

## WHEN THE USER BECOMES A PUBLICIST: MOTIVATIONS FOR EWOM ON FACEBOOK

### ABSTRACT

This qualitative exploratory and descriptive research study seeks to obtain information on “electronic Word of mouth” via social networking websites. Specifically, it aims to further our knowledge of both the identification of the Uses and Gratifications sought (manifest and latent motivations) by the users through becoming part of eWOM practices on Facebook, and also the gratifications obtained from such behaviors. After interviewing 25 individuals using an open ended questionnaire and qualitatively analyzing their responses, the results of this study provide information about users’ motivations for and gratifications obtained from connecting to commercial pages, publishing content on the walls of commercial pages, and exchanging information with other users about brands. The results of this study are useful for communication academics and for marketing and advertising agents.

**Keywords:** Social networks, Marketing, eWOM, Motivations, Facebook, Uses and gratifications, User’s Behavior.

## QUANDO O USUÁRIO SE TORNA UM PUBLICITÁRIO: MOTIVAÇÕES PARA EWOM - PROPAGANDA BOCA A BOCA ELETRÔNICA - NO FACEBOOK

### RESUMO

Esta pesquisa qualitativa, exploratória e descritiva, teve como objetivo obter informações acerca da propaganda “boca a boca eletrônica”, por meio dos websites de redes sociais. Especificamente, este estudo almejou aprofundar o conhecimento sobre a identificação de Usos e Gratificações solicitados (motivações manifestadas e latentes) pelos usuários ao se tornarem parte das práticas de eWOM (propaganda boca a boca eletrônica) no Facebook, assim como sobre as gratificações obtidas com este comportamento. Após entrevistarmos 25 indivíduos, por meio de um questionário aberto, e qualitativamente analisarmos as respostas, os resultados do presente estudo forneceram informações acerca das motivações e gratificações obtidas pelos usuários que se conectam a páginas comerciais e conteúdos de publicidade nelas contidos e que trocam informações com outros usuários sobre marcas. Os resultados deste estudo podem ser úteis para comunicação acadêmica e para agentes de marketing e propaganda.

**Palavras-chave:** Redes Sociais, Marketing, eWOM, Motivações, Facebook, Usos e Gratificações, Comportamento do Usuário.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The popularization of online social networks has strengthened an old consumer habit: conversing about products or brands, and even recommending them. Thanks to these new media, advertisers are now seeking to encourage interrelation with consumers in order for the latter to be involved in advertising objectives and to become channels of communication.

In this exploratory study, we aim to look in depth at specific aspects of the informal transmission among consumers of commercial content that occurs via social networking websites (specifically Facebook). This form of spontaneous one-to-one advertising is usually known as Word-of-mouth (WOM) (Allsop, Basset, & Hoskins, 2007; Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006). In digital realms, the term electronic Word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Negroponte & Maes, 1996) is used to refer to said practices.

There are some specific formal definitions of eWOM that focus on different aspects. Huang, Lin, & Lin (2009, p. 160) consider it to be any online opinion exchange or informal communication through the Internet. Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan (2008, p. 461), define it as any informal direct communication between consumers through the net, which is related to the use or to specific characteristics of goods or services. Finally, Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, & Gremler (2004, p. 39) say that it is any positive or negative opinion available on the Internet produced by real, potential, or past consumers for a product or enterprise.

Researchers agree that eWOM is an increasing source of information for consumers (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Park & Lee, 2009; Wei et al., 2010). Indeed, marketing studies reveal that about 70% of Internet users consult the opinion of others about products and services before buying them (Nielsen, 2009). Because of the importance that eWOM practices are acquiring, professionals are interested in understanding how to promote them, manage their impact, and take profit of their influence (Castronovo & Huang, 2012). In reality, organizations should also be aware of this phenomenon because of the speed of its occurrence and effects. Internet users are embedded in a broader informational environment and this circumstance could affect their perception, not only about themselves and their behavior, but about their changing relation with products and goods. In spite of that, the investigation about eWOM is still scarce, particularly from the receiver's point of view (Cheung, Lee, & Rabjohn, 2008).

This study aims to contribute to the understanding of eWOM. Specifically, it seeks to find out what uses and gratifications are sought (manifest and latent motivations) by the consumer when becoming involved in eWOM practices on Facebook, as well as the gratifications obtained from such usage. Particularly, this research seeks to identify the motivations for (GS) and gratifications (GO) from

three different users' activities of eWOM in Facebook: 1) connecting to commercial pages; 2) publication of content on the walls of commercial pages, and 3) the exchange of information on brands. The study also tries to establish differences and similarities between the above-mentioned users' activities.

From a research perspective, this study fills a void and seeks to provide a solid starting point for future research. In fact, it aims to provide data for scholars who help to build theories of motivation that offer a proper understanding of online users. However, the results of this study will also be of interest to professionals, as it will offer new insights into the behavior of consumers and the value of marketing in new interactive environments.

Up until the time that the data were collected for this study, Facebook was the most popular Internet site, with more than 1 billion active users around the world (Alexa - The Web Information Company, 2012). According to the social network itself, 552 million users access it every day, have an average of 130 friends and are connected to 80 pages. It is claimed that more than 3.5 billion items of user generated content (e.g. links, comments, messages, invitations to events, photos, videos, etc.) are exchanged every week (Facebook, 2012). Moreover, 56% of users say that they are more inclined to recommend a brand after visiting its Facebook page (Digital Buzz Blog, 2012).

This investigation aims to answer the following questions:

**RQ1:** What do users hope to gain from promoting the benefits of a commercial brand on a social network?;

**RQ2:** What do they really gain?; and

**RQ3:** What are the real motivations that explain their attitudes and behaviors?

In order to answer these questions, the research study is fundamentally supported by the Uses and Gratifications theory.

## 2 USES AND GRATIFICATIONS THEORY (U&G)

Contemporary U&G theory defends the idea that people are active, objective-guided, and motivated to select and consume media. It also argues that people select and use the appropriate communication channels to satisfy needs and desires. It considers that audiences behave differently on the basis of social and psychological factors. Finally, U&G sustains that social and psychological situations influence the way the media satisfies people's desires and needs, the media can be functional alternatives for other communication channels, and people are normally more influential than the media (Pornsakulvanich, Haridakis, & Rubin, 2008).

Early studies in this tradition defined typologies of media-related motives, needs, and functions. McQuail, Blumler, & Brown (1972) proposed four motivations for the use of the media: *diversion* (escapism; emotional release); *personal relationships* (social utility, interaction with others and seeking company); *personal identity* (references and value reinforcement), and *surveillance* (different ways of searching for information). Also, Katz, Gurevitch, & Hass (1973), supported by psychological and sociological theories, defined 35 needs (in five categories) for the use of mass media (instruments that individuals use to connect with or disconnect from themselves and others): *cognitive* (information, knowledge, and understanding); *affective* (emotion, pleasure, and feelings), *personal integration* that combines affective and cognitive needs (credibility, stability, and status); *social integration* (contact with others), and *relaxing from tension* (escapism or leisure). U&G helps us to understand how people use technology to negotiate their identities, their social position, and their emotional lives (Williams, Strover, & Grant, 1994).

Researchers associated with U&G make a theoretical distinction between gratifications sought (GS) and gratifications obtained (GO), which is often neglected by most of Internet U&G studies (Yoo, 2011), although some researchers state that these must be conceptually separated (Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rayburn, 1980). GS are defined to be theoretically and temporally prior to the use of media, while GO are consequence of that use (Yoo, 2011). The specific gratification-seeking motives affect the nature of the gratifications perceived to be obtained by media consumption, because they are based on the expectations about a medium and its content (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1985). In fact, GS (motivations) do not necessarily correspond with GO (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1985). In this sense, inconsistencies between GS and GO can be found within the level of one particular gratification, but also in terms of multiple dimensions of GS and GO from a particular medium or content (Palmgreen, Wenner, & Rayburn, 1980). This is the reason why the study of these aspects must be done with a high level of detail and precision.

Although, U&G have been applied to marketing research (Close & Kukar-Kinney, 2010; Chu & Lu, 2007; Huang, 2008; Luo, 2002), even to eWOM (Coyle et al., 2011), there is no known study that investigates the psychological aspects that explain users motivations and gratifications for engaging in eWOM practices in Facebook. This study aims to contribute to this shortcoming.

Although this study is mainly supported by the U&G theory, it reviews preliminary influential work on different aspects of word of mouth (WOM) (De Bruyn, A. & Lilien, 2008; Keller, 2007; Money, Gilly, & Graham, 1998; Phelps et al., 2004). Moreover, it also considers the large body of research related to consumer WOM understanding (Arndt,

1967; Bass, 1969; Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003; Cova & Cova, 2002; Cova, Kozinets, & Shankar, 2007; Engel, Kegerreis & Blackwell, 1969; Fournier & Lee, 2009; Hoffman & Novak, 1996; Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955; Muñiz & Schau, 2005; Thomson & Sinha, 2008; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). In addition, this research also considers significant contributions on WOM marketing theory and practice (Jaffe, 2007; Kelly, 2007; Sernovitz, 2006). Besides, this study recognizes the contributions of preceding works on electronic word of mouth from a marketing point of view (Kozinets et al., 2010). Finally, this research takes into account other contributions related to WOM practices in new interactive environments, such as those that explore consumer tribes (Cova et al., 2007), wikis (Tapscott & Williams, 2006), prosumers and open-source platforms (Pitt et al., 2006), or brand communities (Fournier & Lee, 2009; McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig, 2002; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001).

### 3 METHOD

#### 3.1 Procedure

In the design of the study, we followed Marshall & Rossman (1999), who recommend a qualitative method for research into innovative systems and in situations in which the variables have yet to be identified. We also took into account Babbie (1989) who defends qualitative exploratory and descriptive design for properly characterizing new phenomena (1989). Moreover, all of this is lined with the recommendations of Ruggiero (2000) who argues in favor of the employment of qualitative methods within U&G theoretical frameworks during the 21<sup>st</sup> century for offering a holistic approach to new phenomena, revealing complexities and identifying new insights. We also took into account Stafford, Stafford, & Schkade (2004), who state that the development of a U&G profile is normally based on an initial qualitative research approach.

According to that, we were inclined to use in-depth interviews, with semi-structured questions. The interview sequence was divided into three parts: questions seeking to create a sociodemographic profile of the sample; seven questions to identify Facebook user habits, and questions aimed at finding out the GS and GO when the sample is implicated in activities related with eWOM on Facebook.

The interviews were conducted between April 12 and June 8 of 2010. Throughout this period, a researcher's journal was also developed, including notes referring to the attitudes of the interviewees and nuances that helped us to better understand the transcriptions during data analysis.

The phases of our empirical work are described hereinafter:

- 1) Non-probabilistic selection of the sample of 25 informants;
- 2) Construction of the script for the open standardized and non-programmed in-depth interviews, on the basis of the results of the exploratory observation of Facebook and the theoretical perspectives analyzed;
- 3) Conducting the interviews by video-conference, using the Skype software, with simultaneous recording using Callgraph software;
- 4) Development of the researcher's journal, in parallel with the application of the interviews;
- 5) Transcription of the interviews for subsequent content analysis;
- 6) Definition of the context units and recording units;
- 7) Development of the categories of analysis;
- 8) Codification of the recording units, using MAXQDA software;
- 9) Description and interpretation of the compiled data, and
- 10) Cross comparison of the empirical data with the theoretical framework, for the formulation of conclusions.

Given the difficulty of systemizing the qualitative content analysis, we worked on the basis of the principle of Grounded Theory, by Strauss & Corbin (1998), in accordance with which the qualitative analysis of the data occurred on three levels:

- a) Abstraction of the data;
- b) Description and conversion of the data into a descriptive narration, and
- c) Interpretation of the results, with the construction and development of inductively derived theories.

Afterwards, we also performed what Strauss & Corbin (1998, p. 96) call "axial codification", i.e. crossing socio-demographic variables and codes, as well as interrelation between the codes, which was facilitated by the use of MAXQDA tools.

The first phase of the analysis of the results consisted of grouping the data that emerged from the interviews (which were recorded and transcribed verbatim), into five thematic nucleuses corresponding to the questions asked (Table 1). This followed the recommendations of thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Later, within each thematic nucleus, we sought to order the information by motivations (latent and manifest), and also by gratifications. It must be stated that thematic nucleuses (questions to be asked to subjects), in turn, were inspired from regular U&G studies.

**Table 1**

THEMATIC NUCLEUSES FOR CONTENT ANALYSIS	
1	Main uses of Facebook, gratifications sought and obtained by these uses.
2	Types of eWOM practiced by interviewees on Facebook.
3	Uses, motivations, and gratifications for associating oneself with a brand page.
4	Motivations and gratifications related to the use "publishing content on the walls of brand pages".
5	Motivations and gratifications related to the use "sharing content on brands".
Source: authors' own work	

In the second phase, which had an interpretative nature, we examined the relationships that emerged between the data and suggested plausible explanations, in accordance with the literature consulted and our own observations made during the empirical study. We used the same initial (deductive) codes in both phases, and as we advanced with our classification, we added the inductive categories that were identified throughout the process for each type of motivation (manifest and latent) and gratification obtained.

The reason for separating the classification into manifest motivations, latent motivations, and gratifications obtained was to be able to cross-compare the data in order to verify: 1) whether the gratifications sought are intentional or not, and 2) whether the gratifications obtained satisfy the gratifications sought by Facebook users from involvement in eWOM activities.

#### 4 SAMPLE

The *corpus* used for this study was an intentional non-probabilistic sample by criterion, consisting of 25 individuals who had been implicated more than once in eWOM actions on Facebook. We preferred not to impose restrictive criteria for age, sex, profession, geographic origin or place of residence, given the global reach of Facebook and the exploratory nature of the research. On the contrary, we used the theoretical sampling strategy suggested by Glaser & Strauss (1967): we sought to work with a heterogeneous sample, in which 13 women and 12 men participated, of an average age of 32 years ( $R_g = 21-43$  years). With respect to origin, 52% of the interviewees were Spanish and the remainder came from eight other countries: Mexico (3), Argentina (2), Brazil (2), China (1), Colombia (1), Italy (1), Paraguay (1) and Portugal (1).

## 5 RESULTS

We present first general data about the sample: the profiles of Facebook use of participants and their main uses of Facebook, together with the motivations for (GS) and gratifications (GO) of those uses. Later, we present separately the GS and GO from connecting to commercial pages, publication of content on the walls of commercial pages, and exchange of information about brands. Finally, we present the similarities between the GS of these three types of eWOM analyzed.

We also include another part at the end: the progressivity of gratifications on Facebook. During the analysis, we observed that eWOM practices on the website could increase depending on certain aspects related to the user experience. We explain those observations as the last part of the results section.

### 5.1 Profiles of Facebook use

A large amount of the sample said that they used Facebook both for personal and professional reasons. More than half of the interviewees stated that they personally knew all or almost all of their Facebook friends. However, most of those users did not have strong friendship ties with all of them. The average amount of friends was 438, ranging between 18 and 2,194 friends per interviewee.

With respect to *Facebook consumer habits*, almost all of the interviewees (except two) said that they accessed the site on a daily basis, and most of them also generate content (comments, photos, status updates, etc.) every day. The average duration of their connection was 85 minutes, ranging between 5 and 360 minutes. However, some of the interviewees declared that “the website does not take up all of their attention” and that they use the Internet for other things while they are connected, simultaneously to Facebook.

On the *amount of brand pages* that the interviewees had connected to, the average number of pages per interviewee was 133, ranging from 13 to 498.

More than half of the sample (14) claimed that they intentionally used the website as a platform for sharing information about brands, i.e. though motivated by different factors, these users consciously implicated themselves in eWOM on Facebook.

### 5.2 Main uses of Facebook, and GS/GO of these uses

This study found that “social connection” and “social vigilance” are the main motivations for opening a Facebook account within participants. Meanwhile, the fact that “all my friends are on the site” also appears as an initial motivation. However, differences are observed between the motivations for joining and for using Facebook, as already reported by Lampe et al., (2010), and as we explain later.

This study also confirms that, as claimed by Boyd & Ellison (2008), the initial intention of consumers when they open accounts on social networking websites is to connect with ties that they already have offline. However, there is also the idea that previous knowledge about its use leads to some consumers opening an account with the exclusive intention of “forming new professional ties”. This leads us to believe that the “formation of new ties”, although associated to extra-personal motivations, should likewise be considered to be an initial motivation. So the use of Facebook occasionally occurs in pragmatic and task-oriented fashion. GS could be the obtainment of a higher number of social relations in order to achieve a professional-economic benefit.

One of the uses of Facebook found by this study is the “intentional construction of social identity”, which could, in many cases, be motivated by self-promotion as a professional.

However, we believe that this awareness of the possibility of long-range expression, and thus the adaptation of one’s personal values to one’s social identity could also be related to another two uses that we observe as new to this study: the “promotion of social causes” and the “diffusion of complaints and denunciations”. In this regard, we observe that, when personal manifestations on these issues generate positive reactions among other users, there could also be gratifications due to “personal satisfaction” and “reinforcement of the ego”, which is often due to the sensation of “leadership” and “power”.

The results also led us to suggest that “personal expression” on Facebook could be associated to feelings of pleasure or affective welfare, for when we asked what interviewees like most about the website, we found that they often gave the answer: “telling other people what I feel and what’s happening in my life”, i.e. The user can get pleasure from the possibility of others knowing more about their lives (or the image they want to present).

In addition to the above, gratifications from leisure and entertainment derived from the use of Facebook were associated to the content (e.g. photos, videos, games, applications, and groups), to the processes of the medium (the website’s applications) and to social relations (interpersonal communication). We observe that the social identity that users form on Facebook can serve like a “business card” for their social interactions as they do not only occur between strong ties (family and close friends). The data provided by this research confirmed that this form of interaction also arises between “old friends and acquaintances”, i.e. ties are formed between individuals that present latent connections in their offline lives, as Boyd & Ellison (2008) have already stated.

Given that social networking websites are also interpersonal communication tools, we noted a nuance in their usage for “searching for information”: the source is not the medium, but rather other users

(who could be consumers or brands). In fact, as it has been examined previously, this direct exchange of information between users, changes, on one hand, the Marketing paradigm (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) and, on the other, enables users to also be promoted as a brand (Bauman, 2007). The greater the number of interactions in which the consumer is implicated, the more prominent they are on the web, and, consequently, the greater their power as a leader of opinion (Aranha, 2009). Hence, their social capital also increases (Bourdieu, 1980; Steinfield et al., 2009).

### 5.3 Motivations for (GS) and Gratifications (GO) from Connecting to Commercial Pages

As we stated, one way of obtaining information from other consumers and directly interacting with brands, is by the connection to commercial pages. Such action may be encouraged by simply requesting users to click the “Like” button. In this regard, the data from this study show that the motivation of the consumer to click the “Like” button on commercial pages is to “show their tastes and preferences”, i.e., the user employs the brands as cultural icons whose meanings add value to the image they wish to project socially (their social identity). Note that users are often unaware that this association promotes the brand.

Another motivation suggested by the data for being connected to pages is “support for friends” (who will get some kind of benefit from this brand being promoted). In such cases, the user connects to the page in order to “strengthen their social tie” with the friend (and not with the brand), and thus “construct their social capital”. Likewise, we found that the act of clicking on a button may be so immediate and impulsive that the users sometimes do not even notice what brand they are connecting to.

Another observation of this study is the identification of a possible difference in the motivations for connecting to commercial pages between users who are new to Facebook and others who have more experience with it. Inexperienced newcomers (and who therefore have yet to obtain gratifications from the experience with pages and groups) connect to commercial pages to “negotiate identities” and “support friends”, while more experienced Facebook users add to these initial motivations, GS for reasons of “entertainment”, “obtaining information”, “obtaining rewards” and “social vigilance”. The “pleasure” of pressing the “Like” button on commercial pages was also mentioned both by beginner and veteran users. Note that the “formation of social identity” and the “construction and maintenance of social capital” due to “support for friends”, which we believe are the initial motivations for ties to brand pages, are not spontaneously related in these cases.

With respect to the “obtainment of rewards”, we observe that the material benefits could be an

incentive (not a motivation in themselves), and the possibility of obtainment would only be motivating when brands reflect the users’ values, or their habits and desires of consumption. We have generally observed that, in order for users to revisit the pages they have connected to, it may be necessary for them to perceive some kind of utility in this action, such as the “obtainment of information and/or rewards”, “leisure”, and the “possibility of creating or reinforcing labor ties”.

### 5.4 Motivations for (GS) And Gratifications (GO) from the Publication of Content on the walls of Commercial Pages

We have observed that interaction between brands and their users through the publication of content on the walls of commercial pages is a type of somewhat less impulsive eWOM that may require more potent motivations. In the networks of contacts on commercial pages, the user’s tie is principally formed with the brand and not with other users. Therefore, publishing content on the walls of commercial pages may be adequate for forming relations with new ties. This public exposure on a network formed by weak ties can also provide gratifications such as “reinforcement of the ego”, “personal satisfaction”, “leadership”, “sense of belonging”, “reinforcement of values”, “strengthening of ties”, “creation of new ties”, “construction of social capital” and “pleasure”.

On the other hand, the analysis indicates that public exposure to people with which the user has no ties can also generate concern regarding the perception of the absence of privacy and, therefore, certain resistance to the action. It is considered that, despite this, the “sense of belonging” to the group of consumers of the brand is another important motivational factor. The user can publish content on commercial pages motivated by the “search for behavioral models” in the group and the “reinforcement of personal values” through support from other members or also simply through the “search for information”.

Likewise, interactions with these weak ties can also provide gratification by means of “reinforcement of the ego”, “leadership” and “personal satisfaction”, for example, when publications generate the formation of a thread of comments by the other users of the page. The “entertainment” factor, as an explanation for participation in these types of conversation, is also suggested by the study.

### 5.5 Motivations for (GS) and Gratifications (GO) from the Exchange of Information on Brands.

We have observed that, apart from when an intentional construction of social identity is motivated by professional objectives or by the search for leadership and/or acceptance in groups, in most cases,

the primary motivation for exchanging content on brands is social interaction, i.e., in eWOM through the exchange of content on brands, consumers negotiate their social identity with their group members (e.g., family, childhood friends, workmates, local neighbors, etc.), often providing these groups with the information obtained by means of participation in communities related to commercial pages. From such interactions (whether intentional or not), gratifications related with the formation of identity can be derived (e.g., “reinforcement of values”, “personal satisfaction”, “leadership”, and “search for status”), but also related with leisure, obtainment of information (through other users’ answers) and social relations (e.g., “social capital”, “strengthening of social ties” and “professional promotion”).

Moreover, we have found that there could be greater control of personal expression, through the exchange of contents on brands, between already existing ties, than by the publication of content on the walls of commercial pages, because the reinforcement of values among group members could be more relevant to the user. However, said relevance could encourage the exchange of certain types of content and hence inhibit the exchange of others.

Given all the above, and in general terms, we suggest that the three types of eWOM on Facebook examined in this study may be motivated by four types of factors that, in terms of users of the media, have been identified by McQuail, Blumler, & Brown (1972): personal identity, personal relations, leisure, and vigilance of the environment.

### **5.6 Similarities and Differences Between the Motivations for the three Types of eWOM Analyzed**

The most similar factor between the motivations for the three types of eWOM is the negotiation of identities, represented by the “need for personal expression” and the “formation of social identity”. Note that Facebook applications make this process occur by constant negotiation of identities, through social interactions related to brands in a leisurely manner. Therefore, and also due to the type of content published, the “leisure/pleasure” factor is also a common motivation among the eWOM practices examined in this study. In Table 2, we compile the main motivations and gratifications for the three observed eWOM practices.

**Table 2 -** Main motivations and gratifications obtained for the 3 types of eWOM.

	<b>ASSOCIATE TO PAGES</b>	<b>PUBLISH CONTENT ON PAGES</b>	<b>SHARE CONTENT ON BRANDS</b>
<b>MAIN MOTIVATIONS</b>	Need for personal expression	Need for personal expression	Social interaction (market maven) with already existing ties
	Formation of social identity, Strengthening of social relations	Formation of social identity, Social interaction with new ties	Need for personal expression
		Creation of new social ties, Sense of belonging, Reinforcement of values, Leisure	Formation of social identity, Reinforcement of values, Reinforcement of ego, Leadership
		Search for Information.	Leisure.
<b>MAIN GRATIFICATIONS OBTAINED</b>	Social identity,	Personal expression	Social interaction
	Social vigilance, Information	Social identity	Social identity
	Sense of belonging, Leisure/Pleasure	Social interaction	Personal satisfaction, Reinforcement of values, Reinforcement of ego, Leadership
		Sense of belonging, Reinforcement of values, Leisure/Pleasure	Sense of belonging, Leisure/Pleasure, Information
		Search for information, Search for rewards, Formation of social capital, Creation of new social ties	Social vigilance, Strengthening of social ties
Source: authors' own work based on analysis of field data.			

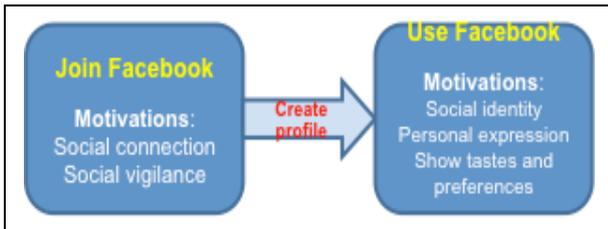
**5.7 THE PROGRESSIVITY OF GRATIFICATIONS IN FACEBOOK**

A more in-depth analysis of the data described in the previous section, leads us to suggest that the motivations (GS) for the use of Facebook and participation in eWOM practices on the website could increase as users discover all its applications. The reason is that they become more implicated in their uses and satisfy their initial desires for gratification (or obtain new gratifications). The “movement” that we are suggesting, and which is one of the contributions of this study, is like a snowball, and we describe (and defend) it hereinafter.

*The snowball movement.* As we commented when we analyzed the uses of Facebook, we perceive that the initial motivations for individuals to create a profile on the site are different than the motivations

that are later implicated in its different uses. In the descriptive analysis, “social connection” and “social vigilance” emerged as the main motivational factors for a user to decide to open an account on the site: users choose Facebook mostly because “it is where all my friends are” and because they want to know about their friends’ lives.

The first step in using Facebook is the creation of a user profile which works like a business card. The user is encouraged, from there, to create their “social identity”, i.e., to design the way they would like to be recognized on the site. To start using Facebook, they have to connect to other users and publish contents (status updates, photos, and comments on other people’s walls). We believe that the first publications are motivated by the “need for personal expression” and the “formation of social identity” (Figure 1).



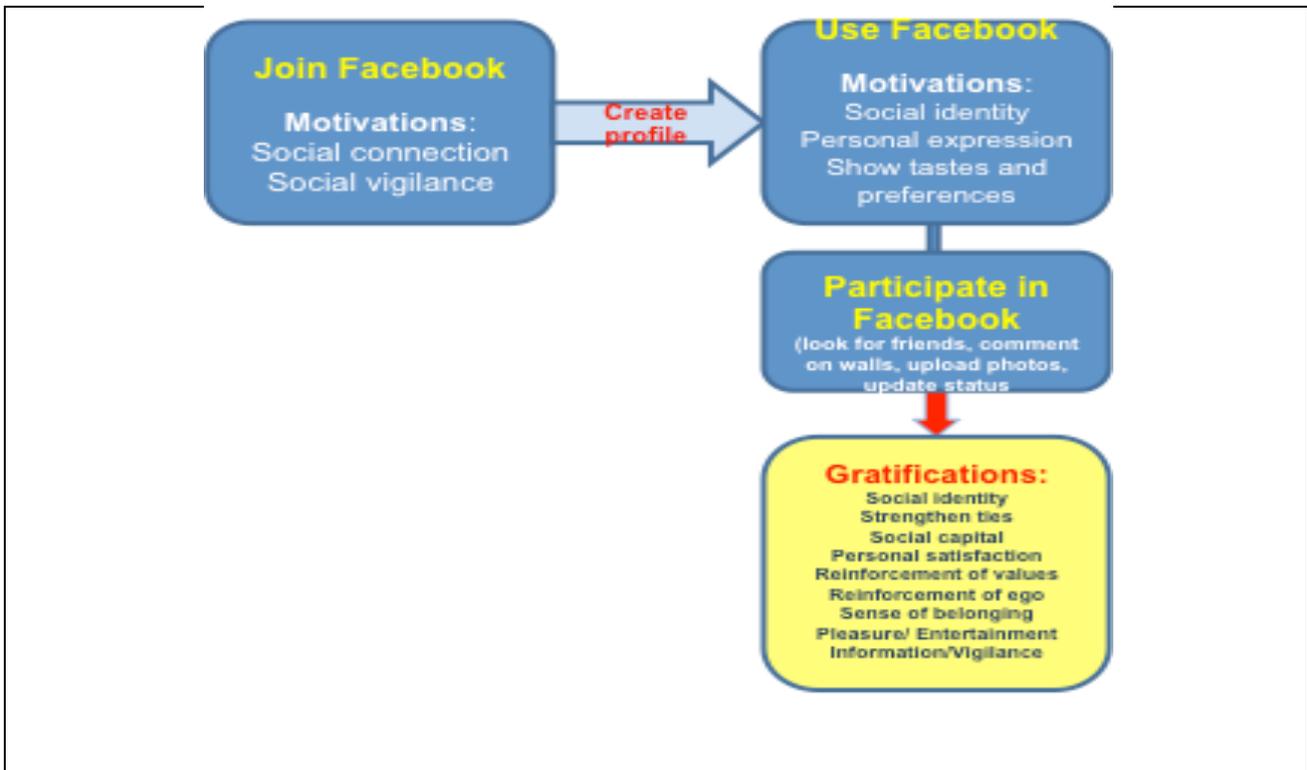
**Figure 1** - The snowball movement: motivations for joining Facebook.

When a user starts forming their network of friends, generally looking for people with whom they already have offline ties, their social interactions also commence. The individual who decides to comment on walls wants their conversation to be visible to the whole of their network. If they do not, they can choose to send private messages. The motivations (GS) for the choosing of public conversation may be the

“formation of social identity” and also “social interaction” with many users at the same time. When they realize that their publication has the “power” to add many people, users obtain new gratifications that, in turn, motivate even greater participation in the network:

“I once said something daft and it generated a thread of 80 comments on my profile and that’s great, because only Facebook brings together 10, 15 people, and generates 80 comments. It’s great fun” (Brian).

In turn, the GO from these public social interactions could be the following: “personal satisfaction”, “reinforcement of the ego”, “reinforcement of values”, “sense of belonging”, “pleasure”, “information”, “social capital”, “strengthening of social ties” and “formation of social identity” (Figure 2).



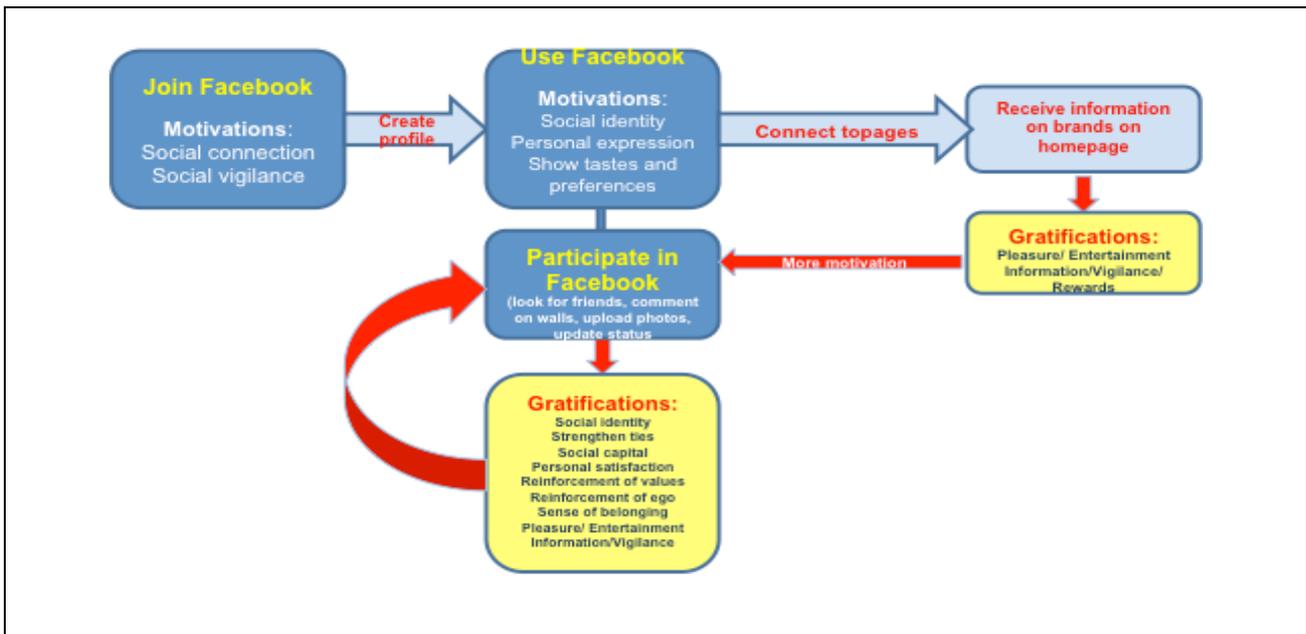
**Figure 2.** The snowball movement: first gratifications from Facebook use.

Facebook offers various tools for the formation of one's "social identity" that facilitate the user's "social interactions", and the tie to commercial pages is one of these possibilities, i.e., although consumers are not initially motivated to "connect to brands", they do so, primarily, in order to "show their tastes and preferences", i.e., "construct their social identity":

"I think that (pages) make my digital identity in the area I'm interested in as a person much clearer, can identify what kind of person I am. And, I also think that they do indeed contribute to my visibility in the professional field" (Martin).

If interaction with other users provides the consumer with gratifications, then the same thing happens with brand pages, i.e. as publications by these brands appear directly on their home pages, the snowball movement begins: the user obtains new gratifications and feels more motivated to participate more and more (Figure 3).

"Well, the brands that might more or less interest me, that I become a fan of, whose pages I follow, whenever they have updates on my homepage, if it's information I'm interested in, then I directly access them to see the information" (Diorino).



**Figure 3:** The snowball movement: first gratifications on increasing participation and associating oneself to pages.

The first GO from being connected to pages are related with "vigilance" and "information", such as "knowing about offers, promotions, and events" and "feeling up to date". Likewise, every time a publication appears on the user's homepage, any comments by other users, with respect to said publication, also become visible. So, when they see the thread of conversation generated, the consumer may want to participate too, motivated by several factors (e.g. "need for personal expression", "sense of belonging", "strengthening of the tie with the brand", "search for rewards", and "search for information"):

"In Stradivarius I knew that they were going to open that shop in Paseo de Gràcia (...) I published, when is the shop in Paseo de Gràcia opening?" (Delia).

This participation in the conversation with the brand, or with other users of the page, may generate even more gratifications for the consumer, such as "reinforcement of the ego", "reinforcement of values", "sense of belonging", "pleasure", "information", "social capital", "strengthening of social ties", "formation of new social ties", and "formation of social identity":

"Like being part of the masses" (Marta S.).

Meanwhile, said GO from social interactions, either with brands or with other users, also function as motivational factors. If consumers perceive no gratification, they do not interact again with the pages that they have connected to (Figure 4). Note that one way of "interacting socially" in social networking websites is through the "exchange of contents".

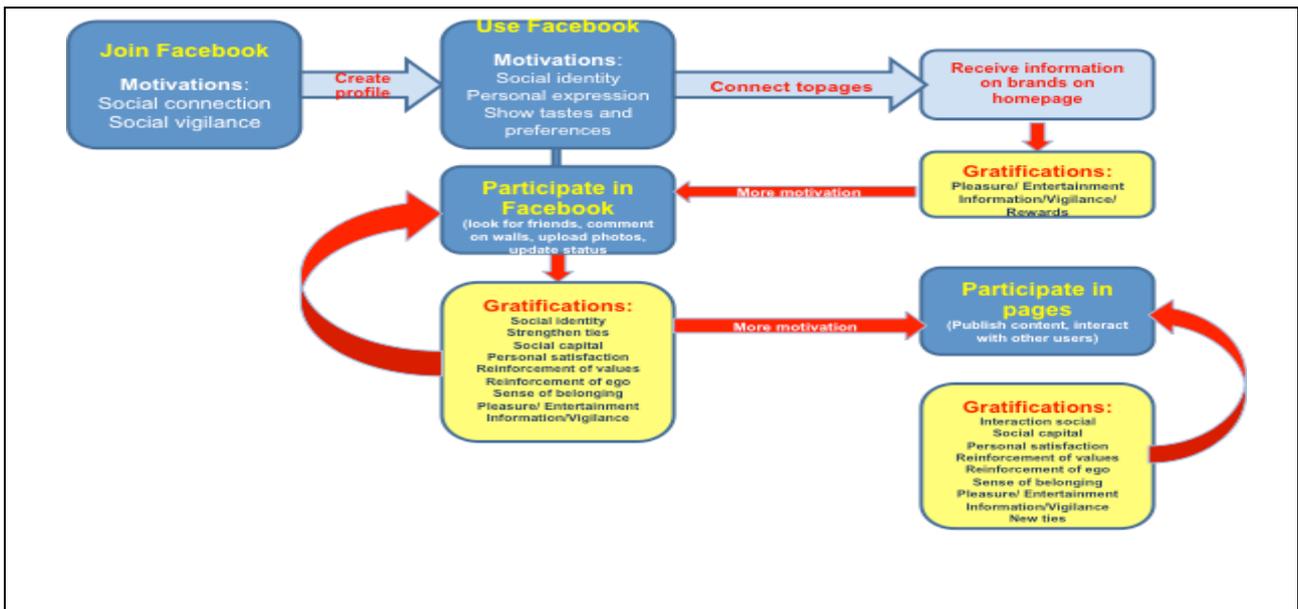


Figure 4. The snowball movement: first gratifications on publishing content on page walls.

As commented earlier, we noted that users are not always aware (or recognize) that they are participating in the diffusion of a commercial message and performing a persuasive action (Figure 5). So, their main motivations for exchanging contents are:

“social interaction”, “need for personal expression”, “reinforcement of values”, “reinforcement of the ego”, “formation of social identity”, “leadership”, and “construction of social capital”.

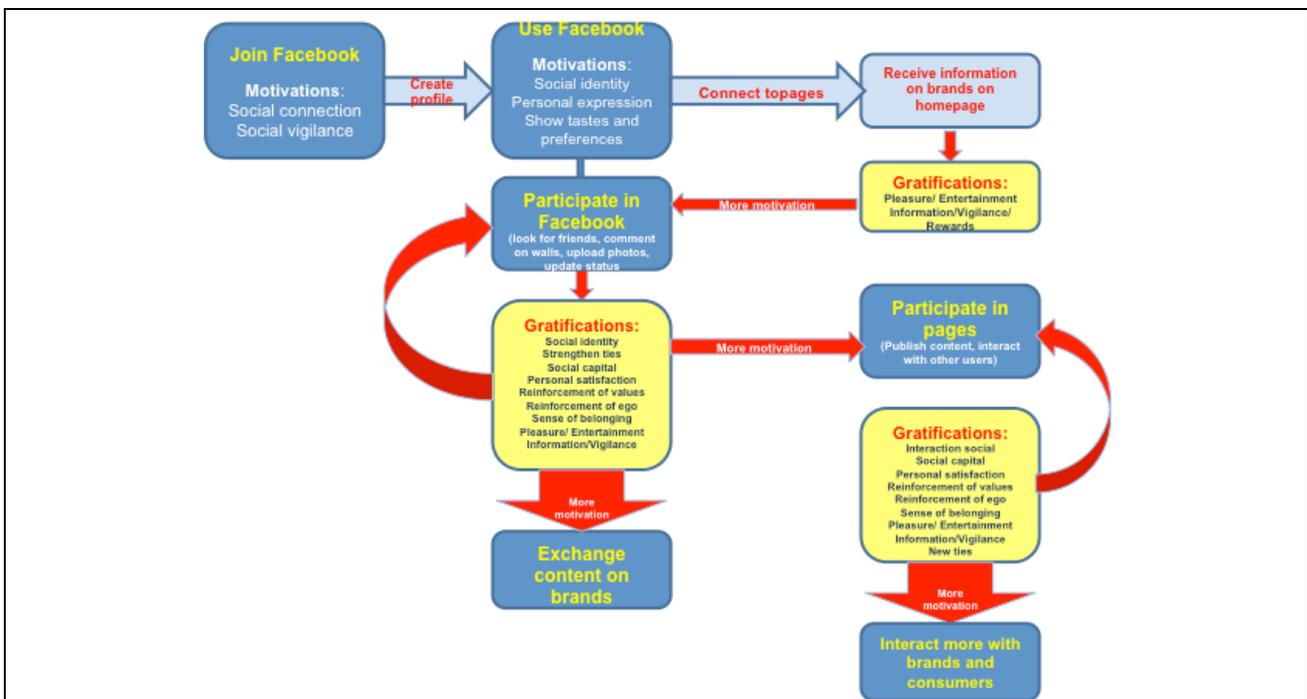


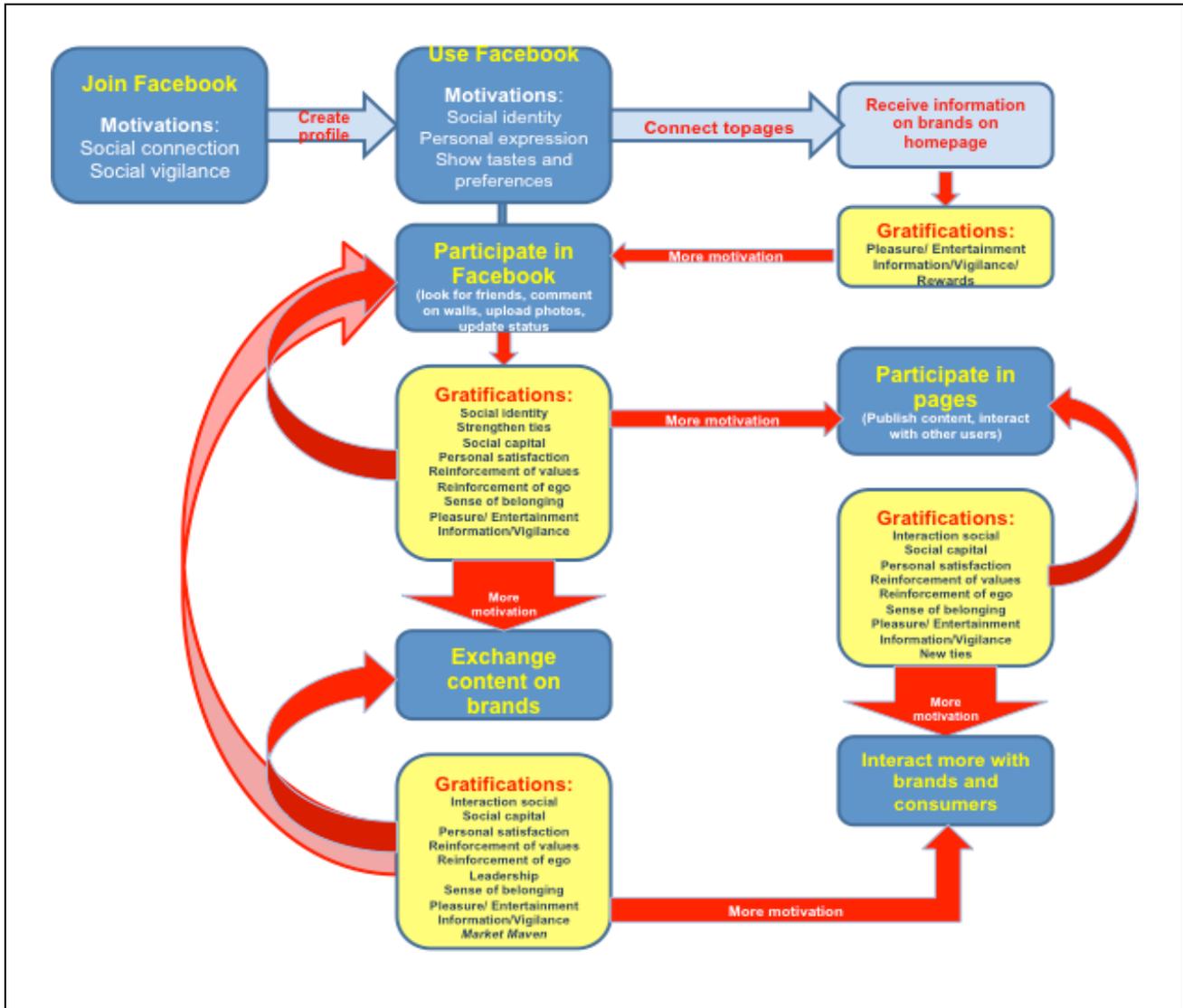
Figure 5. The snowball movement: motivations increase for exchange of content on brands.

In the cases of brand-related content, the specific motivation for “social interaction through the recommendation of brands, products, and services” is included. Also note that a “strong affective tie with the brand” can be another motivating factor in these cases:

“Volkswagen because I like cars a lot, I have a VW and like it a lot (...) on Facebook they publish

new things that you can do with software to activate or deactivate options in the car and I am also interested in keeping up to date as a matter of taste” (Diorino).

From social interaction through the exchange of contents, the user obtains new gratifications and their participation further increases (Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** The snowball movement: gratification from exchanging content on brands motivate the user to participate more.

As we see, the progressive motivational process coincides with all of the types of eWOM analyzed in this study. Such gradual interactions increasingly strengthen the ties between: 1) consumers and Facebook; 2) consumers and brand pages, and 3)

consumers and other consumers. The time factor is also important, for as well as constructing and maintaining relations, consumers and brands are concerned about stimulating interactions that guarantee further gratifications in the future.

## 6 DISCUSSION

This exploratory qualitative study has enabled us to obtain an in-depth understanding of the way consumers behave in social networks and the explanation of the underlying causes for their attitudes, thoughts, and actions with regard to commercial messages and the social network itself. Its results are of interest both to Communication researchers and to agents of related industries, particularly marketing practitioners. To the former, the results are relevant because they provide further knowledge of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral effects and consequences of the use of the media; and to the latter they provide data of interest for guiding their commercial and persuasive practices.

Moreover, from a theoretical point of view, the results of the study, add to the scarce body of work which tried to explain eWOM by its relation to the U&G paradigm (Chu & Lu, 2007; Coyle et al., 2011; Close & Kukar-Kinney, 2010; Huang, 2008; Luo, 2002). It must be considered that, due fundamentally to the novelty of the study, all of the motivational factors that we have identified and described as determinant for the three analyzed types of eWOM practice on Facebook [1) connection to commercial pages and brand-related groups; 2) publication of content on the walls of commercial pages, and 3) brand-related groups, or exchange of content on brands, are specific contributions by this study. In this regard, we should stress that we know of no other previous cases, and even less so in such detail, to have dealt with the subject from this theoretical perspective.

In accordance with Marshall & Rossman (1999), this qualitative study, exploratory in nature, has proved to be useful for efficiently identifying variables in eWOM practices on Facebook, which is an innovative system. In fact, it followed the recommendations of Ruggiero (2000) who argued in favor of the employment of qualitative methods within U&G theoretical frameworks during the present century for revealing the complexity of the phenomena and identifying new insights. Actually, the qualitative method of this work has been crucial to understanding that motivations and gratifications for these practices are not static but changing, progressive, and iterative (one leads to the other). Besides, it has allowed observing that, coherent with preliminary knowledge from traditional marketing studies, those factors are determined by the phase in which the relation between consumers and products happens to be at a certain moment. This is a contribution of this research not only to eWOM studies but to U&G general research as well. However, future studies on eWOM in new interactive environments rooted on U&G must deepen these ideas. It is recommended, particularly, the use of other qualitative data collection techniques, like ethnography, as stated recently by Soto-Sanfíel (2012).

Nevertheless, future investigations must quantitatively study these results in order to establish general magnitudes of occurrence and their relationships. Likewise, other studies must further the establishment of specific motivations depending on brands, types of product or the demographic, and cultural factors of the consumers. Also, other studies must extend the results of this work by specifically observing the effects of eWOM practices of influential agents on Facebook. Moreover, other studies must observe the described eWOM phenomena associated to specific brands too. Finally, because this study has exclusively observed eWOM in the specific environment of Facebook, future works must compare these results with those obtained from other platforms and social networks so to understand their degree of generalization.

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