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The influence of EWOM characteristics on online repurchase intention

Mediating roles of trust and perceived usefulness

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Abstract

Purpose – With the expansion of internet as a tool for exchanging information, companies include in their websites a virtual space to share information among users. The purpose of this paper is to explore the characteristics of consumers' reviews (electronic word-of-mouth quantity, credibility and quality) as antecedents of customers' online repurchase intentions. Specially, it proposes a model where trust on an online seller and perceived usefulness of a website mediate the influence of electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) characteristics on repurchase intentions.

Design/methodology/approach – Structural equation modeling was employed on a sample of 252 online customers. An online questionnaire was aimed at internet users who had previously made an online purchase and read online reviews received from the vendor's website.

Findings – Results show that only EWOM quality has a positive direct effect on consumers' repurchase intention while quantity has a negative influence. Perceived usefulness mediates the influence of all EWOM characteristics on online repurchase intention. EWOM credibility and quality also indirectly influence repurchase intentions through trust on the online vendor.

Practical implications – This paper outlines ways to improve managerial implications by developing mobile applications or websites where the reviews have an appropriate volume and quality of information. Moreover, it suggests general advice to present online reviews in a useful manner to users who visit these websites.

Originality/value – This study is one of the first to propose an integrative model that studies in depth the three main EWOM characteristics and customer responses for understanding their repurchase behavior.

Keywords Credibility, E-commerce, EWOM, Overload information, Quality information, Quantity information

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Consumers are increasingly using the advantages of the online environment to find information about products and services that is integrated in their purchase decision process (Zhu and Zhang, 2010; King *et al.*, 2014; Teng *et al.*, 2014). Recent research shows that the internet allows customers to use online platforms to share reviews with other users (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Kim and Park, 2013). For example, in the Spanish context, 78 percent of internet users consult online reviews before making their purchase decision and 51.5 percent rely on these reviews (Asociación para la



Investigación de Medios de Comunicación, 2014). In other countries, such as the UK and the USA, consumers also rely on online reviews and trust in this type of communication (Local Consumer Review Survey, 2012). Specifically, approximately, 72 percent of consumers place as much trust in online reviews as in personal recommendations. Other studies confirm that 71 percent of US consumers read consumers reviews before making a purchase (Bazaarvoice, 2013).

Marketing researchers refer to these online reviews as recommendations regarding a product or company that include purchase information about an online store (Chatterjee, 2001). Online reviews are the main source of electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) communication, which has become an important means of marketing (Park *et al.*, 2007). EWOM refers to participation from both active and passive customers: active users share their opinions with other consumers and post their reviews on websites, while passive ones search for information and read other consumers' online recommendations, without posting any of their own (Khammash and Griffiths, 2011).

In response to this new phenomenon, and in order to gain more control over online reviews, many companies now offer virtual spaces on their own websites where customers can publish their opinions and share experiences (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006). Two examples of this are Amazon.com and Booking.com, two of the most popular global websites (CNN Travel, 2013; The Statistics Portal, 2014). Amazon includes a virtual space in which regular customers can post their opinions, ratings and evaluations about products they have bought. Users can organize the reviews depending on their usefulness or the date of the review. Moreover, this online platform incorporates diverse symbols to summarize consumers' reviews. Similarly, on Booking.com customers can rate the hotels they have stayed in. These online reviews can be differentiated according to the type of tourist (families, couples, groups of friends or singles), and only users who have actually stayed in the hotel can post reviews.

Despite the fact that previous research has examined the influence of EWOM on consumer behavior, along with its antecedents and consequences (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Khammash and Griffiths, 2011), some questions remain. For example, few papers have specifically explored the influence of the characteristics of a vendor's EWOM platforms on repurchase intentions (RIs). Most of the extant literature has focused on isolated dimensions of information, such as quality or credibility and has explored these influences separately (Park *et al.*, 2007; Cheung *et al.*, 2008). Other studies have incorporated trust in the online vendor or website usefulness as important variables to explain customer behaviors in the online context (Gefen *et al.*, 2003; Chiu *et al.*, 2012, etc.). However, only a limited number of studies have explored the influence of diverse EWOM characteristics on customers' online RIs from a holistic perspective. The consideration of trust and usefulness is a fundamental issue within the literature. It is important to understand whether online customer reviews contribute to creating trust in the online vendor, and if such information also facilitates their purchasing decision. To address this issue, the main purpose of this paper is to propose and test an integrative framework that considers the direct effects of EWOM characteristics on online RIs. In addition, this research model explores the mediating role of perceived usefulness (PU) of the website and trust in the online vendor on the relationship between EWOM and customer loyalty intentions. We propose a multidimensional EWOM approach by identifying information quantity, credibility and quality as three principal elements of EWOM characteristics.

From a theoretical standpoint, this research contributes to the literature by studying in depth the three main EWOM elements that customers perceive when they read online reviews. Moreover, customers' responses are analyzed by identifying two constructs,

which helps us to understand their repurchase behavior: trust in online vendor and PU of the website. The results are intended to show relevant information for vendors in relation to the way in which online information is presented in the online context.

This paper is organized as follows. The next section presents the theoretical framework and the study's hypotheses. The second section describes the research methodology and data collection. We then explain our empirical study and present the results. Finally, the main conclusions, limitations and implications are outlined.

Theoretical background and hypotheses development

The concept of EWOM

The internet has given consumers the opportunity to increase their options for searching and sharing information before or after making an online purchase. Customers have different motivations for searching for online information or generating EWOM by posting their own reviews and experiences about products and services (King *et al.*, 2014; Zhu and Zhang, 2010). Marketing researches have proposed several definitions of EWOM. This paper adopts the conceptualization provided by Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2004, p. 39), since it incorporates the possibility of including multiple receivers and senders: "[EWOM is] any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet."

This new typology of online communication is similar to traditional word-of-mouth (WOM), and some authors have considered EWOM as the extension of traditional WOM in a virtual environment (Yeap *et al.*, 2014). However, it is important to understand the most relevant differences between electronic and traditional WOM. First, online consumers' reviews are available for a long period and a great number of users can access them (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004), thus maintaining non-simultaneous communication between senders and receivers (King *et al.*, 2014). Second, because EWOM is disseminated through the virtual context, information diffuses at great speed and the reviews are shared among more individuals (King *et al.*, 2014). Third, EWOM is more observable than traditional WOM (Park and Kim, 2008): the internet makes it possible for users to view data such as the number of words or the style of the message (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). Finally, EWOM is exchanged between unknown senders and receivers, so that the anonymity offered by the internet can negatively affect the information credibility (Luo *et al.*, 2013).

Frequently, EWOM has been seen as an antecedent of consumers' willingness to revisit websites to purchase products or services (Gruen *et al.*, 2006). Indeed, some previous researchers argue that the different characteristics of EWOM communications affect customers' evaluations on the website, thus determining their attitudes toward the vendor (Chen *et al.*, 2009). Within this context, some authors have identified information quantity, quality or credibility as critical determinants of consumers' attitudinal and behavioral responses.

EWOM characteristics on the vendor's online platform

Marketing literature has considered several characteristics of online information, such as quantity, credibility and quality (Park and Lee, 2008; Luo *et al.*, 2013). However, few studies have specifically explored all three of these items simultaneously. Thus, Cheung and Thadani (2012) conducted a literature review of EWOM by developing an integrative framework to explain the impact of online reviews on consumers' behavior. Other researchers, such as Cheung *et al.* (2008) focused on information credibility and quality as the main EWOM factors that can

encourage information adoption and examined consumers' willingness to adopt online consumers' reviews.

The first of the key EWOM features refers to information volume. Internet users can find a great quantity of reviews about products or services, which play a critical role in e-commerce (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Chen *et al.*, 2009). EWOM quantity refers to the number of comments published through a website (Cheung *et al.*, 2008; Sicilia and Ruiz, 2010). In this sense, Moldovan *et al.* (2011) suggest that the number of consumer reviews can be measured as the contribution of each consumer to the market. Consequently, if a great number of consumers post online reviews about a product or a service, they will provide much more information which helps others potential customers in their purchase decisions.

According to Cheung *et al.* (2008), EWOM credibility refers to the degree of belief that users have in comments they read on the internet. Credibility plays an important role in e-commerce, where online reviews are frequently anonymous. In fact, this anonymity provided by the internet generates distrust and skepticism among consumers who read online recommendations (Luo *et al.*, 2013). Following previous researchers, this paper focuses on the credibility of information provided by other users, instead of considering customers' trusting beliefs about the online vendor. Indeed, EWOM credibility is based on this objective information, which has no commercial purpose. Thus, if consumers think that online reviews are credible, they will be more prone to trust in vendors who own the online platform and will consequently use this information to make purchase decisions (Luo *et al.*, 2013).

Information quality has also been studied in the online context (Teng *et al.*, 2014). Although many authors have studied this variable, there is no consensus about its conceptualization. While some researchers have considered quality information as a one-dimensional element (Sussman and Siegal, 2003), others authors (Nelson *et al.*, 2005; Park *et al.*, 2007) have identified an open list of EWOM quality dimensions. Following Bhattacharjee and Sanford (2006), we consider EWOM quality as the persuasive strength of arguments embedded in an informational message. Within this context, Nelson *et al.* (2005), Cheung *et al.* (2008) and Cheung and Thadani (2012) conceptualize EWOM quality as a multidimensional construct composed of four dimensions: relevance (reviews are relevant and appropriate), accuracy (information is accurate and reliable), comprehensiveness (reviews are complete and in-depth) and timeliness (recommendations are current, timely and up-to-date). According to these authors, in the online context, consumers' purchasing decisions can be influenced by the quality of information they receive.

The influence of EWOM characteristics on online RI

According to Zhang *et al.* (2011), there are two stages of online shopping behavior. In the first stage, consumers are concerned about the initial online purchase and the consequences it implies, such as the perceived risk, or doubts about the payment or product receipt. The second stage is related to the intention to repurchase products in the same online store. This RI can be defined as "the individual's judgments about buying again a designated service from the same company, taking into account his or her current situation and likely circumstances" (Hellier *et al.*, 2003). RI is considered by marketing literature as a manifestation of customer loyalty (Gruen *et al.*, 2006), and has a direct effect on the vendors' profit (Zhang *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, getting and retaining loyal customers is critical for firms that operate through the internet (Hellier *et al.*, 2003). Within this context, EWOM has been identified as a predictor of users' predisposition to revisit an online vendor's website to repurchase products (Gruen *et al.*,

2006). Indeed, previous research suggests that different perceptions of the EWOM characteristics can determine consumers' attitudes and behaviors toward the online store (Zhu and Zhang, 2010; Park *et al.*, 2011).

For example, the number of reviews on an online page is especially important for users who visit it. In fact, it has been shown that the number of reviews published on a website depends on the volume of online opinions posted on that website, considered as a representative element of the popularity of the product or service (Chatterjee, 2001; Park and Lee, 2008). Following this line, some studies argue that the inclusion of a considerable volume of information on a website generates more favorable attitudes and behaviors among consumers (Wang *et al.*, 2007). The higher the number of reviews the more messages will be processed by users, which will result in a more positive inclination to revisit the online store for future purchases. In addition, the credibility of the online recommendations determines customers' predisposition to revisit the online store (Park *et al.*, 2011). Customers consider reviews to be more useful if they provide reliable information to make a purchase decision (Khammash and Griffiths, 2011). Therefore, if consumers believe that the comments posted on the seller's website are credible, they will consider them relevant and helpful in their purchase decision and consequently will be more prone to revisit such store for future purchases. Also, in the online context, consumers' purchasing decisions can be influenced by the quality of the information they receive (Cheung *et al.*, 2008). The content of reviews is composed of a great variety of information, including not only data but also personal opinions and subjective aspects, which influence the quality of the argument (Chatterjee, 2001). However, with the expansion of the internet, anyone can publish and disseminate evaluations and the data quality may diminish (Cheung *et al.*, 2008). Chiu *et al.* (2005) suggested that these information characteristics are significantly related to behavioral intentions in terms of actual use, recommendation and preference. The perception of a higher degree of information quality tends to increase customers' RIs (Shin *et al.*, 2013). Thus, if a seller's website provides customers with valuable, up-to-date and consistent information, this will increase the likelihood of attracting and retaining customers (Lin and Sun, 2009). With this in mind, we expect that EWOM quantity, quality and credibility will directly influence customers' willingness to revisit an online vendor's website to purchase products and services. Thus:

- H1. EWOM quantity has a positive and direct effect on online RI.
- H2. EWOM credibility has a positive and direct effect on online RI.
- H3. EWOM quality has a positive and direct effect on online RI.

The mediating role of perceived trust

Traditionally, trust has been studied in diverse contexts and disciplines such as psychology, sociology, economics and marketing (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Doney and Cannon, 1997; Lee and Turban, 2001). Consequently, this concept has been defined in many different ways. Following Gefen *et al.* (2003, p. 308), this research focuses on trust in the online seller or "the expectation that other individuals or companies with whom one interacts will not take undue advantage of a dependence upon them."

Previous researchers have conceptualized trust as a cognitive construct composed of three different dimensions: honesty, benevolence and competence. Honesty is the belief that the company will keep its promises with sincerity (Doney and Cannon, 1997). Benevolence refers to the idea that the seller is genuinely interested in the welfare of his

or her customers (Doney and Cannon, 1997). Finally, competence includes the skills and resources available to the seller to carry out the business transaction (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Trust plays a key role in commercial transactions between customers and vendors, especially in the online environment where there are no face-to-face interactions (Shin *et al.*, 2013). Prior studies have highlighted the importance of online trust in e-commerce since it can positively leverage electronic commercial transactions, minimize the perceived level of risk and increase RIs (Kim *et al.*, 2008).

As mentioned above, in the online context the number of reviews plays an important role in the purchase decision process (Park *et al.*, 2011). A website containing a great volume of reviews may help consumers to rationalize their purchasing decisions and reduce the perceived risk because other users have previously purchased the same product or service (Chatterjee, 2001; Park and Lee, 2008). Thus, EWOM quantity can contribute to developing the vendor's reputation (Moldovan *et al.*, 2011). Prior researchers, such as Chen *et al.* (2009), confirm the persuasive effect of a large number of consumer reviews. Indeed, users may feel a more positive attitude toward a virtual shop for which many other customers have shared their previous experiences. Therefore, the larger the number of users who recommend a product, the higher the level of trust and the lower the perceived risk in the transaction (Park and Lee, 2008).

Consumers' reviews are more credible than sellers' information (Yeap *et al.*, 2014). Consumers who perceive reviews to be credible have more confidence in using them to make a purchase decision, since they reduce the inherent uncertainty in e-commerce (Park *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, the fact that comments remain visible on the website promotes a more positive and confident attitude toward the seller, which provides customers with a virtual space in which to express their opinions. As a result, EWOM credibility could affect readers' perceptions of the online seller (Cheung *et al.*, 2008). However, the source of credibility will decrease if users perceive that the vendor's website includes incomplete or biased information, thus negatively affecting trust in the vendor (Lee and Turban, 2001). Hence, if users perceive recommendations posted by other consumers as credible, they will have more confidence in adopting this advice and building positive beliefs toward the seller (Park *et al.*, 2011).

In e-commerce, it is difficult for users to obtain a complete idea about a product or service because they usually depend on information provided by sellers' websites. The diffusion of online reviews that contain quality information helps customers to reduce uncertainty in online transactions (Kim *et al.*, 2008; Kim and Park, 2013). According to this, some studies suggest that a website that includes updated, consistent and relevant information acts as a proxy for the seller's characteristics, and users tend to rely on sellers that post information in a more efficient and complete manner (Jones and Leonard, 2008). Therefore, trust in a website is motivated by the existence of the latest, complete, relevant and accurate information provided by the seller's platform (Shin *et al.*, 2013). Thus, the seller's ability and willingness to fulfill the obligations and offer quality arguments will help customers to revisit the online store to make future purchases.

Following these arguments, it is expected that the influence of EWOM characteristics on customers' behavioral intentions will not be effective if consumers do not trust the vendor (Shin *et al.*, 2013). Trust is considered an important element of maintaining the relationship between seller and consumer (Chiu *et al.*, 2012). In fact, consumers will manifest behavioral intentions toward sellers they trust, reducing their search efforts and acting consistently with their ideas, which will promote repeated purchases (Gefen *et al.*, 2003). In examining the impact of trust in online repurchase behaviors, several studies have highlighted a direct effect between both variables

(Shin *et al.*, 2013). Following this line, Chiu *et al.* (2012) suggested that consumers' level of trust significantly affects their intentions to buy from the same vendors' website again. Therefore, EWOM characteristics may not only have direct effects on online RI, but also indirect effects mediated by trust in the online seller (thus, customers' online RIs will be more efficient if consumers read online reviews and trust the online seller). Therefore, we propose that:

- H4. The relationship between EWOM quantity and online RI is mediated by trust in the online vendor.
- H5. The relationship between EWOM credibility and online RI is mediated by trust in the online vendor.
- H6. The relationship between EWOM quality and online RI is mediated by trust in the online vendor.

The mediating role of PU

According to Davis *et al.* (1989), PU refers to "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance." This construct has been shown to be a strong determinant of users' behavioral intentions, in such a way that individuals will be more prone to revisit an online store to make a purchase if they perceive that the website can enhance their performance and help them to make a purchase decision (Gefen *et al.*, 2003). Thus, consumers consider online reviews on a vendors' platform as useful to help them in their purchase decision process.

One of the main advantages of the internet is that consumers can access a considerable volume of information in a short period of time. Thus, a website that presents a large amount of reviews will help make a product more observable for customers. Hence, consumers can get a broader idea about the product's characteristics and other consumers' experiences with it. In fact, customers consider a large number of reviews posted on a vendors' website as a representative element of the website's PU (Park and Lee, 2008). EWOM quantity offers customers more variety of information, which will improve the PU of the online platform and facilitate the purchase decision. Hence, the greater the number of recommendations, the greater the quantity of messages processed by users, who will perceive higher usefulness when visiting the website (Luo *et al.*, 2014).

Online reviews have also become a relevant source of information for other customers (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006). Therefore, the content of the message is an important element of EWOM credibility. Thus, if an online review is persuasive and has a logical structure, consumers will be more likely to rely on it. In the online context, users share not only their personal opinions, but also their positive and negative emotions toward a product or a service. This kind of personal information improves PU, since consumers consider it as impartial and independent (Yeap *et al.*, 2014). In fact, consumers will consider other users' reviews as more authentic, real and useful than information provided by the seller (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004). Consequently, if customers perceive that online reviews posted on the vendor's platform are credible, they will consider them useful and relevant in their purchase decision process (Sussman and Siegal, 2003).

On the other hand, internet features allow users to disseminate their experiences and opinions with relatively freedom, which can affect information quality (Xu and Yao, 2015; Yeap *et al.*, 2014). EWOM quality is important in the online environment;

the review content should be sufficiently broad and comprehensive (Nelson *et al.*, 2005) and provide useful and quality information for making a purchase decision (Filieri, 2015; Zheng *et al.*, 2013). Marketing literature has studied the relationship among quality and PU. Cheung *et al.* (2008) analyzed this influence in the restaurant sector, and showed that comprehensiveness and relevance dimensions have a significant influence on the consumers' perceptions of a review's usefulness. Cheung and Thadani (2012) conceived EWOM quality as a direct antecedent of PU. Thus, consumers who had previously made a purchase may post their own reviews in a website, contribute to offer practical information for others consumers, enhancing the PU of that website (Park *et al.*, 2007). According to Kim *et al.* (2008), if buyers consider the seller's online platform to provide quality information, they will perceive that the seller is working to maintain accurate, relevant, up-to-date and in-depth information.

In summary, previous research reveals that if users perceive online reviews as having quality characteristics, including credibility and perceive that the platform contains a considerable volume of information, they will see the website as useful to their purchase decisions (Filieri, 2015; Wang *et al.*, 2007; Khammash and Griffiths, 2011). Thus, usefulness can mediate the influence of EWOM characteristics on RIs. Websites serve as tools for buyers and sellers to interact with each other, obtain information about available products and services and make online purchases (Teng *et al.*, 2014). Having a good perception of a seller's website as a useful tool through which to find information may lead the user to revisit the same online store later (Yoon, 2002). Gefen *et al.* (2003) suggested that users will be more prone to visit a website if they perceive it as offering higher levels of practical utility. For example, the design of the online store will help customers to improve their purchase experience, as well as their loyalty and RI in the future (Lin and Sun, 2009). Following this line, some authors, such as Zhang *et al.* (2011) and Shin *et al.* (2013), confirm that perceive usefulness determines consumers' RIs. Thus, it is expected that buyers will have individual perceptions of EWOM characteristics in terms of the usefulness of reviews in helping them to make a decision. If they think that reviews within the vendor's EWOM platform are useful, their intention of revisiting the website for future purchases will increase. Thus, it is proposed that:

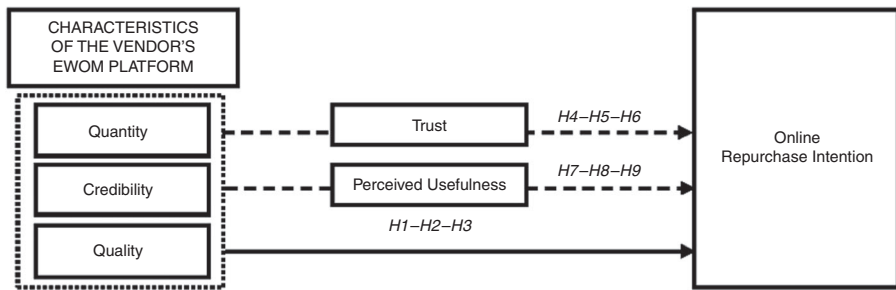
- H7. The relationship between EWOM quantity and online RI is mediated by PU of the website.
- H8. The relationship between EWOM credibility and online RI is mediated by PU of the website.
- H9. The relationship between EWOM quality and online RI is mediated by PU of the website.

The research model and the proposed hypotheses are summarized in Figure 1.

Research methodology

Data collection

In order to test the model and contrast the hypotheses, we employed a quantitative study based on an online questionnaire in the Spanish context. The survey was aimed at internet users who had previously made an online purchase. In the questionnaire, they were asked to think about an online vendor they had made a purchase from and where they had read online reviews published on the own vendor's EWOM platform (e.g. Amazon.com or Booking.com). Thus, the questionnaire was completed

Figure 1.
Research model

Notes: → Direct effect; - - - - - mediated effect

with consideration of their previous experience with the website. The survey was disseminated through social networking sites such as Facebook. We used a non-random sampling approach and collected our data at a national level through a self-administered and voluntary survey. A link to the survey was provided to participants, who were then able to answer it directly and anonymously. Finally, 252 valid questionnaires were completed. With regard to the demographics, 54.4 percent of the respondents were female and 45.6 percent male; over 61 percent of the respondents were 26-35 years old; and most of the respondents had a university degree (81.7 percent). The sample composition is similar to other panels from studies that have explored the socio-demographical profile of online buyers within the Spanish context (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 2014) (Table I).

Measurement of variables

The variables of the study were measured using items adapted from previous marketing research. Specifically seven-point Likert-type scales were employed to measure the variables, (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). To measure EWOM quantity (EQUAN), we used scales adapted from Park *et al.* (2007). The scale of EWOM credibility (ECRED) was adapted from Luo *et al.* (2013) and was composed of three items. EWOM quality (EQUAL) was measured as a multidimensional formative construct (Nelson *et al.*, 2005) consisting of four dimensions (e.g. Cheung *et al.*, 2008). These dimensions referred to information accuracy, timeliness, relevance and comprehensiveness. These first-order dimensions were measured by three items, respectively, adapted from Cheung *et al.* (2008). The three reflective dimensions of trust in an online vendor (honesty, benevolence and competence) were adapted from Doney and Cannon (1997). The PU scales were adapted from Gefen *et al.* (2003). Finally, online RI was measured using a three item-scale from Chiu *et al.* (2012). The scales are presented in Table A1.

Gender	%	Age	%	Educational level	%
Male	45.6	18-25	16.3	Secondary education	1.2
Female	54.4	26-35	60.7	Advanced level	17.1
		36-55	19	University degree	81.7
		> 55	4		

Note: $n = 252$

Table I.
Sample's socio-demographic information

Results

Structural equation modeling with partial least squares (PLS) was used to test the study's hypotheses. In comparison to covariance-based methods, PLS is convenient when the interest of the research focuses on predicting one or more dependent variables and not in confirming a previously validated theory. Reinartz *et al.* (2009) recommend employing PLS in all situations in which the number of observations is lower than 250. Thus, PLS is more appropriate for exploratory analysis and for handling formative constructs (Chin *et al.*, 2003). Thus, this methodology was deemed suitable for the current study. PLS includes a two-step approach to data analysis: The first step focuses on the analysis of the measurement model, while the second tests the causal paths between the constructs.

Measurement model

Following previous approaches (Nelson *et al.*, 2005), EWOM quality (EQUAL) was treated as a second-order formative construct, which was composed of four dimensions (timeliness, accuracy, relevance and comprehensiveness). In addition, trust was analyzed as a second-order reflective construct with three dimensions (honesty, benevolence and competence) (Wang *et al.*, 2007). Thus, since PLS does not permit direct inclusion of second-order constructs, we created these variables with a two-step approximation method. In the first stage, we estimated a model composed of all of the first-order constructs. In this case, the four dimensions of EWOM quality and the three dimensions of trust were studied as first-order constructs. In the second stage, the final model included both second-order constructs using the latent variable scores estimated in the previous stage as indicators of trust and EWOM quality. In the initial estimation, the results showed that the first-order constructs presented individual item reliability, composite reliability (CR) and convergent and discriminant validity (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988).

In the second stage, and once the second-order constructs were created, the measurement model was assessed through three steps. First, the individual reliability of the indicators was analyzed. With regard to the reflective constructs, all factor loadings (λ) were greater than 0.7 and all the indicators were significant at 1 percent (Table II). Second, CR was explored using the Cronbach's α index and CR. In this case, the Cronbach's α index and CR exceed the critical values established in the literature (0.7 and 0.6, respectively) (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Convergent validity was also verified by analyzing the average variance extracted (AVE). In this case, AVE values were greater than 0.5 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). As shown in Table II, all the item loadings were greater than 0.8 and the AVEs were greater than 0.7, suggesting good reliability for all constructs. With regard to the formative second-order construct (EQUAL), all the weights except for those in the comprehensiveness dimension were found to be statistically significant. The variance inflation factor was smaller than 3.3, thus suggesting that multicollinearity was not a problem in this variable. In order to preserve content validity, we decided not to eliminate the comprehensiveness indicator from the EWOM quality variable.

Finally, the third step confirmed the existence of discriminant validity in the reflective constructs. Discriminant validity can be assessed by checking if the square root of the AVE for each construct is larger than the correlations shared between that construct and all other constructs in the model (Barclay *et al.*, 1995) (Table III).

Structural model

After validating the measurement model, the structural model was tested using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples. The results show that the model

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Table II.
Significance of the
factor loadings and
weights of the
second-order model

Construct	Item	Load (λ)	Weight (w)	t -value	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
EWOM quantity	EQUAN1	0.93		77.89	0.92	0.95	0.86
	EQUAN2	0.94		84.37			
	EQUAN3	0.91		59.26			
EWOM credibility	ECRED1	0.95		108.31	0.94	0.96	0.90
	ECRED2	0.96		129.30			
	ECRED3	0.93		64.64			
EWOM quality	ACC		0.51	3.52	n/a	n/a	n/a
	COMPR		-0.19	1.17			
	RELEV		0.46	3.03			
	TIM		0.33	2.10			
Trust	HON	0.91		80.44	0.85	0.91	0.77
	BENEV	0.86		37.47			
	COMPT	0.86		44.13			
Perceived usefulness	PU1	0.83		33.92	0.87	0.91	0.72
	PU2	0.85		33.66			
	PU3	0.85		26.67			
	PU4	0.87		57.75			
Repurchase intention	RI1	0.93		79.19	0.93	0.95	0.87
	RI2	0.93		70.14			
	RI3	0.94		89.97			

Table III.
Discriminant validity

	EQUAN	ECRED	EQUAL	TRUST	PU	RI
EQUAN	0.93					
ECRED	0.59	0.95				
EQUAL	0.65	0.78				
TRUST	0.27	0.47	0.49	0.88		
PU	0.44	0.49	0.49	0.53	0.85	
RI	0.20	0.32	0.38	0.50	0.58	0.93

Notes: Main diagonal elements are the square root of the AVE for each reflective construct. Off-diagonal elements are the correlations between constructs

explained the 41 percent variance for online RI, the 27 percent trust in the online seller variance and the 29 percent variance for PU of a website. Before analyzing the significance of the β parameters, we proceeded to assess the model's predictive relevance by using the Stone-Geisser test. In this case, the model presented predictive relevance since the Stone-Geisser indicator (Q^2) was positive for all dependent variables (Table IV).

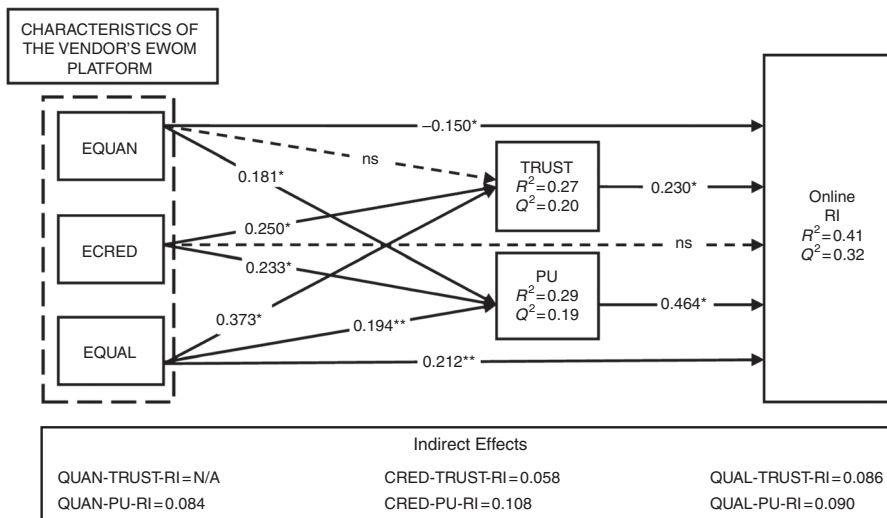
The findings confirm that EWOM quantity has a direct effect on online RIs. However, despite being significant, the causal path is negative; this leads us to reject the first hypothesis ($\beta = -0.150$; $t = 2.597$). $H2$ is also rejected because there is no significant relationship between EWOM credibility and RI ($\beta = -0.092$; $t = 1.191$). Finally, EWOM quality has a positive and direct effect on RI, thus supporting $H3$ ($\beta = 0.212$; $t = 2.292$).

The results also show that EWOM credibility ($\beta = 0.250$; $t = 2.470$) and EWOM quality ($\beta = 0.373$; $t = 3.774$) have a positive and significant influence on trust in the online seller (see Figure 2). However, EWOM quantity does not determine this attitude

	β	t -value	R^2	Q^2
EWOM quantity \rightarrow repurchase intention	-0.150	2.597*		
EWOM credibility \rightarrow repurchase intention	-0.092	1.191	R^2 (TRUST) = 0.27	Q^2 (TRUST) = 0.20
EWOM quality \rightarrow repurchase intention	0.212	2.292**	R^2 (PU) = 0.29	Q^2 (PU) = 0.19
EWOM quantity \rightarrow trust	-0.118	1.574	R^2 (RI) = 0.41	Q^2 (RI) = 0.32
EWOM credibility \rightarrow trust	0.250	2.470*		
EWOM quality \rightarrow trust	0.373	3.774*		
EWOM quantity \rightarrow perceived usefulness	0.181	2.577*		
EWOM credibility \rightarrow perceived usefulness	0.233	2.586*		
EWOM quality \rightarrow perceived usefulness	0.194	1.921**		
Trust \rightarrow repurchase intention	0.230	3.259*		
Perceived usefulness \rightarrow Repurchase intention	0.464	6.567*		

Notes: *,**Significant at 0.01 and 0.05 levels (one-tail distribution), respectively

Table IV.
Results of
hypothesis testing



Notes: *,**Significant at 0.01 and 0.05 levels, respectively

Figure 2.
Results of the
structural model

toward the online vendor ($\beta = -0.118$; $t = 1.574$). The three EWOM characteristics have a significant influence on PU of a website. Thus, EWOM quantity ($\beta = 0.181$; $t = 2.577$), EWOM credibility ($\beta = 0.233$; $t = 2.586$) and EWOM quality ($\beta = 0.194$; $t = 1.921$) are important information elements that consumers take into account when visiting a website. Finally, as expected, trust in online vendor ($\beta = 0.230$; $t = 3.259$) and PU of the website ($\beta = 0.464$; $t = 6.567$) determine users' intentions to revisit the website for future purchases.

In order to study the significance of the indirect effects and test $H4-H9$, we applied the percentiles method, which calculates a confidence interval (CI) for the mediated effect with a reliability level of 5 percent (Preacher and Hayes, 2004). The results are shown in Table V. Because the influence of EWOM quality on trust is not significant, $H4$ is rejected. The indirect effect of EWOM credibility on RI via trust ($\beta = 0.058$) is

significant, since the CI does not include the zero value (CI: 0.007-0.128); consequently, *H5* is supported. For EWOM quality, its indirect effect on RI via trust ($\beta = 0.086$) is also significant (CI: 0.030-0.174), thus accepting *H6*. *H7* is also supported because PU mediates the link between EWOM quantity and RI (CI: 0.019-0.157). The indirect effect of EWOM credibility on RI via PU ($\beta = 0.108$) is also significant (CI = 0.018-0.199), supporting *H8*. Finally, EWOM quality indirectly influences RI through PU ($\beta = 0.090$) (CI: 0.007-0.199), thus supporting *H9*.

Conclusions, limitations and further research

This paper explores the motivations that lead users to repurchase from an online store considering their perceptions on the features of the vendor's EWOM platform. In addition, it analyzes the mediating influence of trust and of the website's PU on the influence that EWOM characteristics have on RIs. Thus, the results suggest that EWOM credibility, quantity and quality have different patterns of influence on customers' online RI.

Theoretical implications

Coherently with previous research (Cheung *et al.*, 2008; Sussman and Siegal, 2003), the findings confirm the existence of a positive and direct effect of EWOM characteristics on consumers' PU of a website. In a scenario in which consumers value their time and effort related to searching, the seller's information facilitates their repurchase decision. Thus, consumers positively value the publication of other users' reviews on the seller's own website, because these social spaces provide more value and utility to the site. The findings also reveal that while the credibility and quality of the reviews also influence trust in the online vendor, quantity does not. Moreover, EWOM quality has a direct and positive effect on consumers' online RI. Consumers will be more prone to revisit an online store to make future purchases if they perceive that other users' comments provide them with qualified information. In this sense, we can suggest that consumers perceive the vendor's efforts as presenting up-to-date, clear and relevant information on the website. However, EWOM credibility does not have a direct effect on online RIs. This influence comes indirectly through trust and PU. It is possible that users will not base their RIs on the veracity of the publications if they do not trust the seller and consider its website sufficient to enhance their purchases decisions. In this case, although the seller by themselves cannot change the reviews on the website, customers consider the information practical.

The negative influence of EWOM quantity on RI could indicate that an excess of information causes confusion in consumers, or prevents them from processing information (Park and Lee, 2008; Sicilia and Ruiz, 2010). However, there is a positive and indirect effect between both variables through PU. These results could indicate that information excess leads users to feel anxious and incite negative emotions in their

Table V.
Estimation results of
the indirect effects

Indirect effects	β	Confidence interval	Hypotheses verification
<i>H4</i> . EQUAN \rightarrow TRUST \rightarrow RI	na	na	Rejected
<i>H5</i> . ECRED \rightarrow TRUST \rightarrow RI	0.058	(0.007; 0.128)	Supported
<i>H6</i> . EQUAL \rightarrow TRUST \rightarrow RI	0.086	(0.030; 0.174)	Supported
<i>H7</i> . EQUAN \rightarrow PU \rightarrow RI	0.084	(0.019; 0.157)	Supported
<i>H8</i> . ECRED \rightarrow PU \rightarrow RI	0.108	(0.018; 0.199)	Supported
<i>H9</i> . EQUAL \rightarrow PU \rightarrow RI	0.090	(0.007; 0.199)	Supported

purchasing decisions, which will negatively affect their attitude toward the online vendor and subsequently their future purchasing intentions. However, even if this negative feeling is generated, users may also perceive that, from a cognitive point of view, a large number of comments provide them with a large amount of information to evaluate products and services, thus affecting their usefulness perceptions.

Based on our findings, this research makes theoretical contributions to the areas of e-commerce and consumer behavior in several ways. First of all, the results call attention to the importance of understanding EWOM and its main elements in depth. Previous studies have identified several EWOM characteristics separately (Park *et al.*, 2007), and explored a limited number of these (Nelson *et al.*, 2005). In order to get better control over, and knowledge of, the EWOM concept, our research model proposes and tests an integrative framework that analyzes information credibility, quantity and quality as the most representative elements that consumers take into account when they read and share online reviews. In line with previous marketing researchers (Nelson *et al.*, 2005), we considered information quality as a formative construct with four dimensions (accuracy, comprehensiveness, relevance and timeliness). This kind of up-to-date, relevant and in-depth content enhances customers' perceptions toward an online store.

Second, the current research contributes to knowledge of customers' responses by analyzing two different perspectives. On the one hand, we identified trust in the online vendor as the customers' reaction toward the online seller. According to previous marketing research, this variable is composed of three important dimensions (honesty, benevolence and competence), which help us to understand customers' level of trust. On the other hand, PU of the website is a tool for enhancing communication between vendors and buyers. Websites and their characteristics (usability, colors or symbols) help customers to improve their perception of usefulness; thus, the design of the vendor's website is an important element affecting consumer perceptions.

Managerial implications

Because consumers make their purchase decisions in a globalized context, companies cannot ignore the importance of customers' online recommendations. This research provides vendors with a complete source of information about customers' behavior, and the results also have valuable practical implications that can be useful at the enterprise level. First, companies should pay attention to and be aware of online reviews about their products and services; to make this easier, they should offer users a specific virtual online environment on which to publish their comments, reviews and suggestions. In this sense, organizations must keep one step ahead of users and develop their own online platforms and mobile applications, thereby improving the usability of these social platforms and providing updated and qualified information. Second, because a large number of reviews may negatively affect individuals' intention to revisit the website (Sicilia and Ruiz, 2010), online vendors should group or classify reviews or provide summarized information in order to avoid information overload. Hence, many firms incorporate symbols, colors and other elements that accelerate visibility in the consumer's mind. For instance, online sellers can present reviews using a standardized format, which helps customers to find out the information they need. Moreover, firms could personalize the presentation of reviews on the website and order reviews according to the most popular products. Additionally, sellers could provide personal information on the reviewer, such as their age or marital status, in order to enable other consumers to feel affinity with the reviewer's online recommendations.

Since consumers' reviews provide first-hand information, allowing them to detect potential failures or enhance other services, stores should provide good customer service relating to complaints and suggestions, and facilitate online portals where customers can express their opinions and formulate complaints. Therefore, firms not only should observe and learn from customers' recommendations, but also manifest an active attitude by engaging with consumers and working on satisfying their needs and suggestions. Finally, firms should take consumers' reviews into account and design precise marketing strategies and advertising campaigns that are adapted to customers' reviews.

Limitations and further research

This paper is subject to certain limitations that need to be addressed in future research. First, this study includes a limited number of EWOM characteristics. Although there is no unanimous agreement in the marketing literature about a closed list of dimensions, further research should aim to increase the number of EWOM characteristics considered. Other variables, such as valence and the emotional-rational orientation of the message, should also be incorporated in future. Second, EWOM quality has been identified as a formative second-order construct composed by four dimensions. Although previous authors focus on this variable (Cheng and Ho, 2015; Cheung *et al.*, 2008; Lee and Shin, 2014), different dimensions are proposed. Moreover, additional research is needed to identify other dimensions of EWOM quality in the online context. For example, Xu and Yao (2015) recently indicated that arguments perspective, defined as the consumer's perceptions on the diversity of the angles adopted by other consumers in reviewing products online, increases EWOM adoption. Also, the inclusion of visual information cues (like product rankings and averaged customers' ratings) (Filieri, 2015) should be explored as potential elements of EWOM quality.

Third, although this study is only focused on written EWOM information, new formats of posting consumers' reviews are increasing their popularity among users (King *et al.*, 2014). Online information is frequently showed as a combination of visual and verbal form (Kim and Lennon, 2008; Lin *et al.*, 2012). In fact, pictures and videos are included in order to review a product in blogs and social media platforms. Consumers usually mix words, photos and videos to describe their personal opinions about a product or a service. This mixed structure helps EWOM readers to get a better knowledge about consumers' experience and because of that, further research should analyze the effect of visual EWOM on consumer's behavior.

From a methodological standpoint, this study has used a convenience sample of limited size. The sample was composed of respondents from Spain, so it could be useful to replicate the study in other countries. Moreover, participants' socio-demographic characteristics are very similar to internet users' profile (Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB Spain), 2013), which can generate biased results. Regarding the questionnaire, participants were asked to think about an online vendor they had made a purchase from. Consequently, this study does not analyze the consumers' perceptions about a unique online shop, affecting to the average levels of trust, PU and RI. Therefore, future research should focus on consumers' perceptions about the same online shop.

Moreover, we only used the survey as a tool to collect data and suggest that the results obtained through this method could be strengthened through experimentation. This methodology leads us to confirm the effects of EWOM characteristics on online RI by manipulating different scenarios.

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Appendix

EWOM
characteristics

1109

Construct	Items		Source
EWOM quantity	EQUAN1	This website includes a large number of consumer reviews	Adapted from Park <i>et al.</i> (2007)
	EQUAN2	The volume of review information on this website is large	
	EQUAN3	A great number of consumers publish their recommendations on this website	
EWOM credibility	ECRED1	I think that consumers' recommendations on this website are credible	Adapted from Luo <i>et al.</i> (2013)
	ECRED2	I think that consumers' recommendations on this website are believable	
	ECRED3	I think that review information on this website is trustworthy	
<i>EWOM quality</i>			
Timeliness	TIM1	The comments on this website are timely	Adapted from Cheung <i>et al.</i> (2008)
	TIM2	The comments on this website are up-to-date	
	TIM3	The comments on this website are current	
Comprehensiveness	COMPR1	The consumers' reviews have sufficient breadth and depth	
	COMPR2	The consumers' reviews include all necessary values	
	COMPR3	The consumers' reviews sufficiently meet my needs	
Relevance	RELEV1	The consumers' reviews are relevant to my buying decisions	
	RELEV2	The consumers' reviews are useful	
	RELEV3	The consumers' reviews help me in my buying decisions	
Accuracy	ACC1	The consumers' reviews are accurate	
	ACC2	The consumers' reviews are correct	
	ACC3	The consumers' reviews are reliable	
<i>Trust</i>			
Honesty	HON1	I think that this vendor usually fulfils his/her commitments	Adapted from Doney and Cannon (1997)
	HON2	I think that the information offered by this vendor is sincere and honest	
	HON3	I think that I can have confidence in the promises that this website makes	
Benevolence	BENEV1	I think that this vendor aims to achieve a situation of mutual benefit with his/her customers	
	BENEV2	I think that this vendor is concerned with the present and future interests of his/her customers	
	BENEV3	I think that this vendor would not intentionally do anything that would harm its customers	
Competence	COMPET1	I think that this vendor has the necessary experience to sell his/her products and services	

Table A1.
(continued) Measurement scales

OIR
40,7**1110**

Construct	Items	Source	
	COMPET2	I think that this vendor has the necessary resources to successfully carry out his/her commercial activities	
	COMPET3	I think that this vendor knows his/her customers well enough to offer them products and services that are adapted to their needs	
Perceived usefulness	PU1	This website is useful for searching for the information that I need to make my purchases	Adapted from Gefen <i>et al.</i> (2003)
	PU2	This website makes it easy to search for and purchase products and services	
	PU3	This website enables me to search for and buy products and services faster	
	PU4	This website enhances my effectiveness in searching for and buying products and services	
Repurchase intention	RI1	If possible, I would like to continue buying products and services from this website in future	Chiu <i>et al.</i> (2012)
	RI2	I plan to continue using this vendor's website to purchase products and services	
	RI3	It is likely that I will continue purchasing products from this website in the future	

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