

Customer insights in the digital era: a mixed-method approach to understanding e-service interactions

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to explore customers' motives and behaviours in sharing comments and information on e-service platforms, as well as what leads them to avoid sharing after consumption.

Design/methodology/approach – To achieve the goal, this research used a mixed-method approach. Firstly, a two-phase qualitative design involving 2 focus groups and 27 in-depth interviews was employed. Secondly, a quantitative approach was implemented to test the relationship between three factors, identified in the qualitative analysis and comment-sharing behaviours.

Findings – The three identified factors are (1) willingness to improve the product/service and customer justice; (2) willingness to share emotions and feelings; and (3) technological readiness. Sharing emotions and feelings, as well as technological readiness, have been found positively associated with high posting behaviours.

Originality/value – Customers' opinions, comments and feedback on online platforms represent a crucial co-creation tool that must be better understood by businesses that aim to embrace the customer-centric philosophy. Despite the importance of the topic, only recently there has been interest in exploring the motives for and behaviours of customers' post-consumption comments and information sharing about a business on an e-service platform. Based on these findings, we put forward some relevant implications for theory and specific managerial strategies to be undertaken to exploit the potential of platforms.

Keywords Customer engagement, E-service platform, Online comments, Online reviews

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

In the context of today's hypercompetitive economic environment, with customers' preferences and expectations continuously changing, businesses worldwide seek value for their products through channels that offer what really matters to the customer for a sustainable competitive advantage. In this regard, customer engagement is a strand of literature that has emerged in recent decades, suggesting the importance of co-creating unique experiences with the customer, which brings value to the customer and to the firm (Fehrer *et al.*, 2018; Van Doorn *et al.*, 2010). The relationship between the customer and firms is



changing, with growing complex dynamics, oftentimes shaped by new technologies (Macca *et al.*, 2024b; Santoro *et al.*, 2024). As such, customer engagement is becoming increasingly important for businesses and is taking on different forms thanks to increasing digitalization (Proskuryakova *et al.*, 2017). The marketing literature on customer engagement is extensive, indicating that, in the current digital and globalized environment, customer engagement is vital for improving business performance, sales and competitive advantages (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Bargoni *et al.*, 2023). This dyadic relationship makes it possible to create and share knowledge flows that are vital in today's knowledge economy, providing firms with new sources of competitive advantage (Wang *et al.*, 2021).

For all these reasons, there is a need to go beyond the traditional customer-firm relationship and explore the role of other relationships, factors and features. For example, the experiences of the focal customers and their subsequent behaviours may influence fellow customers' perceptions about the products and services, especially in a digital service world in which opinions and information are shared easily and steadily (Bae *et al.*, 2003; Pera and Viglia, 2016; Xu, 2020). Nevertheless, such influence is not affected just during the consumption process. In fact, with the rapid growth of technology-enabled interfaces such as social media (Papa *et al.*, 2018; Macca *et al.*, 2024a; Scuotto *et al.*, 2017), the impact of a customer's experience on other potential customers is more relevant, impacting both pre- and post-consumption processes. In this context, the e-Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) plays a key role in witnessing these dynamics (Verma and Yadav, 2021; Viglia *et al.*, 2016; Ye *et al.*, 2011). This is even more remarked in the context of e-service and e-commerce platforms, like TripAdvisor, Amazon and Booking.com, where the e-service is connected to another e-service (buying a product, booking a table at a restaurant or a hotel room) (Nicoli and Papadopoulou, 2017).

A pre-consumption process may involve a focal customer seeking advice on a service provider from other customers. By contrast, a post-consumption process may be a situation where the customer shares his/her (un)favourable experiences online. In both situations, the other customers can influence the focal customer's perception about the firm, product or service, impacting also the firm's business activities through the creation and sharing of relevant knowledge, which assumes an increasing value in the current digital age (Ali *et al.*, 2018; Malhotra and Majchrzak, 2019).

At the post-consumption stage, customers' opinions, comments and feedback are a crucial co-creation and customer engagement tool that must be understood more by companies that aim to be more customer-oriented (Christofi *et al.*, 2018; Ordenes *et al.*, 2014). They can be considered co-creation and customer engagement tools for companies to use to access and store rare and unique information about business activities, which they can ultimately exploit to improve the offering and to engage and retain their customers. Customers' experience is accessible to multitudinous community members and thus shapes their future purchase experience. As a consequence, knowing the motives for and behaviours of post-consumption sharing can be managerially relevant for companies. As such, in a digital service environment, customer engagement changes shape and is influenced by, a number of actors, such as other customers (Mathwick and Mosteller, 2017).

Therefore, in a digital context, customers can be seen as a resource and content provider that should be strategically considered by the company's marketing strategy (Dellarocas, 2003; Meng *et al.*, 2018). Despite this, only recently has there been an interest in exploring the motives for and behaviours of customers operating in digital environments. Accordingly, a growing body of research is emerging that explores customers' psychological traits and motives to perform various activities in digital environments (Berezan *et al.*, 2018; He *et al.*, 2017; Malik *et al.*, 2016). For example, personal social presence, looking for virtual happiness and building self-determination and self-expression are reasons for acting proactively in a digital environment (Wu *et al.*, 2016).

In the specific context of online reviews, which is our context of analysis and which regards a post-consumption activity, recent studies have found that customers share reviews to gain attention and enhance their reputation (Lim *et al.*, 2019; Shen *et al.*, 2015), and some customers share reviews as they did in the past (Moe and Schweidel, 2012). Another study offered a typology of online review engagement that occurs when volunteers generate reviews within the context of a firm-controlled reviewing platform (Mathwick and Mosteller, 2017). A specific stream of literature focused on online review usage, thus taking the perspective of customers looking for reviews before purchasing (Park and Lee, 2009; Zhao *et al.*, 2013). By contrast, most of the studies that focused on post-consumption sharing behaviours and motives are based on Amazon's top reviewer community (<https://www.amazon.com/review/top-reviewers>) and BarnesandNoble.com and thus are based on customers that are used to sharing and are serial reviewers, who are driven by opportunistic and strategic behaviours (see for example Mathwick and Mosteller, 2017; Shen *et al.*, 2015), limiting the scope of analysis. These reviewers are part of online review communities and public ranking systems to receive social benefits such as attention, peer recognition or reputation (Shen *et al.*, 2015).

Therefore, to the best of our knowledge, the literature lacks in studies regarding post-consumption sharing motives and behaviours of traditional customers that do not benefit directly from sharing comments and feedback on online platforms. In fact, serial reviewers have the primary goal of climbing the reviewer rankings, and therefore the findings could be influenced. Moreover, there seems to be a lack of studies regarding individuals who rarely post or do not post at all. This means providing a greater picture of sharing and non-sharing motives and behaviours on online platforms. Thus, our heterogeneous sample of analysis provides us with a complete picture of the phenomenon. Moreover, the mixed-method approach used by this study allows us to deepen our understanding of the motives for and behaviours of sharing and non-sharing activities, which is increasingly strategically important for CEOs and marketing managers.

The purpose of the study is thus to explore the customers' motives for and behaviours of sharing comments and information on e-service platforms, as well as the ones that lead customers to avoid the sharing process after consumption. Specifically, and formally, the study tries to answer the following research questions: *What are the motives and behaviours that push customers to share or not share comments on e-service platforms? Which identified factors actually lead to more intense online sharing behaviour?*

To achieve this goal, this research adopts a mixed-method approach. Firstly, a two-phase qualitative design involving 2 focus groups and 27 in-depth interviews has been employed. Secondly, a quantitative approach has been implemented to test the relationship between three factors, identified in the qualitative analysis and comment-sharing behaviours.

The results of the interviews showed that the main reasons for sharing post-consumption comments and feedback are: (a) to improve the product/service and customer justice; (b) to share emotions and feelings; and (c) technological readiness. The quantitative analysis involving 347 individuals indicates that, while improving the product/service and customer justice does not impact on commenting behaviours, sharing emotions and feelings and technological readiness do.

The study adds to the literature on customer engagement (Mathwick and Mosteller, 2017; Shen *et al.*, 2015) by proposing behaviours and motives that push traditional customers who are not serial reviewers to share comments and feedback on e-platforms, along with the ones that prevent the sharing process. Specifically, we show that customers' post-consumption sharing motives and behaviours are especially driven by their willingness to share feelings and emotions and their technological readiness. These have implications for marketing strategists willing to build strategies aiming at fostering online communities, spread word-of-mouth and positive loops.

2. E-customer engagement

A large number of studies in the marketing field focused on value co-creation with regard to the key role of various stakeholders (Leonidou *et al.*, 2018), including customers (Payne *et al.*, 2008; Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Yi and Gong, 2013), who have become active contributors in enhancing marketing activities (Malthouse *et al.*, 2013; Thrassou *et al.*, 2018). This paradigm shift comprises a transfer of control from the firm to the customer, opening great opportunities but also threats. In this context, customer engagement has been considered a key activity for firms that strive to remain competitive (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2019; Scuotto *et al.*, 2017; Van Doorn *et al.*, 2010). Customer engagement has been defined as a customer's voluntary resource contribution to a firm's marketing function, going beyond financial patronage (Harmeling *et al.*, 2017). It has a high impact on customer's trust and is a powerful form of communication, especially when it occurs organically (De Matos and Rossi, 2008; Risitano *et al.*, 2017).

Most of the studies on customer engagement focused on dyadic interactions, such as the one between the customer and the product, the one between the customer and the frontline employees and so on. In this context, customer engagement occurs in every service encounter (Pugh, 2001). Service encounters include those that happen directly with a service provider and those that happen with the providers' delivery systems and technology, which is playing a role of enabler in new digital relationships (Buhalis *et al.*, 2019; Larivière *et al.*, 2017). Thus, e-service encounters are the provision of any service over electronic network formats, such as the Web, information kiosks and mobile devices (Boyer *et al.*, 2002; Rowley, 2006). Hence, new sophisticated technologies have facilitated customer engagement as well as interaction among customers (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Viglia *et al.*, 2018). This suggests viewing consumer behaviour through a triadic lens, where consumers enjoy their journey within complex networks of companies and other consumers (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Dessart *et al.*, 2015). Studies suggest that effective customer engagement on online platforms leads to greater behavioural intentions to use platforms repeatedly (Heim and Sinha, 2001; Nayeypour and Bokaei, 2019). This greater usage is vital for e-service platforms as their long-term financial performance is directly associated with greater customer engagement. In fact, customer engagement can be considered as the level of a customer's physical, cognitive and emotional presence in the relationship with a service organization (Brodie *et al.*, 2013).

As such, further conceptualization and research to better understand customers' motives and behaviour to share comments on e-service platforms represent one of the more important aspects that require research attention. In this guise, a few studies have addressed the issue concerning the role of other customers' engagement or fellow customers within a service ecosystem, as customers may affect each other directly through interpersonal encounters or indirectly by being a part of the digital environment (Joo *et al.*, 2011). Especially, little research has been conducted in the context of the post-consumption stage, in which customers share comments and information after consuming a product or service (Park *et al.*, 2012).

In this regard, recent studies have focused on the social networking context. Weitzl and Hutzinger (2017) investigated the effect of firm-generated responses to negative comments posted online on bystanders' favourable and unfavourable brand-related reactions. Pan *et al.* (2018) studied the impact of friends' and crowds' reviews on customers' posting behaviour. Others explored the growing importance of customer-to-customer interaction (C2C) and inter-customer help during service failures and their impact on focal customer's satisfaction with the brand (Yi and Kim, 2017).

Recent research continues to emphasize the critical role of customer engagement in digital environments. A study by Fan *et al.* (2022) focused on community e-commerce platforms, showing that high e-service quality, characterized by system design, intelligent fulfillment, security assurance and interactive services, significantly enhances customer engagement

behaviours. This enhancement is mediated by increased customer trust and reduced perceived risk, which in turn foster greater customer loyalty and retention (Fan *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, Wang *et al.* (2022) explored the impact of e-commerce livestreaming services on customer loyalty using the Stimulus–Organism–Response model. The study found that both physical cues (like aesthetic appeal and functional layout) and social cues (such as nonverbal communication and service skills) significantly influence customer engagement. However, there seems to be a need to widen the lens of motives and behaviour of customers sharing comments on e-platforms in the post-consumption phase.

3. Customers' behaviours and motives in digital contexts

This section builds on the marketing and psychology literature to explore the customers' personal behaviour in online customer engagement. As highlighted, customer engagement has evolved, due to the digital environment in which customers live every day and thanks to the proliferation of new technologies (Sashi, 2012). In this guise, customers engage with organizations through social media platforms of various types to perform different activities such as providing comments and feedback (Berezan *et al.*, 2018; He *et al.*, 2017; Malik *et al.*, 2016). From a knowledge management perspective, companies benefit from the proliferation of these continuous flows of knowledge and information fostered by platforms spreading and adoption (Kratzer *et al.*, 2017; Bhatti *et al.*, 2024).

The digital behaviour of customers can be influenced by several psychological, social and economic factors. For example, it has been shown that customers' social presence may lead to negative word-of mouth (He *et al.*, 2017). Power, defined as the ability to influence another person, can impact the willingness to post online reviews (Wu *et al.*, 2016). Several studies suggested that one might pass time on online platforms to reach a sort of virtual happiness (Berezan *et al.*, 2018), build self-determination and self-expression (Ryan and Deci, 2000), increase the feeling of belongingness (Leary and Baumeister, 2000) and increase personal autonomy and competence (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Others indicated that some customers perform service experiences to search for customer delight, which means looking for proper pleasure (Arnold *et al.*, 2005). A stream of research postulated that customers spend time online and share materials online to increase their well-being and self-extensions and to build digital relationships (Malik *et al.*, 2016; Mangold and Faulds, 2009; Pera and Viglia, 2015). Some studies indicated that some personal characteristics drive customer's behaviour in service encounters, such as cynicism (Balaji *et al.*, 2018) or perceived justice (Maxham and Netemeyer, 2002). Other studies indicated that technology covers a key role in shaping customer's online behaviour. For example, ease of use of digital technologies (Featherman and Pavlou, 2003) and personal innovativeness in information technology (Featherman *et al.*, 2006) can facilitate customers' proactive behaviour in online contexts.

In the specific context of service online reviews, Shen *et al.* (2015) explored how online reviewers strategically choose the right product to review and the right rating to post so that they can gain attention and enhance their reputation. Moe and Schweidel (2012) investigated the influence of previously posted ratings on posting behaviour and found that positive rating environments increase posting incidence, whereas negative rating environments discourage posting. Zhao *et al.* (2013) explored consumers learning from online product reviews, thus taking the perspective of consumers willing to buy a product or a service. Specifically, they explored the usage of online reviews and purchase intentions and found that consumers learn more from online reviews of book titles than from their own experience with other books of the same genre. Similarly, Park and Lee (2009) explored the antecedents of using online reviews and purchase influence, using data collected from US and Korean consumers. The authors showed that national culture has important moderating effects on the relationships among online reviews and its antecedents.

Furthermore, the literature has shown that culture can influence posting behaviour. In this regard, [Kim *et al.* \(2018\)](#) found that customers from Western societies, such as the UK and the USA, tend to be positively predisposed and that the dispersion of their ratings is significantly less for hotels in Beijing where they stayed compared to those of Chinese customers.

Finally, an insightful paper on the motives and behaviour of customers sharing comments and information is by [Mathwick and Mosteller \(2017\)](#). In detail, the authors developed a typology of online review engagement that occurs when volunteers generate reviews within the context of a firm-controlled reviewing platform. Three reviewer types are identified: one reviewer type may disregard the public ranking system and is engaged mainly because the platform provides a means of self-expression; the other two reviewer types remain fully engaged but for different reasons. One type approaches reviewing as a game to be mastered, an enjoyable, albeit relatively solitary, hobby. The other fully integrates the public ranking system into the motivation to review, expressing a willingness to advocate on behalf of the system and the reviewing community.

Recent studies have also delved into the psychological and technological aspects that shape consumer behaviour, for example, highlighting the key role of social support in social commerce platforms, and that under certain conditions, customers are more likely to engage actively and share information ([Wu *et al.*, 2023](#)).

Other recent studies investigated the role of AI in customer service and its impact on engagement, finding that AI-powered chatbots that use anthropomorphic language can significantly improve customer perceptions of competence and authenticity. This, in turn, enhances customer engagement by making interactions feel more personal and responsive, highlighting the growing importance of AI in creating engaging digital experiences ([Gao *et al.*, 2023](#)). The recent literature also posits that positive WOM can lead to referral attitudes which in turn affects loyalty. Firms increasingly use growth hacking strategies to stimulate these online behaviours ([Bargoni *et al.*, 2024a, b](#)).

[Table 1](#) shows the main factors explaining customers' behaviours and motives in digital contexts according to the literature.

4. Context of analysis

Our field research took place in Italy. Nearly 55 million Italians have an Internet access. It reveals a steady increase in the number of Internet users, meaning that 9 of 10 people are connected, 88% of users access the Web daily, 11% access at least once per week and only 1% access at least once per month. Every user spends an average of six hours per day connected, of which one-third is on social media. To surf the Web, nine out of ten people use smartphones (89.2%), 45.4% use a desktop PC, 28.3% a laptop, 26% a tablet and finally 6.7% use other devices. Approximately 35 million Italians are active on social platforms (59% of the population), up 2.9% compared to last year, almost 90% access these platforms via mobile devices and the average activity time of each user is about two hours a day. Of those Italians who are active on social platforms, 98% of these are users on a monthly basis and three out of four Italians participate. Each user has an average of 7.4 social accounts. YouTube and Facebook are the most popular platforms, the former with 86% and the latter with 81% of users, followed by Instagram with 55%, Twitter and LinkedIn. The main messaging service is WhatsApp, used by 84%, which continues to dominate the panorama of the most recent social platforms in our country. Regarding e-commerce, 86% of users having access to the network confirm that they have searched for products or services online. Two Italians out of three actually buy or pay online and 42% did it via mobile devices.

Factors	Description	References
Social presence	Social presence may lead to higher negative word-of-mouth (NWOM) intentions for customers after a service failure compared with when they are alone	He et al. (2017)
Power	Power can be defined as one's ability to influence another person or other people	Wu et al. (2016)
Virtual happiness	Happiness could be reached through experiential products, especially on social media platforms and digital ecosystems	Berezan et al. (2018)
Self-determination and self-expression	Self-determination regards the process by which a person controls their own life	Ryan and Deci (2000)
Relatedness	Relatedness is a feeling of belongingness, namely, the need to connect with and develop close and affectionate relationships with others	Leary and Baumeister (2000)
Autonomy	Autonomy is the sense of freedom and the ability to control one's own life in a way to enhance one's sense of identity	Ryan and Deci (2000)
Competence	Competence is the feeling of being able to control one's environment and the results of one's actions	Ryan and Deci (2000)
Customer delight	Customer delight is a proper pleasure that is associated with the feeling of surprise, joy and pleasure, and it is more affect-based than satisfaction	Arnold et al. (2005)
Well-being	Spending time on social media can actually gratify needs of affection, attention and social influence that are missing in real relationships. For example, people post photos, videos on social networks to share their life experiences and to communicate their personal fulfilment, showing their self-identity to a wide community	Malik et al. (2016)
Construction and extension of self	The construction of self and how we present to the world becomes more fluid within the context of the digital environment. Sharing things on social media may be a way of seeking affirmation regarding this construction of self. On the other hand, the Internet can increase the feeling of loneliness and isolation instead of creating social relationships	Mangold and Faulds (2009)
Relationship and digital self	The individual act of sharing things online (for example sharing photos) becomes collective in order to take meaning and to create bonds with the society in which we live and we want to belong. Affirmation in society is critical to raising self-esteem and confidence with others	Conci et al. (2009)
Cynicism	Cynical consumer is defined by deviant behaviour, such as demonstrating lower purchase intentions, spreading negative word of mouth and disparaging a firm's reputation. It is associated with unrealistic expectations and a sense of betrayal and it is characterized by suspicion, hostility and pessimism	Balaji et al. (2018)
Overall perceived justice	How consumers perceive they have been treated fairly in a service encounter; the perception is based on procedures, outcomes and interactions	Maxham and Netemeyer (2002)

Table 1.
Customers' behaviours
and motives in digital
contexts

(continued)

Factors	Description	References
Ease of use	Confidence in online service is directly proportional to the service's ease of use, reliability and responsiveness reduces consumers' concerns of performance efficacy	Featherman and Pavlou (2003)
Personal innovativeness in information technology (PIIT)	Consumers classified as innovators are typically eager to learn of new products and services and show expertise when evaluating them; and when the service is compatible with their lifestyle, they adopt innovations before others. Innovators are characterized as exhibiting a higher willingness to change and try new products and services	Featherman et al. (2006)

Source(s): Authors' own creation

Table 1.

5. Research design

A mixed-method approach has been selected. Firstly, a two-phase qualitative design involving two focus groups and 27 in-depth interviews. Secondly, a quantitative approach has been implemented to test the relationship between three factors, identified in the qualitative analysis and comment-sharing behaviours.

6. Study 1

6.1 Research approach

The ethnographic research method is applied to get a deeper picture of the phenomenon and to best capture participants' personal understanding ([Franco and Haase, 2017](#); [Karagouni, 2018](#)). In detail, this study has adopted a two-stage approach within the interpretive paradigm in which participants are seen as active meaning creators, not just research objects ([Rynes and Gephart Jr, 2004](#)). This methodology favours data collection methods that gather rich data directly from those people experiencing the phenomenon ([Shah and Corley, 2006](#)).

Specifically, ethnographic research is a qualitative method where researchers observe and/or interact with a study's participants in their real-life environment. Therefore, the research method allows for interaction with the participants to refine the research findings and capture unexpected issues and anything that could be neglected with a quantitative study. Moreover, while scales for the identified elements ([Table 1](#)) are partly available in the literature, they are not employed in the context of motives and behaviours of post-consumption customers sharing comments and information about a business on an e-service platform. Therefore, we opted for a qualitative methodology to get an accurate and more precise outcome for the high number of elements, in line with previous studies ([Pera et al., 2022](#)).

6.2 Data gathering

The research encompassed a two-stage study; firstly, we carried out two focus groups, then we conducted 27 in-depth interviews. The focus groups were conducted in early 2022, while the interviews were conducted between 2022 and 2023.

Focus groups were chosen over other forms of data collection, such as informal observation, as they are able to capture the consumers' realities ([Stewart and Shamdasani, 2014](#)). Moreover, this approach to research has been considered an appropriate method for generating data because the research topic is something participants feel natural talking about with other people and interacting with each other ([Macnaghten and Myers, 2004](#)). It is

interesting to note that focus groups have highlighted many of the themes that emerged during the literature review phase. However, new concepts arose that have been tested through interviews. Accordingly, the themes that emerged during the focus groups have been used as a basis to conduct the interviews during the second phase.

The groups were composed of participants of different ages and characteristics in order to have a heterogeneous sample and to reach both active reviewers and non-reviewers. The selection of participants for the qualitative study was conducted meticulously to ensure adequate representation and meaningful data collection. Initially, purposive sampling was employed to select participants with relevant experiences in sharing comments and feedback online. We aimed to include active reviewers, occasional reviewers and individuals who had never shared comments online. This approach allowed us to capture a variety of perspectives and behaviours (Patton, 2015). After identifying the initial participants through purposive sampling, we used the snowball sampling technique. We asked initial participants to suggest other individuals who could provide additional valuable insights for the study. This method helped us reach a broader and more diverse sample (Creswell, 2013). Participants were selected based on various demographic (age, gender) and behavioural (frequency of online comment sharing) criteria. We aimed to ensure a balance across different age groups, genders and levels of online activity to obtain a comprehensive view of sharing motivations and behaviours. The two focus groups and 27 in-depth interviews were conducted following this selection methodology, ensuring the quality and richness of the data collected (Marshall *et al.*, 2013).

Focus groups took place in Turin (Italy) and were moderated by one author. Data were transcribed verbatim. Data collection ended when information saturation occurred. The two groups were composed of eight people, each in line with the recommendations of the literature, which suggests at least six people per each group (Macnaghten and Myers, 2004). Interviewees were recruited via purposeful sampling and snowball techniques. Thus, 27 in-depth face-to-face interviews, ranging from 30 to 60 min, were recorded and transcribed.

As suggested by the literature, sample sizes for qualitative research should be large enough to obtain enough data to sufficiently describe the phenomenon, thus achieving data saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Saturation occurs when adding more participants to the study does not result in additional perspectives or information. The empirical analysis ended after 27 interviews, precisely because the elements that emerged were consistent with those that emerged earlier, and the last interviews did not suggest new dynamics or elements. In addition, the sample size is in line with what was suggested by Creswell (1998) and Morse (1994).

Table 2 provides the profiles of focus group participants.

6.3 Data analysis

One author carried out face-to-face interviews, administrating a semi-structured guide derived from the themes arising from the focus groups. Questions included: Can you describe the process of sharing comments on online service platforms? Why did you do it? Has sharing comments helped you to achieve something? What are the feelings that you have before and after posting a review?

The study adopted an interpretive methodology to identify themes emerging from the analysis of the data. Following Yin (2013), the analytic framework comprised three stages: (1) analysis of individual interviews and transcripts, (2) identification of common recurrent themes and (3) analysis of shared themes. In addition, we first analysed each interview in a separate way, and then we tried to understand the common elements. The coding scheme was unrestricted and imaginative and was not content-specific (Miles and Huberman, 1994). One

No.	Name	Age	Gender	Frequency of posting
1	Stefano	44	Male	High
2	Federico	32	Male	Medium
3	Francesco	31	Male	High
4	Patrizia	56	Female	Medium/high
5	Alessandro	33	Male	Low/medium
6	Alberto	32	Male	Low
7	Maria Vittoria	29	Female	Null
8	Paola	38	Female	Medium
9	Francesco	50	Male	Low
10	Enza	37	Female	Low/medium
11	Paolo	65	Male	Null
12	Luca	25	Male	High
13	Alessandra	29	Female	Medium/high
14	Alberto	38	Male	Low/medium
15	Rosa	45	Female	Medium
16	Vincenzo	54	Male	Medium
17	Franca	48	Female	Medium
18	Camilla	30	Female	Low
19	Umberto	58	Male	Null
20	Erika	24	Female	High
21	Federico	52	Male	Low
22	Alberto	28	Female	Medium
23	Paola	36	Female	Medium
24	Rebecca	34	Female	High
25	Monica	30	Female	Medium
26	Luigi	32	Male	Medium/high
27	Gabriele	44	Male	High

Source(s): Authors' own creation

Table 2.
Information about
respondents

author started the initial coding, while the other authors were involved in categorical aggregation and the search for emerging patterns.

The data were revisited to search for relationships between the shared themes and the different concepts that had emerged. Potential patterns and relationships within and between the shared themes and the core theme of “response-bias” were examined to determine how exactly they influenced the shared aspects of the informants’ “lived experience.” A sample of the material generated was checked for coding coherence and accuracy by all researchers, with no significant problems identified.

6.4 Qualitative findings

Below are presented the findings derived from the interviews. Overall, the participants offered hints about their motives and behaviours for sharing and not sharing reviews online, consistent with some of the theories on behaviours in digital contexts. However, new patterns emerged during the interviews. Interviewees who have shared comments and reviews online do it through Tripadvisor and Google for services and Amazon for bought products. In addition, most of them agreed that sharing information about services is more common, as the consumption process is more frequent for services than for products.

Overall, it is possible to affirm that all the interviewees appeared to share reviews and comments for emotional reasons, and therefore each participant does it in a different way and for different emotional reasons. In the data analysis, we have identified three macro-categories of reasons why customers share reviews and comments after consumption. These

are: (1) to improve the service and for customer justice; (2) to share emotions and feelings; and (3) technological readiness. They will be discussed individually below.

6.4.1 Improve the product/service and customer justice. Some participants share comments online because they believe they help services improve.

I oftentimes share comments and reviews online after a service experience. It is hard to explain why I do this; it is an instinctive action. Thinking more about it, I can say that I usually share because I feel that with our reviews we can help in improving the overall service. (Stefano, 44 years old)

In this case, the customer feels to be a vital part of the service itself and is able to perceive his/her importance within the value offering. This is confirmed by another comment: *“I think it’s very useful to improve products and services”* (Paolo, 65 years old). From another perspective, improving the service can be seen as a way to give justice to customers, as highlighted by the following comment:

I like to share comments and reviews about platforms after I buy a product. However, I don’t do that always when I go to a restaurant. In this case, I do it when I try a new restaurant that strikes me particularly, positively or negatively. I think it’s a way to share your experience with other people, so that they can take advantage of the service they expect. If the service is bad, I share it so that future customers can know what awaits them. On the other hand, if the service is great, I think it’s right to let the world know. (Enza, 37 years old)

Therefore, this behaviour can be seen as a form of “digital altruism” in which the customer believes he/she can do something for the overall customer community, providing insights and thoughts. One respondent underlined this concept from the point of view of the customer who searches online comments before buying products:

I’ve never shared comments and reviews on platforms. Maybe because I don’t feel able, from a technological point of view, or because I don’t feel the need. It happened to me to look for reviews online before buying a product on Amazon or before trying a new restaurant. But again, I have never posted comments. I don’t think I’ll do it in the future. It’s something I don’t feel the need for, even if I think it’s very useful to improve products and services. (Paolo, 65 years old)

This feeling is confirmed by another interviewed:

I like to share comments online but I do it always on the same platforms. I would say that I share comments on a couple of platforms: TripAdvisor and Google. However, I think they are completely different. I go to restaurant every week, so I use to share comments every week when I try a new place. On Amazon it is different because I buy less often on that platform. So, I use to share different comments. Overall, I think I do it because other people deserve to know what really works about a product or service and what really doesn’t. It is like giving customers justice. (Patrizia, 56 years old)

This concept, which can be named “giving customers justice”, has been underlined by many respondents and suggests the power of digital platforms in matching what the customer expects with what the company offers. This has been explicitly cited by another participant: *“Overall I can say that these tools are useful for giving justice to customers. It is like a post-service delivery that should be used smartly by companies. Some of them do not consider these comments wisely”* (Alessandro, 33 years old). Respondents were able to perceive this element, and therefore they felt active in posting comments but also in reading comments before using a service or buying a product.

Finally, sharing can be seen as a social process to influence others, a way to feel powerful and present in a social community.

Sharing is also a way to influence other people, in the sense that your experience will surely impact the choice of future purchase behaviour of other people. This can also be viewed as a social responsibility, a form of economic justice. (Francesco, 50)

In this case, the customer posting the online comment feels that he or she is the main supporter of customer justice and therefore acknowledges the responsibility he or she has towards future consumers of the product/service.

6.4.2 Sharing emotions and feelings. Many respondents stressed the fact that they post comments and reviews on platforms when they feel particular emotions, such as being angry or particularly happy. In this case, the comment is shared precisely to share their emotions (positive or negative) with other subjects online, but also with the company/service provider. *"I feel that I provide reviews because I am about a service or product, which did not provide the value I expected"* (Stefano, 44 years old). Accordingly, some of them share only in specific circumstances.

I do not share all the times. I only share sometimes, especially when I am particularly happy about a product or service, or when I am particularly about it. It is not a matter of losing time. It is a matter of impact that we can make. When a service is normal for me, I usually do not share comments (Federico, 32 years old).

Some respondents stressed that they are pushed to share when they feel mad or angry about or betrayed by a service or product, as the following comments highlight.

I use to do it when I am mad or when I am not satisfied about a service or product. I remember at a restaurant, I felt mad, the service was poor, the quality of food was bad and we paid a lot. I think that the overall service was low because it was Saturday night and therefore the place was full of people. But this is not a proper excuse. I felt that the price was too high for what I received and therefore I have been pushed to share a negative comment online. Another time I expressed my feelings on Amazon as I bought a product which arrived in delay (weeks). In this case I expected at least a discount on a future product or something to make me feel better. So I decided to provide a negative comment. (Alessandro, 33 years old)

So in many cases posting comments on digital platforms can be seen as a special moment in which the customer wants to share special emotions or feelings, not ordinary moments. In line with this, it has been suggested that reviews can be shared when the product/service is unique and special.

I usually do online reviews when the product or service is a special one, like a particular and expensive restaurant or an expensive product that I buy once in a lifetime. I think that I do it because the product or service has a value that deserves attention and a review that can be accessed by many people. (Alberto, 32 years old)

Others indicated that sharing comments is like building an identity portrait. In this case, it is posted online precisely because the product/service purchased is part of the personality of the customer and therefore he/she wants to make it known to the world.

I share sometimes, especially when I buy something special on Amazon or I share some special dinner with friends or my family. I think that sharing in this case is like building an identity portrait. I want to let people know that you appreciate good and pretty things. It is a way to let them know how you are and what you like. (Francesco, 50 years old)

Finally, others have pointed to posting a comment after trying a particular experience, almost as if to try it again.

Summarizing, I do think it is a matter of well-being. If I am very happy about a service or product (like going to a new restaurant), I will be even happier in sharing comments. It is like living that moment again. Offering your well-being and joy to others. It is a search for pleasure, sharing pleasure and joy. (Federico, 32)

Commenting on the experience, therefore, can be considered as the pleasant conclusion of a purchasing process that goes beyond the mere consumption of the product itself. This

enhances the intangible elements around the product itself, which have a unique value for the customer.

6.4.3 Technological readiness. A key element that contributes to the sharing of comments and reviews on online platforms is linked to the technological readiness of the individual. This is related to the fact that we are able to use new technologies in our everyday lives and the frequency with which we use these technologies in continuous activity. In this regard, the responses of the participants were different. For example, one respondent stated:

In my opinion, the relationship with technologies is important in commenting online. I mean, I use to share comments because I know what I do and I constantly live with technologies around me. PC, social media, games, console, etc. It is a well-known world for me. (Luca, 25 years old)

This relationship with the easiness of use and personal IT innovativeness is partially confirmed by the following statement:

Of course it could be a matter of ease of use and personal knowledge about a technology. It is true that we all know how to use WhatsApp and Facebook. However, there is still a portion of population that does not know how to use other tools. Moreover, you have to login and do other things in order to review constantly on TripAdvisor and other platforms. Moreover, for reviewing on Amazon you must buy on Amazon, and not all the people do it. (Paola, 38 years old)

So, according to some participants, the ability to use these technologies influences the frequency with which people post online. In other words, individuals who know less about the technology may post online but rarely do so in specific circumstances. On the other hand, people who live with these technologies every day will be more inclined to post more frequently. Accordingly, one participant highlighted that perhaps he does not share comments because he does not understand the technology. *“I’ve never shared comments and reviews on platforms. Maybe because I don’t feel able, from a technological point of view, or because I don’t feel the need”* (Paolo, 65 years old). One respondent highlighted that it could be a matter of age. *“Using WhatsApp or Facebook is not like posting comments on Tripadvisor for people who don’t use technology very much. Older people know how to use WhatsApp and Facebook because they do it every day”* (Luca, 25 years old).

As anticipated, for several participants, technological readiness is not important for publishing comments and reviews on online platform.

Despite being confident with technologies, I do not share all the time. I only share sometimes, especially when I am particularly happy about a product or service, or when I am particularly mad about it. It is not a matter of losing time. It is a matter of impact that we can make. When a service is normal for me, I usually do not share comments. Again, it is not a matter of knowing a technology, as I am pretty confident about simple technologies (personal computer, smartphone etc.) and hard technologies (software, programming, complex games etc.) (Federico, 32 years old).

This thought is confirmed by another statement.

I can also say that in my view it is not a matter of technology because we all know how to use WhatsApp. If you know how to use WhatsApp, surely you can use TripAdvisor or Amazon. So I’d have to say it’s more about being lazy. (Alessandra, 29 years old)

In conclusion, the matter of technological readiness received different answers during the interviews. It is reasonable to infer that technology is an important factor in the use of the mentioned platforms. However, posting comments online is not very different from using other applications. Therefore, their use is more associated with the usefulness and emotions that drive individuals to post comments online. Table 3 shows the coding scheme.

Main quotes	Main themes	Aggregate themes
I often share comments and reviews online after a service experience. It is hard to explain why I do this; it is an instinctive action I feel that with our reviews we can help in improving the overall service I think it's very useful to improve products and services It's a way to share your experience with other people, so that they can take advantage of the service they expect. If the service is bad, I share it so that future customers can know what awaits them. On the other hand, if the service is great, I think it's right to let the world know I do it because other people deserve to know what really works about a product or service and what really doesn't. It is like giving customers justice These tools are useful to give justice to customers. It is like a post-service delivery that should be used smartly by companies. Some of them do not consider these comments wisely Sharing is also a way to influence other people, in the sense that your experience will surely impact the choice of future purchase behaviour of other people. This can also be viewed as a social responsibility, a form of economic justice I feel that I provide reviews because I am angry about a service or product, which did not provide the value I expected I do not share all the times. I only share sometimes, especially when I am particularly happy about a product or service or when I am particularly angry about it. It is not a matter of losing time. It is a matter of impact that we can make. When a service is normal for me, I usually do not share comments I usually do it when I am angry or when I am not satisfied about a service or product Another times I expressed my feelings on Amazon as I bought a product which arrived in delay (weeks). In this case, I expect at least a discount on a future product or something to make me feel better. So I decided to provide a negative comment I usually do online reviews when the product or service is a special one, like a particular and expensive restaurant or an expensive product that I buy once in a lifetime I share sometimes, especially when I buy something special on Amazon or I share some special dinner with friends or my family. I think that sharing in this case is like building an identity portrait, a way to let people know that you appreciate good and pretty things. It is a way to let them know how you are and what you like If I am very happy about a service or product (like going to a new restaurant), I will be even happier in sharing comments. It is like living that moment again. Offering your well-being and joy to others. It is a search for pleasure, sharing pleasure and joy	Helping others Feeling part of the service Let the world know Digital altruism Sharing special moments Sharing as social process Sense of power Occasional vs serial sharing Sharing feelings Living the emotion again Customer delight Well-being Posting as a pleasant conclusion	Improve the product/ service and customer justice Sharing emotions and feelings

(continued)

Table 3.
Coding scheme

Main quotes	Main themes	Aggregate themes
In my opinion, the relationship with technologies is important in commenting online. I mean, I usually share comments because I know what I do and I constantly live with technologies around me. PC, social media, games, console, etc. It is a well-known world for me Of course it could be a matter of ease of use and personal knowledge about a technology. It is true that we all know how to use WhatsApp and Facebook. However, there is still a portion of population that does not know how to use other tools. Moreover, you have to log in and to other stuff in order to review constantly on TripAdvisor and other platform. Moreover, for reviewing on Amazon you must buy on Amazon and not all the people do it I've never shared comments and reviews on platforms. Maybe because I don't feel able from a technological point of view or because I don't feel the need Using WhatsApp or Facebook is not like posting comments on Tripadvisor for people who don't use technology very much. Older people know how to use WhatsApp and Facebook because they do it every day Although I am confident with technologies, I do not share all the time. I only share sometimes, especially when I am particularly happy about a product or service or when I am particularly mad about it. It is not a matter of losing time. It is a matter of impact that we can make. When a service is normal for me, I usually do not share comments. Again, it is not a matter of knowing a technology as I am pretty confident about technologies I can also say that in my view it is not a matter of technology because we all know how to use WhatsApp. If you know how to use WhatsApp, surely you can use TripAdvisor or Amazon. So I'd have to say it's more about being lazy	Being confident with technologies Technological readiness impacts on posting frequency Laziness	Technological readiness

Table 3. **Source(s):** Authors' own creation

7. Study 2

7.1 Methodology

As anticipated, this paper aims to explore the customers' motives and behaviours in sharing comments and information on e-service platforms, as well as the ones that lead them to avoid the sharing process after consumption. In so doing, Study 2 seeks to test the relationship between our identified constructs and sharing attitudes. We employed a quantitative approach using self-administered questionnaires to collect data. Data were collected using an online platform in order to reach a wide range of respondents in Italy. Before sending the questionnaire, a pretest was done with a random sample of 10 people who accepted to participate in such a test. Results of the pretest indicated that all participants had no difficulty in understanding the questions.

Then, the questionnaire was sent via email and through social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and LinkedIn) to different areas of Italy, which is the context of analysis, in order to find a heterogeneous sample. In total, we received 347 responses from Italian customers. The questionnaire was developed in Italian and the authors translated the questions taken from the literature, with the help of a professional proofreader. We therefore

Respondents were told that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. All the questions and variables were taken and adapted from the literature ([Table 4](#)). Finally, we included several control variables, such as respondents' age, gender, educational background and numbers of reviews per month, which were taken from the literature ([Balabanis and Siamagka, 2017](#)).

7.1.1 Preliminary assessments of scales. The items and variables were assessed for validity via confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using SPSS software. We ran a CFA using principal component extraction with varimax rotation for the following variables ([Table 5](#)): Online comment sharing (OCS); Improving the product and customer justice (IPCJ); Sharing emotions and feelings (SEF); Technological readiness (TR).

7.2 Findings

Two regression models have been implemented to test the impact of both control variables and independent variables (IPCJ, SEF, TR) on the dependent variable (OCS). Model 1 tests just the effect of the control variables on the dependent variable. Model 2 tests the effect of the independent variables and control variables on the dependent variable. It is possible to note that while IPCJ does not impact OCS significantly, SEF and TF do ([Table 6](#)).

Construct	Items or measurement	Source	Role
Online comment sharing	I'm willing to contribute to companies' social media pages that are useful to me by sharing knowledge I'm willing to maintain social connections about product and services I like to share my impressions about product and services through the internet I want to be more recognized for my experiences	Munar and Jacobsen (2014)	Dependent variable
Improve the product and customer justice	I like helping other people It feels good to help others solve their problems I enjoy helping others in shopping I know that other members will help me, so it's only fair to help other members I trust that someone would help me if I were in a similar situation	Wasko and Faraj (2005)	Independent variable
Sharing emotions and feelings	Posting comments online is like enjoying the product/service again Posting comments online makes me feel better I feel that my life is enriched by online communication	Wolny and Mueller (2013)	Independent variable
Technological readiness	Writing comments and posts is a nice thing I have the resources necessary to post comments I have the knowledge necessary to post comments Learning to use e-service platforms is easy for me	Venkatesh et al. (2003)	Independent variable

Source(s): Authors' own creation

Table 4.
Dependent and independent variables

8. Discussion and conclusions

8.1 Discussion of findings

This paper has tried to shed light on the customers’ motives for and behaviours of sharing post-consumption comments and information on e-service platforms and on the ones that lead customers to avoid sharing processes after consumption. To achieve this goal, the paper has implemented a mixed-method approach involving focus groups and in-depth interviews with 27 participants, and a quantitative analysis with a sample of 347 individuals. The initial data generated from the focus groups provided the general themes that were further explored in-depth through individual interviews and then through regression models.

The results of the interviews showed different underlying factors that may explain the sharing and non-sharing online posting behaviour. Overall, these results can be grouped and classified into three macro-categories: (1) improving the product/service and customer justice; (2) sharing emotions and feelings; and (3) technological readiness.

Regarding the first group, helping others, feeling engaged with the product/service, letting the world know, exhibiting digital altruism, sharing special moments, sharing as a social process and having a sense of power were the most recurrent elements that emerged from the interviews. These findings are in line with the theory of co-creation of value proposed by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), which emphasizes the active role of customers in enhancing the value proposition through their feedback and suggestions. Some of these elements are related to social presence, an important factor that leads individuals to share comments about products and services on online platforms (He *et al.*, 2017). The concept of digital altruism aligns with the idea of customers engaging in behaviours that benefit the broader community, enhancing collective value (Brodie *et al.*, 2011). Additionally, the results showed that some individuals share comments online just to feel they are part of social communities, which resonates with the social identity theory that highlights the importance

Table 5.
CFA analysis

Variable	KMO	<i>p</i> value Bartlett’s test	Variance	Cronbach’s alpha
OCS	0.782	0.000	65.240	0.822
IPCJ	0.802	0.000	59.699	0.802
SEF	0.771	0.000	70.578	0.855
TR	0.697	0.000	70.998	0.792

Source(s): Authors’ own creation

Table 6.
Regression models

Variables	Model 1	Model 2
Age	0.012 (0.816)	0.148 (0.000)
Gender	–0.012 (0.820)	0.008 (0.851)
EduBack	0.081 (0.119)	0.033 (0.413)
<i>N</i> posted rev	0.345 (0.000)	0.192 (0.000)
IPCJ		0.026 (0.557)
SEF		0.275 (0.000)
TR		0.501 (0.000)
VIFs	1.006–1.050	1.063–1.305
<i>R</i> ²	0.126	0.493
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.115	0.482

Note(s): Dependent variable: OCS
Standardized Beta outside brackets and *p*-values within brackets
Source(s): Authors’ own creation

of group membership in shaping behaviours (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). In this respect, some individuals engage in these actions as a sign of power, i.e. the ability to influence others (Wu *et al.*, 2016). This notion supports the view of customer engagement as a means to exert influence within social networks (Van Doorn *et al.*, 2010).

Regarding the second group, sharing emotions and feelings, some participants have pointed to posting a comment after trying a particular experience, almost as if to try it again. This phenomenon has been called “customer delight” by the marketing literature, suggesting it as a moment of intangible pleasure that the customer searches for again (Arnold *et al.*, 2005). This aligns with the concept of experiential consumption, where customers seek emotional gratification from sharing their positive experiences (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). The same respondents seem to avoid posting when the product or service is not special. Other recurrent elements of this group regard the sharing of personal feelings, sometimes to relive the emotion and posting as a pleasant conclusion to the consumption process. These behaviours are consistent with the self-determination theory, which posits that individuals are motivated to engage in activities that satisfy their intrinsic needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Finally, the third group regards the personal relationship with technology. In fact, a key element that contributes to shape the sharing and non-sharing online posting behaviour is linked to the technological readiness of the individual (Caputo *et al.*, 2019; Macdonald and Uncles, 2007). This finding supports the technology acceptance model, which suggests that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are critical factors in the adoption and use of technology (Davis, 1989). However, for some participants, sharing and non-sharing behaviours are also laziness-dependent. This means that they need motivation and incentives to start the information-sharing process.

Furthermore, the quantitative analysis showed that, while IPCJ does not impact OCS significantly, SEF and TF do. In other terms, it appears that the willingness to share comments online after is particularly driven by the willingness to share emotions and feelings about product and service experience and technological readiness. These findings contribute to the literature on customer engagement by highlighting the emotional and technological dimensions of engagement behaviour, extending existing theories that primarily focus on the dyadic relationship between the customer and the firm (Brodie *et al.*, 2013).

8.2 Implications for theory and practice

This paper contributes to the literature on customer engagement, offering a view on customers' motives for and behaviours of sharing comments and information on e-service platforms and the ones that lead them to avoid sharing processes after consumption. In this regard, customers' opinions, comments and feedback on online platforms are a crucial co-creation tool that must be better understood by companies that aim to be more customer-oriented (Ordenes *et al.*, 2014). These tools allow companies to build knowledge management systems, which enrich the company's intangibles that are useful for innovating and improving their offerings (Scuotto *et al.*, 2017). Despite this, only recently has there been an interest in exploring the motives for and behaviours of sharing and non-sharing processes on e-service platforms. In the specific context of online reviews, which is the context of our analysis and which regards a post-consumption activity, recent studies have found that customers share reviews to gain attention and enhance their reputation (Shen *et al.*, 2015), and some customers share reviews as they did in the past (Moe and Schweidel, 2012).

Our study contributes to the literature, proposing some behaviours and motives that lead traditional customers, who are not serial reviewers, to share comments and feedback on e-platforms. In fact, the previous studies addressing post-consumption reviews focused on serial reviewers' motives, which are driven by opportunistic and strategic behaviours

(Mathwick and Mosteller, 2017; Shen *et al.*, 2015). Accordingly, these reviewers are looking for social benefits. Therefore, we offer empirical research based on interviews conducted directly with people who take different approaches to sharing comments and reviews on online platforms. In fact, some of them actively comment, while others do so on special occasions or never. This means providing a greater picture of sharing and non-sharing motives and behaviours on online platforms, which paves the way to strategic paths for companies embracing digitalization.

Thus, our heterogeneous sample of analysis has allowed us to give a complete picture of the phenomenon. The research contributes to the literature on customer engagement and social media, suggesting that customers' post-consumption sharing motives and behaviours are driven by the willingness to improve the product/service and give justice to customers, the willingness to share feelings and emotions and their technological readiness. The quantitative study involving 347 individuals suggests that, particularly, the willingness to share feelings and emotions and the technological readiness lead to higher sharing attitudes.

We also add to the body of literature on customer knowledge management (Lee *et al.*, 2006; Fidel *et al.*, 2018). We explored and proposed some variable antecedents of customer sharing behaviours and we established the importance of studying the knowledge flows that are increasingly important for a firm's knowledge management (Archer-Brown and Kietzmann, 2018; Sumbal *et al.*, 2019).

From a managerial point of view, this study suggests the importance for companies to take care of their digital relationship with consumers. As stated, the relationship between the customer and the service provider is changing, with growing complex dynamics, oftentimes shaped by new technologies. Thus, there is a need to go beyond the traditional customer-service provider relationship and explore the role of other relationships, factors and features. For example, the experiences of the focal customers and their subsequent behaviours may influence fellow customers' perceptions about the service delivery process and outcomes, especially in a digital service world in which opinions and information are shared easily and steadily. As a result, there is a need for businesses to understand in-depth the reasons why consumers post comments on online platforms, but also the reasons why consumers do not share comments.

In line with our results, therefore, managers must be able to understand the different targets that use their services and products, and the reasons why they post comments on e-service platforms. More specifically, managers should, through big data and digital tools, study who has bought or has used their services, understand their propensity to share comments, their buying habits (products, when they buy, how much, etc.) and develop strategies accordingly. Moreover, this study suggests that, in order to stimulate greater use of platforms, they must be easy and comfortable to use (to cope with customers' technological readiness). In addition, they should make the consumer feel that he/she is really helping someone else with their comments. Finally, it is clear that the growing flow of digital knowledge suggests that online commentary is increasingly important in consumer purchasing decisions. Businesses need to be able to capture this information, process it and improve where they are lacking.

8.3 Limitations and future lines of research

As with any other study, this research has certain limitations that need to be addressed, which also provide directions for future research. Firstly, the method of exploratory analysis limits the generalizability of the results. However, we believe that this method is appropriate to highlight the reality of the facts directly from consumers who are volunteer reviewers and the motivators of their engagement. Future studies could extend these results by adopting quantitative methodologies. In addition, specific relationships could be hypothesized and

empirically tested. Secondly, as heterogeneous as it may be, our sample does not consider consumers who are minors, and only one over 60 has been involved. Future studies may focus on specific age groups, as the age dimension might potentially reveal new motives for and behaviours of sharing comments and information on e-service platforms. Thirdly, our study pointed out that every consumer has his/her own reasons for posting comments on platforms or not doing so. Future studies should focus in-depth on these reasons and try to understand if they are recurrent for certain types of people, consumers or maybe products/services purchased.

Concluding, the approach taken in this study runs counter to the general trend in marketing and management research that strives for highly focused and specialized research. Instead, we purvey the groundwork for emerging research on e-service encounters that is of great importance in today's era for both researchers and practitioners and spans several, hitherto disjointed research areas and cuts across disciplines such as marketing, information management and psychology. We believe that this study shall spark the initiation of interdisciplinary research and provide a basis for which future research to use and further build on.

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Further reading

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