clear example can be identified in the multitude of food photographs taken before eating a meal, which keeps people who are present waiting for the obligatory snapshot pre-lunch/dinner. Images act to exhibit the desires and needs of the society. In fact, the importance of visualities does not lie in its referentiality to reality (Barthes, 1980) as the first theories of images argued, rather it is in the fact that it is an efficient means to affect individuals' daily behaviours. To extend this line of reasoning and to contribute to Mitchell's question 'What Do Pictures "Really" Want?' (1996) it could be argued that rather than questioning pictures as visual objects, it would be more critical questioning the act that precedes the photograph. Findings show that the ubiquitous possibility of photographing anytime and anywhere produce in individuals a constant state of looking for "photo opportunities", for images to extrapolate from the surrounding. So, it can be said that, within this discourse, Mitchell's question comes late. Before questioning the resulting object (the photograph) the act of photographing that nowadays comes by the potentialities of smart mobile devices should be questioned. The subaltern position that Mitchell argues about the individual in relation to pictures needs to shift towards the subaltern position that the individual holds in relation to events and surroundings precisely because of the widespread attitude of looking for "photo opportunities".

Arguing for the development of new mobile visualities, this study identified the interdependence of the contemporary various uses of images to social practices. The new social visualities view the snapshot aesthetic as a radical transformation of traditional functions of photography. The triangulation of mediation-mobility-visibility, exemplified at the beginning of this study, showed throughout the various areas of analysis the juxtaposition with sociality. Individuals, in their daily life, are used to photographing anything and they give it a meaning and a place afterwards (social media platforms). Social media and smart mobile devices push photography towards new forms of interactivity. The combination of representative and communicative capacities of images emerges evidently. Since their arrival, smart mobile devices amplified the quantity and the variety of social forms (online communities, for instance) of visualities towards the diffusion of the snapshot culture. Emotions, memories, particularities, events, and personal stories translate, indeed, in images the peculiarities of the photographers. In this context, visualities break with traditional visual conventions and social uses going beyond the mere history of visual representation.

Smart mobile technologies push visibility towards the polarisation of its characteristics (representation, connection and memory) emphasising the processes of sharing through the visibility and virality of the Internet. The visual hyper-representation also converges towards the current trend of giving to everything a visual justification (this aspect was exemplified through the responses of *Participant 13* (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 18:24) and *Participant 23* (Skype interview. December 11, 2013 h18:02) that expressed their compulsory necessity to post images on Instagram) and representation. The ubiquitous exercise of photographing confers to visibility a prominent position in the contemporary digital age, guiding individuals to visually experience the surroundings, instead of actually experiencing the surrounding. The object photographed does not appear as important as is the act of photographing itself. Smart mobile technologies in this process become the key factor that allows individuals to accomplish the act of photographing and sharing recalling the snapshot culture based on the “snap and share” (Chalfen, 1987). The mobility that new technologies are equipped for allows the expansion of this concept towards the “snap, share and move on” culture removing the initial importance of the image in favour of the act of photographing. Developing this way of thinking, it is safe to recall Belting’s (2005, 2011) comparison of the similarity between the interdependence of images-media and human mind-body pulling together the reasoning advanced in relation to devices, humans and images. An innovative interdependence emerges among the three instances in a dynamic ephemeral circle that sees the individual perceiving surroundings as a valuable image to extract from the reality, passing by the act of capturing the image with a smart mobile device to finish potentially in cyberspace. This common circular process extends Belting’s dichotomy, ‘images live within media like we live within our body’ (Belting, 2005) into: images live within media as they live in our body (where body stands for mind). This evolution replaces photography into an ephemeral circular dynamics that does not contemplate the stability of traditional photography, rather the mobility and fluidity of digitality.

The creation of new mobile visualities brings us towards the sublimation of photography. The *Liquid Modernity* (2000) theorised by Bauman assumes, where smart mobile devices are a gaseous state, where the images are captured and shared on social media platforms for the love of sharing more than for the love of multimedia contents. Findings show that images on Instagram are well-planned, refined and high-quality.

However, what strongly emerges is the fact that the interest in photographing comes first in particular, when participants admit that they do not fully experience events and surrounding because they focus more on the potential photographs they could capture from the situation. From this mechanism the sublimation of photography is arguable in favour of the act of photographing, showing how human behaviours are affected by the nature and potentialities of new technologies.

### 7.1 Limitations and Further Research

Methodologically, this study does not present weaknesses in terms of reliability and validity of the participants' samples. Through the qualitative methodology, indeed, it was possible to deeply explore the various issues of analysis. This study focused on the clarification of the functions that the mediation and mobility of smart devices afford with concrete examples extracted by real individuals' experiences. However, this type of research could perhaps reverse the sequential order of data analysis. Instead proceeding by interviewing participants before analysing their photo sharing. The methodology design could be organised considering the photo sharing analysis as the key part of data collection. The examination of photo sharing could, in fact, be considered crucial for the following design of the list of questions to ask the participants. Following this reversed order, a further study could focus more on the critical interpretation of visualities than on participants' points of view and interpretations of events. This decision could be useful considering that this study intends to be the base for further investigations aimed to highlight the processes that change contemporary sociality and to disclose the relations that make visual expressions interdependent with social practices. The emphasis on the development of new visualities that this study aims to advance is clear. This study is based on the hypothesis that the presence of the triangulation of mediation-mobility-visuality represents a fundamental turning point on contemporary sociality. This hypothesis contains the suspicion that this triangulation guides us towards further changes in the relation between human-smart technologies.

This study presented a broad and variegated approach to mobile visual communication. From the best of my knowledge, this is the first academic qualitative research of this emerging field in media and communication studies. This study is formed by complex and interdisciplinary fields of research (sociality, marketing, privacy and surveillance,

identity and memory) and shows how the advancement in mobile media affects contemporary sociality at broad spectrum. This is the reason why the ways in which mobile devices alter the perception of events and the surroundings is crucial to deepen the findings that this study disclosed and to progress the current research. The mobility of the Internet needs to be investigated as a socio-technical puzzle of contents, practices, representations and experiences, as new studies suggest (Herman *et al*, 2015), and to analyse how the relation between human-smart technologies is forming new social and behavioural structures.

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BRP Sea-Doo. Available online at: [://instagram.com/BRPSeadoo](http://instagram.com/BRPSeadoo) [Accessed 20/3/14]

Ford Italia. Available online at: <http://instagram.com/forditalia> [Accessed 20/4/14]

Hyundai Aus. Available online at: <http://instagram.com/hyundaiaus> [Accessed 20/3/14]

Issey Miyake Parfums. Available online  
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Jesus Saves Bro Resurrected. Available online  
at: [://instagram.com/jesussavesbroresurrected](http://instagram.com/jesussavesbroresurrected) [Accessed 18/5/14]

LG Nordic. Available online at: <http://instagram.com/lgnordic> [Accessed 20/3/14]

Lululemon. Available online at: [://instagram.com/lululemon](http://instagram.com/lululemon) [Accessed 20/4/14]

Participant 1 (open-ended questions): no visual examples provided.

Participant 2 (open-ended questions): no visual examples provided.

Participant 3 (open-ended questions): no visual examples provided.

Participant 4 (open-ended questions): no visual examples provided.

Participant 5 (open-ended questions): <https://instagram.com/gastonoliva/>

Participant 6 (open-ended questions): no visual examples provided.

Participant 7 (open-ended questions): no visual examples provided.

Participant 8 (open-ended questions): [://instagram.com/grether](https://instagram.com/grether)

Participant 9 (open-ended questions): <https://instagram.com/patrirouth/>

Participant 10 (open-ended questions): no visual examples provided.

Participant 11 (open-ended questions): <https://instagram.com/igerslublin/>

Participant 12 (open-ended questions): no visual examples provided.

Participant 13 (open-ended questions): no visual examples provided.

Participant 14 (open-ended questions): <https://instagram.com/angycat/>

Participant 15 (open-ended questions): no visual examples provided.

Participant 1 (Skype interview. November 16, 2013 h 11:09):

<https://instagram.com/cocorino/>

Participant 2 (Skype interview. November 19, 2013 h 21:01):

<https://instagram.com/alefortuna>

Participant 3 (Skype interview. November 22, 2013 h 18:56):

<https://instagram.com/bandwagoner/>

Participant 4 (Skype interview. November 24, 2013 h 16:08):

<https://instagram.com/brainyartist>

Participant 5 (Skype interview. September 7, 2013 h 16:24):

<https://instagram.com/snakeartworx>

Participant 6 (Skype interview. November 22, 2013 h 12:48):

<https://instagram.com/logopaede>

Participant 7 (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 12:39):

<https://instagram.com/giuliotolli>

Participant 8 (Skype interview. November 25, 2013 h 14:02):

<https://instagram.com/nick83i>

Participant 9 (Skype interview. November 27, 2013 h 16:19):

<https://instagram.com/igersbari>

Participant 10 (Skype interview. November 30, 2013 h 12:54):

[https://instagram.com/pat\\_\\_](https://instagram.com/pat__)

Participant 11 (Skype interview. December 1, 2013 h 23:00):

[https://instagram.com/ara\\_foto](https://instagram.com/ara_foto)

Participant 12 (Skype interview. December 3, 2013 h 17:51):

<https://instagram.com/pakistanjusticeproject>

Participant 13 (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 18:24):

<https://instagram.com/mimicimme>

Participant 14 (Skype interview. December 4, 2013 h 19:58):

<https://instagram.com/ido8all>

Participant 15 (Skype interview. December 5, 2013 h 14:44):

<https://instagram.com/ektara>

Participant 16 (Skype interview. December 6, 2013 h 18:06):

[https://instagram.com/bianca\\_gege](https://instagram.com/bianca_gege)

Participant 17 (Skype interview. December 8, 2013 h 16:08):

<https://instagram.com/inayali>

Participant 18 (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h 13:03):

<https://instagram.com/forditalia>

Participant 19 (Skype interview. December 9, 2013 h 16:50):

<https://instagram.com/giariv>

Participant 20 (Skype interview. December 10, 2013 h 14:58):

<https://instagram.com/miriamtorrente>; <https://instagram.com/livelloundiciottavi>

Participant 21 (Skype interview. December 10, 2013 h16:09):

<https://instagram.com/oraziospoto>

Participant 22 (Skype interview. December 10, 2013 h18:03):

<https://instagram.com/koci>

Participant 23 (Skype interview. December 11, 2013 h18:02):

<https://instagram.com/erikarotella>

Participant 24 (Skype interview. December 12, 2013 h17:29):

<https://instagram.com/emmanuelap>

Participant 25 (Skype interview. December 3, 2013 h 17:51):

<https://instagram.com/beckibecko>

Participant 26 (Skype interview. December 19, 2013 h16:17):

<https://instagram.com/bossthefrenchbulldog>

Participant 27 (Skype interview. January 10, 2014 h10:15):

<https://instagram.com/nicolacarmignani>

Participant 28 (Skype interview. January 14, 2014 h09:03):

<https://instagram.com/uwa2000>

Participant 29 (Skype interview. January 29, 2014 h16:01):

<https://instagram.com/andrewdearling>

Pilot Pen Usa. Available online at: <http://instagram.com/pilotpenusa> [Accessed 20/3/14]

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Nadina. Available online at: <http://instagram.com/fotomaedchen> [Accessed 20/4/14]

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Nike. Available online at: <http://instagram.com/nike> [Accessed 20/4/14]

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## **Appendix**

## History of Instagram

Starting from its launch, a chronological description of the history of Instagram helps to identify the key steps that characterise its development. Instagram was invented by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger, and launched on October , 2010. The creators, to develop Instagram, combined together the intention to produce a social product with the passion for photography and visuality, designing a social media platform able to connect people and allow them to visually communicate easier. The main reason why they started to design Instagram (from the previous version named Burbn) was that they experienced the interest among people of sharing photographs of what they were doing during their everyday lives (Systrom, 2011). Following this, they started to outline the main problems that people had sharing photographs using smart phones. Their research identified three main issues.

The first problem was recognised in the lack of high-quality photographs; the second issue was identified in the long amount of time necessary to upload photographs online and, the third point was the desire to share photographs through different platforms at the same time (Systrom, 2011). The fundamental principles that they followed to create Instagram were ‘simplicity’ and ‘velocity’ (Systrom & Krieger, 2011). Instagram was born as purely a photo sharing service for smart phones but, along the way it has been subjected to several structural modifications (technological developments, usage policy, partnerships so on and so forth) that consequently changed the initial identity of the platform. Through a detailed chronology it is possible to list the fundamental moments that characterise the changes that modified Instagram in order to have a broader understanding of its development. Modifications, improvements, co-operations and business deals are changing Instagram’s initial status of simple photo sharing platform into a business machine, social-communities developer, stories teller, and daily information.

The first significant event could be recognized in the creation of the InstaMeet. On March , 2011 Instagram hosted the first World Wide InstaMeet. An additional platform ‘meetup.com’ was created where Instagram community members could meet each other offline having the opportunity to experience physical relationships with other users, discuss photography, exchange tips, or take photos together. The meetup website shows a world map containing geo-locations of upcoming meetings, the number of participants

and the possibility of spreading the word across Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. After the first InstaMeet, more than 300 online communities have been created across the globe.

The first community of Instagramers was born on January , 2011 thanks to Philippe Gonzalez a Spanish resident (based in Madrid). At the moment, his website counts more than 330 Instagramers groups worldwide. Each group own its personal website, through which it is possible to share information about the community; organise InstaMeets, exhibitions, and other events. Since the first World Wide InstaMeet, Instagram has been collecting members across the world and it is creating a consistent online community.

The second moment has been recognised in the event that happened on November , 2011 when Instagram introduced ‘hashtags’ as a new feature. Hashtags technically are words or phrases prefixed with the symbol # and provide a means of grouping messages, since one can search for the hashtag and get the set of messages that contain it. Within Instagram, hashtags can be used to post pictures with a word or phrases that contain the subject or words with a particular connection to it. The main purpose of this feature is to help users to categorise and rapidly find contents. Since the launch, users have used hashtags, as can be seen through the Weekend Hashtag Projects: #flyflyaway, #middleoftheroad or, #somethinggoldsomethingnew promoted by Instagram itself to educate users to the correct use of hashtags. According to Instagram, the intent of launching hashtags was to render the experience of Instagram more connecting and engaging. At the beginning, Twitter introduced this feature and then Facebook decided to adopt it as well saying that it could offer a “larger view of what’s happening” (BBC - June 12, 2013).

The third important moment can be recognised on February , 2013 when the Instagram community grew to 100 million monthly active users, lending to the online community a growing worldwide visibility.

The fourth moment occurs on April , 2012 when Instagram joined Facebook. Zuckerberg (one of the five co-founders of the social networking website Facebook) made an offer to purchase Instagram with its 13 employees for \$ 1 billion in cash and stock as reported by ABC news (Stern, 2012). This has been declared a crucial moment for both companies: Instagram and Facebook. Nevertheless, Systrom has always

declared that Instagram keeps its own separate identity and that their co-operation is useful for the development of new features in order to find innovative ways for a better mobile photo experience.

The partnership with Facebook increased Instagram's users from 15 million to 100 million (Shively, 2012). This exponential growth pushed businesses to consider the photo sharing platform as an essential part of their social media marketing strategies. Instagram became an important platform within the global social media marketing's landscape. The reason for this strategic purchase emerges as an important question. Gary Vaynerchuk (well-known entrepreneur) predicted, within *The Daily Business*, Facebook's move at the end of 2011. During a short talk within *CNN*, he argued that the main motivation was because Instagram is a mobile application, i.e. it would extend Facebook in terms of mobile communications. Moreover, he added that Facebook was interested in mobility and having a tool that can make users' lives better has been the goal. Indeed, Instagram allows users to share constantly and live permanently with the mobility. A clear example could be recognised in the Photo Contests. Within the Instagram website the section 'Host a Photo Campaign' illustrates step by step concrete examples of how hashtags could be used to make the collection of users' photos around a certain theme easier. Following the instructions there is a list of brands, associations, and other bodies that already created 'Photo Contests' and photo campaigns. Since their partnership, Instagram has been subjected to the direct influence of Facebook. Progressively, Instagram started to acquire its peculiar feeds. Indeed, on June , 2012 Instagram redesigned 'Photo Pages from Web'. Even if Instagram was born to be exclusively mobile, at some point a web profile feature rolled out. This additional service brings on the web the Instagram setting allowing users to follow other users, edit, comment, and like photos directly from their computer screen. This decision might be interpreted on the one hand as an attempt at enlargement and, on the other hand, as an act of emulation towards Facebook or other feeds.

For instance, on August , 2012 Instagram launched 'Photo Maps', a new way to browse photos within the platform. Photo Maps appears on users profiles and lets them showcase their photos on the world map. It also allows the seeing of other users' maps from their profile as well. This feature works through the use of geo-tags, showing the location or the specific place where users' photos had been taken. User-submitted location data or geo-location techniques can allow social media platforms to connect



and coordinate users with local people or events that match their interest. For mobile social apps like Instagram, geo-tags allow location-based services to enrich the social networking experience. They can be used with geo-tagged information (meetups, events, restaurants and so on) to match users with places or local groups to socialise with. Indeed, Instagram allows users to share their locations.

Then, on November , 2012 it launched 'Profiles for Web', an additional similarity with Facebook for its appearance, setting and features. Even if, Systrom stated that nothing was changing in terms of Instagram's identity and Zuckerberg declared that they were not trying to integrate Instagram into Facebook, the reality appears slightly different. What can be seen is that, from its embryonic stage, Instagram is becoming more similar to its buyer.

Following, on December , 2012 Instagram updated 'Terms and Service' based on community feedback, originating general public concern about privacy and copyrights issues. The use of targeted advertising and monitoring is legally guaranteed by Instagram's privacy policy (version from October 2010, accessed on July 24, 2013) and the following updates (version from: January 19, 2013, accessed July 24, 2013).

On May , 2013, Instagram launched 'Photos of You'. As reported on the Instagram blog, through this feature it is possible to increase the amount of information to add pieces to the (users' profile) puzzle. This feature aims to engage users in capturing photos as memories of people, places and moments and then sharing stories registered under precise parameters. In fact, where hashtags help to report the "what?", the Photo Map answers to the "where?", and lastly Photos of You answers to the question of "who?". This feature, according to the co-founder Systrom, empowers the degrees of connectivity across platforms, users and contents.

On June , 2013 Instagram introduced the 'Videos'. For this feature, according to Systrom, simplicity, beauty, and community have been the three major aims of developers. This breaking feature for iOS and Android includes: 15-second video, 13 custom filter, Cover frame and Cinema (it lets users stabilise their videos during the editing. At the moment, it is available only for iPhone 4S and iPhone 5).

The latest update was registered on July , 2013 when the Instagram team launched ‘Web Embedding’, new feed for Instagram contents helpful for sharing Instagram photos and videos across different platforms. Through them, indeed, users are able to locate contents into their blog, website or articles. Regarding this, Systrom says that ‘the interests of the companies do not always align (and may well conflict) with the interests of users. For services that wish to make money from advertising, it makes sense to be open initially — but then, having attracted a large base of users, to start building walls around them’ (Systrom, 2013). Instagram highlights that this feed does not make any modification regarding the privacy policy. Their recurring point is, indeed, the fact that Instagram in all its developments and co-operations intends to give to users the best service, which aims to create a world (positively) more connected.

Thought the brief description of the history of Instagram, passing by the principal moment of its growth, it is possible to break it into different parts and analyse them in depth. Important moments are disclosed in detail combining together information stated by Systrom and Krieger, the founders, with crucial events that happened in relation to the application, such as burning issues on privacy, surveillance, and terms of use, social capital controversies, and visual conflicts. Instagram’s history is the backbone necessary to define the platform’s identity, inner structure and networks. The following sections, indeed, aim to disclose Instagram’s policy and terms of use, crucial for the global understanding of platform’s functioning and users’ connections.

## Legal Terms of Use and Privacy Policy of Instagram

Instagram has a legal section on the website that contains ‘Terms of Use’ and ‘Privacy Policy’ respectively divided into before and after January , 2013, a crucial day for its history. That date emerges as a rupture into two different periods. It also embodies a notable attempt of change regarding the use of users’ data and meta-data by companies or big corporations. It is important to pay particular attention to this moment in order to understand the functioning of the political economy of Instagram and all of its implications. This moment that affected users’ online behaviour and visual information exchange has been signed by a post that Instagram published on its website. Activating the concern of public opinion about the use of personal data the post says that agreeing

with Instagram's Terms of Use 'you agree that a business or other entity may pay us to display your username, likeness, photos (along with any associated metadata), and/or action you take in connection with paid or sponsored content or promotions, without any compensation to you'. As can be observed, Instagram has been progressively changing its appearance and structure. Adding features, feeds and partnerships it enlarges its areas of action and increases its economic value till becoming a different entity compared to the beginning. The majority of Internet surfers are not aware of the terms of use and privacy policies of their favourite social media platforms. Consequently, they are not aware of the effects and hidden meanings of their online practices.

Subsequently, the Instagram post follows highlighting that 'these Terms of Use affect your legal rights and obligations. If you do not agree to be bound by all of these Terms of Use, do not access or use the Service'. These are the welcoming lines that users faced on the platform on January , 2013. These conditions link the political economy Instagram to its privacy policies. Within Instagram's general conditions, for example, it is reported that even if users terminate their access to the service (Instagram) or they deactivate their account, their photos, comments, likes, friendships, and all other data will no longer be accessible through their account, nevertheless that material and data might persist and appear within the platform.

Through the agreement of Instagram's terms of use, users agree that Instagram might place advertising and promotions on the service in conjunction with users' content. In any case, Instagram also states that the manner, mode and extent of such advertising and promotions could be subjected to change without specific notice to users (Instagram, Rights No. 2). Following, Instagram declares its right to remove any content from the platform for any reason, without prior notice. However, it adds that contents removed from the platform might continue to be stored by Instagram, and they might not be retrievable without a valid court order (Instagram, Rights No. 7).

As can be seen, Instagram's regulation has several conditions that consider users' data and meta-data treatment. Updating its advertising policy Instagram activates many reactions among the general public and its online communities. Many interpret, as reported by *Wired*, the update to mean Instagram could 'sell users' photos and information to advertisers' (Anderson & Wolff, 2010). Users' reaction has been the

threat or real cancellation of their account before January , 2013 (the activation of the new policy). Some of the most important entities on Instagram, such as National Geographic responded with a photo saying that @NatGeo was suspending new posts to Instagram. The reason was that they were very concerned about the direction of the new terms of use. They add also the possibility to close their account (see fig. 74).

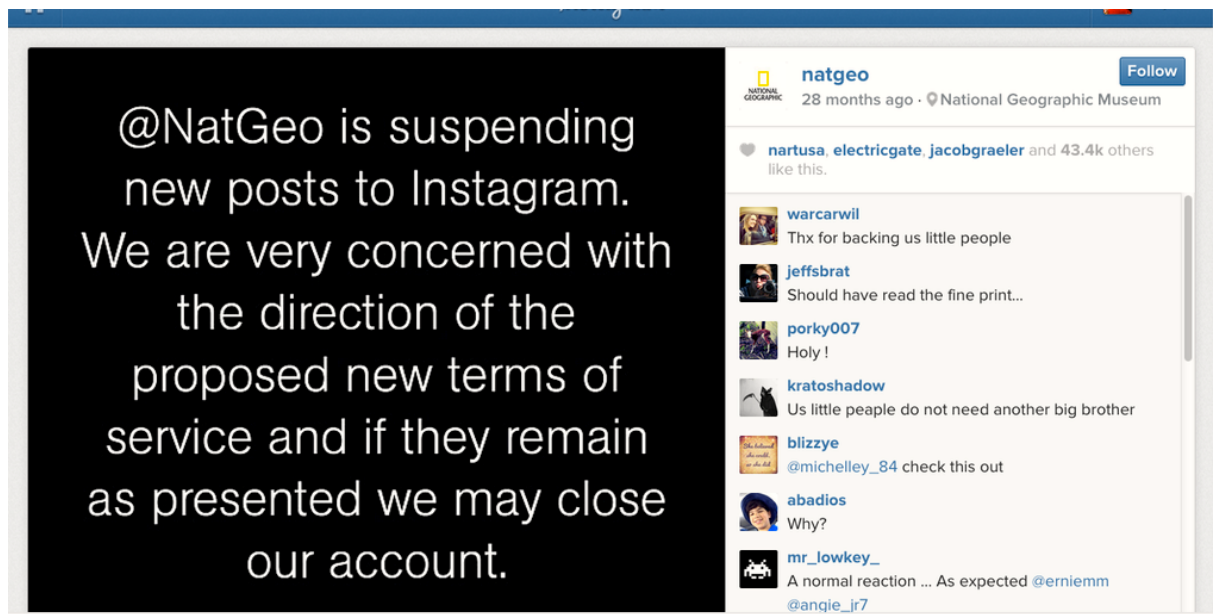


Figure 74. @NatGeo suspends its Instagram account.

Instagram, 2014. SOURCE: <https://instagram.com/natgeo>

After rumours and public threats of cancellation for the unethical statement, Instagram said that it was all a misunderstanding before reverting to the previous policy. Instagram tried to clarify their decision posting on the Instagram blog,

‘Our intent in updating the terms was to communicate that we’d like to experiment with innovative advertising that feels appropriate on Instagram. Instead many that we were going to sell your photos to others without any compensation interpreted it. This is not true and it is our mistake that this language is confusing. To be clear: it is not our intention to sell your photos’. [...] ‘The language we proposed also raised question about whether your photos can be part of an advertisement. We do not have plans for anything like this and because of that we’re going to remove the language that raised the question. Our main goal is to avoid things like advertising banners you see in other apps that would hurt the Instagram user experience. Instead, we want to create meaningful ways to help you discover new and interesting accounts and content while building a self-sustaining business at the same time. Instagram users own their

contents and Instagram does not claim any ownership rights over your photos. Nothing about this has changed’.

Hudson (2013) from *BBC* reported that after Instagram updated its privacy and policy setting giving it the right to sell users’ photos to advertisers without notification, a month later nearly 50% of users dropped the platform. However, according to Langshaw (2013), Instagram has refused to report even the lost 25% of its user base, claiming that the data reported by *AppData* (2012) was inaccurate. Following this, it emerges that through the privacy policy and terms of use Instagram monetizes users’ interactions, data and metadata. In response to this, many celebrities stated publicly the cancellation of their Instagram account. National Geographic, Richard Koci, Rosario Dawson and others have announced plans to delete their Instagram accounts over the controversial new privacy policy (Smith, 2013).

#### Consent Form and Demographic

Participant No. _____
<b><u>Consent Form</u></b>
I confirm that I have been informed and understand the information sheet for the above study, have had the opportunity to ask questions, and have the questions answered satisfactorily. ___
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without providing explanation for doing so. ___
I agree to complete the questionnaire provided. ___
I consent to the collected data (including my images) being used for analysis, presentation and publication under my name or my pseudonym as agreed. ___
I am aware of the UK Data Protection Act 1998 (available online at: <a href="http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29/contents">://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29/contents</a> ). ___
I agree to take part in the above study. ___
Name _____

Pseudonymous \_\_\_\_\_ (if you wish to be anonymous)

Date \_\_\_\_\_

When you complete (with X) digitally this Consent Form, please put your name where required, and send it back to me at: [.serafinelli@2011.hull.ac.uk](mailto:.serafinelli@2011.hull.ac.uk) or using my **Facebook** page.

Please, note that if you wish to be anonymous, your face shall be concealed or excluded in your photographs for anonymity purposes.

Participant N \_\_\_\_\_

### **Demographic Questions Form**

Please fill in the list of formal identifiers below:

Gender:	Age:
Nationality:	Occupation:
Country of current residence:	
Country of origin:	

Please note that:

Your photographs, answers and other information you provide will be used for the purpose of this research; they may be presented in Conferences, Journals, Papers and my PhD thesis under your consent, credited to you with your name or pseudonym.

This will be confirmed in the Consent Form.

It is your right to be anonymous in this research if you wish, and this shall be confirmed in the Demographic Questions Form, which will be presented to you below.

For security issues, your data will be stored digitally within my PhD thesis project and

they will be destroyed completely by the end of December 2015.

You are free to withdraw from this research anytime without giving any reason.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for participating in this research.

## In-depth Interviews Questions

### **(Embedded) unit of analysis 1: Instagram and Photo Sharing:**

1. Describe how you first became aware of Instagram.
2. Why do you take photographs using Instagram rather than other applications?
3. Why and how are you an active Instagramer?
4. What are the main reasons that push you to snap and share photos on Instagram?
5. Can you categorise the account you follow and why?
6. Can you categorise your photographic style?

### **(Embedded) unit of analysis 2: Social Relationships:**

7. What is your conception and use of Instagram as social network?
8. Do you use Instagram to maintain social relationships? How?
9. How do you use Instagram to keep long distance relationships?
10. What is your relationship with the online community? (Hierarchies, powers etc etc)
11. Have you been part of an InstaWalk or InstaMeet? Can you describe your experiences?

### **(Embedded) unit of analysis 4: Political Economy of Instagram:**

12. Have you ever been part of Instagram Photo Contests? Can you describe them?
13. Have you ever had relationships with local shops or brands?
14. Do you follow accounts of brands of celebrities? Who? And why?

### **(Embedded) unit of analysis 5: Privacy, Surveillance and Communication:**

15. How and why do you choose the account you follow?
16. What kind of visual private information are you willing to share on Instagram?

17. Describe how and when you observe photographs on Instagram.
18. What is your use of hashtags and geo-locations?

**(Embedded) unit of analysis 6: Identity and Memory:**

19. How do you consider Instagram as a means of self-representation and self-representation?
20. How do you share on Instagram your visual identity?
21. Describe your contribution to the platform.
22. Do you think that sharing photo on Instagram helps you to keep memories?
23. Do you consider Instagram as an archive of visual memories?
24. Have you ever come across conflicting unethical events through Instagram? Can you describe them?

**Conclusive general questions:**

25. Is there anything that you became aware of (different or new) only thanks to Instagram?
26. Can you describe your emotional engagement with the platform and other Instagramers?
27. How does Instagram make a change in your way to experience events?
28. How do you consider Instagram as visual (political, religious and so on) activism platform?
29. What would you change about the platform?

### Open-ended Questions

The document sent via email or Facebook contained the points in the following open-ended questions:

1. How does Instagram change your daily life experiences? (Examples are encouraged)
2. How does Instagram change your social relationships? (Examples are encouraged)



3. How do you show and represent yourself through Instagram? (Examples are encouraged)
4. How do you consider photos on Instagram in relation to your memories? (Examples are encouraged)
5. Have you ever experienced or heard about conflicts over Instagram? (Examples are encouraged)