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Motivations to use Social Media, Socio-Demographic Characteristics, and Perceived Quality of Life of Italian Generation Z

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Abstract

Purpose: This empirical study aims to identify the relationship between motivations for using social media, the demographic characteristics, and perceived quality of life variables of Italian young people, aged 12-20. This research is part of a larger study.

Methodology: Data were collected from 24,676 young people in 2023 through one of the largest online platforms for Generation Z. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were performed. In particular, our universe is the population of Italian young people, 12-20 years old, who use a popular platform dedicated to their age group.

Findings: The study reveals significant heterogeneity in social media use motivations, demographic characteristics and perceived quality of life variables among the Italian youngest people. Five clusters of young people have been identified. This finding has numerous marketing implications for firms targeting their offering and communication to these buyer personas.

Research limitations/implications: We collected data from a single European country and the results cannot be generalized. SMEs should invest more in social media communication tailored to different sub-targets within Generation Z.

Originality/Value: No previous studies have investigated the relationship between demographic characteristics, perceived quality of life, and motivations for using social media by Italian GenZ, using a large-scale sample.

Keywords: Social media, Generation Z, motivations, quality of life, SMEs

Paper type: research paper

1. Introduction

In today's digital age, social media has significantly influenced the behavior of younger generations. With widespread Internet access and the rise of social networking sites, posting photos has become a popular trend, especially among Generation Z and Millennials (Abril et al., 2022; Javed et al., 2021). Both generations frequently take photos while dining, traveling, engaging in fashion activities, among others, and share them on social media, showcasing their experiences. This trend has greatly impacted Gen Z's habits, affecting not only their consumption choices but also the reasons behind them (Javed et al., 2021).

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2010, grew up with smartphones and social media already widespread (Dimock, 2019). They are the most digitally proficient generation (Hanafiah et al., 2021) and use social media as a primary means of communication and self-expression (Haddouche and Salomone, 2018). Generation Z prefers platforms like Snapchat, TikTok, and Instagram, which offer short-form and visual content, to share their thoughts, emotions, experiences, and interests (Pew Research Center, 2021). They spend more time online and are more social than previous generations (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021).

The impact of user-generated content (UGC) on social media, including text, images, videos, reviews and comments shapes perceptions (Irimi_as and Volo, 2023) and overall experiences (Chen et al., 2021). However, UGC, also known as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), can be a breeding ground for misinformation and fake news (Blandi et al., 2022) and lead to negative attitudes toward brands (Mehra, 2023). On the other hand, negative customer reviews provide organizations with opportunities to improve their service quality (Poyoi et al., 2023).

Millennials and Generation Z, since both generations are deemed tech-savvy, are more active on social media platforms, and constitute the the major target segment (Blandi et al., 2022).

Some precedents of food-sharing intentions have been described. For example, previous literature has identified tourist motivations as determinants for sharing their food experiences on social media (Lin et al., 2022; Zhu et al., 2019). Additionally, Prebensen et al. (2010) and Uslu (2020) suggested that satisfaction may directly affect intentions to spread electronic word of mouth (eWOM). Although researchers have studied the effects of both motivation and satisfaction on food-sharing intentions, there is not enough empirical evidence to confirm these relationships within a single framework.

No prior research on large samples examines the motivations for using social media while identifying different clusters based on demographic characteristics and perceived quality of life. Building on the first part of our research, which identified five clusters of young people based on their motivations for using social media (Camillo, 2024), we developed the second part to identify the main demographic characteristics and variables related to the perceived quality of life of these clusters.

Therefore, the research question of our study is the following:

RQ1 –How is Italian Generation Z (aged 12-20) categorized based on their main demographic characteristics, perceived quality of life, and motivations for using social media?

We then provided detailed descriptions of the five clusters and explored the managerial implications.

2. Theoretical background: the motivations behind intentions to use social media

From a functional point of view, some people post food photographs to create memories during the trip (Ivanyi and Biro-Szigeti, 2021; Javed et al., 2021). However, by spreading eWOM about their experiences, they achieve personal fulfilment (Oliveira et al., 2020; Yang and Lai, 2011) and are therefore acting towards themselves and deriving psychological benefits.

In general, the literature has also drawn upon the uses and gratifications theory of the Internet and social media to demonstrate that users fulfill personal satisfaction or psychological needs, ultimately influencing sharing behavior (Falgout et al., 2022). For example, the perceived enjoyment of using social media (Daxböck et al., 2021) has been widely identified as significantly influencing users' willingness to contribute online content and share it with others.

In addition, psychological factors towards others can be considered. For example, the literature refers to altruistic motivation, which is the desire to serve others without expecting anything in return (among others, Oliveira et al., 2020).

Other studies have suggested that satisfaction can affect the intention to share. For example, satisfaction with the service quality and atmosphere of restaurants influences eWOM engagement (Molinari et al., 2008). Specifically, users are more likely to share positive reviews than negative ones, so customer satisfaction leads to greater sharing intentions, including positive information, opinions, and recommendations (Poyoi et al., 2023).

Conversely, some studies have questioned the impact of satisfaction on sharing intention, suggesting that satisfaction might not be a significant predictor of the intention to share food experiences on social media. Tsao and Hsieh (2012) found that customer satisfaction with products does not necessarily determine their intention to spread positive eWOM. Therefore, there is a debate about whether satisfaction positively influences people's intentions to share experiences on social media.

Prior research on knowledge-sharing intention has shown that it mediates the relationship between motivation and actual sharing behavior (Wang et al., 2016). Kakhk et al. (2019) demonstrated that the intention to share information drives the actual sharing behavior. Drawing on the theory of reasoned action (TRA), Lin and Huang (2013) also noted that behavioral intention directly influences

actual behavior. Specifically, sharing travel experiences on social media affects both current and future behavior (Wang et al., 2016). Therefore, the greater the intention to share, the stronger the sharing behavior.

However, large empirical studies that examine motivations behind the use of social media are scarce. Understanding the motivations behind consumers' use of social media is fundamental for all firms to tailor their offerings and communication strategies.

Originally, social media focused on creating social connections. Today, this characteristic is progressively transforming into a more media-oriented perspective. Entertainment and information have, indeed, become increasingly relevant. However, there is little attention in the marketing literature to understanding the perspectives of the youngest users, particularly those aged 12-20.

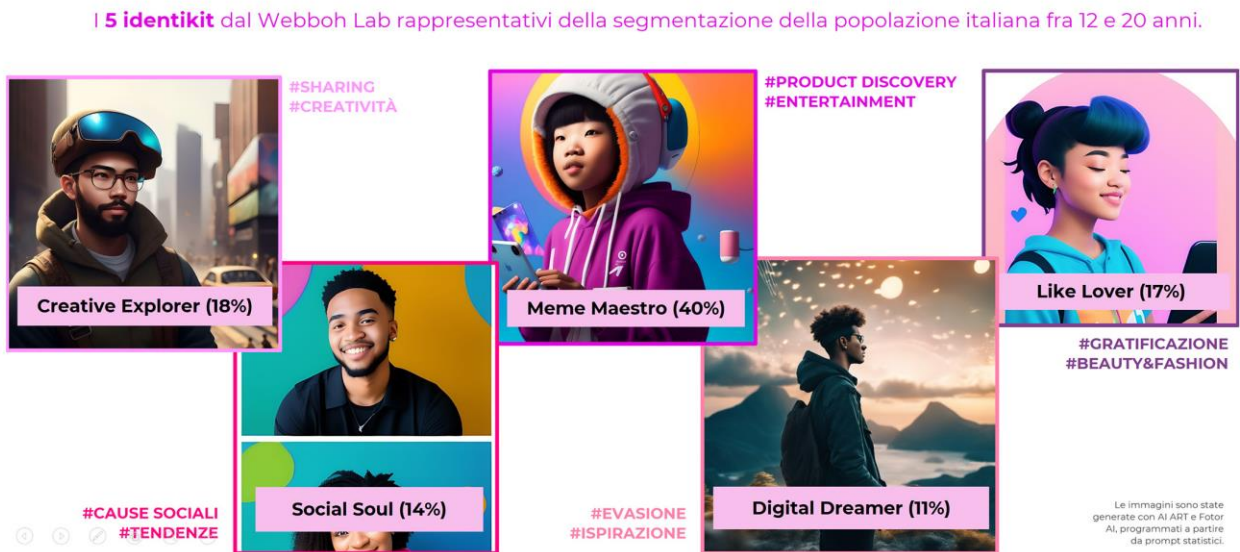
In a recent research report, Camillo (2023) describes the motivations for using social media (Likert scale 1-10) of a sample of 24, 676 Italian young people (ages 12-20) on the Webboh platform (table 1).

Table 1- The motivations for using social media by Italian Gen Z (ages 12-20)

Label	Mean
divertimento, meme, video virali, intrattenimenti	7.52
scoperta dei trend, ispirazione su prodotti di tendenza	7.34
evasione dalla vita quotidiana, mondo online diverso	7.10
connessioni sociali, contatto	7.10
informazioni, si impara e si scoprono cose nuove	7.01
esplorazione di interessi comuni, scoperte nuovi argomenti	6.93
condivisione di se stessi, della propria vita	6.68
identità online diversa dalla realtà	6.65
seguire idoli del momento, creator in voga, contattarli	6.65
condivisione di foto, scrittura creativa, opere d'arte	6.52
ricerca di aiuto, consigli, sostegno	6.01
condivisione informazioni, promuovere istanze sociali	6.00
ritorni positivi, like, apprezzamenti	5.62

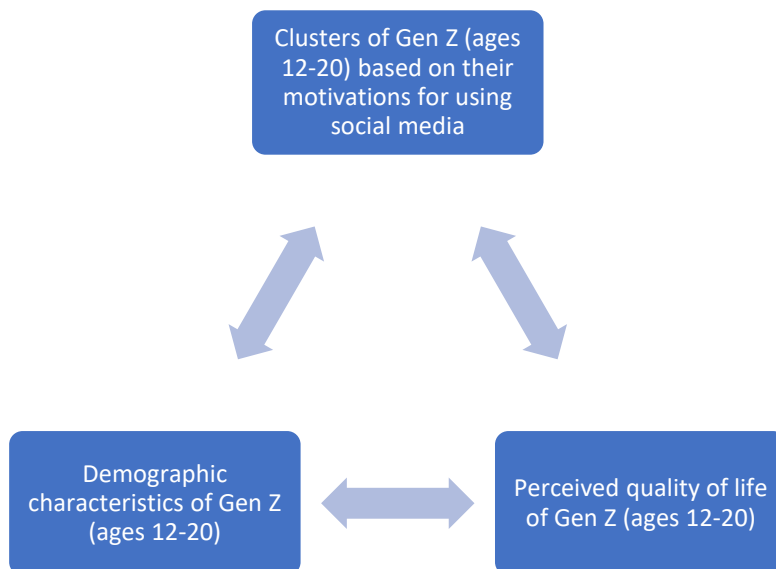
Additionally, the Author identified five clusters of young people grouped by different motivations, namely (Fig. 2): meme maestro (40%), creative explorer /18%), like lover (17%), social soul (14%), and digital dreamer (11%).

Fig. 2 – Clusters of Italian young people (ages 12-20) by motivations for using social media



Therefore, this research aims to identify the relationships between motivations for social media use, demographic characteristics, and perceived quality of life among young people aged 12-20 (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2 – Research Framework



This study builds on the first part of the research, which identified five clusters of Gen Z (Fig. 1) based on their motivations for using social media, as published in a research report (Camillo, 2023). In particular, this study examines the relationship between motivations, demographic characteristics, and perceived quality of life.

The demographic variables we considered include age, geographic origin, and education.

To capture the quality of life, we examined the following variables: phone usage, life satisfaction, feeling of loneliness, perception of territory, Dietary and Political Habits, Online Shopping and Volunteering, Hobbies and Reading, Fashion and Cooking, Travel and Sports.

3. Methodology

The analysis of the clusters was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative variables to ensure the results were statistically significant.

For **quantitative variables**, the significance of the differences between the cluster means and the overall sample mean was tested using a **t-test**. This statistical test assesses whether the means of two groups are statistically different from each other, which in this context is the cluster mean compared to the overall mean.

For **qualitative variables**, the significance of the differences in proportions was tested using a **hypergeometric distribution**. This distribution is used to calculate the probability of a given number of successes in draws from a finite population without replacement, which is appropriate for our categorical data.

In both types of tests, the **threshold for significance was set at a p-value of less than 1%** ($p < 0.01$). This stringent criterion ensures that the results we report as significant have a very low probability of being due to random chance, thereby providing confidence in the findings of our analysis.

4. Findings

4.1 Synthesis and Conclusions on the Five Clusters

4.1.1 Synthesis and Conclusions on the "Meme Maestro" Cluster

The "Meme Maestro" cluster represents about 40% of the survey participants, constituting the majority of the young respondents. This group is characterized by a strong interest in online entertainment, particularly through memes, viral videos, and other forms of social content. These young people use social media not only for fun but also as a primary source of information, reflecting a deep and natural integration of social media into their daily lives.

Main Characteristics

1. Intense Phone Usage:

- The average phone usage in this cluster is 8.132, slightly above the general average (8.044). This data highlights how the phone is an essential tool for "Meme Maestro"

to consume and create social content. The phone is the means through which they interact with the world and stay updated on trends and viral content.

2. **Life Satisfaction:**

- The average life happiness is 6.634, slightly higher than the general average of 6.578. This suggests that, despite the heavy use of social media, these young people manage to maintain a good level of personal satisfaction. Their involvement in social media probably provides them with a sense of belonging and connection.

3. **Feeling of Loneliness:**

- The average feeling of loneliness is 5.400, lower than the general average of 5.583. This may indicate that interaction on social media helps "Meme Maestro" feel less lonely, providing a support network and social connections that compensate for any lack of face-to-face interactions.

4. **Perception of Territory:**

- With an average of 6.155 compared to the general average of 6.341, "Meme Maestro" has a slightly less positive perception of the territory in which they live. This could be due to the constant comparison with more attractive and idealized realities they see on social media.

Social Activities and Interests

• **Getting Information and Entertaining on Social Media:**

- A very high percentage (81.62%) of this group uses social media to get information and entertain themselves. This indicates that social media is their main source of news, trends, and entertainment.

• **Hobbies and Regular Activities:**

- 81.43% regularly engage in hobbies, showing a balance between online and offline activities. This balance could contribute to their life satisfaction.

• **Participation in Volunteering and Social Initiatives:**

- 81.26% participate in volunteer activities, demonstrating a social commitment that could be facilitated and promoted through social platforms.

• **Regular Sports Activity:**

- 81.35% regularly practice sports, reflecting an attempt to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle despite the time spent online.

• **Dietary Habits and Cultural Events:**

- Many follow specific dietary habits (81.16%) and attend musical events (81.12%), indicating an interest in a healthy and culturally rich lifestyle.

- **Interest in Art and Creativity:**
 - With 80.89% showing interest in art and creativity, "Meme Maestro" could also be content creators as well as consumers.
- **Reading and Shopping at Malls:**
 - A good percentage spend time reading (81.10%) and frequent malls (80.98%), demonstrating that despite the online focus, they maintain varied interests.
- **Politics and Sports Events:**
 - They do not worry much about politics (80.78%), but many attend sports events as spectators (80.75%).
- **Cooking and Fashion Trends:**
 - 80.61% love cooking and 80.65% follow fashion and beauty trends, reflecting an interest in practical and lifestyle activities.
- **Online Shopping and Travel:**
 - They are very active in online shopping (80.40%) and participate in trips and excursions (80.55%), highlighting modern and dynamic consumer behavior.
- **Religious or Spiritual Practice:**
 - 80.20% are involved in religious or spiritual activities, indicating that despite their modern and technological lifestyle, they maintain a connection with spirituality.

Conclusions

The "Meme Maestro" cluster represents a generation of young people deeply integrated into the digital world, where social media plays a central role in their entertainment, information, and social interaction. These young people manage to balance their online time with offline activities, showing an interest in a healthy and culturally enriched lifestyle. Despite the intense use of social media, they manage to maintain a good level of personal happiness and a support network that makes them feel less lonely.

Their slightly less positive perception of the territory in which they live could be influenced by the constant comparison with other more ideal realities seen online. However, their active participation in hobbies, volunteering, and sports activities shows that these young people are not just passive consumers of digital content but also active participants in their community.

In summary, "Meme Maestro" represents a dynamic and versatile group capable of navigating between the digital and real worlds, finding a balance that supports their life satisfaction and overall well-being.

4.1.2 Synthesis and Conclusions on the "Social Soul" Cluster

The "Social Soul" cluster represents about 14% of the survey participants. This group is characterized by a conscious and relational use of social media, primarily used to maintain relationships and share common interests. These young people stand out for their social commitment and their balance between online and offline activities.

Main Characteristics

1. Use of Social Media:

- 100% of this group gets informed and entertained through social media, showing a conscious and active use of digital platforms.

2. Interests and Dietary Habits:

- 87.44% of this cluster uses social media, while 85.50% do not follow a vegetarian or vegan diet.

3. Political Commitment:

- 76.58% are not involved in politics, indicating a lack of interest in political issues.

4. Hobbies and Reading:

- 66.86% practice a hobby regularly and 47.75% spend time reading books or magazines, suggesting a balance between online and offline interests.

5. Online Shopping and Volunteering:

- 73.91% shop online and 70.95% do not participate in volunteer activities, reflecting modern consumer behavior and limited participation in social initiatives.

6. Fashion and Cooking:

- 70.67% follow fashion or beauty trends, while 65.49% love cooking or preparing new foods, indicating an interest in practical and lifestyle activities.

7. Travel and Sports:

- 56.91% do not participate in regular trips or excursions and 53.67% practice sports regularly, showing a variety of interests.

8. Religious Practice:

- 25.58% have a religious or spiritual practice, while 63.22% do not, reflecting a diversity of spiritual orientations.

9. Malls and Creativity:

- 57.31% often go to malls with friends and 39.80% have a specific interest in art or creativity.

10. Sports and Musical Events:

- 53.50% do not attend sports events as spectators and 45.20% do not attend musical events or concerts, indicating limited involvement in these activities.

Demographic Variables

1. Geographic Distribution:

- Present in regions such as Campania (7.11%), Lombardy (16.83%), Emilia-Romagna (7.28%), and Sicily (6.65%).

2. Age:

- Majority aged between 14 and 18 years.

3. Educational Level:

- Parents with middle school education (12.68%) or a degree/postgraduate (23.37%).

Conclusions

The "Social Soul" cluster consists of young people who use social media to maintain relationships and share common interests. These young people stand out for their balance between online and offline activities, practicing hobbies and dedicating time to reading. They show modern consumer behavior, with a high frequency of online shopping and an interest in fashion and cooking. Despite their lack of interest in politics and limited participation in volunteer activities, this group maintains a good level of personal satisfaction thanks to their social and relational involvement.

In summary, "Social Soul" represents a group of young people who manage to balance the digital world with offline activities, finding a balance that supports their life satisfaction and overall well-being.

4.1.3 Synthesis and Conclusions on the "Like Lover" Cluster

The "Like Lover" cluster represents about 10.20% of the survey participants. This group is characterized by a strong use of social media to obtain gratification and positive feedback. Individuals in this cluster tend to separate their online identity from daily reality and show a range of interests and habits that reflect this behavior.

Main Characteristics

1. Use of Social Media:

- 100% of the group uses social media to get information and entertain themselves. This reflects a strong integration of social media into their daily lives.

2. Dietary and Political Habits:

- 87.32% do not follow a vegetarian or vegan diet.
- 80.20% are not involved in politics, indicating a lack of interest in political issues.

3. Online Shopping and Volunteering:

- 79.34% shop online, demonstrating modern consumer behavior.

- 75.67% do not participate in volunteer activities, reflecting low participation in social initiatives.

4. **Hobbies and Reading:**

- 70.03% practice a hobby regularly, while 51.41% do not spend time reading books or magazines, suggesting a balance between online and offline interests.

5. **Fashion and Cooking:**

- 73.87% follow fashion or beauty trends.
- 68.62% love cooking or preparing new foods, indicating an interest in practical and lifestyle activities.

6. **Travel and Sports:**

- 64.08% do not participate in regular trips or excursions.
- 53.13% practice sports regularly, while 39.44% do not practice sports regularly.

7. **Social and Religious Events:**

- 56.65% do not attend sports events as spectators.
- 46.40% attend musical events or concerts, while 46.64% do not.
- 67.14% do not have a religious or spiritual practice, while 25.20% do.

8. **Creativity and Malls:**

- 41.63% have a specific interest in art or creativity.
- 36.78% do not frequently go to malls with friends, while 56.10% do.

Demographic Variables

1. **Geographic Distribution:**

- Significant presence in Piedmont (8.76%), Lombardy (18.78%), Veneto (7.67%), and Emilia-Romagna (6.96%).

2. **Age:**

- Majority aged under 14 years (34.82%), between 14 and 15 years (30.67%), and over 18 years (5.87%).

3. **Educational Level:**

- Parents with middle school education (14.63%) or a degree/postgraduate (23.94%).

Conclusions

The "Like Lover" cluster represents a group of young people who use social media to obtain gratification and positive feedback. These young people tend to separate their online identity from daily reality and show a variety of interests and habits that reflect this behavior. Despite the heavy use of social media, they maintain a certain balance between online and offline activities, with a good percentage regularly practicing hobbies and following fashion trends.

In summary, the "Like Lover" represents a group of young people navigating between the digital and real worlds, finding gratification through social media but also maintaining practical and creative interests. This balance supports their life satisfaction and overall well-being, even though their participation in social and political initiatives is limited.

4.1.4 Synthesis and Conclusions on the "Digital Dreamer" Cluster

The "Digital Dreamer" cluster represents about 17.35% of the survey participants. This group is characterized by an intense use of social media for information and entertainment but maintains a balance between online and offline activities. Individuals in this cluster show a strong interest in fashion, beauty, and cooking but have limited participation in social and political initiatives.

Main Characteristics

1. Use of Social Media:

- 100% of the group uses social media for information and entertainment, with 91.21% stating that they use these platforms regularly.

2. Dietary and Political Habits:

- 90.47% do not follow a vegetarian or vegan diet.
- 82.74% are not involved in politics, indicating a lack of interest in political issues.

3. Volunteering and Online Shopping:

- 78.65% do not participate in volunteer activities, reflecting low participation in social initiatives.
- 78.92% shop online, demonstrating modern consumer behavior.

4. Religious Practice and Fashion:

- 71.93% do not practice religious or spiritual activities.
- 75.84% follow fashion or beauty trends, indicating a strong interest in lifestyle.

5. Sports and Creativity:

- 60.29% do not attend sports events as spectators, while 55.59% regularly practice sports.
- 57.43% do not have a specific interest in art or creativity, while 67.19% love cooking or preparing new foods.

6. Malls and Reading:

- 62.40% frequently go to malls with friends, suggesting an active social life.
- 48.96% do not spend time reading books or magazines, while 46.02% do so regularly.

Demographic Variables

1. Geographic Distribution:

- Significant presence in Lombardy (18.50%), Lazio (8.51%), Emilia-Romagna (7.18%), Veneto (7.41%), Tuscany (4.83%), Piedmont (5.48%), and Sardinia (3.36%).

2. Age:

- Majority aged between 14 and 15 years (37.14%), under 14 years (33.82%), and between 16 and 18 years (10.40%).

3. Educational Level:

- Parents with middle school diplomas (20.75%), high school diplomas (29.18%), and degrees/postgraduate (27.66%).

Conclusions

The "Digital Dreamer" cluster represents a group of young people who use social media intensively for information and entertainment but manage to maintain a good balance between online and offline activities. These young people are strongly interested in fashion, beauty, and cooking but show limited participation in social and political initiatives. Despite the intense use of social media, they manage to maintain an active social life by going to malls with friends and participating in sports and creative activities.

In summary, the "Digital Dreamer" represents a dynamic and versatile group of young people capable of navigating between the digital and real worlds. They find a balance that supports their life satisfaction and overall well-being, even though their participation in social and political initiatives remains limited.

4.1.5 Synthesis and Conclusions on the "Creative Explorer" Cluster

The "Creative Explorer" cluster represents about 18.29% of the survey participants. This group is mainly composed of young people who use social media as a platform for exploration, discovering new interests, sharing information, and promoting social causes. They express their creativity through various artistic forms such as photography, writing, and artwork. They are actively engaged in the online world to learn and connect with others, following trends and finding inspiration from trending products. They lead an active lifestyle, involving themselves in activities such as volunteering, reading, and occasional travels.

Main Characteristics

Use of Social Media:

- A very high percentage (91.84%) of this group uses social media for information and entertainment. This indicates that social media is one of the primary sources of news, trends, and leisure for these individuals.

Dietary Habits:

- 89.87% do not follow vegetarian or vegan dietary habits, suggesting a preference for a traditional diet.

Online Shopping:

- 79.70% shop online, reflecting modern and digital consumer behavior.

Interest in Politics:

- 80.10% are not involved in politics, suggesting a low interest in this area.

Fashion and Beauty Trends:

- 75.73% follow fashion or beauty trends, indicating a strong interest in the fashion and beauty sector.

Cooking and Food Preparation:

- 70.45% love cooking or preparing new foods, reflecting an interest in culinary activities.

Hobbies and Regular Activities:

- 69.88% have a hobby that they practice regularly, showing a balance between online and offline activities.

Religious or Spiritual Practice:

- 69.23% do not engage in religious or spiritual practices, indicating lower participation in these activities.

Musical Events and Concerts:

- 49.24% attend musical events or concerts, highlighting an interest in cultural and entertainment activities.

Regular Sports Activity:

- 56.09% regularly practice sports, reflecting an attempt to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle.

Volunteering and Social Initiatives:

- 72.33% do not participate in volunteer activities or social initiatives, showing less inclination towards social engagement.

Shopping Malls:

- 60.06% frequently go to shopping malls with friends, demonstrating an interest in shopping and social interaction in these places.

Art and Creativity:

- 42.56% have a specific interest in art or creativity, indicating a passion for creative activities.

Conclusions

The "Creative Explorer" cluster represents a group of individuals with varied interests and modern consumer behavior. They intensively use social media for information and entertainment, do a lot of

online shopping, and follow fashion and beauty trends. Although they show an interest in cooking and hobbies, they tend not to be heavily involved in political, religious, or volunteer activities. This group balances their online time with offline activities such as sports, hobbies, and cultural events. Even though they are less involved in volunteer activities, they maintain a strong connection with modern trends and popular culture, demonstrating dynamic and varied consumer behavior.

4.2 Comparison of Clusters Regarding Social Media Usage, Socio-Demographic Characteristics, and Perceived Quality of Life

Social Media Usage

1. Meme Maestro (40%):

- **Social Media Usage:** Intensively used for entertainment and information.
- **Characteristics:** High integration of social media into daily life.
- **Quality of Life:** High life satisfaction, low feelings of loneliness.

2. Social Soul (14%):

- **Social Media Usage:** Used to maintain relationships and share common interests.
- **Characteristics:** Balance between online and offline activities.
- **Quality of Life:** High personal satisfaction due to social balance.

3. Like Lover (10.20%):

- **Social Media Usage:** Strong use for obtaining gratification and positive feedback.
- **Characteristics:** Separation of online identity from everyday reality.
- **Quality of Life:** Balance between online and offline activities, limited participation in social and political initiatives.

4. Digital Dreamer (17.35%):

- **Social Media Usage:** Intensive use for information and entertainment.
- **Characteristics:** Strong interest in fashion, beauty, and cooking.
- **Quality of Life:** Balance between online and offline activities, active social life.

5. Creative Explorer (18.29%):

- **Social Media Usage:** Used for exploring new interests and promoting social causes.
- **Characteristics:** Creativity expressed through various artistic forms.
- **Quality of Life:** Active life and involvement in activities such as volunteering and traveling.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

1. Meme Maestro:

- **Geographic Distribution:** Wide distribution without particular concentrations.
 - **Age:** Young adults.
 - **Education:** Varied.
2. **Social Soul:**
- **Geographic Distribution:** Concentrated in regions such as Campania, Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, and Sicily.
 - **Age:** Mainly between 14 and 18 years old.
 - **Education:** Parents with middle school or higher education.
3. **Like Lover:**
- **Geographic Distribution:** Significant presence in Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto, and Emilia-Romagna.
 - **Age:** Majority under 14 years and between 14 and 15 years.
 - **Education:** Parents with middle school or higher education.
4. **Digital Dreamer:**
- **Geographic Distribution:** Significant in Lombardy, Lazio, Emilia-Romagna, Veneto, Tuscany, Piedmont, and Sardinia.
 - **Age:** Mainly between 14 and 15 years and under 14 years.
 - **Education:** Parents with middle school, high school diplomas, and higher education.
5. **Creative Explorer:**
- **Geographic Distribution:** Wide distribution without particular concentrations.
 - **Age:** Varied, mainly young people.
 - **Education:** Varied.

Perceived Quality of Life

1. **Meme Maestro:**
- **Life Satisfaction:** High life satisfaction, low feelings of loneliness.
 - **Perception of Territory:** Slightly less positive perception of the territory.
2. **Social Soul:**
- **Life Satisfaction:** High personal satisfaction due to the balance between online and offline activities.
 - **Social Engagement:** High social and relational engagement.
3. **Like Lover:**
- **Life Satisfaction:** Balance between online and offline activities, but limited participation in social and political initiatives.

4. **Digital Dreamer:**

- **Life Satisfaction:** Active social life, balance between online and offline activities.

5. **Creative Explorer:**

- **Life Satisfaction:** Active life, involvement in activities such as volunteering and traveling.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The empirical research conducted on a representative sample of Italian Gen Z aged 12-20 enabled us to answer the research question. Given the little understanding of the relationship between social media motivations, demographic characteristics, and variables related to perceived quality of life variables, our exploratory and quantitative investigation contributes to filling this gap in the literature. The perception and imagery of social media significantly influence socio-demographic characteristics and perceived quality of life. Young people who deeply integrate social media into their daily lives, such as “Meme Maestro” and “Like Lover,” tend to show higher life satisfaction, albeit with lower participation in social and political initiatives. In contrast, groups like “Social Soul” and “Creative Explorer” who balance social media use with offline activities show higher social engagement and positive perceived quality of life.

This study has produced several managerial implications. First, entrepreneurs and managers must recognize that Generation Z is not a monolith; even among young people aged 12-20, there are differences in motivations, values, interests, and behaviors. At least five distinct clusters have been identified.

While large companies can effectively manage social media, SMEs face many challenges due to scarce resources and limited skills. Another implication is for policymakers: the government should support communication and marketing investments for SMEs to satisfy heterogeneous targets.

The originality of this study lies in its extensive empirical investigation of Generation Z's motivations for using social media, along with their characteristics and interests—a relatively unexplored area.

As Gen Z represents future consumers, it is fundamental for companies, particularly SMEs, to understand this important target group in depth and to identify buyer personas to serve them with customized value propositions and communication strategies.

Future studies should delve deeper into each cluster or buyer persona using qualitative research methods, such as interviews and observations.

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