Master's
Thesis

# Consumers' behaviours on Online Opinion Platforms :

motivations and levers
to increase participation

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# ABSTRACT

With the spread of Web 2.0, a new type of consumer arises: the consumer 2.0, also qualified as "consum'actor". Consumers are more informed, engaged, and increasingly rely on the eWOM (electronic Word-Of-Mouth) spread by their peers on social media when making a purchase decision. The purpose of the thesis is to analyse the participation of consumers on online opinion platforms in the context of Web 2.0, and to find levers to increase the participation, which can then be used by marketers. Indeed, although the number of internet users reading online reviews is dramatically increasing since the emergence of web 2.0, the number of users writing reviews, and so participating, remains relatively low. Yet, both companies and users would benefit from stronger participation: more users writing and not only reading reviews . The thesis finds out in the literature the reasons why users read or-and write reviews. A list of potential levers to increase participation was created and tested through a survey done in June 2016 on 232 Internet users writing and/or reading reviews. The results of a factor analysis identify two underlying constructs (involvement and incentive). The results of the PLS (Partial Least Squares) analysis show that the "involvement" motivation contributes positively to a more active participation, whereas the "incentive" motivation contributes negatively. Interpretations and leverage recommendations for marketers are provided based on the study's results.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, new kinds of Internet applications shape a new kind of consumers increasingly integrating the web into their daily life. These applications are modifying the way individuals communicate with each other, socialize, entertain themselves, but also study, work, make decisions and purchase items. Indeed, a tremendous change has occurred in the way consumers gather and exchange information about products and services. According to Nicolas Bordas (2009, p.8) "The Internet has arrived, and with it, the advent of a communication society in the full sense of the term in its Latin etymology, communication: put in common. Communicating is creating common. Everyone is now connected to everyone. Knowledge and ideas now circulate instantly, here and now." Therefore, the development of the Internet made consumers able to look for information on products and services through other consumers' reviews posted on the Internet, and gave them the opportunity to give their own opinion related to their personal consumption experience.

Not that long ago, companies still had the authority on the information publicly accessible about them through strategically placed advertisements and efficient public relations. Today, however, companies are more and more relegated as observers of consumers' interpersonal communication. Online consumers exert a massive power: negative reviews on websites such as TripAdvisor or Amazon can make a company rapidly change its offer or lose clients. To highlight this online consumers' power, a humorous New Yorker cartoon *(Leighton, 2014)* showed clients facing a hotel receptionist saying "If there's anything we can do to make your stay more pleasant, just rant about it all over the Internet."



*"If there's anything we can do to make your stay more pleasant, just rant about it all over the Internet."*

As of June 30th 2016, Yelp's metrics showed that the platform held 108 million reviews and averaged 165 million unique visits per month *(Yelp, 2016)*: through these numbers, it is clear that opinion websites transform purchasing decisions that affect an individual's everyday life. But while having an immediate possibility to reach unlimited consumers' reviews can be a valuable resource, its disadvantage is becoming exposed: opinion websites fail to provide a representative sample of broad opinion. Beyond the ideal capabilities of the Web 2.0 to allow every Internet user to take on both the role of consumer and content creator, we question the real motivations of consumers to become actors. Indeed, only a small fraction of customers write reviews. This reflects an involvement issue of consumers who are systematically looking for others opinions before purchasing products or services, but who rarely give their own.

## I.1. RESEARCH QUESTION AND PURPOSE

*How can the active participation of consumers in writing reviews on online opinion platforms be increased?*

My goal is to start with a basic research, understanding established reasons for the particular social action of writing reviews on online opinion platforms. Then, continue with an applied research to find out how this social process or pattern can be changed, on the basis of an established understanding. We need to know why something happens the way it does before being confident about intervening to change it.

## I.2. RESEARCH OUTLINE

The thesis starts with a theoretical focus on the Web 2.0 area of study. This part takes the form of a literature review synthesizing the actual state of the research linked to the research question. First, a funnel shaped description of the Web 2.0 leading to the Online Reviews is produced understanding the specificities of the Web 2.0: its origin, construction, and ramifications. Then, the consumers' motivations to write online reviews are explained, following the Hennig-Thurau framework. Eventually, the benefits of a strong consumers' participation in giving their opinion, both for companies and for consumers are exposed.

Part III is the methodology part developing the research strategy, the research philosophy of science, and the data collection method adopted.

Part IV contains the analysis and subsequent discussion of the data collected, looking to provide information on the potential levers that could increase the participation of consumers on online opinion platforms.

Finally, a conclusion is reached, leading to an answer to the research question, embracing the theoretical and empirical parts together. Recommendations, limitations of the study, and future research directions are given.

# II. LITERATURE REVIEW

## II.1. CIRCUMSCRIPTION OF THE STUDY'S CONTEXT

### II.1.1 WEB 2.0 AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Most of the web applications and sites belong today to the so-called Web 2.0, which is in its maturity phase. Now users can interact with the companies and interact between them. Further developments are taking place in the web environment and especially in the search engines area: Semantic Web (Web 3.0) and Intelligent Web (Web 4.0) are the new web buzzwords. In the context of the thesis, I focus on the Web 2.0 area, as this is the actual place for users' interactions. The Web 1.0 marked the period 1990-1997. In the mid-1990s, the first Internet users were stupefied by all this information suddenly available and its easy access thanks to the first search engines such as AliWeb. This was the birth of the information age. Web 1.0 applications were designed to create a web of information resources. Millions of static websites appeared. Users were searching information in order to read it.

The Web 1.5 was a transitional stage to the Web 2.0. It covered the period 1997-2003. New tools and languages appeared, which allowed any type of users to create and manage dynamically web pages. The first shopping cart applications also appeared with the Web 1.5. The idea was for retailers to present their products to consumers (the same way a brochure does) and to give them the ability to purchase online products from anywhere in the world. A typical example is the Amazon website in 1999.

The Web 2.0 appeared in 2000. Internet users were demanding more interactivity with the information available to them. To answer this demand, dynamic pages have been generated according to users' participation and interaction and new functionalities have been developed. First, for the user to be able to add animation and video streams to Internet pages, Adobe Flash was created. Then, AJAX - Asynchronous JavaScript and XML, was put in place to collect data from web servers asynchronously, permitting the update of contents without interfering with the entire page's display. To finish, RSS - Really Simple Syndication, was developed in order to publish content that are repeatedly updated, in a format that is standardized, like for example news headlines.

The term "Web 2.0" was made-up in DiNucci's 1999 article called *Fragmented Future, p.32*, and made popular by O'Reilly and Dougherty at the first O'Reilly Media Web 2.0 Conference in 2004 in

San Francisco. O'Reilly tied the name Web 2.0 to the idea of cumulative changes in web development as well as new uses on the web put in place by end users. The Web 2.0 proposes a new version of the World Wide Web, but does not refer to an update to some technical specification. It rather suggests cumulative changes in the construction and use of Internet pages. "Web 2.0 is the network as platform, spanning all connected devices; Web 2.0 applications are those that make the most of the intrinsic advantages of that platform: delivering software as a continually-updated service that gets better the more people use it, consuming and remixing data from multiple sources, including individual users, while providing their own data and services in a form that allows remixing by others, creating network effects through an architecture of participation, and going beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0 to deliver rich user experiences." *(O'Reilly, 2007, p.17)*

This Web 2.0 has emancipated from the web and the technology to evolve towards a 2.0 concept whose influence is felt in all areas of social activity. Gradually, Internet users began to put content online, to participate with tools that have become common and easy to handle. Therefore they moved from a status of passive users, to a status of active users who exchange information, comment, and participate. Hsu et al. (2009, p.353) mentioned that a transition has occurred "from the Web-as-information-source to the Participatory Web" characterized by a greater participation and interaction in the Internet space, allowing users to participate in the production or co-production of content, in their distribution and in their evaluation. The Web 2.0 is also qualified as "Contributory Web" by Hogg & Lerman (2009, p.50) expressing the passage of a vertical communication specific to traditional media, to a horizontal communication or "many to many" *(Kimmerle & Cress, 2008, p.424)*. It reflects and contributes to the emergence of a communication paradigm, characterized by lower hierarchical interactions in the expression, the semantics of the information and the development of social networks. "As users add new content and new sites […] the web of connections grows organically as an output of the collective activity of all web users" *(O'Reilly, 2007, p.22)*. Web 2.0 becomes more and more a relational tool: its appropriation by users is essential and constitutes value. Web 2.0 applications are aimed at creating a global human network, or human web, where information is provided by individuals and not by servers. These new uses induced new behaviours at the individual level, but especially at the collective one. Internet has become a tool for exchanging information, ideas, truths and also untruths, extremely important due to its spreading power. This free expression on the Internet affects all stakeholders (employees, customers, consumers, citizens, politicians, companies...) and may take the form of individual writing or coalition by the federation in communities *(Boistel, 2013)*.

The advent of this information economy has led, at the world level, to many disruptions both economically and socially speaking. Indeed, consumers have new needs, and demand more online services through which they can interact with marketers but also and more importantly access peer communities *(Levy & Jouyet, 2006)*. This new type of consumer is consuming through sharing, and sharing through consumption. He/she is contributing to the network of consumers. These consumer-driven networks are now thriving because consumers are interacting with other consumers, collaborating. This is collaborative consumption. What may be the most interesting aspect of the collaborative economy, and collaborative consumption in particular, is that consumers are now looking for new ways of meeting their consumption needs. Even in the case of traditional needs, their means of finding ways to meet those needs are rapidly evolving. Consumers are increasingly finding solutions to their problems through and with peers. In addition, these peer-to-peer interactions are mediated by social and technological networks where consumers are connected to their peers. *(Hamari et al., 2015)*

For the purpose the thesis, I concentrate on the following Web 2.0 characteristics:

- The web is used as a platform, where contents and applications are not anymore built and published as showcase websites, but rather constantly modified in a participatory and collaborative way by several different Internet users. Web 2.0 reflects the transition from a static web where the user is merely a consumer of content, to a dynamic web where the user concurrently assumes the roles of producer, distributor, creator and consumer of content. The web is no longer a showcase where people post things viewed by others. It becomes a platform in the era of the conversation and exchange.

- The network effects allow individuals to be linked on the websites and to share information. With the tools and applications of the Web 2.0, the individual is put back at the center of the concerns. Following the advent of Web 2.0, the role of the Internet user has been changed, from passive consumer to fully-fledged player. New features have emerged, considerably increasing opportunities for interaction with the system.

- Data is posted, shared, spread and commentated; therefore it becomes an implicit knowledge, even though users that create this knowledge might be anonymous or might lack skills and qualitative credentials.

Web 2.0 and Social Media are very proximate and interchangeable terms. However, the term Web 2.0 is mainly associated with online applications whereas the term Social Media is affiliated with the Web 2.0 applications' social aspects (participation, conversation, connectedness and openness). The Web 2.0 is considered as the platform for the evolution of Social Media *(Mayfield, 2007)*. Gillin (2007) explains that Social Media emerges as a new origin of consumers' blossoming through their creativity, empowerment, and influence and therefore appears as a beneficial healthy concept. According to the Nielsen Group (2012), web users spend more time on Social Media sites than on any other kind of site. In the USA, the total time spent on Social Media sites (on computers and mobile devices) has increased by 37%: to 121,1 billion minutes in July 2012 compared to 88,4 billion minutes in July 2011 *(Nielsen Group, 2012, p.6)*. However, it is important to note that not all people have dealt with Social Media the same way. The youth: the generations Y and Z have adopted it, leading the way, then professionals and mainstream online consumers have embraced it, realizing that Social Media can empower them *(Mata and Quesada, 2014)*.

The Social Media phenomenon is hard to define and delimit precisely, but it refers to one main idea: allow individuals and companies to create content in virtual communities, sharing or exchanging information, ideas, images or videos, and not be simply passive users of applications designed by others *(Stenger & Bourliataux-Lajoinie, 2011)*. This principle of action paving the way for exchanges between and with the Internet is qualified of participation as seen previously in the thesis. The famous websites Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Twitter, etc., all encourage users to share in several manners: the presence of a 'Share' button enables the Internet user to catch the attention of others. More specifically, the photo-sharing site Flickr suggests to "Share your photos"; on Facebook, users are encouraged to "connect and share with the people in your life," posting a status is also called sharing; on Amazon, a user does not write a review of an item, but is rather asked to "Share your thoughts with other readers". So, the notion that describes Internet users' participation in Web 2.0 is Sharing.

To conclude, a Web 2.0 site permits Internet users to interact and collaborate together in a Social Media dialogue *(Boistel, 2013)*. The purpose of the following part of the thesis is to have a better understanding of the different existing Social Media applications and to precise the place and role of an Opinion Platform among these.

## II.1.2. OPINION PLATFORMS

As explained by Proulx (2007, p.3) Social Media applications could be interpreted in terms of the aphorism "the medium is the message". This statement originates from the book *Understanding Media, the Extensions of Man* (McLuhan, 1964, p.1)*, meaning that the characteristics of the medium itself are as important as the contents conveyed through the medium (and sometimes even more important). Indeed, the medium influences the perception of the contents, for instance the usage itself of a collaborative medium, regardless of the contents delivered, shape its reception. So, the usage of Social Media applications can not only increase the persuasiveness of the content, but also provide the user with the opportunity to become more involved. The Internet is an extremely powerful mobilizing medium.

The Social Media applications types can be split into five main categories according to Constantinides and Fountain (2008, p.233) : content communities, social networks, blogs, content aggregators and finally forums/opinion platforms. Content communities are websites that organize and share specific types of contents like videos (Youtube) or photos (Flickr). The online encyclopedia edited by web users Wikipedia and social bookmarking sites like Del.icio.us are content communities as well. Social networks are applications granting Internet users to create web pages about their person, allowing other users to access their personal contents and communication. Examples of famous social networks are Facebook and Linkedin. Blogs are online journals (for example the Huffington Post) often combined with podcasts, that is to say, sounds and videos aimed at being streamed or downloaded. Content aggregators are "applications allowing users to fully customize the web content they wish to access" *(Constantinides and Fountain, 2008, p.233)* for example the Google and Yahoo search engines can be customized according to the users' wishes. The last category is the thesis' area of interest: Forums and Opinion Platforms. Their main usage is for Internet users to give their opinion on a subject, person, company, product or service, exchanging ideas and information (example: Tripadvisor). Conversations on Forums or reviews on Opinion Platforms center the discussion on a specific common interest.

Opinion platforms can also be called Virtual Communities of Interest. For Amami and Rowe (2000, p.12) a Virtual Community is "a group of individuals spread around the world having common interests and needs, and being linked through the Internet network". With the same spirit, Jones and Rafaeli (2000, p.215) adopt the Fernback & Thompson (1995) definition of Virtual Community as "'social relationships forged in cyberspace through repeated contact within a specified boundary or place (e.g., a chat channel) that is symbolically delineated by topic of interest". Kozinets (1999,

p.254) uses the wording of Virtual Communities of Consumption, which seems appropriate: "Virtual communities of consumption are a specific subgroup of virtual communities that explicitly center upon consumption-related interests. They can be defined as affiliative groups whose online interactions are based upon shared enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, a specific consumption activity or related group of activities".

These various definitions focus on the common interests and needs of groups of users interacting online, taking into account consumers' simple interest for a company. One must pay attention to the distinction between two communities that have some similarities: Virtual Communities of Interest and Brand Communities. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) have been the first sociologists studying consumption communities created around a particular brand. The aim of a brand community is to gather brand fans who are engaged towards it, connecting consumers of a given brand so they can share experiences, feelings and questions about the brand. So, the Virtual Communities of Interest linking individuals through their common needs and interests must specifically be differentiated from the Brand Communities for the good understanding of the study.

| CONCEPT | AUTHOR | WORDING USED | DEFINITION |
|---|---|---|---|
| **BRAND COMMUNITY** | Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) | Brand Community | *"A specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of relationships among admirers of a brand"* |
| | Wipperfürth (2005) | Brand Tribe | *"Behavior of consumers driven by a similar passion for a brand to assemble into a parallel social universe with its own values, rituals, vocabulary and hierarchy"* |
| | Sitz (2009) | Brand Community | *"An elective perennial group of stakeholders sharing a system of values, norms and representations (i.e. a culture) and identifying membership links one to one and one to the community whole, based on the shared attachment to a particular brand"* |
| **COMMUNITY OF INTEREST** | Rheingold (2000) | Virtual Community of Interest | *"Social aggregations being part of public discussions for a while, with a minimum sense of belonging to initiate interpersonal relations on the web"* |

| | Amani and Rowe (2000) | Virtual Community of Interest | *"A group of individuals spread around the world having common interests and needs, and being linked through the internet network"* |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Jones and Rafaeli (2000) | Virtual Community of Interest | *"Media spaces created thanks to the computer tool, giving the opportunity to groups of individuals to taking part of interpersonal interactions around a common subject"* |

To get a better overview of the opinion platforms' characteristics, let's look at two different electronic media classifications.

The first classification reflects the level of interactivity and communication scope of Internet users.
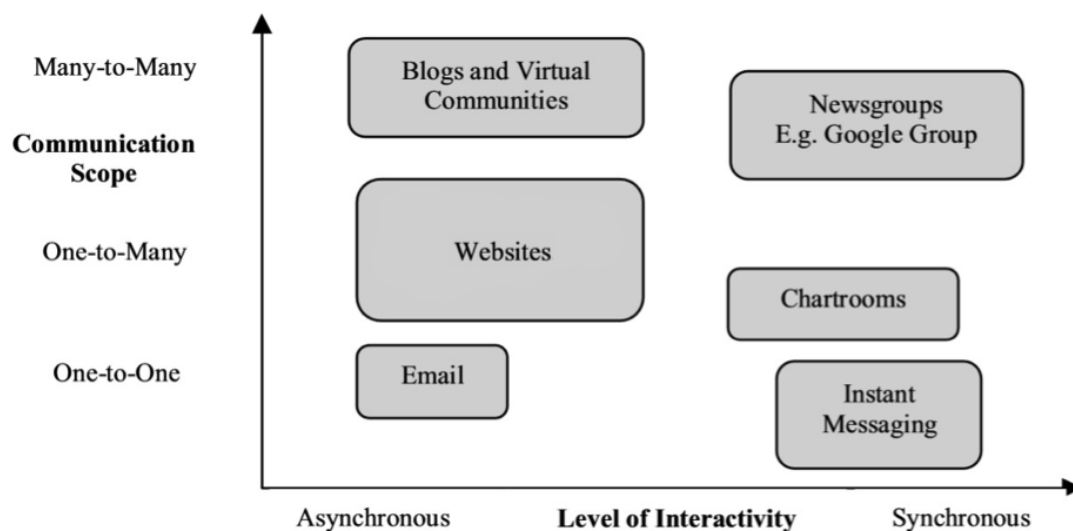
Interpersonal relationships are different according to the type of electronic media the individual is facing. Every electronic media has its particular level of interactivity and communication mode. Emails for example, are accessed by writers and readers at different moment whereas instant messaging necessitates two individuals available at the same time. These are the distinction between asynchronous and synchronous channels *(Litvin et al., 2008, p.462)*. In addition, some communications link one individual with another, like emails or instant messaging, while other kinds of communication connect a single individual (only person entitled to be the sender and allowed to publish information) with many others, for example showcase corporate websites. Both in one-to-one or in one-to-many communication situations, participants can be identified.

Opinion Platforms flow within a new marketing paradigm, the "many-to-many communications" *(Kimmerle & Cress, 2008)*. The many-to-many communication paradigm is characterized by multiple users contributing and receiving information, with the information elements often interlinked across different websites. "In many-to-many communication, each participating person can post messages and each person can receive messages. Consequently, a sender does not know who the recipients are (high anonymity) and the recipients do not know who the sender of a message is (low identifiability)." *(Kimmerle & Cress, 2008, p.425)*. With the evolution to the full many-to-many communication paradigm, individuals can give and receive information to and from the Internet, they will have the possibility to connect and interact dynamically within a flexibly formed scope, no artificial barriers will obstruct the way between information and communication tools, and the definition of 'many' will go further to include entities such as companies, products, processes, events, and concepts *(Hoffman & Novak, 1996)*.

The second classification is the one of Stenger and Coutant (2013, p.113) offering a new sociotechnical and ethnographic approach, which classifies Social Media depending both on platforms specificities and users' practices.



Stenger and Coutant, 2013
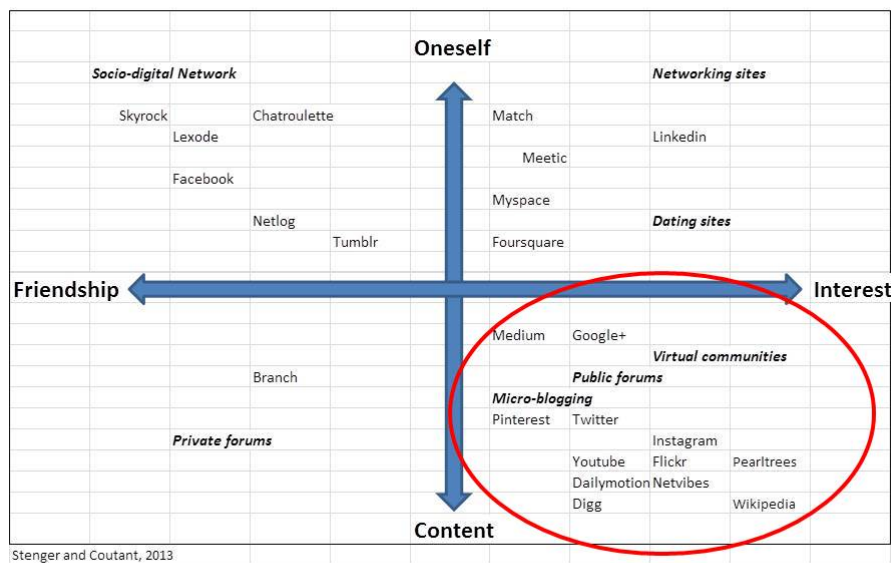
A Social Media mapping is done on two axes: participation type and visibility. The first axe is participation centred on an 'interest' VS participation centred on 'friendship'. The second axe is the 'self-presentation' purpose or the 'content publication' purpose concerning the content that is shared and made visible. On the graph, Virtual Communities, therefore Opinion Platforms, are characterized by general Content (as opposed to Social Media used to deliver and exchange

information on oneself) and offering an Interest for the web community (as opposed to Social Media used to develop and maintain relations with friends).

Let's now look more deeply to the main characteristics of opinion platforms that are interesting for the thesis.

Opinion platforms are offered as a service rather than as packaged software *(O'Reilly, 2007)*, without scheduled releases, usually free to everyone (no licensing fees are charged) easy to download, share and distribute. In addition, these applications are considered as unfussy and easy to use. User interfaces are more instinctive and the value proposition for the Internet user is simple to recognize *(Constantinides and Fountain, 2008, p.235)*.

The main goal of an opinion platform, and therefore it's most important characteristic is that it enables interaction between users. According to Pavlik & MacIntoch (2015), opinion platforms operate "in a dialogic transmission system (i.e., many sources to many receivers). This is in contrast to traditional media that operates under a monologic transmission model (one source for many receivers)." The users create a specific profile for the website, designed and maintained by the platform organization, and can connect with other individuals.

Two profiles of users have to be distinguished : the opinion seekers and the opinion leaders. The opinion leaders are characterized by their position and social visibility, their domain of expertise and their personality *(Vernette & Florès, 2004)*. "The opinion leader could be identified by his attractive force, which lies on his empathy and exemplarity, and his conviction force which depends on the credibility of his advices and behaviour" *(Béji-Bécheur & Gollety, 2007, p.24)*, or as persons having an influence on people around and/or exchanging information on products and brands, according to Gilly et al. (1998). For Rogers and Cartano (1962, p.435), opinion leaders are "individuals who exert an unequal amount of influence on the decisions of others". Their understanding of opinion leadership as personal influence is clear and concise. If the opinion leader profile has been studied for a while by researchers and companies, it is because he/she has the ability to efficiently exchange information with other consumers and influence them. Opinion seekers are also spontaneously looking for opinion leaders' advices when purchasing innovative products or for products implying a high involvement, as opinion leaders are in general interested "in particular products fields" and are often "early adopters" *(Litvin et al., 2008, p 459)*. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1964) described many ways in which opinion leaders and thus seekers function. The leaders learn from and form opinions from the mass media and then give their opinions to others: this is the two-step flow of communication. The receivers that are influenced by opinion leadership:

the consumers at the end of the two-step influence flow, are the opinion seekers. Opinion seeking is less well documented than opinion leadership in the marketing literature. The existence of opinion leadership, however, is based on the fact that some individuals seek and then follow the advice of opinion leaders. Engel et al. (1990, p.42) make this clear: "when we actively seek advice from another, that person becomes an opinion leader". Opinion leaders can't exist without opinion seekers. *(Flynn et al., 1996)*

In addition to the distinction between opinion leaders and opinion seekers, a more detailed Social Media users' profiles is explained in the Forrester's Social Technographics data (2009) that classified consumers on a 7 scale ladder according to their online participation *(Bernoff, 2010, p.3)*.



Base: US online adults
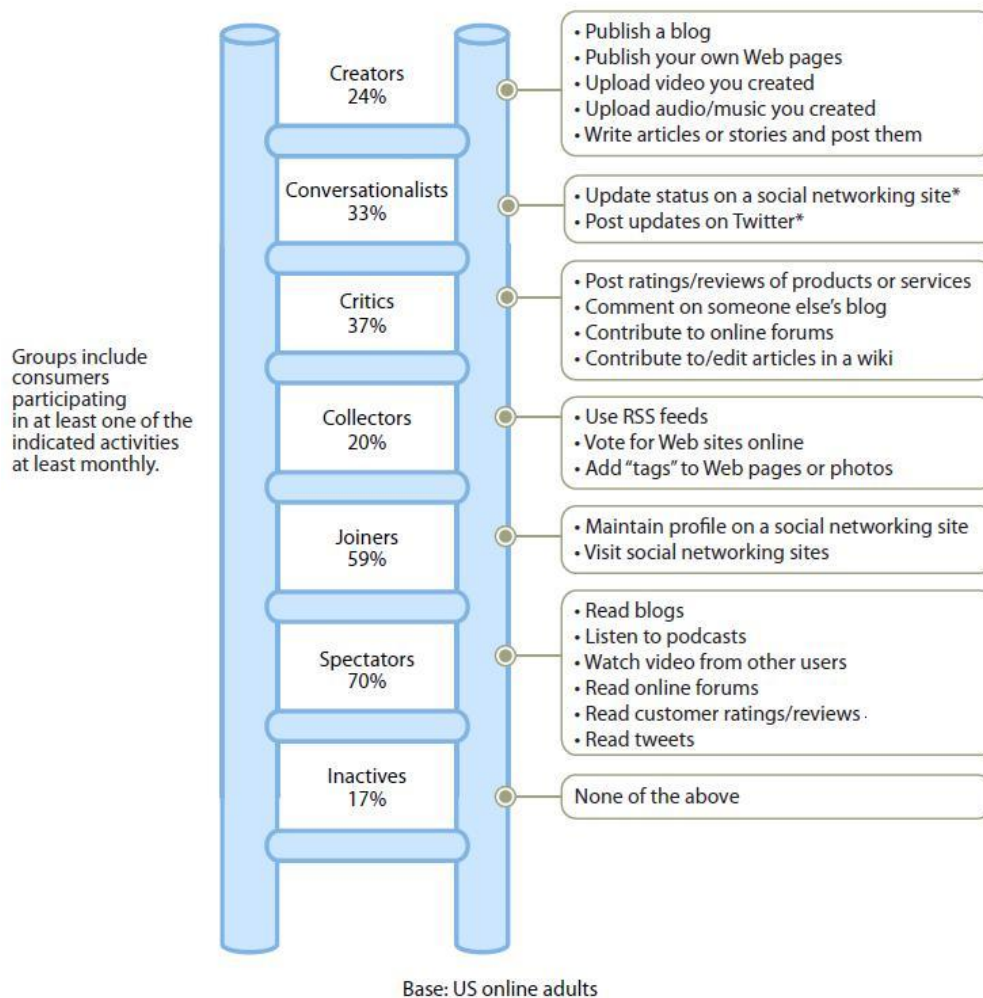
Source: North American Technographics® Empowerment Online Survey, Q4 2009 (US)
*Conversationalists participate in at least one of the indicated activities at least weekly.

56291                                                                 Source: Forrester Research, Inc.

Thank to this ladder, we can position the population of interest of the thesis (i.e. opinion platform users) among the entire Social Media population. This ladder hasn't been built as segmentation of users (groups are overlapping), but to emphasize users profiles. The data collected showed that consumers are part of different behaviours. This classification helps us to better define the usage

of the Social Media by Internet users. Within this ecosystem, the "critics" creating contents in posting reviews of products/services are the opinion leaders, and "spectators" consuming contents in reading customer reviews are the opinion seekers.

In order to highlight the impact of the development and democratization of opinion platforms on modern societies, the example of the tourism industry is given to finish this part on opinion platforms. Over the past decade, a significant change in the distribution of travel products has occurred leading to a progressive disappearance of travel agents. Yet, a new generation of intermediaries are progressively filling the gap, for example Booking, Expedia, Hotels.com, Opodo, and many others. However, these new electronic intermediaries do not provide a personalized tangible relation with the customers like the old travel agencies did. They rather generate traffic through price and placement marketing strategies, which fail to satisfy the customers' affective needs for assistance, guidance and advice, normally provided by a tangible travel agent. Indeed the opinion of travel agents, who were selling third-party products, was trusted by customers.  Due to this trust, tourism industry providers were motivated to maintain good relations with travel agent intermediaries, believing that the travel agent would then exercise an influence in moving incremental sales in the side of the provider *(Litvin et al., 2008, p.466).* Therefore, all the new travel agency websites now possess an opinion platform that features many opinions of consumers concerning the products they distribute. These electronic travel agencies do so in order to compensate for the latent defect of a lack of personal relationship with the customer. The opinion platforms offer numerous travellers' assessments, discussions, and virtual dissection of most hotels and restaurants worldwide. The best example of opinion platform in the tourism industry is the famous website TripAdvisor: "the world's largest travel site […] (which) offers advice from millions of travellers […]. TripAdvisor branded sites make up the largest travel community in the world, reaching 340 million unique monthly visitors, and 350 million reviews and opinions covering 6.5 million accommodations, restaurants and attractions. The sites operate in 48 markets worldwide" *(TripAdvisor.com, 2016).*

Now that the main stakes of the opinion platforms were explained, the next part will precise the role of an opinion platform's user generated content: the online review. If we consider that an opinion platform is an organism, then online reviews are the lifeblood of the opinion platform organism.

## II.1.3. ONLINE REVIEWS

Online reviews are contents generated by users on the Web 2.0. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2009, p.61) "when Web 2.0 represents the ideological and technological foundation, User Generated Content can be seen as the sum of all ways in which people make use of Social Media. The term, which achieved broad popularity in 2005, is usually applied to describe the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end-users." The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2007) mentions three conditions for online reviews to be validated as user generated contents. The first condition is that they have to be published on a website available to every Internet user, thus contents exchanged via emails or instant chats are excluded. The second condition is that they need to be written in a unique individual manner with a creative state of mind, therefore it rejects replications of contents that already exist. The third condition dismisses all contents that have been conceived in a company's context, inside of a professional practice with a commercial intention.

Online reviews are used in a consumption context, in order for some consumers to give their opinion on a product, service or company; and for some others, to access it. Indeed, consumers follow a new decision-making process before the purchasing act. The now include in their purchasing cycle the ZMOT: Zero Moment of Truth, concept introduced by Google in 2001. The ZMOT is a summary of today's multichannel consumer decision-making for the purchase of an item where the consumers search, review ratings, styles, prices and comments on Social Media before visiting a retailer. It is the specific moment in the purchasing cycle when the consumer looks for information online, most of the time consumers' reviews on a product, service or company. In the recent years, there has been an increasing number of consumers researching information online prior to the purchasing act, as the Internet keeps evolving. From now on, marketers have to take the ZMOT in consideration and build strategies to be prepared for it *(Collet, 2013).* "If you're available at the Zero Moment of Truth, your customers will find you at the very moment they're thinking about buying, and also when they're thinking about thinking about buying." *(Lecinski, 2011, p.26).* It's a fact, Internet users' reviews are now on very influential and essential at the time of the purchasing decision. Indeed, Marketing research *(Litvin et al., 2008, p.465)* showed that more and more clients rely on recommendations from other clients online. This indicates a clear modification in the way consumers get information about their desired product or service. In their 2015 study "Navigating the new digital divide - Capitalizing on digital influence in retail" Deloitte

Digital highlighted the importance of the consumers' online review at each steps of the purchasing process, illustrating the ZMOT:

| Moment | Definition | Finding |
|---|---|---|
| Find Inspiration | The customer informally gathers information from a variety of trusted sources: family, friends, blogs, social media, and traditional media. | Seventy percent of consumers are now leading their own shopping journey (becoming aware of products through means outside of retailer or brand communications), while only 30 percent get their initial inspiration from a retailer or brand's advertisement. |
| Browse and Research | The customer begins to match the inspiration to a group of physical products that meet his/her need. He/she gathers additional information on the options available for sale. | Sixty-seven percent of shoppers browse retailer sites prior to shopping in stores, but nearly as many (61 percent) are using search engines for their browsing and research activities. |
| Select and Validate | The customer continues to narrow down his/her consideration set, eventually reducing the choices to only a few options. Then, he/she makes a selection and validates that the choice will best meet his/her need. | Sixty-seven percent of consumers read product reviews during their shopping journey. The reviews they read are split equally across retailers' sites or apps and third-party sites or apps. |

*Source: Deloitte Digital, 2015*

Let's now have a look at some figures in two main and representative developed countries of the Western World: France and the USA, to highlight the fact that consumers' reviews play a major role in the consumption decision.

- Figures in France

According to a 2015 IFOP (French Institute of Public Opinion) survey, Internet is an indispensable channel to guide the purchasing decision, regardless of the future purchasing location (Internet or physical shop). This survey, realized for Reputation VIP - an agency specializing in online reputation, highlights the data collected among a sample of 1 003 persons, representative of the French population.

80% of Internet users declare using Internet to get information before buying a product or service. This score reaches 87% in the Parisian area and 92% among the liberal professions and senior executives. *(IFOP Survey, 2015, p.26)*

Before purchasing online, 88% of the individuals consult online reviews of consumer, forums or blogs (of which 44% "often"). This practice is also widespread before a purchase in a store: 73% (of which 29% "often"). *(IFOP Survey, 2015, p.26)*

Furthermore, half of the respondents consult reviews on social networks before purchasing online (52% in global, 70% for the 18-24 years old and 66% for the 25-34 years old), and 44% before purchasing in stores (59% for the 18-24 years old and 57% for the 25-34 years old). *(IFOP Survey, 2015, p.26)*


- Figures in the USA

The results of a 2008 survey from Opinion Research Corporation, an infoGROUP company, confirm that online reviews have a major impact on the decision the purchasing decision in the USA. The study surveyed 736 American respondents from the 6th to the 9th of June 2008.

61% of respondents stated that before purchasing a new item, they were consulting online reviews, blogs and other sources of online customer feedback.

83% of respondents indicated that online product evaluations and reviews had some level of influence on their purchasing decisions.

The survey also reported that 38% of respondents first consult online product or service reviews when they begin their shopping research, 27% do it when they are trying to decide between two or three products or services, and 21% do it to confirm that they are buying the right product or service. *(Opinion Research Corporation, 2008)*

Furthermore, according to a February 2008 study commissioned by PowerReviews and lead by the E-tailing Group, nearly one-half of 1200 US consumers surveyed who shopped online four or more times per year and spent at least $500, said they needed four to seven customer reviews before making a purchase decision. *(The E-tailing Group, 2008, p.5)*

To finish, the BrightLocal Consumer Review Survey in 2015 (annual survey exploring into how consumers both read & use online reviews, 2354 entries) showed that 68% of consumers reported that positive reviews are a major factor in their decision process when buying a product/service. The survey also revealed that 92% of consumers read online reviews to determine their choice (vs 88% in 2014). *(BrightLocal, 2015)*


Now that the extent of this phenomenon was highlighted, the inherent reasons why an increasing number of consumers read online reviews will be explained. This success is due to the strength of interpersonal communications that take the form of word-of-mouth (WOM), and more specifically of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in an online context. The word-of-mouth is a "process [that]

allows consumers to share information and opinions directing buyers towards and away from specific products, brands, and services." *(Hawkins et al., 2004)*

First Marketing literature on word-of-mouth is dated from the 1960s. The 1967 definition of Arndt mentioned "face-to-face communication about products or companies between those people who were not commercial entities". Since then, the word-of-mouth definition has been sharpened with time evolution. In the 1980's, a more far-reaching definition appeared including "all informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services or their sellers." *(Westbrook, 1987, p.261).* In Westbrook's study, "informal communications" refer to interpersonal communications, opposed to the communications that transfer product/service information from companies to consumers via mass-media channels. According to Silverman (2011, p.52) the interpersonal communications' "essential element is that they are from or among people who are perceived to have little commercial vested interest in persuading someone else to use the product and therefore no particular incentive to distort the truth in favor of the product or service."

The strength of WOM is especially apparent in the service sector. Indeed, WOM is particularly useful in the service sector as intangibility makes the pre-purchase trial of services impossible. WOM is particularly important when services are complex or have high-perceived risk *(Zeithaml et al., 1996)* because it is seen as a highly credible information source as the sender is usually independent of the organization providing the service and is not seen to gain directly from advocating the service *(Silverman, 2011).* Murray (1991) determined that consumers of services had more trust in personal sources of information, and that a service purchase decision was more impacted by personal sources of information. Thus, WOM plays a particularly significant role for those services that have high-credence qualities, such as the tourism industry *(Litvin et al., 2008, p.458).*

Thus, the key-defining characteristic of word of mouth is the perceived independence and credibility of the source of the message. Indeed, "Interpersonal influence and word-of-mouth (WOM) are ranked the most important information source when a consumer is making a purchase decision." *(Litvin et al, 2008, p.458).* Hovland and Weiss (1951) gave one of the first experimental validations of the relationship between credibility and persuasion. The results of the experience of Hovland and Weiss demonstrate a clear impact of the credibility of the source on the persuasiveness of a communication, showing that a highly credible source would more probably generate an attitudinal change compared to a weakly credible source. Conceptual researches on persuasion agree to define the credibility of a source according to two dimensions retained by

Hovland, Janis and Kelley (1953): expertise and reliability. The expertise is the perceived ability of a source to formulate correct statements. The reliability is the degree to which an audience perceives the statements of a source as being valid. However, even if there is a certain conceptual consensus around these cognitive components of the credibility of the source, some scientists have proposed to enrich the concept. Whitehead (1968) and Berlo, Lemert, and Mertz (1969) identify competence, reliability, dynamism and objectivity as formative dimensions of the credibility of a source. A source will be perceived as objective from the moment it expresses an opinion that the receiver considers as impartial. Even though the receiver may grant to the source some expertise of the problem addressed, he can simultaneously doubt the veracity of the speech he is confronted to. Objectivity is assessed in terms of suspicions and intentions attributed to the source by the audience. The source must not, for example, favour one aspect of the problem rather than another, or suggest that his speech serves some personal interests.

While a multitude of research considered word-of-mouth in a traditional context, the way consumers search and consult the reviews on the Internet has been relatively little studied. Consumers seem to trust disinterested opinions of people outside their close circle, such as online reviews *(Duana et al, 2008)*. Malcolm Gladwell in his book *The Tipping Point* (2000) has shown how word-of-mouth communication has a tremendous impact on the rate of adoption of new products/services and we can suggest this effect is often enhanced or facilitated through the Internet. Whereas WOM initially referred to the idea of consumer-to-consumer conversation about a consumption item, the worldwide spread of the Internet developed a less personal but more ubiquitous form of WOM becoming both more pervasive and amorphous, the so-called electronic WOM (eWOM) (*Brown et al., 2007; Godes and Mayzlin, 2004*). Vernette and Florès (2004) highlight the fact that interpersonal communication is no longer based on the traditional WOM, but can transit from keyboard to keyboard via Internet exchanges. Larceneux (2007) even talks about "Word of mouse". eWOM is qualiticated by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004, p.39) as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company which is made available to multitude of people and institutions via the Internet." This new type of WOM has become an important venue for consumers' opinions *(Mayzlin, 2006)* and it is assumed to be even more effective than WOM in the off-line world *(Chatterjee, 2001)*. The reasons of this effectiveness and the motivations for consumers to consult online reviews are first due to some characteristics of electronic technologies developed hereafter.

eWOM communications possess unprecedented scalability, speed of diffusion and facilitate information exchange among communicators. "Posted comments can certainly convey a sense of

customer satisfaction level in a more neutral environment than can the company-sponsored sites."
*(Litvin et al., 2008, p.464)*

In addition, eWOM communications are more powerful than traditional WOM due to their higher accessibility and high reach: interpersonal influence not only flows from opinion leaders to opinion seekers, but also spreads as a result of relationships among followers *(Chatterjee, 2001)*. Consumers obtain information more easily and reduce costs of information research. This is related to the own perception of the consumer to lack time, he/she is looking to reduce at maximum the search time when looking for information about products/services. Indeed, as opposed to the ephemeral essence of traditional WOM, eWOM exists in an online scope that accessible, linkable, and searchable. eWOM is also more persistent: most of the text-based information presented on the Internet is reachable for an unlimited amount of time in many cases, at least in theory, *(Cheung and Lee, 2012)*. This actual technological context allows consumers to access unlimited quantity of information and an ability to communicate with other consumers and brands everywhere in the world.

To finish, reflecting the social media's low cost, wide extent, and growing anonymity, it is probable, as time moves forward, that an increasingly large number of consumers will either look for or directly be exposed to the reviews of online opinion leaders *(Hennig-Thurau et al, 2004)*. Indeed, sometimes consumers do not plan to look for online reviews but find them by "accident" while navigating on the Internet *(Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006, p.12)*.

Now that the characteristics of electronic technologies motivating consumers to read online reviews were presented, the next paragraph will explore the concrete intrinsic reasons to look for eWOM.

First, consumers look for eWOM to reduce their risk. According to the 2015 Nielsen Global Trust in Advertising Report (p.4), consumers believe recommendations from friends and family over all forms of advertising. However, an interesting Bazaarvoice survey (p.6) of 2012 published that 51% of people actually found user generated contents more important than the opinion of their friends and family. So the main reason for customers to consult online reviews is the credibility of the word-of-mouth: the information source and the organization being independent, this source gets a higher credibility than marketer created source of information *(Fong and Burton, 2008)*. This independence leads to a perceived sincerity, reliability, and trust in the quality of the information. Since the source of the information is perceived as credible, consumers consult reviews to obtain credible information aiming at guiding the purchasing act. This utilitarian dimension of information

research through eWOM includes the reduction of the risk inherent in the consumption decision, that is the fear of making the wrong choice of consumption. According to Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006) consumers go on the Internet when they are stimulated by offline inputs like the TV to reduce information asymmetry *(Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006, p.1)*. Indeed, Internet users are qualified as impartial and reviews as relevant *(Mata and Quesada, 2014).* The Internet allows an individual to provide feedback to many others resulting in a written form of eWOM, also known as consumers' online reviews. In a collective fashion, online reviews can provide a real feeling of the product or service, complete the global image that the consumer has of it, considerably diminish pre-purchase doubt, and lighten post-purchase conflicts. As such, according to Litvin et al. (2008, p.466) "it would seem that these eWOM sources play an increasingly important role in the consumer decision-making process" and maximize benefits linked to the product/service.

Then, consumers look for online reviews to infer product/service quality. In evaluating a product/service in which interaction processes are dominant, consumers are more likely to consult peer consumers' experiences (ex: eWOM) and rely on the diversity of personal experiences to infer product/service quality. In fact, for many services, interaction processes are critical to consumers' perceptions of quality *(Parasuraman et al., 1985)*. In these areas, eWOM is particularly valuable to consumers. According to Hennig-Thurau and Walsh (2003) consumers have different motivations to read peer-generated product reviews and the most important motivation is making inferences of product/service quality*.* A study from Raffour Interactif (2015) in the tourism industry in France shows that 71% of consumers read the other consumers reviews when preparing their holidays *(Raffour Interactif, 2015, p.1)*. In addition, a study made by Del Chiappa (2011) with Italian tourists shows that 64,8% sometimes and 12% almost always changed their hotel reservation after having read negative online reviews *(Del Chiappa, 2011, p.336)*.

A final reason to look for online reviews is to follow the lead and imitate the common practices. Marie Seguette (2004) makes the postulate that the development of citizen consumption is explained by the rise of holistic social determinations, that is to say, motivations aroused by norms, values, or imperatives acting on the scale of the global society. Thus, the motivation goes beyond the frame of the community, of the "tribe", but makes sense in societal concerns. Yet consumers may not realize that they are influenced by the norms of society and think they act according to their individual free will. According the results of Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006), some consumers seek the opinions of others online because "the others do" *(Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006, p.1)* and because "it is cool" *(Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006, p.12)*. Consumers imitate each other

following a social or vicarious learning paradigm. This imitation creates a snowball effects leading to a network effect: more and more users will use specific Web 2.0 applications because everyone uses it and it became the reference *(Hawkins et al., 2004).*

However, despite all the positive aspects seen previously, one could question the real credibility of online reviews supposedly written by consumers in a non-commercial market context in mind. Indeed, ethical boundaries are frequently overstepped by companies. These non-ethical practices can be seen as ''employing tactics that engage the prospects without them knowing they are being marketed'' *(Neisser, 2004, p.4).* These kind of practices appeared long time ago in British theaters, when people planted in the audience were paid to clap and shout 'Bravo' *(Taylor, 2003).* The most obvious non-ethical online tactic is when a company asks its employees to post positive reviews on online opinion platforms as if they were real consumers. Companies provide employees with scripted postings so they can comment several times. As comments should appear coming from knowledgeable users and not from company front-men, employees are asked to play the role of opinion leaders in order to make sure that opinion seekers will rely on their comments. It is indeed very easy to implement such a strategy and the subterfuge is undetectable. But companies don't hesitate to go further in non-ethical practices. They can ask employees to post negative comments regarding the competition, like harsh reviews on restaurants and hotels, complaints on imaginary poor customer services for travel agencies *(Litvin et al., 2008, p.465).* The abuses have become so important that countries and norm organisms are thinking at introducing standards to control them, in order to increase the Internet users' trust in online reviews and discussions. In 2004 a new trade association has been created - the Word of Mouth Marketing Association, and in 2005 the American Marketing Association's Code of Ethics specifically prohibited the deliberate mislead of consumers *(Carl, 2006).* Indeed, trust in the quality of the information on the Web 2.0 is a major challenge *(Bornemann, 2004).*

Nevertheless, in spite of the existence of non-ethical practices, reading consumers' reviews to obtain information stays a widespread phenomenon due to the several powerful reasons presented above. Yet, Moe, Schweidel and Trusov (2011) point out a fact worthy of interest : the proportion of consumers actually writing reviews on opinion platforms is much lower than the proportion of consumers looking for online reviews to get information. So there is disequilibrium in the reviews read and the reviews written. In the literature, information sharing is viewed as a public-good phenomenon. According to Cabrera and Cabrera (2002, p.693) a public-good is characterized as "a shared resource from which every member of a group may benefit, regardless of whether or not

they personally contribute to its provision, and whose availability does not diminish with use." The fundamental problem of a public-good is that any individual may consume a public good without contributing to a group. This results in a social dilemma situation, which occurs when an individual attempts to maximize self-interest over social-interest and makes a rational decision. On the Internet, anyone can access and consume knowledge without making a direct contribution back to it. So it is very likely that individuals will free-ride *(Cheung et al., 2012, p.219)*.

To support this fact with meaningful figures, a 2012 study realized by Nomao – first search engine specialized in touristic places recommendations in Europe, reveals the evolution of the online reviews' number in five European countries (France, United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, Germany) between 2007 and 2011 *(Nomao, 2012, p.6)*.
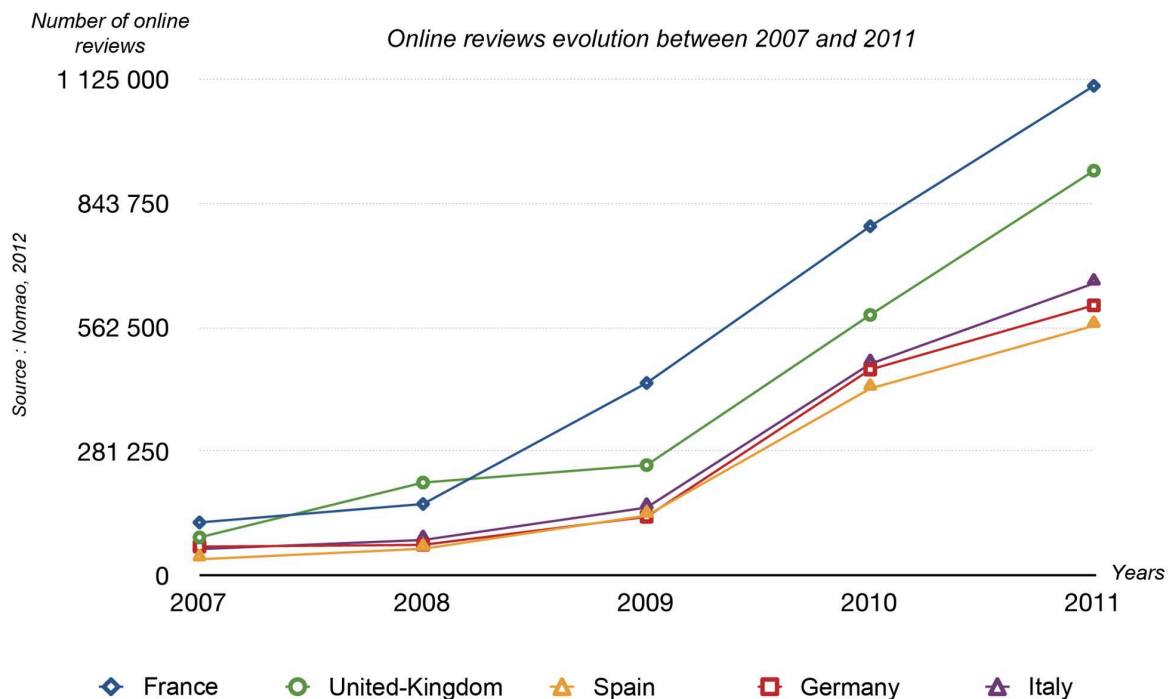


In 2011, the 45 millions of French Internet users posted 1,1 million reviews, the 51 millions of English Internet users posted 917 000 reviews, the 30 millions of Italian Internet users posted 662 000 reviews, the 65 millions of German Internet users posted 612 000 reviews and the 29 millions of Spanish Internet users posted 566 000 reviews. We can see on the graph that the number of online reviews is increasing over time. In the five largest European countries, reviews have been multiplied by 8 in 4 years *(Nomao, 2012, p.6 and 7)*. But despite the fact that this phenomenon has increased and is still increasing over time, if we compare the number of reviews with the number of internet users in 2011, we find that only 2,5% of French Internet users were posting reviews, 2,2% of Italian, 1,9% of Spanish, 1,82% of British and the lowest score for the Germans: 0,9% of actively

participating Internet users. Even in extrapolating this increasing tendency to 2016, we would still reach a low percentage of Internet users posting reviews. Research has found that the majority of Internet users are not inclined to post their opinions online. Thus, posting online reviews on opinion platforms typically fail to depict a random sample of consumers. *(Litvin et al., 2008, p.464)*

To conclude the circumscription of the study's context : beyond the ideal capabilities of the Web 2.0 Social Media allowing every Internet user to take on both the role of contents' consumer and creator described previously, one could question the real motivations of consumers to become actors. To answer this interrogation, the next part of the thesis will determine which motives lead the few consumers who do write reviews, to activity participate in giving their opinion online. The structure will be based on the Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) study developing motivations to engage in spreading eWOM.

## II.2. CONSUMERS' MOTIVES TO WRITE ONLINE REVIEWS: HENNIG-THURAU FRAMEWORK

I chose to build the thesis' framework on the Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) quantitative study on motivations behind consumers engaging in eWOM on an online opinion platform. This study has a deep understanding of the subject as it is an extension of another study on the same area of interest, the one of Balasubramanian and Mahajan (2001). Indeed, Hennig-Thurau et al. extended Balasubramanian and Mahajan's three types of social interaction utility: "focus-related utility, consumption utility, and approval utility" *(Balasubramanian and Mahajan, 2001, p.125)*, to include two additional consumer utilities: "moderator-related utility, and homeostasis utility" *(Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p.43)*. In addition, the sources of these utilities are diverse and credible, indeed, Hennig-Thurau et al. united and synthesized all the valuable and existing literature on the consumers' motivations to participate online in their study : Dichter (1966); Engel, Blackwell and Miniard (1993); Sundaram, Mitra and Webster (1998). Finally, Hennig-Thurau et al.'s study is relevant for the thesis' framework because the hypothesis of the empirical part on potential levers that could increase online participation in writing reviews, are based on the motives identified in their study.

A detailed description of the 'Hennig-Thurau framework', thoroughly and academically explaining the various types of "utilities", adding some complementary literature to the underlying theories the study, is given below.

## II.2.1. FOCUS-RELATED UTILITY

Focus-related utility is linked to the consumer's belief that contributions from all users (including himself) will increase the focus on the community *(Balasubramanian & Mahajan, 2001, p.125)*. On an online opinion platform, examples could be writing reviews on subjects or products of interest for the rest of the community. "This utility is based on the assumption that "adding value" to the community is an important goal of the individual" *(Hennig-Thurau, 2004, p.42)*.

Four motives are included in the focus-related utility:

-concern for other consumers

-helping the company

-social benefits

-exerting power

*(Hennig-Thurau, 2004, p.42)*

### II.2.1.1. CONCERN FOR OTHER CONSUMERS

Posting reviews on online opinion platforms can be linked to the desire of helping other consumers doing the right choices when purchasing goods or services avoiding mistakes. As a consequence, such communication might include positive and negative reviews concerning a company or a product/service *(Dichter, 1966; Sundaram et al., 1998)*. Dichter uses the term "Other involvement", meaning that the motivation is to give a gift to the other (person), to share experiences, to express feelings like friendship and care *(Dichter, 1966, p. 148)*.

This "concern for other consumers" motive is close to altruism, which means giving to others without expecting reward in return. Altruism comes from the Latin "alter": "other". According to Batson (2011, p.115) a definition of altruism is "a motivation with the ultimate goal of increasing the welfare of one or more individuals other than oneself". These people are characterized by their open-mind to others and generosity. They might be empathetic towards a person needing advices or help in the purchasing process, and this feeling increases the wish to help the person. Researchers found that the fact of enjoying helping the others is linked to altruism. "Though there

is no apparent compensation, people in virtual communities still obtain intrinsic enjoyment and satisfaction by helping others through sharing their knowledge." *(Cheung et al., 2012, p.221).*

## II.2.1.2. HELPING THE COMPANY

Customers who are very pleased by their experience with a product or a service might have the desire to help the company. Sundaram et al. use the term "Product-involvement". "The purchase and use of products that are perceived highly important or relevant tends to create excitement and WOM is employed to vent the positive feelings" *(Sundaram et al., 1998, p.529).* Customers consider that the company is worth receiving support through positive eWOM. Dichter (1966) explains that the excitement with the product is such, that it creates a tension that needs to be released through eWOM *(Dichter, 1966, p.148).*

Wang and Fesenmaier (2003) found out that enforcing service excellence is an important point that can lead to consumer engagement towards the company. The marketing concept of engagement has been explored from the perspective of Consumer Brand Engagement (CBE) and Consumer Engagement (CE). Hollebeek (2011) describes the concept of Consumer Brand Engagement as "the level of an individual customer's motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterised by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity in direct brand interactions." *(Hollebeek, 2011, p.790).* According to Patterson et al. (2006) the Consumer Engagement is "the level of a customer's various "presence" in their relationship with a service organisation. The presences include physical presence, emotional presence and cognitive presence" *(Patterson, 2006, p.3),* while Vivek et al. (2012) define it as "the intensity of an individual's participation in and connection with an organization's offerings and/or organizational activities, which either the customer or the organization initiate. We argue that it is composed of cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social elements." *(Vivek, 2012, p. 127).* Individuals can be current or potential consumers of the brand.

Another more interesting definition of Consumer Engagement is given by Van Doorn et al. (2010) from a behavioural perspective. In their definition, the authors position the engagement as "behavioral manifestation toward a brand or firm, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers. CEBs include a vast array of behaviors including word-of-mouth (WOM) activity, recommendations, helping other customers, blogging, writing reviews, and even engaging in legal action" *(Van Doorn, 2010, p.253).* Van Doorn et al. have also determined prerequisites of consumer engagement. They divide these factors into three categories: client-related, company-

related and context-related. The client-related factors are multiple. We can mention first the customer's satisfaction towards the brand that translates into brand engagement, commitment, trust or perception of the performance. Then the customer's personality also plays an important role. In terms of company-related factors, these are the characteristics of company, its reputation and its size. As for the context-related factors, it refers to the competitive factors of the company as well as its political, economic, social and technological environment. According to this conceptual model of Customer Engagement Behaviour, these various factors may interact with each other *(Van Doorn et al., 2010, p.259)*.

Studies on consumer engagement in the online context began to appear in the literature arguing that engaged consumers were spreading positive word-of-mouth about the company and were recommending its products through websites (such as brand communities, opinion platforms and blogs) and social networking sites *(Sashi, 2012)*. Thus the customer's activity of writing in a purpose of defense or promotion of the brand appears as an engagement act towards the brand. Following the idea of Van Doorn et al. (2010) that consumer engagement is a behavioural concept (Customer Engagement Behaviour), Jahn and Kunz (2012) states that it is the actions that engage the customer online. In addition, Gummerus et al. (2012) argue that Web 2.0 is now one of the most popular forums in which consumers engage behaviourally with brands. They show that the consumer engagement behaviour includes displaying, commenting in online discussions, and all communication activities run by the firm that take place through brand communities, blogs and other Social Media.


Mollen and Wilson (2010, p.923) define "online engagement" by describing it as "the cognitive and affective commitment to an active relationship with the brand as personified by the website or other computer-mediated entities designed to communicate brand value. It is characterized by the dimensions of dynamic and sustained cognitive processing and the satisfying of instrumental value (utility and relevance) and experiential value (emotional congruence with the narrative schema encountered in computer-mediated entities)".

In the line with research on online consumer engagement, a new concept has been formed: the willingness to participate (WTP), in reference to the consumer's willingness to engage with the company, by giving of his time and thus rely on the power of many *(Parent et al., 2011)*.

As seen in this part, the consumer engages himself on the Web 2.0 giving his opinion about a company or a brand and this gives him power: the power to express himself in favour or against the company. In the following part we are going to see that the consumer also engages himself on Social Media looking for a social benefit.

## II.2.1.3. SOCIAL BENEFITS

"Affiliation with a virtual community can represent a social benefit to a consumer for reasons of identification and social integration; thus, it can be presumed that consumers engage in eWOM communication to participate in and belong to online communities (McWilliam, 2000; Oliver, 1999). Specifically, consumers may write comments on opinion platforms as such behavior signifies their participation in and presence with the virtual community of platform users and enables them to receive social benefits from this community membership." *(Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p.42)*

According to Huang's study (2012, p.124), the first reason why consumers want to participate in communities is the wish to "collaborate with others to achieve common goals". They feel part of a collective intelligence looking for the best deals and opportunities. They also feel stronger together to get the best products/services from companies.

The importance of the experience of socially interacting with other humans is emphasized because peers are not perceived as agents representing a commercial business, thus the consumer experience is given an extra social dimension. Nowadays, individuals are looking to reinforce, even give again a social dimension in a society looking for social links. In the information economy, we have the opportunity to be in contact with anyone and anytime through the web 2.0. Yet, individuals have never felt as lonely. Alain Decrop (2008), in his article "Paradoxes of the postmodern consumer" has identified this paradox in the current consumer. On the one hand the consumer has never been as connected with the world and with his family through computers, mobile phones, and interactive television and he saw his human relations multiply. On the other hand, he feels lonely because these technologies also deprive him of real concrete and deep human relations. In professional life, for example, more and more people work at home through the Internet, weakening concrete professional human links within a company *(Decrop, 2008, p.86).* To balance this feeling of loneliness, we are witnessing the emergence of many consumer tribes who gather around common values in a desire to recreate this social link through Social Media and the feeling to belonging to a group. This explains the success of many social networks like Facebook, Twitter or Linkedin. Belonging to a group means that participants are emotionally involved. They will feel part of the community, share goals, and see the others as members of their family and so be willing to help. Lakhani and Von Hipper (2003, p.937) also argued that "people who have a strong attachment to an organization will be more likely to assist others with organization related

problems. It has also been argued that people who develop a strong attachment to a virtual group are more likely to participate and provide assistance to others."

Batson (1994) defines collectivism as "motivation with the ultimate goal of increasing the welfare of a group or collective" *(Batson, 1994, p.605)*. Collective motivation leads to a contribution of knowledge in the interest of the community, without expectation of something in return. As Cheung and Lee (2012) notice, "collectivism can be linked to the social identity theory, in which individuals gain social identity from the groups they belong to." *(Cheung and Lee, 2012, p.220)*. According to Akkinen (2005), the Social theory explains the reasons why Internet users join virtual communities. This theory states that participation is not due to individual benefits provided to members but rather to social benefits. Two movements coexist in this direction: the Social Exchange theory and the Social Identity theory. The Social Exchange theory says that participation in a group activity is explained by the expected reciprocity *(Akkinen, 2005, p.25)*. The Social Identity theory postulates that the participation of an individual in a group activity allows the construction and maintenance of its social identity. Thus, the individual builds his "self" thanks to his interactions with the group and his membership *(Akkinen, 2005, p.26)*. When individuals identify themselves as members of a social aggregate, they are more likely to define themselves in terms of their membership in that group. Members have the feeling that others' needs will be satisfied by the resources received through their contributions to the group.

## II.2.1.4. EXERTING POWER

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004, p.42) call this motive in their article "exertion of collective power over companies". The collective power is linked to two major factors: the increasing number of internet users, and so to the increasing number of consumers and companies receiving eWOM and the ongoing availability of the reviews. Consumers are aware that negative eWOM, specially when numerous and simultaneous, can have an impact on companies' image and reputation and that they consequently can exert a collective power. "Therefore, eWOM communication provides a mechanism to shift power from companies to consumers" *(Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p.42)*.
Consumer empowerment is the delegation of power to the consumer *(Wright et al., 2006)*. It is considered as a "result" and thus is reflecting in the consumers' freedom of choice and ability to make arbitrations of consumption *(Denegri-Knott et al., 2006, p.963)*. In other words, the consumer empowerment would fall within an approach of redistribution of the resources' control in favour of the consumers *(Shaw et al., 2006)*. According Cova and Ezan (2008), consumer empowerment

would be analyzed as "a current social phenomenon that sees consumers have more and more skills and know-how, be able to thwart business strategies and guide the actions of the companies in the direction they desire" *(Cova and Ezan, 2008, p.73).* The approach recognizes to the consumer the power to modify the conduct of the company by its skills and knowledge. The company would then be invited to "take into account the Other, the consumer, not learning about him, but learning from him, from his expertise, from his experiences..." *(Cova and Ezan, 2008, p.73).*

Rezabakhsh et al. (2006) and Rodriguez-Ardura and Martinez-Lopez (2008), analyzed the different sources of empowerment on the web. These studies created a basis for a bigger power coming from online consumers, thanks to a bigger transparency of information through online exchanges. However, the discipline of the consumer behaviour takes in consideration other sources of empowerment, like the growing ability of online consumers to act directly in the elaboration of a value proposition adapted to fit their individual needs *(Pires, Stanton and Rita, 2006).* While an online consumer segment is reluctant to increase its level of empowerment, on the contrary some consumers use the web to strengthen it. This second group of consumers is better informed and more active: they use tools to make research on products more effective and efficient *(Deck and Wilson, 2006)*, they are ready to defend themselves against intrusive or discriminatory marketing practices and propagate their opinions and recommendations among many other consumers *(Carl, 2006),* they are more likely to participate in the design of a value proposition that meets their preferences *(Kamali and Loker 2002)*.

With the rise of communication technologies, the development of social networks and the evolution of the Internet, consumers clearly took power over brands, marked their interests and increased their requirements. The ease of mobilization, particularly through Social Media, clearly shows the response capacity that people have taken with the Internet. In this way, a TNS Sofrès study (2011, p.8) conducted during the Top Com Corporate on the e-reputation of French major companies (CAC 40), showed that 44% of social network users say that they "like" using the Internet to seek to change a company's behaviour

According to some authors, this consumer empowerment leads to a phenomenon of consumer accountability *(Wright et al., 2006).* Because the consumer is empowered through Social Media, he has the impression to contribute to a change in the society. He feels that he can control the market when he had no power on it in the past. Cochoy (2008) mentions a «market politicization» or a «political consumerism». This engagement feeling goes with a lack of confidence towards

governments and public institutions. On the same way, economic powers, represented by multinational companies that have a direct influence on political powers, inspire more and more suspicion. Citizens feel neglected and deluded by marketing services that are using sophisticated techniques to make them buy. Through Social Media, active consumers feel less manipulated by political and economic powers.

## II.2.2. CONSUMPTION UTILITY

Consumption utility means for consumers to obtain value through "direct consumption of the contributions of other community constituents" *(Balasubramanian & Mahajan, 2001, p.125).* In other words, "consumption utility" happens when a consumer reads reviews on products/services and decides to comment what the other consumers have written, soliciting an answer from them. This is typically the case in post-purchase situations, when customers have questions about the way to use the product. *(Hennig-Thurau, 2004, p.43)*

### II.2.2.1. POST-PURCHASE ADVICE SEEKING

Once a product/service is purchased, customers might want to look at opinions concerning it and eventually look at ideas to better use the product, or solutions if he is meeting some difficulties. If the consumer interacts with other members of the user's community, asking questions or posting comments, he has more chances to get qualified and useful information than if he only read reviews. "This "post-purchase advice seeking" motive is concerned with acquiring the skills necessary to better understand, use, operate, modify, and/or repair a product." *(Hennig-Thurau, 2004, p.43).* Sundaram, Mitra and Webster (1998, p.350) give "advice seeking" as a reason write comments in order to obtain advice on how to resolve problems, and point it as one of the reason to engage in negative WOM*.*

## II.2.3. APPROVAL UTILITY

According to Balasubramanian and Mahajan, (2001), approval utility comes "when other constituents consume and approve of the constituent's own contributions" *(Balasubramanian & Mahajan, 2001, p.126).* The "approval" contribution can be formal. This happens when a consumer recommends another user's contribution to the rest of the community, which he finds of a particular interest. This can also be through rankings or a "useful" or "helpful" checkbox like on Tripadvisor,

which can be asked by the platform about reviews, and then lead to a classification of the "best contributors". The "approval" can also be informal, through a direct communication with the user who wrote the review. Finally, the "approval" can also be a "disapproval". In that case users communicate generally on a private mode.

The approval utility can be linked in some way with the notion of egoism. According to Batson (1994) egoism refers to serving the public good to benefit oneself. He considers that if " the ultimate goal is to increase the actor's welfare" we can then consider it as egoistic *(Batson, 1994, p.604)*. Researchers in psychology, sociology, economics, and political sciences assume that all human actions are ultimately directed towards self-interest. Rewards and avoidance are the most obvious self-benefits that drive individuals to act for the public good. It is quite common indeed for a human being to expect something in return (money, congratulations, recognition...) when doing something for others (like writing reviews). This is explained by the Social Exchange theory which points out that consciously or not, human beings to get the more and to pay the less when exchanging with the others. *(Batson, 1994, p.604)*

This egoistic dimension is commonly pointed out in eWOM communication articles. For example, reputation is often cited as an important determinant of information sharing behaviour. Users who share their knowledge expect recognition and feel themselves as experts. Similarly, if a consumer wants to gain a reputation in an online opinion platform, he/she has a higher tendency to spread eWOM. Therefore perception of the opportunity to enhance one's own reputations is positively related to one's eWOM intention. *(Cheung et al., 2012)*

Another selfish motivator of the act for the public good is reciprocity, which is also conceived as a benefit for individuals to engage in social exchange. When information providers do not know each other, the kind of reciprocity that is relevant is called "generalized" exchange, and the person who offers help to others is expecting returns in the future *(Ekeh, 1974, p.394)*. Prior research found that people who share knowledge in online communities value reciprocity, and it is this belief that drives them to participate and share. Therefore, the perception of the opportunity for reciprocity is positively related to one's eWOM intention. *(Cheung et al., 2012)*

The two concrete motives associated with the approval utility will now be developed: self-enhancement and economic rewards.

## II.2.3.1. SELF-ENHANCEMENT / SELF-REALIZATION

Self-enhancement motivation is linked to the wish to get a positive image and reputation by the other community members and to be seen as an expert or a connoisseur. This participates to elaborate a certain level of social status that can be important for one's personal development *(Hennig-Thurau, 2004, p.43).* Dichter uses the term "self-involved speaker" that corresponds to a need of recognition. The opinion leader is looking for the receivers of eWOM so that he feels less lonely *(Dichter, 1966, p.148).*

Furthermore, prior studies have demonstrated that knowledge self-efficacy is an important antecedent of knowledge sharing in the online environment. Individuals tend to provide useful advice on computer networks if they possess a high level of expertise. Conversely, when they lack information or knowledge that is useful to others, they tend to make less contribution in knowledge sharing. In social cognitive theory, self-efficacy is a personal judgment of one's capability to execute actions required for designated types of performances. It has a great impact on people's intentions and behaviour. Derived from this line of study, we believe that a higher perceived knowledge self-efficacy about a purchasing experience, leads to a higher tendency to spread eWOM in online opinion platforms. Indeed, knowledge self-efficacy can be served as a self-motivator for knowledge contribution in opinion platforms. *(Shaari et al., 2014)*

Self-realization is what any individual is looking to reach in a blooming life. It can be defined as "the fulfilment by oneself of the possibilities of one's character or personality" *(Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, 2016).* Yet, to be realized, this self-realization has to be confronted with the look of the others for acceptance and validity. Therefore, there is a tension between what the individual wants to be and the vision that others have of him. The identity is based on oneself, the idea that the individual has of himself, and also the vision that others have of him. Throughout his life the individual will try to bring these two identities together. The first identity evolves with the events of the personal life of the individual and the second identity changes with the collective history. Throughout his life, the postmodern individual will personally construct his life project at the mercy of the vagaries of his life, without feeling stuck in a membership group, but having the need to be recognized by his peers and by the society as belonging to the group he has chosen. Indeed, the individual is looking to act together with others to achieve its own life project. In this sense, the individual belongs to several groups that may be disparate but at a definite time, which gives him the resources to move forward in his life project.

In a study of the Crédoc *(Hebel et al., 2009, p.44)*, based on current motivations of consumers, in particular the importance given to the life project and the attention of others to valid it, the Maslow pyramid ends up to be inverted concerning the young generations and the upper middle class.
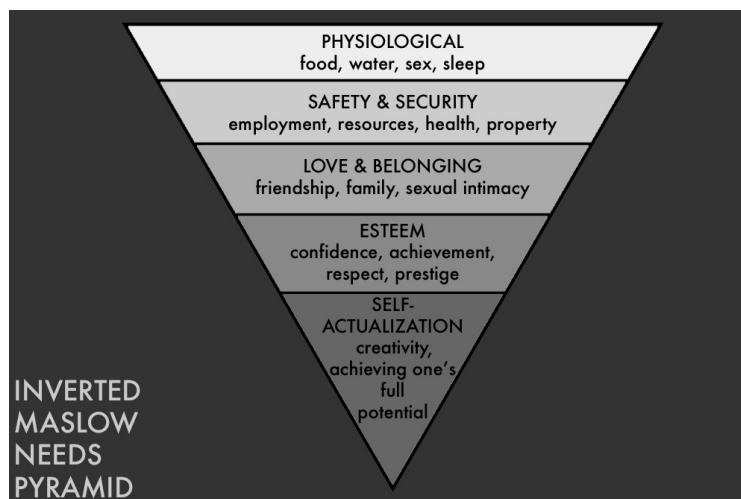


*Source: Maslow (1987)*

These categories value the fulfilment needs of self-actualization before the physiological needs. Expenses related to self-actualization represent a third of total spending. Expenditure on culture, leisure time, education and housing are included in this category.

Moreover, the postmodern generation is embedded in the digital age, where it spends most of its time, where reputation is becoming increasingly important. Indeed we saw that the boundary between the real and the virtual is becoming more and more blurred and therefore the need for recognition and achievement, seen through the inverted Maslow pyramid, is also present in the individuals' virtual life *(Hebel et al., 2009).* Thus the reputation of individuals on the Internet is very important. That is why Internet users pay an increasing attention to what they publish on Social Media, as this can have repercussions in their real life but also in their virtual community. The "e-reputation" has become as important as the reputation. According to Donath (1999) building a reputation would be a primordial motivation for participating in a group activity.

## II.2.3.1. ECONOMIC REWARDS

An economic reward has always been seen by the person receiving it as a sign of satisfaction from the giver. Economic rewards can have various forms: invitations, coupons, bonus on freemium platforms etc. When they exist, economic rewards are usually offered by platforms operators as a

gift for participating. "As such, the receipt of *economic rewards* for eWOM communication from platform operators is another form of approval utility". *(Hennig-Thurau, 2004, p.43)*

## II.2.4. MODERATOR-RELATED UTILITY

In some cases, opinion platforms can act as a moderator, that is to say an intermediary between the customer and the company. This moderator-related utility is specially useful in two cases: when the customer doesn't succeed in having a direct contact with the company, because the company doesn't want to talk directly with customers, or hasn't got a dedicated call center for customers. The other case is when the customer wants to complain about a product/service, and doesn't dare to face or contact the company directly (for example the restaurant in case of a dissatisfaction). Again, this "moderator" feature doesn't exist in the traditional WOM. *(Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p.43-44)*

### II.2.4.1. CONVENIENCE

As seen above, using the platform moderator can be very convenient for the user in case of complaints. Hennig-Thurau et al.,(2004) mention the example of the dedicated "complaining forum" created by United Airlines. *(Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p.44).* They refer to Harrison-Walker's on "e-complaining" where she mentions: "The complaint forum may simply be easier for consumers to identify and access than the company" *(Harrison-Walker, 2001, p 403).*

### II.2.4.2. PROBLEM SOLVING SUPPORT

The moderator can act as an advocate for the consumer and speak for him to the company. This is helpful for consumers, especially in the case where many of them are dissatisfied by the product/service. The moderator has in that case a more powerful voice than the one of single customers. The chances of getting the issues solved is higher. In addition, this has no financial cost and prevents the consumer from facing directly the company. *(Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p.44).*

## II.2.4. HOMEOSTASIS UTILITY

Homeostasis utility is based on a theory that people need to have a balance in their lives. If they become unbalanced, they will manage to take the necessary measures to recover their equilibrium.

Heider (1958) gives a simple definition: "this principle (i.e. homeostasis) states that the self-regulating processes within the organism tends towards a state of equilibrium." *(Heider, 1958, p.275)*. As far as eWOM is concerned, the consumer's balance can be broken in case of a very good or a very bad consumption experience. The way to come back to the balance can be by writing positive or negative reviews.

Litvin et al. (2008) relate in their paper on eWOM the study carried out by Westbrook (1987) concerning cars and TV consumers. *(Litvin et al., 2008, p.459)*. Findings of the study were that positive or negative experience with the products were creating psychological tension. This tension could be released through eWOM. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) associate two motives with homeostasis utility: "expressing positive emotions" and "venting negative feelings" *(Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p.44)*.

## II.2.5.1. EXPRESSING POSITIVE EMOTIONS

"The purchase and use of products that are perceived highly important or relevant tends to create excitement and WOM is employed to vent the positive feelings" *(Sundaram et al., 1998, p.529)*. Dichter (1966) adds that the use of the product purchased is not enough to release the tension created by the joy of having purchased it. Writing reviews can solve the tension *(Dichter, 1966, p.148)*.

## II.2.5.2. VENTING NEGATIVE FEELINGS

Anxiety reduction is one of the four motives found out by Sundaram et al. to explain negative WOM. "Respondents indicated that sharing their negative experiences with others helped in easing their anger, anxiety, and frustration" *(Sundaram et al., 1998, p.530)*. A second reason is vengeance. Respondents said they were lead by revenge, trying to prevent other customers from purchasing from the company *(Sundaram et al., 1998, p.530)*. This feeling is even stronger. It is defined as "intense, compelling wish or intention to get even, right a wrong, or avenge an injury" *(Gabriel and Monaco, 1994, p.165)*. The desire for revenge is different from the customer dissatisfaction because it incorporates the intention to act. It also differs from anger or intense rage, because it is less spontaneous and more intentionally planned *(Neidermeyer and Rose, 1999)*.

The eleven district motivations ("concern for other consumers", "desire to help the company", "social benefits", "exerting power over the company", "post-purchase advice seeking", "self-enhancement", "economic reward", "convenience in seeking redress", "problem-solving support", "expressing positive emotions", "venting negative feelings") were then empirically tested by the authors *(Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004)* using an online questionnaire with a sample size of 2 063.

The authors' analysis suggested the four primary factors leading to eWOM writing behaviour were:
-consumers' desire for social interaction
-desire for economic incentives
-concern for other consumers
-the potential to enhance their own self-worth
Hennig-Thurau et al. also identified four potential consumer segments: "self-interested helpers", "multiple-motive", "consumer advocates" and "true altruists". Of these, self-interested consumers were found by the authors to form the biggest generators of eWOM. *(Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p.49)*

Now that the consumers' motivations to participate in writing reviews on opinion platforms were explained, the following part of the thesis will display the benefits of a strong online participation in order to give a purpose to my empirical study.

## II.3. BENEFITS OF A STRONG ONLINE PARTICIPATION IN WRITING REVIEWS
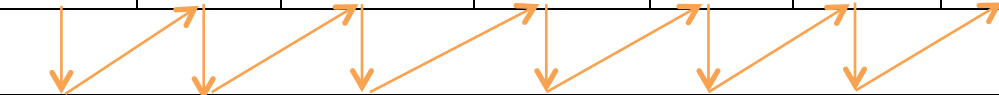
### II.3.1. BENEFITS FOR CONSUMERS

The outcomes of contributing in Social Media are much stronger than simple social sharing for consumers. It has an impact on business reputation, career evolution and new opportunities, as discussed in Gu, Tang and Whinston (2012). The changes in communication between businesses, communities and consumers introduced by Social Media are deep and widespread.

Today's consumers serve as retailers on eBay, producers' media directors on YouTube, authors on Wikipedia, critics on Amazon and TripAdvisor. The role of the individual, both consumer and media

becomes crucial in any process of exchange and value creation. The relationships between customers and companies have evolved considerably thanks to the tool of the Web 2.0 that they use more and more to listen, be listened, to hear, be heard, to understand and be understood. The Web 2.0 is today the symbol of a new division of roles between producers and consumers. Thus the Time magazine, breaking the tradition of almost 40 years, has chosen the modern virtual consumer as personality of the year 2006 ("TIME's Person of the Year for 2006 is you", Time Magazine cover, December 25th, 2006), instead of any particular personality. This notifies the development of the participation and collaboration online. Interpersonal relationships have emerged as the main use of the web *(Gensollen, 2006)*. We are living now a mutation of the consumer through the rise of a consum'actor also called prosumer or post-consumer, i.e. a consumer "actor of his destiny, of his choices, of the products that he imagines, that he criticizes and of which he makes, or not, the success" *(Flores, 2008, p.79)*. The consumer becomes a consum'actor towards its human and institutional interlocutors and he wants to be more invested in the organizational chain. The Web 2.0 being a global public space for creativity and innovation on the Internet, the consumer intervenes more and more in and wants to co-produce through the information found on the Internet (articles on Blogs, Forum or Social Networks, post videos on YouTube, etc.). The consumer is allowed to become active without the intervention of the company thanks to the Web 2.0. Thus "technological developments gradually give birth to a new consumer: a smarter consumer, because more informed and demanding, a freer and stronger consumer in front of retailers and brands, a consumer becoming an actor of his consumption. This mutation is fast and new generations enter fully in this new world" *(Cova & Cova, 2009, p.88)*.

The Internet user is no longer a spectator of the Web, which gives way to a new form of democracy of discourse and the rise of a new power *(Boistel, 2013)*. Raynal (2009) explains that each power generates a counter power. This balance of power leads for a while to stability in the society. This counter power is issued from disagreements and aims at correcting mistakes and abuses of power. According to his cycle of power evolution below, the new counter power given to people comes from the New Information Technologies and the Internet. Raynal (2009, p.38) says it is an "absolute power" because the user alone with its computer can say what he wants (truth or lie) to anyone anywhere in the world.
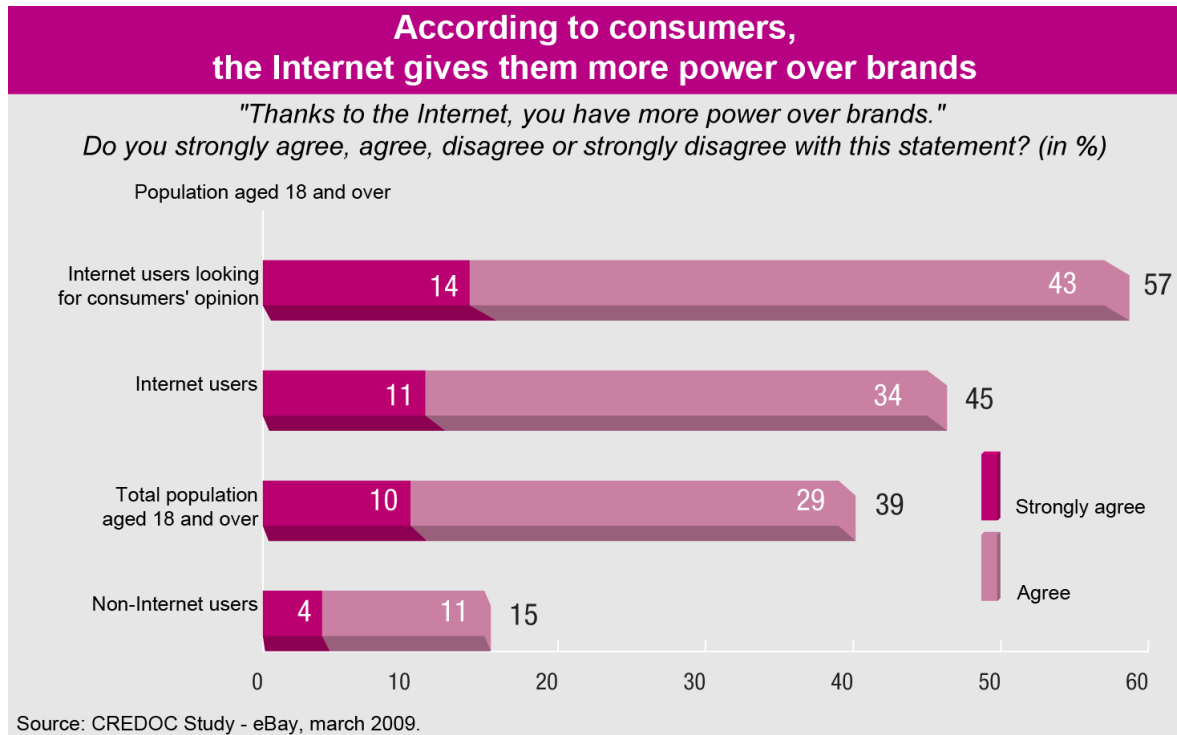
| Power | Earth Nature Animals | Tribes Nations Countries PHYSICAL POWER | Arts Enlightenment century INTELLECTUAL POWER | Trade Business MONEY POWER | Ideological power of the Nations POLITICAL POWER | Image power MEDIA POWER | ? TOMORROW |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Balance | | | | | | | |
| Counter Power | Men physical power and intelligence | Religions SPIRITUAL POWER | Industrial Era Inventions SCIENTIFIC POWER | Unions Associations NGO POWER OF THE VULNERABLE | Laws power POWER OF THE JUDGES | Internet power ABSOLUTE POWER | |

*Source : Raynal (2009)*

Pitt et al. (2002) explained that Web 2.0 enables consumers to obtain more transparency from companies and more balancing information exchange between consumers and companies. It is a new paradigm compared to past versions of the Internet: a change of power and communication between companies and consumers, Indeed, we are witnessing the creation of a much more horizontal communication model where there is a shift from traditional mass media to new personalized ones *(Belvaux and Notebaert, 2015)*. This new paradigm in power migration from companies to consumers was underlined by Time magazine in 2005, explaining that the access of an unlimited mass of information and knowledge by the consumers was completely new and lead the consumers to infinite choices in products and services directly available from the Internet *(Constantinides and Fountain, 2008, p. 236)*. From now on, the consumer has the power to influence the market, to influence demand, and the power to influence sales.

The power of consumers is treated to understand consumers' reaction towards the hegemonic power of the company becoming more democratic by means of Web 2.0. The latter, offering greater freedom of expression, allows them to learn to develop a different relationship with companies, including a relationship of equality because they can, through exchanges with other consumers, develop knowledge about a given product or service without the intervention of the company. They have become more powerful and more creative subjects *(Muniz and Schau, 2007)*. They use the market and the consumption as an exercise ground of creativity and power *(Berthon, Pitt and Campbell, 2008)*. A study of the Credoc (French Centre of Research for the Study and the Observation of Life Conditions) for eBay France affirms that «the Internet fundamentally transforms the relation that the consumers maintain with the brands, rebalancing the ratio of power» (see

graph below). Thus, in 2009, 39% of the consumers aged 18 and over, 45% of Internet users and 57% of Internet users looking for consumers' opinion considered they had more power over brands thanks to the Internet *(Hebel et al., 2009, p.33)*.



**According to consumers, the Internet gives them more power over brands**

*"Thanks to the Internet, you have more power over brands."*
*Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with this statement? (in %)*

Population aged 18 and over

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Internet users looking for consumers' opinion | 14 | 43 | 57 |
| Internet users | 11 | 34 | 45 |
| Total population aged 18 and over | 10 | 29 | 39 |
| Non-Internet users | 4 | 11 | 15 |

Source: CREDOC Study - eBay, march 2009.

Consumer empowerment is a major and unprecedented consequence and benefit of Web 2.0. The domain of technology development has certainly been strongly impacted with Web 2.0, but the consumer's relationship with the brand, businesses, strategy and marketing even more *(Litvin et al., 2008)*. Consumer empowerment is defined as managerial practices allocating more freedom or control to consumers. That is, to give them more power, providing more means of information and a better understanding of goods and services *(Hunter, Harrison and Waite, 2006)*. In other words, the consumer takes more power through increased control of his choices *(Wathieu et al, 2002)*. Rowlands (1995, p.103) states that "empowerment can be seen to have three dimensions: personal […], close relationship […] and collective […]". A process of empowerment consists of increasing self-confidence, self-esteem and development of a sense of being able as individual or group. If the main aspects of the empowerment of the individual or the group are encouraged and developed, self-perception will change and internalized oppression will be challenged. There will be changes that can take many forms, with the person or group in the best position to make its own decisions and be more able to act in its own interests.

In addition, Surowiecki has developed the concept of Collective Intelligence in his book "The Wisdom of crowds" (2005). The knowledge and experience of consumers in this concept are aggregated in relation to Social Media. Golub and Jackson (2010, p.113) mention that aggregated personal beliefs of consumers become a kind of truth in Social Media "if and only if the influence of the most influential agent in the society is vanishing as the society grows". The theory that explains how Social Media become the place where the knowledge is built, is called "social constructionism". "More users: more value through the aggregation of collective intelligence" *(Constantinides and Fountain, 2008, p.236)*. Increasing the number of participative users widen the magnitude of collective intelligence, that leads to enhanced and more valuable products and services. The online encyclopaedia Wikipedia, the tourism website Wikitravel, or Amazon that suggest purchases based on customers profiling are good examples of aggregation of collective knowledge and intelligence *(Constantinides and Fountain, 2008, p.236)*. According to Larceneux (2007), the more consumers write reviews, the more it will benefit to the community.

## II.3.2. BENEFITS FOR COMPANIES

The active role of the consumer is highly prized by companies. Indeed, prior studies have examined how an important eWOM affects the business bottom line, including product sales *(Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006)*, customer value and loyalty *(Gruen et al., 2005)*, and the success of new product introductions *(Clemons et al., 2006)*.

The well being of a single consumer is upgraded "by the action of other individuals, without a mutually agreed-upon compensation" *(Easley & Kleinberg, 2010, p. 509)*: this is due to the network effect in social media. The more users on Web 2.0 applications, the more the value of the applications increases. Reaching the critical mass of users is the key factor success to make network effect fully effective. Before the critical mass is obtained, the challenge for new applications is to attract users as soon as possible, which is not a big issue if there is a value perceived by users adopting the application before reaching the network effect. This successful loop: perceived value and network effect in a Web 2.0 application, sets up a strong barrier to entry for imitating applications because of the increasing number and loyalty of users to the pioneer application. Network effect on Web 2.0 applications increases the bottom line of the companies that reach the critical mass of users. Indeed, studies showed that the influence of online reviews on consumers' purchasing decision is more important according to the number of reviews.

In addition, strong online participation can help companies improve their products and services. Indeed, critics raised by consumers concerning price, quality and delivery of the product/service are valuable enhancements tracks. Web 2.0 gives the opportunity for the company to have a closer relationship with their customers: interactivity creates proximity with consumers. Borders, time zones, physical distances don't exist anymore. Conversations and exchanges with customers are recorded and kept "forever". Therefore, companies have more and more data on their customers and prospects that they can analyze and use to improve their offer of products/service so that it becomes as close as possible to the consumers expectations and desires. This is part of the "Big data" issue faced by most of the commercial companies. Furthermore, communities can act very intelligently and promote innovation: recurring pointing to a defect in the comments can be a harbinger event of new consumers' expectations and lead to marketing solutions to position new offers corresponding to these new needs. Consumers' reviews help enhancing existing offers and contribute also to the emergence of new ones. Moreover, the users' reviews can offer valuable insights into the difficulties encountered in the implementation and/or use of the product/service. This information is useful to improve customer relations and customer service *(Breillat, 2015)*. Merriam-Webster (2016) has recently redefined the use of Crowdsourcing (business word created in 2006 and meaning outsourcing marketing functions to a Social Media) as a tool adapted for soliciting contributions from an online community rather than employees or suppliers to invent new or enhanced services and products. Crowdsourcing on Social Media can also be used to provide feedback on products, services, and communication of companies towards their consumers: this is a modern type of focus groups, so called Conversational Marketing, useful to be activated to widely discuss all topics related to a company and its customers.

Literature has also demonstrated that reading reviews increases the receiver's knowledge *(Sheth, 1971)*, attention *(Mikkelsen et al., 2003)*, consideration *(Grewal et al., 2003)*, brand attitudes *(Herr et al., 1991 and Laczniak et al., 2001)*, intentions *(Grewal et al., 2003)*, and expectations *(Webster, 1991)*. With the growing popularity of consumer opinion websites, virtual communications among online users have become a commonplace. This fact led some researchers to assert that eWOM plays a vital role to acquire and retain consumers *(Litvin et al., 2008 and Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009)*. The setting up of a system to gather consumers' reviews, if numerous, can help a company predict sales. It will then review the communication actions to be taken for the future. Indeed, it has been showed that the volume and the valence of online assessments influence product sales *(Godes and Mayzlin, 2004 and Phelps et al., 2004)*. Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) have studied the influence of eWOM on books sales through online recommendations on Amazon.com and Barnesandnoble.com sites. Their work showed that the number of reviews and the average score

for a book had an impact on sales. The increasing number of "brand advocates", i.e. customers recommending a product/service without an economic reward, can also help a company to forecast sales *(Marsden et al., 2005)*. Kirkpatrick and Roth (2005) mentioned as well that there was a direct link between eWOM and revenue generation in the tourism industry *(Litvin et al., 2008)*. In Australia, several studies: O' Neil et al. (2002) study on wine tourism in Australia, or Shanka et al. study of destination selection in Western Australia showed that eWOM recommendations have far more impact on consumers decisions than official opinion leaders or classical specialized media. In the US, in 2004 already, Litvin et al. showed that eWOM recommendations had more effect on tourists' restaurant selections than classical media of professional experts. To conclude, eWOM is a major free advertisement done by consumers themselves. This leads to higher visibility on the market, gain of new customers, partners, and contacts.

Now that all the key concepts underlying the research question were explained and that the beneficial purpose of such a research has been developed, the thesis will focus on the empirical study aiming at putting in light the potential levers that could lead consumers to participate more on online opinion platforms, answering the problematic highlighted by Moe, Schweidel et Trusov (2011, p.14): "While customers routinely seek out the opinions of others prior to making a purchase, it's much less common for customers to share their own opinions online. As a result, the opinions that potential buyers and social media strategists see come from only a small segment of the customer population."

# III. RESEARCH METHODS

The empirical study presented in the following part has to goal to discover the potential different levers that could be activate in order to increase consumers' participation in writing online reviews on opinion platforms. A quantitative analysis was realized in order to determine what could lead the majority of customers to break the silence. Indeed, research is missing on the intersection between what leads customers to participate and how this participation can be increased. This is a field of exploration as no research has been made on this specific subject yet.

## III.1. RESEARCH STRATEGY

The logic I chose in order to create knowledge is the Deduction logic. It is the dominant research approach in the natural sciences, where laws present the basis of explanation, allow the anticipation of phenomena, predict their occurrence and therefore permit them to be controlled *(Collis and Hussey 2003).*

According to Snieder and Larner (2009, p.16) "the deductive approach follows the path of logic most closely. The reasoning starts with a theory and leads to a new hypothesis. This hypothesis is put to the test by confronting it with observations that either lead to a confirmation or a rejection of the hypothesis."

Yin (2003) suggests that, where you have made use of existing theory to formulate your research question and objectives, you may also use the theoretical propositions that helped you do this as a means to devise a framework to help you to organise and direct your data analysis.

The following 10 hypotheses to be tested are mostly based on the Hennig-Thurau framework, as well as on some other existing literature mentioned in the literature review part of the thesis:

Consumers would be more willing to write reviews if:
- the user interface was more adapted to their needs : easier, faster, possibility not to write a text, better ergonomics of the website.
- they had the conviction that their contribution would help other consumers. Ex: consumers characterizing their review as "helpful" or thanking them for it.

- they had tangible proofs that their review had influenced the improvement of a company's products/services.
- they earned economic rewards after participating.
- the company acknowledged receipt of their review by answering it.
- they were convinced that Internet users could exert a real collective power over companies.
- their experience with a company's product/service was exceeding their expectations.
- they had no other choice to further access the platform.
- they felt closer to the platform community members.
- they had recognition from the platform. Ex: thanking them, encouraging them, congratulating them, giving them points and diplomas.

## III.2. RESEARCH PHYLOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

The research paradigm I am going to follow is the Positivist paradigm, assuming that knowledge is a real and measurable phenomenon. Reality can be observed with human senses. The ambition is to decipher patterns.

My ontological assumption is Realist: reality is independent of the observer, constructed of measurable, testable objects and phenomena that exist even when we are not directly perceiving or experiencing them.

My epistemological assumption is Positivism: the knowledge that science progressively constitutes, is the knowledge of Reality, a reality in itself, objective, independent from the observers that describe it.

## III.3. DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected through a self-administered Internet-mediated questionnaire (cf. Appendix n°1). This choice of data collection was made because of the suitable population's characteristics: computer-literate individuals who can be contacted through the Internet. The purpose of a survey is to produce quantitative numerical descriptions about the study population, by gathering and analysing respondents' answers in order to make broader, more general statements about a population.

The time taken to complete collection lasted approximately 5 weeks from distribution: from the 17th of June to the 25th of July 2016.

The targeted population was worldwide geographically dispersed Internet users who have already accessed online opinion platforms at least once in their life. A convenience sample was used by inviting volunteers to participate in this study. I posted an invitation message with the URL to the online questionnaire on a number of Facebook groups related to online opinions (ex: TripAdvisor, OuiShare), as well as on my own Facebook and LinkedIn pages to activate my social networks. I also sent personalized emails containing the URL to the online questionnaire to my contacts.

I noticed that I did not get a very high response rate when posting the link on Facebook or LinkedIn directed to a mass of people, so I decided to target my respondents individually, talk to them directly in person to make them feel concerned, engaged and to be able to convince them to fulfil the questionnaire. I noticed a huge peak in answers when I sent the link individually to specific people rather than to a mass of people.

To increase the response rate, I used what I consider the most ergonomic and pleasant online survey form: TypeForm. Their slogan is "A beautiful way to interact with users humans". I built the survey in an engaging manner with motivation quotes and funny pictures and gifs to encourage people to answer it.

I also paid attention to the time needed to fulfil my survey, as I know numerous people give up before reaching the end when the questionnaire takes too long time. The average time for completing my questionnaire is 7 min.

Each question was carefully thought, referring to existing literature mentioned in the literature review of the thesis. The questionnaire was built in a funnel shaped structure, questions going from the general to the specific. The aim is to build profiles, asking question about the global picture to finish to the main point of the study: understand what would make each of the respondents participate more.

The first question of the survey was created as a control question to be confident that the right population would answer the questionnaire. Out of the 242 respondents, only those 232 individuals who had previously accessed online opinion platforms, thus answered "yes" to the first question of

the survey, were included for data analysis. Hence, a total of 232 usable questionnaires were collected in this study.

Now, the analysis will be done for each question of the online questionnaire, forming different areas of analysis. The descriptive statistics concerning the 232 respondents will be presented, followed by an interpretation linked to the theories previously mentioned in the literature review.

# IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

## IV.1. SAMPLE'S DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Among the 232 respondents, 54% are female and 46% are male. 32% of the respondents are between 25 and 34 years old, 23% are between 19 and 24 years old. Concerning the socio-professional categories, an equal number of respondents are managers/executives and students (35% each), then 13% are employees. A majority of respondents are French (72%) due to the convenience sample (my network being French in majority), followed by 24 different nationalities represented.

Our sample is divided in two characteristic groups that we are going to study:
- the people that use opinion websites in order to read online reviews only
- the people that use opinion websites to read but also and more important to write some reviews

So the key difference between the two groups is the activity of writing some reviews, or not, on online opinion platforms.

The first group that only reads reviews is composed of 152 respondents. 45% of males and 55% of females. The age range the most represented is the 25-34 years old with 32%, then the 19-24 years old with 25%. Concerning the socio-professional category, 41% are students, followed by 33% of managers/executives, and 12% of employees.

The second group that writes reviews is composed of 80 respondents. 46% of males and 54% of females. The age range the most represented is the 25-34 years old with 31%, then the 19-24 years old with 19%, followed by the 55-64 : 16%, 45-54 : 14% and 35-44 : 13%. Concerning the socio-professional category, 40% are managers/executives, 21% are students, and 16% are employees.

| Sample demography | TOTAL | | READ REVIEWS ONLY | | READ & WRITE REVIEWS | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of respondents | 232 | 100% | 152 | 66% | 80 | 34% |
| Male | 106 | 46% | 69 | 45% | 37 | 46% |
| Female | 126 | 54% | 83 | 55% | 43 | 54% |
| < 19 years old | 17 | 7% | 16 | 11% | 1 | 1% |
| 19-24 years old | 53 | 23% | 38 | 25% | 15 | 19% |
| 25-34 years old | 74 | 32% | 48 | 31% | 26 | 32% |
| 35-44 years old | 25 | 11% | 15 | 10% | 10 | 13% |
| 45-54 years old | 28 | 12% | 17 | 11% | 11 | 14% |
| 55-64 years old | 22 | 9% | 9 | 6% | 13 | 16% |
| > 64 years old | 13 | 6% | 9 | 6% | 4 | 5% |
| Student | 80 | 35% | 63 | 41% | 17 | 21% |
| Manager, executive | 82 | 35% | 50 | 33% | 32 | 40% |
| Intermediate occupation | 12 | 5% | 5 | 3% | 7 | 9% |
| Employee | 31 | 13% | 18 | 12% | 13 | 16% |
| Retired | 16 | 7% | 11 | 7% | 5 | 6% |
| Other | 11 | 5% | 5 | 3% | 6 | 8% |

We can notice from the figures of the Sample Demography table that the gender is not correlated with the fact that the respondents write or don't write reviews on opinion platforms, the results are almost equals in both groups (male 45%, female 55% for the group that doesn't write reviews VS male 46%, female 54% for the group that writes reviews).

Concerning the age of the respondents, the percentage of young people (24 years old or younger) belonging to the group that doesn't write reviews (35%) is higher than the percentage of young people belonging to the group that writes reviews (20%).

At the opposite, the adults write more reviews than the youth in proportion, especially the percentage of mature adults (55-64 years old) belonging to the group that writes review (16%) is higher than the percentage of mature adults belonging to the group that desn't write reviews (6%).
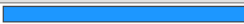
The results for the socio-professional category are the following: the percentage of students writing reviews (21%) is lower than the percentage of students that don't write reviews (41%). Whereas the percentage of managers/executives and intermediate occupations writing reviews (49%) is

higher than the percentage of managers/executives and intermediate occupations that don't write reviews (36%).
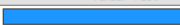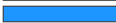
Significance test:

Caractérisation par les modalités des variables nominales
De la modalité - Purpose RW - R only    (Effectif = 152 Pourcentage = 65.52)

| Libellé de la variable | Modalité caractéristique | Valeur-Test | % de la modalité dans la classe | Probabilité |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| socio-prof cat | Student | | 41 | 0.001 |
| age range | 18- | | 11 | 0.006 |
| socio-prof cat | Intermediate | | 3 | 0.073 |
| age range | 55 - 64 | | 6 | 0.012 |

Caractérisation par les modalités des variables nominales
De la modalité - Purpose RW - R W    (Effectif = 80 Pourcentage = 34.48)

| Libellé de la variable | Modalité caractéristique | Valeur-Test | % de la modalité dans la classe | Probabilité |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| age range | 55 - 64 | | 16 | 0.012 |
| socio-prof cat | Intermediate | | 9 | 0.073 |
| age range | 18- | | 1 | 0.006 |
| socio-prof cat | Student | | 21 | 0.001 |

What significantly characterizes the group that only reads reviews from the group that writes reviews, in descending order of importance, are the following socio-demographic categories :

- Student : 41% for the group that only reads reviews against 21% for the group that writes reviews. The difference is significant with a risk of 10%, which means the probability of making a mistake is lower than 10%. Indeed, the probability is equal to 0,001 so 0,1%.

- 18 years old or younger : 11% for the group that only reads reviews against 1% for the group that writes reviews. The difference is significant with a risk of 10%, which means the probability of making a mistake is lower than 10%. Indeed, the probability is equal to 0,006 so 0,6%.

What significantly characterizes the group that writes reviews from the group that only reads reviews, in descending order of importance, are the following socio-demographic categories :

- 55-64 years old : 16% for the group that writes reviews against 6% for the group that only reads reviews. The difference is significant with a risk of 10%, which means the probability of making a mistake is lower than 10%. Indeed, the probability is equal to 0,012 so 1,2%.

- Intermediate occupation : 9% for the group that writes reviews against 3% for the group that only reads reviews. The difference is significant with a risk of 10%, which means the probability of making a mistake is lower than 10%. Indeed, the probability is equal to 0,073 so 7,3%.

The classification according to the importance of the difference is inversely proportional to the probability of being wrong in affirming that there is a significant difference.

Interpretation: Mature adults being mostly managers/executives (9 managers/executives out of 13 fifty-five to sixty-four years old in the write reviews group) have a higher purchasing power than young people being mostly students (46 students out of 54 twenty-four years old or younger in the reading reviews group) and can therefore more easily write reviews about consumption goods or services that they have tried and that they can afford.

## IV.2. PURPOSE OF USING ONLINE OPINION PLATFORMS

| | |
|---|---|
| To read reviews only (Lire des avis seulement) | 152 / **66%** |
| To read and write reviews (Lire et écrire des avis) | 80 / **34%** |

66% of the respondents are using online opinion platforms with the purpose of reading consumers' reviews, whereas 34% of the respondents use these platforms to read consumers' reviews but also to write their own reviews.

Interpretation: This result confirms that a majority of Internet users do not actively participate in writing their own reviews on opinion platforms. However, the percentage of 34% is high and shows a fast increasing tendency compared to the figures of 2011. The figures obtained are very close to the percentage of "spectators" and "critics" in the 7 scale ladder by Forrester Research, respectively 70% and 37% (cf. part II.1.2.).

## IV.3. FREQUENCY OF READING / WRITING REVIEWS

Frequency of reading online reviews (for the entire sample) :

| | |
|---|---|
| Occasionally during the year (Occasionnellement durant l'année) | 121 / **52%** |
| Several times a month (Plusieurs fois par mois) | 77 / **33%** |
| Several times a week (Plusieurs fois par semaines) | 25 / **11%** |
| Rarely - less than once a year (Rarement - moins d'une fois par an) | 9 / **4%** |

Frequency of writing online reviews (for the group that reads and writes reviews) :

| | |
|---|---|
| Occasionally during the year (Occasionnellement durant l'année) | 57 / **71%** |
| Rarely - less than once a year (Rarement - moins d'une fois par an) | 15 / **19%** |
| Several times a month (Plusieurs fois par mois) | 7 / **9%** |
| Several times a week (Plusieurs fois par semaine) | 1 / **1%** |

44% of the respondents that read reviews do it frequently (several times a week and several times a month added), whereas only 10% of the respondents that write reviews do it frequently.

Interpretation: this result is in accordance with the result of the first question, showing that a minority of respondents writes reviews (34%) and when they do, a strong majority of them (90%) do it only occasionally or rarely. In addition, the fact that 44% of the respondents frequently read reviews shows that the practice of reading reviews is more widespread and belongs more to the habits of the respondents than the practice of writing reviews.

## IV.4. TRUST IN REVIEWS

Respondents' trust in reviews they read :

| | |
|---|---|
| Most of the time (La plupart du temps) | 131 / **56%** |
| Sometimes (Parfois) | 93 / **40%** |
| Rarely (Rarement) | 5 / **2%** |
| Always (Toujours) | 3 / **1%** |
| Never (Jamais) | 0 / **0%** |

A majority of respondents (57%) trust reviews they read on opinion websites frequently ("most of the time" and "always" added).

Interpretation: this confirms the fact that this source of information (i.e. interpersonal communication, eWOM or online reviews) is credible (cf. part II.1.3.).

However this result also shows that a consequent number of respondents (42%) are quite skeptical towards the veracity of the reviews as they answered they only trusted reviews they read "sometimes" of "rarely".

Interpretation: indeed, as seen in the part II.1.3., because of non ethical practices, some reviews may be planted by companies to burnish their own reputations or tarnish those of competitors. Other reviews written in good faith by consumers may just lack consistency or precision to be qualified as trusted ones. According to Bornemann (2004) trust in the information quality on the Web 2.0 is a major challenge.

Let's now look at the figures for the two groups separated:

| Trust in reviews | READ REVIEWS ONLY | | READ & WRITE REVIEWS | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total of 232 respondents | 152 | | 80 | |
| Always | 0 | 0% | 3 | 4% |
| Most of the time | 82 | 54% | 49 | 61% |
| Sometimes | 68 | 45% | 25 | 31% |
| Rarely | 2 | 1% | 3 | 4% |
| Never | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |

When we split the sample in the two groups (read reviews only / read and write reviews), we can notice that in the group that writes reviews, the percentage of people who trust reviews "always" or "most of the time" (65%) is higher than the percentage of people who trust reviews "always" or "most of the time" in the group that doesn't write reviews (54%).

Interpretation: writing reviews and trusting reviews are associated. Indeed, you need to have some trust in the system to be part of it. Once you are a member of the online opinion platform and you use it as an active player, this means you trust in the benefits of such a system.

○ Criteria potentially increasing trust: quantity VS quality

More trust in the overall consumers' opinion on a specific product/service with a high number of reviews:



| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Yes (Oui) | 208 / **90%** |
| 2 | No (Non) | 24 / **10%** |
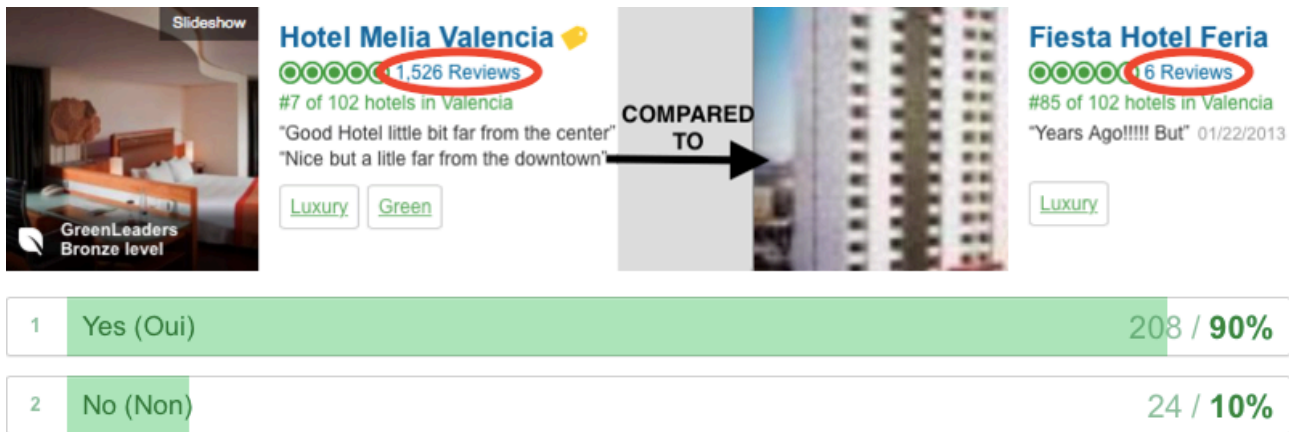
More trust in a specific review that was rated "helpful" by a high number of consumers:



| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Yes (Oui) | 138 / **59%** |
| 2 | No (Non) | 94 / **41%** |
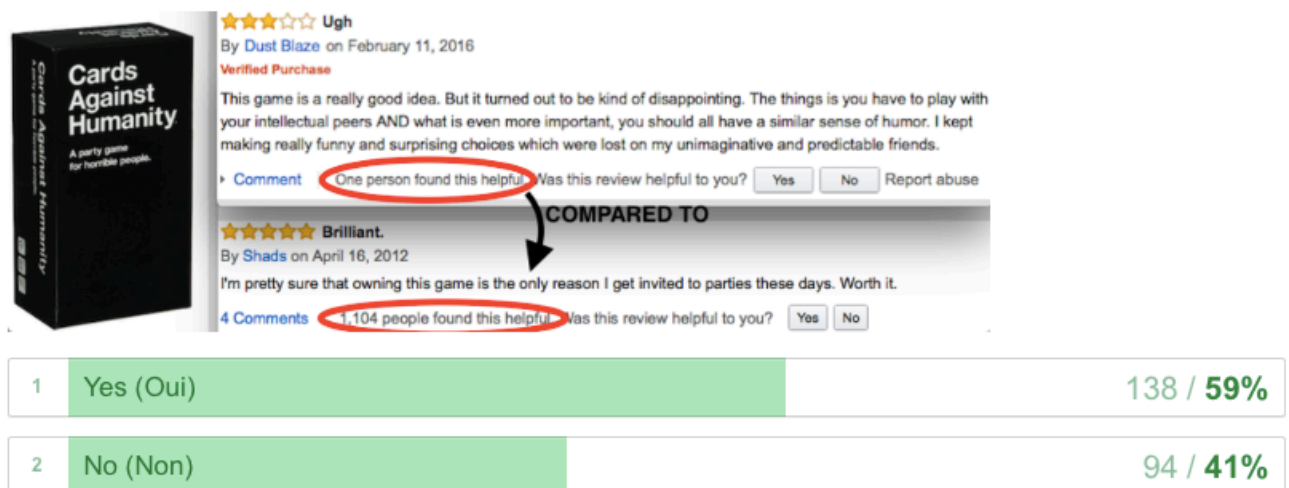
Most important criteria regarding the credibility of the consumers' opinion:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | A high number of reviews (Un grand nombre d'avis) | 163 / **70%** |
| 2 | A high number of "helpful" votes on few reviews (Un grand nombre de votes "utile" … | 69 / **30%** |

The results show that a vast majority (90%) of the respondents would trust more an overall opinion about a product/service if the number of reviews on this product/service was high.

However, only 59% of the respondents consider that a high number of "helpful votes" on one review means that this specific review should be trusted more.

Accordingly, when asking the respondents to choose between the two regarding the credibility of the opinion, 70% of them state that a high number of reviews is the most important criteria.

Interpretation: these results relate to the arbitration between quantity and quality of reviews concerning their credibility. It appears on the results that the quantity prevails over the quality regarding trust in the overall consumers' opinion under the form of online reviews about a product/service. Indeed, according to Larceneux (2007) and Surowiecki (2005), the influence of online reviews on consumers' purchasing decision will be more important according to the number of reviews: "more users: more value through the aggregation of collective intelligence" (cf. part II.3.1). This can be explained by the fact that statistically speaking, the more reviews will be written on a specific product/service, the less errors (ex: false reviews, inconsistent reviews) will be considered. Then, the majority of the review will tend to a reliable and true opinion.

Concerning the quality of reviews, the low percentage of trust can be explained by the fact that a review can seem at first sight very serious, detailed and well explained, but written for a biased purpose or non-ethical reason (cf. part II.1.3).

## IV.5. OBSTACLES PREVENTING FROM WRITING REVIEWS

| Obstacle | Count / % |
|---|---|
| You didn't feel the need to personally give your opinion because there were already a lot of other consumers' reviews (Vous ne ressentiez pas le besoin de donner votre opinion personnelle car il y avait déjà beaucoup d'autres avis consommateurs) | 56 / **37%** |
| You didn't have the time to write a valuable detailed review and you didn't want to give a thoughtless one (Vous n'aviez pas le temps d'écrire un avis intéressant et détaillé et vous ne vouliez pas en donner un sans intérêt) | 53 / **35%** |
| You didn't get through the whole evaluation process because it was too complicated and too long (Vous n'êtes pas allé au bout du processus d'évaluation car c'était trop compliqué et trop long) | 39 / **26%** |
| You didn't find any personal benefit in doing it (Vous ne perceviez aucun avantage personnel à le faire) | 37 / **24%** |
| You didn't feel involved in the community of the online opinion platform (Vous ne vous sentiez pas inclu dans la communauté de la plateforme d'opinion) | 35 / **23%** |
| You didn't feel the need because you weren't particularly satisfied or dissatisfied with the product/service (Vous n'en ressentiez pas le besoin parce que vous n'étiez ni particulièrement satisfait, ni particulièrement insatisfait du produit/service) | 35 / **23%** |
| You thought your review would have no influence on the quality of products/services offered by the company (Vous pensiez que votre avis n'aurait aucune influence sur la qualité des produits/services de l'entreprise) | 18 / **12%** |
| You didn't think you had a high enough knowledge of the product/service to express your opinion (Vous ne pensiez pas avoir une assez bonne connaissance du produit/service pour exprimer votre opinion) | 13 / **9%** |
| You didn't want to harm the company (Vous ne vouliez pas causer du tort à l'entreprise) | 5 / **3%** |
| Your opinion was at the opposite of the other consumers' reviews concerning the product/service (Votre opinion était à l'opposé des avis des autres consommateurs sur le sujet) | 1 / **1%** |

This question was designed for the group of respondents that only reads reviews. One respondent could select as many reasons as desired.

- The first obstacle that prevented this group of people from writing reviews is that they didn't feel the need to give their own opinion because there were already a lot of other consumers' reviews (37%).

Interpretation: this obstacle can be linked with the theory of the public-good : "a shared resource from which every member of a group may benefit, regardless of whether or not they personally contribute to its provision, and whose availability does not diminish with use" (Cheung et al., 2012). Indeed, everyone can consume a public good without participating. This results in a social dilemma situation, which occurs when an individual attempts to maximize self-interest over social-interest. According to Cheung et al. (2012) it is likely that individuals will free-ride on the Internet concerning the participation on online opinion platforms.

- Then, 35% of the group thought they didn't have the time to write a valuable review and didn't want to write a thoughtless one.

Interpretation: this obstacle accentuates the fact that writing a review is not a priority for the respondents because they don't find the time to do it properly, and can be linked to the notion of knowledge self-efficacy as well. Indeed, self-efficacy is a personal judgment of one's capability to execute actions required for designated types of performances (Shaari et al., 2014). The people that chose this reason don't have time to write a valuable review, so if they wrote a botched one, their review would lack of knowledge useful to others. So their knowledge self-efficacy would be low and consequently they would tend to make less contribution in knowledge sharing.

- In the continuity of the previous obstacle, 26% of the group considered the process of writing a review was too complicated and long so they gave up.

Interpretation: this obstacle is also linked to the notion of lacking time and that writing a review is not a priority. This shows that 26% of the group thinks the user interface and the evaluation process of an online opinion platforms are not optimized to make people participate.

- The fourth obstacle for 24% of the group is that they didn't find any personal benefit in writing reviews.

Interpretation: this obstacle can be linked to the egoistic theories. Indeed, a motive is considered egoistic if the ultimate goal is to increase the actor's own welfare. So since the group of respondents didn't find any personal benefit in writing reviews and didn't get any return for it, they would not do so for another motive. According to Batson (1994) individuals try to look for returns to maximize their own benefits.

To conclude, these 4 first obstacles that prevented the group of respondents that never wrote reviews in their life from writing reviews, are closely related to prioritizing self-interest over social-interest in some situations.

## IV.6. REASONS FOR WRITING REVIEWS

| Reason | Count / % |
|---|---|
| To express positive feelings because you were particularly satisfied with a product/service (Pour exprimer des émotions positives car vous étiez particulièrement satisfait d'un produit/service) | 60 / **75%** |
| To help other consumers to make their choice (Pour aider les autres consommateurs à faire leur choix) | 51 / **64%** |
| To release yourself from negative feelings because you were particularly dissatisfied with a product/service (Pour décharger des émotions négatives car vous étiez particulièrement mécontent d'un produit/service) | 39 / **49%** |
| To support a company/brand (Pour encourager une entreprise/marque) | 31 / **39%** |
| To exert a mass collective power over companies to get improved products/services (Pour exercer un pouvoir collectif de masse sur les entreprises de façon à obtenir des produits/services de meilleur qualité) | 17 / **21%** |
| To use the platform as a moderator between you and the company in case of problem (Pour utiliser la plateforme comme intermédiaire de contact avec l'entreprise en cas de problème) | 12 / **15%** |
| To request information about products/services from other consumers (Pour demander des informations sur des produits/service à d'autres consommateurs) | 10 / **13%** |
| To participate in and belong to a virtual community (Pour participer et appartenir à une communauté virtuelle) | 7 / **9%** |
| To receive economic rewards like coupons, free entrances, free virtual goods etc. (Pour recevoir des récompenses économiques comme des bons de réduction, entrées gratuites, bonus, etc.) | 7 / **9%** |
| To feel recognized by the other consumers as an influential reviewer (Pour se sentir reconnu par les autres consommateurs comme un critique influent) | 2 / **3%** |

This question was designed for the group of respondents that reads and writes reviews. One respondent could select as many reasons as desired. The 10 reasons proposed in the questionnaire follow the framework of Hennig-Thurau about consumers' motives to write online reviews (cf. part II.2.).

The two major reasons why this group of respondents has already written reviews in the past are to express positive feelings because they were particularly satisfied with a product/service (75%) and to help the other consumers to make their choice (64%). Then, 49% of the respondents wrote reviews to release themselves from negative feelings when they were particularly dissatisfied with a product/service. Followed by 39% of the respondents that wanted to support a company.

Interpretation: the four first reasons refer to the Homeostasis utility: expression of positive emotions and venting of negative feelings (cf. part II.2.5.) and to the Focus-related utility : concern for other consumers and desire to help the company (cf. part II.2.1.). All these reasons can be related in a certain way to the empathic emotions and altruism theories. Indeed, concerning the Homeostasis utility, according to Neelamegham and Jain (1999) and Nyer (1997), consumers' affective elements of satisfaction, pleasure, and sadness all motivate them to wish to share experiences with others. So, eWOM is an important aspect of the consumers' expression to communicate his/her satisfaction or dissatisfaction to the brand and the other consumers. Concerning the Focus-related utility, the two reasons in this category that got the highest percentage both concern the action to help, either the company or the other consumers. Individuals acting on altruistic goals are willing to volunteer themselves to contribute their knowledge to online consumer reviews without expecting direct rewards in return. When studied in terms of empathic emotion, individuals may have empathy towards a person in need and this increases helping of that person. Enjoyment of helping has been acknowledged by researchers as an altruistic factor to explain individuals' willingness to share knowledge in opinion platforms. According to Cheung et al. (2012) without any apparent compensation, people in virtual communities obtain intrinsic enjoyment and satisfaction by helping others through sharing their knowledge.

When we compare these results to the results of Hennig-Thurau (cf. conclusion part II.2.) we notice that they differ except from the reason "concern for other consumers" called in my questionnaire "help other consumers to make their choice". The results of the thesis appear to be centered on respondents that would generate eWOM for altruistic reasons whereas the results of Hennig-Thurau emphasize the self-interested consumers as the biggest generator of eWOM. As the Hennig-Thurau's study dates back to 2004, it might be possible that the feeling of being 'part of Internet world' is increasing over time, along with the generations Y and Z growing up, as well as

the development of the collaborative consumption as an online service, explaining the difference in results.

## IV.6. LEVERS TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION IN WRITING REVIEWS

| *Would these levers increase your participation? – Percentages of "Yes" and "Probably" added* | **ENTIRE SAMPLE** **232 persons** | **READ REVIEWS ONLY** **152 persons** | **READ & WRITE REVIEWS** **80 persons** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Influence improvement of product/service | 87% | 128 (84%) | 73 **(91%)** |
| Product/service exceeding expectations | 82% | 120 (79%) | 70 **(88%)** |
| Answer from the company | 77% | 113 (74%) | 66 **(82%)** |
| Exert a real collective power | 76% | 114 (75%) | 63 **(79%)** |
| Conviction to help other consumers | 72% | 108 (71%) | 69 **(86%)** |
| User interface more adapted | 70% | 112 **(74%)** | 52 (65%) |
| Economic rewards after participating | 64% | 105 **(69%)** | 43 (54%) |
| Closer feeling to the platform members | 45% | 80 **(53%)** | 26 (32%) |
| Recognition from the platform | 41% | 62 **(41%)** | 31 (39%) |
| No other choice to access the platform | 39% | 62 **(41%)** | 28 (35%) |

o Levers for the entire sample

A majority of respondents would be more willing to write reviews :

- 87% if they had tangible proofs that their review had influenced the improvement of a company's products/services
- 82% if their experience with a company's product/service was exceeding their expectations
- 77% if the company acknowledged receipt of their review by answering it
- 76% if they were convinced that Internet users could exert a real collective power over companies
- 72% if they had the conviction that their contribution would help other consumers (ex: consumers characterizing their review as "helpful" or thanking them for it)
- 70% if the user interface was more adapted to their needs: easier, faster, possibility not to write a text, better ergonomics of the website
- 64% if they earned economic rewards after participating

At the contrary, a majority of respondents would not be more willing to write reviews :

- 61% answered they would not or probably not write more reviews if they had no other choice to further access the platform
- 59% answered they would not or probably not write more reviews if they had recognition from the platform. Ex: thanking them, encouraging them, congratulating them, giving them points and diplomas
- 55% answered they would not or probably not write more reviews if they felt closer to the platform community members

Interpretation: we can notice from the answers of the respondents that the major reasons (4 first reasons in the list) that would make people write more reviews are linked with the quality of the products/services, or a sign from the company that the quality of the product/service is going to be improved. Indeed, Wang and Fesenmaier (2003) found out that enforcing service excellence is an important point that can lead to consumer engagement. This raises the question and the importance of power and dialogue between the consumers and the companies that was explained in the part II.3.1. of the thesis.

o Levers for the two groups separated

When we split the respondents in the two groups, the results show that for the five first reasons (influence improvement of product/service, product/service exceeding expectations, answer from company, exert a real collective power, conviction to help other consumers), the group that reads and writes reviews is more willing to write more reviews than the group that only reads reviews. (See percentages of the green part of the previous table that are higher than the corresponding percentages for the entire sample).

At the opposite, for the five last reasons (user interface more adapted, economic rewards after participating, closer feeling to the platform members, recognition from the platform, no other choice to access the platform), the group that only writes reviews is more willing to write reviews than the group that reads and writes reviews. (See percentages of the purple part of the previous table that are higher than the corresponding percentages for the entire sample).

Significance test:

Caractérisation par les modalités des variables nominales
De la modalité - Purpose RW - R only    (Effectif = 152 Pourcentage = 65.52)

| Libellé de la variable | Modalité caractéristique | Valeur-Test | % de la modalité dans la classe | Probabilité |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| _If closer to the community | 1-Yes,Probably | | 53 | 0.003 |
| _if conviction to help | 2-Not,Probably not | | 29 | 0.006 |
| _if economic rewards after participating | 1-Yes,Probably | | 69 | 0.016 |
| _If outstanding experience | 2-Not,Probably not | | 21 | 0.074 |
| _if influence improvement of products | 2-Not,Probably not | | 16 | 0.095 |
| _if influence improvement of products | 1-Yes,Probably | | 84 | 0.095 |
| _If outstanding experience | 1-Yes,Probably | | 79 | 0.074 |
| _if economic rewards after participating | 2-Not,Probably not | | 31 | 0.016 |
| _if conviction to help | 1-Yes,Probably | | 71 | 0.006 |
| _If closer to the community | 2-Not,Probably not | | 47 | 0.003 |

Caractérisation par les modalités des variables nominales
De la modalité - Purpose RW - R W    (Effectif = 80 Pourcentage = 34.48)

| Libellé de la variable | Modalité caractéristique | Valeur-Test | % de la modalité dans la classe | Probabilité |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| _If closer to the community | 2-Not,Probably not | | 68 | 0.003 |
| _if conviction to help | 1-Yes,Probably | | 86 | 0.006 |
| _if economic rewards after participating | 2-Not,Probably not | | 46 | 0.016 |
| _If outstanding experience | 1-Yes,Probably | | 88 | 0.074 |
| _if influence improvement of products | 1-Yes,Probably | | 91 | 0.095 |
| _if influence improvement of products | 2-Not,Probably not | | 9 | 0.095 |
| _If outstanding experience | 2-Not,Probably not | | 12 | 0.074 |
| _if economic rewards after participating | 1-Yes,Probably | | 54 | 0.016 |
| _if conviction to help | 2-Not,Probably not | | 14 | 0.006 |
| _If closer to the community | 1-Yes,Probably | | 32 | 0.003 |

What significantly characterizes the group that only reads reviews from the group that writes reviews, in descending order of importance, are the following levers:

- "Closer feeling to the platform members": 53% for the group that only reads reviews against 32% for the group that writes reviews. The difference is significant with a risk of 10%, which means the probability of making a mistake is lower than 10%. Indeed, the probability is equal to 0,003 so 0,3%.

- "Economic rewards after participating": 69% for the group that only reads reviews against 54% for the group that writes reviews. The difference is significant with a risk of 10%, which means the probability of making a mistake is lower than 10%. Indeed, the probability is equal to 0,016 so 1,6%.

What significantly characterizes the group that writes reviews from the group that only reads reviews, in descending order of importance, are the following levers :

- "Conviction to help other consumers": 86% for the group that writes reviews against 71% for the group that only reads reviews. The difference is significant with a risk of 10%, which means the probability of making a mistake is lower than 10%. Indeed, the probability is equal to 0,006 so 0,6%.

- "Product/service exceeding expectations": 88% for the group that writes reviews against 79% for the group that only reads reviews. The difference is significant with a risk of 10%,

which means the probability of making a mistake is lower than 10%. Indeed, the probability is equal to 0,074 so 7,4%.

- "Influence improvements of product/service": 91% for the group that writes reviews against 84% for the group that only reads reviews. The difference is significant with a risk of 10%, which means the probability of making a mistake is lower than 10%. Indeed, the probability *is equal to 0,095 so 9,5%.*

Interpretation: the people that don't write reviews need more incentive to start doing it than the people that already write some. Indeed, for this group of people, writing reviews is not in their habits, so starting doing it would be a disruptive element in their lifestyle. As we saw above in the analysis, the group of respondents that only reads reviews has mostly a self-interested profile. Therefore they need personal benefits or returns to start writing review. This takes the form of a user interface more adapted to them or some economic rewards after participation. We can relate these levers to the Approval utility of the Hennig-Thurau framework (cf. part II.2.3.). Indeed, these two reasons are self-interested reasons, meaning the respondents would be ready to write reviews if it was really simple and if they were rewarded for it.

As for the 'closer feeling to the platform members' reason, it can be linked to the 'social benefit' motive of the Hennig-Thurau framework (cf. part II.2.1.3.). Respondents would be willing to start writing reviews for reasons of identification and social integration, which allow them to build emotional connections and intimacy. So they would need to feel relatively close or even friends with the other community members of the platform to be ready to share their experiences and write reviews, as they would do naturally with family in traditional WOM.

The people that already write reviews are more familiar with this practice, they adopted it in their life habits, so increasing such a practice is much easier than to start from zero. As we saw above in the analysis, the group of respondents that writes reviews has mostly an altruistic profile. So logically, the reasons 'if they were convinced that their review would help other consumers' and 'if the product/service was exceeding their expectations' characterize this group. These two reasons refer to the 'concern for other consumers' and 'helping the company' motives in the Hennig-Thurau framework (cf. part II.2.1.1. and II.2.1.2.). Indeed, if a product or service exceeds expectations, writing a review accordingly will promote and support the company as well as give the good tip to other consumers.

Concerning the reasons 'if they had an influence on the improvement of a product/service', 'if they got an answer from company after writing a review', 'if they were convinced they could exert a real collective power', these are linked with the influence consumers have and even want to increase

over companies. Consumers want to be listened and raise their voice for a new power distribution leading to better quality of products/services fitting their needs and desires. This would be beneficial both for companies that would become more effective, and for consumers that would be more satisfied. People already writing reviews have faith in the system, they understand the Web 2.0's stakes and the strength that it can give to them.

- o Correlation between the obstacles preventing the from writing reviews and the levers to increase participation

Cf. Appendix n°2 - Pivot table 'Read Reviews Only'. For the purpose of the analysis, only the remarkable results showing the highest correlation (i.e. highest percentage) will be commentated.

In a logic way, 94% of the respondents who don't write reviews because they think that posting a review would have no influence on the quality of the product/service, would start doing so if they noticed their reviews actually improved of a company's product/service. As well, 100% of the respondents who don't write reviews because they don't want to harm the company, 92% who don't do it because they don't find any personal benefit, 92% who don't do it because they consider they don't have a high enough knowledge of the product/service, 89% who don't do it because they don't feel involved in the community of the opinion platform, and finally 81% who don't do it because they don't have time to write a valuable review - would start doing it for the same reason: if their reviews influenced the improvement of a company's product/service.

It seems that no matter the obstacles preventing them from writing reviews, the respondents would certainly be ready to write reviews if the company listened to eWOM and reacted to it by following the advices and making the improvements that the consumers desires.

Another good-sense result: 79% of the respondents who don't write reviews because there are already a lot of other consumers' reviews, would start doing so if they were convinced that Internet users could exert a real collective power over companies. In addition, 92% of the respondents who don't write reviews because they consider they don't have a high enough knowledge of the product/service to give their opinion would start doing it if the same condition was fulfilled.

These consumers are people who doubt about the collective power and who are conscious that they don't have any power on their own. They don't give their individual opinion because they either think that it will be lost in a mass of reviews, or that their individual thinking is not legitimate

to help anyone. They should appreciate the fact that they can be part of a collective power, which would therefore legitimate their participation as part of a group that forms collective knowledge.

Still logically, 80% of the respondents who don't write reviews because they were not particularly satisfied or dissatisfied with a product/service, would start doing so if their experience with a company's product/service was exceeding their expectations. Likewise, 81% of the respondents who don't write reviews because they don't have time to write a valuable one, would start doing it for the same motive.

Consumers recognize, notice and remember a delightful product or service they encounter, and they know how rare and valuable this is. Therefore, despite the fact that normally they would not take the time to write a review for an average or bad product/service, they would be ready do to so for an extraordinary one. Companies should always try to surprise the consumer and go beyond its expectations.

Concerning the ergonomics, 92% of the respondents who don't write reviews because they find the process too complicated and too long, would start doing so if the user interface was more adapted to their needs. In the same way, 79% of the respondents who don't write reviews because there are already a lot of other consumers' reviews would start doing it if there was a better user interface.

Consumers want an individualized process, more personalized. They need to feel that the platform is talking to them directly and not to a mass of people. Consumers should be told that their review matters individually and is not useless like a drop in an ocean.

100% of the respondents who don't write reviews because they don't want to harm the company would start doing so if they earned economic rewards after participating.

Being rewarded for writing a negative review legitimizes the fact that the consumer is allowed to say bad things about a product/service/company. The consumer has to understand that the company needs every feedback and is ready to accept negative reviews to become conscious of its weak points. Rewarding the consumer will free him/her of guilt.

o Correlation between the reasons for writing reviews and the levers to increase participation

Cf. Appendix n°3 - Pivot table 'Read and Write Reviews'. For the purpose of the analysis, only the remarkable results showing the highest correlation (i.e. highest percentage) will be commentated.

If consumers' reviews influenced the improvement of a company's products/services, the following categories would logically increase their participation in writing reviews: 94% of the respondents who write reviews to exert a mass collective power over companies in order to get improved products/services and 97% who write reviews to release themselves from negative feelings because they were particularly dissatisfied with a product/service. But this lever would also increase the participation of 100% of the respondents who write reviews to participate in and belong to a virtual community, 94% of the respondents who write reviews to support a company, 100% of the respondents who write reviews to request information about products/services to other consumers 100% of the respondents who write reviews to receive economic rewards like coupons, free virtual goods, etc., 92% of the respondents who write reviews to use the platform as a moderator between them and the company.

So we can see that this lever is not particularly linked to any specific reason to write reviews, but is so strong that almost all categories would increase their participation if this condition was fulfilled.

If consumers had the conviction that their contribution would help other consumers, the following categories would naturally increase their participation in writing reviews: 100% of the respondents who write reviews to help other consumers make their choice, 100% of the respondents who write reviews to participate in and belong to a virtual community. And as well 94% of the respondents who write reviews to exert a mass collective power over companies in order to get improved products/services.

Helping the other consumers is related to the altruism theory. These people put the benefit of the collectivity together with their own. This is actually the case of the category that writes reviews to exert a collective power. They are already in a mindset of collective action and mutual help.

If the consumers' experience with a company's product/service was exceeding their expectation, the following categories would without surprise increase their participation in writing reviews: 92% of the respondents who write reviews to express positive feelings because they were particularly satisfied with a product/service, and 94% of the respondents who write reviews to support a company.

These categories of respondents already write reviews to highlight and notify good work in order to encourage the company to keep delivering good service/products. Therefore a product/service exceeding their expectations would generate even more participation.

If the company acknowledged receipt of consumers' review by answering it, the following categories would increase their participation in writing reviews: 92% of the respondents who write reviews to use the platform as a moderator between them and the company, and 100% of the respondents who write reviews to request information about products/services to other consumers. These categories are looking for a sign, a reaction from the company. They need to know that they are listened. When they use the platform as a moderator or are in need of information about a product/service, they would benefit from a direct answer from the company.

92% of the respondents who write reviews to use the platform as a moderator between them and the company would increase their participation if they were convinced that Internet users could exert a real collective power over companies.
The platform, as intermediary between the consumer and the company, will have more arguments if more reviews are complaining in the same direction. The more voices united together on the platform, the more the platform would have strength and power against the company.

To finish, as expected and showing the coherence of the participants' responses, 100% of the respondents who write reviews in order to receive economic rewards like coupons, free virtual goods, etc. would increase their participation if they earned economic rewards after participating.

To go deeper and more detailed in the analysis, a factor analysis (Principal Component Analysis) and a PLS Path Modeling (PLS-PM) have been performed.

o Factor analysis

A Principal Component Analysis has been performed on the 10 levers to participate more, in order to identify underlying constructs:
- if better interface (i.e. easier and quicker to write reviews)
- if conviction to help (i.e. more useful for the other users)
- if influence improvement of products (i.e. power on the brand to enhance products/services)
- if economic reward after participating
- if answer from company
- if exert a real collective power (i.e. power over the brand in case of complaints, dissatisfaction..)
- if outstanding experience (i.e. product/service exceeding expectations)

- if no other choice (i.e. platform makes it compulsory to give a review, otherwise you are blocked to access other platform features)
- if closer to the community (i.e. strong belonging feeling)
- if recognition from the platform (i.e. incentive from the platform, congratulations...)

A four point Likert scale (Yes = 4, Probably Yes= 3, Probably Not = 2, No = 1) has been used to measure the items.

After some iterations, the results of the factor analysis showed that two motivation constructs can be found with multiple motives. The two motivation constructs can be called :

- "involvement" with 6 items ( f influence improvement of products/if outstanding experience/if conviction to help/if answer from company/if exert a real power/if better user interface). The item better user-interface appears in fact in this group.
- "incentive" with 4 items (if recognition from the platform/if closer to community/if economic rewards after participating/if no other choice)

## Correlation Matrix

| | if better user interface | if conviction to help | if influence improvement of products | if economic rewards after participating | if Answer from company | if exert a real collective power | If outstanding experience | If no other choice | If closer to the community | If recognition from the platform |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| if better user interface | 1,000 | | | | | | | | | |
| if conviction to help | 0,313 | 1,000 | | | | | | | | |
| if influence improvement of products | 0,300 | 0,376 | 1,000 | | | | | | | |
| if economic rewards after participating | 0,199 | 0,181 | 0,151 | 1,000 | | | | | | |
| if Answer from company | 0,242 | 0,238 | 0,223 | 0,211 | 1,000 | | | | | |
| if exert a real collective power | 0,213 | 0,324 | 0,357 | 0,265 | 0,431 | 1,000 | | | | |
| If outstanding experience | 0,223 | 0,254 | 0,249 | 0,082 | 0,295 | 0,225 | 1,000 | | | |
| If no other choice | 0,197 | 0,123 | 0,084 | 0,286 | 0,079 | 0,127 | 0,156 | 1,000 | | |
| If closer to the community | 0,192 | 0,298 | 0,240 | 0,252 | 0,160 | 0,380 | 0,131 | 0,369 | 1,000 | |
| If recognition from the platform | 0,246 | 0,278 | 0,230 | 0,341 | 0,434 | 0,285 | 0,312 | 0,316 | 0,455 | 1,000 |



69
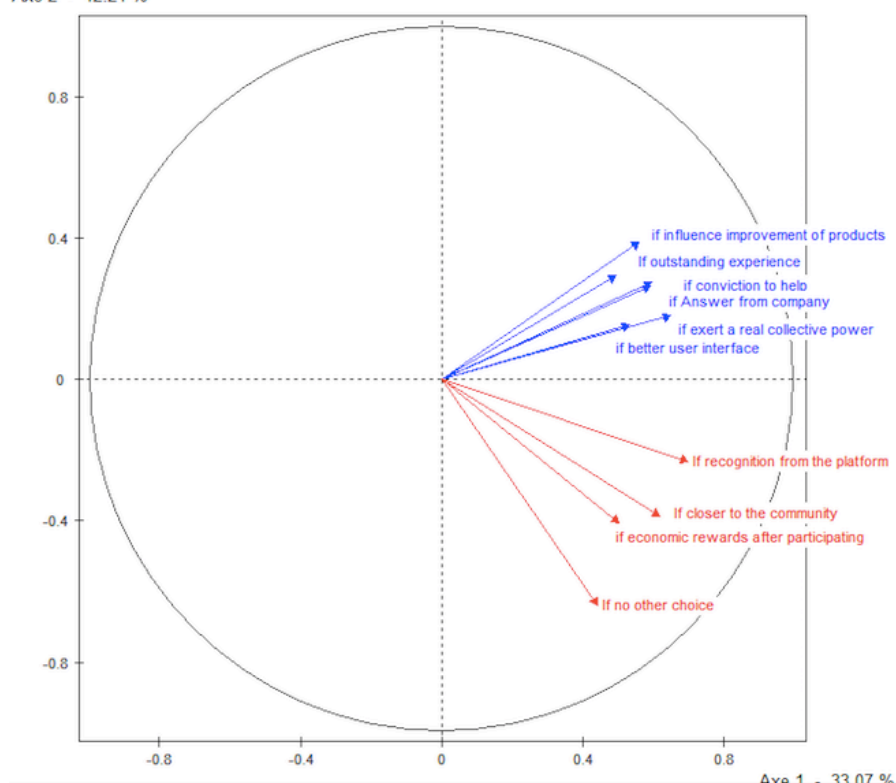
The two axes are the most significant to explain the variables. Axe 1 explains 33,07% of the information. We can see that it is positively correlated with all the items, which means that in all cases the participation will increase. This axe represents the Yes/No to an increased participation. Axe 2 explains 12,24% of the information. This axe represents the two underlying constructs: involvement (in blue) and incentive (in red). This is an opposition axe, as involvement is correlated positively whereas incentive is correlated negatively. The length of the arrows indicates the quality of the representation of the variables in the axes.

Findings of the factor analysis: there are two underlying constructs or factors (involvement and incentive) which explains the willing to participate more, and each group of items are highly correlated with the factor.

o PLS Path Modeling

PLS-PM is a data analysis approach for studying a set of blocks of observed variables in which each block can be summarized by a latent variable and that linear relations exist between latent variables.
The observed variables are the 10 items of motivations (called manifest variables) and the latent variables are the two underlying constructs (involvement and incentive).

Finally, we used a PLS Path Modeling (PLS- Partial Least Squares in XLSTAT) to find out if the two latent variables are contributing positively or negatively to an increase of the online participation. We choose this method because it is well appropriate to small samples and to variables with a high collinearity (multicollinearity), which isn't the case of a logistic regression.

Indeed a logistic regression was performed first and lead to the same findings as for the path analysis, i.e. the items "involvement" have a positive influence on Writing, and the items 'incentive" have a negative influence on Writing (so a positive influence on Reading). But the items coefficients weren't reliable (positive sign instead of negative and vice-versus) because of the collinearity between the items.

In the path analysis, we assume that manifest variables contain information that reflects the latent variables. For this reason, the motivation "if better user interface" belongs to the Incentive latent

variable, when it appeared in the Involvement construct in the first factor analysis. The path diagram shows the two latent variables with 5 motivation variables.

The reflective manifest variables must be in a space of one dimension since they are practically indicating the same latent construct (cf. Principal Component Analysis). The Cronbach's alpha is a coefficient that is intended to evaluate how well a block of items measure their corresponding latent variable. The value of the Cronbach Alpha close to 0,7 indicates a good unidimensionality for each block of manifest variables. If a block is unidimensional, then the first eigenvalue should be larger than 1 whereas the second eigenvalue should be smaller than 1 (See Table below). Their cross-loading values are coherent. A loading in one of a latent variable must be greater than any other loading in the other.

| Validation tests | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Underlying construct** | **Dimensions** | **Cronbach Alpha** | **Eigenvalue** |
| *INVOLVEMENT* | 5 | 0,679 | |
| conviction to help | | | 2,196 |
| influence improvement of products | | | 0,858 |
| answer from company | | | 0,798 |
| exert a real collective power | | | 0,627 |
| outstanding experience | | | 0,520 |
| *INCENTIVE* | 5 | 0,666 | |
| better user interface | | | 2,166 |
| economic rewards after participating | | | 0,858 |
| no other choice | | | 0,762 |
| closer to the community | | | 0,699 |
| recognition from the platform | | | 0,516 |
| Purpose R W | 1 | | |

| Cross-loadings | Involvement | Incentive |
|---|---|---|
| conviction to help | **0,509** | 0,336 |
| influence improvement of products | **0,684** | 0,279 |
| answer from company | **0,692** | 0,268 |
| exert a real collective power | **0,671** | 0,408 |
| outstanding experience | **0,681** | 0,191 |
| better user interface | 0,374 | **0,417** |
| economic rewards after participating | 0,252 | **0,756** |
| no other choice | 0,167 | **0,579** |
| closer to the community | 0,328 | **0,772** |
| recognition from the platform | 0,466 | **0,561** |

A regression between each latent variable and the Purpose variable Reading only or Writing (Purpose RW) shows path coefficients of 0,337 for the Involvement and -0,372 for the Incentive. It mean that the more Involvement, the more writing. At the opposite, the more "Incentive", the less writing.

The following figure shows the path diagram resulting from the PLS-PM. W, the loadings are correlations between a latent variable and its manifest variables (positive correlations). The overall quality of the model is validated by a relative Goodness of Fit of 0,914 (close to 1).
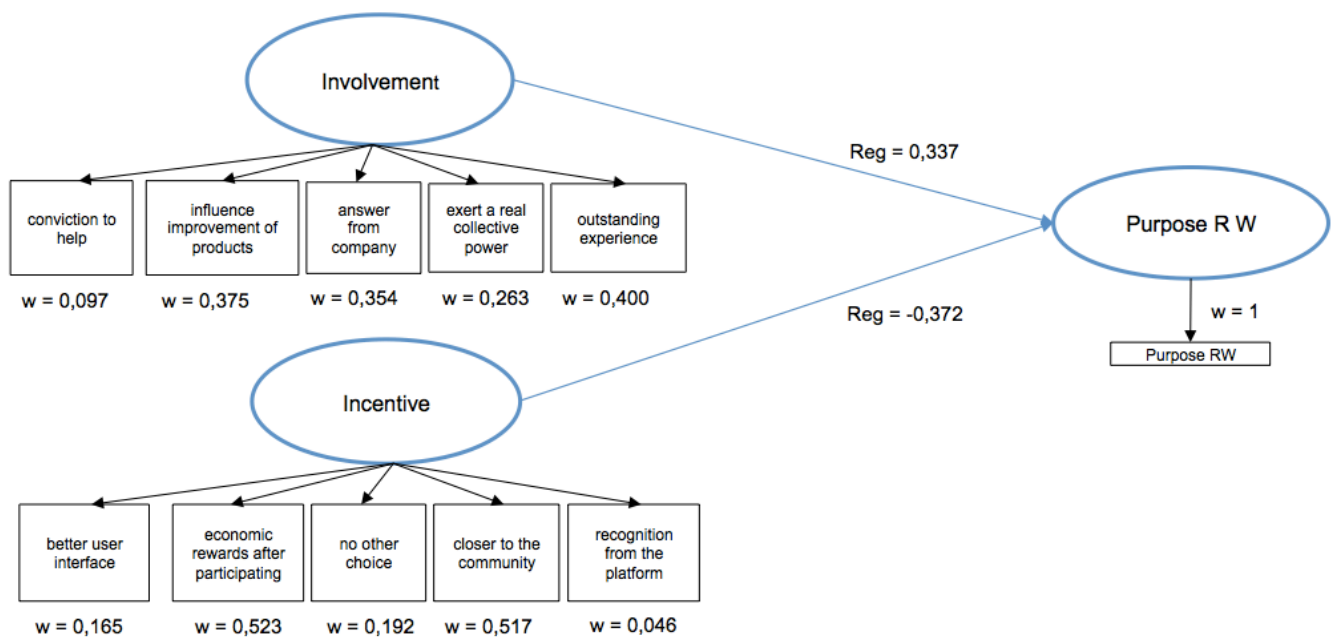
Findings of the path analysis: the levers appear in the graph according to their contribution to write more according to their loadings. We can see that the item "if outstanding experience with the product"(0,400) is the first lever to action, then "influence improvement of product"(0,375), "answer from the company" (0,354), "exert a collective power" (0,263) and finally "conviction to help" (0,097).

# V. CONCLUSION

Thanks to the development of the Web 2.0, we experienced a migration of market power from companies to consumers due to a reduced information asymmetry, and the recent powers the consumer acquired: powers to influence the market, the demand, and the sales. Companies, on their side, lost a partially control on their reputation and started to be exposed to critics of consumers on virtual communities of interest and especially on online opinion platforms. Hence, we are witnessing the hegemony of the consum'actor: an empowered consumer actor of his choices of consumption.

The Web 2.0 is by now integrated in our daily lives creating a major change in the consumption habits of the modern societies. This led 'opinion seekers' consumers to look for online reviews to obtain pre-purchase information about products/services. Indeed, from the consumers' side, eWOM is the most efficient source of information: independent from the company, credible, ubiquitous and pervasive.

However, there are much more opinion seekers than opinion leaders. According the thesis' empirical findings only 1/3 of the people that are already familiar with opinion platforms, give their opinion online. Still referring to the empirical study, the first reasons why 'opinion leader' consumers do give their opinion is to express their particular satisfaction with a product/service, and to guide the other consumers in their consumption decisions. At the opposite, the major obstacle that prevents the 2/3 of silent consumers to give their opinion is the social dilemma that occurs when a public good is consumed: an individual will benefit from the public good, regardless of whether or not he/she contributes to it.

The main levers to activate in order to make the opinion seekers break the silence, and the opinion givers participate even more, are the following: companies should communicate on the influence consumer's' reviews potentially had on the improvements of products/service, and companies should try to offer products/service that go beyond the ordinary to surprise and delight the consumer. Indeed, on the Internet nowadays, the key to generate positive eWOM and even create a buzz is *Quality*.

For a more in-depth conclusion about the levers increasing online participation, separating the opinion seekers from the opinion leaders is meaningful. Indeed, opinion seekers and opinion givers significantly differ depending on certain situations.

Opinion seekers need to be encouraged to start participation by tangible incentives. First, the platform's user interface should be really simple and intuitive and the evaluation process as fast as

possible. Then, consumers can be attracted by an economic reward after participation. Finally, consumers need to feel, when they are on the platform, that they belong to a real community composed of real people behind their computers sharing the same interests, instead of insignificant anonymous.

Opinion leaders, who are used to an opinion platform's interface and processes, already know what they are dealing with and accept it. However, the platform could make them participate even more if they put in place a system that encourage other consumers to thank them for writing a review, in order that they have more guarantee of actually being helpful to people. One way could be to make more apparent the 'helpful review' button and to democratize this practice on opinion platforms as it is already the case on social networks with the 'like' button for example on Facebook or Twitter.

To finish the PLS Path analysis allows us to discover two latent variables behind the motivations items to participate that we called involvement and incentive. The involvement group is more willing to participate in writing reviews, whereas the incentive group is more inclined to read reviews. This allows marketers to classify different target population, in order to put in place specified marketing strategies for each.

## V.1. RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into account the different practices and concerns, I have completed a list of recommendations for companies wishing to succeed in the Web 2.0 environment.

First of all, they should create a users' community, and consider the members of the community as users, not as customers. Members have to get the feeling that their opinions are important, they should feel that they have a value that is recognized. Marketers should 'listen-in' to the consumer's voice. Thanks to search engines, it is now possible for marketers to detect and collect reviews. This information is very valuable for companies, as they can learn qualitative information from users at each stage of the purchasing process (are the users happy with the online order, were they pleased with the delivery options and time, did the product or service met their expectations?). In addition, this information can be acquired at a very low-cost.

The company has to interact in a transparent and honest manner with the members of the community and let them express themselves. It should accept all critics, understanding that they are constructive for the brand evolution. In their book "Marketing in the Groundswell", Li and

Bernhoff (2008) explain that it is important to put in place an attentiveness and a real dialog between brands and consumers. Companies should not censor negative reviews, but should put in place a very efficient and constructive reply service in order to avoid a buzz around negative comments.

Companies' managers should embrace the notion of "consumer advocacy", striving to provide useful and complete information to consumers in order to earn their trust and purchases. They should make sure that the products/services delivered are the one expected by the customers. If any problems, they should fix it as soon as possible. Always trying to enhance customers' experience is the key for future success.

It is useful that companies make a conscious effort to organize and present the most persuasive reviews to consumers, particularly when numerous reviews are available. Opinion leaders have to be clearly identified and the company should collaborate with them as closely as possible. In addition, the company should emphasize the actions of the members, developing a culture and values of sharing and exchange, to be perceived as altruist and engaged. Then, it is important that the company steps backwards to let the members discuss between themselves, in order for them to feel empowered and to be convinced that the company wants what is good for them.

To conclude, Web 2.0 shouldn't be seen as a threat, but more as a real opportunity to give new enthusiasm and freshness to consumers and a new impetus to the company itself. The silent majority of opinion seekers have to be encouraged by the companies to comment on the Internet. Indeed, encouraging or stimulating good eWOM will result in enhanced business activity.

## V.2. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Limitations associated with the thesis can provide directions for future research. The review of prior literature indicates that research on consumer engagement in eWOM communication remains relatively new and has only received limited attention in the scholarly literature.

Concerning the empirical study, it is difficult to validate the levers for increasing participation in writing reviews as no existing frame or previous studies were available.

The empirical study didn't distinguish different families of products or services. The findings are at an aggregate level. Future research could be done to see if the levers for increasing online participation are different depending on products or services.

A sample predominantly French was used in this study. Future research directions could be to extend the study to other countries, or to groups of countries having the same level of Internet access, and/or the same cultural context. Findings would be probably different in less developed countries.

The sample size is relatively small and it is a convenience sample comprised mostly of students. This suggests that future research should include a more diverse sample of potential users in different age categories, professions, and usage experience with the consumer opinion platforms. A larger sample size can also bring more statistical power for analysis. Finally, since only a single questionnaire was used to measure all the constructs in our study, common method bias may exist in the measurement. Further studies could test our model by using different research methods to overcome this weakness.

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# VII. APPENDICES

## VII.1. APPENDIX N°1 – ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

**1. Have you ever accessed online opinion platforms on specialized opinion websites or on commercial/reservation websites. Ex: TripAdvisor, Yelp, Amazon, Booking, etc. ?**

-YES

-NO

**2. For what purpose did you use online opinion platforms ?**

-To read and write reviews

-To read reviews only

**3. What is your frequency of reading online reviews ?**

-Several times a week

-Several times a month

-Occasionally during the year

-Rarely - less than once a year

**4. In general, do you trust reviews you read ?**

-Always

-Most of the time

-Sometimes

-Rarely

-Never

**5. Would you trust the overall consumers' opinion on a specific product/service more if there was a higher number of reviews on this product/service ?**

-YES

-NO

**6. Would you trust a specific review on a product/service more if a higher number of consumers had characterized it as an "helpful review"?**

-YES
-NO

**7. Which one of both criteria is the most important to you regarding the credibility of the consumers' opinion ?**

-A high number of reviews
-A high number of "helpful" votes on few reviews

**8. a. 1. What is your frequency of writing online reviews ?**

-Several times a week
-Several times a month
-Occasionally during the year
-Rarely - Less than once a year

**8. a. 2. Check the reasons why you have written reviews in the past :**

-To help other consumers to make their choice

-To support a company/brand

-To participate in and belong to a virtual community

-To exert a mass collective power over companies to get improved products/services

-To request information about products/services from other consumers

-To feel recognized by the other consumers as an influential reviewer

-To receive economic rewards like coupons, free entrances, free virtual goods etc.

-To express positive feelings because you were particularly satisfied with a product/service

-To release yourself from negative feelings because you were particularly dissatisfied with a product/service

-To use the platform as a moderator between you and the company in case of problem

**8. b. What are the obstacles that prevented you from writing an online review about a product/service when you had the opportunity ?**

-You didn't have the time to write a valuable detailed review and you didn't want to give a thoughtless one

-You didn't get through the whole evaluation process because it was too complicated and too long

-You didn't think you had a high enough knowledge of the product/service to express your opinion

-You didn't want to harm the company

-You didn't feel the need because you weren't particularly satisfied or dissatisfied with the product/service

-You didn't feel involved in the community of the online opinion platform

-You thought your review would have no influence on the quality of products/services offered by the company

-You didn't feel the need to personally give your opinion because there were already a lot of other consumers' reviews

-You didn't find any personal benefit in doing it

-Your opinion was at the opposite of the other consumers' reviews concerning the product/service

**9. Would you be more willing to write online reviews if :**

**a. If the user interface was more adapted to your needs : easier, faster, possibility not to write a text, better ergonomics of the website.**

-Yes
-Probably
-Probably not
-No

**b. If you had the conviction that your contribution would help other consumers. Ex : consumers characterizing your review as "helpful" or thanking you for it.**

-Yes

-Probably

-Probably not

-No

**c. If you had tangible proofs that your review had influenced the improvement of a company's products/services.**

-Yes

-Probably

-Probably not

-No

**d. If you earned economic rewards after participating.**

-Yes

-Probably

-Probably not

-No

**e. If the company acknowledged receipt of your review by answering it.**

-Yes

-Probably

-Probably not

-No

**f. If you were convinced that Internet users could exert a real collective power over companies.**

-Yes

-Probably

-Probably not

-No

**g. If your experience with a company's product/service was exceeding your expectations.**

-Yes

-Probably

-Probably not

-No

**h. If you had no other choice to further access the platform.**

-Yes

-Probably

-Probably not

-No

**i. If you felt closer to the platform community members.**

-Yes

-Probably

-Probably not

-No

**j. If you had recognition from the platform. Ex : thanking you, encouraging you, congratulating you, giving you points and diplomas.**

-Yes

-Probably

-Probably not

-No

**10. About you :**

**a. What is your age range ?**

-18 or younger

-19-24

-25-34

-35-44

-45-54

-55-64

-65 or older

**b. What is your gender ?**

-Male

-Female

**c. Where are you from ?**

List of countries

**d. What is your socio-professional category ?**

-Farmer

-Crafterpson, shopkeeper

-Manager, executive

-Intermediate occupation

-Employee

-Worker

-Retired

-Unemployed

-Student

-Other

| NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS | no time for valuable review (53) | process too complicated, long (39) | not enough knowledge (13) | not harm the company (5) | not satisfied or dissatisfied (35) | not involved in community (35) | no influence on quality (18) | already a lot of reviews (56) | no personal benefit (37) | opposite opinion (1) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **if user interface more adapted** | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1-Yes | 17 | 19 | 2 | 3 | 11 | 13 | 8 | 21 | 11 | 0 |
| 2-Probably | 24 | 17 | 7 | 1 | 10 | 9 | 5 | 23 | 13 | 1 |
| Grand Total | 41 | 36 | 9 | 4 | 21 | 22 | 13 | 44 | 24 | 1 |
| Percentage | 77% | 92% | 69% | 80% | 60% | 63% | 72% | 79% | 65% | NA |
| **if conviction to help other consumers** | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1-Yes | 12 | 11 | 3 | 1 | 8 | 8 | 6 | 14 | 10 | 0 |
| 2-Probably | 24 | 17 | 6 | 2 | 14 | 14 | 6 | 27 | 12 | 1 |
| Grand Total | 36 | 28 | 9 | 3 | 22 | 22 | 12 | 41 | 22 | 1 |
| Percentage | 68% | 72% | 69% | 60% | 63% | 63% | 67% | 73% | 59% | NA |
| **if influence improvement of product/service** | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1-Yes | 24 | 15 | 8 | 2 | 14 | 16 | 9 | 24 | 13 | 0 |
| 2-Probably | 19 | 20 | 4 | 3 | 13 | 15 | 8 | 19 | 21 | 1 |
| Grand Total | 43 | 35 | 12 | 5 | 27 | 31 | 17 | 43 | 34 | 1 |
| Percentage | 81% | 90% | 92% | 100% | 77% | 89% | 94% | 77% | 92% | NA |
| **if economic rewards after participating** | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1-Yes | 25 | 14 | 6 | 4 | 13 | 16 | 7 | 27 | 20 | 0 |
| 2-Probably | 13 | 11 | 2 | 1 | 12 | 8 | 7 | 16 | 7 | 1 |
| Grand Total | 38 | 25 | 8 | 5 | 25 | 24 | 14 | 43 | 27 | 1 |
| Percentage | 72% | 64% | 62% | 100% | 71% | 69% | 78% | 77% | 73% | NA |
| **if answer from the company** | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1-Yes | 20 | 12 | 5 | 2 | 8 | 10 | 4 | 19 | 11 | 0 |
| 2-Probably | 22 | 18 | 6 | 1 | 17 | 16 | 10 | 24 | 15 | 1 |
| Grand Total | 42 | 30 | 11 | 3 | 25 | 26 | 14 | 43 | 26 | 1 |
| Percentage | 79% | 77% | 85% | 60% | 71% | 74% | 78% | 77% | 70% | NA |
| **if exert a real collective power** | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1-Yes | 17 | 12 | 4 | 1 | 10 | 10 | 4 | 22 | 12 | 0 |
| 2-Probably | 18 | 17 | 8 | 3 | 15 | 17 | 12 | 22 | 18 | 1 |
| Grand Total | 35 | 29 | 12 | 4 | 25 | 27 | 16 | 44 | 30 | 1 |
| Percentage | 66% | 74% | 92% | 80% | 71% | 77% | 89% | 79% | 81% | NA |
| **if product/service exceeding expectations** | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1-Yes | 21 | 13 | 2 | 1 | 9 | 9 | 6 | 20 | 12 | 0 |
| 2-Probably | 22 | 19 | 6 | 3 | 19 | 19 | 7 | 22 | 14 | 1 |
| Grand Total | 43 | 32 | 8 | 4 | 28 | 28 | 13 | 42 | 26 | 1 |
| Percentage | 81% | 82% | 62% | 80% | 80% | 80% | 72% | 75% | 70% | NA |
| **if no other choice to access the platform** | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1-Yes | 16 | 8 | 0 | 2 | 13 | 13 | 4 | 14 | 10 | 0 |
| 2-Probably | 6 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 10 | 8 | 1 |
| Grand Total | 22 | 14 | 1 | 4 | 15 | 15 | 10 | 24 | 18 | 1 |
| Percentage | 42% | 36% | 8% | 80% | 43% | 43% | 56% | 43% | 49% | NA |
| **if closer feeling to the platform members** | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1-Yes | 7 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 10 | 6 | 0 |
| 2-Probably | 17 | 13 | 7 | 3 | 9 | 9 | 8 | 17 | 12 | 1 |
| Grand Total | 24 | 18 | 7 | 4 | 14 | 14 | 11 | 27 | 18 | 1 |
| Percentage | 45% | 46% | 54% | 80% | 40% | 40% | 61% | 48% | 49% | NA |
| **if recognition from the platform** | | | | | | | | | | |
| 1-Yes | 8 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 7 | 6 | 0 |
| 2-Probably | 13 | 8 | 2 | 2 | 8 | 10 | 5 | 14 | 9 | 1 |
| Grand Total | 21 | 12 | 4 | 2 | 8 | 13 | 7 | 21 | 15 | 1 |
| Percentage | 40% | 31% | 31% | 40% | 23% | 37% | 39% | 38% | 41% | NA |

| NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS | help consumers (51) | support company (31) | belong to community (7) | collective power (17) | request information (10) | feel recognized (2) | economic rewards (7) | express positive feelings (60) | release from negative feelings (39) | moderator between you and the comp (12) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **If user interface more adapted — 1-Yes** | 19 | 11 | 1 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 21 | 17 | 7 |
| 2-Probably | 18 | 11 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 0 | 2 | 19 | 11 | 2 |
| Grand Total | 37 | 22 | 5 | 12 | 8 | 2 | 6 | 40 | 28 | 9 |
| Percentage | 73% | 71% | 71% | 71% | 80% | NA | 86% | 67% | 72% | 75% |
| **If conviction to help other consumers — 1-Yes** | 0 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 2 | 2 |
| 2-Probably | 51 | 22 | 6 | 13 | 6 | 1 | 4 | 45 | 33 | 8 |
| Grand Total | 51 | 27 | 7 | 16 | 8 | 2 | 6 | 51 | 35 | 10 |
| Percentage | 100% | 87% | 100% | 94% | 80% | NA | 86% | 85% | 90% | 83% |
| **If influence improvement of product/service — 1-Yes** | 30 | 20 | 2 | 16 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 32 | 25 | 9 |
| 2-Probably | 19 | 9 | 5 | 0 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 22 | 13 | 2 |
| Grand Total | 49 | 29 | 7 | 16 | 10 | 2 | 7 | 54 | 38 | 11 |
| Percentage | 96% | 94% | 100% | 94% | 100% | NA | 100% | 90% | 97% | 92% |
| **If economic rewards after participating — 1-Yes** | 13 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 13 | 8 | 3 |
| 2-Probably | 16 | 10 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 20 | 13 | 4 |
| Grand Total | 29 | 18 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 7 | 33 | 21 | 7 |
| Percentage | 57% | 58% | 71% | 35% | 40% | NA | 100% | 55% | 54% | 58% |
| **If answer from the company — 1-Yes** | 26 | 17 | 3 | 8 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 25 | 18 | 8 |
| 2-Probably | 19 | 7 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 0 | 2 | 27 | 15 | 3 |
| Grand Total | 45 | 24 | 6 | 14 | 10 | 1 | 4 | 52 | 33 | 11 |
| Percentage | 88% | 77% | 86% | 82% | 100% | NA | 57% | 87% | 85% | 92% |
| **If exert a real collective power — 1-Yes** | 25 | 12 | 2 | 8 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 23 | 17 | 5 |
| 2-Probably | 20 | 10 | 4 | 7 | 5 | 0 | 3 | 22 | 16 | 6 |
| Grand Total | 45 | 22 | 6 | 15 | 7 | 1 | 5 | 45 | 33 | 11 |
| Percentage | 88% | 71% | 86% | 88% | 70% | NA | 71% | 75% | 85% | 92% |
| **If product/service exceeding expectations — 1-Yes** | 28 | 24 | 2 | 9 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 34 | 23 | 9 |
| 2-Probably | 17 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 0 | 3 | 21 | 13 | 2 |
| Grand Total | 45 | 29 | 6 | 15 | 7 | 2 | 6 | 55 | 36 | 11 |
| Percentage | 88% | 94% | 86% | 88% | 70% | NA | 86% | 92% | 92% | 92% |
| **If no other choice to access the platform — 1-Yes** | 6 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 1 |
| 2-Probably | 12 | 9 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 14 | 8 | 2 |
| Grand Total | 18 | 13 | 3 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 20 | 12 | 3 |
| Percentage | 35% | 42% | 43% | 35% | 30% | NA | 29% | 33% | 31% | 25% |
| **If closer feeling to the platform members — 1-Yes** | 5 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 0 |
| 2-Probably | 11 | 7 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 14 | 7 | 1 |
| Grand Total | 16 | 9 | 3 | 6 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 18 | 9 | 1 |
| Percentage | 31% | 29% | 43% | 35% | 20% | NA | 43% | 30% | 23% | 8% |
| **If recognition from the platform — 1-Yes** | 6 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 6 | 3 | 0 |
| 2-Probably | 15 | 9 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 18 | 12 | 3 |
| Grand Total | 21 | 14 | 2 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 24 | 15 | 3 |
| Percentage | 41% | 45% | 29% | 35% | 40% | NA | 29% | 40% | 38% | 25% |