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MAGAZINE

The priceless pleasure of discovery

September 20, 2022

About online reviews and how they influence our choices and limit our chances of making new discoveries.

In the last editorial we talked about more or less truthful online reviews and drew a parallel with the world of research and, in particular, with the importance of making correct information and communication (of science, but not only).

I would like to return for a moment to the **reviews** of restaurants, products, experiences and propose a reflection on how much and how, after their spread on the web, they have been **affecting our choices**, our moments of leisure and our daily life. I have friends who do not sit down in a restaurant unless they have read a number of reviews about it before and, if they find one rated less than five stars, they continue their exhausting research until they reach the best possible choice ever. Or rather, what they believe it to be. We have already said how potentially volatile and unreliable the truthfulness of the information contained in reviews is, either because they could be manipulated or simply because they are based on contingency: even the best pizza maker someday may have the dough leaven badly and even the most professional waiter can snap a resentful remark in years of honourable and polite service, but this does not affect their overall competence and ability. Also individual tastes and expectations influence the opinion we make of something: a film that to us is wonderful because it touches strings that only we possess, for someone else can represent an hour and a half of deadly boredom.

Even leaving aside this variable, which for many people may still be acceptable, have you ever considered how much time you waste peeking out hundreds of reviews online? Time that you are probably taking away from your holiday, your family or yourself in the effort to try to avoid the unpredictable and to enjoy the best possible experience, wasting your eyes and neck on a screen of a few inches. Of course, the time we decide to invest in reading online reviews depends on what we need to understand if it is good or not, from an economic or emotional point of view: one thing is to spend a little time of our day to inquire about the strengths and weaknesses of a computer costing several hundred euros or the restaurant where we plan to organize our wedding banquet, another one is to do it to buy a backpack or have a pizza after work with friends.

But in addition to **time**, which still remains one of the most **precious assets** in contemporary society, all these painstaking searches steal from us, indirectly, a great pleasure that the English call **serendipity**, paraphrasable in our language with **“pleasant discovery”**: we deprive ourselves, that is, of the pleasure of walking through the streets of an unknown city and running into a small restaurant that catches our attention, where we immediately slip in, or of spotting in a

shop window in the city centre, in a warm spring afternoon, a flowery dress which makes us think about summer and carefreeness. Of course, maybe then in that restaurant we ended up not eating very well or the dress after a few years may have faded in colour, but the pinch of magic experienced in their discovery, that remains.

And if we want to resume the parallelism with the **world of science**, even in this area researchers carry out experiments based on in-depth studies and valuable previous knowledge, but they are at the same time guided by **curiosity towards the unknown** and the **courage to enter so far unexplored fields**. Sometimes even by chance.

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- #reviews
- #science

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