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# eWOM and content marketing strategies: maximizing brand engagement among social media users in Spain

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses how brands' content marketing strategies on social networks influence electronic word of mouth (eWOM), a major predictor of business success that reflects consumer engagement and shapes behaviours such as increased purchase intention, willingness to pay more, reduced perceived risk, and strengthened brand trust and loyalty. While prior research has focused on isolated aspects of digital communication, such as message format or content appeal, this work incorporates additional key elements—brand humanization, personalization, and conversational relationships—that are essential for fostering trust and engagement in today's audiovisual content on platforms like Instagram and TikTok.

Grounded in theories such as Service-Dominant Logic, brand personalization and humanization, Uses and Gratifications, trust transfer, Marketing Communications Theory, and Media Richness Theory, this research proposes a conceptual model based on the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) framework. The study analyses 250 Instagram posts and 250 TikTok posts from top-interaction consumer brands in Spain, measuring independent variables such as brand consistency, post position, message format, celebrity endorsement, content attractiveness, and interactivity, with eWOM operationalised as the volume of likes and comments. Control variables included posting day, emoji use, and post length, with content analysis applied for coding and negative binomial regression for hypothesis testing.

Findings reveal platform-specific patterns: while message format drives eWOM on TikTok, content attractiveness is more influential on Instagram. Celebrity endorsement is the only variable showing similar effects across platforms, increasing likes on both networks and comments on TikTok. This work addresses the gap in comparative analyses of content effectiveness between platforms with distinct social and technical dynamics, offering evidence-based insights for optimising brand communication strategies according to platform-specific audience interaction styles, message temporality, and visual engagement.

## 1. Introduction

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is a dynamic form of digital communication or online review through which users share and disseminate ideas, experiences, and opinions about products or services on social media and other digital platforms (Alarcón et al., 2018; Gildin, 2022; Haq et al., 2024; Lourenço et al., 2024). This phenomenon includes any consumer interaction, such as reacting to or "liking" posts, sharing content on their social network accounts, or evaluating products or services through rating systems (Srivastava & Sivaramakrishnan, 2021).

It is currently estimated to be one of the main predictors of business success. According to Moisescu et al. (2025) and Moliner-Tena et al. (2023) eWOM reflects the individual's level of engagement and demonstrates a behavioural response to the influence received from the brand (Boujena et al., 2021). Scholars highlight the impact of eWOM on both current and potential customers, increasing purchase intention (Aprilia & Kusumawati, 2021), willingness to pay a higher price for products or services (Nieto-Garcia et al., 2017), reducing perceived risk (Bai et al., 2022), strengthening brand trust (Sánchez-Villar & Bigne, 2020), and improving brand loyalty (Donthu et al., 2021).

In recent years, interest in identifying the drivers of eWOM and its

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strategic implications for organizations has grown significantly. The literature has partially addressed this phenomenon from a number of different marketing and communication theoretical perspectives, such as Service-Dominant Logic (Vargo, 2023; Vargo et al., 2023), theories on brand personalization and humanization (Lourenco et al., 2024; Teepapal, 2025; Tran et al., 2024), the Trust Transfer Theory (Lee & Hong, 2019), the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Xie & Lu, 2022); Marketing Communications Theory (Xu et al., 2022) and Media Richness Theory (Porto et al., 2024). These frameworks highlight how certain aspects of digital communication—such as message format, content appeal, and influencers' endorsement—enhance the value that brands offer to consumers, personalizing the conversational tones and fostering more fluid and interactive brand–customer relationships. In this regard, Ceylan and Hayran (2025), Jung et al. (2022), Wang et al. (2024) emphasize how content generated by organizations and influencers and shared through multiple channels—especially social media—contributes to the promotion of eWOM. Additionally, these practices can reinforce the humanization of brands, endowing them with personality and human traits. This strengthens consumers' trust and commitment to these brands, as they perceive them as relatable (MacInnis & Folkes, 2017). Similarly, research by Kleer and Kunz (2023) demonstrates that the sensory richness of content and the satisfaction of specific emotional needs foster digital engagement and eWOM, reinforcing the notion that content personalization not only improves the user experience but also activates cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions of brand engagement—dimensions that are essential for building lasting relationships in digital environments.

In this line Molina et al. (2020) and Gunarto and Anggraini (2024) highlight the importance of understanding how corporate content marketing strategies influence the generation and dissemination of eWOM. These authors also advocate for a comprehensive analysis of all aspects of digital communication to improve understanding of this phenomenon and, thus, enhance business performance and brand equity through value co-creation, increased consumer emotional engagement, and brand loyalty. Furthermore, considering the findings of Porto et al. (2024), it is necessary to identify whether the drivers of eWOM are common across all social networking platforms or, on the contrary, whether content marketing initiatives impact eWOM differently depending on the social network, given that each network targets audiences with varying sociodemographic and psychographic profiles, diverse interests, and at different stages within the consumer journey.

Given the existing knowledge gap regarding the role of content marketing in the creation of eWOM and its varying levels of intensity depending on the social media platform used, this study conducts an analysis based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model. Accordingly, the objective is to identify the effect that the characteristics of brand-generated communicational content published on social media have on the generation of eWOM. Based on a solid review of the academic literature, the concept of eWOM is defined, and a range of variables that characterize marketing content on social networks are identified. Once the conceptual model is established, it is validated through an exploratory empirical investigation. For this purpose, 250 Instagram posts and 250 TikTok posts are analysed, all from the companies with the highest interaction rates in Spain, according to IAB Spain (2024). The selected brands, belonging to the mass consumption sector, enjoy high recognition and credibility among consumers. Although their digital marketing strategies differ significantly, none of them are known for making substantial efforts to personalize their communications. The independent variables related to marketing content include brand consistency, post positioning, message format, celebrity endorsement, content appeal, and interactivity. The dependent variables comprise eWOM, operationalized as the number of comments and likes received by each post on social media. Day of the week, use of emojis, and post length are included as control variables. Content analysis is employed to code the variables, and a negative binomial regression analysis is conducted to test the proposed hypotheses.

The findings demonstrate that platform dynamics impact how users engage: on Instagram, attractive posts yield more likes, while promotional messages generate higher levels of eWOM via comments. Conversely, on TikTok, highly arousing, sensational content, in particular content with functional appeals, is more effective. Additionally, consistent branding and celebrity endorsement were found to be the only factors that significantly drive both engagement and eWOM over all the platforms considered. The need for platform-specific content strategies that work with the distinct affordances of each social networking platform, and a range of user engagement behaviours was noted.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Digital marketing is emerging as an effective strategy for business success. In an environment shaped by the internet, digital technologies, smartphones and social media platforms, companies have unprecedented opportunities to build brands, increase sales and drive traffic to their products or services (Khanom, 2023). However, beyond connecting with their audience, companies must foster active engagement and involvement of their audiences to develop strong relational capital (Bharati & Chaudhaury, 2019; Naeem & Ozuem, 2021)

In today's digital environment, users have become highly empowered, which has boosted the creation, dissemination and impact of eWOM. This phenomenon is widely used to share impressions, opinions and experiences about companies, brands and their products or services (Haq et al., 2024). eWOM encompasses all types of brand-related digital communication, regardless of who carries it out (customer or non-customer) or when and how it relates to the brand (past or present; awareness, positive attitude, purchase, or emotional connection). Furthermore, communication can be expressed formally or informally and materialized through different types of actions, such as likes, shares, or reviews (Zhang et al., 2021).

Moliner-Tena et al. (2023) point out that eWOM is a perfect expression of consumer engagement with the brand because it represents a form of voluntary, proactive, and public participation that goes beyond simple consumption or passive approval of content. This communicative action reveals a level of connection, which articulates the affective dimension (I care), the cognitive dimension (I have something to say), and the behavioural dimension (I am actively involved).

Engagement generates a socio-psychological state that fosters frequent interaction between people and the object of their engagement, such as a brand. This interaction goes beyond simple transactional motivation and encompasses the building of value cocreation relationships between various actors (people, companies, brands, etc.). From the perspective of relationship marketing and Service-Dominant Logic, eWOM represents the point at which the consumer ceases to be a recipient of value and becomes a symbolic co-creator of it, contributing to the brand's narrative, reputation, and social meaning (Vargo et al., 2023).

When someone talks about a brand, they make it their own—and that, in branding terms, is engagement in its purest form. However, Wahyuningsih et al. (2022) indicate that factors such as people's age influence the level of engagement, which in turn modulates their interactions with the brand. Greater value provided by the brand, or a strong identification with it, is key to the intensity of this relationship, as well as people's responses to any brand stimulus (Daryus et al., 2022).

According to Algharabat et al. (2020) and Kleer and Kunz (2023), engagement in social media manifests itself in three dimensions: cognitive, affective and behavioural. Cognitively, engagement is reflected in involvement and interactivity with the brand. On the affective level, it establishes a deep and meaningful connection thanks to the positive emotions generated. In the behavioural dimension, engagement translates into an activation that manifests itself in specific behaviours, such as reactions to the brand's actions and intensive use of digital tools and channels to express feelings, share experiences, or use information, demonstrating deep social and emotional connections.

Specifically, it is in the latter dimension where eWOM manifests itself most strongly, albeit at varying levels. Malthouse et al. (2013) and Wu et al. (2019) describe how eWOM can exhibit varying levels of engagement, ranging from low (or almost passive) engagement to high or active engagement, underscoring the multifaceted nature of eWOM and its diverse implications for brand perception and consumer influence. At a low level, individuals passively consume content and utilize basic responses such as likes, ratings, emoticons, or social media hashtags. For example, research by Pang et al. (2024) indicates that passive eWOM activities, such as liking and sharing posts, can positively influence social trust among users of digital platforms. In contrast, high-level eWOM engagement involves more deliberate and effortful activities, such as writing detailed reviews, creating and sharing multimedia content, or actively participating in discussions about a brand. Leong et al. (2025) explore how intrinsic motivations, such as altruism and selfishness, drive consumers to share their experiences on food platforms, highlighting that this deep interaction is often motivated by the desire to inform or help others. Similarly, Haro-Sosa et al. (2024) examine the motivations behind eWOM behaviour among millennials in the context of restaurant experiences, emphasizing that active participation is linked to a greater understanding of and connection with the brand.

In addition, the ability of electronic word of mouth to spread buzz, create emotional connection with brands (Lourenco et al., 2024; Tran et al., 2024) and potentially alter the purchasing decisions of potential customers has led companies to value eWOM as an essential communications marketing tool. Jain et al. (2023) and Kleer and Kunz (2023) highlight that eWOM is perceived as more credible, empathetic and relevant than traditional communications imposed by marketers. The positive effects of eWOM extend throughout the marketing funnel, from increased web traffic and visit duration at the top of the funnel (TOFU) (Mukhopadhayay et al., 2023), to purchase likelihood and product adoption in the middle (MOFU) (Kumar et al., 2023), and culminating in significant improvements in sales, brand recommendations and emotional engagement at the bottom (BOFU) (Pangarkar et al., 2023). In addition, researchers such as Sann et al. (2021) note that, compared to search goods, online reviews are especially influential in the purchase of experiential goods, such as travel, hotels and restaurants. Wu et al. (2020) also show that eWOM offers an indirect shopping and usage experience that helps mitigate the risk and uncertainty associated with the purchase process.

Supported by research, development and innovation companies are using a wide range of marketing resources and communication techniques that encourage consumers to actively participate in social media. In recent years, eWOM has been gaining ground over other integrated marketing communication strategies, as companies realize that these are useful, customer-generated sources of information that enhance consumer engagement and cocreation (Vargo et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022). Buzz marketing, blogging, social media marketing, brand ambassador programs, influencer collaborations, and online communities are commonly employed as mechanisms to stimulate dialogue among consumers. These strategies not only encourage users to actively generate and share content across digital platforms but also aim to engage more passive users by eliciting simple yet measurable reactions to the shared content. This latter form of engagement, referred to as secondary or reactive eWOM, is typically expressed through behavioural manifestations such as likes, shares, or comments. As noted by Verma and Dewani (2021), these tactics serve as personalised touchpoints that allow brands to initiate and maintain conversations with diverse consumer segments. Furthermore, Mukhopadhayay et al. (2023) conceptualize this type of interaction as a key indicator of digital engagement, evidencing how brand-led content can trigger varying degrees of consumer response in online environments. This dynamic of interaction illustrates how content-driven strategies not only personalize brand communication but also enable symbolic value co-creation, whereby consumers, whether actively producing or passively responding, become integral contributors to the brand's identity and perceived human character in digital ecosystems.

It is important to note that eWOM is an evolved form of traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) that has been adapted to digital ecosystems and is currently one of the most important touchpoints for influencing consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviour (Verma & Dewani, 2021). Authors such as Lourenco et al. (2024); Tran et al. (2024) examine which elements and characteristics of brands' marketing communications can generate this behaviour in people, especially when their level of engagement is high.

Several studies highlight the importance of message format and the appeal of its content, demonstrating the positive effect of personalised communications on brand engagement, whether through customer-tailored arguments that illustrate brand value or anticipate unforgettable experiences or high levels of satisfaction (Seo and Park, 2018), or through the use of visual and non-visual elements with high affective content (Berger & Milkman, 2012).

More recent studies reinforce this argument by demonstrating that message format and content appeal are decisive in shaping engagement behaviour on social media. For example, Shahbaznezhad et al. (2021) show how message format richness (e.g., video, imagery, text) increases cognitive accessibility and triggers higher engagement levels. Ceylan and Hayran (2025) and Kleer and Kunz (2023) add that emotionally resonant and personalised content appeals are more likely to spark user reactions such as likes, shares, and comments. Similarly, Porto et al. (2024) argue that the vividness and aesthetic composition of content significantly enhance eWOM, particularly on visual platforms like Instagram and TikTok, which demand more sensorial and appealing narratives. These studies support the claim that the synergy between content appeal and platform dynamics plays a pivotal role in brand-consumer interaction.

Recently, some studies have gone a step further and, under the auspices of different theories from marketing and communication areas such as Service-Dominant Logic (Vargo, 2023; Vargo et al., 2023), theories on brand personalization and humanization (Lourenco et al., 2024; Teepapal, 2025; Tran et al., 2024), the Trust Transfer Theory (Lee & Hong, 2019), and the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Xie & Lu, 2022), Marketing Communications Theory (Xu et al., 2022) or Media Richness Theory (Porto et al. (2024)., among others, point to the existence of factors beyond the content of marketing communications, especially in the realm of social media, that can significantly influence eWOM. In this sense, works such as Ceylan and Hayran (2025), Zhang et al. (2021) indicate that brand consistency, strategic positioning of posts, persuasive message formats, celebrity endorsement, emotional content appeal, and interactive content features are key drivers of eWOM.

## 3. Brand consistency

Digitalization has transformed brands into global and omnipresent entities that operate through clear, recognizable, and standardized platforms worldwide. These brands constantly generate online content to maintain engagement with their audience, sharing not only messages that directly promote their products but also relevant information about their sector and utility content to encourage interaction with their audiences (Naeem & Ozuem, 2021).

Brand management literature asserts that the global standardization of brand activities enables the creation of a coherent and clearly defined image and meaning across different markets, fostering audience engagement (Solberg & Durrieu, 2023). However, maintaining coherence in communication is challenging, particularly when adapting and personalizing content for diverse audiences. Content standardization complicates the maintenance of a consistent and authentic tone in the messages delivered, aligning with the brand' s values and personality. This is essential for leaving a lasting impression on consumers and the public.

In this context, the necessity to humanize the brand becomes strategic. Humanization, understood as imparting relational, emotional, and personal attributes to a brand, fosters more authentic and closer connections with consumers (Khan & Arif, 2022). This strategy not only drives engagement but also enhances the generation of eWOM, as users tend to share content from brands they perceive as human, empathetic, and aligned with their values (Ceylan & Hayran, 2025).

Therefore, personalised communication tailored to the buyer persona profile emerges as an imperative to connect with diverse audiences while maintaining brand consistency without sacrificing closeness. Brand consistency is established through the coherence of corporate communications and how they reflect the organization' s values, product features, and brand positioning in their comprehensive communication strategy (Castañeda et al., 2020).

Tafesse and Korneliussen (2013) distinguish two levels of brand consistency: strategic and tactical. Strategic consistency refers to the overall alignment of business units, values, products, services, and communication strategies. In contrast, tactical consistency emphasizes the coherent integration of visual and creative elements into communication pieces (Tafesse, 2015), such as the brand name, slogan, promises, colours, and visual identity (Brasel, 2012).

From the perspective of Integrated Marketing Communication Theory, the inclusion of recognizable brand symbols can significantly influence consumer cognition and behaviour (Schultz, 1992; Xu et al., 2022). If the brand enjoys a positive image, these elements reinforce its acceptance; but if the perception is negative, they can have the opposite effect (Brasel, 2012).

Although empirical evidence is still limited, studies such as that by Tafesse (2015) demonstrate that brand consistency can have significant and positive effects on eWOM, particularly in sectors such as the automotive industry. Considering this theoretical and empirical basis, and with the aim of exploring the role of brand consistency in eWOM engagement, the following research hypothesis is proposed:

*H1. High brand consistency is positively related to higher eWOM behaviour.*

## 4. Position of the post

Post position refers to the time a post spends in the first position, i.e. the number of hours or days before the organization makes a new post (Schultz, 2017). On social networks such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, the most recently shared posts appear at the top of the brand's fan page, pushing older posts to a lower position (De Vries et al., 2012). If organizations disseminate content with high frequency, less recent posts change quickly, which means they are less noticed and may receive less attention than posts that are at the top for longer.

This positioning is far from superficial; it directly influences user attention and interaction. Posts that remain at the top for extended periods receive greater exposure and interaction, whereas a high posting frequency may cause valuable content to be buried before users even see it. As Hamzah et al. (2021) highlight, post position significantly moderates consumer-brand engagement, making strategic timing a crucial element in the effectiveness of content dissemination. In essence, longer top-position presence correlates positively with engagement metrics and the potential for content to be organically amplified via eWOM.

Moreover, the top position serves as a strategic spotlight for branding messages. In today's saturated digital environment, where consumer attention is fragmented and fleeting, the temporal prominence of a post can be as decisive as its creative or emotional content (Amponsah, 2024). Exercising strategic control over the timing and frequency of posts is essential not only to maximize visibility but also to strengthen emotional resonance with the audience—ultimately encouraging spontaneous user interactions and eWOM. When combined with authentic and humanized brand communication, as Loureiro and Romero suggest, this approach enhances both brand credibility and consumer trust, further amplifying the message reach.

Accordingly, the following research hypothesis is proposed.

*H2. The time a publication spends in the top position affects the volume of eWOM.*

## 5. Message vividness

The concept of message vividness refers to the sensory richness of a publication, determined by the quantity and diversity of formats used in its presentation (Cervellon & Galipienzo, 2015). This construct captures the visual and auditory elements that companies integrate to attract customer attention and reduce the cognitive load necessary to process information (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). In social networks, vividness manifests through the combination of formats such as images, videos, songs, subtitles, voice-overs, and links (Martin-Neira et al., 2023). The association between message vividness and eWOM behaviour is based on the Media Richness Theory (MRT) proposed by Daft and Lengel (1986).

MRT posits that messages with greater sensory richness better facilitate comprehension and reduce ambiguity, measured by the diversity of signals and sensory channels used. In the digital environment, this theory explains how the accumulation of multiple formats in a single publication intensifies the user's sensory experience (Moran et al., 2020). Content with high vividness simultaneously activates different sensory channels, which increases attention, cognitive processing, and message memorability (Gunarto & Anggraini, 2024). As Porto et al. (2024) point out, publications with greater vividness generate higher engagement and better performance metrics. Ceylan and Hayran (2025) complement this perspective by showing that high-intensity messages generate greater perceived congruence with the brand by humanizing it, providing it with characteristics such as spontaneity and the ability to surprise. This situation is especially important when communication is supported by influencers, since they not only reinforce brand credibility but also promote both the identification and the transfer of associations between them. MRT also explains that posts with multiple formats better simulate natural interaction, reducing the psychological distance between the sender and the receiver (Molina et al., 2020). With these considerations in mind, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H3. A higher level of message vividness is positively related to higher eWOM behaviour.*

## 6. Celebrity endorsement and influence on eWOM

In digital and traditional advertising, brands can include models to reinforce their messages. In fact, the literature argues that around 30 % of advertising generated and disseminated in Western countries employs spokespeople to increase its effectiveness (Schimmelpfenning, 2018). Evidence confirms that the inclusion of spokespersons (according to their characteristics) can exert significant effects on consumer attitudes. For example, it has been reported that the use of celebrities contributes to improving consumer attitudes towards products and services (Martínez-López et al., 2020), increases the credibility of the organization, strengthens brand awareness and can even trigger an increase in sales (Derdenger et al., 2018). Regarding the gender of the spokesperson, some authors argue that congruence between the gender of the character used in advertising and the consumer can lead to favourable consumer attitudes towards brands (Hudders & Jans, 2022).

Although research on how the use of spokespersons in advertising affects eWOM is limited, some studies such as Andrade et al. (2021) find that the reputational level of the spokesperson can have a significant impact on the eWOM generated on Facebook, especially when the spokesperson is recognized as an expert or authority on the subject. According to the theoretical approach known as Power Distance Belief, consumers may have a more favourable attitude towards advertising communication where authority or power figures are present (Oyserman, 2006). However, other works such as Zatwarnicka-Madura et al. (2022) show that perhaps this relationship is influenced by the age of the receiver, such that in social networks such as TikTok, some micro influencers, and even anonymous people who have a low level of recognition, exert a strong influence on the receivers during the first phases of contact with the brand (Shen, 2021). It is common for brands to use figures of different gender, age, and ethnicity in their communications and as brand ambassadors, all with the aim of increasing the degree of consumer identification with the ambassador and the brand (Barrios et al., 2021).

In the light of the above, the following research hypothesis is proposed:

*H4. The use of spokespersons in branded publications increases eWOM behaviour.*

## 7. Content attractiveness and its influence on eWOM

Organizations can disseminate content with different approaches or appeals (Sann et al., 2021). Broadly speaking, four categories are recognized in this regard: functional, emotional, promotional, and social (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Functional appeal refers to content that alludes to functional or informational aspects of products and services, e.g., posts that report on their functionality (Sann et al., 2021). Emotional appeal refers to content that is linked to feelings, fantasy, or experiential aspects of products and services (John & De Villiers, 2020). A post that appeals to nostalgia, for example, falls into this category.

Promotional appeal is found in messages that communicate brand offers and promotions, such as financial incentives, discounts, and loyalty programs (Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). Finally, social appeal has to do with advertising that focuses on communicating a brand's corporate responsibility actions to its different audiences of interest. Subsequent research has demonstrated that the attractiveness of content affects customer interaction through eWOM actions (Schultz, 2017; Menon et al., 2019; Shahbaznezhad et al., 2021). This influence has been analysed in light of the Theory of Uses and Gratifications (TUG) developed by Katz in 1959. TUG represents a paradigm shift in understanding media behaviour, by conceiving the audience as active users who consciously select content based on their specific needs, rather than passive recipients of information.

This theory posits that the mental processing consumers undertake to process advertising information is affected by their own interests and motivations (Rubin, 2009). TUG identifies five main categories of gratifications that users seek: cognitive (knowledge acquisition), affective (emotional experiences), personal integrative (reinforcement of credibility or status), social integrative (strengthening connections), and tension release (escape or entertainment).

In the digital context, these gratifications acquire additional dimensions. A customer seeking hedonic enjoyment, for example, will have a more favourable attitude towards emotional advertising, which may result in a greater willingness to participate in eWOM (De Vries et al., 2012). This process occurs because emotional content satisfies the user's affective and tension release needs, motivating them to share similar experiences. On the other hand, a customer seeking to save money and find better deals will assume a favourable attitude towards the attractiveness of promotional content (Tafesse, 2015), satisfying cognitive and personal integrative needs that can subsequently translate into eWOM behaviours such as recommendations or reviews. TUG explains why different types of content generate varying levels of engagement and eWOM behaviours, as each user selects and processes content according to the specific gratifications they seek to obtain. Therefore, the following research hypothesis is proposed:

*H5. The attractiveness of content affects eWOM behaviour.*

## 8. Interactivity of the post

Interactivity refers to actions that motivate the user to engage with branded posts via eWOM (Shultz, 2017). Interactivity has been studied in previous research with mixed results. De Vries et al. (2012) found that the use of interactive tools such as questions in branded posts generates more likes but decreases comments. Moran et al. (2020) and Schultz (2017), on the other hand, found that using interactive tools such as calls to action increases likes, comments and shared content on social networks such as Facebook.

Although the relationship between interactivity and eWOM has shown ambivalent results, the Media Richness Theory (MRT) proposed by Daft and Lengel (1986) suggests that the use of such tools can encourage consumer engagement. MRT proposes that media and communication messages that more closely resemble a natural "face--to-face" conversation have a greater capacity to activate the senses of the audience and, therefore, encourage the audience to take an active role in the communication process (Chew & Ng, 2021). In a traditional conversation, all actors have the possibility to participate and interact freely with each other. Therefore, it can be intuited that to the extent that a communication medium or message encourages and enables bidirectionality and responsiveness on the part of the audience, it is emulating the "natural" communication process, which can lead to a more favourable attitude towards engagement. Therefore, the following research hypothesis is proposed.

*H6. The use of interactive tools in the post is positively related to higher eWOM behaviour.*

## 9. Control variables

In addition to the independent variables included in the model, the inclusion of three control variables that have reported significant effects in previous research was considered.

First, the day of the week is included, which refers to whether the post was shared on a workday (Monday to Friday), or at the weekend (Saturday and Sunday) (Kleer & Kun, 2023). Also included is the length of the message accompanying the post, measured by the number of characters in the text. Finally, the use of emojis within the post were included, these are widely used as a means of informal and emotionally proximate communication (Kejriwal et al., 2021).

## 10. Methodology

The main objective of the study is to analyse the influence on eWOM of content marketing strategies carried out by brands on their social network accounts. The independent variables considered for this analysis are brand consistency, post position, message format, celebrity endorsement, content attractiveness and interactivity. Dependent variables include eWOM engagement as indicated by the volume of comments and reach as indicated by the number of likes each post receives on social networks. The day of the week, the use of emojis and the length of the post are added as control variables. The variables are coded using content analysis, while the hypotheses are tested using negative binomial regression analysis.

To meet the research objective, 250 Instagram posts and 250 TikTok posts were reviewed from the five brands with the most interaction on social networks in 2023 according to IAB Spain (2024): Redbull, Iberdrola, Starbucks, Carrefour and Acciona (see Table 1. **Brand analysis information).** The selection criteria for the publications consisted of obtaining the latest posts disseminated by these companies on their social networks, which covered the period from 1 June to 30 October

**Table 1**
Brand analysis information.

| BRAND | SECTOR | ORIGIN | SIZE |
|---|---|---|---|
| REDBULL | Energy drinks | Austria | International |
| IBERDROLA | Electricity and Gas | Spain | International |
| STARBUCKS | Cafeteria | USA | International |
| CARREFOUR | Supermarket | France | International |
| ACCIONA | Infrastructure and construction | Spain | International |

2023.

## 11. Content analysis

Once the posts had been selected, the information was processed by means of content analysis. This technique consists of the interpretation of texts, whether recorded, written, painted or filmed, where a record of data can be found (Abela, 2012; Adorno, 2001). In other words, content analysis applies visual or textual reading of secondary information to classify the variables or categories of study.

Thus, coders reviewed the posts and operationalized each of the variables included in the model in the following way: eWOM was coded as the number of comments and likes each post received. For brand consistency, the number of brand signals (brand name, logo, colours and product) were counted, assuming a value between 0 and 4. The message format was coded by counting the number of formats used in the post (text, image, video, voiceover, subtitle, video and links), assuming a value between 0 and 7. Celebrity endorsement was coded as a dichotomous variable, where one (1) was marked for the presence of a celebrity in the post and zero (0) for its absence. Content attractiveness was also operationalized as a 4-level dichotomous variable, where it was coded as one (1) for the presence of one of the attractions and zero (0) for its absence. It is worth mentioning that these categories are not mutually exclusive, meaning that the same post can have more than one attraction.

Interactivity in turn was coded as a dichotomous variable where one (1) was marked for the use of a call to action (question, contest, invitation to click on a link), and zero (0) when none of these conditions appeared. The position of the post was coded as the number of days that elapsed between the publication of a new piece of communication on each social network.

Regarding the control variables, emojis were operationalized as a dichotomous variable, where one (1) was set for the presence of emojis and zero for their absence (0). The length of the post was constructed by counting the number of characters of the text accompanying the post and, finally, the day of the week was configured as a dichotomous variable where one (1) refers to a post shared during the weekend, while zero (0) has to do with posts disseminated on weekdays. Table 2. **Coding of model variables** summarizes the coding of the variables included in the model.

## 12. Reliability of content analysis

For content analysis to be approached in a systematic, objective, valid and replicable way, reliability in the operationalization of variables must be guaranteed (Adorno, 2001; Krippendorff, 2012; Stojanovic et al., 2018). To achieve this criterion, two professional subjects, with marketing experience, were trained as coders of the variables proposed in the research model.

These subjects underwent three training sessions to understand the theoretical and operational definitions of the variables. Once the subjects were trained, each was given a coding template and asked to code 80 random publications, corresponding to 16 % of the total sample. Subsequently, to check inter-rater reliability, Krippendorf's alpha (2018) was applied, reaching reliability values above 0.8 for each variable, which implies good reliability in coding.

## 13. Empirical analysis

After constructing the research model variables, statistical techniques were applied to test the formulated hypotheses. First, an ordinary least squares regression model was applied, and the variance inflation factor (VIF) was obtained, with the intention of testing the assumption of multicollinearity. All values obtained in the VIF presented values between 1 and 2, so the existence of collinearity problems among the predictor variables can be rejected (Hair et al., 2010).

**Table 2**
Coding of model variables.

| Variable | | Coding | Details |
|---|---|---|---|
| **eWOM** | **Comments** | 0 – infinity | Comment count on the post |
| | **Likes** | 0 – infinity | Post likes count |
| **Vividness** | | 0 – 6 | Number of formats used in the post (image, video, song, subtitles, voice-over, link) |
| **Brand consistency** | | 0 – 4 | Count of branded signs (name, logo, colours, product/service) |
| **Position of the post** | | 0 – infinity | Number of days until a new post is published on the network |
| **Celebrity endorsement** | | 0 – no celebrity<br>1– with celebrity | Presence or absence of a celebrity in the post |
| **Appeal of the message** | **Functional** | 0 – absence of content<br>1 – presence of content | Presence or absence of functional appeal |
| | **Emotional** | 0 – absence of content<br>1 – presence of content | Presence or absence of emotional appeal |
| | **Promotional** | 0 – absence of content<br>1 – presence of content | Presence or absence of promotional appeal |
| | **Social** | 0 – absence of content<br>1 – presence of content | Presence or absence of social appeal |
| **Interactivity** | | 0 – no call to action<br>1 – with call to action | Presence or absence of calls to action |
| **Emojis** | | 0 – no emojis<br>1 – with emojis | Presence or absence of emojis in the post |
| **Message length** | | 0 – infinity | Number of characters in the post |
| **Day of the week** | | 0 – working day<br>1 – weekend | Day the post was published on the social network |

Subsequently, to test the proposed relationships, a Poisson regression model (PR) was considered, taking into account the nature of the dependent variables (likes and comments). Poisson models are ideal for treating data that comes from a count, violates the assumption of normality, is discrete, and has a high incidence of zeros (Cameron & Trivedi, 2013). However, one of the problems when estimating count regression models using the Poisson distribution is that some of its assumptions are unrealistic. Specifically, the Poisson distribution forces the mean and variance to be equal, which rarely occurs in reality (Ver Hoef & Boveng, 2007). In fact, as can be seen in the descriptive results (Table 3), the dependent variables exhibit strong overdispersion.

The existence of overdispersion in PR models can lead to an underestimation of the standard errors of the coefficients, which implies the statistical significance of variables that are not associated with the

**Table 3**
Cross-validation.

| Dependent variable | Negative binomial RMSE | Poisson RMSE | Percentage difference | Alpha | LR Test (p-value) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Likes -TikTok | 25,927.54 | 25,954.12 | −0.10 % | 2.027 | <0.001 |
| Comments -TikTok | 200.72 | 192.53 | +4.25 % | 1.566 | <0.001 |
| Likes – Instagram | 20,188.13 | 19,075.67 | +5.83 % | 2.125 | <0.001 |
| Comments – Instagram | 8602.92 | 14,289.99 | −39.80 % | 2.273 | <0.001 |

explained phenomenon (Navarro et al., 2001). When this occurs, an appropriate alternative is to apply a negative binomial regression model (NBREG), as this distribution captures part of the variance that is not treated by the PR (Rodríguez & Peón, 2011). An option to compare the parsimony of the PR and NBREG models involves using the AKAIKE information criteria (AIC) and the Bayesian information criterion (BIC), which behave similarly to the adjusted $R^2$ in Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression. Thus, the AIC and BIC penalize models that include variables indiscriminately or overfit models and reward the inclusion of variables that improve the fit, that is, those that increase the likelihood (Akaike, 1974; Schwarz, 1978). In this case, as seen in Table 3. **Cross-validation**, the AIC/BIC values were more satisfactory in the negative binomial regression. Additionally, with the aim of performing a more robust validation and ruling out possible overfitting problems, a 5-fold cross-validation was applied to the four negative binomial regression models and the four Poisson models developed in this study. This technique allowed evaluating the stability of each model by randomly dividing the data into five subsets, training the model with four of them and validating it with the remaining one, repeating this process five times.

The cross-validation results show differentiated behaviour according to the dependent variable and the platform analysed. For the TikTok likes model, a RMSE (Root Mean Square Error) of 25,927.54 was obtained with the negative binomial model, just 0.10 % lower than its Poisson counterpart (25,954.12). In contrast, the Instagram comments model showed the greatest difference, with an RMSE of 8602.92 for the negative binomial model, 39.80 % lower than the Poisson model (14,289.99), indicating a substantial improvement in predictive capacity. Interestingly, for TikTok comments and Instagram likes, the Poisson models presented better performance, with differences of +4.25 % and +5.83 % respectively in favour of the Poisson model. Although the RMSE favours Poisson in certain cases, overdispersion violates its assumption of equality between mean and variance, which biases the standard errors (SE). However, the significant values of the dispersion parameter (alpha) in these cases (1.566 for TikTok comments, 2.125 for Instagram likes, and 2.273 for Instagram comments) confirm the presence of overdispersion. The likelihood ratio tests were highly significant ($p < 0.001$) in all four models, statistically corroborating the suitability of the negative binomial specification despite the differences in RMSE. Prioritizing the LR test and the alpha value guarantees valid inferences, such as the real significance of predictors, which is crucial in theoretical contrasts, even when the RMSE is similar.

It is important to note that these error values, although high, reflect the inherently variable nature of engagement on social networks, where user behaviour is influenced by multiple unobservable external factors, such as platform algorithms, temporal trends, and viral effects not captured in the model variables. This variability is characteristic of digital social interaction phenomena and does not necessarily indicate deficiencies in the specification of the models.

The cross-validation results reveal a notable consistency in the behaviour of the models across the five partitions. Specifically, the coefficients of the key variables maintained not only their signs but also similar relative magnitudes between the different folds. This stability in the estimated parameters, together with the consistency in the values of the dispersion parameter (alpha) between partitions, suggests that the models are capturing genuine relationships in the data and not random patterns that would be characteristic of overfitting. Therefore, it is confirmed that there are no significant overfitting problems in any of the models developed. Despite the predictive difficulties inherent to this type of data, the models provide valuable findings on the factors that influence engagement on both platforms.

Considering that the negative binomial regression was selected to apply the models. Below, in equation 1, the model is presented:

$$(y) = \alpha + \beta 1 Cmark + \beta 2 RespCel + \beta 3 Afun + \beta 4 Aemo + \beta 5 Aprom + \beta 6 Asoc + \beta 7 Inter + \beta 8 posi + \beta 9 Emoji + \beta 10 long + \beta 11 day$$

Where Log($y$), is equal to the dependent variable which can assume one of two values (likes and comments). $\alpha$ is the constant term $\beta 1 Cmark$ represents brand consistency, $\beta 2 RespCelis$ celebrity endorsement.$\beta 3 Afunis$ the functional appeal, $\beta 4 Aemois$ emotional appeal, $\beta 5 Aprom$ represents promotional appeal, and $\beta 6 Asoc$, stands for social appeal. In turn, $\beta 7 Inter$ is interactivity, $\beta 8 posi$, the position of the post, $\beta 9 Emoji$, the variable emojis, $\beta 10 long$ the variable length of the post, and $\beta 11 day$ the day of the week.

## 14. Descriptive results

Tables 4 and 5 show the descriptive results for the quantitative variables operationalised. On Instagram, each post receives an average of 5384 likes (SD: 17,443) while on TikTok, the average is 8746 (SD: 23,374). In terms of comments, each post has an average of 1170 (SD = 9170) on IG and 62 (SD = 185) on TikTok.

## 15. Empirical results

The application of empirical models can be seen in Table 6. **Results obtained for Instagram and TikTok**. The first thing to note is that all estimates are globally significant at the 99 % confidence level, given that the Chi2 test is significant in all cases (<0.05). Similarly, the likelihood test that evidences the alpha parameter is also significant in all models at 99 % (<0.01); this means that there is overdispersion corrected by the negative binomial regression model with respect to Poisson, therefore, the BN model is the best alternative to treat the data of this research.

Interpreting the results, brand consistency decreases the rate of likes on Instagram (−0.352***), while it increases the rate of comments on TikTok (0.133**). This indicates that for brands seeking to build engagement on TikTok, increasing brand consistency is key.

High message intensity increases the rate of likes and comments on TikTok (0.280*** and 0.296***), however, it has no effect on Instagram metrics.

Posts with celebrity endorsements increase the rate of Likes on Instagram (1522), on TikTok (1095) and also increases the number of comments on TikTok (1496). However, no statistically significant effects of celebrity endorsement on comments on Instagram were found.

For message attractiveness, functional or cognitive content increases the rate of likes on TikTok (1.147***) and the volume of comments on this social network (0.580**). On the other hand, it has a negative effect on the number of comments on Instagram (- 1.362***). Emotional content has a marginal negative effect on likes on Instagram (-0.428***), and a highly significant negative effect on the volume of comments on Instagram (−1.106***), although the results show that this type of content has a positive effect on the comment rate on TikTok (0.208***). Transactional content has significant and positive impact on the number of comments (3.085***), but it is worth noting that this type of content was not estimated in the TikTok models due to its low level of presence in the publications reviewed. To finish with the attractiveness of the message, social content has negative effects on Instagram likes and TikTok comments (- 1.650*** and −1.779***) but increases the likes rate in the latter social network (0.718***).

Regarding the use of calls to action, these show negative effects on likes on TikTok (−0.445***), but the use of emojis has positive and significant effects on likes and comments on the same social network (0.683*** and 0.701***). In turn, the length of the ad decreases the rate of likes and comments on TikTok (- 0.019*** and −0.030***) although it has positive effects on comments on Instagram (0.032***).

The day of the week is only significant in TikTok likes (0.922***): posts that are disseminated on weekends receive a higher volume of likes on this social network.

**Table 4**
Descriptive results Instagram and TikTok.

| Variable | Instagram | | | | | TikTok | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Average | SD | Minimum | Maximum | Median | Average | SD | Minimum | Maximum | Median |
| **Likes** | 5384 | 17,443 | 12 | 223,656 | 1181 | 8746 | 23,374 | 18 | 267,600 | 2851 |
| **Comments** | 1170 | 9170 | 0 | 95,144 | 19,5 | 62 | 185 | 0 | 2292 | 12 |
| **Brand consistency** | 2.1 | 1.2 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 2.2 | 1.2 | 0 | 4 | 3 |
| **New post** | 1.1 | 1.18 | 0 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 1.3 | 0 | 6 | 2 |
| **Length** | 39.5 | 27.8 | 5 | 196 | 34 | 16 | 10 | 2 | 77 | 15 |
| **Intensity (format)** | 2.5 | 0.7 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 3.3 | 0.8 | 1 | 7 | 3 |

**Table 5**
Qualitative descriptive results Instagram and TikTok.

| Variable | | Frequency Instagram | Frequency TikTok |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Celebrity endorsement** | | 10.40 % | 15.60 % |
| **Content attractiveness** | **Emotional** | 61.20 % | 78.80 % |
| | **Functional** | 36.80 % | 21.60 % |
| | **Promotional** | 9.20 % | 3.60 % |
| | **Social** | 17.20 % | 12.80 % |
| **Day of the week** | **Weekend** | 21.60 % | 10.80 % |
| | **Workday** | 78.40 % | 89.20 % |
| **Call to action** | | 54.80 % | 43.20 % |
| **Emojis** | | 86.40 % | 68.80 % |

## 16. Discussion

The results obtained in the previous section (and listed in Table 7. **Acceptance of the hypotheses formulated)** allow us to engage in an interesting discussion regarding the characteristics of the posts made by companies on different social networks and their effects on eWOM expressed in terms of the volume of comments and likes.

The findings of this study reveal significant differences in how content marketing strategies influence eWOM across social networks, highlighting the importance of platform-specific approaches. These results contribute to the growing body of knowledge on digital engagement and have several important theoretical and practical implications. Our results demonstrate that the characteristics of each social network significantly influence how users respond to brand content, aligning with Porto et al.'s (2024) argument that different platforms attract audiences with distinct socio-demographic and psychographic profiles. The contrasting user demographics between Instagram (predominantly women aged 18–34) and TikTok (both genders, but mainly 12–18 age group) help explain the divergent eWOM behaviours observed. This supports Wahyuningsih et al. (2022) contention that age significantly modulates engagement levels and brand interactions, with younger users on TikTok responding more favourably to functional content and message vividness compared to Instagram's audience.

The varying responses to similar content strategies across platforms also validate Ceylan and Hayran's (2025) finding that platform-specific characteristics influence how users process and engage with brand messages. On TikTok, highly vivid messages with multiple formats significantly increased both likes and comments, supporting Gunarto and Anggraini's (2024) assertion that content with high vividness activates multiple sensory channels, thereby enhancing cognitive processing and engagement. In contrast, Instagram users appeared more selective in their engagement, with content attractiveness rather than format diversity driving interaction. This divergence underscores Daryus et al. (2022) observation that younger audiences (predominant on TikTok) tend to seek content with higher representational richness compared to

**Table 7**
Acceptance of the hypotheses formulated.

| | Instagram | | TikTok | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Comments | Likes | Comments | Likes |
| H1. High brand consistency is positively related to higher eWOM behaviour. | NO | Partial | YES | NO |
| H2. The time a publication spends in the top position affects the volume of eWOM. | NO | NO | NO | NO |
| H3. A higher level of message vividness is positively related to higher eWOM behaviour. | NO | NO | YES | YES |
| H4. The use of spokespersons in branded publications increases eWOM behaviour. | NO | YES | YES | YES |
| H5. The attractiveness of content affects eWOM behaviour. | YES | Partial | Partial | YES |
| H6. The use of interactive tools in the post is positively related to higher eWOM behaviour. | NO | NO | NO | Partial (-) |

**Table 6**
Results obtained for Instagram and TikTok.

| Variable | | Likes (IG) | Likes (TK) | Comments (IG) | Comments (TK) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Brand Consistency | | −0.352*** | 0.117 | −0.217 | 0.133** |
| New Post | | −0.104 | 0.035 | −0.153 | 0.010 |
| Intensity (format) | | 0.030 | 0.280*** | −0.228 | 0.296*** |
| Celebrity Endorsement | | 1.522*** | 1.095*** | 0.108 | 1.496*** |
| Appeal | Functional | −0.168 | 1.147*** | −1.362*** | 0.580** |
| | Emotional | −0.428* | 0.543** | −1.106*** | 0.208 |
| | Promotional | 0.123 | – | 3.085*** | – |
| | Social | −1.650*** | 0.718** | −1.779*** | 1.137*** |
| Call to action | | −0.785 | −0.445** | 0.206 | 0.183 |
| Use of emojis | | −0.018 | 0.683*** | 0.539 | 0.701*** |
| Length of post | | 0.002 | −0.019*** | 0.032*** | −0.030*** |
| Day | Workday | BL | BL | BL | BL |
| | Weekend | −0.273 | 0.922*** | −0.495 | −0.111 |
| Constant | | 9.890*** | 6.441*** | 4.681*** | 1.646*** |
| Prob Chi2 | | (12°)85,45*** | (11°)79,77*** | (12°)339,7*** | (11°)106,8*** |
| Alfa L-test | | 3.0e+06*** | 4.0e+06*** | 4.0e+05*** | 2.4e+04*** |
| Remarks | | 250 | 250 | 250 | 250 |

older demographic segments.

Interestingly, celebrity endorsement emerged as the only variable consistently effective across both platforms, significantly increasing likes on both networks and comments on TikTok. This finding extends Andrade et al. (2021) research, which found that spokesperson credibility impacts eWOM on Facebook, by demonstrating this effect holds across different platform environments and user demographics. The more pronounced impact on TikTok comments aligns with Zatwarnicka-Madura et al. (2022) insight that Generation Z (TikTok's core demographic) is particularly receptive to influencer marketing. These results also complement Jain et al. (2023) research showing how parasocial relationships with online personalities can strengthen trust and engagement in digital environments.

Our findings on content attractiveness reveal complex and platform-dependent dynamics. On TikTok, functional content significantly increased both likes and comments, while emotional content showed positive effects on comments. This aligns with Mukhopadhyay et al. (2023) identification of the top of funnel effects of eWOM, where information-seeking behaviour (particularly prominent among younger TikTok users) drives engagement. Conversely, on Instagram, promotional content strongly increased comments while emotional content decreased both engagement metrics. This unexpected finding challenges conventional marketing wisdom but may be explained by Kumar et al. (2023) research on how utilitarian motivations can sometimes outweigh hedonic ones in driving eWOM behaviours, particularly among more mature audiences.

The divergent effects of social content (negative on Instagram metrics but positive on TikTok likes) highlight the evolution of social responsibility communication in digital spaces. This supports Pangarkar et al. (2023) assertion that bottom of funnel emotional engagement varies significantly across different user segments and platform contexts. The finding also extends Wang et al. (2022) research on value co-creation in online communities by demonstrating how platform affordances mediate the relationship between CSR messaging and user engagement.

The contrasting effects of brand consistency, decreasing Instagram likes while increasing TikTok comments, reveal important nuances in digital brand management. These results partially challenge Solberg and Durrieu's (2023) argument for global standardization of brand activities, suggesting instead that strategic flexibility across platforms may be necessary. This finding expands on Khan and Arif's (2022) discussion of brand humanization by demonstrating that different audience segments respond differently to consistent brand signalling. For TikTok's younger audience, clear brand identification appears to facilitate deeper engagement (comments), potentially supporting their information-seeking behaviours highlighted by Khanom (2023).

Finally, the methodological aspects employed in this study deserve special attention for their contribution to the validity and generalization of the findings. The implementation of cross-validation techniques has allowed us to evaluate with greater precision the predictive capacity of our models, revealing distinctive patterns according to the platform and type of interaction analysed. Notably, the models for comments demonstrated greater predictive stability than those for likes, suggesting that the determinants of more elaborate interactions follow more consistent and less random behaviours. This substantial difference supports the conceptualization of comments as a deeper and more deliberative form of engagement, while likes would represent more spontaneous and variable responses. Additionally, the comparison between platforms showed that engagement dynamics on Instagram present greater predictability than on TikTok, which confirms our hypothesis about the existence of fundamentally different interaction mechanisms between social networks. The significant overdispersion detected in all models faithfully reflects the asymmetric nature of digital engagement, characterized by long-tail distributions where a minority of content disproportionately concentrates attention. This statistical phenomenon corroborates the principle of preferential accumulation in digital environments and underscores the importance of employing models that explicitly contemplate this characteristic. Particularly relevant is the stability of coefficients across different validation partitions, which considerably strengthens the robustness of our findings on the factors that influence engagement, especially those related to celebrity endorsement and message vividness, which maintained their significance and direction of effect across all analytical iterations.

## 17. Theoretical and empirical implications

From a theoretical perspective, our findings contribute to the literature on Media Richness Theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986) by demonstrating that the effectiveness of message vividness is contingent upon platform context and user demographics. The results also extend the Theory of Uses and Gratifications (Katz, 1959) by showing how different platforms satisfy distinct user gratification needs, which in turn influences engagement behaviours. Furthermore, our findings on interactivity challenge previous assumptions by revealing that direct calls to action can actually decrease engagement (TikTok likes), suggesting more complex mechanisms than previously theorized.

These insights advance the understanding of engagement as a multidimensional construct (Algharabat et al., 2020; Kleer & Kunz, 2023) by empirically demonstrating how cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions of engagement manifest differently across platforms. The research also extends eWOM theory by illustrating how low engagement behaviours (likes) and high engagement behaviours (comments) are driven by different content characteristics, supporting the hierarchy proposed by Malthouse et al. (2013) and Wu et al. (2019).

Our results integrate well with emerging perspectives on digital transformation in marketing highlighting the practical importance for organizations of using different digital marketing tools. The findings on platform-specific engagement patterns support Dihingia et al. (2023) work on how AI-powered recommendation systems expand eWOM by tailoring content to user preferences and behaviours. Similarly, the demonstrated importance of content attractiveness aligns with contemporary understanding of social media as prioritizing relevance and value-creation over mere presence (Wang et al., 2022).

Taking as an example of the brands analysed in this work, Red Bull effectively leverages high-vividness video formats and sports-related functional content on TikTok, which aligns with our findings that functional and sensational messages drive engagement on this platform. Red Bull's adrenaline-charged visuals and frequent use of athlete-ambassadors are key to generating likes and comments. On the other hand, in the retailing sector Carrefour often shares promotional content and product highlights on Instagram, capitalising on visually attractive posts that align with user expectations of practicality and value — a strategy that our findings associate with high comment volumes on this platform. Starbucks, by contrast, blends emotional and social appeals through storytelling, often connected to seasonal campaigns (e.g., #PumpkinSpiceLatte), CSR initiatives, and sustainability narratives, which resonate well with audiences seeking meaningful brand experiences. Iberdrola frequently uses celebrity endorsements and emotional storytelling linked to sports sponsorship (e.g., women's football), which boosts engagement across both platforms, especially in comment-based interaction. Finally, Acciona, with its strong environmental positioning, employs social appeal in its posts — a type of content that, according to our analysis, may be more effective in generating likes on TikTok than on Instagram, where such messaging may yield lower engagement metrics. Additionally, brands such as Zara succeed by encouraging UGC (user-generated content) and promoting fashion challenges via TikTok — a tactic closely related to interactivity and brand humanisation. Estrella Damm integrates poetic, emotionally charged audiovisual storytelling that promotes Mediterranean identity, which our data confirms to be more effective for generating engagement on Instagram. Similarly, Iberia uses travel storytelling and destination guides on Instagram, blending informational content with evocative visuals to generate trust and positive eWOM. These examples support the conclusion that brand managers must tailor their strategies to platform dynamics and audience expectations, choosing content types based on whether their objective is to extend reach or deepen engagement. However, this decision should always be made considering the characteristics of the sector in which the brand competes, as well as the profile of its target audience. They should not forget that the customer profile determines the channel (social/digital) through which the customer initiates and maintains a conversation with the brand.

The observation that weekend posts generate more TikTok likes reflects evolving patterns of digital media consumption and engagement timing, complementing IAB Spain's (2024) findings on social media usage patterns. This temporal dimension of engagement adds an important layer to existing theoretical frameworks that have traditionally focused more on content characteristics than timing strategies.

## 18. Further research and limitations

This research highlights many useful questions for theory and practice, starting with the challenge raised above: are these findings applicable beyond users in Spain? Testing these hypotheses across other national audiences would allow a stronger understanding of their transferability or their localized implications. Another important limitation is that our sample focused on the top five brands, which might introduce biases related to their larger marketing budgets and engagement levels. The results might not be generalizable to small or emerging brands with limited resources, so future studies should include a more diverse sample of brands. Additionally, classifying social media platforms based on more generic characteristics (e.g., visual-based vs. text-based, or professional-oriented vs. youth-oriented) rather than analysing specific platforms in isolation would provide more generalizable findings. Future research could also expand to a wider spectrum of social networks with different interaction dynamics such as LinkedIn, Twitter or YouTube to validate if the observed patterns hold across various platform types.

Beyond platform characteristics and brand diversity, another crucial aspect that requires further exploration is the relationship between the frequency of a brand's posts and its visibility in users' feeds. This issue underscores another limitation of our study. Here, the proxy for a post's popularity was how long it remained visible over time, operationalized by measuring the time elapsed between posts. However, this may not be the most effective way to assess visibility in practice, as user engagement is influenced by multiple factors, including platform algorithms. A social media manager, for instance, should not assume that posting infrequently guarantees greater visibility or engagement. Finally, the attractiveness measure used in this study combined multiple variables, which might provide deeper insights if analysed separately.

Our conceptualization and measurement of interactivity was relatively limited, focusing primarily on direct calls to action. Future research should adopt a broader operationalization of interactivity, including various forms of participation stimuli, such as the use of interactive hashtags, open-ended questions, polls, interactive elements within the post, and other invitations to engagement that do not necessarily follow the traditional call-to-action format. Similarly, while in this study content attractiveness was operationalized as a dichotomous variable with four categories, future studies could benefit from a more detailed scale that captures different levels of emotional, functional, promotional, and social attractiveness, which could reveal more complex relationships with eWOM behaviours. These more sophisticated measurements could identify interaction dynamics that were not captured in the present study and provide a deeper understanding of how different content characteristics influence engagement across platforms.

Regarding data analysis techniques, despite the robustness of our models, the RMSE values obtained in cross-validation reveal a fundamental limitation in accurately predicting social media engagement. This limitation does not necessarily derive from deficiencies in model specification, but from the intrinsically stochastic nature of online behaviour. Recommendation algorithms that determine content visibility, ephemeral trends, and social cascade effects are factors that significantly influence engagement but are practically impossible to parameterize in traditional statistical models. Future studies should explore alternative modelling approaches such as Hurdle models to better distinguish between factors that determine whether content receives engagement and those that affect engagement magnitude. Similarly, quantile regression could provide valuable insights into how engagement determinants vary across its distribution, allowing a better understanding of the factors that differentiate moderately successful content from viral content.

## 19. Conclusions and implications for practice

eWOM is of increasing importance in how brands promote their visibility in search and on social networks. Firms need to build customer loyalty and harness user generated content. For many consumers TikTok and Instagram are the primary means of conducting market research and approaching purchase decisions. The role of content, and the importance of content management strategy is growing. This paper offers insights derived from empirical research into the uses of content made by Spanish consumers, as they engaged with content from four major brands. The findings show that content does not come in a one size fits all. For marketing managers there are choices about how to prioritize likes or comments, in the quest for reach or engagement.

The response of customers varies according to the brands' choices of content type. When managers try to decide on the optimal content strategy, they must make choices depending on their goals. For example, is extending reach of high importance, or does increasing engagement create greater value? The two are achieved by different content types, depending on which social network (audience) is sought. If extending reach is the primary purpose of a content campaign, then regardless of which social network is used, attractive content and the use of a brand ambassador are key. However, for brand managers seeking engagement in the form of user generated content (comments) then the approach must vary, dependant on the platform used. For younger audiences on TikTok, brand consistency, vivid and attractive content and the use of spokespersons are important. Whereas, if the goal is eliciting comments from the older (and wealthier) demographic on Instagram, the attractiveness of the image is key. These findings highlight the need to consider the affordances of a social network platform when formulating a content marketing strategy. While the results are derived from users in Spain, they may offer insight for digital marketeers more broadly.

## CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Carlos Osorio-Andrade:** Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Pericles asher Rospigliosi:** Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis. **Ana Jiménez Zarco:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

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