

## **AN EXAMINATION OF THE DETERMINING FACTORS TO SHARE CSR CONTENT ON FACEBOOK**

### **Abstract**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become an essential concept in the context of the tourism industry where it is considered as a significant factor in competition and firms' survival. However, little is known about the main factors that influence electronic word of mouth (eWOM) about CSR communication of companies through social media in the hotel setting. This research proposes a comprehensive model including expressive information sharing (defined as any message about the self that a person communicates to another), environmental consciousness (that involves psychological factors related to an individual's propensity to engage in pro-environmental behaviors), homophily (degree to which individuals who interact are congruent or similar on certain attributes) and attitude towards sharing firms' content (both commercial information and about environmental CSR issues), as key predictors of individuals' intention to share firms' content on a specific social networking site (SNS): Facebook. To test the proposed model empirically, 239 Facebook users were surveyed in Spain. A structural equations model was developed to test the research hypotheses. Empirical testing confirms most of the hypothesized effects except the influence of expressive information sharing on attitude towards sharing firms' environmental CSR content, the impact of homophily on attitude towards sharing firms' commercial content, and the influence of this variable on intentions to share content on Facebook.

**Keywords:** eWOM; CSR communication; Facebook; expressive information sharing; environmental consciousness; homophily.

## **1. Introduction**

Growing social and environmental awareness has made customers change their attitudes and increasingly demand that industries provide products and services that are environmentally friendly and ethically correct (Martínez et al., 2019). The tourism industry in general, and the hospitality sector in particular, are no exception. Therefore, a corporate social responsibility (CSR) orientation is vital for companies to minimize the negative impacts of their activities in natural, cultural and social environments. There have been many attempts to establish a better understanding of CSR and to develop a more robust definition (Dahlsrud, 2008). CSR can be referred to as those activities and status of a firm that is linked to its obligations towards the environment, stakeholders and society it operates in (Liu et al., 2014). However, companies not only have to be socially responsible. They also need to ensure their stakeholder groups are adequately aware of their CSR initiatives (Luu, 2017; Pomeroy and Johnson, 2009) without invoking skepticism about companies' overall corporate responsibility (Moreno and Kang, 2020). For the public perception of a firm's practiced social responsibility what counts is not only what companies do, since stakeholders may not know about that, but what firms communicate that they do and how it is perceived by their stakeholders (Öberseder et al., 2013). Therefore, not only in the tourism industry but also in other contexts, CSR communication is of utmost importance for companies, so that their investment in CSR activities does not stay invisible (Moisescu, 2015).

As scholars and practitioners claim, CSR communication is in evolution. Traditional one-way CSR communication tools are increasingly being complemented by bidirectional and symmetrical communication channels, which blur the boundaries between the senders and receivers of CSR information and transform organization-stakeholder interaction (Capriotti, 2011). Morsing and Schultz (2006) indicated that corporate CSR engagement necessitates more sophisticated and continuous stakeholder awareness, which requires increasingly elaborated CSR communication strategies. In this sense, CSR communication can be disseminated via various channels, including corporate websites, CSR reports, CSR advertising, public relations and social media (Ettiger et al., 2018; Ziek, 2009). Within the domain of online CSR communication, social media has emerged as a powerful and successful tool through which to disclose CSR information (Song and Wen, 2019). Social media is a group of Internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The following taxonomy has been proposed to classify social media: blogs, social networking sites (SNS), content communities, forums/bulletin boards and content aggregators (Constantinides and Fountain, 2018). Among these five categories, SNSs are the most popular nowadays given their ability to broadly propagate information to a large audience, which directly influences electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Kim et al., 2014). According to a recent research, Facebook is the social network most used by hotels, both to interact and to establish relationships with their customers, and to provide them with relevant information (Ferrer-Rosell et al., 2020). The focus of this study on Facebook is also explained since this platform offers great opportunities in terms of page creation (e.g. specialized groups, creation of events and small communities), illustration (e.g. photo or video albums) and posting opinions or evaluations (e.g. comments and status sharing) (Ladhari and Michaud, 2015). Therefore, this SNS includes a number of Web 2.0 features,

which allow the creation of sophisticated collaboration platforms through which users may share CSR information in the tourism industry.

Tourism and hospitality business have established their own SNS pages to communicate with their relevant audiences, so CSR information is easily available. Therefore, individuals can use this media to create content or freely express their opinions and experiences about CSR-related issues. In the tourism industry, online CSR communication thus has great potential for hospitality companies (e.g. hotels), given that the Internet is a cheap, easy and flexible way to present companies in whatever way is desired and this 24/7, to all stakeholders imaginable (Du and Vieira, 2012). With the advent of social media, eWOM is regarded as a major driver of customers' purchasing decision in the hotel industry (Chen et al., 2015; Leong et al., 2017) and green consumption settings (Bedard and Tolmie, 2018). EWOM consists of a basic information transfer between those who send and receive the information. Tourism and hospitality practitioners and academics acknowledge that social media has transformed the ways in which people share information and engage in eWOM in these contexts (Han et al., 2018). In this regard, SNSs have brought a new aspect to eWOM on CSR information by enabling users to communicate with their existing networks before, during and after travel (Jung et al., 2018). People are now able to exchange opinions and experiences about different aspects, including CSR-related issues, with their friends and acquaintances on social media (Erkan and Evans, 2016). Furthermore, eWOM can play a particularly vital role in the hotel sector, as intangibility makes pre-purchase trial of services impossible (Jalilvand et al., 2017).

Therefore, this study focuses on online CSR communication in the hotel industry, a topic that has attracted increasing research, but which is still considered under-researched (García de los Salmones et al., 2020; Martínez et al., 2020). Specifically, this research analyses the main factors that influence the intention to generate eWOM on CSR issues (a firm's post on environmental CSR) covered by hotel companies through a specific SNS (Facebook). The proposed model is based on the integrative framework of the impact of eWOM communication (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). Specifically, we explore how factors related to the receiver (Facebook users) and to the stimulus (post content) influence the response (intention to share). Concretely, this research includes as explanatory variables users' attitudes towards sharing firms' content (both commercial information and about environmental CSR issues), and environmental consciousness, homophily and expressive information sharing as factors related to information processing (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). The next section provides the conceptual model and the hypotheses to be tested. The authors will then describe the methodology, including measures of variables, data collection procedures, and sample characteristics. The results are subsequently presented, followed by a discussion of its theoretical and managerial implications. Finally, research limitations and future lines of research are outlined.

## **2. Literature review and research hypotheses**

In recent years, the advance and evolution of new media technologies such as the Internet has increased consumer opportunities to not only interact with members of their pre-existing social network but also make and communicate with new friends and acquaintances online (Hung and Li, 2007). With the rapid development of the Internet,

WOM has taken a significant turn and evolved to eWOM. Litvin et al. (2008) define eWOM as all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods or services, or their sellers. They add that this includes communication between producers and consumers as well as those between consumers themselves. EWOM is seen as a reliable and impartial source of information. It is argued that eWOM shapes consumers expectations, influences preferences and attitudes and affects purchasing decisions and post-use evaluation (Luo and Zhong, 2015). EWOM implies the involvement of actors whose behavior is motivated by various reasons, in particular the desire of social interactions and maintaining social connection, enjoyment of online activities, emotional support, altruism, identification, feeling of solidarity, mutual help or self-esteem (Munar and Jacobsen, 2014). Although previous research in the hospitality industry provides insights into the drivers and consequences on eWOM behavior (Serra-Cantalops and Salvi, 2014), our theoretical knowledge of eWOM on CSR communication in social media (e.g. SNS) is very limited (García de los Salmones et al., 2020; Martínez et al., 2020).

Social media are playing an increasing role in the tourism and hospitality sector. Social media facilitate dynamic and effective interactions between hotels and their customers (Luo and Zhong, 2015). Within this group, SNSs such as Facebook have been paid mounting attention from scholars and marketers. SNSs attract a fast-growing number of consumers by enabling them to visualize and articulate their social network and engage in social interactions in a dynamic, interactive, multi-modal form over the Internet (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). In the particular case of users-consumers, the content which they generate reflects their impression, usually influenced by relevant experiences, archived or shared online, to allow easy access to other interested consumers (Zhang et al., 2010). SNSs are of paramount importance to eWOM as consumers freely share their experience and opinions and rapidly spread information and opinions regarding products and services in their social networks comprised friends, personal contacts and other acquaintances (Raacke and Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Bedard and Tolmie, 2018).

Social communication is defined as the process by which an individual (communicator) transmits stimuli to modify the behavior of other individuals (communicatees) (Hovland and Weiss, 1951). Social communication includes four major elements: communicator (source), stimulus (content), receiver (audience) and response (main effect). EWOM represents a new form of social communication content (stimuli) involving both information-seeking customers (receivers) and information-sharing customers (communicators) (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). This study explores how factors related to the receivers (Facebook users) and to the stimulus (post content) influence the response (intention to share).

### *2.1. Environmental consciousness and attitude towards sharing firms' environmental CSR content on Facebook*

Environmental consciousness may explain attitudes towards participating in social media, in this case, sharing firms' environmental CSR content on SNSs. Environmental consciousness is rooted in the fact that individuals feel that it is due to humans that the natural environment is facing so many problems (Cheema et al., 2020). The concept of environmental consciousness involves specific psychological factors related to an individual's propensity to engage in pro-environmental behaviours (Zelezny and Schultz,

2000). Pro-environmental behaviours can be explained with the help of Schwartz's values theory (Schwartz, 1977). According to this proposal, values play a role in specific situations when they are activated by a set of altruistic concerns (e.g. environmental degradation, global warming, etc.). Schwartz (1977) argued that altruistic behaviour would occur when individuals hold personal norms regarding a specific behaviour (e.g. pro-environmental behaviour). Value-attitude-behaviour (V-A-B) model (Homer and Kahle, 1988) is a popular model which implies that the influence should theoretically flow from abstract values to mid-range attitudes to specific behaviour. It means that the relationship between values (e.g. environmental values) and actual behaviour (e.g. intention to share specific content on a SNS) is mediated by attitudes. Depending on the importance placed on environmental values in relation to other competing values, environmental activities developed by companies will be judged as more or less significant in relation to other corporate strategies. As sharing environmental CSR content on a SNS can be considered as a way of showing deeper pro-environmental values, the more consumers perceive themselves as environmentally conscious the more positive attitude they will develop towards this behaviour (e.g. sharing environmental CSR content on a SNS). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Environmental consciousness positively influences attitude towards sharing firms' environmental CSR content on Facebook.

## *2.2. Homophily and its relationship with attitude towards sharing firms' environmental CSR content and firms' commercial content.*

The influence of homophily on consumer decision-making process can be justified by several theories, such as the Theory of Social Comparison (Festinger, 1954) and the Source-Attractiveness Model (Kelman, 1961), among others. In the social networks' literature, homophily is defined as the similarity between the members of social groups, or between individuals sharing a social link (Aiello et al., 2012). Literature confirms that homophily affects socialties and configures the multiple social systems to which individuals belong (Birindelli et al., 2019). Previous studies found that information exchange most frequently occurs between a source and a receiver who are alike, that is, homophilous (Gilly et al., 1998). In the WOM context, consumers with higher level of perceived homophily may be more likely to exchange marketing information when making product choices (Chu, 2009). In the communication process, both sources and receivers behave based on the perceived characteristics of each other and the message being delivered (Rogers and Bhowmik, 1970). A receiver's perception of the communication situation, including the degree of similarity, influences the persuasive effect of a message on a receiver's attitude and behaviour (Rogers and Bhowmik, 1970).

Extant research demonstrates that personal characteristics of senders and receivers may influence their beliefs and attitudes towards the content transmitted (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Chu and Kim, 2011). As previous studies demonstrate, homophily increases individuals' likelihood in using homophilous social contacts as a source of information, and thereby engaging in eWOM behaviours (Chu, 2009). In support of this observations, Fong et al. (2014) argue that information dissemination may be explained by homophily via both online-personal and online-collective media. All these arguments can be extended to the context of our research (online CSR communication). An individual will transmit a certain corporate message (e.g. a post about a firm's CSR engagement) if he thinks that the people in his network are similar or homophilous to him (e.g. due to their

demographic or psychological characteristics). Thus, it is assumed that if a person believes that the members of their network are homophilious social contacts, they will be interested in the same topics (e.g., environmental content or specific corporate information) and their attitude towards sharing this type of information will be more positive, because a better reception by the social network is expected. Therefore, based on these ideas, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Homophily positively influences attitude towards sharing firms' environmental CSR content.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Homophily positively influences attitude towards sharing firms' commercial content.

### *2.3. Expressive information sharing and its relationship with attitude towards sharing firms' environmental CSR content and firms' commercial content*

The body of literature on interpersonal communication and WOM suggests that consumers with certain personal and personality traits are more likely to disseminate WOM to fellow consumers (Feick and Price, 1987; Gilly et al., 1998). Consumers with different levels of expressive information sharing might display different patterns of eWOM communication in social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Expressive information sharing or self-disclosure is traditionally defined as any message about the self that a person communicates to another (Wheless and Grotz, 1976). Expressive information sharing is an autonomous act of revealing information to others and is noted as a central mechanism in developing relationships (Altman and Taylor, 1973). For example, consumers with a higher level of expressive information sharing are more likely to disseminate and pass information than those who are less subject to self-disclose.

Information-exchange activities are promoted when people are motivated to be involved in such exchanges (Wasko and Faraj, 2005). According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci and Ryan, 1985), expressive information sharing is one of the most prominent influences on information-exchange activities. SDT asserts that intrinsic motivations are more effective than extrinsic motivations (e.g. coercion and reward) in promoting positive behavior, improving performance and increasing psychological well-being (Moller et al., 2006). In an interpersonal communication context, expressive information sharing lowers stress, builds intimacy in relationships and increases social approval of a person's ideas (Wang et al., 2016).

Extant research has demonstrated that expressive information sharing has a positive impact on eWOM intentions in SNS (Fariás, 2014; Martínez et al., 2020) and that people are more likely to self-disclose personal information through online platforms than in face-to-face interactions (Rheingold, 1993). Considering these arguments, it is reasonable to suggest that expressive information sharing will have a positive impact on attitude towards sharing both environmental and commercial content in an online CSR communication context in order to reinforce their personal social benefits. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H<sub>4</sub>:** Expressive information sharing positively influences attitude towards sharing firms' environmental CSR content.

**H<sub>5</sub>:** Expressive information sharing positively influences attitude towards sharing firms' commercial content.

### *2.4. Attitudes and eWOM intention*

Weigel (1983) defines attitude as an enduring set of beliefs about an object that predisposed people to behave in particular ways toward the object. It refers to the psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1991) are the most popular theories used to discuss the attitude-behavior relationship toward environmental activities and other CSR actions (Jones et al., 2017). According to these theories, a specific attitude is known to be relatively strong in predicting a single behavior on a particular attitude object, while a general attitude explains the general tendency engaged in relevant behaviors on a category of objects. Consequently, it is considered logical that a person holding a favorable attitude towards some object performs favorable behaviors (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1977).

Additionally, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) conceptualizes general attitudes as predictors of the perception and evaluation of situation-specific beliefs. The general attitude sets the stage for the effects of situational factors through its influence on lower-order attitudes. If the general attitude is favorable, subordinate attitudes will also be favorable and the balance is tipped toward the behaviors referred by the specific attitudes (Poole and Hunter, 1980). Applying these ideas to the context of this research, it is postulated the effect of a more general attitude (e.g. sharing firms' commercial content) on a more specific one (e.g. sharing firms' content on environmental CSR issues). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H6:** Attitude towards sharing firms' commercial content positively influences attitude towards sharing firms' environmental CSR content.

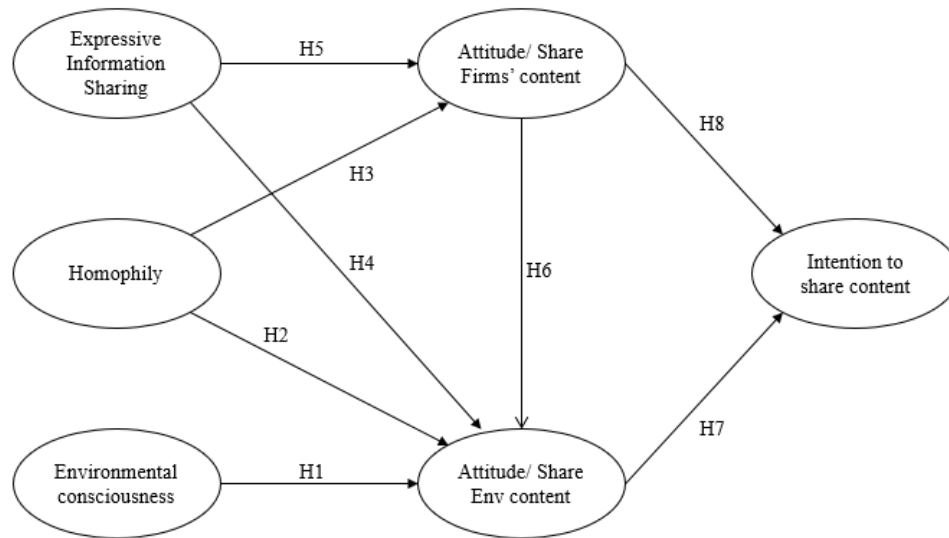
Previous studies describe that attitude is a major element in eWOM communication (Cheung and Tadani, 2012; Hussain et al., 2018). In the SNS setting, extant research demonstrates that attitude towards a behaviour shape consumer eWOM engagement behaviour (Gvili and Levi, 2018) and individuals' intention of using a specific SNS (Ruiz-Mafe et al., 2014). In a similar vein, Bilal et al. (2020) found that attitude (towards eWOM behaviour) positively influences eWOM intention in social media platforms. All these arguments can be extended to the context of our research. If an individual has a positive attitude towards a specific behaviour (e.g. sharing specific content on a SNS), this person will be more likely to perform this behaviour (e.g. intention to share this content on this SNS). Therefore, and based on the postulates of TRA and TPB, we propose that:

**H7:** Attitude towards sharing firms' commercial content positively influences intentions to share firms' environmental CSR content on Facebook.

**H8:** Attitude towards sharing environmental content positively influences intentions to share firms' environmental CSR content on Facebook.

The research causal model is presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Research Model



### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Measures and questionnaire

In order to test the hypothesis and research model proposed, we adopt a quantitative approach using a structured questionnaire to gather information about the variables under study from a sample of regular users of Facebook. The questionnaire focused on the hotel sector, given users' tendency to share contents about their tourism experiences, and the high impact of eWOM in the hospitality industry (Serra-Cantalops and Salvi, 2014). Additionally, we use a fictitious post of a leader Spanish hotel chain (NH Hotels) referred to a CSR initiative (environmental dimension), as a stimulus to analyze how companies' communication about CSR in Facebook influence the perceptions and eWOM intentions of individuals. Specifically, before the participants answered the questionnaire, they were shown the fictitious post, which was focused on an environmental activity that the company was going to develop in Cantabria, a region in the North of Spain characterized for the richness and value of its natural resources, and where the research fieldwork was developed (Figure 2). NH Hotels is a Spanish hotel chain with strong CSR engagement, especially in the dimensions of environmental responsibility and sustainability, and it has a hotel in the region where the empirical data were gathered. At the end of the survey, we indicated that the post showed was fictitious, specifically created for research purposes.

In particular, the questionnaire included questions regarding the following issues: 1) habits of use of social network sites, including frequency of use of Facebook for different behaviors related to information consumption and sharing; 2) individuals' general expressive information sharing in Facebook and the homophily perceived in the social network; 3) their environmental consciousness; 4) participants' attitudes towards sharing company/branded content in Facebook in general, and contents related to environmental CSR initiatives in particular; 5) their intention to share the post presented with the questionnaire. The complete scales for each factor are detailed in Appendix 1, indicating the original articles in which they were used in previous literature. All the items were measured using seven-point Likert scales, with values rating from strong disagreement to strong agreement with the statements presented.



**Figure 2.** Research Stimulus



### 3.2. Sample

As stated previously, the target population in this research are Facebook regular users, who are the target audience of companies' communication about CSR activities in this social network (and can also share and viralize it). Given the difficulty to obtain a probabilistic sample of this population, as no census is available, we used a non-probabilistic sampling procedure. In particular, we established sampling quotas according to the sociodemographic profile of Facebook users in Spain described in the Annual Study of Social Networks 2018, elaborated by IAB Spain (Interactive Advertising Bureau). Respondents were randomly approached in main commercial streets of the biggest cities in the region under research, respecting the quotas defined according to gender and age of Facebook users. Participants were asked if they were regular used of Facebook, and the ones that did not fulfil this requirement were discarded from the final sample. This way, we obtained a final sample of 239 valid surveys respecting the sociodemographic profile of Facebook users. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the sample obtained.

**Table 1.** Sample profile

Variable	%	Variable	%
Gender		Education level	
Male	49.4	Less than primary	3.8
Female	50.6	Primary	8.8
Age		Secondary	46.6
16 to 30 years	30.1	University	40.8
31 to 45 years	39.4		
46 to 65 years	30.5		

## 4. Results

In order to test the hypothesized relationships proposed in the research model, we use a covariance-based structural equations model (CB-SEM) approach (software EQS 6.1), in two phases. First, we estimate the measurement model (confirmatory factor analysis CFA) to validate the psychometric properties of the scales (reliability, and convergent and discriminant validity). Second, we analyze the structural model to test the direct effects reflected in the research hypotheses. In all cases, we use a Robust maximum likelihood estimation procedure, which allows to control the problems related to non-normality of data by providing the outputs ‘robust chi-square statistic’ and ‘robust standard errors’, which are corrected for non-normality (Byrne, 2006).

### 4.1. Estimation of the measurement model

The results obtained in the estimation of the measurement model, summarized in Tables 2 and 3, confirm the psychometric properties of the scales used in this research. First, goodness of fit indices supports the adjustment of the model to the data, so that the Bentler–Bonett Normed Fit Index (BBNFI), Bentler–Bonett Non-Normed Fit Index (BBNNFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) take values clearly above the minimum threshold of 0.9. Similarly, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is within the recommended limit of 0.08, and Normed  $\chi^2$  takes a value clearly under the recommended value of 3.0 (Hair et al., 2010).

Regarding the reliability of the measurement scales, it is confirmed for all the measurement instruments, given that Cronbach’s alpha, compound reliability and AVE coefficients are, in all cases, above the required minimum values of 0.7 and 0.5, respectively (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Hair et al., 2010) (Table 2). The results obtained also support the convergent validity of the scales, as all items are significant to a confidence level of 95% and their standardized lambda coefficients are higher than 0.5 (Steenkamp and Van Trijp, 1991).

Finally, the discriminant validity of the measurement instruments is tested according to the procedure proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981), which consists on the comparison of the variance extracted of each pair of constructs (AVE coefficients) with the squared correlation estimate between these two constructs (Table 3). For all the scales, the variance extracted for each construct is bigger than the squared correlation between them, which supports the discriminant validity of the instruments.

**Table 2.** Measurement Model (Confirmatory Factor Analysis)

Factor	Variable	Stand. Coef.	R <sup>2</sup>	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	Goodness of fit indices
Intention to Share Content (ISC)	ISC1	0.93	0.86	0.97	0.97	0.90	Normed $\chi^2$ = 2.13 BBNFI = 0.93 BBNNFI = 0.95 CFI = 0.96 IFI = 0.96 RMSEA = 0.07
	ISC2	0.97	0.94				
	ISC3	0.95	0.91				
Attitude/ Share Firms' Content (AFC)	AFC1	0.87	0.75	0.89	0.90	0.75	
	AFC2	0.94	0.88				
	AFC3	0.78	0.61				
Attitude/ Share Env Content (AEC)	AEC1	0.85	0.72	0.88	0.89	0.74	
	AEC2	0.95	0.90				
	AEC3	0.77	0.59				
Homophily (HOM)	HOM1	0.91	0.83	0.96	0.96	0.89	
	HOM2	0.97	0.95				
	HOM3	0.95	0.91				

Expressive Information Sharing (EFS)	EFS1	0.65	0.43	0.84	0.85	0.65
	EFS2	0.90	0.80			
	EFS3	0.85	0.73			
Environmental Consciousness (ENV)	ENV1	0.87	0.76	0.87	0.87	0.69
	ENV2	0.77	0.59			
	ENV3	0.85	0.71			

**Table 3.** Results of Fornell and Larcker's criterion for discriminant validity

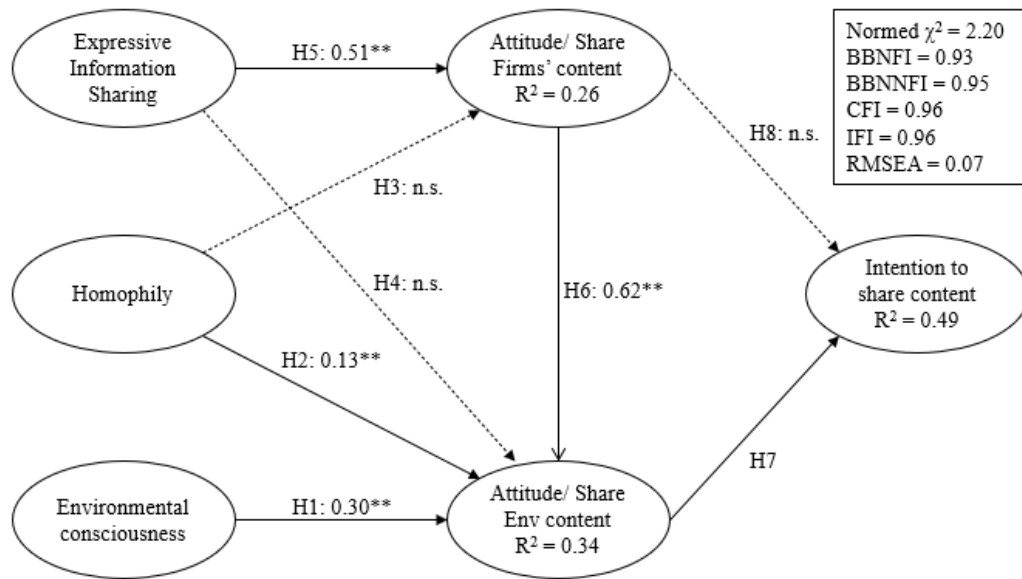
	ISC	AFC	AEC	HOM	EFS	ENV
Intention to Share Content (ISC)	<b>0.90<sup>a</sup></b>					
Attitude/ Share Firms' Content (AFC)	0.21	<b>0.75</b>				
Attitude/ Share Env Content (AEC)	0.48	0.47	<b>0.74</b>			
Homophily (HOM)	0.16	0.11	0.10	<b>0.89</b>		
Expressive Information Sharing (EFS)	0.26	0.26	0.21	0.45	<b>0.65</b>	
Environmental Consciousness (ENV)	0.15	0.04	0.16	0.01	0.03	<b>0.69</b>

a= AVE Coefficient for the construct. Off diagonal elements are the squared correlations among constructs.

#### 4.2. Estimation of hypothesized structural model

A first estimation of the structural model showed that some of the research hypotheses are not supported by the empirical data obtained. In particular, the following relationships are non-significant: 1) the effect of homophily on attitude towards sharing firms' commercial content (hypothesis H<sub>3</sub>); 2) the effect of expressive information sharing on attitude toward sharing firms' content focused on environmental CSR initiatives (hypothesis H<sub>4</sub>); and, 3) the effect of attitude towards sharing firms' environmental CSR content on intention to share (hypothesis H<sub>8</sub>). According to the model development procedure proposed by Hair et al. (2010), we reformulated the structural model, eliminating the non-significant relationships. Figure 3 summarizes the results for the estimation of the final structural model, detailing the goodness-of-fit indices, the R<sup>2</sup> statistics for each dependent variable and the standardized coefficients and significance level (p-value) for each direct effect.

**Figure 3.** Measurement model



\*\* p-value < 0.05; n.s. = non-significant

According to the goodness-of-fit indices obtained, the final structural model reflects appropriately the relationships between variables underlying in the empirical data (Normed  $\chi^2 = 2.20$ ; BBNFI = 0.93; BBNNFI = 0.95; CFI = 0.96; IFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.07). Additionally, the results of  $R^2$  statistics for the dependent variables are within the common values in the field of social sciences, and the LM-Test does not suggest the inclusion of any other relationship to improve the structural model (Byrne, 2006).

According to the empirical evidence obtained, individuals' environmental consciousness positively influences their attitude towards sharing corporate content focused on environmental CSR initiatives (hypothesis H<sub>1</sub> is supported). Besides, homophily has a direct effect on attitude towards sharing corporate content focused on environmental CSR initiatives (hypothesis H<sub>2</sub> is supported), but not on attitudes towards sharing general content (commercial information) posted by companies (hypothesis H<sub>3</sub> is rejected). On the contrary, expressive information sharing exerts a significant influence on attitude towards sharing general corporate content (commercial information) (hypothesis H<sub>5</sub> is supported), but not on attitude towards sharing content focused on environmental CSR initiatives (hypothesis H<sub>4</sub> is rejected). Finally, attitude towards sharing general corporate content (commercial information) has a positive effect on attitude towards sharing content focused on environmental CSR initiatives (hypothesis H<sub>6</sub> is supported) but not on the intention to share the post (hypothesis H<sub>8</sub> is rejected), which is only influenced by attitude towards sharing content focused on environmental CSR initiatives (hypothesis H<sub>7</sub> is supported).

Thus, according to the results obtained attitude towards sharing corporate content focused on environmental CSR issues initiatives is the only direct antecedent of intention to share a corporate post about CSR (environmental dimension), explaining almost 50% of the variance in the dependent variable ( $R^2=0.49$ ). Homophily and environmental consciousness exert an indirect influence on intention to share through its effect on by attitudes towards sharing corporate content about environmental CSR initiatives, whereas the impact of expressive information sharing is also mediated through attitude towards sharing general corporate content.

## 5. Discussion

### *Theoretical implications*

Our research contributes in several ways to a greater theoretical understanding of online CSR communication and eWOM behavior in the social media setting. First, our results demonstrate that environmental consciousness has positive influence on attitude towards sharing corporate content about environmental CSR issues. Regarding environmental consciousness, previous studies have focused on this variable to explain pro-environmental behaviors (Martínez et al., 2018). In this sense, a growing understanding of ecological issues has made individuals modified their attitudes and preferences and consider the impacts of companies in the natural environment. According to Schwartz (2005) the more concerned people are, the more likely they will create action plans to express this concern in their daily behavior. As sharing environmental CSR content on SNS can be considered as a way of showing pro-environmental values and environmental concern, environmentally conscious consumers will develop a positive attitude towards this behavior. Our results also show that homophily positively influences attitude towards sharing environmental CSR content. Since individuals tend to socialize with those who share similar characteristics, interpersonal communication in SNSs are more likely to occur between two individuals who are alike. As a result, in the context of this research (online CSR communication), the attitude towards exchanging CSR information in social media is more likely to occur between individuals who are similar with respect to certain attributes (e.g. interests, preferences, etc.). This result expands previous studies in the marketing context that demonstrate that homophily plays a significant role in influencing the persuasive process on online communication contexts (Chu, 2009; Fong et al., 2014; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Similarly, expressive information sharing positively influences attitude towards sharing firms' commercial content, which is consistent with previous studies in the literature on interpersonal communication suggesting that consumers with higher levels of self-disclosure are more likely to disseminate and pass on information than those who are less subject to self-disclose (Farías, 2014; Martínez et al., 2020). This finding is of special interest in the field of CSR communication because the ultimate goal of companies in this regard is to communicate their CSR activities to engage their stakeholders and thus gain favorable considerations. The fact of exchanging information (and viralize it) is key to generate strong connections with customers (current and potential) and other stakeholders, which in turn favors the co-creation of value that strengthens firms' competitive advantage.

We also found that attitude towards sharing environmental CSR content has a positive impact on eWOM intentions to share positive (environmental) CSR posts. Specifically, our results demonstrate that those individuals with a positive attitude towards sharing environmental CSR content are more willing to share corporate messages (e.g. a post) published by firms in their SNSs. Similarly, attitude towards sharing firms' content has a positive influence on attitude towards sharing environmental CSR content. These results support previous studies that describe attitude as a major element in eWOM communication (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Hussain et al., 2018), supporting the postulates of TRA and TPB. However, the relationships between expressive information sharing and attitude towards sharing environmental CSR content, and between homophily

and attitude towards sharing firms' commercial content were not significant. The effect of individuals' expressive information sharing on their attitude towards sharing environmental CSR content is mediated by the attitude towards sharing corporate (commercial) content. In other words, the level of self-disclosure affects the general attitude towards sharing firms' corporate content, and this general attitude influences the specific attitude towards sharing content on environmental CSR issues.

As far as the non-significant relationship between homophily and attitude towards sharing firms' commercial content, the cause of this result may reside in the fact that the effect of this variable on the attitude towards sharing environmental CSR content is significant because the environmental factor may be considered as a personal value. On the contrary, the attitude towards sharing corporate (commercial) content is a more general belief, so homophily does not have a relevant influence (it is not relevant to consider that the recipients of the general eWOM are similar to oneself). Therefore, perceived homophily may decrease individuals capacity to access certain information and knowledge from each other (e.g. corporate or commercial content) discouraging eWOM (Chu and Kim, 2011). The relationship between individuals' attitude towards sharing firm's commercial content and their intention to share (environmental) CSR content on Facebook was not significant either. Even when this finding does not support extant research based on the postulates of TRA and TPB, one possible explanation may reside in the fact that the influence of the attitude towards sharing corporate content (a more general attitude) on the intention, is mediated by a more specific kind of attitude, such as the attitude towards sharing content of firms about environmental aspects, which is consistent with previous studies analyzing the process through which marketing communications influence consumer behavior (Mackenzie et al., 1986).

### ***Managerial implications***

These findings have important managerial implications not only for tourism and hospitality companies but also for firms operating in other business settings. This study emphasizes the relevance of CSR communication in a social media context. Our results demonstrate that individuals are willing to share (positive) CSR content reported by companies in their SNSs, which may influence other individuals' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes not only about CSR issues but also towards the firms themselves (Pomeroy and Johnson, 2009). In this regard, CSR communication in SNSs should not be seen as merely a tool to interact with consumers concerning CSR issues. Instead, it should be integrated into strategic corporate communication and used as a marketing tool for desired outcomes. From a strategic perspective, managers should consider the key role of eWOM about CSR-related issues to build credibility and avoid skepticism from consumers.

Companies should take advantage of increasing stakeholders' awareness of environmental impacts to enhance their relationship with these groups. By creating and managing CSR-dedicated spaces in SNSs companies can develop great potential for stakeholder integration into the CSR communication strategy (Morsing and Schultz, 2006). Such integration will demonstrate to stakeholders that they are being heard and that the company is truly interested in changing for the better. In the context of this research, users' comments on SNSs (e.g. Facebook posts) might provide valuable input for such stakeholder integration in CSR-dedicated spaces. Managers ought to create CSR-dedicated spaces on SNSs (e.g. a general corporate account on Facebook or an account dedicated to a specific brand or topic) to provide unique opportunities for their companies to engage stakeholders with CSR messages. Therefore, firms should set up these spaces to share information about CSR initiatives, interact with their stakeholders and gather

feedback. By exchanging CSR information companies will engage with stakeholders in their CSR activities to develop a meaningful discussion about CSR and exchange diverse resources such as ideas or volunteer labor, among others. In the same vein, companies need to identify CSR trends and changing expectations of stakeholders as well as different types of emerged eWOM about CSR-related issues (e.g. environmental issues, supplier relations, diversity issues, employee relations, community relations, etc.) and develop strategies to establish an interactive communication with stakeholders.

### ***Limitations and future research***

To conclude, this study had several limitations. While participants suggested that the research stimulus was a reasonable reproduction of a real life Facebook post, further studies involving different types of tourism companies (e.g. food and drink services, recreation, transportation, etc.) or even firms operating in diverse business settings (e.g. banking, energy, etc.) would be useful to determine whether different contexts influence the effects of the antecedents on attitudes and intentions in different ways. Further research could explore eWOM on CSR issues in other SNSs (e.g. Twitter or Instagram) or other categories of social media (e.g. blogs, content communities, etc.). In addition, this research has dealt with the relationship between the variables of interest without considering other antecedents. Thus, there still exists a need to explore other mediating variables such as individuals' interest in the CSR topic (e.g. environment, diversity, employee relations, etc.), users' privacy concerns in social media or tie strength, among others. To conclude, this study focuses on the Spanish context, which is a reference market and traditional benchmark in the tourism industry, but may not reflect the situation in other countries, so comparative studies with different cultural backgrounds and environmental situations should be a further research direction.

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## Appendix

### Measurement scales

Intention to share content (Herrero et al. 2017; García de los Salmones et al., 2020)
ISC1 I intend to use Facebook to share this post ISC2 I will possibly use Facebook to share this post ISC3 I decided to use Facebook to share this post
Attitude towards sharing firms' (commercial) content (Herrero and San Martín, 2012; García de los Salmones et al., 2020)
AFC1 I think it is a good idea to share a corporate/brand post in Facebook AFC2 I like the idea of sharing a corporate/brand post in Facebook AFC3 I am predisposed to share a corporate/brand post in Facebook
Attitude towards sharing firms' environmental content (Herrero and San Martín, 2012; García de los Salmones et al., 2020)
AEC1 I think it is a good idea to share a corporate/brand post about environmental initiatives in Facebook AEC2 I like the idea of sharing a corporate/brand post about environmental initiatives in Facebook AEC3 I am predisposed to share a corporate/brand post about environmental initiatives in Facebook
Expressive information sharing (Smock et al., 2011)
EFS1 I usually use Facebook to provide personal information about myself. EFS2 I usually use Facebook to provide information about topics that are interesting to me. EFS3 I usually use Facebook to share information that may be of use or interest to my contacts.
Homophily (Brown et al., 2007; Herrero et al., 2015)

NS1 My contacts in Facebook have interests which are similar to my own.
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NS2 My contacts in Facebook are like me in their preferences.
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NS3 My contacts in Facebook have tastes similar to mine.
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Environmental consciousness (Schlegelmilch and Bohlen, 1996)
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EC1 I consider myself to be a person sensitive to environmental problems
--

EC2 I think it is important to protect the environment
--

EC3 I am concerned about my impact on the environment
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