An investigation of the motives that drive consumers to engage in eWOM about consumer goods.

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ABSTRACT

EWOM has become an integral part of users' online communication, affecting not only consumers' brand and product opinions, but also their purchase behavior. Brands, acknowledging the significance of eWOM in today's digital era, have been attempting to realize its source in an effort to understand how they could increase the eWOM content related to them, enhancing their reputation. In this research, a specific industry, the consumer goods industry, will be the focal point of the eWOM investigation, as, although it constitutes a highly profitable sector, it remains underexplored. Therefore, this research is concerned with the motives that drive consumers to engage in eWOM communication about consumer goods. The motives examined were retrieved from literature related to eWOM and are product dissatisfaction, social benefits, self-enhancement, economic incentives, advice-seeking, and anonymity. A possible mediation effect of concern for other consumers in the relation between product dissatisfaction and eWOM engagement was also investigated. All motives were classified according to the adapted Balasubramanian and Mahajan's framework, into focus-related utility, consumption utility, approval utility, and identity protection utility, and the research aimed to offer an answer to the question: *"To what extent do focus-related utility, consumption utility, approval utility, and identity protection utility drive consumers to engage in eWOM communication about consumer goods?"*. To provide a response to the research question, an online survey was conducted, gathering 233 accurate responses. The results of the data analysis demonstrated that when the motives are examined according to the category they belong to, social benefits from focus-related utility, self-enhancement from approval utility, and anonymity from identity protection utility, are significant in predicting eWOM behavior, whereas the combination of all motives in one analysis indicated that only self-enhancement constitutes the main predictor of users' eWOM. This result signifies that social benefits and anonymity are better explained through self-enhancement. Also, although finally there was no mediation effect, further analyses examined the relations between the three variables,

to obtain a better understanding of their associations. Overall, the findings provide a useful, practical guide about how consumer goods brands could augment the eWOM content related to their products.

KEYWORDS: eWOM, focus-related utility, consumption utility, approval utility, identity protection utility, product dissatisfaction, self-enhancement, social benefits, economic incentives, advice-seeking, anonymity, concern for other consumers.

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1. Introduction

Decades ago, when the Internet was invented for military purposes during the Cold War, no one could predict how powerful and integral this tool would be years later, for the general population. Nowadays, the Internet has been converted into an impactful tool for users' daily routine, offering them online product recommendations, and the sharing of perceptions, perspectives, and beliefs through the online network channels has been completely normalized (Fong & Burton, 2006; Lee & Hu, 2004; Ren et al., 2015). Before the internet expansion, consumers used to proceed with interpersonal communication that concerned services and products, called word of mouth (WOM) (Alreck & Settle, 1995; Arndt, 1967). WOM can be defined as the non-formal person-to-person interaction between a non-commercial individual and another person about a product, company, or service (Anderson, 1998; Arndt, 1968; Buttle, 1998). It is considered accurate and believable as it is not dependent on the selling purpose of marketers (Anderson, 1998; Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Bone, 1995; Harrison-Walker, 2001; Lau & Ng, 2009), and is more trustworthy than the persuasive brand-created messages (Feick & Price, 1987), leading to significant effects on consumers' decisions (Day, 1971; East et al., 2008; Harrison-Walker; 2001; Litvin et al., 2008). In detail, research demonstrates that it possesses a more persuasive impact on consumers' purchase choices than traditional marketing strategies, which include conventional advertising, public relations, and sale promotions (Cheung et al., 2008; Engel et al., 1969; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), managing to alter consumer behavior (Day, 1971; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) and to reinforce patronage (Arndt, 1967; Holmes & Lett, 1977). Adding to this, it is considered impactful, as it also affects product judgment (Bone, 1995; Herr et al., 1991; Laczniak et al., 2001).

But as internet technologies reached exponential growth, providing users with multiple online opportunities for expressing their opinion online, WOM power was intensified (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Dellarocas, 2003; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Sun et al., 2006). The development of media based on the Internet reinforced the evolution of word of mouth (Serra-Cantallops & Salvi, 2014) to the electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Chu & Kim, 2011), a more dynamic WOM type (Themba & Mulala, 2013). EWOM can be defined as the positive or negative remarks noted by future, current, or past consumers of a product or an organization, which are accessible online to users and brands (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) and it has been investigated

by numerous empirical studies (e.g. Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Chu & Kim, 2011; Gruen et al., 2006; Haque et al., 2020; Henning-Thurau et al., 2004; Hu & Kim, 2018; Kim, 2016).

It can be agreed that eWOM possesses the main characteristics of WOM, as it comprises its antecedent. Specifically, WOM and eWOM are both considered helpful, consumer-generated information sources, and are perceived as more truthful and relevant than marketers' brand communication (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Gruen et al., 2006). Nevertheless, two differences can be implied between them, meaning the reach of users' reviews and individuals' communication speed (Serra-Cantallops & Salvi, 2014; Sun et al., 2006). In detail, eWOM communication, can spread more widely and quicker (Jeong & Jang, 2011), and can be effectuated at any time (Litvin et al., 2008), with users' comments being available online for a long time period (Yen & Tang, 2015). Consequently, it can be argued that eWOM is considered more influential than WOM, as it is faster transmitted, more convenient, it reaches a greater audience, and it lacks person-to-person tension (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000; Serra-Cantallops & Salvi, 2014; Sun et al., 2006).

Nevertheless, as eWOM is more recent than WOM, less information is available about the reasons for the engagement in this interpersonal communication that influences consumer behavior and significantly affects today's competitive markets. One of them is the consumer goods industry, in which limited research related to eWOM has been conducted. Consumer goods can be defined as the products or services that have been acquired for private, family, or household purposes and aim at fulfilling individuals' desires and needs through their use or consumption (Kolb, 2018). For instance, clothing, foods, electronics, and automobiles are classified in this category. In this thesis, eWOM and consumer goods were investigated, with a focus on the motives that lead consumers to engage in eWOM about consumer goods. Motives can be defined as the overall drivers that lead consumers' attitudes towards satisfying their needs (Assael, 1998) and are considered significant as they can effectively define consumer behavior (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2003).

There are many possible explanations regarding the reasons that drive consumers to post content about a product or a brand. For this research, six eWOM motives were examined. Four of them were retrieved from the research of Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) about users' motives for their online articulation. In their

research, platform assistance, venting negative feelings, concern for other consumers, self-enhancement, social benefits, economic incentives, helping the company, and advice-seeking were examined as possible motives, where five of them were proved significant, specifically *self-enhancement, social benefits, economic incentives, advice-seeking and concern for other* consumers. The first four significant motives, meaning self-enhancement, social benefits, economic incentives, and advice-seeking were utilized in this research as possible eWOM motives. Apart from their significance in the research, their selection can be also attributed to the fact that they cover important aspects of eWOM and at the same time, they are frequently mentioned in the literature, as the paper of Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) has been utilized in papers related to eWOM communication, (e.g. Bronner & de Hoog, 2011; Jeong & Jang, 2011; Yen & Tang, 2015; Yoo & Gretzel, 2008), reinforcing at the same time its applicability. This signifies that the motives of their research were examined through reliable and valid scales. Adding to this, their survey constitutes an extensive study and it examines product-related information and not just general online users' content, so it is appropriate for this research that focuses on products too.

The last significant eWOM motive from the research of Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), meaning concern for other consumers, was mostly presented in the literature as a mediator in the relation between *product dissatisfaction* and engagement in eWOM communication, so in this research, it was utilized only as a possible mediator between their relation. Therefore, the fifth motive examined was product dissatisfaction. The sixth motive that was incorporated and investigated in the research was *anonymity*, which was selected as it is frequently reported by the literature (e.g. Kapoor & Gunta, 2016; Litvin et al., 2008; Steffes & Burgee, 2009; Sun et al., 2006; Zhang et al., 2020) and was not investigated in the research of Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004). Also, it comprises a significant characteristic of the Internet as people can honestly share their product opinion while not sensing the fear of revealing their identity and research has demonstrated that users who write online reviews using their real identities post reviews less often than anonymous users (Chen & Huang, 2013). It can be argued that anonymity and product dissatisfaction, the new additional motives of the research, and concern for other consumers as the mediator between product dissatisfaction and engagement in eWOM, offered new dimensions to the previous study, as for the first time they were utilized together in an effort to

effectively examine product-related information in the context of consumer goods industry.

For their better analysis and understanding, the motives were grouped according to Balasubramanian and Mahajan's framework (2001) which incorporates the correlation of social and economic activities with online communities and was also adopted by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004). In this framework (Balasubramanian & Mahajan, 2001), three categories of utilities are presented, the focus-related utility, the consumption utility, and the approval utility. Focus-related utility relates to consumers who feel useful when creating or reinforcing with their product reviews and comments the value of an online community. Consumption utility is addressed to users who acquire value by "consuming" the brand-related content posted by others and approval utility is associated with users' satisfaction, derived from the approval of their online content. In the first category, product dissatisfaction and social benefits are included, in the consumption utility, advice-seeking is incorporated and in approval utility, self-enhancement and economic incentives are traced. The motives were classified into the categories they were already assorted in the research of Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), with product dissatisfaction being incorporated into the category its mediator, concern for other consumers, was previously classified, meaning focus-related utility. As it was required for anonymity to be integrated into this framework, a new category was formed for this motive, the identity protection utility, that relates to users who post online content about products due to the possibility of their anonymity. Finally, the proposed research question can be formulated as follows:

RQ: *"To what extent do focus-related utility, consumption utility, approval utility, and identity protection utility drive consumers to engage in eWOM communication about consumer goods?"*

For the accurate investigation of the correlation of these categories with eWOM communication about consumer goods and the provision of a valid answer to the research question, an online survey was designed and distributed online. Participants, recruited by snowball sampling, were asked to respond to questions, which were comprised of scales retrieved from previous research.

1.1 Scientific relevance

Research about eWOM in specific sectors addresses mostly the hotel industry (e.g. Hu & Kim, 2018; Serra-Cantallops & Salvi, 2014; Sparks & Browning, 2010; Yen & Tang, 2015) and the restaurant industry (e.g. Jeong & Jang, 2011; Kim, 2016; Pantelidis, 2010; Yang, 2016; Zhang et al., 2010). So, this project will help shed light and provide accurate information about eWOM in another significant market sector, meaning the consumer goods industry. It can be argued that this industry is differentiated from the other two sectors, as it mainly refers to essential products for consumers' daily life and not to services related to consumers' experiences, such as travel and dining experiences. Moreover, concerning eWOM motivations, different studies have examined this topic, indicating the different motives for eWOM communication in their investigated subject or sector and leading to the conclusion that no previous research related to motives for engagement in eWOM communication about consumer goods has been conducted. To better understand the research of eWOM motives and realize this gap traced, the results of some related to eWOM studies are presented below.

In detail, Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006) investigated consumer motives for online opinion seeking, where it was demonstrated that opinion seekers post content to decrease their risk, to secure lower prices, to easily obtain information, to gain information before proceeding with their purchase, by accident, because it is pleasant and because they get motivated by off-line inputs. Reasons for posting travel reviews were also explored (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008), with help provision to a travel service provider, concern for other consumers, and positive self-enhancement being proved significant. Moreover, Bronner and de Hoog (2010) showed the reasons for vacationers' eWOM communication, which were classified into five categories, meaning being self-directed, helping other vacationers, obtaining social benefits, empowering consumers, and assisting companies, whereas the research of Jin et al. (2010), proved that affective and normative commitment constitute key determinants of continuance intention to contribute to eWOM in opinion platforms. Research related to the influence of personality traits on travel-related consumer-generated media creation was also conducted, showing that altruism and self-enhancement comprise strong motives for users possessing high levels of agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness and that the last two characteristics

augment the possibility for a consumer-generated media creator to be motivated by venting need (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011).

Furthermore, Jeong and Jang (2011) investigated the restaurant experiences that lead customers to create positive eWOM content, with food quality, service quality, and atmosphere, being considered the significant ones. Research has demonstrated that review ratings, comments on a user's review, and helpful votes are positively associated with the frequency and continuity of reviews and that users' anonymity also contributes to the posting frequency (Chen & Huang, 2013). The study of Wolny and Mueller (2013) on the motivations for engaging in eWOM about fashion brands through social media shows that high brand commitment and fashion involvement constitute the most significant antecedents and that users who are motivated by product involvement or possess a high need for social interaction engage more often in this type of eWOM than the other users. Finally, the main personal level motives for eWOM communication were also scrutinized, with involvement and risk-taking being proved significant (Alhidari et al., 2015).

As the aforementioned studies demonstrate the lack of research about eWOM in consumer goods industry, this research will contribute to the existing literature about eWOM drives, providing information about the antecedents for consumers' online expression of opinion and recommendations about consumer goods, contributing to the understanding of this sector. By providing an accurate answer to the research question, the knowledge of eWOM motives will be expanded. Consequently, the gap traced in eWOM literature will be finally addressed, documenting the motives that drive consumers to engage in eWOM about consumer goods. Furthermore, as consumer goods are classified into convenience goods, shopping goods, and specialty goods (Bucklin, 1963), this research could serve as the paradigm for the future exploration of the eWOM motives for these consumer goods' subcategories, examining whether the same motives apply to these specific categories. Moreover, as mentioned before, this research will extend the study of Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), offering new dimensions to their research, with the incorporation of anonymity and product dissatisfaction as eWOM motives and the addition of concern for other consumers as the mediator between product dissatisfaction and engagement in eWOM. Hence, an accurate guide about eWOM motives on consumer goods will be generated, finally filling the research gap traced.

1.2 Societal relevance

As the Internet growth has led to the creation of online forums, communities, and social media which have intensified the consequences of eWOM for consumers and brands (Dwyer, 2007; Kozinets et al., 2010; Malthouse et al., 2013), the identification of the motives will assist consumer goods brands to realize their source and adopt the initiatives required to enhance their reviews and reputation. Studies have demonstrated that online reviews affect online sales and product awareness (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004; Lee & Youn, 2009; Park & Lee, 2009; Suárez Álvarez et al., 2007), that consumers usually depend on eWOM communication when needing information about their future purchases (Chu & Kim, 2011) and that this assimilation of information by online users can affect their purchase intentions, brand loyalty and commitment (Dessart et al., 2019; Yan et al., 2018). This illustrates that eWOM can be considered an effective marketing tool to compete in the crowded marketplace. Consequently, the study of the reasons for this user-generated content will help consumer goods brands adapt their current or future advertising strategies, which will affect opinion seekers and will offer advice on how these brands could increase the eWOM volume about their products.

The challenge of brands is to preserve the correct balance between reinforcing their customers to spread information about their products via today's viral networks and effectively managing their marketing goals (Wolny & Mueller, 2013), for which they are forced to invest great amounts of their resources in social media marketing campaigns (Rossmann et al., 2016). At this point, it is of importance to point out that brands' campaigns are proved successful when recipients share campaigns' messages or generate content about them (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Adding to this, the significance of eWOM for brands has been increased and the quantity of eWOM messages has become extensive. So, consumer goods marketers who have realized the importance of the eWOM triggers, could be based on this research to understand how to generate positive eWOM flow on social media, e-commerce forums, or their brand's website or to affect users to disseminate positive commercial information about their brand, that would finally increase brand's profit. Consequently, the need for further investigating eWOM motives that affect consumers' purchase decisions (Gruen et al., 2006; Lin et al., 2005; Park & Lee, 2009; Ren et al., 2015; See-To &

Ho, 2014), form brand attitudes (Wu & Wang, 2011) and impact the success of consumer goods brands, and generally whole societies is indicated.

1.3 Chapter outline

The current research is structured as follows, navigating the reader through the procedures ensued to provide an accurate answer to the research question of this work. To begin, the second chapter will elaborate on the theoretical concepts of the research, firstly analyzing eWOM and brands' behavior and the importance of consumer goods. Then theories and concepts about eWOM motives will be explained, providing strong arguments, from theories and empirical research that will lead to the formulation of hypotheses about product dissatisfaction, social benefits, advice-seeking, self-enhancement, economic incentives, and users' anonymity. For their better understanding, the concepts of the motives will be divided into four sections, categorized according to their utility. In chapter three, the methodological approach of the research that led to the empirical investigation of the hypotheses via the online survey will be presented. In this section, the choice of method will be explained and justified, and then the sampling will be analyzed, meaning the target population, the sampling design, the procedure and the survey response, to ensure the transparency of the survey. Following, the measurements of the variables will be decribed with the incorporation of the reliable scales that are required for appropriately measuring the research concepts. Then, the data preparation, the validity, and the reliability of the research will be pointed out to demonstrate the accuracy of the research. In the fourth chapter, the results from the statistical analyses will be provided, along with their concise interpretation in accordance with the hypotheses formed. This procedure will clarify which hypotheses are accepted and which are rejected. In the fifth chapter, the results outlined will be thoroughly discussed, explaining their meaning in regard to the research question and offering a comprehensive answer to this question. The theoretical and practical implications, the limitations, and the directions for future research will be also mentioned. Finally, in the sixth and last chapter, the conclusion of the research will be provided.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 EWOM and brands' behavior

EWOM, the powerful and continuous procedure of the online exchange of brand or product information among current, former, or previous consumers (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) can be observed among users with little or no existing relation between them, such as fellow consumers or total strangers (Lee & Youn, 2009). The aim of eWOM is to offer online user-generated information providing all users the chance to openly state their opinions (Zhang et al., 2020). Moreover, as customer experience can affect eWOM communication (Jeong & Jang, 2011), eWOM constitutes an important information source for brands and it can therefore significantly affect firms' marketing strategies (Jun et al., 2010; Yacouel & Fleischer, 2011).

It has been found that individuals possessing a high degree of opinion-giving behavior are able to significantly impact other users' attitudes (Feick & Price, 1987). These users are considered as more credible and influential information sources than the brands themselves (Hussain et al., 2020), even though they may be perceived as strangers (Lin et al., 2005). This can be attributed to their attractiveness, their connection with online consumers, or their knowledge on a specific matter (Lin et al., 2018). Also, according to the message source theory, when high source credibility is observed, the recipients become highly convinced by the message, but when low source credibility is noticed, the recipients may express uncertainty concerning the message (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Zhang & Buda, 1999). Consequently, with their online presence, they can affect consumers who seek online information about products and brands.

EWOM can be effectuated not only on social media, which constitute a hybrid element of integrated marketing communications, reinforcing brands to form powerful relations with users (Mangold & Faulds, 2009) but also on other online channels too, including emails, blogs, websites, forums, online consumer communities and websites about consumer reviews (Dwyer, 2007; Hung & Li, 2007; Phelps et al., 2004; Thorson & Rodgers, 2006). For this reason, some brands have developed online platforms to simplify the eWOM content creation and information sharing that is related to their products, including boards for discussion, user reviews, or other

associated with this process tools (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008). Adding to this, many brands even stimulate consumers to post content about the products they purchased and used (Grewal & Levy, 2010 p. 534). Consequently, firms that sufficiently address eWOM can have a competitive asset, leading their actions to particular target groups, maintaining loyal consumers, and affecting consumers who could become loyal to them (Loureiro & Kastenholz, 2011).

2.2 Consumer goods and their industry

Consumer goods are significant to individuals for their survival and their life's facilitation and are utilized by them on a daily basis. According to Bucklin (1963), consumer goods can be classified as convenience goods, shopping goods, and specialty goods. Convenience goods are the products for which consumers have already developed awareness and preference and are more eager to consume instead of searching for another product. Shopping goods refer to the products for which previous research has been executed by consumers before going shopping. Concerning specialty goods, individuals have already set their product preferences and feel more eager to consume their favorite goods, instead of purchasing the products that may be easier accessible to them. These three categories are considered significant, as their products are consumed by individuals at a great pace.

COVID-19, the infectious disease that significantly affected society and the global economy, impacted the consumer goods industry too. According to the research of Accenture (2020) on COVID-19 and the alteration of consumer behavior, 88% of consumers argue that are worried about the impact of COVID-19 on the economy and 64% of their job security, thus, they have adopted new behaviors and habits. Specifically, they have become more mindful and conscious about what they purchase, with their consumption priorities being centered on their basic needs while reducing their spending on non-essential product categories (Accenture, 2020). In detail, consumers' spending on their necessities increased by 90.69%. (Di Crosta et al., 2021). Therefore, the fear of the economic impact of COVID-19 on their life, forced them to postpone some unnecessary spending on consumer goods (McKinsey, 2020). This can be explained by Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943), according to which, the physiological needs of individuals, meaning water, food, clothing, shelter, sleep, and breathing are the most important than every other need,

and when individuals experience extreme circumstances, such as fear, in the case of COVID-19, their priority becomes the satisfaction of these basic needs.

The industry of consumer goods has been also greatly disrupted and its profitability has been impacted due to the omnipresence of digital technologies, the increasing strength of e-commerce giants, the upsurge of small brands, and the alterations in the preferences of consumers (McKinsey, 2021). Nevertheless, this industry remains financially strong, with its bigger brands possessing billions of dollars as revenue. For instance, in 2021 the net revenue of Nestle SA was $92.159 billion, of Procter & Gamble was $70.950 billion, and of PepsiCo was $70.372 billion (Consumer Goods Technology, 2021). Consequently, the global importance of this sector is illustrated as it remains lucrative, invading at the same time individuals' daily lives.

2.3. EWOM motives and their categorization

The motives identified by research and presented below, are categorized according to Balasubramanian and Mahajan's framework (2001). This framework illustrates the types of utilities that arise from users' behavior in online communities, suggesting that users who are part of social interaction, comprise a potential market for brands. For this reason, the relation between social and economic activities with online communities was incorporated into the creation of this framework. Hence, the motives are classified into *focus-related utility, consumption utility, approval utilit*y and into *identity protection utility* that constitutes the new category formed that extends this framework. In the first category, product dissatisfaction and social benefits are included, whereas, in the consumption utility, advice-seeking is observed. In the approval utility, self-enhancement and economic incentives are traced, and finally, in the identity protection utility, the anonymity of consumers is incorporated.

2.3.1 EWOM and focus-related utility

The Internet provides consumers with the opportunity to exchange product or services opinions (Chu & Kim, 2011; Kozinets et al., 2010) by freely generating and transmitting brand information, with recipients being their friends, or other acquaintances (Vollmer & Precourt, 2008). Therefore, users have the opportunity to express at ease to other users their brand experiences (Schindler & Bickart, 2005), and

adding to this, the study of Westbrook (1987) on consumer behavior demonstrates that consumption experiences create influences that function as sources of people's motivation. In this context, focus-related utility relates to consumers who feel useful when creating or reinforcing with their product reviews and comments the value of an online community (Balasubramanian & Mahajan, 2001). In this category, product dissatisfaction and social benefits are identified.

To begin, concerning the first motive, when products' performance does not satisfy consumers' expectations, their dissatisfaction emanates (Bhattacherjee, 2001; Chung et al., 2015; Hossain & Quaddus, 2012; Hsu & Lin, 2015). Adding to this, users with pleasing experiences are not essentially more prone to advocate a brand and persuade other users about it than users who are not satisfied with it (Swanson & Hsu, 2009). This can be also explained by prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979) which interprets loss-avoidance tendency, suggesting that when dissatisfaction (i.e. loss) is observed, a more powerful response can be generated, than the response provoked by a satisfaction (i.e. gain). Therefore, is likely that dissatisfied consumers not only will abandon using this good or service (Bhattacherjee, 2001) but will also react unfavorably towards it (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

This reaction can be related to their concern about other consumers, which can be defined as the provision of recommendations about a product they like or their consulting against a specific purchase they made (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Moreover, concern for other consumers is associated with the act of altruism (Carman, 1992; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Price et al., 1995) meaning acting for other consumers without expecting anything in exchange (Sundaram et al., 1998). Within the context of consumption, altruism is considered as the desire to assist other consumers in their purchase decisions (Engel et al., 1993), as, being helpful and offering advice are also considered basic human needs (Smith et al., 2007). Altruists do not anticipate anything in exchange, as altruism constitutes an act of voluntarism (Piliavin & Charng, 1990; Sundaram et al., 1998).

According to Jeffries (1988), altruistic behavior is stronger when the altruistic individuals believe that they are justice protectors and it is possible that they will express themselves in an intensive way. Consequently, users' altruistic motive to assist others affects their engagement in eWOM (Hsu & Lin, 2008; Kwon & Wen, 2010;) and it can force them to proceed with eWOM communication in order to "save" other users from this negative experience (Peddibhotla & Subramani, 2007;

Wetzer et al., 2007; Yoo & Gretzel, 2008). In detail, consumers with a negative experience can show their concern about others by warning them about it (Yap et al., 2013), as after facing a negative experience, they earn focus-related utility when assisting other consumers in their purchase decisions or protecting them from unpleasant experiences (Veloutsou et al., 2017). Consequently, dissatisfaction can provoke a negative eWOM attitude, and users who have regretted their purchase are more likely to proceed with it, presumably with the intention of warning people instead of acting for revenge (Sánchez-García & Currás-Pérez, 2011).

Furthermore, eWOM can reach more people than WOM, and the posts and comments created remain online for a long time (Yen et al., 2015). These two characteristics lead users to discuss products or services not only to shape online communities exerting at the same time power over brands (Jeong & Jang, 2011), or to send to other users social signals, such as their expertise (Wojnicki & Godes, 2011), but also to initiate or participate in a social conversation (Kreis & Gottschalk, 2015; Wolny & Mueller, 2013). In focus-related utility, users not only upload content due to product dissatisfaction, but they also share eWOM content to obtain social benefits from the online communities (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), which constitute the second motive of this category. Specifically in the research of Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), social benefits are the outcome of the connection with an online community, and the two social benefits identified are social integration and community identification. Apart from the study of Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), social benefits can be traced in different eWOM studies, such as in the travel and hospitality industry (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011; Cheung & Lee, 2012), and in social media studies (Chu & Kim, 2011; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012).

EWOM can lead to user engagement, meaning the connectivity of the audience with the eWOM content, which can be expressed with likes or comments on the message posted (Calder et al., 2009; van Doorn et al., 2010). Users' engagement in eWOM can be justified by the fact that social function forces them to search for activities that are preferred by other users and can help them engage with other individuals (Daugherty et al., 2008). This was also supported by the study of Wolny and Mueller (2013), which demonstrated that social interaction need is associated with the frequency of engagement in eWOM content, as posting this type of content constitutes a means of communication with other users (Yen et al., 2015). So, they may create online posts as proof of their presence and contribution within a

community, leading them to obtain social benefits from their participation (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2014; Yen et al., 2015), which can also facilitate the development of new users' conversations and consequently new users' connections (Wolny & Mueller, 2013).

Although some users may only want to read through messages of eWOM, it is likely that they begin sharing their opinions when they become better acquainted online with other consumers (Burton & Khammash, 2010). In addition, research has shown that users who use to participate in these communities, will experience a sense of belonging in this virtual space under the online environment (Zhao et al., 2012), meaning that they feel emotionally involved (Cheung & Lee, 2012). Sense of belonging is considered vital for virtual communities' success (Roberts, 1998) and for users' loyalty to them (Lin, 2008). Therefore, by proceeding with eWOM communication to become members of online communities (McWilliam, 2000; Oliver, 1999), the connection with these communities can be advantageous for users' identification and integration within a specific group. Consequently, the first hypotheses concerning focus-related utility are formed:

H1a: Product dissatisfaction is positively associated with consumers' engagement in eWOM communication about consumer goods.

H1b: The relation between product dissatisfaction and engagement in eWOM communication about consumer goods is mediated by consumers' concern for other consumers.

H2: Acquisition of social benefits through online posts is positively associated with consumers' engagement in eWOM communication about consumer goods.

2.3.2 EWOM and consumption utility

The second category, meaning consumption utility, is addressed to users who acquire value by "consuming" the content of other users (Balasubramanian & Mahajan, 2001). This utility is related to users who discuss their product experience online, requesting from other users solutions to their product-related problems, so they acquire utility by reading the suggestions of other users (Hennig-Thurau et al.,

2004). Therefore, in this category, the motive indicated is advice seeking, which has been reported by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) and Sundaram et al. (1998) as users' obtainment of advice on how to face their problems. Advice-seeking as an eWOM motive is associated with products' problems that consumers have to deal with, leading them to search for other users' help to handle and find a solution to these problems (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). For instance, after purchasing a product, consumers may discover the absence of safety instructions or of the usability and reliability of it, causing them anxiety, which can be decreased when they post online about it, asking for information and advice related to the specific matter (Kumar & Purbey, 2018). So, they may proceed to eWOM communication, to be offered advice on how to solve their problem and to receive constructive and product-specific feedback (Magalhaes & Musallam, 2014).

Apart from this, advice-seeking can be considered as the necessity to receive suggestions and support from other users, to create a better understanding of product knowledge (Sun et al., 2006; Yap et al., 2013). This derives from their sentiment of risk when they are not experienced or familiar with a product, forcing them to demand advice in order to be led to more accurate decisions. (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2003, p. 51-74; Khammash & Griffiths, 2011, p. 82-87). It can be also attributed to the fact that users may be doubtful about brands' marketing strategies and need verification or guidance for the brands or products from others who can serve as opinion leaders (Kimmel, 2010, p. 237). As it was mentioned before, these people are thought to be more credible and influential than brands, due to their attractiveness, their connection with online consumers, or their knowledge of a specific matter (Lin et al., 2018) and therefore, they can offer consumption-related brand information to online users (Hussain et al., 2020), affecting at the same time consumer behavior (Kotler, 2000).

Moreover, studies have demonstrated that advice-seeking significantly impacts eWOM, (Haque et al., 2020; Kucukemiroglu & Kara, 2015; Toder-Alon et al., 2013). This can justify the fact that brands are looking for ways to affect opinion seeking and to employ opinion leaders who can serve as positive brand representatives (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Huete-Alcocer, 2017; Tsang & Zhou, 2005). Additionally, advice-seekers may not have any previous experience or familiarity with a brand, so it may be more convenient for them to post content, looking for advice from other users (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2003; Khammash & Griffiths, 2011). Consequently, due to the absence of social pressure online, advice-seekers can be more confident and therefore

share content about brands with other users (Kucukemiroglu & Kara, 2015). Therefore the current research hypothesizes that:

H3: Advice-seeking positively relates to consumers' engagement in eWOM communication about consumer goods.

2.3.3 EWOM and approval utility

The third category, named approval utility, is related to the satisfaction that users receive when their online content, which requires effort to be created, is consumed and approved by other users (Balasubramanian & Mahajan, 2001). In this category, self-enhancement and economic incentives are traced. According to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), approval can be either formal or informal. Informal approval may derive from their public praise in regard to their online input or from their private communication with other users about their information's helpfulness. Formal approval addresses the "contribution rankings" that are attributed to users from online platform operators according to the usefulness of their reviews, tracing in this way "top reviewers". This approval is considered vital to users with a high degree of self-enhancement, which relates to their necessity to feel good about themselves (Goris, 2014). Before being applied as a motive in eWOM communication engagement (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), self-enhancement was firstly identified by Dichter (1966, p.148) as a reason for engagement in WOM communication, where it was defined as consumers' necessity to share favorable brand experiences, with the purpose of enhancing their image towards other consumers, by promoting themselves as smart shoppers. Therefore, it can be referred as the condition in which users attempt to present themselves favorably by posting online content (Berger, 2014).

Self-enhancement has been proved as a significant factor that drives users to the creation of eWOM content and this can be justified by the many studies in which it has been incorporated (Chu et al., 2018; Cui et al., 2014; Eisingerich et al., 2015; Hu & Kim, 2018; Presi et al., 2014; Yen & Tang, 2015; Yoo & Gretzel, 2008; Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). The need for self-enhancement can be explained by the self-evaluation maintenance model (Tesser, 1988), which suggests that individuals behave in a way that maintains or ameliorates their self-evaluation and that their relations with other individuals have a significant effect on this evaluation. This means that it is embodied

in the need to ameliorate the self-concept, obtain a favorable self-image, and preserve self-esteem (De Angelis et al., 2012; Eisingerich et al., 2015; Leary, 2007; Turel & Gil-Or, 2019; Yong et al., 2014). The latter, seems very important for users, as it has been also identified in other studies related to self-enhancement as eWOM motivation (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Tan et al., 2017; Yap et al., 2013).

As attention seekers, self-enhancers are very likely to write online about a brand experience (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Research has shown that these users endorse brands' products online (Nambisan & Baron, 2010), as self-enhancement promotes eWOM behavior and reinforces consumer engagement (Chu et al., 2018), making them act as shopping experts (Schindler & Bickart, 2005) who desire to increase their popularity towards other customers (Sundaram et al., 1998). Studies investigating the correlation between self-enhancement and eWOM illustrate that consumers may be motivated to post content about their brand experience because of the recognition they will receive from the community addressed with this information (Akpinar & Berger, 2017; Goh et al., 2013). This motive can be described as an online "trend" that permits consumers to boast about their achievements and capabilities (Packard et al., 2016). Additionally, it has been demonstrated as a motivation unified with the pleasure of sharing favorable experiences (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Yoo & Gretzel, 2008). Wojnicki and Godes (2008) argue that consumers with a favorable self-image use to post the favorable and pleasing experiences they have obtained with brands and products. Finally, these individuals tend to relate themselves with brands and post online more favorable experiences than unfavorable ones (Vargo et al., 2019), with comments related to product trust and excitement (Felbermayr & Nanopoulos, 2016).

Moreover, another element of approval utility that has been proved significant, is users' rewards from brands for their behavior towards them (Lawler, 1984) that demonstrates the approval of their online behavior by these brands (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In detail, the rising eWOM's role in this digital era has forced marketers to utilize rewards for favorable buzz creation concerning their goods (Kim et al., 2019), by compensating consumers for creating reviews about them (Chatterjee, 2001; Werde, 2003). Before the research of Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004), the study of Orlikowski (1992) had demonstrated that economic incentives constitute a significant external motivational element, that can increase consumers' participation and execution degree. The economic incentives that are offered by companies, in an effort

to customize consumers' behavior towards their brand (Liu et al., 2020) can be comprised, apart from money, of discounts, vouchers, and free samples (Abendroth & Heyman, 2013; Balaji et al., 2018; Cui et al., 2014; Israeli et al., 2019; Petrescu et al., 2018; Van Vaerenbergh & Orsingher, 2016).

According to social exchange theory (Emerson, 1976), human behavior can be considered as the outcome of the cost-benefit reasoning by individuals who try to have an interaction with the communities and the environment, so if they assert that they can obtain more economic incentives when adopting a specific behavior, then they will adopt it. In this context, consumers can adopt the eWOM behavior proposed by brands, as they may seek economic incentives and care about being compensated for posting eWOM content (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004). Additionally, when they realize that their compensation surpasses the cost of adopting a specific behavior, this behavior usually is observed more often by them (Son et al., 2012), implying more eWOM content creation by these users.

With this information disclosure, users may be perceived as truthful, prompting other consumers' purchase decisions towards these brands (Kim et al., 2019), so, not only consumers but brands benefit too. In other words, this reward is considered a marketing tactic (Gyung et al., 2010; Mattila, 2001), as it is required for brands to achieve the balance between reinforcing consumers to promote their brand on their networks and successfully managing their main marketing goals (Wolny & Mueller, 2013). In addition, this content creation seems impactful, as its receivers are possessed by higher forgiveness and lower unfavorable eWOM intentions (Lyu et al., 2018). This information may also reduce the decision time of users, adding to the accomplishment of a pleasing decision (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000), as users who have received economic incentives for disclosing information about a brand, may force other users to consider them as truthful, reinforcing at the same time brand trust and users' purchase intentions (Kim et al., 2019). Consequently, the following hypotheses for approval utility are proposed:

H4: The need for self-enhancement is positively associated with consumers' engagement in eWOM communication about consumer goods.

H5: Economic incentives to review products is positively associated with consumers' engagement in eWOM communication about consumer goods.

2.3.4 EWOM and identity protection utility

Although users are encouraged to create online profiles providing their actual identity (Erkan & Evans, 2016), some online platforms such as discussion forums, or shopping websites via their sections dedicated to online reviews facilitate anonymous eWOM (Dellarocas, 2003; Sen & Lerman, 2007), permitting users to exchange points of view related to brands' products or services (Erkan & Evans, 2016). In this case, identity protection utility, illustrates that users receive utility by concealing their identity when posting eWOM content, as they can express their real product-related opinions without experiencing any constraints. So, this category concerns this important characteristic of eWOM, meaning the possibility of users' anonymity (Dellarocas, 2003; Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006; Sen & Lerman, 2007), which constitutes the motive traced in this category.

Anonymity can be considered a significant eWOM motive (Zhang et al., 2020), allowing consumers to express their opinion in a more comfortable way, without having the duty to reveal their personal information (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006; Kapoor & Gunta, 2016). It reinforces the feeling of being protected while being able to adopt different online identities and helps users not feel restrained by liabilities while expressing an opinion (Zhang et al., 2020). In this way, users feel reassured about sharing their point of view with others, augmenting at the same time the size of eWOM (Chatterjee, 2001). Additionally, anonymity is significant enough, as research has proved that weak bond sources such as strangers are considered more impactful on decision making than strong bond sources, meaning users' friends and family (Steffes & Burgee, 2009).

Moreover, due to the Internet's anonymity, online freedom of speech is also enhanced, as users cannot be held accountable for the way they act online, even if their purpose is to deceive other users (Litvin et al., 2008; Zhang et al., 2020). On the other hand, this freedom of eWOM anonymity equips consumers with more chances for self-disclosure (Merchant, 2011; Sheldon, 2008; Sun et al., 2006), and the personal link connecting the user who sends the message and the receiver of it, is demolished (Chatterjee, 2011). Finally, this anonymous self-portrayal has the potential to reinforce consumers' expression, as individuals can experience sentiments of augmented autonomy (McKenna & Bargh, 2000; Shaw & Gant, 2002; Szwedo et al., 2012). This can be justified by the fact that users can tailor their self-representation, selecting on their own which of their features will be revealed and

which will be concealed (Keipi et al., 2014), contributing to the expression of aspects that would probably remain covered if anonymity was not allowed (Shaw & Gant, 2002). Therefore, the current research hypothesizes that:

H6: Sense of anonymity positively relates to consumers' engagement in eWOM communication about consumer goods.

Figure 1: *Visual representation of the theoretical model*
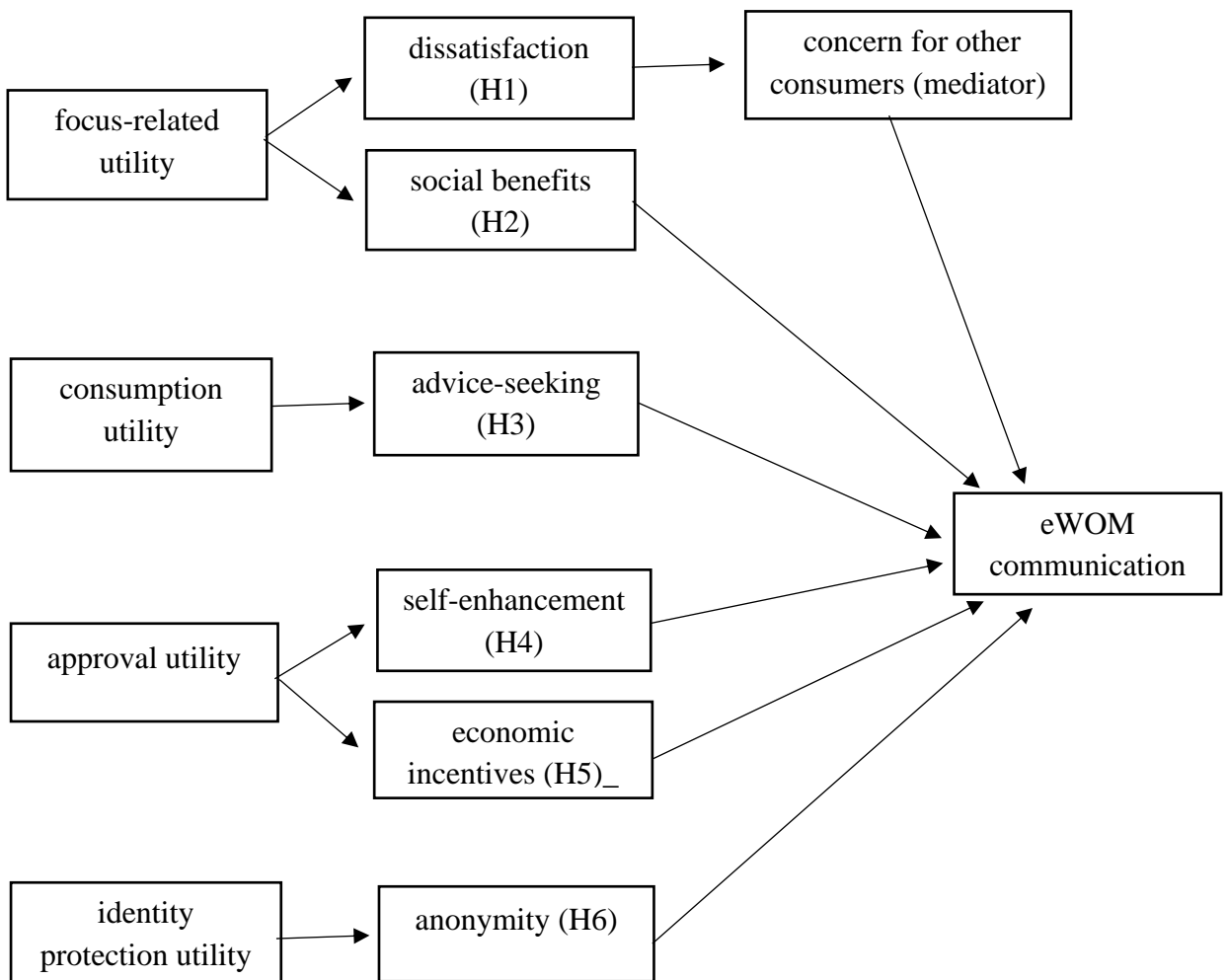
3. Method

The purpose of this research was to investigate the extent to which focus-related utility, consumption utility, approval utility, and identity protection utility drive consumers to engage in eWOM communication about consumer goods. For this reason, the six motives of these categories, named product dissatisfaction, social benefits, advice-seeking, self-enhancement, economic incentives, and users' anonymity, were examined. Each of the motives constitutes a part of a hypothesis that will be finally accepted or rejected, and for the first one, meaning product dissatisfaction, concern for other consumers was added as a mediator.

3.1 Choice of method

The research used to reveal the motives for consumers' eWOM about consumer goods was quantitative research. Quantitative research can be characterized as a "top-down" procedure, starting with forming a research question (Fallon, 2016). The next step is to refer to theories that possibly offer answers to this question (Schneider & Kerlinger, 1979), by creating predictions and constructing a methodology that examines the hypotheses shaped by this theory (Fallon, 2016). Then, answers about the topic are provided, with the help of data collection. The data collected and offered for analysis, are numerically quantified and able to be statistically investigated (Creswell, 2014), and their statistical analysis can offer conclusions (Fallon, 2016), which facilitate the discussion about the topic. Consequently, at the end of this procedure, an answer is provided to the research question.

It can be argued that the quantitative method was selected as the method of this study in order to test the hypotheses formed, as its main purpose in social research is to ascertain the correlation between independent and dependent variables (Singh, 2007; Stockemer, 2018), allowing at the same time various observations (Stockemer, 2018). Apart from this, this method is appropriate, as it looks for social behavior regularities possessing a wider scope and a greater generalized explanation degree, excluding at the same time any personal bias (Payne & Payne, 2004). Therefore, all these features of the quantitative method, facilitated the obtainment and analysis of the information required for providing an answer to the research question: *"To what extent do focus-related utility, consumption utility, approval utility, and identity*

protection utility drive consumers to engage in eWOM communication about consumer goods?"

Moreover, the execution of a survey was determined as the appropriate means for data gathering, as surveys are utilized for asking the precise questions that the researcher requires to be answered, and they provide possible answers to the questions, with the purpose of receiving consistent answers from the precise questions related to the topic (Sapsford, 2011). Adding to this, with this systematic and rigorous process, researchers are able to scientifically and empirically investigate and offer information about individuals, and social phenomena, creating at the same time the statistical profile of the target population (Lavrakas, 2008). For this reason, a questionnaire was designed in Qualtrics, an online tool for the creation of online surveys. Questionnaires are widely used in social research, selecting from a sample of a large population not only factual data but also individuals' perceptions, thoughts, behaviors, and experiences (Matthews & Ross, 2010). So, for the data collection that will explain users' motives for eWOM communication about consumer goods, the distribution of questionnaires was considered the most suitable method. For the execution of the survey to be successful, the appropriate sample and sampling strategy should be guaranteed and a transparent description of data collection, processing, and analysis should be illustrated. These steps are explained in detail below.

3.2 Sampling

3.2.1. Target population

Since the research investigates the motives of Internet users for eWOM engagement about consumer goods, the target population was comprised of adult consumers, from all education levels and occupations who have used the Internet at least once, to post online content about these products. This selected sampling frame was appropriate for accomplishing conducting inclusive research for the specific topic, accumulating different opinions, and leading to a representative sample.

3.2.2. Sampling design

An accurate survey requires not only questions that are in accordance with the object of the research, but also, printed or online questionnaires that will be filled out by participants (Fowler, 2009). For this research, online questionnaires were

preferred, as they can easier overcome global boundaries, and paper and data entry expenses' elimination is effectuated (Dillman, 2000). The sampling method for the data gathering was snowball sampling, a method that gathers participants by initially identifying a participant who will offer the names of additional possible respondents, and in turn, these respondents will create new possibilities for reinforcing participation in the research (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004; Ruel et al., 2016). Additionally, it commences when the researcher initiates the research by selecting some participants through methods of convenience (Ruel et al., 2016), like the social media accounts of the researcher in this research, exploiting the social connections of initial participants, offering in this way a total of potential respondents to the research (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). By utilizing the snowball sampling technique, the non-probability sampling method was used (Lavrakas, 2008), which helped reach the required number of participants for gathering the data needed for analysis. In detail, the researcher created a post on each of her social media accounts, specifically on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn with the link to the survey and a brief explanation of it, requesting users to participate. Adding to this, she encouraged them to share the link of the survey with their acquaintances, such as friends and colleagues, to increase and finally reach the required number of responses.

3.2.3. Procedure

About the procedure that was followed for the completion of the survey, at first, the purpose of the survey was explained and research ethics were reported. It was clarified that the research was voluntary, confidential, and anonymous, stressing that participants' personal opinions would contribute to the research. Therefore, people who wanted to participate would freely express themselves about the topic. The contact information of the researcher was also provided, in case more information or remarks were required by participants, and then, their informed consent for their participation was asked. For a more accurate interpretation of the results, participants were asked to indicate the frequency of their eWOM communication about consumer goods and the online tools they utilized for this purpose. Then, their eWOM engagement and the six motives, along with the mediator were investigated, asking questions retrieved from already existing scales. Finally, their demographics were selected, meaning their age, gender, educational level, and occupation. The

questionnaire circulated online from the 28th of April till the 12th of May and its duration was approximately five minutes.

3.2.4 Survey response

Concerning the survey response, a total of 333 individuals cooperated and participated in the survey. Nevertheless, 100 responses were excluded, as it emerged that 100 participants did not match the sampling criterion for having previously engaged in eWOM communication about consumer goods. So, the final number of valid responses was 233. Most of the research participants (53.2%) were identified as female, while 42.9% of participants were male. The non-binary respondents constituted 2.1% of the participants and 1.7% did not desire to disclose their gender identity. Respondents' age ranged from 18 to 74 years ($M = 33.36$, $SD = 11.98$). Participants represented different education levels with the majority of them having obtained degrees in higher education. Specifically, 91 respondents (39.1%) possessed a Master's degree, 74 a Bachelor's degree (31.8%), and 34 (14.6%) a Doctorate degree. Regarding the remaining respondents, 1 respondent (0.4%) had no schooling completed, 3 (1.3%) had attended some high school but had no diploma, 23 (9.9%) had some college credit but no degree, and 4 (1.7%) a professional degree. The remaining 1.3% (3 respondents) had another educational level completed, such as Technical Educational Institute Diploma. Concerning their employment status, most respondents (59.7%) worked full-time or were students (18.9%). Self-employed (9.4%), employed part-time (3.9%), unemployed (3.9%,) and retired participants (7%) or participants possessing another employment status (1.3%) comprised the minority of respondents.

Regarding the frequency of their eWOM communication about consumer goods ($M = 2.43$, $SD = .71$), more than 2/3 of participants (68.7%) declared having posted a few times online comments or reviews about consumer goods, and 20.2% reported that they sometimes did it. Often was selected by 10.3% and always by 0.9% percent of participants. The online tools that respondents utilized for proceeding with eWOM communication about these products also varied, with social media (34.8%), consumer reviews websites (23.8%), and brands' websites (22%) constituting the most popular online tools, while, emails (7.5%), forums (5.2%), blogs (2.6%) or other tools (4.1%) such as Google reviews, comprised less popular answers.

3.3 Measurements

To test the six hypotheses and the mediator formed about the eWOM motives for consumer goods, scales that had been used in previous research were customized and utilized for the specific survey. For each scale that contained more than two items, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted. The purpose was to ascertain the minimum number of factors for these scales and the underlying dimensions of the research data (Kim & Mueller, 1978). Then, reliability analysis was executed for all scales to test their internal consistency reliability (Leech et al., 2015). In this section, the operationalization of the concepts along with the factor and reliability analyses of their scales will be presented. The variables are analyzed in the order that they were asked in the survey.

Engagement in eWOM communication about consumer goods: The eagerness of online users to propose a consumer good to other users was assessed with a three-item scale adapted from the three-item scale about WOM communication of Zeithaml et al. (1996). In their research, the scale contributed to the measurement of the effect of the service quality on specific behaviors that indicate whether consumers continue or stop supporting a company. The scale was also utilized in the survey of Eisingerich et al. (2015), where it measured individuals' in-person willingness to propose a brand to family and friends, reaching good reliability (α = .90). For investigating eWOM communication about consumer goods, some of the items of the initial scale were customized to eWOM communication, with the final items being about how likely it is that respondents post positive content about consumer goods, encourage with their posts other users to purchase them and recommend these products to someone seeking advice online. The statements were formulated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = extremely unlikely, 7 = extremely likely).

The 3 items were entered into a factor analysis to ensure the unidimensionality of the scale's items, utilizing principal components extraction with varimax rotation based on Eigenvalues (> 1.00), KMO = .66, X^2 (N = 233, 3) = 167.03, p < .001. The results demonstrated that the data were suitable for factor analysis and the resultant model explained 66.2% variance. As expected, the three items were loaded onto one factor. The factor was then subjected to reliability analysis to examine its internal consistency reliability. A new variable that represented the average score of the eWOM engagement scale was computed – eWOM engagement (M = 4.56, SD =

1.39). The loadings of the three items and the scale's internal consistency reliability score are presented in Table 3.1:

Table 3.1: Factor and reliability analyses for the scale of eWOM communication *(N = 233)*

Items	Engagement in eWOM communication
"How likely is it that you post positive content about consumer goods?"	.74
"How likely is it that you encourage with your posts, comments, or reviews other users to purchase a consumer good that you like?"	.86
"How likely is it that you will recommend a product you like or use to someone seeking advice online?"	.83
R^2	66.18
Cronbach's α	.74

Social benefits, advice-seeking, self-enhancement, and economic incentives: These four of the six proposed motives for eWOM communication, were measured with the corresponding motive scales derived from the research of Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) about the motives for eWOM communication on consumer-opinion platforms. In their research, each motive comprised a factor with strong reliability (αs = ≥ .79). Social benefits were measured on a three-item scale, advice-seeking on a two-item scale, self-enhancement on a four-item scale, and economic incentives on a two-item scale. All statements were phrased in the same way in the beginning, stating that "I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because.." and then, each of the items was reported, such as "..I believe a chat among like-minded people is a nice thing.", which comprised one of the three items

that measured social benefits. Participants were asked to indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement with each statement, formulated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Only social benefits and self-enhancement scales were entered into factor analysis, as the number of items in advice-seeking and economic incentives was insufficient for conducting this analysis. Therefore, only reliability analysis was performed for advice seeking (α =.78) and economic incentives (α =.81) scales. The other two scales were entered into factor analysis with principal component extraction with varimax rotation, which was based on Eigenvalues, (> 1.00), so for social benefits KMO = .60, X^2 (N = 233, 3) = 218.41, $p < .001$ and for self-enhancement KMO = .73, X^2 (N = 233, 6) = 313.84, $p < .001$. The resultant model of social benefits explained 68.7% variance and of self-enhancement 62.6% variance. In each scale, the items were loaded onto one factor, which was then subjected to reliability analysis. Following the reliability analyses, four new variables were computed, corresponding to each of the motives, representing their mean average score – social benefits (M = 3.85, SD = 1.25), advice-seeking (M = 4.39, SD = 1.59), self-enhancement (M = 3.89, SD =1.24) and economic incentives (M = 2.85, SD = 1.59). The loadings of the items and the scales' internal consistency reliability scores can be found in Tables 3.2 and 3.3:

Table 3.2: Factor and reliability analyses for the scale of social benefits *(N = 233)*

Items	Social benefits
"I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because I believe a chat among like-minded people is a nice thing".	.78
"I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because it is fun to communicate this way with other people in the online community".	.91

"I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because I can meet nice people this way".	.79
R^2	68.75
Cronbach's α	.77

Table 3.3: Factor and reliability analyses for the scale of self-enhancement *(N = 233)*

Items	Self-enhancement
"I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because in this way I can express my joy about a good buy".	.73
"I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because I feel good when I can tell others about my buying successes".	.85
"I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because I can tell others about a great experience".	.82
"I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because my contributions show others that I am a clever customer".	.77
R^2	62.59
Cronbach's α	.80

Users' anonymity: This motive was assessed with the six-item scale of perceived anonymity (Hite et al., 2014), which previously measured the anonymity perceptions of individuals, with the aim to evaluate the correlation between perceptions of anonymity and behaviors. It was selected as a scale, as it constitutes a valid and reliable instrument for measuring anonymity perceptions, possessing at the same time good reliability ($\alpha = .82$) on their research. The statements for measuring this motive were phrased in the same way in the beginning, reporting that "I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because.." and then each of the 6 items was asked such as "..It is difficult for others to identify me as an individual.", Participants were invited to respond with a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

After recoding the first three items of the scale to obtain the same direction as the other items, the 6 items were entered into a factor analysis with principal component extraction with varimax rotation which was based on Eigenvalues (> 1.00), KMO = .68, X^2 ($N = 233, 15$) = 580.06, $p < .001$. Nevertheless, although in the initial research one factor was reported, in this factor analysis, two factors were found, one with the positively worded items about anonymity and one with the negatively worded ones. One item did not classify into any scale, as values below .3 were suppressed. In the first factor, the explained variance was 46.6% and in the second was 22.6%. The factors were then subjected to reliability analysis, with the results indicating that factor one was more reliable and possessed more items than the second factor. Therefore, for the measurement of users' anonymity, the first factor was selected, meaning "positively worded anonymity". Following the reliability analysis, the average score of this factor was computed into a new variable – anonymity ($M = 5.33$, $SD = 1.33$). The loadings of the six items and their reliability analysis are provided in Table 3.4:

Table 3.4: Factor and reliability analyses for the scale of anonymity *(N = 233)*

Items	Positively worded anonymity	Negatively worded anonymity
"I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because I am easily	.73	

identified as an individual by others".		
"I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because others are likely to know who I am".	.94	
"I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because my personal identity is known by others".	.92	
"I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because it is difficult for others to identify me as an individual".	(.24)	
"I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because I am confident that others do not know who I am".		.90
"I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because I believe that my personal identity remains unknown to others".		.96
R^2	46.57	22.60
Cronbach's α	.86	.85

Product dissatisfaction: Product dissatisfaction was assessed with the 4-item customer dissatisfaction scale developed by Uppal and Mittal (2019). This scale initially was utilized to measure consumers' dissatisfaction in research that investigated the role of product-based functional failure and product-based visible failure, as two possible reasons for post-purchase dissatisfaction. In their research, the scale's reliability was very good ($\alpha = .97$). A sample item that was utilized in the current research is "After experiencing a negative experience with a consumer good, my feelings towards the product are negative", where respondents were asked to illustrate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the four statements, which were all measured with a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree).

The four items were entered into a factor analysis with principal component extraction with varimax rotation based on Eigenvalues (>1.00), KMO = .72, X^2 ($N = 233, 6$) = 347.45, $p < .001$. The resultant model explained 59.2% variance. As expected, the four items were loaded onto one factor, but one item, meaning the statement "After a negative consumer good experience, I feel bad about coming back to this product for the offerings I am looking for", did not correlate with the other items and also led to very low scale reliability ($\alpha = .12$) so, it was excluded from the scale. Then factor analysis with the three items was executed again with principal component extraction with varimax rotation based on Eigenvalues (>1.00), KMO = .72, X^2 ($N = 233, 3$) = 347.56, $p < .001$, with 78.9% explained variance and was afterward subjected to reliability analysis to examine its internal consistency reliability. A new variable that represented the average score of the product dissatisfaction scale was computed – dissatisfaction ($M = 5.20$, $SD = 1.12$). The loadings of the factor analysis and the final scale's internal consistency reliability score can be found in Table 3.5:

Table 3.5: Factor and reliability analyses for the scale of product dissatisfaction (N = 233)

Items	Product dissatisfaction
"After a negative consumer good experience, my feelings towards the product are negative".	.85

"After a negative consumer good experience, overall I am dissatisfied with the product".	.91
"After a negative consumer good experience, I feel dissatisfied with this product produce".	.90
R^2	78.94
Cronbach's α	.87

Concern for other consumers: The mediator of product dissatisfaction and engagement in eWOM communication was measured with the four-item corresponding scale from the research of Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) about the motives for eWOM communication on consumer-opinion platforms, in which, its good reliability was proved (α = .80). All statements were phrased in the same way in the beginning, stating that "I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because.." and then, each of the items was differentiated, such as "..I want to warn others of bad products". Participants were asked to demonstrate their degree of agreement or disagreement with each statement, formulated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

The items were entered into factor analysis, with principal component extraction with varimax rotation, which was based on Eigenvalues, so for concern for other consumers KMO = .57, X^2 (N = 233, 6) = 322.69, $p < .001$. Although in the previous research the items were categorized in one factor, in this analysis, two factors were formed, with the first one possessing 55.5% explained variance and the second one 28.4% variance. The most suitable factor for testing the mediator was considered the first one, as it was proved more reliable during reliability analysis. Following the reliability analysis, a new variable was computed for the first factor, representative of its mean average score – concern (M = 5.51, SD = 1.27). The

loadings of the items and the scales' internal consistency reliability scores are presented in Table 3.6:

Table 3.6: Factor and reliability analyses for the scale of concern for other consumers *(N = 233)*

Items	Warn and save consumers	Help consumers
"I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because I want to warn others of bad products".	.95	
"I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because I want to save others from having the same negative experiences as me".	.92	
"I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because I want to help others with my own positive experiences".		.88
"I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because I want to give others the opportunity to buy the right product".		.91
R^2	55.48	28.35
Cronbach's α	.85	.75

Demographics: Except for the dependent and the independent variables and the mediator, demographic data were also gathered to facilitate not only the sample description but also the analysis of the results. Specifically, respondents were asked at the end of the survey questions about their gender, age, level of education, and occupation. Questions concerning the frequency of their online eWOM behavior and the tools they used for commenting about consumer goods were also asked, but at the beginning of the survey, in order to obtain more information about their eWOM behavior.

3.4 Missing data and anonymity assurance

Before exporting the data from Qualtrics to SPSS, answers were filtered, aiming at exporting the responses with no missing answers and the ones in which participants reported having engaged in eWOM communication about consumer goods. Personal data including participants' location, IP addresses, completion time, and distribution channel that were automatically collected, were erased from the existing total of participants' data, to ensure that their anonymity was achieved.

3.5 Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability are considered vital for quantitative research. Concerning validity, it can demonstrate how well the data gathered cover the area of the topic that needs to be investigated (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005) and it means for researchers to measure what should be measured (Field, 2005). It is considered one of the main quality matters that should be considered during research and for this reason, a pre-test was conducted which involved a few respondents who were among the target population (Matthews & Ross, 2010) to clarify possible validity issues and improve the questionnaire's validity before sharing it online. During pre-tests, minor problems were traced, such as the altering of the question "What is your education level?" to the question "What is the highest level of education you have achieved?", facilitating the response of current students, who would probably get confused. Pre-test participants responded that the questionnaire was easy to complete and no problems arose related to the scales. Adding to this, the fact that research relies on previous significant works and is based on theoretical concepts reinforces its validity.

Reliability illustrates the extent to which one measurement leads to an accurate result (Carmines & Zeller, 1979), and its testing in research is considered significant, as it is related to the measurements' consistency (Huck, 2007). Therefore, the internal consistency of this research was measured with a reliability analysis, measuring the Cronbach Alpha coefficient, where all scales used proved to possess good reliability ranging from α =.74 - .87.

4. Results

In this section, product dissatisfaction, social benefits, advice-seeking, self-enhancement, economic incentives, and users' anonymity will be examined to test if they constitute motives for engagement in eWOM communication about consumer goods. At first, the results of the correlation analysis of the variables will be outlined and the outcome of the testing of the control variables will follow. Next, the examination of the hypotheses will be effectuated, firstly by examining each category and then by testing the overall model, to finally reveal the significant motives for eWOM communication about these products, followed by the mediation analysis.

4.1 Correlation analysis

Before testing the six hypotheses formed, the creation of a correlation matrix was effectuated to observe the relations among the dependent, independent, and mediator variables presented in the conceptual model, as according to Gogtay and Thatte (2017), this analysis indicates the correlation among two or more quantitative variables. Concerning the relations between the dependent and independent variables, the analysis illustrated that not all correlations were significant and a negative correlation was also traced. In detail, the significant, positive correlations of the outcome variable, meaning eWOM engagement, with the predictor variables were restricted to social benefits ($r = .23$, $p < .001$) and self-enhancement ($r = .28$, $p < .001$), but they were all weak. Adding to this, anonymity ($r = -.16$, $p < 0.05$) had the only significant negative relation with the outcome variable. No moderate or strong significant correlations were found. A significant positive relation was also observed between the outcome variable and the mediator variable, meaning concern ($r = .16$, $p < 0.05$). There was no significant relation between product dissatisfaction *($r = -.02$, $p = .79$)*, advice-seeking *($r = .12$, $p = 0.07$)*, economic incentives *($r = .07$, $p = .32$)* and the outcome variable.

Moreover, some positive interactions among the independent variables were observed. In detail, social benefits were moderately related to advice-seeking ($r = .43$, $p < .001$), self-enhancement ($r = .60$, $p < .001$), and economic incentives ($r = .46$, $p < .001$). Their relations could be attributed to the fact that these motives may entail users' necessity to receive something in exchange for their eWOM engagement, which can be social integration (social benefits), support (advice-seeking), popularity

(self-enhancement), or financial rewards (economic incentives). Moreover, advice-seeking was also moderately correlated with self-enhancement ($r = .46$, $p < .001$), probably because they can both satisfy users, even though satisfaction can be effectuated for different reasons in these two motives. A weak significant correlation of advice-seeking with economic incentives ($r = .29$, $p < .001$), was also traced. Furthermore, a moderate connection between self-enhancement and economic incentives ($r = .47$, $p < .001$) was observed, maybe because in both cases, users obtain fulfillment from the approval of their online content.

Concerning the negative correlations observed, most of them were related to anonymity. Specifically, anonymity was moderately associated with social benefits ($r = -.51$, $p < .001$), self-enhancement ($r = -.55$, $p < .001$) and economic incentives ($r = -.52$, $p < .001$) and weakly correlated with advice-seeking ($r = -.26$, $p < .001$). It can be implied that social integration, self-presentation, economic incentives, and request for help were not considered vital to users who engage in eWOM about consumer goods without revealing their real identity. Dissatisfaction was weakly associated with social benefits ($r = -.13$, $p < .005$), showing that it was negatively associated with the need to obtain social integration or community identification. In Table 4.1, the means and the standard deviations of each variable along with their correlations are presented.

Table 4.1: Means, Standard deviations, and Correlations between variables (*N = 233*)

Measure	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. EWOM engagement	4.56	1.39								
2. Dissatisfaction	5.2	1.12	-.02							
3. Social benefits	3.85	1.25	.23**	-.13*						
4. Advice seeking	4.39	1.59	.12	.	.43**					
5. Self-enhancement	3.89	1.24	.28**	-.09	.60**	.46**				
6. Economic incentives	2.85	1.59	.07	-.1	.46**	.29**	.47**			

| 7. Anonymity | 5.33 | 1.33 | -.16* | .07 | -.51** | -.26** | -.55** | -.52** | |
| 8. Concern | 5.51 | 1.27 | .16* | .18** | .13 | .30** | .1 | .01 | -.01 |

Significance: **. $p < .01$ *. $p < .05$.

4.2 Control variables

Before intricately testing the relations among the predictors, the criterion, and the mediator, it was examined whether demographics could impact the dependent variable. For this reason, a correlation analysis was executed again. The analysis showed that gender ($r = -.07$, $p = .31$), education level ($r = -.04$, $p = .58$) and employment status ($r = .03$, $p = .69$) had no significant association with the outcome variable. Only a significant correlation between the outcome variable and the age ($r = -.15$, $p < .05$) was found, which was negative and weak. Consequently, no positive correlations between any of the demographics and eWOM engagement were detected and this demonstrates that only age should be examined as a control variable to test the hypotheses. For this reason, it was incorporated into the examination of the motives, as control variables help conclude that the predictor variable accounts for variance in the outcome variable above and beyond the control variables in the regression model (Frey, 2018). The results of the control variables testing can be shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Correlations between dependent variable and control variables *(N = 233)*

Measure	1	2	3	4	5
1. EWOM engagement	-				
2. Gender	-.07				
3. Age	-.15*	.01			
4. Education level	-.04	-.07	.47**		

| 5. Employment | .03 | -.04 | .36** | .23** |

4.3 Hypotheses testing - Regression analyses

Correlation analysis is almost always followed by regression analysis, as, although correlation analysis ends with the computing of the correlation coefficient and the significance testing, regression analysis expresses the relationship related to the prediction realm in an equation form (Gogtay & Thatte, 2017). For this reason, regression analysis that examines the functional relationships between variables (Chatterjee & Hadi, 2006) was selected. As in regression analysis, relations' equations connect the dependent variable with one or more predictor variables, (Chatterjee & Hadi, 2006) this method efficiently tested the six hypotheses formed. In the theoretical framework, the motives were classified into four categories and for this reason, initially, each category was separately examined. Due to the significance of age as a control variable, hierarchical regression analyses were executed to test the hypotheses. In each analysis, engagement in eWOM was the dependent variable, whereas age was included in the first block as a control variable, and the different motives examined in each hierarchical regression analysis were added to the second block.

4.3.1 EWOM and focus-related utility

The first category of motives analyzed in the theoretical framework was focus-related utility. The two motives identified were product dissatisfaction and acquisition of social benefits. Correlation matrix demonstrated no significant association between product dissatisfaction ($r = -.02$, $p = .79$) and the outcome variable, but a weak positive correlation with social benefits ($r = .23$, $p < .001$) and eWOM engagement was observed. To test the hypotheses of this category, hierarchical regression analysis was conducted, with product dissatisfaction and acquisition of social benefits being entered as predictors in the second block. When age ($\beta = -.15$, $p = .023$) was used as a single predictor, the model reached significance $R^2 = .02$, $F (1, 231) = 5.25$, $p = .023$. Nevertheless, by adding dissatisfaction ($\beta = .03$, $p = .659$) and social benefits ($\beta = .22$, $p = .001$), the predictive value of the model was improved, $\Delta R^2 = .07$, $F (2, 229) =$

5.87, $p = .003$ and age ($\beta = -.13$, $p = .050$) remained significant. The analysis demonstrated that the older users were, the less likely it was that they engaged in eWOM communication. Dissatisfaction was not proved as a significant predictor of engagement in eWOM communication about consumer goods, whereas social benefits were shown as a significant predictor, possessing a positive effect on it. Thus, hypothesis 1a was rejected. Hypothesis 1b would examine the mediation of concern for other consumers between product dissatisfaction, as the predictor variable and eWOM engagement, as the outcome variable. Nevertheless, to test for mediation, an effect is required between the predictor and the outcome variable. As hypothesis 1a was rejected, hypothesis 1b was also rejected, as no effect between these two variables was observed, so mediation testing was not feasible. Hypothesis 2 was accepted.

Table 4.3 Results of the hierarchical regression analysis with eWOM engagement as an outcome ($N = 233$)

	Model 1	Model 2
Age	-.15*	-.13*
Dissatisfaction		.03
Social benefits		.22*
	$R^2 = .02$	$\varDelta R^2 = .07$
	$p = .023$	$p = .003$

Significance: **. $p < .01$ *. $p < .05$.

4.3.2 EWOM and consumption utility

Concerning the second category, meaning consumption utility, the motive indicated by the theory was advice-seeking. The correlation matrix showed no significant association of advice-seeking and engagement in eWOM communication about consumer goods ($r = .12$, $p = .07$). To examine if this motive could lead to eWOM engagement, advice-seeking was entered as a predictor in the second block of the hierarchical regression analysis. The first model that included age ($\beta = -.15$, $p = .023$) as a single predictor, reached significance $R^2 = .02$, $F (1, 231) = 5.25$, $p = .023$. However, adding advice-seeking ($\beta = .10$, $p = .150$) to the control variable, did not improve the model, $\varDelta R^2 = .03$, $F (1, 230) = 2.09$ $p = .150$, which was not significant

anymore, so advice-seeking did not comprise an important motive for eWOM about consumer goods. Therefore, hypothesis 3 was rejected.

Table 4.4 Results of the hierarchical regression analysis with eWOM engagement as an outcome ($N = 233$)

	Model 1	Model 2
Age	-.15*	-.13*
Advice-seeking		.10
	$R^2 = .02$	$\Delta R^2 = .03$
	$p = .023$	$p = .150$

Significance: **. $p < .01$ *. $p < .05$.

4.3.3 EWOM and approval utility

The two motives identified in approval utility were self-enhancement and economic incentives to review products. According to the correlation matrix, self-enhancement was positively associated with eWOM engagement ($r = .28$, $p < .001$), although their association was weak. Nevertheless, economic incentives' correlation with the dependent variable was not proved significant ($r = .07$, $p = .32$). To examine the functional relationships between the outcome and predictor variables, they were both entered into a hierarchical regression analysis. As in the previous analyses, engagement in eWOM was the dependent variable, age was the control variable which was added in the first block, and the investigated motives, meaning self-enhancement and economic incentives in this analysis, were included in the second block. When age ($\beta = -.15$, $p = .023$) was used as the only predictor, the model was significant, $R^2 = .02$, $F(1, 231) = 5.25$, $p = .023$. By including self-enhancement ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$) and economic incentives ($\beta = -.09$, $p = .213$), the predictive value of the model was enhanced, $\Delta R^2 = .10$, $F(2, 229) = 9.25$, $p < .001$, while age ($\beta = -.12$, $p = .071$) was no longer significant. The model showed that self-enhancement was a significant predictor for consumer goods' eWOM but, interestingly, economic incentives did not constitute a significant eWOM motive. Consequently, hypothesis 4 was accepted, but hypothesis 5 was rejected.

Table 4.5 Results of the hierarchical regression analysis with eWOM engagement as an outcome ($N = 233$)

	Model 1	Model 2
Age	-.15*	-.12
Self-enhancement		.30**
Economic incentives		-.09
	$R^2 = .02$	$\Delta R^2 = .10$
	$p = .023$	$p < .001$

Significance: **. $p < .01$ *. $p < .05$.

4.3.4 EWOM and identity protection utility

The last category of motives analyzed in the theoretical framework was identity protection utility, which included anonymity. Although the correlation matrix showed significance among anonymity *(r = -.16, p < .05)* and engagement in eWOM communication about consumer goods, their correlation was negative and weak. To test if this motive could lead to eWOM engagement, a hierarchical regression analysis was executed, with anonymity being entered as a predictor in the second block. The model that had age ($\beta = -.15$, $p = .023$) as a single predictor, reached significance $R^2 = .02$, $F (1, 231) = 5.25$, $p = .023$. By adding anonymity ($\beta = .15$, $p = .018$) model's value increased, $\Delta R^2 = .05$, $F (1, 230) = 5.72$, $p = .018$, with age ($\beta = -.15$, $p = .026$) still negatively impacting the outcome variable. The model illustrated that anonymity constituted a predictor of eWOM engagement, possessing a positive effect on it, and this signified that hypothesis 6 was accepted.

Table 4.6 Results of the hierarchical regression analysis with eWOM engagement as an outcome ($N = 233$)

	Model 1	Model 2
Age	-.15*	-.15*
Anonymity		.15*
	$R^2 = .02$	$\Delta R^2 = .05$
	$p = .023$	$p = .018$

Significance: **. $p < .01$ *. $p < .05$.

4.4. EWOM motives as a combination

To exclude any possible misleading interpretations of the aforementioned results, a hierarchical regression analysis was executed to examine the six motives in combination as possible reasons for eWOM engagement about consumer goods. The same procedure as before was followed, so, eWOM engagement was the dependent variable, age was the control variable that was included in the first block, and the six motives were added in the second block. When age (β = -.15, p = .023) was used as the only predictor, the model was found to be significant R^2 = .02, F (1, 231) = 5.25, p = .023. By adding dissatisfaction (β = .03, p = .644), social benefits (β = .14, p = .113), advice-seeking (β = -.05, p = .537), self-enhancement (β = .25, p = .007), economic incentives (β = -.12, p = .119), and anonymity (β = .03, p = .754), model's value was improved, ΔR^2 = .11, F (6, 225) = 3.60, p = .002, with age (β = -.12, p = .060) no longer being significant. The examination of all the motives with one analysis showed that only self-enhancement constituted the main predictor for eWOM engagement about consumer goods, while social benefits and anonymity were no longer significant.

Moreover, it was observed that the value signs of advice-seeking and economic incentives were altered from positive to negative and these changes could be attributed to multicollinearity, the linear relationship among variables that can make a variable's sign to be wrong (Alin, 2010). For this reason, the predictor variables were examined for multicollinearity, testing their Variable Inflation Factors (VIF). In this analysis, when the observed value is above 10.0 VIF, it is considered large, but the results demonstrated that all Variable Inflation Factors (VIF) were below 10.0, ranging from 1.04 to 2.02, so little multicollinearity was observed.

Furthermore, according to Akinwande et al. (2015), if the VIF value is below 5, the suppression effect may be implied. So, after VIF was tested, the possibility of the suppression effect, caused by a suppressor variable, was reinforced. Suppressor variables are considered beneficial, as they improve the criterion's prediction, increasing the weight of regression and consequently other variables' predictive validity (Conger, 1974). This is effectuated by suppressing irrelevant variance in other independent variables, leading to a more concise estimation of the relation between the independent and dependent variables (Akinwande et al., 2015). Adding to this, the suppression effect can be observed if the independent variable possesses a weak

correlation with the dependent variable (Cohen & Cohen, 1975). Correlation analysis (see table 4.1) demonstrated that social benefits and anonymity had significant but weak correlations with the dependent variable, whereas in hierarchical regression analysis they were no longer significant. Nevertheless, the predictive validity of self-enhancement was decreased, indicating that there was no suppression effect.

The correlation analysis of the independent variables showed a moderate correlation between self-enhancement and social benefits, and self-enhancement and anonymity, relations that constituted the highest correlations in the table. The same table demonstrated that from all the independent variables, self-enhancement was the most related motive to eWOM, so, it could be argued that in hierarchical regression analysis it prevailed again over the other two previously significant motives. Consequently, this result could be only explained by implying that the impacts of social benefits and anonymity are better explained through self-enhancement, which was finally the main motive for eWOM engagement about consumer goods.

Table 4.7 Results of the hierarchical regression analysis with eWOM engagement as an outcome ($N = 233$)

	Model 1	Model 2
Age	-.15*	-.12
Dissatisfaction		.03
Social benefits		.14
Advice-seeking		-.05
Self-enhancement		.25*
Economic incentives		-.12
Anonymity		.03
	$R^2 = .02$	$\varDelta R^2 = .11$
	$p = .023$	$p = .002$

Significance: **. $p < .01$ *. $p < .05$.

4.5 Mediation Analysis

One of the theory-generated assumptions was the existence of a positive effect between product dissatisfaction and eWOM engagement and the mediation of their relation by consumers' concern for other consumers. According to Baron and Kenny

(1986), the mediation should be tested with three regressions. In the first regression, the independent variable should predict the dependent variable, in the second regression the independent variable should predict the mediator and in the third regression analysis, the mediator should predict the dependent variable. The mediation effect is observed only when all regressions are significant. Nevertheless, hypothesis 1a which comprised the first of these three conditions was rejected, as product dissatisfaction did not have a significant effect on eWOM engagement. Therefore, concern for other consumers does not mediate the relation between product dissatisfaction and eWOM engagement, because product dissatisfaction as a predictor and eWOM engagement as the outcome variable are not related. As no mediation effect was observed, hypothesis 1b was finally rejected.

However, to obtain a better understanding of the relations of these variables, it was explored whether concern for other consumers was related to eWOM engagement and whether product dissatisfaction was associated with concern. For this reason, two simple regression analyses were conducted. Concerning the first regression analysis, concern for other consumers was entered as a predictor, while engagement in eWOM was the outcome variable. Regression analysis demonstrated that the model was significant $F(1, 231) = 5.70$, $p = .018$, $R^2 = .02$, so concern for other consumers ($\beta = .16$, $p = .018$) constituted a positive predictor of eWOM engagement about consumer goods. In the second simple regression analysis, the model was also proved significant, $F(1, 231) = 7.83$, $p = .006$, $R^2 = .03$, indicating the positive significant relation between product dissatisfaction ($\beta = .18$, $p = .006$) and concern for other consumers. Nevertheless, although concern for other consumers impacted eWOM engagement and was impacted by product dissatisfaction, the idea that there was a mediation effect had to be rejected, as there was no direct effect between product dissatisfaction and eWOM engagement to proceed with mediation testing.

Table 4.8 Results of the simple regression analysis with eWOM engagement as an outcome ($N = 233$)

	β	p
Independent variable		
Concern for other consumers	.16	.018

R^2	.02	
F	5.70	.018

Table 4.9 Results of the simple regression analysis with concern for other consumers as an outcome ($N = 233$)

	β	p
Independent variable		
Dissatisfaction	.18	.006
R^2	.03	
F	7.83	.006

5. Discussion

EWOM has offered consumers the opportunity to express their product-related opinions online at any time and via different online tools, such as social media, retailers' or product reviews websites, emails, and blogs (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). This user-generated content can refer to any product or brand (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) and more and more consumers tend to proceed with this type of communication for different personal reasons. The current research was focused on investigating the motives for users' engagement in eWOM about consumer goods, as although consumer goods constitute a lucrative industry, they are also an underexplored sector. Therefore, the investigation of the antecedents for eWOM behavior was conducted to lead to a better understanding of this sector and of the reasons that lead consumers to proceed with this type of eWOM, offering a comprehensive report of these motives.

The motives examined in the research were product dissatisfaction, social benefits, advice-seeking, self-enhancement, economic incentives, and users' anonymity. Initially, these motives were examined as grouped, according to the category of utility they belonged to. The results indicated that social benefits from focus-related utility, self-enhancement from approval utility, and anonymity from identity protection utility predict users' engagement in eWOM communication about consumer goods, whereas product dissatisfaction, advice-seeking, and economic incentives are not significant indicators of eWOM about these products. Nevertheless, when all motives were combined in one analysis, self-enhancement was the only predictor of eWOM. In this section, the key findings of the research will be interpreted, by comparing them with related studies, and through these interpretations, tactics that consumer goods brands could adopt for increasing and facilitating eWOM about their products will be proposed. Next, the theoretical and practical implications will be discussed, followed by the limitations and the proposals for future research.

5.1 Key findings
5.1.1 EWOM and focus-related utility

In focus-related utility, product dissatisfaction and social benefits were the motives identified. Although theory demonstrated that product dissatisfaction can lead to eWOM engagement with the intention to inform and warn consumers (Sánchez-García & Currás-Pérez, 2011), this motive was not significant for consumer goods

eWOM, neither when examined as part of this category nor as a stand-alone motive when all motives were combined in one analysis. This quite surprising finding implies that dissatisfaction derived from the purchase and consumption of consumer goods may not drive users to share their negative experiences with other users. This finding is consistent with the research of Dixit et al. (2019) that investigated the reasons that affect eWOM about restaurants, where it was indicated that consumers do not perceive eWOM as a way to convey their dissatisfaction with a restaurant, as dissatisfaction can be considered an insufficient reason to proceed with eWOM if the need for revenge is not intense. Instead, their research demonstrated that users proceed with eWOM communication to take vengeance about their dissatisfaction. Another possible reason for the rejection of this hypothesis could be attributed to the abundance of consumer goods brands. In other words, after a disappointing purchase, discontinuance intention may arise, with consumers preferring to just switch brand, instead of also reporting online their product-related disappointment. Nevertheless, although product dissatisfaction is not a significant eWOM motive for these products, it would be advisable for consumer goods brands, in case they ever observe dissatisfied users' eWOM, to be properly trained to effectively and genuinely handle these negative users' complaints in an effort to regain consumers' trust.

The second motive of this category was the social benefits, meaning users' social integration and community identification through their participation in social conversation and their engagement with other users. This motive was proved as a significant predictor of eWOM about consumer goods when examined as part of this category. Social interactions and activities were restricted due to the pandemic and social distancing, and that drastically altered individuals' social lives. The Internet partially filled this communication gap, facilitating consumers' communication. Maybe this situation reinforced consumers' engagement in eWOM about consumer goods, in an attempt to feel more socially connected to others, expressing at the same time their brand opinions.

Social benefits' significance was consistent with the study of Bronner and de Hoog (2010) about vacationers' eWOM motives, where the acquisition of social benefits contributed to their eWOM engagement, and the research of Zhang et al. (2021) about the motives for employees' positive eWOM on social media, in which a positive relation among social-related motives and employees' eWOM behavior was

observed. It was also a significant eWOM predictor in the study of Wolny and Mueller (2013) about users' social media interactions with fashion brands, in which users with a high need for social interaction engaged more often in eWOM than the other users. This is not surprising, as it could be argued that the need for social benefits can be satisfied through eWOM, as this form of communication requires by nature the contribution of social media, or other platforms or websites, in which consumers' interaction is present. Moreover, the examination of control variables demonstrated that age is negatively related to eWOM engagement, so the younger users are, the more likely it is that they will engage in eWOM about consumer goods to gain these benefits.

Nevertheless, it should not be overlooked that when all motives were combined, social benefits were no longer significant, as only self-enhancement was the main predictor of eWOM for consumer goods. This means that social benefits could be better explained through self-enhancement and their correlation could be possibly justified by the fact that self-enhancement can lead to these benefits (Goorin & Bonanno, 2009). In other words, self-enhancement can increase users' popularity and therefore their social interactions with other users, reinforcing their acquisition of social benefits. Social benefits as a motive is not related to the products or brands themselves, but to the satisfaction of a social need, and when expressed through self-enhancement, the self-promotion need. Therefore, consumer goods brands should realize that it is a motive difficult to control, as it does not directly depend on their products but on human nature. This means that limited actions can be taken by consumer goods brands to augment the eWOM content that is related to them. Initiatives that would focus on their reputation's enhancement would probably enhance the volume of eWOM about them, and their brand image would be positively affected. In this way, users would be more inclined to post positive eWOM content, while experiencing a sense of belonging in this virtual space and promoting their self-concept for fulfilling their self-enhancement needs.

5.1.2 EWOM and consumption utility

In consumption utility, advice-seeking, meaning consumers' necessity to receive suggestions and support from other users in order to facilitate product knowledge (Sun et al., 2006; Yap et al., 2013), was not proved a significant eWOM

motive for consumer goods. In an attempt to identify the possible reason for this finding, attention was focused on studies with the same outcome. One of them was conducted by Magalhaes and Musallam (2014) who investigated the reasons that drive consumers to mention brand names on Twitter. The result was attributed to this specific networking site, claiming that Twitter is more likely to be perceived as a broadcasting media than a tool for requesting any advice. Apart from this, the study of Wolny and Mueller (2013) that examined users' communication with fashion brands demonstrated that advice-seeking was not an important reason for affecting the frequency of fashion brand-related eWOM engagement. Their study was also related to eWOM on Facebook and Twitter. By these two studies, it can be indicated that when social media are utilized as the tool for eWOM engagement, advice-seeking may not be a primary eWOM motive. The observation of the online tools used for eWOM in this research showed that social media comprised the most popular tool for eWOM about consumer goods (34.8%). Therefore, this proliferation of social media may have contributed to the result, suggesting that they are not the most preferred media for advice-seeking, as the majority of users may prefer offering their opinions instead of asking other users' opinions.

5.1.3 EWOM and approval utility

In approval utility, self-enhancement and economic incentives were examined as possible eWOM motives. Self-enhancement was identified as an eWOM predictor in this category, and also as the only eWOM predictor when all motives were combined in one analysis. In other words, users mostly post content and share their consumer goods experiences to gain public praise and improve their self-esteem or image towards other users. This finding is also supported by other studies related to eWOM. For instance, the study of Chu et al. (2018) showed that the need for self-enhancement positively impacts Chinese travelers' engagement with WeChat, a social media messaging tool, while the research of Yoo and Gretzel (2008) about eWOM for travels also found self-enhancement as a significant motive. Apart from the travel industry, self-enhancement was the critical factor for positive eWOM for hotels (Hu & Kim, 2018). This may imply, that it can constitute a general predictor of eWOM and does not necessarily relate to specific industries. Apart from this, COVID-19 significantly restricted face-to-face communication and although self-enhancers need

to be approved and promote a positive self-image to other individuals, this was hardly feasible during governments' restrictions. Consequently, they probably turned to online communication to satisfy these needs. It was mentioned before that the financial insecurity due to COVD-19 led many consumers to purchase only the necessities, and consumer goods were part of them. So, they may proceed to eWOM about consumer goods, to fulfill their need for recognition and self-promotion, by posting content about this "popular" product category. Furthermore, this result may suggest that although consumer goods brands may come up with tactics to increase their positive eWOM content and consequently, popularity, they should be aware that the decisive factor for users' eWOM creation is their personality and not brands' initiatives.

The second investigated motive of approval utility were the economic incentives offered to users by brands for posting eWOM content. Although it has been observed that marketers offer rewards to consumers to create favorable buzz related to their brands' products (Kim et al., 2019), economic incentives were not proved as a significant eWOM factor for engaging in this type of communication. In other words, offering compensation to consumers to post online content about any consumer good, attempting to customize their behavior towards a brand (Liu et al., 2020) is not effective in this sector. Similar results were found in the research of Yen and Tang (2015), which investigated the eWOM motives that are affected by hotel attribute performance. Specifically, this study indicated that economic incentives did not ameliorate the possibility of posting eWOM content on websites that concern consumers' opinions and decreased the likelihood of posting eWOM content on users' social media, such as Facebook. This result was attributed to the demographics selected, the experience of consumers, or any pre-existing users' attitudes. Also, the study of Tong et al., (2013) which concerned the motives that could impact users' intention to express their product opinions in online feedback systems demonstrated that economic rewarding mechanisms did not significantly impact these users' intention, implying that these mechanisms' effectiveness is associated with the likelihood of improving self-image and the degree of cognitive cost discerned by users.

Although economic incentives are regarded as a marketing tactic (Gyung et al., 2010; Mattila, 2001), the results indicate that consumer goods brands should avoid

compensating individuals for creating any type of content related to their products. The reasons for the rejection of this motive could be attributed to different reasons than the previous studies. In detail, economic incentives signify an ulterior brands' motive of offering rewards in exchange for positive online reviews (Godes et al., 2005), so the fact that this motive was not significant may demonstrate that individuals disagree with being paid for possibly deceiving others. Adding to this, brands' rewards undermine the reviews' independence and generate the belief that the review has been paid by the brands, leading to a negative stance towards a company, not only from the reader's side but also from the creator's side (Reimer & Benkenstein, 2016). Another possible explanation for the rejection of the hypothesis could be the fact that users may not want to be engaged in biased reviews, as they would not also like to be exposed to this type of review, especially for products that they use on a daily basis, such as consumer goods. Consequently, this result illustrates that if brands need to increase the eWOM content about their products, they should encourage users to post content about their products, without promising any compensation, to eliminate any possible bias and be perceived as more truthful.

5.1.4 EWOM and identity protection utility

In the last category, anonymity was examined as a possible motive of eWOM for consumer goods, as some websites and forums allow anonymous comments, and some social media users who post content for consumer goods prefer to keep their identity private and use pseudonyms on their social media accounts. When tested in its category, anonymity was found significant, constituting the third and the last significant eWOM motive. Anonymity was also significant in research on employer review websites that allow reviewers to keep their identity anonymous (Parameswaran et al., 2022), showing that these users could easier report the incompetency of their leadership team and that anonymity positively affected their review's helpfulness. This implies that anonymity can facilitate users' expression, as they feel reassured that their identity is protected and they do not sense the fear of a negative outcome that their content could lead to. Furthermore, in this category, age is negatively related to eWOM engagement, demonstrating that the older the users are, the less likely it is that they will post eWOM content.

Nevertheless, when anonymity was tested in combination with the other motives, it was found that it was no longer a significant motive. Correlation analysis between anonymity and self-enhancement demonstrated the existence of a negative moderate relation between them. In other words, the higher the self-enhancement need of users is, the less likely it is that they will proceed with eWOM about consumer goods without revealing their real identity. Similar findings were observed in the research of Hoyer and van Straaten (2022) on anonymous reputation systems which showed that the number of users' ratings significantly decreases if users keep their identity anonymous when their motive for posting online content is self-expression, which comprises a prerequisite for self-enhancement. Therefore, self-enhancement prevails over anonymity.

5.2 Mediation Analysis

The purpose of the mediation analysis was to examine whether consumers' concern for other consumers mediates the relationship between product dissatisfaction and eWOM engagement. Nevertheless, the results from the regression analysis demonstrated that product dissatisfaction does not have a significant direct effect on eWOM engagement. In other words, concern for other consumers has no mediation effect, because product dissatisfaction as a predictor and eWOM engagement as the outcome variable are not related. Therefore, it should be acknowledged that the mediating effect of concern for other consumers is rejected by this outcome.

Nevertheless, two regression analyses related to the aforementioned variables were conducted to examine if there are any indirect effects between these three variables. In the first analysis, concern for other consumers was entered as a predictor and eWOM engagement as the outcome variable. The analysis revealed the existence of a positive association between them. This is in line with the findings of the research of Sun and Chen (2014) that investigated the servicing effectiveness of social media in users' eWOM, in which concern for others significantly and positively affected users' eWOM. Adding to this, research about the restaurant experiences that force customers to positive eWOM (Jeong & Jang, 2011) revealed that restaurants' superior atmosphere can provoke positive eWOM in consumers who are motivated by concern for others. It can be also stressed that concern for other consumers is associated with altruism, so users may be forced to engage in eWOM about consumer goods due to

their need to assist other users (Hsu & Lin, 2008; Kwon & Wen, 2010). Furthermore, the relationship between concern for other consumers and product dissatisfaction was examined in the second regression analysis, with product dissatisfaction as a predictor and concern for other consumers as the outcome variable. The results demonstrated that product dissatisfaction positively affects concern for others. Therefore, people who feel dissatisfied after the purchase or use of a product, feel worried about other users, probably because they do not want them to experience the same negative feelings. Consequently, the significance of these relations illustrates an indirect effect between these variables, although no direct mediation effect was observed.

5.3 Implications

5.3.1 Theoretical implications

The findings of the current research on eWOM about consumer goods offered valuable theoretical implications related to eWOM. To begin, knowledge about the motives that lead users to engage in eWOM about these products was gained. It was surprising that although the eWOM motives in different industries such as in the hotel industry (e.g. Hu & Kim, 2018; Serra-Cantallops & Salvi, 2014; Sparks & Browning, 2010; Yen & Tang, 2015) and in the restaurant industry (e.g. Jeong & Jang, 2011; Kim, 2016; Pantelidis, 2010; Yang, 2016; Zhang et al., 2010) had been investigated, no prior research had meticulously examined eWOM motives in the highly profitable consumer goods sector. The main contribution of this work to academic research lies in the fact that self-enhancement is the only main predictor of eWOM about consumer goods. As part of the approval utility, self-enhancement is derived from the public praise due to users' information helpfulness (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), and the fact that it constitutes the main reason for proceeding with eWOM communication can be attributed to users' necessity to feel good about themselves (Goris, 2014). Moreover, this study demonstrates that in the era of COVID-19, personal and social needs came at the forefront, so it is likely that results in social research are impacted by the effects of confinement and social distancing, demonstrating individuals' need to regain the personal and social life they had before. As motives constitute the drivers that lead consumers' attitudes towards satisfying their needs (Assael, 1998), this signifies that consumer needs' may have been altered during the pandemic. Therefore, this motive should be taken into consideration when research on eWOM and the consumer goods

sector is conducted. Also, this finding indicates that although the six proposed eWOM motives were found significant in eWOM studies, consumers are driven by different motives to post eWOM content about different industries, so eWOM motives should be probably customized according to the characteristics of the investigated industry.

Furthermore, the utilization of motives derived from the study of Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) that has been used in studies about eWOM (e.g. Bronner & de Hoog, 2011; Jeong & Jang, 2011; Yoo & Gretzel, 2008), signifies that these findings could be treated as accurate and can be utilized in future research. As mentioned before, the research gap was filled and self-enhancement was revealed as the main eWOM predictor, with social benefits and anonymity also being significant motives when analyzed as a category. This means that the individual examination of the different theoretical categories, along with the testing of the overall model in social research, serves to a better understanding of how variables can affect each other, leading to a more accurate interpretation of results and offering insights on how related motives can impact the outcome. Also, a new category was generated for the proper examination of eWOM motives for consumer goods, named identity protection utility, and was added in the Balasubramanian and Mahajan's framework (2001). This category which was proved significant when was individually tested in regression analysis, could serve as a paradigm for adoption in eWOM studies.

This research highlights the significance of testing control variables before examining the hypotheses formed, as they may be responsible for affecting the outcome of an analysis. For instance, when categories were examined with regression analysis, age was found to be negatively related to eWOM engagement in focus-related utility and identity protection utility. Finally, the mediation effect that was added in the research was not examined, as analysis revealed no significant effect among product dissatisfaction which was the predictor, and eWOM engagement which was the outcome variable. In that sense, the existence of a positive effect between product dissatisfaction and eWOM engagement and the mediation of the relation between them by consumers' concern for other consumers were rejected, although theory suggests that dissatisfaction can lead to a negative eWOM attitude, presumably with the intention of warning people (Sánchez-García & Currás-Pérez, 2011). Consequently, the rejection of the mediation effect and of the motives mentioned before, illustrates that they may not be appropriate for being utilized in

further research related to eWOM motives about consumer goods, for instance, for the exploration of specific consumer goods categories, such as convenience goods, shopping goods, and specialty goods.

5.3.2 Practical implications

Apart from the theoretical implications, the practical implications of this study can be also observed. This research offers insights to brands and specifically to marketing professionals that work in the consumer goods industry, suggesting significant implications for marketing practice. It is valuable for marketers who have realized the crucial role of eWOM about brands to understand the reasons for users' engagement, as online reviews impact online sales and product awareness (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Godes & Mayzlin, 2004; Lee & Youn, 2009; Park & Lee, 2009; Suárez Álvarez et al., 2007). As eWOM can affect consumers' purchase decisions (Muntinga et al., 2011), the understanding of the antecedents of eWOM facilitates professionals to come up with efficient methods for accomplishing the increase of eWOM content related to their products, by stimulating users' willingness to post content about their products. The results of this research should be taken into consideration by marketers to sufficiently and efficiently organize their marketing strategies and campaigns, by being aware of the factors that can influence online consumer behavior towards their products.

In this research, the most salient antecedent of eWOM is self-enhancement. This result indicates that eWOM should be effectuated in an environment that makes users feel valuable, as most users share their consumer goods experiences to receive public praise and enhance their self-image. On the other hand, it shows that the decisive factor for eWOM is users' personality. Nevertheless, brands and their platform operators can still customize their services to address self-enhancers. For instance, initiatives such as contribution rankings that are attributed to users from platform operators according to their reviews' usefulness with the most popular users named as "top reviewers", would be probably an effective means of augmenting eWOM volume on their platforms. This strategy is advisable for marketers in order to facilitate consumers' eWOM activity, which can positively impact other consumers' buying behavior, as the readers of this content may be their future customers.

Furthermore, the significance of social benefits when examined as part of the approval utility, shows that although they were not significant in the overall model,

they should be also taken into consideration by consumer goods brands. For instance, brands could incorporate discussion forums for consumers on their websites, allowing users not only to share product-related opinions but also to engage in social conversation. Additionally, consumer goods brands could post product-related information on their social media, requesting users to express their opinions, who, in turn, may interact with other users below these posts. For example, after a product launch, this action would force users' interaction and at the same time, it would help brands obtain precious information about their new product.

Apart from this, this study shows that although brands try to affect eWOM, offering economic incentives to users for posting content about their products (Chatterjee, 2001; Werde, 2003), consumer goods brands should abstain from this tactic, as users are finally not encouraged by this initiative. As it was also revealed that dissatisfied consumers may not constitute a threat to these brands, as they do not seem willing to express online their dissatisfaction after an unsatisfactory product purchase or consumption, this means that, for now, the main focus of the marketers should not be on this part of consumers. Additionally, users do not post content to seek brand advice, so this probably means that no further explanations on products' use and consumption are required by brands. Moreover, although anonymity was significant only when examined as a category and not when other motives were incorporated, this may imply the necessity to facilitate users' anonymous expression. This can motivate anonymous users to post brand-related content and can help consumer goods brands receive honest feedback about their products from consumers who may sense fear of posting this content with their real identity.

This research demonstrates that the most popular tool for eWOM about consumer goods are the social media. Brands should focus more on replying to users' comments below their brands' posts, showing that they care about consumers' opinions. This would also make users adopt a more positive attitude towards these brands which would seem more approachable to them. Finally, another significant observation was that only 22% of participants responded that they visit brands' websites for proceeding with eWOM communication. This could imply that some consumer goods brands may not possess any section on their official website that allows consumers to post content about their products. Therefore, the incorporation of this section on their website could offer users the opportunity communicate directly

with brand specialists, who would have the knowledge and would be efficient in providing brand-related opinions to them.

5.4 Limitations and future research

Although research provides new insights for eWOM motives about consumer goods, some limitations are also observed. To begin, in this study, not an exhaustive list of motivations was introduced, in an attempt to build on a valid and adapted by many studies research (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004) for the first investigation of consumer goods' eWOM. Furthermore, consumer goods were examined as a whole and not as subcategories, meaning convenience goods, shopping goods, and specialty goods (Bucklin, 1963) and it was not ascertained whether the same motives apply to all these categories or if differences are detected between them. Other limitations of the study were the lack of focus on a specific country or culture, where differences in the motives may apply, and the lack of investigation of eWOM about consumer goods in specific social media.

Consequently, these limitations could pave the way for future research on the investigated topic. Initially, no previous research related to eWOM about consumer goods has been conducted. Therefore, the need for deepening and extending eWOM research about consumer goods that affects consumers' attitudes and purchase behavior is strengthened. In future research, the expansion of the eWOM motives could be effectuated, to investigate whether other motives affect users' eWOM engagement about these products. As self-enhancement constituted the main eWOM predictor for consumer goods, other personal conditions that can impact consumer attitudes, such as image-building, narcissism, and altruism (Luarn et al., 2015) could be examined. Furthermore, studies related to eWOM motives about consumer goods in specific countries could be conducted, as different cultural backgrounds can lead to a different eWOM posting behavior (Dang & Raska, 2021). It would be also interesting to separately examine eWOM motives for the different consumer goods subcategories, specifically, convenience goods, shopping goods, and specialty goods (Bucklin, 1963), to test if changes in the motives are observed in these subcategories. Moreover, it would be useful to investigate different social networking sites about eWOM motives for these products to reveal whether the same motives are traced between social media such as Facebook and Twitter, as each social media may be

related to different motives. For instance, Facebook could be associated with the need for belongingness and self-presentation (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012), whereas Twitter could be associated with concern for other consumers, helping the company and venting negative feelings (Musallam & Magalhães, 2012). Adding to this, users who post eWOM on consumer opinion sites may be motivated by practical antecedents while users' eWOM on social media may be attributed to psychological antecedents (Yen et al., 2015). Finally, as COVID-19 significantly impacted consumers across the globe (Accenture, 2020) and this research demonstrated the prevalence of personal and social factors when categories were separately examined, more research focusing on social and personal eWOM motives would elaborate on the knowledge of this topic.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to examine the extent to which focus-related utility, consumption utility, approval utility, and identity protection utility drive consumers to engage in eWOM about consumer goods. The significance of social benefits from the focus-related utility, of self-enhancement from approval utility, and of anonymity from identity protection utility, when the categories were separately examined, pointed out that human nature constitutes the main drive for these users' eWOM. It was also signified that the effects of COVID-19, might reinforced users' need for self-promotion, social interaction, and freedom to post anonymous consumer goods-related content. Also, this investigation of the motives for eWOM engagement about consumer goods, offered a new dimension in the research of product-related eWOM.

Moreover, it became apparent from the combination of all motives in one analysis, that the main predictor for eWOM behavior towards these products was approval utility and specifically self-enhancement. This finding implied that the impacts of social benefits and anonymity in eWOM are better explained through self-enhancement. These results led to the recommendations of tactics that brands could adopt to increase the volume of user-generated content about them and at the same time to augment their visibility, reputation, and consequently profits in the crowded consumer goods market. Therefore, a better understanding of the topic was effectuated which could be exploited by consumer goods brands for their own benefit, and suggestions for future research on the investigated topic were provided.

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Appendix A - Online survey

Dear participant,

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire, which constitutes a part of my Thesis for the Master "Media and Business" at Erasmus University Rotterdam. This survey was designed to investigate Internet users' behavior towards consumer goods and I really value your input! Consumer goods are commodities purchased by individuals in order to satisfy their needs, such as clothing, electronics, and supermarket products.

Please note that there are no right or wrong answers in this questionnaire and that your participation is completely voluntary. Your identity will remain strictly confidential. Your answers will be treated anonymously and will be used only for research purposes. You also reserve the right to withdraw from this survey at any point.

If you have any questions or require additional information or remarks regarding the research, please feel free to contact me, by sending me an email at the following email address: 617856am@eur.nl

Thank you again for your participation,

Myrto Magklara

To proceed with the survey please indicate your participation below:

- o I consent to participate in the survey

1. **How often do you post online comments or reviews about consumer goods?**
   - o Never
   - o A few times
   - o Sometimes
   - o Often
   - o Always

2. **Which online tools do you use for commenting about a consumer good?**
   - o Social media
   - o Blogs

- o Email
- o Brands' websites
- o Consumer reviews websites
- o Forums
- o Other- text input

3. **How likely is it that you post positive content about consumer goods?**
   - o Extremely unlikely
   - o Moderately unlikely
   - o Slightly unlikely
   - o Neither likely nor unlikely
   - o Slightly likely
   - o Moderately likely
   - o Extremely likely

4. **How likely is it that you encourage with your posts, comments, or reviews other users to purchase a consumer good that you like?**
   - o Extremely unlikely
   - o Moderately unlikely
   - o Slightly unlikely
   - o Neither likely nor unlikely
   - o Slightly likely
   - o Moderately likely
   - o Extremely likely

5. **How likely is it that you will recommend a product you like or use to someone seeking advice online?**
   - o Extremely unlikely
   - o Moderately unlikely
   - o Slightly unlikely
   - o Neither likely nor unlikely
   - o Slightly likely
   - o Moderately likely
   - o Extremely likely

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements:

I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because:

6. **I want to warn others of bad products.**
   - o Strongly disagree
   - o Disagree
   - o Somewhat disagree
   - o Neither agree nor disagree
   - o Somewhat agree
   - o Agree
   - o Strongly agree

7. **I want to save others from having the same negative experiences as me.**
   - o Strongly disagree
   - o Disagree
   - o Somewhat disagree
   - o Neither agree nor disagree
   - o Somewhat agree
   - o Agree
   - o Strongly agree

8. **I want to help others with my own positive experiences.**
   - o Strongly disagree
   - o Disagree
   - o Somewhat disagree
   - o Neither agree nor disagree
   - o Somewhat agree
   - o Agree
   - o Strongly agree

9. I want to give others the opportunity to buy the right product.

- o Strongly disagree

- o Disagree

- o Somewhat disagree

- o Neither agree nor disagree

- o Somewhat agree

- o Agree

- o Strongly agree

10. I believe a chat among like-minded people is a nice thing.

- o Strongly disagree

- o Disagree

- o Somewhat disagree

- o Neither agree nor disagree

- o Somewhat agree

- o Agree

- o Strongly agree

11. It is fun to communicate this way with other people in the online community.

- o Strongly disagree

- o Disagree

- o Somewhat disagree

- o Neither agree nor disagree

- o Somewhat agree

- o Agree

- o Strongly agree

12. I can meet nice people this way.

- o Strongly disagree

- o Disagree

- o Somewhat disagree

- o Neither agree nor disagree

- o Somewhat agree

- o Agree

o Strongly agree

I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because:

13. I expect to receive tips or support from other users.
- o Strongly disagree
- o Disagree
- o Somewhat disagree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Somewhat agree
- o Agree
- o Strongly agree

14. I hope to receive advice from others that will help me solve my problems.
- o Strongly disagree
- o Disagree
- o Somewhat disagree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Somewhat agree
- o Agree
- o Strongly agree

15. In this way I can express my joy about a good buy.
- o Strongly disagree
- o Disagree
- o Somewhat disagree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Somewhat agree
- o Agree
- o Strongly agree

16. I feel good when I can tell others about my buying successes.
- o Strongly disagree

o Disagree

o Somewhat disagree

o Neither agree nor disagree

o Somewhat agree

o Agree

o Strongly agree

17. I can tell others about a great experience.

o Strongly disagree

o Disagree

o Somewhat disagree

o Neither agree nor disagree

o Somewhat agree

o Agree

o Strongly agree

18. My contributions show others that I am a clever customer.

o Strongly disagree

o Disagree

o Somewhat disagree

o Neither agree nor disagree

o Somewhat agree

o Agree

o Strongly agree

19. I receive incentives from the brands (e.g. Web miles, discounts, vouchers, free samples)

o Strongly disagree

o Disagree

o Somewhat disagree

o Neither agree nor disagree

o Somewhat agree

o Agree

o Strongly agree

20. I receive compensation for the writing.

- o Strongly disagree
- o Disagree
- o Somewhat disagree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Somewhat agree
- o Agree
- o Strongly agree

I like writing comments or reviews online about consumer goods because:

21. I am easily identified as an individual by others.

- o Strongly disagree
- o Disagree
- o Somewhat disagree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Somewhat agree
- o Agree
- o Strongly agree

22. Others are likely to know who I am.

- o Strongly disagree
- o Disagree
- o Somewhat disagree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Somewhat agree
- o Agree
- o Strongly agree

23. My personal identity is known by others.

- o Strongly disagree
- o Disagree
- o Somewhat disagree
- o Neither agree nor disagree

- o Somewhat agree
- o Agree
- o Strongly agree

24. It is difficult for others to identify me as an individual.
- o Strongly disagree
- o Disagree
- o Somewhat disagree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Somewhat agree
- o Agree
- o Strongly agree

25. I am confident that others do not know who I am.
- o Strongly disagree
- o Disagree
- o Somewhat disagree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Somewhat agree
- o Agree
- o Strongly agree

26. I believe that my personal identity remains unknown to others.
- o Strongly disagree
- o Disagree
- o Somewhat disagree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Somewhat agree
- o Agree
- o Strongly agree

Please indicate to want extent you agree or disagree with the following statements:

After experiencing a negative experience with a consumer good:

27. My feelings towards the product are negative.

- o Strongly disagree
- o Disagree
- o Somewhat disagree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Somewhat agree
- o Agree
- o Strongly agree

28. I feel bad about coming back to this product for the offerings I am looking for.

- o Strongly disagree
- o Disagree
- o Somewhat disagree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Somewhat agree
- o Agree
- o Strongly agree

29. Overall I am dissatisfied with the product.

- o Strongly disagree
- o Disagree
- o Somewhat disagree
- o Neither agree nor disagree
- o Somewhat agree
- o Agree
- o Strongly agree

30. I feel dissatisfied with this product produce.

- o Strongly disagree
- o Disagree
- o Somewhat disagree

- o   Neither agree nor disagree

- o   Somewhat agree

- o   Agree

- o   Strongly agree

31. To which gender identity do you most identify?

- o   Female

- o   Male

- o   Non- Binary/ Third gender

- o   Other

- o   Prefer not to say

32. What is your age?

- o   Text input

33. What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

- o   No schooling completed

- o   Some high school, no diploma

- o   Some college credit, no degree

- o   Bachelor's degree

- o   Master's degree

- o   Professional degree

- o   Doctorate degree

- o   Other

34. What is your employment status?

- o   Student

- o   Self-employed

- o   Employed-Full time

- o   Employed-Part time

- o   Not employed

- o   Retired

- o   Other- Text input

Thank you for completing my survey and for participating in the study! The purpose of this research is to investigate the motives of users' eWOM communication (meaning the positive or negative remarks about a product, brand, or service) on consumer goods.

If you have any questions about the survey, please feel free to contact me, by sending me an email at: 617856am@eur.nl