Social Media and E-commerce: a study on motivations for sharing content from E-commerce websites

By

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Biographical Note

Tiago Costa was born on the 3rd of November 1986 in Oporto. He possesses a degree in International Relations by the Universidade do Minho since 2008, a Specialization in European Studies also by the Universidade do Minho since 2009 and a Post-Graduation in Sales and Trade Marketing by the Instituto Português de Administração e Marketing since 2013.

His first professional experience was an internship at the Economic Section (AICEP), of the Portuguese Consulate in Shanghai, between January and July 2010, followed by a short 3-month internship, from September to October 2010 at Moble SA, a company operating in the furniture-manufacturing industry.

Between December 2010 and September 2015 he took the role of Sales Representative at Petratex S.A, one of the most prominent companies in the textile industry in Portugal, with responsibilities in client management and acquisition. From October 2015 until March 2016 he worked as Partner Services Agent at Farfetch, providing support to over 30 partners and from April 2016 until today he plays the role of Senior Brand Services Representative at the Black & White division of Farfetch.
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Abstract
Social media and e-commerce are two inescapable concepts in today’s interconnected world and their intersection proves to be a rich field for research. Several studies have approached the link between social media and e-commerce with different lenses however, the study of motivations for sharing content specifically from e-commerce websites into social media, does not appear to have been thoroughly approached so far and provides fertile ground for further exploration. Understanding the underlying motivations and feelings of individuals towards this particular type of sharing can broaden the knowledge in both the fields of social media and e-commerce. The goal of this study was to uncover through a qualitative methodology, the conduction of a focus group interview of 7 individuals, which motivations serve as a background for individuals sharing intentions of e-commerce content and the results obtained appear to indicate that participants focus more on intrinsic rewards rather than extrinsic ones when sharing, that self-interest is more predominant than reciprocity as a motivator for sharing, one-to-one exchanges are the preferential direction of exchange, websites with cleaner designs and higher usability have a positive impact on sharing intentions, experiences tend to be more likely shared than physical products and that participants are purposeful in their selection of sharing channels. This study contributes to the existing literature about social media users’ motivations through the focus of a more specific context which is e-commerce and also uncover realities that may be useful in a managerial perspective as it can provide insights as to what users of e-commerce consider when or if they share content from these platforms, allowing managers to tailor strategies for better usability and more frequent sharing which may lead to increases in sales.

Keywords: Social Media, E-commerce, Sharing, Motivation, Human Behavior, Focus Group

JEL Codes: D91, L82, L86, C92
Resumo
Social media e e-commerce são dois conceitos incontornáveis no mundo interconectado atual e a interseção de ambos é uma área rica para a investigação. Vários estudos abordam a ligação entre social media e e-commerce de diferentes prismas, no entanto, o estudo específico das motivações para partilha de conteúdos de páginas de e-commerce em social media não aparenta ter sido ainda devidamente desenvolvido e proporciona um campo de estudo fértil para uma exploração mais aprofundada. Compreender as motivações e sentimentos subjacentes dos indivíduos em relação a este tipo particular de partilha pode servir para alargar a base de conhecimento, tanto no campo dos social media, como no campo do e-commerce. O objetivo deste estudo primava por tentar descortinar através de uma metodologia qualitativa, a realização de um focus group com 7 participantes, que motivações servem de base para as intenções de partilha de conteúdos de e-commerce dos indivíduos e os resultados obtidos parecem apontar que os participantes se focam mais em recompensas intrínsecas do que extrínsecas quando partilham, que o interesse-próprio é mais predominante do que a reciprocidade como motivador para a partilha, trocas one-to-one são a forma preferencial de partilha, websites com um design limpo e alta usabilidade têm um impacto positivo nas intenções de partilha, experiências têm maior probabilidade de serem partilhadas do que produtos físicos e que os participantes revelam intencionalidade na seleção dos canais de partilha. Este estudo contribui para a literatura existente acerca das motivações dos utilizadores de social media através do enfoque num contexto específico que é o e-commerce e também revela realidades que poderão ser úteis numa perspetiva de gestão pelo facto de poder proporcionar indícios acerca do que os utilizadores de e-commerce têm em consideração quando ou se partilham conteúdos destas plataformas, permitindo aos gestores organizarem estratégias para gerar um maior número de partilhas o que pode levar a um consequente aumento nas vendas.

Palavras-chave: Social Media, E-commerce, Partilha, Motivação, Comportamento Humano, Focus Group

Códigos JEL: D91, L82, L86, C92
1 - Introduction

The great advancements in the internet in the recent years have made several new systems available to businesses and lead to the emergence of new business models of which social media and online, or virtual, communities are good examples (Lu, Zhao, & Wang, 2010).

The widespread availability of the internet has granted individuals’ access to Social Media allowing people to interact with one another without the need for direct physical meetings (Hajli, 2014) and the rise of the social media phenomenon has significantly altered the ways in which people, communities and organizations communicate and interact (Ngai, Tao, & Moon, 2015) and where customers are dictating the nature, extent and context of marketing exchanges, powered by the transition from traditional web 1.0 model to the highly interactive web 2.0 (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011).

Web 2.0 is a new advancement, which has transferred the internet to a social environment by introducing social media, where individuals can interact and generate content online (Hajli, 2014). The rapid development of social media and of the web 2.0 has brought a considerable potential to transform e-commerce from a product-oriented landscape to a more social and customer-centered environment, and this potential has led to an evolution in e-commerce, through which web 2.0 features, functions and capabilities are being adopted to enhance customer participation, promote relationships and generate more economic value (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013).

The rapid growth e-commerce has experienced in recent years, with online shopping has become a popular method for purchasing goods, and the increasing use of social media towards becoming become one of the most important platforms of communication (Yan et al., 2016), along the realization of the aforementioned potential transformative power that social media has on e-commerce, serve as an interesting backdrop for the development of new studies in these areas, especially in the links between them as it may be that that e-commerce and social media are not so much on parallel lines of development but, rather, pending towards intersection, as both technologies become seamlessly intermingled (Andzulis, Panagopoulos, & Rapp, 2012) This realization is also what motivates the present study whose relevance and objectives we discuss next.
1.1 - Objectives and Relevance of the Study

There have been a considerable number of recent studies in the field of social media theory. Examples in our literature review are the studies of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010); Khang, Ki and Ye (2012); Lin, Li and Wang (2016); Ngai, Tao and Moon (2015); and Weller (2015). The behavior of users in the use of social media is also not under researched with several studies published from different perspectives. Some examples in this case could be the papers from Daugherty, Eastin and Bright (2008), Hess, Lang and Xu (2011); Akrimi and Khemkhem (2012); Whiting and Williams (2013) and Hajli (2014). In addition to these, the links between social media and e-commerce have not been entirely overlooked in the literature with several studies and papers addressing the issue in a wide variety of perspectives. Our review of literature has uncovered several examples from authors such as Lu, Zhao and Wang (2010); Zhao, Truell, Alexander, Sharma and Smith (2013); Huang and Benyoucef (2013); Hajli (2014); and Song and Yoo (2016). However, we believe that the understating of this growing field of study, despite the variety of approaches found in our review, can still be enriched by new contributions with both academic and management applications for companies running e-commerce operations.

Understanding the motivations for sharing content from e-commerce websites into social media networks, as far as our literature review revealed, is a field of knowledge that can be expanded and no studies were found which approached the motivations of users in a specific e-commerce context, i.e., when users are actually browsing e-commerce websites and are offered the possibility to share product and other information on social media channels. Therefore, we believe that going deeper and analyzing usage motivations in a very specific context should provide a new contribution to this field of study. On a more practical side, we believe that it is also in the best interest of companies operating e-commerce websites, to understand what consumers think and what drives them to share content in order to adapt their websites’ content strategically, significantly improving the “shareability” of the content and efficiently using the users social networks to spread the word about products or services promoted by the company.

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1 DISCLAIMER – The fact that we are not aware of any specific studies in this particular area does not necessarily mean that these studies do not exist or are not being undertaken at the time of writing of this document. A certain degree of originality in the approach is assumed but as a growing field of research and considering the relatively limited scope of the literature review we are aware that similar studies in concept or even approach may arise.
The main objective underlying this study is to enrich the field of social media and e-commerce research, by trying to uncover some factors which may explain the motivations of the users of e-commerce to share the content on social media networks. Therefore, we pose the question: “What motivates individuals to share content from e-commerce websites into social-media?”

The research and review of literature conducted, has not revealed specific qualitative studies connecting the behavior of e-commerce users when faced with embedded tools to share those e-commerce websites content on social media and what thoughts, motivations and attitudes underlie sharing activities in an e-commerce specific context. The growing interest in social media and e-commerce as well as the fact that it is still a relatively recent field of study lead us to believe that there is still room for contributions and, with this study, we hope to provide yet more insights into the study of the phenomenon.

1.2 - Structure
This subsection serves as an overview of the overall structure of present study.

Section 2 provides a literature review of the main themes of the study. Topics such as web 2.0, social media, e-commerce, online user behaviors and theories of motivation and human behavior are discussed under this section and the main research questions formulated.

Section 3 provides considerations on methodology selection and describes how the empirical component of this study was conducted.

In Section 4, we provide a deeper analysis of the data collecting during the empirical research by discussing the results, as well as providing insights on the main findings obtained.

Section 5 will be dedicated to the concluding remarks of this study, by addressing conclusions, contributions and limitations of the present study as well as hinting at potential avenues for future research.
2 – Literature Review

The present chapter consists on presenting a systematic review of the literature found on social media, e-commerce and human behavior and motivation theories. The main purpose of this review is to summarize some of the main approaches found in the literature in order to sustain the objectives of the study and uncover potential gaps in the existing knowledge which we will aim at addressing through a series of research questions grounded in existing studies or theories.

2.1 – Web 2.0

The continual growth of web technologies, new web applications and services, and ideas have determined that there are significant differences between the key features of the web today, compared to the key features of the web in the past (Kim, Yue, Hall, & Gates, 2009). Web 2.0 has come to introduce a new dimension to the Internet, opening opportunities to ordinary users to participate through the creation of content (Blank & Reisdorf, 2012). The term “Web 2.0” was originally created in 2004 by Dale Dougherty, a vice-president of O’Reilly Media Inc. during an internal team discussion on a potential future conference about the web (Andersen, 2007). It was intended to distinguish activities from traditional static and passive web pages as a paradigm of dynamic and interactive knowledge creation on the Internet (Shang, Li, Wu, & Hou, 2011) This topic is massive and combines a wide number of elements and addressing the web 2.0 from different angles and with different approaches provides distinct definitions for the topic (Kim et al., 2009). Robust definitions such as the one provided by Constantinides and Fountain (2008) for whom “Web 2.0 is a collection of open-source, interactive and user controlled online applications expanding the experiences, knowledge and market power of the users as participants in business and social processes” (pp. 232-233) are counterbalanced in the literature by more concise ones. Murugesan (2007), for instance, defined it as a collection of technologies, business strategies, and social trends, more interactive in the sense that it allows users to both access content from a website and contribute to it while Shang, Li, Wu and Hou (2011) described the web 2.0 as a network platform on which peers contribute to the development of tools, content, and communities on the Internet. Blank and Reisdorf (2012) provided one of the most concise attempt at clarifying the concept, defining web 2.0 as “using the Internet to provide platforms through which network effects can
emerge” (p. 539). This definition was particularly interesting for our study as the authors approached the concept from a user perspective. According to Blank and Reisdorf (2012) from a user perspective, the web 2.0 has two primary components: It takes advantage of (1)“network effects”, the idea that some things are more valuable when more people participate in a network environment and (2) a component which the author call “platform” in the sense that the web 2.0 creates, through these platforms, simple and reliable environments for users to interact in. Both components are strongly linked, as platforms provide the structure where the network effects can arise if a significant number of individuals find the platform valuable and, combined, they provide fertile ground for new forms of user engagement, communication and information gathering to arise (Blank & Reisdorf, 2012).

As a technology, web 2.0 encourages user participation and derives greatest value when large communities contribute to the content and, although much of this technology is hard combine in a single definition, but it can be acknowledged that the basic concepts behind it revolve around interaction, community and openness (Lytras, Damiani, & de Pablos, 2008).

The technologies of web 2.0 facilitate the co-creation of the value by the buyer and the seller and their link with the interactive nature of social media, which we will discuss in the following section, allows companies to share and exchange the information with the consumers but, it also bestows consumers with the possibility of exchanging information between them, becoming powerful tools through which companies can then create and maintain relations with existing and potential customers (Akrimi & Khemakhem, 2012).

2.2 – Social Media

Social media penetration worldwide is increasing steadily. In 2016, 68.3% of internet users were social media users and it is estimated that, in 2018, there will be around 2.67 billion social media users around the globe, up from 1.91 billion in 2014 (Statista, 2016). Current examples of social media platforms include social networking sites like Facebook, photo sharing sites like Flickr, video sharing sites like YouTube, business networking sites like LinkedIn, micro blogging sites like Twitter, and numerous others. Social media sites are inexpensive and, very frequently, completely free to use (Whiting & Williams, 2013).
Many researchers perceive social media as an ever-changing subject to such an extent as to, for example, by the time a research paper is published, the platform it focuses its study on, may already have changed and with it, so may have its users (Weller, 2015) and, after nearly a decade of social media studies the knowledge about social media users and about why and how people make use of it is still limited (Weller, 2016). Several researchers, coming from different backgrounds, have tried to understand social media usage in a variety of settings, applying, for the purpose, a wide array of methods spanning from surveys and participatory research designs to analyses based on data collected from specific social media platforms (Weller, 2016).

Several definitions of social media have been proposed across several fields, from communication to public relations, information science and mass media, definitions which usually revolve around the notion that social media refers to digital technologies emphasizing user-generated content or interaction (Carr & Hayes, 2015). Definitions however, can vary greatly in length and scope. Russo, Watkins, Kelly, and Chan (2008) provide a simple definition of social media as “those that facilitate online communication, networking, and/or collaboration” (p. 22), whereas Carr and Hayes (2015) approach the concept in a more complex manner, defining it as “Internet-based, disentrained, and persistent channels of masspersonal communication facilitating perceptions of interactions among users, deriving value primarily from user-generated content” (p. 49). This link between social media and user-generated content has also been used by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) in their definition of social media as “a group of Internet – based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (p. 61). This later definition spiked the interest for the context of the present study precisely because of the way it links social media with the concepts of web 2.0, approached in a previous section, and user-generated content, which will be discussed in an ulterior section.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) also approached a classification of social media by social presence and self-disclosure: personal blogs and micro-blogs, social networking sites, virtual worlds, collaborative projects and content communities. It is important to understand that, while social media shares some of the functions of traditional media by providing content to users, there are differences in terms of the relationships between users and the content, since social media users actively participate in producing content.
by submitting links or news stories from various sources and content can be spread across the world within minutes (Song & Yoo, 2016). Although the idea behind social media is not recent or immensely innovative, there still seems to be some confusion on both the management and academic fields as to what exactly should fall under the umbrella of the term and how it differs from the related concepts of web 2.0 and user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media includes a myriad of sources of online information that are created, circulated and used by consumers to educate one another about products, services, and brands available in the marketplace (Whiting & Williams, 2013).

Overall, and of importance for the present study, it is also acknowledged that social media has the power to drive traffic more effectively while being cost effective, enhancing customer loyalty and communication and strengthening brand awareness and also strengthens brand awareness and brand power (Song & Yoo, 2016).

As transpires from the previous two sections, the rapid development of social media and of the web 2.0 has brought a considerable potential to transform e-commerce from a product-oriented landscape to a more social and customer-centered environment, and this potential has led to an evolution in e-commerce, through which web 2.0 features, functions and capabilities are being adopted to enhance customer participation, promote relationships and generate more economic value (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). We will delve into the concept of e-commerce in the next section.

2.3 - E-commerce
The importance and potential of e-commerce has been recognized since the very early stages of its existence. The OECD (1999), has stated that Electronic commerce over the Internet is a new way of conducting business and that it has the potential to drastically alter economic activities and even the social environment. Through the use of e-commerce, companies are able to connect with their trading partners which improves their competitiveness globally (Ngai & Wat, 2002). The emergence of this concept has played an important role in the creation a new marketplace but, pinpointing exactly what constitutes e-commerce is not simple and definitions of e-commerce are varied (Chang, Jackson, & Grover, 2003). Normally, the views of what e-commerce is as a concept depend on the context and research objective of the author (Grandon & Pearson, 2004).
When the term e-commerce was first introduced, it was understood as simple as transactions over the Internet, however, as time passed and e-commerce evolved, the complexity of its scope also broadened eventually becoming associated with the conduct of selling, buying, logistics, or other organization-management activities via the web (Sung, 2006).

Zwass (1996), for instance, provided one of the earliest definitions found in our research, stating that “Electronic commerce is the sharing of business information, maintaining business relationships, and conducting business transactions by means of telecommunications networks” (p. 3).

Kalakota and Whinston (1997), for instance, have approached this subject and the variability of definitions for e-commerce and provided different possible descriptions for the phenomenon based on four different lenses or perspectives. According to these authors, from a (i) communications perspective, e-commerce is the delivery of information, products/services, or payments via telephone lines, computer networks, or any other means; From a (ii) business process perspective, e-commerce is the application of technology toward the automation of business transactions and workflows; From a (iii) service perspective, e-commerce is a tool that addresses the desire of firms, consumers, and management to cut service costs while improving the quality of goods and increasing the speed of service delivery and; from an (iv) online perspective, e-commerce provides the capability of buying and selling products and information on the Internet and other online services.

Even the OECD (2002) in an attempt to provide a clearer view of e-commerce has endorsed two definitions for the concept. These definitions are based on the scope of the approach, one broader and one narrower in which the broader perspective states that electronic transactions correspond to the “sale or purchase of goods or services, whether between businesses, households, individuals, governments, and other public or private organizations, conducted over computer mediated networks” (p. 89), in which the goods and services can be ordered through those networks activities such as payment and delivery of both the goods and/or services can take place either online or offline (OECD, 2002). while the narrow definition is founded in the realization that “An Internet transaction is the sale or purchase of goods or services, whether between businesses, households, individuals, governments, and other public or private
organizations, conducted over the Internet (p. 89). Similarly to the broader definition, payment and delivery of both the goods and/or services can take place either online or offline contexts (OECD, 2002). According to the organization, the method by which the order is placed or received, not the payment or the channel of delivery, determines whether the transaction is an Internet transaction (conducted over the Internet) or an electronic transaction (conducted over computer-mediated networks) (OECD, 2002).

Other authors provide even more definitions for e-commerce. Weill and Vitale (2013) define e-commerce as doing business electronically by completing business processes over open networks and Grandon and Pearson (2004), for instance, provide a more concise definition stating simply that e-commerce is ‘‘the process of buying and selling products or services using electronic data transmission via the Internet and the www’’ (p. 197).

The present section, without aiming at being an extensive review of the concept of e-commerce, is helpful in providing a clearer theoretical view of what e-commerce is. In the next section, and building on the previous sections of the work, we will try to link e-commerce and social media, whose linkage is the foundation of the present study.

2.4 – E-commerce and Social Media Sharing
It is important then, in the context of the present study, to understand how social media and e-commerce concepts are brought together, as the link between both concepts forms one of the underlying premises of this study.

Social media brings big challenges to companies as consumers have evolved from being passive recipients in business transactions (Zhao et al., 2013). With the empowerment given to consumers by social media these have been taking an increasingly active role in co-creating everything from product design to promotional messages. Customers want companies to listen, engage, and respond. (Zhao et al., 2013) However, when companies change their mentality from business-centered to consumer-centered thinking, they can see that social media bring them great opportunities for engaging consumers and listening to them for what they would like and need. (Zhao et al., 2013) As consumers spend more of their time on social media, purchase decisions have become highly influenced by interactions through these networks, a fact which has lead

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2 Author’s note: “www” stands as an acronym for World Wide Web. Due to the fact that it has been used in this text as a direct quotation, it was decided to leave the original term/acronym in the text.
businesses to place more emphasis on marketing strategies which focus on two-way communication platforms to reach online consumers and take advantage of word-of-mouth (Song & Yoo, 2016). Internet-based social media are quickly merging into the domain of e-commerce as a wide range of applications has been adopted on e-commerce platforms because internet-based social media provide online retailers great opportunities to build their brand, and to promote and sell their products (Qu, Wang, Wang, & Zhang, 2013). As a reflection of the growth of social media, commercial websites have shifted from a unidirectional information provider format (web 1.0) to multidirectional collaborative web technologies (web2.0) (Aluri, Slevitch, & Larzelere, 2015).

Social media and the web 2.0 have provided a huge potential to transform e-commerce into a more organized environment. The web 2.0’s open structure allows for the creation and exchange of user-generated content and both these concepts (discussed above), embedded into e-commerce, allow consumers to join and interact with others through the sharing of information and has reshaped these customers information seeking and sharing behavior (Isa, Salleh, & Aziz, 2016). The impacts of web 2.0 on e-commerce encompass both business outcomes and social interaction between customers in the sense that, besides directly influencing business transactions, it can also provide opportunities to strengthen relationships with customers, increase traffic into company websites and also support product and brand development (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). Within such an environment, customers have access to social knowledge and experiences which allow them to assess their online purchase purposes and help them in making more informed purchase decisions while, at the same time, businesses are given information on the customers’ behaviors and shopping experiences, which can be used to enhance their business strategies (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). As mentioned, to accommodate the growth of social media, commercial websites have shifted from a unidirectional information provider format (web 1.0) to multidirectional collaborative web technologies (web 2.0) and starting embedding links to social Media channels (Aluri et al., 2015). This practice can be considered as part the construct of social embeddedness which, as described by Hess, Lang and Xu (2011) refers to the extent to which organizations can be “connected to other actors other actors via linkages of a social network or the extent to which human action of consumers (including their
economic behavior) takes place within a web of social attachments such as friendship and kinship.” (p. 157).

Today it is fairly simple for website administrators to add several social sharing buttons on their web pages such as Facebook “Share” or Twitter “Tweet this”. With hundreds of social networking sites all over the world currently and in order to facilitate the sharing of videos, news, information or online products with their friends via their preferred channels, several companies aggregate social sharing buttons and provide a simple widget for websites. These social sharing widgets always contain most popular social networking sites and traditional sharing media such as email for instance (Y. Liu & Sutanto, 2011).

A recent study by Cappel and Zhenyu (2017) on the presence of social media through a content analysis of INC. 5000 company websites indicates that more than two-thirds of the companies had a social media presence on the home page of their websites, with an average of 3.63 social media elements on their home pages. The same study shows that companies in the retail, travel, advertising and marketing, software, and consumer products and services industries showed the highest social media presence on their websites, while engineering, manufacturing, and construction companies had the lowest.

Of interest to the present study, Cappel and Zhenyu’s (2017) results also reveal that that companies whose websites contained e-commerce capabilities had both a significantly higher social media presence and social media magnitude than companies whose websites did not possess this capability.

The acknowledgment of such a reality leads us to try and understand how e-commerce websites use these embedded social media tools and, more specifically, how customers view these tools and what are the underlying motivations to share content on e-commerce websites on social media platforms. We understand sharing in the context of this work as described by Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011) as representing the “extent to which users exchange, distribute and receive content” (p. 245). Sharing is a way of interacting in social media but the impact of this activity on the users will to convert or even to build relationships with one another depends on the functional objective of the specific social media platform (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). Sharing on social networking sites can generate traffic back to the websites from where the sharing takes place, as when an individual shares a
web page on Facebook, for instance, his or her friends can see this link and it is possible for them to follow the link directing to those web pages (Liu & Sutanto, 2011). In the e-commerce environment, the web 2.0 and social media shift market power from companies to customers, who are looking for more social and interactive ways to stimulate engagement and provides them with new approaches to interact with both marketers and communities of peers at the same time (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013).

It is then undeniable that e-commerce and social media concepts are connected and that they provide fertile field to develop several types of research. In the proposed study, as mentioned in the introductory chapter we intend to delve into the motivations of users to share content from e-commerce websites onto social media platforms. We assume then that the sharing action is rooted in the volition of the users to do so and as such, it is a behavioral response to those volitions. Also, of interest for the present study, we have previously established the patent connections between social media and e-commerce, powered by the web 2.0 and the concept of user-generated content.

However, because individual motivations can vary significantly, consumers may decide to create user-generated content for different reasons (Daugherty et al., 2008). Previous research has also explored topics associated with user-generated content such as customer engagement, electronic word-of-mouth, online brand reputation management, customer relationship management, and social network analysis (Hazari, Bergiel, & Sethna, 2016). Of these, we find electronic word of mouth of particular relevance for this study as due to its connection to “sharing” activities. Therefore, we find important explore the field of online user behaviors, with the main focus on the concepts of both user-generated content and the topic of electronic word-of-mouth.

2.5 – Online user behaviors
2.5.1 – User-generated Content
The Internet has, due to its own nature, provided a good platform for the creation of content and file sharing applications and has increasingly become a highly personalized information space allowing consumers to tailor their media exposure to their specific needs and desires (Daugherty et al., 2008). User-generated content (UGC) may be seen as content coming from regular people who, voluntarily, contribute data, information, or media that then appears before other people in a useful or entertaining way, usually on the web (Krumm, Davies, & Narayanaswami, 2008). O’Hern and Kahle (2013) provide
an interesting definition of the concept of UGC as original contributions, created by users “which are expressed in a number of different media (such as physical objects, sound recordings, computer code, and graphic designs), and are widely shared with other users and/or with firms.” (p. 22) UGC is, then, created by consumers rather than paid professionals and can involve a wide variety of online channels (Poch & Martin, 2015). A more technical description of what UGC is, is provided by OECD (2007) which deconstructs the concept in three main constituents and describes it as being (i) content made publicly available over the Internet, (ii) which reflects a certain amount of creative effort, and (iii) which is created outside of professional routines and practices. Some authors, like Chritodoulides, Jevons and Bonhomme (2012) however, consider this definition has a few gaps as some UGC is, according to them, not completely public and is available only to designated communities while citing the Internet as the only publication medium, which limits the range of the definition. It is interesting to consider how user-generated content is linked to the concept of Word-of- Mouth (WOM). Many e-commerce platforms allow consumers to post their WOM on products on e-commerce websites in order to share their view preferences or experiences, which makes WOM a valuable informational tool that helps consumers evaluate the quality of products or act as effective recommendations (Z. Lin, 2014).

According to Poch and Martin (2015), existing literature defines WOM communication between consumers as being informal, interpersonal, without any direct marketer participation or commercial bias and connected to the evaluation of goods and services. From this definition we can see a direct link with UCG which is also informal, interpersonal, between consumers, and lacks marketer participation. However, it is key to understand that, although UGC is closely aligned, and many times, confused with, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (E-WOM), both terms diverge from one another depending on whether the content is being generated by users (UGC) or being instead conveyed (E-WOM), by them (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). It is, therefore, important in the context of this present study, to delve deeper into the concept of WOM and, more specifically, the concept of E-WOM.

2.5.2 - Electronic Word-Of-Mouth
The weight of WOM in marketing theory and practice is undeniable and it acquires a new significance in today’s world, where digital technology and interconnectedness are a reality (Hornik, Shaanan Satchi, Cesareo, & Pastore, 2015). It is unquestionable that
the Internet is a powerful medium to transmit WOM which forms a significant and dynamic part of online communication at an interpersonal level (Sun, Youn, Wu, & Kuntaraporn, 2006).

The traditional concept of WOM is normally associated with proximity and traditionally takes place in a more private environment, in which social and contextual cues influence participants directly, whereas E-WOM’s setting is more visible and complex, and unravels itself in a computer-mediated environment, supported by online communities (King, Racherla, & Bush, 2014). Typical or traditional WOM communication also consists on the face-to-face exchange of spoken words between individuals in a given situation while, on the other end, E-WOM usually involves the transmission of personal experiences and opinions through written words (Sun et al., 2006). Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, and Gremler (2004) defined E-WOM as 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. E-WOM can be articulated in many different forms such as opinions, online ratings, feedback, reviews, comments and experience sharing on the internet and through many different channels which range from blogs to discussion forums as well as online retailers and social networking sites (Mishra & Satish, 2016). When compared to traditional WOM, E-WOM can be more influential due to increased speed and convenience, broader reach and exclusion of human constraints which can arise from face-to-face communication (Sun et al., 2006).

Incidentally, E-WOM is considered as one of the most useful information sources by consumers due to the fact that it consists of peer opinions and experiences instead of company-generated information (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Other individual’s opinions and recommendations play a very important and effective role in shaping and the pervasiveness of the online medium nowadays significantly increases the power of WOM (Hornik et al., 2015). The influence of E-WOM on purchase intention for instance has long been known and studied by researchers, however, due to its relative novelty, less attention seems to have been given to the influence of E-WOM in social media, which allows for the exchange of user generated content enriched by visual tools like pictures and videos (Erkan & Evans, 2016).
**Positive and Negative E-WOM**

The popularity and importance of online communication and E-WOM has become relevant in the context of e-commerce in the sense that both generate information for potential customers in an unprecedented scale and with a great diffusion speed, that can lead to a sense of trust (Chang & Wu, 2014). Many e-commerce websites actively encourage their customers to produce E-WOM actually based on this increased sense of trust in potential customers, turning E-WOM into a viable marketing strategy for attracting new customers and retaining existing ones (Yoo, Sanders, & Moon, 2013). In this perspective it should also be noted that the type of WOM, whether positive or negative, also have a very powerful effect on behavior (Alexandrov, Lilly, & Babakus, 2013). Individuals have a tendency to seek information before making some decisions. Positive information can lead to more positive attitudes and increase purchase intention, for instance, whereas negative information can have the opposite effect, generating a negativity-oriented attitude which impacts purchase intention reversely (Chang & Wu, 2014). In particular, negative WOM communication can have an adverse effect in attitudes and purchasing intentions of customers and a firm’s brand image, which can lead to undesirable long-term outcomes, such as brand dilution, volatility in stock returns and the overall erosion of firm value (Balaji, Khong, & Chong, 2016) Nevertheless, if consumers are not willing to accept these negative messages nothing will change despite their exposure to a negative e-WOM message (Chang & Wu, 2014).

Customers experiencing very high levels of both satisfaction or dissatisfaction are also more likely to share experiences than customers with more neutral opinions (Alexandrov et al., 2013). Human beings have a natural tendency to share emotional experiences with others and the social environment in which they live, motivates the expression of emotions with other people around them in order to obtain help and support, vent, bond or achieve some sort of validation (Kim, Wang, Maslowska, & Malthouse, 2016).

By this stage it is clear that the concepts of user-generated content and E-WOM inextricably connected and, as seen above, E-WOM is particularly interesting for us because of the link it appears to have to “sharing” in the sense that, as Cheong and Morrison (2008) put it, is defined by the conveying of content rather than its creation. It is this conveying of content which interests us and, in particular, the motivations which may precede this behavior. In this sense, it becomes essential to explore precisely the
field of motivation and behavior, to unravel possible avenues of enquiry in this study. The approach to motivation and behavior and how it can be applied to the present investigation will take place in the following section.

2.6 – Theories of Human Behavior and Motivation

Viewing E-WOM, for instance, as a conversation between two sources implies a need to understand the process involved in the transmission of information from person to person (Ho & Dempsey, 2010). Previous studies on areas related to the forwarding of information online, in which websites and blogs were the main focus, the forwarding of messages has mainly been influenced by motivation to share, without which information flow is hindered, and also by individual cognitive and social influences (Chih-Yu, Hsi-Peng, & Chao-Ming, 2015).

There has also been a significant number of theories and models applied in the field of social media research to study the socio-psychological behavior of social media users and other stakeholders, such as marketing people and customers (Ngai et al., 2015). For the purpose of the current review, we will refer to the work of Ngai, Tao and Moon (2015) and their review of the main theories used on social media research from 2002 to 2011. The authors have identified three main groups of theories (summarized in Table 1, adapted from the authors’ work) used in the field of social media Research: (i) Personal Behavior Theories, aimed at explaining the behavior of human beings at a personal/individual level; (ii) Social Behavior Theories, attempting to explain individuals’ behavior toward social media in a social context and; (iii) Mass Communication Theories, whose purpose lies in understanding the influence of Mass communication on people’s behavior (Ngai et al., 2015).
Table 1 - Theories and models used in Social Media research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Behavior Theories</th>
<th>Social Behavior Theories</th>
<th>Mass Communication Theories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attribution theory</td>
<td>Cognitive map</td>
<td>Media richness theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaboration likelihood model</td>
<td>Effectuation process</td>
<td>Para-social interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation and disconfirmation paradigm</td>
<td>Involvement process</td>
<td>Uses and gratifications theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal-directed behavior model</td>
<td>Justice theory</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hofstede’s theory of cultural difference</td>
<td>Social capital theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personality traits</td>
<td>Social Exchange theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychological choice model</td>
<td>Social identity theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk perception theory</td>
<td>Social influence theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social cognitive theory</td>
<td>Social interaction theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Switching behavior</td>
<td>Social loafing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task-technology fit model</td>
<td>Social network analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology acceptance model (TAM)</td>
<td>Social power</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of planned behavior (TPB)</td>
<td>Social ties</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Theory of reasoned action (TRA)</td>
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</table>

Source: Adapted from Ngai et al. (2015)

For the purpose of the current study, we will follow a combination of theoretical models that should allow us to get a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon at hand. Although the main focus is on motivations behind the intentions to share content from e-commerce websites into social media, we believe that motivation theory should be complemented with behavior theories, which should aid in giving a more robust theoretical background for the formulation of research questions as well as to the analysis of the data generated in the Focus group interviews. Therefore, the adopted approach will be based on concepts extracted from the Social Cognitive Theory, Social Exchange Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory which, combined, should provide a solid background for the understanding of behavior on a Personal and Social levels (Social Cognitive and Social Exchange Theories), as well as providing a view of how individuals act in the context of the potential for Mass communication offered by the internet (Uses and Gratifications Theory). These approaches, as mentioned above, will be combined with concepts from Motivation theory. According to Oh and Syn (2015), an analysis on the study of motivations reveals that there are three fundamental theories/models that have been widely adopted in research on the topic: i) Maslow’s hierarchy of needs ii) the Intrinsic and Extrinsic motivation model and iii) Herzberg’s two factor theory. In the present study, we will apply the Intrinsic and Extrinsic...
motivations approach to help us understand what can lead individuals to share content from e-commerce websites on social media.

2.6.1 - Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation
Most theories of motivation look at the concept as a unitary phenomenon yet, a deeper analysis about this suggests that motivation is hardly a unitary phenomenon and individuals possess not only different amounts, but also different kinds of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). This means that individuals possess not only different levels of motivation (higher or lower levels), but also different orientations of motivation (distinct types of motivation) (Ryan & Deci, 2000a) Orientation of motivation in connected to the underlying attitudes and goals that generate action or, to simply, as to “why” an action is undertaken (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

Intrinsic motivation is defined as performing an action or activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequence (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). i.e. when the individual performs this activity or action receiving no apparent reward besides the performance of the activity itself (Deci, 1971). In this sense, although Intrinsic motivation exists within individuals, it also exists between individuals and activities since people can be intrinsically motivated to perform certain activities in detriment of others and, in reality, many activities performed by most individuals are not necessarily intrinsically motivated (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). This introduces the concept of Extrinsic motivation, a construct which arises whenever an activity is done in order to attain some separable outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2000a) Extrinsic motivation contrasts with intrinsic motivation, which refers to doing an activity for the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself (Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Extrinsic motivation, according to Ryan and Deci (2000a) comes increasingly into play as individuals age, right after early childhood, since the level of freedom to act based on intrinsic motivation starts to be restrained by social demands and roles that require individuals to assume responsibility for non-intrinsically interesting tasks.

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation focuses then on the rewards given in response to particular actions where both internal and external rewards stimulate individuals’ willingness to perform actions (Oh & Syn, 2015).

Therefore, on the basis of motivations, we propose the following research question:
RQ1 – What types of internal and external rewards motivate individuals to share content from e-commerce websites into social media platforms?

Yoo, Sanders and Moon (2013), in their study on how electronic word of mouth influences the online shopping patterns of customers, found that both intrinsic and extrinsic motives have a significant impact on E-WOM participation and that it should be possible to motivate customers to participate in E-WOM by stimulating their intrinsic motives through, for instance, advertising E-WOM participation as ‘kind’ and ‘benevolent’ behavior, but also by promoting extrinsic motives through more external compensations. In this sense, Intrinsic motives lead to E-WOM participation because of their association with positive sensations of enjoyment, friendship, and pleasantness, whereas Extrinsic motives can be promoted by offering monetary benefits, such as gift certificates, other prizes (Yoo et al., 2013). In line with these findings Liu, Cheung and Lee (2016), in their study on information sharing behavior on social commerce sites, did note that individuals who feel good about helping others can be more disposed to share information online without expecting direct rewards in return remarking, however, that the results of their study appear to indicate that extrinsic rewards maybe more important than intrinsic returns to motivate information sharing in the context of SCSs. Intrinsic motivation implies, then, a level of self-encouragement or self-interest in a given activity and also that individuals perform actions because they like to do them, while Extrinsic motivation is, by and large, imposed by external parties and may include a variety of types of external rewards, such as monetary or non-monetary incentives (Oh & Syn, 2015). Research on E-WOM incentives is still scarce and although empyrical examinations of monetary E-WOM marketing actions found that monetary incentives appear to be an effective management tool for increasing the likelihood of online recommendations, these incentives also appear have potential negative consequences (Reimer & Benkenstein, 2016). Monetary rewards invoke market-pricing norms following which the amount of compensation has a direct impact on the level of effort and they seem to prime people towards business transactions rather than social relationships and the latter tend to suffer with the introduction of money (Jin & Huang, 2014).
This dicotomy between the role of external rewards and/or positive internal sensations of enjoyment in individuals leads us to formulate two supporting questions to help us guide the discussion in the Focus Group context:

**Support Question A - Would the existence of monetary rewards such as discounts, vouchers, free gifts, etc encourage you to share content from e-commerce websites into any social media platform you use?**

**Support Question B - Would you consider any level of personal satisfaction could arise from sharing content from e-commerce websites into social media platforms? Examples may include recognition by peers, help a friend, establish a personal position or opinion.**

### 2.6.2 Social Exchange Theory

Exchange theory, deriving from economics’ rational choice theory and the study of relationships and exchanges, states that individuals weigh different courses of action in order to obtain the best possible value at the lowest possible cost in any transaction (Hall, 2003). Social exchange however, differs from strictly economic exchange in several ways, one of the most striking being that social exchange entails unspecified obligations, whereas economic exchanges requests stipulated conditions (Blau, 1964).

Social Exchange Theory views exchange as a social behavior that may, nonetheless, result in both economic and social outcomes and in which individuals build new associations and maintain existing ones because they expect doing so will prove to be rewarding for them (Lambe, Wittmann, & Spekman, 2001) and, even though economic rewards cannot be disregarded and have a certain degree of importance, social rewards (examples may include emotional satisfaction, spiritual values, pursuit of personal advantage, and humanitarian ideals) tend to be valued to a greater extent (Lambe et al., 2001). Constant, Kiesler, and Sproull (1994) developed a theory of information sharing on the basis of the Social Exchange theory in which it was emphasized a relationship between people’s attitudes towards information sharing and factors such as organizational culture, politics, and personal factors as well as indentifying two main factors – self-interest and reciprocity – as core reasons for information sharing within organizations (Oh & Syn, 2015).
All forms of social exchange occur within structures of mutual dependence, that is, structures in which actors are mutually, or reciprocally, dependent on one another for valued outcomes and where the mutual or reciprocal dependence can be either direct or indirect. (Molm, Collett, & Schaefer, 2007). According to Social Exchange theory, reciprocity can be considered as a behavioral response to perceived kindness and unkindness, where kindness comprises both distributional fairness as well as fairness intentions and there is a large body of evidence which indicates that reciprocity is a powerful determinant of human behavior (Surma, 2016)

In traditional Social Exchange theory, reciprocity is interpreted as a one-to-one relationship. However, in a social environment the relationship is expanded from one-to-one to one-to-many in a phenomenon called generalized reciprocity (in which, an individual helps others, but does not expect to receive help in return from a specific person believing instead that someone in the community would help him/her later, should a need arise) has been deemed to act as a very important factor in motivating individuals to partake in knowledge sharing in various types of virtual communities (Oh & Syn, 2015). In forms of exchange with direct reciprocity (direct or restricted exchange), two actors exchange resources with each other. In forms of exchange with indirect reciprocity (indirect or generalized exchange), the recipient of benefit does not return benefit directly to the giver, but to another actor in the social circle (Molm et al., 2007)

In online settings, reciprocity tends to be generalized, meaning that this type of reciprocity refers to the tendency to reciprocate another’s action, not by directly rewarding the benefactor, but by helping another actor implicated with the benefactors, i.e. part of their social network, in a social exchange (Feng & Ye, 2016).

Important though as the phenomenon of reciprocity is for the purpose of the present study, it is also essential to consider the role played by self-interest. As Pelaprat and Brown (2012) suggested, social phenomena are often interpreted as a dilemma between individual rationality (which consists in doing what is best for oneself) and collective rationality (acting in a way that may eventually return a benefit). In their views, online behavior can therefore be considered “social” to the extent in which self-interest motivates collaboration and meaningful so far as utility explains our actions (Pelaprat & Brown, 2012).
But what is the measure of reciprocity versus self-interest that comes into play when deciding to share content from e-commerce websites into social media? Both concepts arise then as dimensions we would like to explore in our study, which leads us to formulate the following research question:

**RQ2 – When sharing content from e-commerce websites with one or many individuals, do people act based on self-interest, reciprocating a similar behavior towards them or, do they act based on the concept of generalized reciprocity?**

The directness or indirectness of reciprocity also implies two additional, related structural differences: whether exchange is dyadic (direct exchanges, between two parties, in which reciprocity is direct and each actor is dependent only on one another) or collective (collective exchanges, between more than two actors, in which reciprocity is indirect, and each actor is dependent—directly or indirectly—on all other actors in the chain of indirect reciprocity) (Molm et al., 2007).

This raises the question of how direct or indirect reciprocity dimensions affect the sharing behaviors of people and, in order to clarify this dimension and successfully approach the concepts mentioned in RQ2 we propose the following support question:

**Support Question C – When sharing content from e-commerce websites are individuals more prone to engage in more direct (one-to-one) or indirect (one-to-many) exchanges and why?**

The concept of Self-interest is an interesting one for the purpose of this study but it can also cause some confusion as to its actual meaning in the context of the present study. The role of self-interest as a motivator for human behavior has been widely discussed with most major theories of human behavior pointing towards it as the primary driver for human endeavors (A. Kim, 2014)

Self-interest is deeply connected to Rational Choice Theory, with one of it’s key assumptions being that individuals are goal-directed and that all social phenomena can be explained as the aggregation of discrete, isolated decisions made by individuals (Pelaprat & Brown, 2012)
The three most commonly used definitions of self-interest used in social sciences are I) the motivation to maximize material resources, promote one’s health and to minimize material harm and avoid harm to one’s health, II) the hedonistic motive to pursue feeling good and avoid feeling bad, and III) the psychological impact of being involved in a particular outcome (Kim, 2014). These three perspectives on the self-interest are quite diverse, probably contributing to the perception that all behaviors can be self-interested (Kim, 2014) and one can always deduce, if necessary, self-interest from anything anybody does (Pelaprat & Brown, 2012).

The purpose of this study is not to delve too deep in the concept or definitions of what Self-interest truly is but, as mentioned above, this construct surely has a role to play in human motivations which are central to this study. Therefore we propose the following support question which should guide the conversation not in the direction of epistemological clarification of what a Self-interest motivated behavior is but, instead, aims to veer it towards the natural perceptions the participants may have on what is, for them, self-interest and how it may motivate them to share content from e-commerce websites:

**Support Question D – Which examples of self-interested motives, from material rewards, to hedonic pursuits, to direct impact on their lives do people consider would make them more prone to share content from e-commerce websites into social media?**

### 2.6.3 - Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory (SCT) (Bandura, 1989; Wood & Bandura, 1989) is a widely accepted model for validating individual behavior, in which, contextual factors, personal factors, and behavior act as interacting relationships (Lin, Hung, & Chen, 2009)

SCT is founded on the premise that environmental influences such as social pressures or unique situational characteristics, cognitive and other personal factors including personality as well as demographic characteristics, and behavior are reciprocally determined (Compeau & Higgins, 1995). This implies a triangular relationship model in which individuals, besides the fact that they are able to choose the environment in which they exist, are also influenced by that environment, signifying that behavior in a given situation is affected by situational or environmental factors, which, in turn, can be also influenced by the individual’s behavior and, finally, this very behavior is also
influenced by cognitive and personal factors pertaining to the individuals (Compeau & Higgins, 1995).

As such, SCT explains psychosocial functioning in terms of triadic reciprocal causation by applying a model of reciprocal determinism in which behavior, cognitive, and other personal factors and environmental events operate as interacting forces that influence each other bi-directionally (Wood & Bandura, 1989). This reciprocity does not necessarily mean that the various sources of influence are equaled in strength nor that they occur in a simultaneous fashion, as it takes time for a causal factor to exert and activate reciprocal influences but, due to this bi-directionality it can be said that individuals operate as both products and producers of their environment (Wood & Bandura, 1989). Figure 1 below exemplifies this construct of triadic reciprocal causation in a visual manner.

Figure 1 - Visual representation of the Triadic reciprocal causation construct.

SCT then subscribes to a model of emergent interactive agency (Bandura, 1989) in which individuals are neither fully autonomous agents nor simply mechanical conveyers of environmental influences but instead, they contribute to their own motivation in a reciprocal manner and any attempt to identify the determinants of human action should, forcefully, include self-generated influences as a contributing factor (Bandura, 1989).

Although the SCT comprises several different factors influencing individual’s behavior, our study will focus on the External Environment dimension. Through their actions,
people create as well as select environments and environmental influences, in turn, partly determine which forms of behavior are developed and activated (Bandura, 1989).

In the context of this study, we understand External Environment in the sense of, not only the social environment in which individuals interact, but especially in the environmental cues of the e-commerce environment such as the design of the websites and the possibilities these offer users to easily share their contents on other channels as well as the typology of the e-commerce medium in terms of products and services involved. Empirical evidence suggests that most of the products discussed on the internet are mostly search goods (examples include consumer electronics, house appliances, and vehicles) and experience goods (like hotels, restaurants or movies) (Tsao & Hsieh, 2015). Under the thematic of e-commerce, it is also of importance to lend attention to aesthetics in website interface design as an important predictor of customer’s emotions, perception, and action toward the website, as well as to how this area serves as an enhancer of user experience (Deng & Poole, 2012).

We aim to understand how the external environment, in this case the design and usability aspects of e-commerce websites can generate different behaviors and intentions to share content. We therefore ask:

RQ3 – How are the content sharing intentions and behaviors of individuals affected by e-commerce website characteristics such as website design and product/service typologies?

As mentioned above, search and experience products appear to be discussed at length on the internet and this may likely be due to the fact that consumers possess more objective indicators to judge these types of products with, which may, ultimately, motivate them to share their opinions via E-WOM (Tsao & Hsieh, 2015). Related to this fact it was also noted by Chen and Berger (2016) that products and information which stir up more interest, arouse more emotion and arousal or contain more useful information get shared more. Bearing this in mind, and for the purpose of this study, we can formulate a new supporting question:

Support Question E - What sort of products make or would make you more prone to share their information through a social media platform? For instance, would there be
difference between fashion items and consumer electronics or experience products such as restaurants or hotels?

Website interface design is, as discussed previously, an important factor to consider for the purpose of this study. The concept of usability acquires, in this context, a special place to be analyzed. Usability is the most traditional concept in human computer interface (HCI) research and can be defined as a measurable component of a product's user interface that exists to some degree (Green & Pearson, 2011). The success of B2C websites is directly affected by their usability and it can be considered that businesses with B2C websites with high levels of usability possess a competitive edge (Ling & Salvendy, 2013). Green and Pearson proposed in one of their studies on usability (2011) that design specific usability attributes such as design credibility, content, interactivity, navigability, and responsiveness play an important role in the online shopping experience. In this study, and under the context of the interface design, we consider this importance and the dimension that usability can have in users’ intentions to share content from e-commerce websites into social media. Therefore, we postulate the following support question to Research Question 3:

Support Question F - What sort of website design or usability characteristics make or would make it easier - or harder - for you to consider sharing their contents into social media networks?

2.6.4 - Uses and Gratification Theory

The Uses and Gratifications (U&G) paradigm was originally developed and applied by researchers in the field of communications with the goal to understand people’s motivations towards the usage of different media (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearson, 2004).

U&G proposes that communication behavior is goal-oriented and purposeful and that individuals’ rely on their needs, wants or expectations, and take social and psychological factors into account, when deciding to select or participate in media messages (Chen, 2011).

Research has revealed that seeking out media in a goal-directed fashion is, more often than not, a way for individuals to fulfill a core set of motivations, which are also helpful in understanding why consumers might participate in virtual communities (Dholakia et al., 2004). U&G’s main elements therefore include both the psychological and social
environments, individuals’ needs and motives to communicate, the media and people’s expectations about the media as well as functional alternatives to using the media, communication behavior and the consequences of that same behavior (Rubin, 2009).

While previously the notion of “media” was connected to a handful of mass communication tools such as newspapers, radio, television, and film, the current academic conception of media is broader, and reflects the proliferation of new communication technologies in recent times as media today can range from a plethora of devices (smart phones, robots) to channels (Internet, cable) to venues on those channels (social networking sites, home shopping network) and/or devices (smartphone apps), affording users the ability to not only interact with these “media” (human-computer interaction) but also interact through them to communicate with other users (computer-mediated communication) (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

According to Rubin (2009) U&G’s contemporary perspective is based on five main assumptions: (i) Communication behavior, including the acts of selecting and usage of the media, is goal-oriented, purposive and motivated; (ii) Audience members are active participants who initiate the selection and use of communication vehicles; (iii) Social and psychological factors are important in the sense that they serve as guides, filters or mediators of behavior; (iv) The media are in direct competition with other functional alternatives of communication such as interpersonal interaction for selection, attention and use to gratify individual’s needs or wants and; (v) Although not always, people tend to be more influential than the media in this context, and more often than not, individual initiative mediates both patterns and consequences of media use.

The U&G perspective, therefore, views individuals as purposive and active and selecting media based on their needs, at the core of which we may find core motivations such as obtaining information, entertainment, social interaction and understanding their own personal identities (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001).

The U&G theory allows us then to extract some interesting perspectives that could be applied in several ways to the present study. Nevertheless, we will focus on the first assumption described above which postulates that individuals’ selection and usage of the media, is goal-oriented, purposive and motivated. Considering the greatly varied offer of different channels to communicate and share content online directly from e-commerce websites available today, we believe it is important to understand the
underlying motives and preferences of means through which users’ forward their messages. If this selection, as Rubin (2009) states is “goal-oriented, purposive and motivated” then we aim to understand:

RQ4 – Which channels individuals commonly prefer to share content from e-commerce websites and how purposive is the selection of these channels?

The application of U&G to the study of social media content on engagement behaviors recognizes he interactive nature of the media and the active nature of customers in their decision-making and selection of media is consistent with the social media context, where customers choose not only to consume but to engage with the media (Dolan, Conduit, Fahy, & Goodman, 2016). Berger and Iyengar (2013) noted that while it is patent that WOM has an important impact on consumer behavior, not much is known about how the medium consumers choose to communicate through affects products or brands they mention. Individuals online can select what sort of media they want to use very easily and the U&G can help explain how an active audience or users would seek out a computer-mediated medium to gratify a psychological need (Chen, 2011).

This leads us to ponder then that, if an individual has a plethora of channels or mediums to choose from on the internet, and if this is also true in the context of the various social media available, which channels would individuals pick preferentially? Thus we propose the following support question:

Support Question G - When or if you would share content from e-commerce websites which channels would you select preferentially? (This may be specific social media platforms or communication tools like, for instance, e-mail or Whatsapp).

Table 2 below summarizes the aforementioned research questions and respective theoretical approaches which will frame this study and Table 3 provides an overview of how the main research questions are linked to the support questions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Theory Group</th>
<th>Theoretical Domain</th>
<th>Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1 What types of internal and external rewards motivate individuals to share content from e-commerce websites into social Media platforms?</td>
<td>Motivation Theories</td>
<td>Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation</td>
<td>Deci, 1971 Ryan &amp; Deci, 2000a Ryan &amp; Deci, 2000b Oh &amp; Syn, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ2 When sharing content from e-commerce websites with one or many individuals, do people act based on self-interest, reciprocating a similar behavior towards them or, do they act based on the concept of generalized reciprocity?</td>
<td>Social Behavior Theories</td>
<td>Social Exchange Theory</td>
<td>Blau, 1964 Constant, Kiesler, &amp; Sproull, 1994 Lambe, Wittmann, &amp; Spekman, 2001 Hall, 2003 Molm, Collet &amp; Schaefer, 2007 Oh &amp; Syn, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ3 How are the content sharing intentions and behaviors of individuals affected by e-commerce website characteristics such as website design and product/service typologies?</td>
<td>Personal Behavior Theories</td>
<td>Social Cognitive Theory</td>
<td>Bandura, 1989 Wood &amp; Bandura, 1989 Compeau &amp; Higgins, 1995 M.-J. J. Lin, Hung, &amp; Chen, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ4 Which channels individuals commonly prefer to share content from e-commerce websites and how purposive is the selection of these channels?</td>
<td>Mass-communication Theories</td>
<td>Uses and Gratifications Theory</td>
<td>Flanagin &amp; Metzger, 2001 Dholakia, Bagozzi, &amp; Pearo, 2004 Rubin, 2009 Chen, 2011 Sundar &amp; Limperos, 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author
### Table 3 - Main Research Questions and Related Support Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Support Question</th>
<th>Literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ1</strong> What types of internal and external rewards motivate individuals to share content from e-commerce websites into Social Media platforms?</td>
<td><strong>SQ A</strong> Would the existence of monetary rewards such as discounts, vouchers, free gifts, etc encourage you to share content from e-commerce websites into any social media platform you use?</td>
<td>Yoo, Sanders &amp; Moon, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>SQ B</strong> Would you consider any level of personal satisfaction could arise from sharing content from e-commerce websites into social media platforms? Examples may include recognition by peers, help a friend, establish a personal position or opinion.</td>
<td>Liu, Cheung &amp; Lee, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Oh &amp; Syn, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ2</strong> When sharing content from e-commerce websites with one or many individuals, do people act based on self-interest or reciprocating a similar behavior towards them?</td>
<td><strong>SQ C</strong> When sharing content from E-commerce websites are individuals more prone to engage in more direct (one-to-one) or indirect (one-to-many) exchanges and why?</td>
<td>Molm, Collet &amp; Schaefer, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>SQ D</strong> Which examples of self-interested motives, from material rewards, to hedonic pursuits, to direct impact on their lives do people consider would make them more prone to share content from e-commerce websites into social media?</td>
<td>Pelaprat &amp; Brown, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kim, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ3</strong> How are the content sharing intentions and behaviors of individuals affected by e-commerce website characteristics such as website design and product/service typologies?</td>
<td><strong>SQ E</strong> What sort of products make or would make you more prone to share their information through a social media platform. For instance, would there be a difference between fashion items or consumer electronics?</td>
<td>Tsao &amp; Hsieh, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>SQ F</strong> What sort of website characteristics make or would make it easier - or harder - for you to consider sharing their contents into social media networks? Examples may include website design, website fame, number of clicks or actions required to share, etc.</td>
<td>Chen &amp; Berger, 2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Green &amp; Pearson, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ling &amp; Salvendy, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ4</strong> Which channels individuals commonly prefer to share content from e-commerce websites and how purposive is the selection of these channels?</td>
<td><strong>SQ G</strong> When or if you would share content from ecommerce websites which channels would you select preferentially? (This may be specific social media platforms or communication tools like, for instance, e-mail or Whatsapp).</td>
<td>Chen, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Berger &amp; Iyengar, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dolan, Conduit, Fahy, &amp; Goodman, 2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author
3- Study Design and Methodology

The purpose of this section is to provide a brief explanation for the proposed methodology for the study. We will take a qualitative approach to the investigation topic and propose to base the investigation on what are the drivers and motivations to share content from fashion e-commerce sites on social network platforms using the Focus-group methodology for data acquisition.

In the attempt to make a case for the choice of a qualitative approach for this study, it is of interest to make a general note on the distinctions between qualitative and quantitative methodologies. According to Barnham (2015), quantitative research elicits numbers and percentages that, within a given sample, have the status of facts while qualitative research is used when more “in depth” understating of attitudes behavior and motivations is required. Giving further strength to our decision, we can also cite Snelson’s (2016) work in reviewing the literature for social media studies and the main qualitative and mixed approaches used in the analysis of this topic, in which it was noted that Interviews and Focus group were common strategies in a series of studies designed to investigate people and their perceptions or use of social media, themes in social media content, or a combination of both. It is interesting in this context as well to cite Khang, Ki and Ye’s (2012) work in reviewing the main methods used for research in the field. The authors found that their data demonstrated that quantitative research is more prevalent than non-quantitative research and recognize that qualitative methods may provide useful approach to understanding a situation which is assumed to hold multiple realities and that, while quantitative and qualitative research are inherently different, they can be considered complementary and that a greater balance of both methodologies should be encouraged (Khang et al., 2012).

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, it is assumed that a qualitative approach will be, in general, more appropriate in this specific scenario and, specifically, the organization of a focus group.

It is well-established within the social science literature that focus group discussions constitute a type of group interview where, amidst a relatively informal atmosphere, people are encouraged to approach and discuss specific topics in order to try and
uncover underlying norms, beliefs and values which are common to the participants' experiences (Parker & Tritter, 2006)

Multiple benefits can be derived from the use of focus groups on research. Among these benefits we can consider is the socially-oriented environment, which can bring more spontaneous responses and the interactions among participants can yield important data for the research (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009). In interacting and responding to each other, participants can reveal more of their own frame of reference on the subject of study (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013).

We are aware, however, that the selection of the Focus Group method also brings some limitations attached to it. Focus groups should be used for the collection of data about content and process and should not be relied upon for the collection of data about personal attributes or for estimating population parameters of personal attributes (Bernard & Bernard, 2012). Due to the normally small sample sizes in Focus group studies the group may not be fully representative and generalization of results is not entirely possible (Masadeh, 2012). Another specific problem or difficulty pertaining to the Focus group method is the management of the process of data documentation in a way which allows for the identification and differentiation between statements of individual and parallel speakers (Flick, 2009). Focus groups can also be limited by the tendency for certain types of socially acceptable opinion to emerge within the context of the focus group discussions as well as for certain types of participants to dominate the research process (Smithson, 2000).

Notwithstanding these limitations, advantages such as speed, transparency, interaction, flexibility, open-endedness and the possibility to note non-verbal cues (Gorman, Clayton, Shep, & Clayton, 2005) still prove to be solid motivators for the selection of the Focus Group methodology for the present study.

Particular care needs to be given in the selection of the group composition since the quality of the discussion and even its direction may be influenced by the people the session brings together (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014)

An issue that is widely debated by proponents and organizers of focus group is the importance of group member homogeneity to the quality of a group's output (Corfman, 1995). While the focus group methodology requires that participants are relatively
homogeneous, too much homogeneity can limit the range of perspectives or, worst case scenario, render the results obtained invalid (Drechsling, 1999). Homogeneity must, in this sense, be challenged by guaranteeing a certain degree of heterogeneity to obtain data which is sufficiently varied (Grønkjær, Curtis, de Crespigny, & Delmar, 2011).

Considering the need to select a group which is homogenous enough to incite a good dynamic in the discussion of the present subject but which is heterogeneous enough as well to increase the possibilities of gathering varied data, the first consideration we took was the age composition of the participants.

GlobalWebIndex’s bi-annual report on the latest trends in online commerce (2017a) with a base of 56,768 internet users aged 16-64 shows that age ranges 25 to 34 and 35 to 44 years old appear to be the more active groups in online shopping with a percentage of 80 and 78% of respondents having made a purchase online in the last month. In terms of social media usage, statistics show that age groups 25-34 and 35-44 years combined, average more than 50% of the active users worldwide on some of the top social media platforms (Statista, 2014). Although this data may point towards the age range between 25 and 34 years old as being, apparently, the range which aggregates the most interesting individuals for the purpose of this study, we believe that this may actually pose a limitation and in the selection of individuals we tried to obtain participants from older and younger so more diversity is assured.

Gender was also an important variable to consider. Studies have shown that women and men communicate differently, not only in the way they communicate but also in the reasons as to why they do so (Maceli, Baack, & Wachter, 2015). In this sense, it is important to have a mixed-gender base of participants in the study to limit the potential of gender-biased views and to add some heterogeneity to the group. Furthermore, to provide an extra controlled degree of heterogeneity to the group, participants’ occupations were as varied as possible.

Selected participants were also required to provide some feedback on their social media usage habits and number of active social media accounts.

According to Eurostat (2016) the results of the 2016 Survey on ICT (information and communication technology) usage in households and by individuals focusing on individuals’ electronic commerce (e-commerce or e-shopping) statistics in the European
Union, around 35% of e-shoppers had in the previous three months before the survey bought goods or services for private use once or twice and a third had done so three to five times with the proportion of e-shoppers who had made online purchases over 10 times being lowest, at 14%.

In terms of social media usage Global Web Index’s quarterly report on latest trend in social networking (2017b) shows that 94% of digital consumers aged 16-64 say they have an account on at least one social platform and 98% have visited/used one within the last month. The same report also reveals that, in all markets and across all the major demographics groups, daily time spent on social continues is still on the rise on a yearly basis and, globally, around 1 in every 3 minutes spent online is devoted to social networking and messaging, with digital consumers engaging for a daily average of over 2 hours (GlobalWeb, 2017b).

Using the above statistical data participants were provided a brief questionnaire with the purpose of profiling them as e-commerce and social media users. The following framework of reference to classify their self-assessed usage levels:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of purchases done on e-commerce annually</th>
<th>Usage Level</th>
<th>Time spent on social media daily</th>
<th>Usage Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to 5</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>1 minute to 1 hour</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 10</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>1 hour to 2 hours</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 and higher</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>2 hours or more</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author

The Focus Group session took place on the 26th of August 2017 and was comprised of 7 participants. The group possessed a certain degree of heterogeneity in terms of gender, age, background and professional occupation. Participants were recruited through personal invitation, from a potential pool of 19 individuals and selected according to their availability for the date of the study. Table 5 below shows some data collected from the participants through a self-administered questionnaire provided prior to the beginning of the focus group session, and takes into account some of the considerations.
defined in the previous section and serves to attest the degree of heterogeneity of the participants.

Table 5 - Participants List and Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Identifier</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>E-commerce Usage</th>
<th>Social Media Usage</th>
<th># of Active Social Media accounts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Medical Doctor</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Audiovisual Agent</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Sales Representative</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Chemical Lab Assistant</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Professional Makeup artist</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Airforce Sargeant</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Public Agent</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author

Consent forms were distributed and signed by each of the participants (see Annex I). After the revision and signing of the consent forms, the session was initiated and lasted 110 minutes. A simple Powerpoint presentation (see Annex II), was used to guide the proceedings, projected in area of the room at an angle which ensured full visibility for all participants at all times and which served the main purpose of keeping the participants on track of the specific question being addressed. The focus group interview was tape-recorded and transcribed for posterior analysis. It should be noted that due mainly to convenience, the fact that the level of English of the participants could not be assessed and in order not to limit the potential flow of the conversation, the discussion took place in the main language of the participants which is Portuguese. The transcription was also done in this same language but a great effort has been done to ensure an accurate translation in terms of the words and expressions used as well as the meaning that the participants wanted to give to their comments. A preliminary stage of analysis consisted in reading the transcript of the session in order to gather a general sense of the data, prior to the coding of main themes.
A second stage of analysis consisted in organizing the data using the computer software Nvivo 11. The transcript was uploaded to the software and this stage also included, for easier sorting and categorization of the data, dividing the transcript into sections delimited by the research questions. Therefore we had 4 main nodes labeled Question 1, Question 2, Question 3 and Question 4, plus one extra node for the Introduction of the focus group session which was disregarded in the analysis due to its exclusively explanatory and introductory character.

For each of these questions, an analysis of the main themes reflecting ideas and thoughts of the participants, which arisen during the discussion, was conducted. For the purpose of further analysis, we followed the criteria proposed by Krueger and Casey (2014), and each one of the questions and the comments were analyzed according to considerations of Frequency, or how often a comment and view is made; Specificity, with emphasis given to comments that are more specific and provide more detail; Emotion, with comments or themes where participants showed more emotion, enthusiasm or intensity having more weight and; Extensiveness, which although related to Frequency, differs in the sense that it considers how many people different people shared similar views, not only the reiteration of the view or comment.

These were aggregated into child-nodes, pertaining to each of the specific Questions mentioned above. Some interesting themes, indirectly connected to the main points being addressed also emerged, mainly topics connected to Location-Tagging, Service Levels of e-commerce websites and sharing as Spam and the potential it has to bother others. Table 6 below shows the node classification and the number of references under each specific node:
Table 6 - Focus Group Main Themes and Number of References

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th># References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Question 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Rewards</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discount - Voucher - Free Products</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerging Theme – Spam vs. Monetary incentives</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Reasons - Being paid to share</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal Rewards</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Satisfaction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect other from negative experiences</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Question 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-to-One Motivations</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-interest Motivations</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Question 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product-Service Typology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerging Theme - Location-tagging</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Products</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website Design</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease-of-use</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerging Theme - Service Levels</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Design</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Question 4</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposiveness</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposiveness</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whatsapp – Messenger</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposiveness</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Output Nvivo 11
4 - Results and Discussion

4.1 - Internal vs. External Rewards

On RQ1 we tried to uncover the connection between External and Internal rewards and the motivational impact these could have on individuals towards the sharing of content from e-commerce websites into social media. As seen in the literature Intrinsic and Extrinsic motivation is connected to rewards obtained in response to particular actions and both stimulate individuals’ willingness to perform actions (Oh & Syn, 2015). The focus group conversation provided some interesting insights on these themes. In terms of External rewards, connected to Extrinsic motivation several themes arose mainly connected to references to Discount or Vouchers, Professional motives, which include the possibility of being paid to share and the possibility of Receiving free products as a reward for sharing. In terms of Internal Rewards, connected to Intrinsic motivation, some generic comments on Personal Satisfaction arose, accompanied by the manifest will to Protect others from negative experiences. Table 7 below shows the number of references made on each of these sub-categories of analysis under RQ1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal Rewards</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Satisfaction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protect other from negative experiences</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Rewards</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discount – Voucher – Free Products</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Reasons - Being paid to share</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Output Nvivo 11

The results of the analysis seem to only partially confirm similar research found in the literature. Liu, Cheung and Lee (2016), in their study on information sharing behavior on social commerce sites, note that individuals who feel good about helping others can be more disposed to share information online without expecting direct rewards in return. This appears to be true to some extent as the following comments indicate:
“My opinion can be important for someone”

“My benefit is always aligned with what good I’m able to give to the community who follows me”

“There are people who follow my work and who are looking for opinions specifically and, as such, I do it in that sense: of being able to bring some good and a positive influence”

These expressions revealed a certain degree of personal satisfaction in sharing, with concepts of being able to help and inform the community and be able to have pleasant feelings which is aligned with the realization that Intrinsic motives do appear to lead to e-WOM participation, in the form of sharing, through association with positive sensations of enjoyment, friendship, and pleasantness as apparent in the literature (Yoo et al., 2013).

An second topic connected to Intrinsic motivation was the realization that the individuals in the study were more inclined to share if they felt some degree of dissatisfaction and felt like they were somehow protecting others from feeling the same dissatisfaction they felt with a product or service. This seems to be consistent with our findings in the literature, especially in what concerns negative E-WOM in the sense that high levels of satisfaction or, in this case, dissatisfaction make customers more prone share experiences than customers with more neutral opinions (Alexandrov et al., 2013). Interestingly, although the literature seems to suggest that high levels of satisfaction also make customers more prone to share these experiences, the focus group responses were almost exclusively biased towards dissatisfaction and negative E-WOM with 7 references to this topic and with clear statements such as:

“(…) I would only share in the event that I was very dissatisfied with the product, in the sense of trying to protect others from this product.”

“I shared products which I didn’t like, also in the sense of alert and so that people know what’s good and what’s not.”

“If i did (share it) it would be to alert towards a negative aspect of the product”
As for External rewards which can be promoted by offering monetary benefits, such as gift certificates, other prizes (Yoo et al., 2013) the comments of the participants reported a considerable negatively-charged sentiment towards how these would affect their motivation to share. This is remarkable as it seems to contradict to some extent findings mentioned in the literature such as the results of Liu, Cheung and Lee (2016) which appear to indicate that extrinsic rewards maybe more important than intrinsic returns to motivate information sharing in the context of SCSs at least, and is particularly in line with specific findings in terms of monetary-rewards in the sense that they may have have potential negative consequences even when they appear to be good marketing tools (Reimer & Benkenstein, 2016). Mentions in the discussion to Discounts and Vouchers, particularly, revealed the most negative sentiments towards these incentives to sharing:

“I'm not a fan. I don’t do it with supermarket vouchers and I would not do it also in this situation only because I would benefit from a discount, a promotion or some sort of benefit”

“I'm very suspicious of these promotions or bonuses they offer because I think it’s a gift in disguise so they can benefit from it. So I completely refuse to do it.”

“I do not share with other people with the purpose of obtaining monetary rewards or vouchers.”

Under the context of External rewards, the analysis revealed that professional reasons were also mentioned as a potential motivation for sharing. One of the participants, Subject E, described herself as a digital influencer and assumed that there was a clear relationship in some cases between the external rewards received and her sharing activities:

“In my case it is almost a professional matter. I work in partnership with several brands, several e-commerce websites so it’s normal that I have some interest there as there is something to be gained (...) and being paid to share”

Although all the comments under this particular node revealed very little extensiveness as they all pertained to Subject E, it was relevant to mention this as, although no other participants made comments in this sense, their body language revealed that they understood and approved the coherence of these comments, which seemed to suggest that for them it was obvious why Subject E was making them and that it appeared
logical to them that in that situation, external rewards obviously had a role to play in terms of motivating individuals to share content from e-commerce websites into social media.

An interesting theme arose in the context of the discussion connected to monetary rewards. We categorized it as an Emerging theme related to ‘Spam’ vs. Monetary incentives. These were references made to the fact that sharing had the possibility of being abusive and could have a negative impact on the recipients of the shared content. Some of the expressions and comments made to the theme were:

“(…) I don’t feel good as being another one adding ‘spam’ on the social network. And I don’t feel good by spamming and for that I don’t share”

“I share the opinion of some people here in the sense that it is a type of sharing which can be abusive”

“(…) and by doing that I would be bothering others. And I’m careful with that.”

This was not a theme included in the literature review but, consistently following Krueger and Casey’s (2014) approach, this theme was noteworthy, not only due the frequency of the comments made, but also because the comments showed a notable level of specificity, emotion and extensiveness in the group. Table 8 below shows the number of references made to the theme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Emerging Themes</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spam vs Monetary Incentives</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 – Emerging Theme “Spam-Bothering others” and Number of References

Source: Output Nvivo 11

Also of interest, and likely one of the key-findings of the focus group analysis, was the fact that, although the abovementioned concern about the potential impact that sharing content from e-commerce websites on social media could have on the recipients and its equation to the normally negatively-charged concept of ‘spam’, some participants brought forth the idea that there could be a “threshold” for these discounts which could counteract this feeling and that it could potentially ease the unpleasantness of
“bothering” others and eventually make it worthwhile. This was patent in comments such as:

*It would have to do with the balance between my compensation and “bothering” others. If I thought that it would be worth it to “bother” others to obtain a discount...i don’t know, I’m guessing...15 or 20% of a product with a high price, that’s fine. (...) For a product costing 2 Euros and a discount of 20 cents I would never “bother” anyone.*

“How much is the “feel-bad” factor actually worth? Because that really exists. Because I would be bothering my list of friends. The social networks are weird and you don’t know if you are sharing something for a 30-cent discount and it’s not worth it because you also don’t want to bother other people.”

“I don’t need to share or spam on social networks for a 10% discount.”

“(…) the fact that I would feel bad for bothering others would have to be compensated by the factor that, monetarily, I would not spend as much.”

This appears to be in line with the literature reviewed in the sense that the amount of compensation obtained from these monetary rewards can directly impact the level of effort and that the introduction of “money” in the equation seems to have a negative effect on cooperative, communal, and altruistic behaviors (Jin & Huang, 2014). In the literature review we did not find any references to the particular subject of how people’s behaviors could be influenced by the breaking of a the “thresholds” mentioned above nor on the effect this could have on peoples’ motivations to share online. However, the fact that it emerged on the focus group discussion with undeniable weight is intriguing and can perhaps present a fertile ground for future investigation and broadening of knowledge in this field. For instance, questions such as how much discount would be necessary to start overcoming the feel-bad factor associated with bothering others or if there is an upper-limit after which this stops making a difference come to mind.

4.2 - Reciprocity, Self-interest and Sharing Orientation

For RQ2 we looked into the concept of reciprocity as an important determinant of human behavior (Surma, 2016) and it’s dyadic or collective orientation (Molm et al., 2007) versus the role of self-interest as also a primary driver of that behavior (Kim, 2014). Specifically, we wanted to understand how both concepts fared against one another and whether the participants could provide clues as to what motivations would be behind the particular inclination towards one or the other. Table 9 below shows the
themes analysis and the number of references/comments made related to motivations for the themes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th># References</th>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Table 9 – Research Question 2 Main Themes and Number of References

The concept of “reciprocity” was apparently completely overlooked by the participants and no real noteworthy references were made to whether they would reciprocate a given behavior towards them in the particular context of sharing content from e-commerce websites into social media. Although the literature reviewed does mention the importance of the concept of reciprocity in people’s behavior (Surma, 2016) and even of generalized reciprocity as an important factor in motivating individuals to participate in knowledge sharing in virtual communities (Oh & Syn, 2015), in the context of the focus group, these concepts did not arise and the only attempt at pulling this subject was categorically rejected:

Moderator – “You mentioned that if someone asked you to share you would probably help. Would you do it altruistically if they shared and without them asking?”

Subject D – “No.”

We may consider the possibility that the respondents were not prepared to answer this question clearly for reasons which could not be uncovered but it remains unproven in this research if reciprocity or generalized reciprocity are concepts that play a role in the sharing activities or motivations of these particular individuals.

The concept of self-interest, on the other hand, appeared to be more clearly recognized by the participants in the sense that there were comments directed towards the role that it may play in motivating them to share. One of the participants, Subject C, although not
directly referring to e-commerce, did mention, due to his involvement in event organization that:

“We organize events to earn Money. And the social media platforms are very important for us to attract peoples’ attention”

Other comments, categorized under the same node, which also appeared to reveal a clear self-interested posture were, for example:

“With the general public, the only thing I recall sharing was a car which I was trying to sell and I shared it due to self-interest.”

“Personally, I’ve also done it (sharing) for my sister’s shoe brand...

“(Talking about wife’s business) I did it for her when she started her business, to help her out.”

“We end up having to share due to personal and professional interest for our company”

As defined in the literature, common measures of self-interest include, among other things, the motivation to maximize material resources, hedonistic motives to pursue feeling good, and psychological impacts of being involved in a particular outcome (Kim, 2014) and, although the broad scope of these concepts may leave to the feeling that everything that one does is rooted in self-interest (Pelaprat & Brown, 2012), it is nevertheless necessary to note that self-interest does seem to play a pivotal role on the motivations for sharing content from e-commerce websites into social media, confirming previous views brought forth by other authors.

Despite the fact that reciprocity did not appear to represent a main concern for the participants in the group one of the supporting questions in our study was connected to the directness or indirectness of reciprocity and two related structural differences: whether exchange is dyadic or collective (Molm et al., 2007). Therefore, we tried to explore whether participants would be more prone to engage in one-to-one or one-to-many exchanges which, although initially connected to the base concept of reciprocity in the literature, in the context of the group conversation appeared in a more loose manner, not necessarily connected to the concept of reciprocity. The view of several participants of the focus group revealed that their inclination pended more for towards a more direct exchange, and that the concept of one-to-one sharing emerged as
predominant. It could be understood that participants felt more at ease with more directed, private and personal sharing. This was corroborated by several comments from different participants such as:

“It would probably be easier for me to share with one person in particular”

“I’m not saying that I do it exclusively one-to-one but, like I said, I normally do it in a private manner, through direct messages”

“I do it but in a more personal manner (...) Customized. Not generalized.”

This tendency to prefer one-to-one exchanges appeared to reveal some connection with some of the reasons or motives which could be uncovered in the analysis of the comments. Participants appeared to link this directness in the exchanges with their connection to a closer circle of relationships and the nurturing or these relationships or to the need to help a member or this narrower circle. This was to some extent patent in comments such as:

“One-to-one sharing happens several times. When (we are talking about) friends, clients too, close people which I happen to know need something...”

“(if) I’m pleasing a friend, of course I’ll share one-to-one”

“I have shared things which I think people can take advantage of (...) I do that when I believe it’s interesting. That kind of sharing is one-to-one”

“(one-to-one or one-to-few) I do several times because I know it pleases that group of friends”

Interestingly, one can be inclined to deduce a level of self-interest in these reasons, recognizing possible social rewards like emotional satisfaction (Lambe et al., 2001) and hedonistic drives to pursue feel-good sensations (Kim, 2014). This, it can be noted, does seem to provide some degree of consistency to the participants view, by linking the concept of self-interest to a more direct and personal level in their exchanges, with one-to-one interactions (or, at most, one-to-few) being the preferred way of interaction for the participants when sharing content from e-commerce websites via social media, and the remarkable absence of any relevant comments towards reciprocity or generalized reciprocity, in this context, as being a driver for the sharing behavior of individuals.
4.3 - Website design and Product/Service Typologies
Under RQ3 we tried to uncover how the external environment, in this case, in the form of e-commerce websites’ design and usability characteristics could impact the motivations for the participants in the study to share content from these platforms into social media as well as the potential impact different products and/or services could also have in these motivations. Table 10 below shows the coding of these themes after the analysis of the focus group transcription.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th># References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Website Design</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease-of-use</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Design</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Product-Service Typology</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Products</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Output Nvivo 11

The literature established that aesthetics in website interface design can serve as an important predictor of customer’s emotions, perception, and action toward the website (Deng & Poole, 2012). Findings of analysis of the focus group discussion appear to confirm this in the sense that the design of websites can have, to some extent, a direct impact on the actions and willingness of the participants to share content from them into or through social media. Concepts such as cleanliness and clarity in the design were directly associated by several participants to their intent to share their content. This is definitely visible in comments such as:

“I would only share if the website ‘deserved’ it. If it was a clear website, evident, without subterfuges…there are complicated websites in which you get lost (...) only if it was a good website…”

“(…) having a clean and direct image of course it influences (sharing)”

“Regarding the aspect of the websites, of course a clean design makes it easier”
Another point raised during the discussion pertained to the ease-of-use of e-commerce websites. Participants associated positively websites which are easy to use with the possibility of sharing content from those websites:

“(…) I think I would share more easily all websites which are easy to use”

“I would easily share if it’s easy to buy in that website”

“Regarding websites, they need to be easy in terms of access…if I have to make a lot of clicks... no”

This seems to be in direct alignment with the notions advanced in the literature that the success of B2C websites is directly affected by their usability (Ling & Salvendy, 2013) and that specific usability-related design attributes such as design credibility, content, interactivity, navigability and responsiveness play an important role in the online shopping experience (Green & Pearson, 2011).

In terms of ease-of-use and design, participants interestingly made a link between the websites and the sharing widgets present in them and remarked at how impractical these seemed to be when the intent is making a more targeted share and even how that could serve as a detractor for sharing:

“Although those buttons seem very practical, I find it very hard to make a more targeted sharing. (…) If you want to share to a few people only, when possible, it’s not practical. If you want to share with three different people you have to send an individual message to each. It’s not practical.

“I think social networks facilitate more generalized sharing. Everything else starts becoming more complex. For starters, you waste more time sharing individually, it’s not as intuitive. What’s intuitive and easier to access is what suits them the most which is sharing with everyone”

“(…) only they then lose the greater number of people who don’t want to share at a more generalized level”

A particular comment spiked our interest in the analysis in the sense that it expanded on the concept of design and usability to include the concept of service as a whole in which became an interesting emerging theme.
Table 11 – Emerging Theme “Service Levels” and Number of References

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging Themes</th>
<th># References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service Levels</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Output Nvivo 11

Both references made to this theme are shown below, in an interaction with the moderator of the focus group:

Subject A – “Now, if everything’s very simple, you buy, you pay and the next day you’re getting a message saying that they will deliver in 48 hours you think: ‘this is really effective, it’s worth buying here’”

Moderator - You are talking about not only how easy the website is to use but also of the quality of the service?”

Subject A – “Exactly! I would easily share if the website is easy to buy in and also if the service is really effective, if it is delivered quickly....”

Although not part of the original scope of the question and not discussed in our literature review, this mention to service as a part of the considerations for sharing content from an e-commerce website, bundled with concepts of design and usability seemed, nevertheless, worthy of being mentioned as a potential topic to be further explored in other studies.

As seen previously, empirical evidence suggests that most of the products discussed on the internet are mostly search goods, like consumer electronics, house appliances, and vehicles, and experience goods such as hotels and restaurants (Tsao & Hsieh, 2015). The findings of the focus group discussion appeared to confirm this evidence as the references revolved around physical products and experiences. However, the references to the sharing of products had a more negatively-charged comments whereas the references to experiences evoked more positive comments.

“Eventually a product of my interest but with a one-to-one objective to share it with that particular person”

“(…) I would very hardly share something which was a real product...like a shirt or something. I don’t recall sharing something like that...only if it was a personal request...
because, due to my job, a lot of people come to me for an opinion but this sharing is more because others ask me than by my own initiative”

“I find it less likely when it comes to products”

This seems to show that participants, although not excluding the possibility of sharing products, revealed in their speech expressions of resistance like “eventually”, “hardly” and “less likely” when it came to discussing if or why they would share actual physical products. When it came to experiences, however, the participants showed more openness and willingness to share in general. References to experiences were linked to terms such as “satisfaction”, “liking, or “emotion” for instance:

“(…) I think that experiences as a products don’t stop being something more personal and the satisfaction you had (…) everyone will like and I think you’re not ‘pushing’ but rather informing.”

“I would more easily share experiences, which transmit emotion and liking and are moments of peoples’ lives”

This finding also seems to be consistent with the literature as was noted previously by Chen and Berger (2016), for instance, that products and information which stir up more interest, arouse more emotion and arousal or contain more useful information get shared more. Participants appeared to be more “at-ease” with experience-sharing online than with products and one comment from Subject C revealed consistency with the previously discussed emerging theme of ‘Spam-Bothering others’ in the sense that this Subject equated the sharing of an experience to guiding or informing someone through his experience rather than just bothering others through the intrusive sharing of products:

“(An) experience leaves me on a different level…because sharing an experience like a restaurant or a hotel I would be more ‘at-ease’ to do. Because I would be (sharing) in the sense of guidance and not spamming (…) with a product I feel like I’m ‘pushing’ something. With an experience I feel more like I’m ‘informing’ than anything else.”

During the discussion of RQ3 an interesting topic was raised by two participants, which, even though it was not considered in our literature review and does not appear to be in direct connection with the sharing of content from e-commerce websites. This concept was the concept of Location-tagging or Geo-Tagging. As table 12 below shows this was mentioned only twice during the focus group discussion but, following Krueger and
Casey’s (2014) comments on Frequency, although we pay attention to the number of times something is said it can be a mistake to assume that only what is said most frequently is most important. This topic, although seemingly unrelated to the main discussion being conducted, did appear to add an interesting degree of complexity to the theme and as such it was included in this analysis as a potentially interesting emerging theme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location-tagging</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Output Nvivo 11

The two comments related to this theme, coming from two different subjects, are shown below:

“(…) generally I would not go to a restaurant’s page and share it but if I have a good experience I might share and recommend…for instance through the location. The GPS will give you the location and by sharing that location, you are already advertising it (the restaurant)”

“(For) experiences mainly Instagram where I can take picture and add the location”

This concept arose particularly connected to the discussion of Experiences and it was interestingly linked by one of the participants, as seen in the comments above, as a tool to advertise an experience by linking it to its location. Time on the focus group session proved insufficient to explore this new theme but we feel this has potential to broaden the areas of research on motivations to share into social media.

4.4 - Main Channels and Purpose in their selection
Under RQ4 we aimed at uncovering which channels individuals commonly prefer to share content from e-commerce websites into social media and how purposive is the selection of those channels. If Individuals can easily select what sort of media they want to use online (Chen, 2011) what which and why would they choose a particular channel over another?
The analysis of the focus group discussion on this point revealed some that channels like E-mail, Instagram and Whatsapp/Messenger messaging services were preferentially used by the participants in this particular group. Table 13 below shows these channels in context compared by number of references and with the number of references to the topic of purposiveness when selecting that particular channel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>E-mail</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposiveness</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instagram</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposiveness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whatsapp - Messenger</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposiveness</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Output Nvivo 11

With an average of 6 active social media accounts in for the participants in the group it was interesting to note the emergence of these three communication means as preferential, especially considering that three of them are more directed to personal rather than collective sharing. Taking the U&G theory as the background for this question, we tried to understand if individuals are purposive and active and select media based on their needs (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001) and if they would be goal-oriented and consistent they would be with their choices of medium to share the message (Rubin, 2009). The findings obtained from the analysis of the expressions do seem to agree with the literature in the sense that there appears to exist some coherence in the views of the participants especially when linking these to the findings of RQ2 in which one-to-one sharing took prominence over one-to-many sharing scenarios. For E-mail for instance, participants made reference to the “personal”, “direct” and “formal” characteristics of the mean:

“I would say E-mail. Precisely because it’s more formal. If you get an e-mail from me you will be more interested in checking it out.”
“I share by e-mail because it’s more personal and directed. I share with whom I want, direct the content…”

“It’s more direct and guided, because I will not send an e-mail (about a watch) to someone who is not interested”

It may be worth to note that these references to e-mail were made specifically by Subjects A and G which were the two oldest of the group and which consistently revealed throughout the study some “resistance” to the concept of sharing directly from e-commerce into social media, with some of the most negatively-charged comments, and this may raise an interesting case towards the usage of E-mail rather than another particular medium. Nevertheless, it is still worth noting the directness of potential sharing activities even in this case remains consistent with a more purposeful and directed one-to-one, exchange.

This can be corroborated by the views of some of the other participants which mainly mentioned Whatsapp and Messenger as preferred methods as opposed to the “formality” of E-mail. Subject C made a specific remark concerning this specific point which can serve as a link between both topics: “I do not share ‘formally’ because I’m going to recommend products to strangers…it’s always more personal so it will be through Whatsapp or Messenger”.

Other participants’ comments, similar to Subject C’s view, did show a more favorable view towards using Whatsapp and Messenger as their preferential means of sharing while also using terms such as “directed” and “private”, apparently linking these notions to the purpose of keeping these interactions on a more one-to-one or one-to-few basis:

“If it’s a product, from an e-commerce page, it will always be by Messenger or Whatsapp”

“Basically, the sharing I make it’s always directed and always via Messenger or Whatsapp…never a general share if it’s a product”

“Messenger and Whatsapp are the social media that I use more often to share with my closest circle of friends.”
“(…) Messenger and Whatsapp in a more private manner”

As for the references made to Instagram it was interesting to note that most participants held this social network in highest regards when compared to other available networks such as Facebook even when it came to generalized sharing. This appeared to be due to its more visual nature and simplicity as some comments seem to reveal:

“In what concerns public sharing I normally use Instagram. That’s because normally that sharing is more visual, through images, and images transmit more than words when it comes to experiences and sensations in a more direct manner”

“Facebook has become very textual, with a lot of confusion and Instagram is more visual”

This appears to reveal some measure of consistency in the participants as they also mentioned that “cleaner” designs are favored in terms of e-commerce websites and this notion can “spill” into the design of social media platforms. Although this remains unproven, as it was not discussed at length and it was not included in the original scope of this study, this notion can be worth exploring. However, despite references to Instagram as a potential preferential platform for more generalized sharing, no real indication in the discussion appeared to reveal its use for sharing content from e-commerce websites into social media, with the main references to this, as seen above, always being connected to more direct and private means such as E-mail, Whatsapp and Messenger. Consistency in the opinions of the participants also appears to exist on this point in connection to the findings of the previous section when participants also noted some dissatisfaction towards the fact that the sharing interfaces on websites appear to facilitate generalized sharing as opposed to more targeted, direct sharing which may serve as a detractor to the activity due to their more one-to-one sharing preferences.

Table 14 below shows a summary of the main findings discussed in the present section.
Table 14 – Summary of the Main Focus Group Discussion Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Summary of Main Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1 What types of internal and external rewards motivate individuals to share content from E-commerce websites into Social Media platforms?</td>
<td>- Intrinsic motivation with sensations of personal satisfaction appears to take on a more relevant role than Extrinsic motivation prompted by external rewards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Dissatisfaction towards a product or service (Negative E-WOM ) arose as an important potential factor for participants motivation to share content from E-commerce websites into Social Media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- External Rewards such as vouchers or discounts appeared to generate some negative positions as to their effect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Individuals, although apparently averse to the effect of external rewards, seem to consider there might be a threshold where the benefits of these rewards can thwart negative feelings and eventually promote sharing activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ2 When sharing content from E-commerce websites with one or many individuals, do people act based on self-interest or reciprocating a similar behaviour towards them?</td>
<td>- Self-interest appears to have a more prominent role than reciprocity when motivating people to share.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- One-to-one or one-to-few exchanges seem to be the most common when considering sharing content from E-commerce websites into Social Media especially when it comes to actual physical products.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ3 How are the content sharing intentions and behaviours of individuals affected by e-commerce website characteristics such as website design and product/service typologies?</td>
<td>- Websites which are easy to use and which have unobtrusive and clear designs appear to motivate individuals to more easily share content from them into Social Media.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Experiences or Experience-related products seem to be favoured over actual physical products and are more easily shared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Participants evoked the concept of Location-tagging as a way of promoting a given business/experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ4 Which channels individuals commonly prefer to share content from E-commerce websites and how purposeful is the selection of these channels?</td>
<td>- People seem to prefer sharing content from E-commerce websites through more private channels such as E-mail, Whatsapp and Messenger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Individuals purposively select more private channels due to the possibility of making more directed and targeted exchanges, which is consistent with the findings that one-to-one and one-to-few exchanges appear to prevail over one-to-many when deciding to share content from E-commerce websites.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author
5 – Final Considerations

5.1 – Conclusions of the Study
The present study was aimed at uncovering motivations for sharing content from e-commerce websites into social media through a series of research questions founded in theories of motivation and human behavior and through the use of a qualitative methodology, namely, the conduction of a focus group session. For research question 1 “What types of internal and external rewards motivate individuals to share content from e-commerce websites into social media platforms?” the main conclusions appear to be that Intrinsic motivation, with sensations of personal satisfaction, appears to take on a more relevant role than Extrinsic motivation prompted by external rewards. Although results in other studies such as those of Liu, Cheung and Lee (2016), in which the Extrinsic rewards appear to have a prevalence over intrinsic ones, this study revealed otherwise and found that people can actually have a more negative perception of these rewards, in line with what was previously suggested by Jin and Huang (2014) and Reimer and Benkenstein (2016), which may lead to distrust and even serve as a detractor for sharing content from e-commerce websites into social media. Dissatisfaction proved to be a powerful motivator to share content from e-commerce websites into social media, confirming similar views brought forth in the literature (Alexandrov et al., 2013) as powerful sensations of dissatisfaction in this particular case, appear to be prime motivators for the generation of negative E-WOM. Findings also appear to indicate that people show some aversion to abusive sharing and to “spamming” and that they believe that sharing can have the potential to “bother” other people and that their sharing activities are moderated by the acknowledgement of that reality although, interestingly, it also appears that External rewards such as vouchers or discounts obtained through sharing activities can eventually motivate them to share if the discount or benefit overshadows their negative feelings associated to bothering others if the benefit is appealing enough.

Under Research Question 2 “When sharing content from e-commerce websites with one or many individuals, do people act based on self-interest or reciprocating a similar behavior towards them?” we found in our study that, although evidence in the literature points towards the reciprocity and generalized reciprocity phenomena as playing an important role in people’s motivations (Oh & Syn, 2015; Surma,2016), these
notions failed to obtain any real prominence in the participants minds and self-interest appeared to play a more relevant role in peoples’ motivations to share content from e-commerce websites into social media. This does not mean that reciprocity is not an important factor to consider but participants revealed to be less prone to share because someone shared something with them but rather would do it out of self-interested motives like the personal satisfaction and social rewards obtained for helping others or pleasing a friend. This was consistent with the direction of the reported sharing activities as one-to-one sharing was mentioned and noted as the most common direction of these activities, suggesting that people may actively engage in more direct and personal exchanges rather than more generalized ones when talking about sharing content from e-commerce websites, especially when it comes to physical products.

Research Question 3, How are the content sharing intentions and behaviors of individuals affected by e-commerce website characteristics such as website design and product/service typologies? Revealed that website characteristics do have an important impact on peoples’ intentions to share, confirming similar views in the literature that aesthetics in website interface design can serve as an important predictor of customer’s emotions, perception, and action toward the website (Deng & Poole, 2012). People appear to be more inclined to share from a given e-commerce website if they find that the website is easy to use, with a clean and unobtrusive design and they also appear to bundle the website characteristics to the overall service provided when making a judgment on the websites “worthyness” of being shared and that one-to-one sharing is made unnecessarily more difficult than generalized sharing. We also found that, although people can and do share products from e-commerce websites into social media, they appear to prefer to share experiences which may, or may not be entirely connected to a traditional e-commerce website but may include services such as restaurants and hotels. When it came to Experiences, however, due to their more emotional nature participants felt more likely to share these in a generalized manner but with a focus on guidance and information and not with the specific purpose of “pushing” the experience like they would do with actual physical products. Under this thematic, the topic of Location-tagging or Geo-tagging was also brought forth and although underexplored in this study, it was definitely connected to the sharing of experiences and it hinted at the importance that this may have towards the promotion of businesses in the participants’ opinion.
Finally, under Research Question 4, “Which channels individuals commonly prefer to share content from e-commerce websites and how purposive is the selection of these channels?” our findings show some consistency with findings initially related to other Research Questions in the sense that participants showed a more favorable inclination towards the use of more one-to-one exchange methods such as E-mail and social messaging applications such as Whatsapp and Messenger purposively selecting them for their more directed and personal characteristics especially when considering sharing information of physical products from e-commerce websites. This is in line with the Uses and Gratifications literature explored previously, for instance Rubin (2009), in the sense that individuals do appear to be goal-oriented and consistent with their choices of the medium in which the message is shared, going for more direct means rather than generalized ones. Experiences were again mentioned and associated to more open platforms such as Instagram because they were not related to product Pushing and because of the appeal of a simple design which was also proven to exist when discussing e-commerce websites characteristics.

5.2 - Contributions

The present study provides some contributions for both the academy and management. On the academic field, the present study provides a modest contribution at the understanding the motivations people have to share content into social media, with particular focus on a specific scenario which is e-commerce websites as the content providers. It also helped substantiate some notions present in other studies on the field of social media motivations namely on the impact that intrinsic motives, self-interest, website design have on individuals motivations for sharing while also corroborating the view that individuals are purposive in the selection of their communication. At the same time, this study revealed that reciprocity may not be one of the prime concerns for individuals when sharing in social media and it also questions the weight that external rewards may actually have in motivating individuals to share as well as raising interesting themes for further exploration such as the themes of Location-tagging or how people view the relations between social media sharing and “spam”.

On the management field, the findings on this study show that it would be interesting for e-commerce website managers to take into further consideration how to ensure that
the user experience of the websites aids in the sharing activities through evaluating if the website is appealing and ensuring that the tasks of sharing at a one-to-one level are more easily accomplished rather than made difficult. Also, platforms such as Whatsapp and Messenger should also have a more prominent placement as they appear to gain in importance to others and studying how this can be done in terms of technology and design can be an interesting field to investigate and measure the real impact it could have in terms of number of shares over time.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research
As with all studies, this one is not free of limitations. A basic and evident one is connected to the fact that the selected methodology, a Focus Group discussion, as previously noted was composed of a small sample of individuals and, as such, the results may not be fully representative of the views of a broader population and as such, no attempt at a generalization of the results can be made. The fact that the discussion took place in Portuguese as mentioned previously, may also mean that, in translation, some meanings conveyed or expressions utilized may lose some of their power, even though particular was taken to ensure the most faithful translation at all times. Also, although the participants heterogeneity was a key concern, the fact that only one Focus Group was organized, due to limitations in resources, also prevents us from comparing the findings and comments from this particular group of individuals with other comments which could ensure more richness in the data gathered and potentially either give more credence or contradict some of the comments made. The social scenario in which the focus group takes place can also limit the sharing of contradicting opinions and the agreement about some topics can be influenced by this same context. The need to keep the session under a reasonably controlled time-limit also limited the exploration of some of the themes discussed which could have garnered more data to help us address the questions and, eventually, explore some interesting topics which emerged during the session. Also, as with any qualitative approach, the analysis of the group discussion is also connected to the researcher’s views and personal interpretation of the data. Although an attempt was also made to make sense of the findings with an impartial approach, founded in the knowledge acquired during the literature review, other researchers could have come to different conclusions than the ones presented in this study.
Some of the topics raised can provide fertile ground for future investigation. For instance, it can be interesting to apply a quantitative lens to findings such as the prevalence of one-to-one sharing intentions over one-to-many when it comes to products from e-commerce websites to understand if they hold their ground after statistical scrutiny. Another point which could be subject to further investigation is the idea that, although it was interesting to note that External reward do not appear to motivate the participants to share content from e-commerce websites into social media, there may be a threshold after which when the benefits outweigh the negative feelings associated with these actions. Future researchers can use this information to perhaps delve deeper into this and try to uncover what that threshold might be and if it varies according to product-service typologies for example. We also found in this study that although websites’ ease-of-use and design impact the sharing intentions of the participants, the view that this may also be linked to the service as a whole could prompt other questions such as how greatly service levels impact the overall sharing intentions of individuals and how connected these really are to the overall buying experience. Another concept which arose was the concept of Location-tagging or Geo-tagging. As a fairly recent technology, the study of how this impacts peoples sharing attitudes and, probably more relevant still, although not directly related to e-commerce, what real impacts it can have for businesses as a promotional tool can also have some interest as an avenue for future research.
References


Annex I – Consent Form

Declaração de Consentimento

Título do Estudo: Social Media and E-commerce: A Focus Group Study on motivations for sharing content from E-commerce websites.

Investigador: Tiago Fernando Pereira Neto da Costa

Telefone: +351 917348795 // E-mail: tiago.neto.costa@gmail.com

Orientador: Professora Beatriz Casais

Objetivo do Estudo: O objetivo do presente estudo é obter informação sobre quais as principais motivações subjacentes para utilizadores de páginas de E-commerce partilharem conteúdos das mesmas em redes Sociais.

1. Descrição dos Procedimentos: Este Estudo envolve uma entrevista em grupo presencial, conduzida num ambiente seguro para garantir privacidade e confidencialidade. A discussão será gravada em formato áudio para posterior transcrição e serão tiradas notas durante a mesma.

2. Duração dos Procedimentos: A entrevista em grupo terá uma duração máxima de 1:30h.

3. Declaração de Participação:

   a. Sou maior de 18 anos.
   b. Tomei conhecimento do teor dos tópicos que serão discutidos na entrevista de grupo.
   c. A minha participação neste projeto é voluntária e não será remunerada.
   d. Reconheço o meu direito a descontinuar a minha participação sem que tal incorra em nenhum tipo de penalização pessoal ou financeira para a minha pessoa.
   e. Reconheço o meu direito a declinar a resposta a questões colocadas durante a sessão mas que quaisquer respostas ou opiniões avançadas por mim são fruto da minha livre vontade e não serão resultado de coerção externa por parte de outros participantes ou do investigador.
   f. Aceito a gravação áudio da sessão para posterior transcrição. Tomei conhecimento do meu direito de requerer, após a sua conclusão, o acesso à mesma e, dentro de limites razoáveis, de requerer edições no que respeita às minhas intervenções.

4. Declaração de Confidencialidade:
a. O Investigador compromete-se a tomar as medidas necessárias para garantir a confidencialidade dos dados recolhidos.
b. O Investigador recordará todos os intervenientes do dever de respeitar a privacidade dos outros participantes e a não repetir os temas discutidos fora do âmbito deste grupo, sem consentimento expresso dos participantes visados.
c. O Investigador manterá o meu nome, ou qualquer outro tipo de informação que possa servir para me identificar, confidencial em quaisquer relatórios realizados com recurso à informação recolhida.

5. **Questões/Dúvidas:** Para quaisquer questões/dúvidas em relação ao estudo ou à informação recolhida/utilizada no decurso do mesmo, por favor contactar o Investigador pessoalmente ou através dos contactos acima disponibilizados.

Li e compreendi a informação acima explanada e aceito participar voluntariamente neste estudo.

__________________________  __________________________
Assinatura do Participante    Data

__________________________  __________________________
Assinatura do Investigador    Data
Annex II – Presentation used in the Focus Group Session

Social Media and E-commerce

A Focus Group study on motivations for sharing content from E-commerce websites.

- Não existem opiniões/respostas CERTAS ou ERRADAS. Sintam-se à vontade para expressar o que pensam.
- Têm o direito de NÃO responder a questões colocadas directamente a vós se assim o desejarem.
- Esta sessão será gravada para posterior transcrição mas todas as gravações são CONFIDENCIAIS e não serão partilhadas sem a vossa autorização prévia.
- Por favor tentem falar um de cada vez. Isto garantiu uma gravação com maior qualidade e é também importante respeitar o tempo dos outros participantes.
- São livres de discordar das opiniões dos outros participantes mas por favor façam-no de forma respeitosa e não partilhem as opiniões dos outros participantes for a desta sessão sem consentimento dos mesmos.
- A sessão durará entre 1:00h e 1:30 no máximo.
RQ1 – Que tipo de recompensas internas ou externas motivam indivíduos a partilhar conteúdos de páginas de E-commerce em plataformas de Social Media?

RQ2 – Aquando da partilha de conteúdos de páginas de E-commerce com um ou mais indivíduos, as pessoas agem baseadas em interesse-próprio, reciprocando um comportamento semelhante para consórcio ou agem com base no conceito de reciprocidade generalizada?

RQ3 – Como são as intenções individuais de partilha de conteúdos afectadas por características das páginas web como design da página e tipologias de serviço/produto?

RQ4 – Que canais os indivíduos comumente preferem para partilhar conteúdo de páginas de E-commerce e quão intencional é a escolha destes canais?

Support Question A - Poderia a existência de recompensas monetárias como descontos, vouchers, amostras, etc. encorajar a partilha de conteúdos de páginas de E-commerce em qualquer plataforma de Social Media que usem?

Support Question B - Considerariam que algum nível de satisfação pessoal poderia surgir através da partilha de conteúdos de páginas de E-commerce em plataformas de Social Media? Exemplos podem incluir reconhecimento de pares, ajudar um amigo, estabelecer uma posição ou opinião pessoais.
RQ2 – Aquando da partilha de conteúdos de páginas de E-commerce com um ou mais indivíduos, as pessoas agem baseadas em interesse-próprio, reciprocando um comportamento semelhante para consigo ou agem com base no conceito de reciprocidade generalizada?

Support Question C – Na partilha de conteúdos de páginas de E-commerce estarão os indivíduos mais inclinados a encetar trocas de informação mais directas (one-to-one) ou indirectas (one-to-many) e porquê?

Support Question D – Que exemplos de motivos auto-interssados, desde recompensas materiais a motivos hedónicos, passando por impactos directos nas suas vidas os indivíduos consideram poderiam influenciar a inclinação de partilhar conteúdos de páginas de E-commerce em plataformas de Social Media?

RQ3 – Como são as intenções individuais de partilha de conteúdos afectadas por características das páginas web como design da página e tipologias de serviço/produto?

Support Question E – Que tipos de produtos fazem, ou fariam os indivíduos mais inclinados a partilhar a informação sobre os mesmos através de uma plataforma de Social Media? Por exemplo, existiria alguma diferença entre produtos de moda, produtos de tecnologia ou produtos de experiência como restaurantes ou hotéis?

Support Question F – Que tipo de características de design de websites ou usabilidade podem tornar mais fácil ou mais difícil a decisão de partilhar os conteúdos dos mesmos em redes sociais?

RQ4 – Que canais os indivíduos comummente preferem para partilhar conteúdo de páginas de E-commerce e quão intencional é a escolha destes canais?

Support Question D – Quando, ou se, partilham conteúdos de páginas de E-commerce que canais seletoriam preferencialmente (Podem ser plataformas de social media ou ferramentas de comunicação como por exemplo, e-mail ou Whatsapp)?
You gave me your time, the most thoughtful gift of all.

Dan Zadra

Thank you!
Any questions?