

Master's Degree Program in
Data-Driven Marketing

Specialization in
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**Short-Lived, Strongly
Felt: Instagram Stories
and the Psychological
and Brand-Relational
Drivers of Content
Engagement in the
Fashion Industry**

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Short-Lived, Strongly Felt: Instagram Stories and the Psychological and Brand-Relational Drivers of Content Engagement in the Fashion Industry

by

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STATEMENT OF INTEGRITY

I hereby declare having conducted this academic work with integrity. I confirm that I have not used plagiarism, any form of undue use of information or falsification of results along the process leading to its elaboration. I further declare that I have fully acknowledged the Rules of Conduct and Code of Honor from the NOVA Information Management School.

[Lisbon, 28/02/2026]

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ABSTRACT

Ephemeral content, particularly Instagram Stories, has become a core element of fashion brands' digital communication strategies. This dissertation explores how exposure to fashion brands' Instagram Stories relates to content engagement by integrating psychological (consumer gratification and fear of missing out) and brand-relational mechanisms (brand trust and self-brand connection) within a single conceptual model. A quantitative approach was adopted using an online survey, resulting in 293 valid responses, and the proposed relationships were tested through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM). Ephemeral content was modelled as a formative second-order construct comprising six dimensions. Among these, perceived relevance, aesthetic quality, and interactivity significantly shape the construct within the fashion context, whereas informativeness, entertainment, and trendiness do not contribute significantly. At the structural level, exposure to Instagram Stories was positively associated with consumer gratification, FOMO, brand trust, and, most strongly, self-brand connection. In turn, gratification, brand trust, and self-brand connection were significant predictors of content engagement, while FOMO played a comparatively weaker role. Although the conceptual model emphasized indirect effects, the results also reveal a significant direct link between ephemeral content and content engagement. Overall, engagement seems to grow from a combination of enjoyable experiences and brand-related responses. By combining psychological and relational mechanisms in one framework, this study offers a more comprehensive understanding how Instagram Stories can shape engagement in the fashion industry and provides practical direction for brands aiming to use Instagram Stories more strategically.

KEYWORDS

Ephemeral Marketing; Content Engagement; Brand Trust; Self-Brand Connection; Fear of Missing Out (FOMO); Consumer Gratification

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG):



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AVE	Average Variance Extracted
FOMO	Fear of Missing Out
HTMT	Heterotrait-Monotrait
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling
SMM	Social Media Marketing
U&G	Uses and Gratifications
VIF	Variance Inflation Factor



1 INTRODUCTION

Social media marketing (SMM) has become a key part of how brands communicate today. Blending digital tools with more traditional marketing practices helps companies interact with customers in a more direct and ongoing way, often inviting them to take an active role in the brand's online "world" (Ebrahim, 2020). This shift places consumers closer to the center of marketing, giving brands new opportunities to build stronger relationships and promote products in more creative and engaging ways (Goel et al., 2022). SMM also supports the creation of brand communities where people can exchange opinions and feedback, thereby strengthening engagement and loyalty over time (Salhaba et al., 2023). Within this context, Instagram has become especially popular and is widely used by companies for brand management, social commerce, and customer service (Jin & Ryu, 2020).

Within this fast-changing digital landscape, ephemeral content has become a popular and effective strategy for brands. By disappearing after a set time, this type of content can create a sense of immediacy and urgency, capturing attention. Ephemeral content is also often perceived as more authentic and less polished, which can help strengthen engagement (Chen & Cheung, 2019; Flecha-Ortíz et al., 2021). Unlike traditional posts, ephemeral content is designed for quick consumption and tends to evoke stronger emotional responses, as users focus more on information they perceive as fleeting (Kreling et al., 2022; Sánchez-Cobarro et al., 2020). Due to this growing impact, researchers have increasingly turned their attention to ephemeral features and their potential to foster relationships between brands and consumers (Pinto et al., 2019).

Introduced in 2016, Instagram Stories allows users to share short images or videos up to 15 seconds long that automatically disappear after 24 hours. The format has become hugely popular, with more than 500 million people using Stories daily, making it one of the most dynamic formats for brands to promote content, connect with audiences, and encourage actions like polls, swipes, and replies (Stallone & Koller, 2021; Chen & Cheung, 2019). This dynamic highlights how ephemeral formats such as Instagram Stories can serve as a valuable tool for brands seeking to strengthen content engagement (Aggarwal et al., 2025). Instagram Stories have also gained widespread acceptance among both companies and consumers as a highly effective tool for sharing brand-created content. Businesses view this format as a way to deliver distinctive value through entertaining or informative posts (Kusumasondjaja & Tjiptono, 2019; Song et al., 2019). Especially in visually driven sectors such as fashion, Stories have become popular because they make it easy for brands to share content that feels both visually appealing and timely. This format is especially popular among millennial and Gen Z audiences, who are highly active on Instagram and respond well to immersive, short-form content (Lu & Lin, 2022; Ellison & Vitak, 2015).



Even though interest in ephemeral content, particularly Instagram Stories, has been growing, there is still a need to understand better how this format actually encourages users to engage with branded content. Existing studies have emphasized users' psychological and behavioral responses, while giving less attention to how ephemeral content may also shape brand-relational aspects that foster more sustained content engagement. Moreover, these mechanisms are often studied separately, limiting an integrated understanding of how these pathways may work together in shaping content engagement. Finally, evidence is concentrated in broad or mixed-industry settings, leaving the fashion sector underexplored. Given the growing strategic relevance of ephemeral formats, this study also aims to clarify what motivates users to consume and interact with Instagram Stories and how these responses connect to engagement with branded content.

The primary objective of this study is to understand how exposure to fashion brands' Instagram Stories relates to content engagement. More specifically, the research examines the roles of key psychological factors (consumer gratification and fear of missing out (FOMO)) and brand-relational factors (self-brand connection and brand trust) in explaining how exposure to Instagram Stories is linked to content engagement. By jointly considering both types of mechanisms, the study adopts an integrated perspective that reflects the multifaceted nature of content engagement.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following research question: In the fashion industry, how does exposure to Instagram Stories influence content engagement through psychological and brand-relational mechanisms?

This dissertation is organized into five chapters: the Literature Review, Methodology, Empirical Study, Results and Discussion, and Conclusions and Future Research. The Literature Review introduces ephemeral content, especially Instagram Stories, as the core format examined in the study and reviews the key constructs underpinning the study: consumer gratification, FOMO, brand trust, self-brand connection, and content engagement. This chapter ends by presenting the conceptual model and research hypotheses. The Methodology chapter describes the questionnaire design, measurement scales, target population, and sample characteristics. The Empirical Study chapter then explains the data collection and analysis of the results, followed by the presentation and interpretation of the results in the Results and Discussion chapter. Finally, the last chapter summarizes the main conclusions and highlights the study's implications, limitations, and directions for future research.



2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 EPHEMERAL CONTENT ON INSTAGRAM

Ephemeral marketing content refers to digital materials such as images, text, and videos that are designed to be temporary, disappearing after typically 24 hours (Bayer et al., 2016). Brands use this format as a dynamic communication tool to deliver promotions and engage users (Mehra et al., 2018; Bayer et al., 2016; Saunders & Eaton, 2018). Initially introduced by Snapchat, ephemeral content was later adopted by major platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp, becoming a common feature across social media environments (Dange et al., 2021).

Strategically, ephemeral marketing has become a key component of digital communication plans. These formats create entertaining, high-quality environments in which users not only consume but also can directly engage with brand content (Campbell et al., 2021; Sánchez-Cobarro et al., 2021), broaden their reach, and foster longer-term relationships (Mavilinda et al., 2024). This responsiveness is driven both by the built-in urgency of ephemeral formats and often by FOMO prompting spontaneous interactions (Dange et al., 2021). Such interaction is further strengthened when brands share relevant and engaging posts that reinforce their presence across platforms (Sánchez-Cobarro et al., 2021; Chaabane & Pez, 2017).

Research shows that ephemeral formats enhance a sense of being “in the moment,” making the experience feel more exciting and emotionally resonant than traditional posts (Kivetz & He, 2017; Chen & Cheung, 2019). In this sense, ephemeral marketing reshapes user experience, enabling consumers to feel a closer, more personal connection with viewed content (Chen & Cheung, 2019).

The use of ephemeral formats continues to grow, particularly following the widespread adoption of Instagram Stories, launched in 2016 and modelled after Snapchat. Today, with millions of daily users, Instagram Stories is a major tool for businesses, with one-third of the most-viewed Stories coming from companies that regularly use them to promote products (Dange et al., 2021; Sánchez-Cobarro et al., 2021). Its increasing adoption reflects how effective it can be at improving visibility and capturing attention in a competitive digital environment. Businesses across industries, including fashion, often rely on the visual nature of Instagram Stories to showcase their offerings and attract consumer attention (Amalia et al., 2023).

When conceptualizing SMM, four core dimensions are frequently highlighted: informativeness, trendiness, entertainment, and interactivity (Kim & Ko, 2012; Chen & Lin, 2019; Chen & Qasim, 2020). Building on this, Nguyen et al. (2024) propose a more specific framework for ephemeral content marketing based on six dimensions, adding aesthetic quality and perceived relevance to better reflect the visual and personalized nature of short-lived content. Accordingly, the six dimensions are presented as a way



to strengthen how researchers and practitioners evaluate customer experience with ephemeral content (Nguyen et al., 2024).

2.1.1 INFORMATIVENESS

Informativeness refers to a brand's ability to provide sufficient and relevant information that helps consumers make more informed purchase decisions (Rotfeld, 1987). In Instagram Stories and other ephemeral formats, higher informational value fosters more favourable attitudes toward branded content (Ko & Yu, 2019). Operationally, informativeness involves delivering clear and useful details about products or services, including available alternatives, enabling consumers to compare options and select the greatest value (Koay et al., 2021). Given that information seeking is a primary motivation for social networking site use (Lu & Lin, 2022), and that these platforms facilitate the sharing of brand experiences as valuable information sources for other consumers (Kitsios et al., 2022), informativeness emerges as a key evaluative dimension of ephemeral content marketing (Nguyen et al., 2025) and an element that can shape behavior (Lee & Hong, 2016; Hanaysha, 2022b).

2.1.2 TRENDINESS

Trendiness can be understood as the purposeful use of timely and popular information about a brand's products or services on social media (Koay et al., 2021). In ephemeral contexts, maintaining up-to-date content enables audiences to track ongoing changes and align with prevailing trends, thereby supporting trendiness as a relevant evaluative dimension and requiring creators to refresh content to prevent obsolescence continually (Nguyen et al., 2024). By tapping into people's desire to stay current and in touch with the latest fads, trendiness can also stimulate customer engagement and help brands and influencers remain relevant by frequently producing ephemeral content that reflects current trends (Amalia & Widodo, 2023).

2.1.3 ENTERTAINMENT

Cheung et al. (2020) suggest that entertainment on social media arises when brands create light, playful and humorous content, that satisfies users' desire for enjoyment. On social media platforms, users are therefore motivated to seek enjoyment and amusement (Qin, 2020). In this regard, entertainment has become a central element of SMM and has been shown to enhance brand evaluations and increase intentions to revisit a site, thereby highlighting the importance of designing playful and interesting content (Sharma et al., 2022). These effects align with the notion that entertainment in social media reflects pleasure and play derived from the experience (Manthiou et al., 2018). Entertainment constitutes a salient feature that shapes consumers' attitudes toward social media platforms (Pertierra, 2021).



2.1.4 INTERACTIVITY

According to Jensen (1998), interactivity refers to a brand's ability to enable the virtual sharing and exchange of information among its stakeholders. It involves two-way and many-to-many communication between companies and customers, as well as among customers themselves (Nilasari et al., 2019), and is operationalized through platforms that allow users to interact directly with a brand's profile (Kim & Lee, 2019; Koay et al., 2021; Kim & Ko, 2012). As online consumer conversations become more intense, firms must remain dynamic, responsive, and open to dialogue in order to sustain engagement (Godey et al., 2016). In this setting, ephemeral features such as Instagram Stories can enhance engagement beyond regular posts by offering interactive tools like polls and links that redirect users to landing pages or websites (Nguyen et al., 2024). Moreover, interactivity can trigger physiological responses that influence users' attitudes and purchase-related intentions (Amalia & Widodo, 2023).

2.1.5 PERCEIVED RELEVANCE

Zhu and Chang (2016) conceptualize perceived relevance as the degree to which content feels personally meaningful to consumers and aligns with their personal goals and values. Similarly, prior research indicates that when marketing content is perceived as relevant and aligned with consumers' specific needs and interests, it can strengthen their trust in the brand (Kim & Ko, 2012; Sohail et al., 2020).

2.1.6 AESTHETIC QUALITY

Aesthetic quality refers to how visually appealing images and videos appear to users on social media (Bazi et al., 2023). When visual elements are attractive, they tend to evoke positive emotions and are often associated with higher levels of engagement (Li & Xie, 2019). In the context of Instagram Stories, Nguyen et al. (2024) argue that the format's design features give brand elements like colours, typography, and logos renewed visibility and impact within ephemeral content. For this reason, aesthetic quality is widely considered a key dimension when assessing consumers' attitudes toward ephemeral content marketing (Nguyen et al., 2024).



2.2 CONSUMER GRATIFICATION

Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory explains how individuals actively choose media in order to satisfy specific personal needs. These needs are often categorized into affective, integrative, social, and escape (Katz et al., 1973). As digital media evolved, new forms of gratification have emerged. Sundar and Limperos (2013) extended the original framework to include modality-based gratification (how content is displayed), agency-based gratification (user control), interactivity-based gratification (real-time response), and navigability-based gratification (ease of movement through content). These new dimensions help explain the appeal of formats such as ephemeral content.

Ephemeral content, including Instagram Stories, can satisfy modality-based gratifications through visually rich, short-lived content and interactivity-based gratifications through features (Lopez et al., 2021). These formats also align with users' preferences for quick and engaging information, especially in time-sensitive formats that meet cognitive needs by presenting product information in a brief, engaging way (Anderson, 2015; Katz et al., 1973; Lopez et al., 2021). Beyond addressing cognitive and interactive needs, ephemeral content enhances a more immersive and emotionally engaging media experience (Chen & Cheung, 2019). Its short-lived nature fosters a sense of immediacy and exclusivity, often leading to heightened emotional reactions such as excitement and a sense of "in the moment" (Kivetz & He, 2017).

Strategically, ephemeral formats merge visual appeal, entertainment, interactivity, and timely information to create engaging user experiences (Moreno et al., 2017; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016; Belanche et al., 2019). Features such as polls, stickers, and swipe-up links support real-time interaction, strengthen consumer-brand connections, and enhance social engagement (Moreno et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2017), contributing to emotional satisfaction and social sharing, which in turn deepen brand relationships and shape consumer attitudes and behaviors (Bayer et al., 2016; Lopez et al., 2021; Mochon et al., 2017; Nisar et al., 2020). Additionally, factors such as FOMO, immediacy, trust, and social pressure significantly shape users' gratification levels and their engagement with ephemeral media (Dange et al., 2021).

Accordingly, the hypothesis is stated:

H1: Ephemeral content positively influences consumer gratification.



2.3 FOMO

Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is commonly described as the anxiety or unease that arises from the possibility of missing rewarding experiences or opportunities (Çelik et al., 2019). In digital environments, particularly on social media, this feeling is amplified by time-sensitive content, which encourages users to stay continuously connected to avoid missing out (Mavilinda et al., 2024).

The short lived nature of ephemeral content, such as Instagram Stories, intensifies this reaction. Because this content is available only briefly, it is perceived as urgent and exclusive, two characteristics that can heighten FOMO (Chen & Cheung, 2019). As a deliberately time limited format, ephemeral content is designed to activate FOMO and prompt instant user reactions (Dange et al., 2021). Consistent with this, Mavilinda et al. (2024) concluded that exposure to ephemeral marketing significantly increases FOMO, suggesting that greater exposure to ephemeral marketing leads to stronger FOMO among users.

Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Ephemeral content positively influences FOMO.

In social media environments, FOMO is closely connected to consumer gratification, often acting as a psychological trigger that motivates users to consume content to satisfy emotional or informational needs (Chen & Cheung, 2019). Moreover, because users believe ephemeral content will disappear after 24 hours, they tend to process it with greater cognitive effort, which can lead to stronger memory retention and increased motivation to act (Lin et al., 2020). The experience of FOMO can also encourage more active information seeking and exploration, which in turn enhances user satisfaction (Mavilinda et al., 2024). Furthermore, empirical evidence from Chen and Cheung (2019) and Mavilinda et al. (2024) found that FOMO directly contributes to users' degree of gratification when engaging with time-sensitive content.

Drawing from the arguments outlined above, the study advances the following hypothesis:

H3: FOMO positively influences consumer gratification.



2.4 BRAND TRUST

As consumers spend more time interacting with brands on social media, stronger brand ties emerge, and community trust can grow, intensifying overall consumer-brand trust (Füller et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2021).

Brand trust is the consumer's willingness to rely on a brand despite risk, based on expectations of positive outcomes (Lau & Lee, 1999; Khusniah et al., 2024). It also reflects confidence in the brand's ability to perform its stated function (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). In marketing terms, brand trust manifests behaviorally as a readiness to return to and choose the same brand (McKinney & Benson, 2013).

Companies build brand trust to secure a competitive advantage and improve performance, primarily by increasing customer satisfaction online (Ha, 2004). Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman (2001) argue that trust operates bidirectionally: for consumers, it reflects the belief that a brand will honour its promises, while for the brand, it involves a commitment to prioritize and fulfil customer expectations. Consistent with this view, brand trust is strengthened when a brand's offerings consistently meet or exceed expectations (Lau & Lee, 1999) and is also cultivated through social media touchpoints (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). Furthermore, Kwon et al. (2020) indicate that brand trust evolves through the accumulation of consumers' experiences, with each interaction deepening and consolidating that trust.

Beyond the theoretical mechanisms, recent empirical research consistently shows that SMM activities positively influence brand trust across multiple sectors (Salhab et al., 2023; Hafez, 2021; Moslehpour et al., 2022). Sector-specific studies in hospitality, fast food, and consumer electronics similarly suggest that effective online interactions and content strategies increase consumers' confidence in brands (Tatar & Eren Erdoğan, 2016; Puspaningrum, 2020; Nilowardono et al., 2020). Given that ephemeral marketing in social media represents a specific, time-sensitive form of SMM, it is therefore hypothesized that it similarly exerts a positive influence on brand trust.

These considerations lead to the formulation of the following hypothesis:

H4: Ephemeral content positively influences brand trust.



2.5 SELF-BRAND CONNECTION

Self-brand connection is “the extent to which individuals have incorporated brands into their self-concept (Escalas & Bettman, 2003, p. 379). Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) further describe this construct in terms of brand recognition, alignment with personal self-image, and incorporation of the brand into one’s identity, positioning it as a central element in understanding strong consumer-brand relationships. This connection is not only crucial to how consumers perceive brands, but also to how they interact with branded content online (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006), and it is strongest when consumers perceive a close match between their self-image and the brand’s image (Escalas & Bettman, 2003).

When a brand’s image corresponds with consumers’ self-concepts, the brand-consumer relationship is strengthened and preference for that brand increases (Escalas, 2004; Escalas & Bettman, 2005). In social media environments, this effect is intensified. SMM activities reinforce the self-brand connection as shown by Panigyrakis (2019) on Facebook, and deeper engagement with a brand’s content further nurtures self-brand connection and increases intentions to use the brand (Hollebeek et al., 2014).

In this way, social media plays a fundamental role in strengthening these connections. Through dynamic storytelling, brands can shape emotional narratives that deepen users’ perception of their relationship with the brand (Harrigan et al., 2017). Research suggests that helps reinforce customer-brand relationships and improve customer responses, particularly in hospitality, tourism, and food and beverage settings. (Kim & Ko, 2012; Ibrahim et al., 2020; Seo & Park, 2018; Hanaysha, 2022a; Kim et al., 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2021). Moreover, Ibrahim and Aljarah (2024) show that SMM activities on restaurant Instagram pages significantly predict users’ self-brand connection.

Taken together, this body of evidence provides a clear conceptual foundation for the hypothesis that follows.

H5: Ephemeral content positively influences self-brand connection.



2.6 CONTENT ENGAGEMENT

Engagement can be understood as “a state of being involved, occupied, fully absorbed, or engrossed in something” (Higgins & Scholer, 2009, p. 102). In the context of short-lived social formats, engagement with ephemeral content refers to users’ responses that emerge from interacting with and co-creating around this content, including thoughts, emotional connections, and intrinsic motivations (Chen & Cheung, 2019). Following this view, content engagement is commonly described as comprising three components: cognitive engagement (what users think about the content), affective engagement (how they feel about it), and behavioral engagement (what they do with it) (Hollebeek et al., 2014). This conceptualization closely aligns with the broader consumer brand engagement literature, which similarly highlights cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of brand (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Van Doorn et al., 2010). Given this overlap, engagement with branded content can be seen as a specific instantiation of consumer brand engagement, expressed through interactions with content. Accordingly, this study assumes that established relationships observed in the consumer brand engagement literature are applicable at the content level.

The engaging nature of ephemeral content provides opportunities for gratification through interaction, which in turn encourages continued participation (Chen & Cheung, 2019). Consumers who are satisfied with the content, thanks to its informational value, entertainment, perceived relevance or other attributes, are more likely to deepen their interaction with the content and the brand (Chen, 2011; Brodie et al., 2016; Brodie et al., 2013; Dolan et al., 2016). This satisfaction can create a feedback loop, where media usage fosters further engagement (Brodie et al., 2013). Accordingly, it is expected that higher levels of consumer gratification will lead to greater engagement, as proposed in the following hypothesis:

H6a: Consumer gratification positively influences content engagement.

Brand trust operates as an attitudinal driver of content engagement, such that the more trusting consumers are, the more they engage with the brand (Van Doorn et al., 2010; De Oliveira Santini et al., 2020). Although some studies view trust as a result of engagement (Hollebeek, 2011), others position it as an antecedent (Brodie et al., 2011; Van Doorn et al., 2010) and as part of consumers’ brand-related beliefs (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2020).

Empirical findings reinforce this conceptual view. Brand trust consistently and positively contributes to predictive engagement (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Hsu et al., 2012), underscoring the relevance of cultivating long-term trust to promote engagement. Research consistently reports a significant positive influence between trust and content engagement (Van Doorn et al., 2010; Osei-Frimpong et al., 2020; Ndhlovu & Maree, 2024). Overall, findings confirm trust as a pivotal factor influencing engagement (Osei-Frimpong et al., 2020) and show that brand trust serves as a crucial



factor that stimulates and strengthens consumers' willingness to engage with brands on social media and other online platforms (Chahal and Rani, 2017).

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6b: Brand trust positively influences content engagement.

The time limited nature of ephemeral content heightens a sense of urgency and exclusivity, which often increasing satisfaction and prompts immediate interaction (Chen & Cheung, 2019). When content is perceived as time sensitive, users remain connected and engage more actively with Stories and similar formats (Alt, 2015; Przybylski et al., 2013; Chen & Cheung, 2019). These repeated, rewarding micro interactions help consolidate a felt closeness to the brand, reinforcing self-brand connection (Kumar & Nayak, 2019; Maar et al., 2023; Mavilinda et al., 2024). In turn, a stronger self-brand connection sustains and deepens user engagement, consistent with evidence that gratifying media experiences lead users to increase their involvement with the brand or platform (Brodie et al., 2013; Dange et al., 2021).

Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6c: Self-brand connection positively influences content engagement.

In sum, ephemeral content fosters content engagement by meeting psychological, emotional, and social needs and is driven by both consumer gratification, brand trust and self-brand connection (Mavilinda et al., 2024; Nguyen et al., 2024).



2.7 CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The conceptual model for this study (Figure 1) visually represents the hypothesized relationships among six key constructs. In this model, ephemeral content (specifically fashion brands' Instagram Stories) serves as the independent variable while content engagement is the dependent variable. Consumer gratification, FOMO, brand trust, and self-brand connection are included as explanatory constructs that are expected to be associated with content engagement.

Taken together, the model captures two complementary routes to content engagement. The first is a psychological-behavioral pathway, in which the time limited and immersive nature of Instagram Stories can trigger responses such as FOMO and increase the gratifications users experience from consuming the content. These responses are expected to intensify cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement, resulting in higher content engagement. The second route reflects a brand relational perspective, acknowledging that ephemeral content may also influence how users perceive the brand, thereby strengthening brand trust and self-brand connection, both of which are known to foster deeper engagement with brand generated content. By integrating these two pathways, the model offers a more complete explanation of how ephemeral content fosters engagement, capturing both short term psychological reactions and relational perceptions linked to the brand.

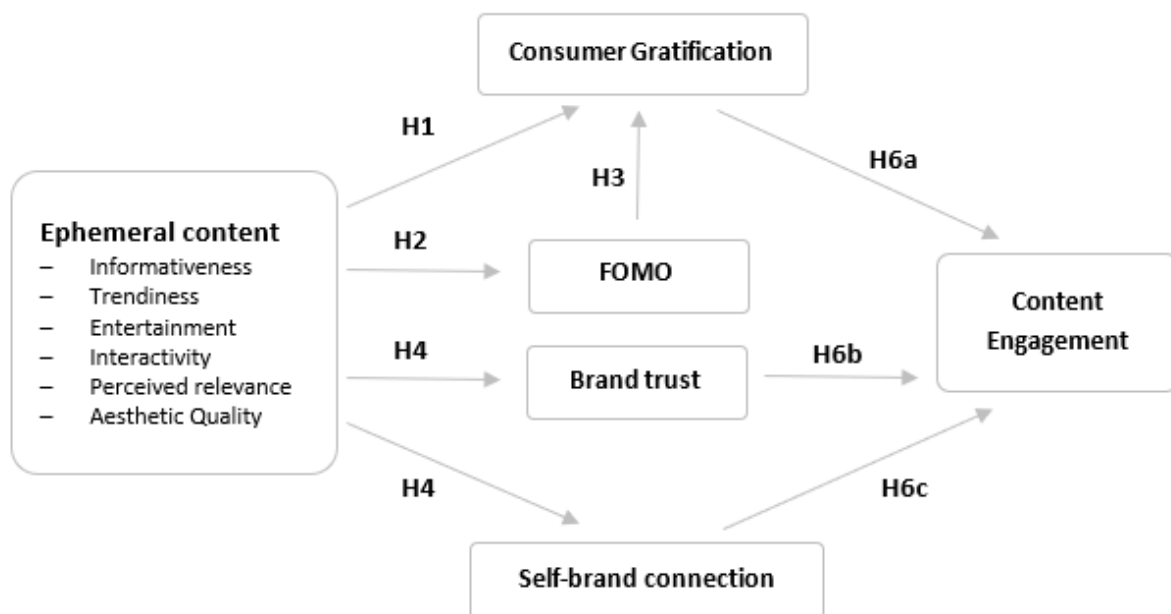


Figure 2.1 - Conceptual Model



3 METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative survey approach to explore how ephemeral content shapes users' experiences and behaviors, specifically Instagram Stories published by fashion brands. The focus is on understanding how this content influences users' gratification, feelings of FOMO, connection to the brand, and ultimately, their engagement with it. By focusing on a highly relevant and widely used format like Instagram Stories, the research offers insights into how time-limited, interactive content can influence deeper psychological and behavioral responses with fashion brands on social media.

3.1 QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

A structured questionnaire was developed to collect the data needed to assess the relationships proposed in the conceptual model. First, a pilot test was conducted with a small group of 15 participants to assess the structure and comprehensibility of the questionnaire. Minor adjustments were made based on their feedback to improve wording and flow prior to the official launch. The final questionnaire was administered via the Qualtrics online platform and shared across multiple digital channels, including institutional email and social media (WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn), resulting in a non-probabilistic convenience sample. The survey targeted individuals aged 18 or older who regularly use Instagram and view Instagram Stories published by fashion brands.

The questionnaire was structured into four sections. The opening section introduced the study, explained its purpose, and assured respondents of anonymity and confidentiality. Participants could only proceed after providing informed consent and acknowledge that their participation was voluntary. The second section assessed Instagram use with a focus on Instagram Stories (including frequency of use, whether participants follow fashion-related accounts, and whether they view their ephemeral content). The third section was focused on construct-specific measurement items for the proposed model and included an attention-check item instructing participants to select the option "Agree". Finally, the last section collected demographic items such as age, gender, nationality, education, professional situation status and monthly income.



3.2 MEASUREMENTS

All constructs were measured using validated scales adapted from prior literature to the context of ephemeral Instagram content. The items were translated into Portuguese, reviewed by a marketing professional, and the wording was slightly refined for clarity and contextual fit (Appendix A). Responses were collected using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = “Strongly disagree”, 7 = “Strongly agree”).

The Ephemeral Content construct comprised six dimensions (informativeness, trendiness, entertainment, interactivity, aesthetic quality, and perceived relevance) and, together with the self-brand connection scale, was adapted from Nguyen et al. (2024). The construct consumer gratification was measured with items from Chen and Cheung (2019) and FOMO used the Bui et al. (2022) scale. The brand trust measures were derived from Khan et al. (2020). Finally, content engagement was measured using an adaptation of Chen and Cheung (2019).

3.3 DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLE

Data were collected through the Qualtrics platform between 9 and 25 January. The responses were exported to Excel and screened to ensure data quality. This process included removing incomplete questionnaires, excluding respondents who failed the attention-check item, and eliminating cases that did not meet the eligibility criteria. In addition, participants who did not follow fashion brands on Instagram or who reported never or only rarely viewing fashion brands’ Instagram Stories were excluded. After these steps, a final sample of 293 valid responses was retained for analysis.

Most respondents were women (72%), 28% were men and 1% identified as non binary. Consistent with the typical profile of Instagram users, the sample is predominantly composed of young adults, with respondents aged between 18 and 29 representing 66% of the total, followed by those aged 30 to 44 (21%). Regarding professional status, 58% reported working for an employer, while 28% were students. Monthly income levels also reflect a young demographic, with the majority earning below €2000 per month, around 19% earning between €2000 and €2999 and nearly one-fifth reporting no personal income.

Regarding participants’ behavior on Instagram, usage frequency is high with 83.28% of respondents use the platform daily, and an additional 10.58% use it 3 to 6 times per week. In terms of preferred content formats, Stories emerged as the most popular, selected by 46.08% of respondents, followed by Reels (34.13%) and posts (19.80%). Furthermore, 74.96% reported seeing fashion-brand Stories frequently, and 19.93% reported seeing them sometimes, suggesting a strong level of engagement with fashion-related content on the platform.



4 RESULTS

For the analysis, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to evaluate the relationships among the constructs in the proposed research model, using SmartPLS 4.0.

Within the measurement model, most constructs were specified as first-order reflective latent variables. Ephemeral content was modelled as a second-order formative construct, resulting in a reflective-formative hierarchical component model (HCM). The formative construct integrates six distinct dimensions that together shape users' perceptions of this type of content, with each dimension capturing a unique facet of this type of content and potentially varying independently. This conceptualization is consistent with Nguyen et al. (2024), who similarly treated ephemeral content as a multidimensional composite comprising these first order dimensions.

4.1 MODEL ESTIMATION

4.1.1 MEASUREMENT MODEL EVALUATION

The measurement model was assessed in two stages due to the presence of both reflective and formative constructs. First, the reflective constructs were evaluated for indicator reliability, internal consistency, and convergent and discriminant validity.

As a preliminary step, a descriptive analysis of the items was conducted by examining their means and standard deviations (Appendix C). Overall, mean values range from 2.87 (F3) to 5.77 (EC_T2), while standard deviations range from 1.05 (EC_T2) to 1.97 (CE3), indicating moderate to high evaluations with varying levels of dispersion across indicators. Looking more closely at the results, higher mean scores are observed for the trendiness and informativeness items, suggesting that respondents generally perceive fashion brands' Instagram Stories as current and informative. In contrast, FOMO and gratification items show lower mean values, indicating more moderate agreement with statements related to urgency and enjoyment. In terms of variability, the trendiness and informativeness indicators tend to show lower dispersion, reflecting more consistent perceptions across respondents, whereas the FOMO and content engagement items generally show greater variability, suggesting greater heterogeneity.

Indicator reliability was then assessed by analysing item loadings, for which the recommended threshold is 0.70 (Hair et al., 2021). This criterion was met by most indicators, except EC_Inf5, EC_AQ1, F2, F3 and F7. To determine whether these items should be removed, their impact on internal consistency and convergent validity was examined (namely, in average variance extracted (AVE), Cronbach's alpha, ρ_A , and ρ_C).



For the Informativeness construct, item EC_Inf5 (loading = 0.657) was removed because its exclusion improved AVE (from 0.556 to 0.638) and composite reliability (rho_C from 0.862 to 0.876), while preserving adequate construct representation. For the FOMO construct, items F3 (0.560) and F7 (0.619) were removed due to their weak loadings and negative effect on convergent validity. Their exclusion substantially increased AVE (from 0.530 to 0.653) and improved composite reliability (rho_c: from 0.886 to 0.904), resulting in a more coherent measurement of the construct. In contrast, F2 (loading = 0.690) and EC_AQ1 (loading = 0.694) were retained despite being slightly below the 0.70 guideline. Removing either item did not meaningfully improve AVE or rho_c, and both constructs already met recommended thresholds.

In assessing the perceived relevance construct, items EC_PR3 and EC_PR4 showed very high loadings (0.931 and 0.923, respectively) and a correspondingly high AVE, suggesting potential redundancy, as loadings near or above 0.90 may indicate that the items capture nearly identical content. A review of the items' wording confirmed substantial semantic overlap between ECP_R3 ("I think ephemeral content marketing fits my interests.") and EC_PR4 ("I think ephemeral content marketing fits with my preferences."). To reduce redundancy and avoid inflating reliability and convergent validity, EC_PR4 was removed. After this adjustment, the loading of EC_PR3 decreased slightly (from 0.931 to 0.918), and AVE also decreased, while remaining slightly above recommended thresholds. EC_PR3 was retained as it ensures adequate coverage of the construct. All final loadings for the retained items are statistically significant and are presented in Appendix C.

As a second step, the internal consistency reliability of the reflective constructs was evaluated, with the results presented in Table 4.1. All constructs have acceptable levels of reliability, with both Cronbach's Alpha and rho_C values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Moreover, the rho_C values were generally close to 0.90, reflecting a strong consistency among the indicators within each construct.

Convergent validity was assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with all constructs exceeding the recommended 0.50 threshold. This confirms that the indicators captured an adequate proportion of variance in their respective constructs, thereby supporting the internal coherence and validity of the measurement model.

Table 4.1 - Construct Reliability and Validity

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Brand Trust	0.879	0.882	0.925	0.804
Content Engagement	0.720	0.720	0.843	0.641
EC A. Quality	0.811	0.833	0.875	0.639
EC Entertainment	0.823	0.824	0.895	0.739
EC Informativeness	0.812	0.822	0.876	0.638
EC Interactivity	0.878	0.880	0.925	0.804



EC P. Relevance	0.927	0.928	0.948	0.821
EC Trendiness	0.700	0.732	0.828	0.617
FOMO	0.871	0.891	0.904	0.653
Consumer Gratification	0.751	0.766	0.857	0.668
Self-Brand Connection	0.875	0.876	0.909	0.667

To ensure that the constructs were empirically distinct, discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Table 4.2) and HTMT ratio (Table 4.3). According to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, discriminant validity is established when the square root of each construct's AVE (the diagonal values in Table 4.2) is greater than its correlations with all other constructs. This condition is satisfied in the results, thereby confirming that discriminant validity is achieved.

Table 4.2 - Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	Brand Trust	Content Engagement	EC A. Quality	EC Entertainment	EC Informativeness	EC Interactivity	EC P. Relevance	EC Trendiness	FOMO	Consumer Gratification	Self-Brand Connection
Brand Trust	0.897										
Content Engagement	0.624	0.801									
EC A. Quality	0.473	0.458	0.799								
EC Entertainment	0.379	0.49	0.562	0.86							
EC Informativeness	0.29	0.388	0.437	0.537	0.746						
EC Interactivity	0.306	0.349	0.346	0.431	0.415	0.897					
EC P. Relevance	0.532	0.614	0.565	0.651	0.462	0.358	0.906				
EC Trendiness	0.137	0.173	0.283	0.265	0.466	0.225	0.327	0.786			
FOMO	0.432	0.56	0.341	0.335	0.314	0.249	0.418	0.265	0.728		
Consumer Gratification	0.566	0.639	0.515	0.527	0.504	0.46	0.655	0.312	0.46	0.817	
Self-Brand Connection	0.666	0.678	0.609	0.606	0.469	0.446	0.713	0.297	0.521	0.769	0.817

According to the HTMT criterion, values below 0.90 indicate that discriminant validity is established. As shown in Table 4.3, all HTMT values fall below this threshold, confirming that the constructs are empirically distinct.

Table 4.3 - Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)

	Brand Trust	Content Engagement	EC A. Quality	EC Entertainment	EC Informativeness	EC Interactivity	EC P. Relevance	EC Trendiness	FOMO	Consumer Gratification	Self-Brand Connection
Brand Trust											
Content Engagement	0.782										
EC A. Quality	0.546	0.583									



EC Entertainment	0.442	0.637	0.672							
EC Informativeness	0.271	0.427	0.468	0.635						
EC Interactivity	0.346	0.437	0.402	0.505	0.421					
EC P. Relevance	0.595	0.761	0.650	0.751	0.496	0.405				
EC Trendiness	0.165	0.280	0.378	0.332	0.634	0.273	0.377			
FOMO	0.519	0.703	0.369	0.372	0.217	0.274	0.415	0.251		
Consumer Gratification	0.691	0.862	0.648	0.670	0.591	0.559	0.777	0.427	0.489	
Self-Brand Connection	0.752	0.851	0.709	0.716	0.497	0.508	0.793	0.365	0.561	0.757

Having established the reliability and validity of the reflective constructs, the evaluation then proceeded to assess the formative higher-order construct, ephemeral content, composed of six lower-order dimensions. This construct was evaluated by examining the relevance and significance of the weights, the practical relevance through effect sizes (f^2) and the collinearity among indicators (Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)).

Using bootstrapping, the weights, together with their t-values, p-values and confidence intervals, were examined to assess whether each dimension contributes uniquely and significantly to the formation of ephemeral content (Hair et al., 2018) (Table 4.4). Results indicate that only perceived relevance, aesthetic quality, and interactivity make statistically significant unique contributions, as indicated by $p < 0.05$, $t \geq 1.96$ (two-tailed), and 95% confidence intervals that exclude zero (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 4.4 - Weights and Significance

	Weights	T statistics	P value	2.5%	97.5%
EC A. Quality -> Ephemeral Content	0.293	4.268	0.000	0.159	0.427
EC Entertainment -> Ephemeral Content	0.049	0.659	0.510	-0.094	0.196
EC Informativeness -> Ephemeral Content	0.100	1.639	0.101	-0.026	0.215
EC Interactivity -> Ephemeral Content	0.218	3.721	0.000	0.095	0.326
EC P. Relevance -> Ephemeral Content	0.615	9.469	0.000	0.478	0.731
EC Trendiness -> Ephemeral Content	0.025	0.467	0.641	-0.080	0.133

The significant dimensions (aesthetic quality, interactivity and perceived relevance) also demonstrated the greatest practical relevance in forming the second-order construct, as evidenced by their comparatively higher effect sizes (Table 4.5). To further support the validity of the formative specification, potential collinearity among the six dimensions was assessed through VIF values. All VIFs ranged between 1.293 and 2.217, remaining well below the recommended threshold of 5 (Hair et al., 2021), indicating that collinearity is not a concern (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5 - Effect Size and VIF

	Effect Size (f^2)	VIF
EC A. Quality -> Ephemeral Content	2.592	1.679
EC Entertainment -> Ephemeral Content	0.054	2.217



EC Informativeness -> Ephemeral Content	0.034	1.682
EC Interactivity -> Ephemeral Content	1.854	1.293
EC P. Relevance -> Ephemeral Content	9.427	2.031
EC Trendiness -> Ephemeral Content	0.024	1.329

4.1.2 STRUCTURAL MODEL EVALUATION

Before interpreting the structural relationships, collinearity among predictor constructs was evaluated. As shown in table 4.6, all VIF values were below the commonly accepted threshold of 5 (Hair et al., 2021), indicating that multicollinearity is not a concern and that the path coefficients can be interpreted reliably. Constructs with a single predictor (brand trust, FOMO, and self-brand Connection) have VIF values of 1.000, as collinearity can not occur in such cases. Overall, these results confirm that the model is free of multicollinearity, ensuring the stability and interpretability of the estimated path coefficients.

Table 4.6 - VIF Values

	VIF
Brand Trust -> Content Engagement	1.821
Ephemeral Content -> Brand Trust	1.000
Ephemeral Content -> FOMO	1.000
Ephemeral Content -> Consumer Gratification	1.255
Ephemeral Content -> Self-Brand Connection	1.000
FOMO -> Consumer Gratification	1.255
Consumer Gratification -> Content Engagement	2.479
Self-Brand Connection -> Content Engagement	3.031

Path coefficients indicate the strength and direction of the relationships between variables, ranging from -1 to 1, with values closer to 1 reflecting stronger positive effects. Coefficients are considered statistically significant when $p < 0.05$, $t \geq 1.96$ (two-tailed), and when their 95% confidence intervals do not include zero, following the same criteria applied to the assessment of formative construct weights (Hair et al., 2021). All structural path coefficients (table 4.7) are statistically significant, based on bootstrapping with 5000 samples. Moreover, all estimated relationships are positive, indicating consistent positive associations among the latent variables and providing empirical support for the proposed structural model. The strongest effects are observed for ephemeral content's impact on self-brand connection and consumer gratification, indicating that it strongly enhances both outcomes. Additionally, ephemeral content also shows positive effects on brand trust and FOMO. The direct effects on content engagement are comparatively smaller but still significant, while FOMO's influence on consumer gratification is the weakest relationship.



Table 4.7 - Path Coefficients

	Path Coefficient	T statistics	P values
Brand Trust -> Content Engagement	0.286	4.710	0.000
Ephemeral Content -> Brand Trust	0.587	13.890	0.000
Ephemeral Content -> FOMO	0.451	9.538	0.000
Ephemeral Content -> Consumer Gratification	0.672	18.741	0.000
Ephemeral Content -> Self-Brand Connection	0.784	33.669	0.000
FOMO -> Consumer Gratification	0.112	2.241	0.025
Consumer Gratification -> Content Engagement	0.252	4.016	0.000
Self-Brand Connection -> Content Engagement	0.293	4.208	0.000

The model's explanatory power was assessed through the coefficient of determination (adjusted R^2) of each endogenous construct (Table 4.8). R^2 values indicate the proportion of variance in a construct explained by its predictors, with values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 typically interpreted as substantial, moderate, and weak explanatory power, respectively (Hair et al., 2021). The results show that the model explains a substantial proportion of the variance in self-brand connection (adjusted $R^2 = 0.614$), and content engagement (adjusted $R^2 = 0.534$). Moderate explanatory power is observed for gratification (adjusted $R^2 = 0.528$) and brand trust (adjusted $R^2 = 0.342$). FOMO exhibits the lowest adjusted R^2 (0.201), indicating weak explanatory power in the context of social media behavior. Overall, the R^2 values suggest that the model provides strong explanatory capability for the key outcome variables in the conceptual framework.

Table 4.8 - R-squared and R-squared adjusted

Constructs	R-square	R-square adjusted
Brand Trust	0.345	0.342
Content Engagement	0.539	0.534
FOMO	0.203	0.201
Consumer Gratification	0.531	0.528
Self-Brand Connection	0.615	0.614

Table 4.9 presents the total effects, including both direct and indirect pathways. The results of total effects are mostly significant, thereby providing support for all hypotheses within the model. Total indirect effects were examined to evaluate the overall mediated influence of the formative construct on the endogenous construct. The total indirect effect of ephemeral content on content engagement is positive and statistically significant (p-value <0.01), indicating that its influence on engagement is transmitted through the specified mediators. In addition, ephemeral content shows a small but significant indirect effect on gratification via FOMO (0.050). Notably, the total effect and total indirect effect of FOMO on content engagement are small and not statistically significant (p-value = 0.061 for both).



The results of effect size (f^2) showed a large effect of ephemeral content on brand trust, gratification, and self-brand connection, as well as a moderate effect on FOMO. The effect of brand trust on content engagement is small, and the remaining effects are not considered statistically significant.

Table 4.9 - Effects and Mediation

	Total Effect	Total Indirect Effect	f^2
Brand Trust → Content Engagement	0.286**		0.098*
Ephemeral Content → Brand Trust	0.587**		0.526**
Ephemeral Content → Content Engagement	0.580**	0.580**	
Ephemeral Content → FOMO	0.451**		0.255**
Ephemeral Content → Consumer Gratification	0.722**	0.050*	0.767**
Ephemeral Content → Self-Brand Connection	0.784**		1.598**
FOMO → Content Engagement	0.028 (ns)	0.028 (ns)	
FOMO → Consumer Gratification	0.112*		0.021 (ns)
Consumer Gratification → Content Engagement	0.252**		0.056 (ns)
Self-Brand Connection → Content Engagement	0.293**		0.062 (ns)

Note: * significant $p < 0.05$; **significant $p < 0.01$; ns = not statistically significant



5 DISCUSSION

The results indicate that fashion brands' Instagram Stories meaningfully influences consumer responses and engagement. At the structural level, ephemeral content showed its strongest effects on self-brand connection and consumer gratification, followed by brand trust and FOMO. In turn, content engagement is significantly predicted by self-brand connection, brand trust, and gratification. Overall, the findings support the proposed hypotheses, as Table 5.1 summarizes.

Table 5.1 - Hypotheses Validation

Hypothesis	Formulation	Results
H1	Ephemeral content positively influences consumer gratification.	Supported
H2	Ephemeral content positively influences FOMO.	Supported
H3	FOMO positively influences consumer gratification.	Supported (small effect size)
H4	Ephemeral content positively influences brand trust.	Supported
H5	Ephemeral content positively influences self-brand connection.	Supported
H6a	Consumer gratification positively influences content engagement.	Supported (small effect size)
H6b	Brand trust positively influences content engagement	Supported (small effect size)
H6c	Self-brand connection positively influences content engagement.	Supported (small effect size)

5.1 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This study contributes to the literature on digital marketing by examining how fashion brands' Instagram Stories influence users' responses to them. In line with prior research, ephemeral content was treated as a multidimensional construct encompassing six key dimensions. However, the results suggest that these dimensions do not contribute equally in the context of fashion brands' Instagram Stories. Only perceived relevance, aesthetic quality, and interactivity emerged as significant contributors to the formative high-order construct, while informativeness, entertainment, and trendiness did not, suggesting that the relative importance of the dimensions may depend on the context. In the fashion industry, content that feels relevant, looks high quality, and invites interaction seems to shape the experience more strongly than more informational, entertaining or trend-driven elements.

Building on this, by bringing together psychological and brand-relational mechanisms, the study directly addresses the research question. Overall, the results suggest that content engagement reflects combined responses to fashion brands' Instagram Stories, rather than a single underlying mechanism. From a psychological perspective, ephemeral content increases consumer gratification (Lopez et al., 2021; Belanche et



al., 2019). This is consistent with U&G theory (Katz et al., 1973), reinforcing the idea that consumers engage more with media formats that satisfy emotional and experiential needs. Ephemeral content also increases FOMO, supporting prior research suggesting that time-limited formats generate urgency (Przybylski et al., 2013; Bayer et al., 2016). However, although FOMO positively influences gratification, its role is comparatively weaker, demonstrating that the sense of urgency alone is insufficient to stimulate it.

From a relational standpoint, the results show that ephemeral content strengthens both brand trust and self-brand connection. Brand trust, which in previous studies was associated with SMM (Moslehpour et al., 2022; Salhab et al., 2023), emerges as a meaningful outcome of ephemeral marketing in Instagram. This challenges the idea that short-lived content is superficial, suggesting instead that temporary formats can build credibility when they feel authentic and relevant. The strong relationship between ephemeral content and self-brand connection (Nguyen et al., 2024) suggests that fashion brands' Stories can help people feel that a brand fits who they are. This supports identity-based theories, which argue that consumers use brands to express and reinforce their self-image (Escalas & Bettman, 2003).

The study also confirms that consumer gratification, brand trust, and self-brand connection all contribute to content engagement (Chen & Cheung, 2019; Osei-Frimpong et al., 2020; Dange et al., 2021). This suggests that content engagement does not come from one single driver, instead, the results support the view of engagement as a gradual and multidimensional process.

Finally, Instagram Stories impacts positively content engagement. The findings indicate that ephemeral content has a direct effect on content engagement as well as an indirect influence through the psychological and relational mechanisms tested. In other words, Stories can prompt engagement both directly and by creating positive experiences, build trust, and reinforce consumers' connection to the brand. The limited role of FOMO in directly driving content engagement reinforces the idea that urgency is not the main explanation.

Overall, this study shows that, in the fashion industry, Instagram Stories influence engagement through both experiential and relational pathways. By integrating these mechanisms into a single framework, it offers a clearer understanding of how ephemeral content, despite its temporal nature, can support meaningful consumer-brand relationships and encourage content engagement in social media environments.



5.2 PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This study provides practical insights for fashion brands seeking to use Instagram Stories strategically to enhance content engagement. Firstly, since ephemeral content increases consumer gratification, Instagram Stories should be designed as experiences rather than purely promotional messages. Brands can strengthen engagement by creating visually appealing, dynamic, and interactive content that feels enjoyable and relevant. Interactive tools (such as polls, Q&As and countdowns) can be effective, but mainly when they enhance the experience and involvement rather than generating interaction for its own sake.

The results also show that Instagram Stories strengthen brand trust and, even more strongly, self-brand connection. This highlights the value of Stories as tools for relationship building. Fashion brands should use ephemeral content to reinforce identity alignment by communicating brand values, aesthetics, and lifestyle cues, and by using more authentic storytelling approaches such as behind-the-scenes content and collaborations.

Finally, although Stories increase FOMO, urgency alone does not drive engagement. Therefore, scarcity tactics such as limited drops or time-sensitive promotions should not be used in isolation, but combined with content that provides real experiential value and strengthens the consumer-brand relationship.

Overall, the findings suggest that content engagement is best supported through a multidimensional approach that simultaneously enhances gratification, builds trust, and strengthens self-brand connection. Even though Stories are temporary, their impact can be lasting when they are strategically aligned with brand positioning and audience expectations.



6 CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

6.1 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this study provides useful insights, some limitations should be acknowledged. First, the research relied on a convenience sample, meaning that the participants who chose to respond may not fully represent the wider population. A second limitation concerns the cross-sectional design. Because data were collected at a single point in time, the findings offer only a snapshot of participants' perceptions and behaviors, which prevents analyzing changes over time and means the observed relationships should be seen as associations rather than evidence of causality.

A further limitation is that the formative second-order construct *Ephemeral Content* captures perceived attributes rather than objective characteristics of the content itself and, as a result, these ratings may be influenced by users' prior attitudes toward the brand.

In addition, the exclusive focus on Instagram and the scope of the conceptual model narrow the generalizability of the conclusions. As social media platforms differ in user profiles, content formats, and interaction dynamics, the findings may not fully translate to other social media contexts. Moreover, the model focused on selected psychological and brand-relational mechanisms and did not include other factors that may shape engagement (such as perceived authenticity, user characteristics, platform use, or influencer effects), nor did it examine longer-term outcomes such as loyalty or purchase intention.

Building on these limitations, future research could adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to strengthen the conclusions. Tracking users over time would clarify whether the effects observed persist and whether engagement with ephemeral content leads to more lasting outcomes.

Future work could also extend the analysis beyond Instagram. Comparing ephemeral formats across platforms including Snapchat, TikTok, Facebook Stories and contrasting them with other permanent content formats, such as Reels or posts, would help determine whether the observed effects are primarily driven by platform-specific cultures and algorithms or by content temporality.

Extending the framework by incorporating additional variables would also be valuable. Factors such as brand involvement, social media use intensity, perceived authenticity, or susceptibility to FOMO, may help explain why some users respond more strongly than others. In the same vein, the model could be tested across industries or product categories, or industry/product category could be included as moderators to assess whether the proposed relationships are stronger in certain contexts. Additionally, consumer characteristics, such as age group or intensity of social media use, could be



explored as moderating factors to capture potential differences in how users respond to ephemeral content.

Finally, examining longer-term outcomes such as loyalty, brand love, purchase intention, and customer lifetime value would also provide a more complete view of the lasting strategic value of ephemeral content in brand-consumer relationships.



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APPENDIX A - CONSTRUCTS OPERATIONALIZATION

Construct			Original scale	Adapted scale	Source
Ephemeral Content	Informativeness	EC_Inf1	Ephemeral content marketing on social media platforms is a good source of product information and supplies relevant product information.	Instagram Stories de marcas de moda são uma boa fonte de informação sobre produtos e fornecem informação relevante sobre os mesmos.	Adapted from: Nguyen et al. (2024)
		EC_Inf2	Ephemeral content marketing provides timely information.	Instagram Stories de marcas de moda disponibilizam informação em tempo útil.	
		EC_Inf3	Ephemeral content marketing is a good source of up-to-date product information.	Instagram Stories de marcas de moda são uma boa fonte de informação atualizada sobre os produtos.	
		EC_Inf4	Ephemeral content marketing is a convenient source of product information.	Instagram Stories de marcas de moda são uma fonte conveniente de informação sobre produtos.	
		EC_Inf5	Ephemeral content marketing supplies complete product information.	Instagram Stories de marcas de moda fornecem informações completas sobre produtos.	
	Trendiness	EC_T1	Ephemeral content marketing is up to date.	O marketing de conteúdo efémero é atual.	
		EC_T2	Ephemeral content marketing is very trendy.	O marketing de conteúdo efémero é muito alinhado com as tendências.	
		EC_T3:	Ephemeral content marketing is the newest information.	O marketing de conteúdo efémero apresenta as informações mais recentes.	
	Entertainment	EC_E1	Brands' ephemeral content seems interesting.	Instagram Stories de marcas de moda parecem interessantes.	
		EC_E2	It is exciting to use brands' ephemeral content.	É entusiasmante visualizar e interagir com Instagram Stories de marcas de moda.	
		EC_E3	It is fun to collect information on products through brands' ephemeral content	É divertido recolher informação sobre produtos através de Instagram Stories de marcas de moda.	
	Interactivity	EC_Int1	Ephemeral content marketing allows me to communicate easily with the brand.	Instagram Stories de marcas de moda permitem-me comunicar facilmente com as mesmas.	
		EC_Int2	Ephemeral content marketing allows me to deliver my opinion easily to the company.	Instagram Stories de marcas de moda permitem-me transmitir facilmente a minha opinião às mesmas.	



		EC_Int3	I can interact easily with brands through ephemeral content marketing of this brand	Consigo interagir facilmente com marcas de moda através dos Instagram Stories das mesmas.
	Aesthetic Quality	EC_AQ1	Images and/or videos on brands' ephemeral content are artistic.	As imagens e/ou vídeos partilhados nos Instagram Stories de marcas de moda são artísticos.
		EC_AQ2	Images and/or videos on brands' ephemeral content are very intriguing.	As imagens e/ou vídeos partilhados nos Instagram Stories de marcas de moda são muito intrigantes.
		EC_AQ3	Images and/or videos on brands' ephemeral content are very charming.	As imagens e/ou vídeos partilhados nos Instagram Stories de marcas de moda são muito cativantes.
		EC_AQ4	Images and/or videos on brands' ephemeral content are very fascinating	As imagens e/ou vídeos partilhados nos Instagram Stories de marcas de moda são muito fascinantes.
	Perceived Relevance	EC_PR1	Ephemeral content marketing is relevant to me.	Instagram Stories de marcas de moda são relevantes para mim.
		EC_PR2:	Ephemeral content marketing is important to me.	Instagram Stories de marcas de moda são importantes para mim.
		EC_PR3	I think ephemeral content marketing fits my interests.	Considero que Instagram Stories de marcas de moda se adequam aos meus interesses.
		EC_PR4	I think ephemeral content marketing fits with my preferences.	Considero que Instagram Stories de marcas de moda se adequam às minhas preferências.
		EC_PR5	Overall, I think ephemeral content marketing fits me	No geral, considero que Instagram Stories de marcas de moda se adequam a mim.
	FOMO	F1	I fear the others have more rewarding experiences than me on social media networks.	Temo que os outros tenham experiências mais gratificantes do que eu através de Instagram Stories.
		F2	I fear that my friends have more rewarding experiences than me on social media networks.	Temo que os meus amigos tenham experiências mais gratificantes do que eu através de Instagram Stories.
		F3	Sometimes I wonder if I spend too much time keeping up with what is happening on social media networks.	Às vezes, pergunto-me se passo muito tempo a acompanhar o que está a acontecer através de Instagram Stories.
		F4	It bothers me when I miss an opportunity to connect with friends on social media networks.	Perturba-me quando perco uma oportunidade de me conectar com amigos através de Instagram Stories.
		F5	When I have a good time, it is important for	Quando me divirto é importante para mim

Adapted from;
Bui et al.
(2022)



		me to share the details on social media networks (e.g., status updates).	partilhar os detalhes através de Instagram Stories.	
	F6	When I miss out on an event posted on social media networks, it bothers me.	Quando perco um evento publicado nos Instagram Stories, isso incomoda-me.	
	F7	When I go on vacation, I continue to keep tabs on what my friends are doing on social media networks.	Quando vou de férias, continuo a acompanhar o que os meus amigos estão a fazer através de Instagram Stories.	
Consumer gratification	G1	I feel I am connected to other users through ephemeral content in social media.	Sinto que estou conectado a marcas de moda através de Instagram Stories.	Adapted from: Chen & Cheung (2019)
	G2	I feel like I fit in ephemeral content in social media.	Sinto que me encaixo no conteúdo efêmero do Instagram.	
	G3	I feel comfortable communicating with other people through ephemeral content in social media	Sinto-me confortável a comunicar com marcas de moda através de Instagram Stories.	
Self-Brand Connection	SBC1	I can really identify with brands that use ephemeral content marketing.	Consigo realmente identificar-me com marcas de moda que utilizam Instagram Stories.	Adapted from: Nguyen et al. (2024)
	SBC2	Brands that have ephemeral content fits with how I see myself in the future.	As marcas de moda que utilizam Instagram Stories enquadram-se com a forma como me vejo no futuro.	
	SBC3	Brands that use ephemeral content marketing are always a pleasant experience.	As marcas de moda que utilizam Instagram Stories são sempre uma experiência agradável.	
	SBC4	Brands that have ephemeral content fit with my ideal lifestyle.	As marcas de moda que utilizam Instagram Stories enquadram-se com o meu estilo de vida ideal.	
	SBC5	Brands that have ephemeral content contribute to enriching my life.	As marcas de moda que utilizam Instagram Stories contribuem para enriquecer a minha vida.	
Brand Trust	BT1	BT1 I feel that I can trust brand X completely.	Sinto que posso confiar completamente em marcas de moda que utilizam Instagram Stories.	Adapted from: Khan et al. (2020)
	BT2	Brand X is honest and truthful with me about its products and services.	As marcas de moda que utilizam Instagram Stories são, em geral, honestas e verdadeiras quanto aos seus produtos.	
	BT3	Brand X is truly sincere in what it promises through its products and services.	As marcas de moda que utilizam Instagram Stories são sinceras no que prometem através dos seus produtos.	



Content Engagement	CE1	I read updates about what is happening with others (e.g., your friends or family members) through ephemeral content in social media.	Através dos Instagram Stories de marcas de moda, vejo as atualizações para ficar a par de novidades e atualizações relacionadas com essas marcas.	Adapted from: Chen & Cheung (2019)
	CE2	I respond to social or personal updates of others through ephemeral content in social media.	Costumo reagir ou responder a conteúdos partilhados por marcas de moda nos seus Instagram Stories.	
	CE3	I update personal information through ephemeral content in social media.	Eu atualizo informações pessoais através dos meus próprios Instagram Stories nas redes sociais.	



APPENDIX B - ONLINE SURVEY

Dear participant,

The main objective of this study is to analyse how Instagram Stories published by fashion brands influence the public's perception of the brand and their interaction with its content. The survey will take approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete. There are no right or wrong answers, and there is no risk associated with taking part in this survey. Your participation is voluntary, which means you can choose not to participate or withdraw at any time. However, your responses are very important, completely anonymous, and will be used exclusively for academic purposes.

Formulário de Consentimento Informado

Declaro que tenho 18 anos de idade ou mais e que concordo em participar neste estudo. Declaro que fui informado(a) de que a minha participação neste estudo é voluntária e que posso desistir a qualquer momento sem qualquer penalização. Compreendo que todos os dados recolhidos são confidenciais e que este estudo não apresenta riscos significativos.

Informed Consent Form

I declare that I am 18 years of age or older and that I agree to take part in this study. I declare that I have been informed that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time without any penalty. I understand that all data collected is confidential and that this study does not present significant risks.

☐ Yes, I agree to participate and I declare that I am over 18 years old.

☐ I do not agree to participate



The questions in this questionnaire refer to the ephemeral content shared on Instagram, Instagram Stories, which consists of content available for a limited period (24 hours). Whenever the term "fashion brand(s)" is used, it refers to clothing, footwear, and/or accessories brand.

How often do you use Instagram?

- ☐ Everyday
- ☐ Frequently (3–6x per week)
- ☐ Sometimes (1–2x per week)
- ☐ Rarely (less than 1x per week)
- ☐ Never

What type of content do you prefer to see on Instagram?

- ☐ Posts
- ☐ Stories
- ☐ Reels

Do you actively follow fashion brands on Instagram?"

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

You view fashion brands' Instagram Stories in an...

- ☐ Intentional way
- ☐ Occasional way
- ☐ Both/depending on the moment

How often do you view Instagram Stories from fashion brands?

- ☐ Very often
- ☐ Often
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never



What is your level of agreement with the following statements?

Ephemeral content refers to posts that are available for a limited period of time (usually 24 hours), such as Instagram Stories.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Fashion brand's Instagram stories are a good source of product information and supply relevant product information.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fashion brand's Instagram stories provide timely information.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fashion brand's Instagram stories are a good source of up-to-date product information.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fashion brand's Instagram stories are a convenient source of product information.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fashion brand's Instagram stories supply complete product information.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ephemeral content marketing is up to date.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ephemeral content marketing is very trendy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ephemeral content marketing is the newest information.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fashion brands' ephemeral content seems interesting.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It is exciting to see and interact with fashion brands' ephemeral content on Instagram.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It is fun to collect information on products through fashion brands' ephemeral content on Instagram.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐



Fashion Brands' Instagram Stories allow me to communicate with them easily.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fashion Brands' Instagram Stories allow me to deliver my opinion easily to the company.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can interact easily with fashion brands through their Instagram Stories.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Images and/or videos shared by fashion brands on Instagram Stories are artistic.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Images and/or videos shared by fashion brands on Instagram Stories are very intriguing.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Images and/or videos shared by fashion brands on Instagram Stories are very charming.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Images and/or videos on fashion brands on Instagram Stories are very fascinating.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fashion brands' Instagram Stories are relevant to me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fashion brands' Instagram Stories are important to me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I think fashion brands' Instagram Stories fit my interests.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I think fashion brands' Instagram Stories fit with my preferences.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Overall, I think fashion brands' Instagram Stories fit me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐



What is your level of agreement with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I fear the others have more rewarding experiences than me on Instagram Stories.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I fear that my friends have more rewarding experiences than me on Instagram Stories.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sometimes I wonder if I spend too much time keeping up with what is happening through Instagram Stories.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It bothers me when I miss an opportunity to connect with friends through Instagram Stories.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When I have a good time, it is important for me to share the details on Instagram Stories.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When I miss out on an event posted on Instagram Stories, it bothers me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
When I go on vacation, I continue to keep tabs on what my friends are doing through Instagram Stories.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

What is your level of agreement with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel I am connected to fashion brands through Instagram Stories.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel like I fit in ephemeral content in Instagram.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel comfortable communicating with fashion brands through Instagram Stories.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Please select the option "Agree".	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐



What is your level of agreement with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I can really identify with fashion brands that use Instagram Stories.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fashion brands that use Instagram Stories fit with how I see myself in the future.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fashion brands that use Instagram Stories are always a pleasant experience.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fashion brands that use Instagram Stories fit with my ideal lifestyle.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fashion brands that use Instagram Stories contribute to enriching my life.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel that I can trust fashion brands that use Instagram Stories completely.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fashion brands that use Instagram Stories are honest and truthful about its products and services.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fashion brands that use Instagram Stories are truly sincere in what it promises through its products.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐



What is your level of agreement with the following statements?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Through fashion brands' Instagram Stories, I see updates to stay informed about news and developments related to those brands.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I usually react to or reply to content shared by fashion brands on their Instagram Stories.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I update personal information through my Instagram Stories.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Please indicate your age.

Please indicate your gender

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Non-binary
- ☐ Prefer not to answer.

Please indicate your nationality.

What is your highest level of education?

- ☐ Primary school
- ☐ High school
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ PhD degree



What is your current professional situation?

- ☐ Student
- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Employed
- ☐ Independent worker
- ☐ Unemployed
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Other

What is your current net income range?

- ☐ No income
- ☐ Less than 1000€
- ☐ 1000€ - 1999€
- ☐ 2000€ - 2999€
- ☐ 3000€ - 3999€
- ☐ Mais de 4000€
- ☐ Prefer not to answer.

Thank you for your cooperation!

Did you have any difficulty completing this questionnaire? Do you have any question or comments? If so, please share them.



APPENDIX C - OUTER LOADINGS

Items	Outer Loadings	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation
EC_Inf1	0.813	5.188	1.259
EC_Inf2	0.774	5.099	1.296
EC_Inf3	0.817	5.321	1.263
EC_Inf4	0.790	5.430	1.233
EC_Inf5	Eliminated	3.969	1.509
EC_T1	0.750	5.505	1.152
EC_T2	0.775	5.768	1.054
EC_T3	0.829	5.259	1.147
EC_E1	0.811	5.167	1.325
EC_E2	0.891	4.331	1.545
EC_E3	0.875	4.560	1.480
EC_Int1	0.905	4.205	1.508
EC_Int2	0.906	3.887	1.608
EC_Int3	0.879	4.198	1.624
EC_PR1	0.901	5.010	1.701
EC_PR2	0.896	4.218	1.664
EC_PR3	0.918	4.952	1.623
EC_PR4	Eliminated	4.423	1.577
EC_PR5	0.908	4.355	1.536
EC_AQ1	0.692	3.884	1.270
EC_AQ2	0.779	4.508	1.436
EC_AQ3	0.863	4.563	1.265
EC_AQ4	0.851	4.471	1.347
G1	0.869	3.331	1.698
G2	0.762	3.249	1.604
G3	0.817	4.638	1.700
F1	0.796	3.119	1.784
F2	0.765	3.297	1.783
F3	Eliminated	2.867	1.881
F4	0.831	5.034	1.770
F5	0.792	3.935	1.866
F6	0.852	4.478	1.767



F7	Eliminated	3.577	1.680
BT1	0.883	4.225	1.605
BT2	0.909	3.891	1.357
BT3	0.898	4.437	1.310
SBC1	0.825	4.082	1.556
SBC2	0.845	3.201	1.538
SBC3	0.768	3.553	1.417
SBC4	0.824	3.857	1.457
SBC5	0.819	3.843	1.669
CE1	0.775	4.662	1.646
CE2	0.800	2.894	1.854
CE3	0.826	3.625	1.970



ANNEX A - ETHICS COMMITTEE REPORT



This is to certify that

Project No.: **DDMKT2026-1-69071**

Project Title: **Short-lived, strongly felt: the impact of Fashion Brands' ephemeral Instagram Content on Engagement**

Principal Researcher: **Inês Oliveira**

according to the regulations of the Ethics Committee of NOVA IMS and MagIC Research Center this project was considered to meet the requirements of the NOVA IMS Internal Review Board, being considered **APPROVED** on 1/6/2026.

It is the Principal Researcher's responsibility to ensure that all researchers and stakeholders associated with this project are aware of the conditions of approval and which documents have been approved.

The Principal Researcher is required to notify the Ethics Committee, via amendment or progress report, of

- Any significant change to the project and the reason for that change;
- Any unforeseen events or unexpected developments that merit notification;
- The inability of the Principal Researcher to continue in that role or any other change in research personnel involved in the project.

Lisbon, 1/6/2026

NOVA IMS Ethics Committee

ethicscommittee@novaims.unl.pt _____

Data with Purpose.

