Electronic word of mouth in social media: the common characteristics of retweeted and favourited marketer-generated content posted on Twitter

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Abstract: Marketers desire to utilise electronic word of mouth (eWOM) marketing on social media sites. However, not all online content generated by marketers has the same effect on consumers; some of them are effective while others are not. This paper aims to examine different characteristics of marketer-generated content (MGC) that of which one lead users to eWOM. Twitter was chosen as one of the leading social media sites and a content analysis approach was employed to identify the common characteristics of retweeted and favourited tweets. 2,780 tweets from six companies (Booking, Hostelworld, Hotels, Lastminute, Laterooms and Priceline) operating in the tourism sector are analysed. Results indicate that the posts which contain pictures, hyperlinks, product or service information, direct answers to customers and brand centrality are more likely to be retweeted and favourited by users. The findings present the main eWOM drivers for MGC in social media.

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1 Introduction

The developments in internet technologies provide new opportunities for companies to interact with their current and potential customers (Bickart and Schindler, 2001). Social media, as one of the milestones in the developing process of the internet, has also brought new possibilities to bridge marketers and consumers together via popular platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. However, while social media facilitates the communication between companies and customers, it also increases the communication between customers about companies, which we call electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Kozinets et al., 2010).

Table 1   Summary of previous studies on MGC*

Authors and year	Aim of the study	Method	Sample	Context	Results
Goh et al. (2013)	To explore the impact of social media brand community contents on consumer purchase behaviour.	Content analysis	The customer reward program database with information 14,388 customers	Facebook	Engagement in social media brand communities leads to a positive increase in purchase expenditures. Additional examinations of UGC and MGC impacts show evidence of social media contents affecting consumer purchase behaviour through embedded information and persuasion.
Ding et al. (2014)	To examine the role of MGC and UGC in sustaining the growth of social media brand communities over time.	Panel data	Employed 233-day length of data of the members in the brand community	Brand community set up in a leading social networking website in China	Show that both social- and product-related UGC can promote growth over time; but only social-related MGC is effective in this regard. However, MGC regardless of their nature may stimulate UGC. It suggests that sustaining the growth of a brand community requires a symphony of both marketer effort and consumer response, thus providing a more comprehensive and balanced view of their role.
Scholz et al. (2013)	To investigate the effects of UGC and MGC in a multi-stage model of purchase decision processes: awareness creation, interest stimulation, and final purchase decision.	Panel data	Employed 547-days of the number of visitors purchases the online shop	A large German e-tailer on Facebook	Both MGC and UGC create awareness by attracting users to the fan page. Increased numbers of active users stimulate user interest, and more users visit the e-tailor's online shop.

Notes: *Based on the search Web of Science & Google Scholar, the papers which have 'MGC' included in the title.

Table 1 Summary of previous studies on MGC*

Authors and year	Aim of the study	Method	Sample	Context	Results
Lin and Goh (2011)	To propose the networked user/MGC model to explore the impact of social media UGC and MGC on consumer purchase behaviour	Analytical modelling	n/a	n/a	UGC and social network sites allow for a communicative relationship between firm and user and between user and user. The proposed model is helpful to better understand the economic value of social media content and further design more effective marketing strategies.
Qi et al. (2014)	To explore optimal MGC strategies for firms to handle extremely negative UGC (EN_UGC) by proposing a model based on MGC and EN_UGC interaction.	Analytical modelling	n/a	Facebook, YouTube, microblog, douban.com	There are multiple pieces of information coexisting in the real-world and these pieces of information spread through social networks simultaneously. MGC does not affect the propagation of EN_UGC, and the optimal MGC strategy is to do nothing. However, in effective mode, the effect strength of MGC on EN_UGC is the most important key factor in defending against EN_UGC propagation, followed by the input rate of the subgroup where users accept and repost MGC.

Notes: *Based on the search Web of Science & Google Scholar, the papers which have 'MGC' included in the title.

The effect of eWOM on consumers has long been known (Bickart and Schindler, 2001; Huang, 2010; Kumar and Benbasat, 2006; Park et al., 2007), but it has become more appropriate for consumer behaviour and exchanging information via the social media sites (Canhoto and Clark, 2013). The online conversations in social media naturally have a significant effect on consumers` purchase intentions (Tsimonis and Dimitriadis, 2014; Wang et al., 2012) and brand awareness (Zadeh and Sharda, 2014), since they often contain brand names or refer to specific products or services (Wolny and Mueller, 2013).

Particularly in Twitter, almost one in five posts includes a specific brand name and one-fifth of these posts express positive or negative feelings about that brand (Jansen et al., 2009). When the number of tweets sent per day, which is 500 million (Twitter, 2015), is taken into account, the importance of eWOM conversations in Twitter can be seen more explicitly; an average 100 million tweets per day mention brands. For this reason, companies desire to interact with customers on Twitter by having official accounts; based on the latest statistics, 77% of Fortune 500 companies use Twitter actively and Twitter is the most used social media site among these companies (Barnes et al., 2013).

The content generated by marketers in Twitter can spread rapidly among users through eWOM (Jansen et al., 2009; Wolny and Mueller, 2013). However, while some content gets a high reaction, spreads rapidly and reaches more consumers, other content receives an inadequate reaction, or even no reaction, and cannot spread. Previous scholars (Berger and Milkman, 2012) who realised this difference have studied the issue, but social media was not the focus. Therefore, the aim of this research is to empirically investigate the characteristics of marketer-generated content (MGC) posted on social media and find those characteristics that make MGC more easily disseminated. In order to achieve this, we develop a conceptual framework that is based on the related literature and our observation on MGC.

This paper consider the characteristics of MGC in Twitter in four categories: contextual characteristics, informational characteristics, characteristics related to entertainment, and characteristics related to brand (De Vries et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2012; Suh et al. 2010). The findings provide directly applicable implications for marketers by highlighting some characteristics of MGC, and contribute to eWOM and social media literature. The remainder of the paper is as follows: first, concise review of the literature on eWOM, MGC and Twitter will be provided. Second, the developed framework and discuss of the methodology will be presented. Finally, the results of this study will highlight the discussion of findings and propose some opportunities for further research by considering the limitations of the study.

2   Literature review

2.1   eWOM and MGC

Word of mouth (WOM), which can be defined as communications among consumers about products and services of brands (Arndt, 1967), is recognised as one of the most influential marketing tools regarding consumer behaviour (Bone, 1995; Herr et al., 1991; Lee and Youn, 2009). However, it has gained a new aspect by the more widespread and frequent usage of the internet (Elwalda and Lu, 2014; Kim and Choi, 2012; King et al., 2014; Yaylı and Bayram, 2012). Consumers have started to share their opinions and

experiences about companies on the internet, known as eWOM (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Marketers had always struggled regarding the negative side of WOM, which is difficult to control and influence (Godes and Mayzlin, 2004; Haywood, 1989); but today, with the advent of eWOM, while conversations among customers are still not completely under the control of marketers, there is the opportunity for them to explore the notions of customers and even lead the eWOM conversations by generating content.

EWOM offers several advantages for marketers. Through eWOM, the marketing message can be conveyed to huge number of people (Filieri and McLeay, 2014; Liu, 2006) in a short period of time (Huang et al., 2011; Hung and Li, 2007; King et al., 2014). It provides an opportunity to advertise, without necessitating the high budgets of traditional advertising methods. Marketers thus can improve brand awareness amongst consumers in a fast and cost-effective way (Litvin et al., 2008; Yang, 2013b). However, eWOM can also be detrimental to the image of companies when the communication is instigated by unhappy customers (Ferguson and Johnston, 2011); eWOM has also cons as well as pros. EWOM conversations are able to start with either MGC or user-generated content (UGC) (Bickart and Schindler, 2001).

So far, research studies in this field has mostly focused on UGC (Christodoulides et al., 2012; Presi et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2012), while some studies compare UGC and MGC as a focal point (Goh et al., 2013; Lim et al., 2012) (see Table 1). However, notwithstanding these few studies, MGC has not yet been separately examined in detail. Therefore one of the aims of this study is to expand the related literature, by focusing on MGC.

MGC publishes content on the internet, which is created by marketers, on behalf of their companies, in order to interact with customers (Goh et al., 2013). Marketers can control the context of information just as in advertising (van den Bergh et al., 2011) and introduce their brands, products and services. Users can respond to MGC by replying or sharing the content with each others. Thus, any MGC may have the potential to reach millions of users on the internet through eWOM (Sigala et al., 2012). Therefore the content of the message, target of the message and its location must be evaluated by marketers in detail (Barnes and Hunt, 2000; Kotler and Armstrong, 2013). Recently, social media has been considered as one of the most appropriate and powerful platforms for MGC (Canhoto and Clark, 2013), this is due to bringing large numbers of users together (Belk and Llamas, 2013). However, while this is an opportunity for marketers to initiate eWOM conversations among their targeted customers, not all MGC has the same impact on consumers; some content achieve a high response while others do not (De Vries et al., 2012). For this reason, creating accurate content is surely important to gain a positive customer response (Reichelt et al., 2014) and thus, this study particularly focus on the characteristics of MGC that make it accurate and lead users to use eWOM in social media.

2.2 Social media sites and Twitter

Social media sites are described as web-based services that allow people to build and expand their friend networks by creating personal profiles (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). These websites have spread dramatically throughout the world and due to this growing interest and usage, the number and type of social media sites have also increased. Latest statistics show that three social media sites, namely Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, are

among the top ten most visited websites in the world (Alexa, 2015). Therefore these websites draw the attention of many marketers as well as researchers. Marketers view these websites as an opportunity to interact with customers (Gangadharbatla et al., 2012; Michaelidou et al., 2011) because the number of people who use social media as a part of their daily life is noticeably high and these people share their experiences, preferences and opinions regarding the products or services of brands on the social media. Particularly Twitter has 288 million active users (Twitter, 2015) and almost 20% of tweets mention brands (Jansen et al., 2009), which provides a great opportunity for marketers to track and learn from customers` experience about the company.

On the other hand, according to Jansen et al. (2009) Twitter is also considered as the most popular micro-blogging platform which allows users to post within a 140 character only. Users can also post simply by retweeting others` tweets and this characteristic of Twitter, of being short and convenient, encourages users to post more often (Sakaki et al., 2010). However, this does not mean that Twitter only allows text-oriented messages; users are able to enrich their posts through pictures, videos, and website links. In addition, most of the tweets can be seen publicly, without logging into the website, and these aforementioned features make Twitter an appropriate platform for eWOM. Hence, information about companies has the potential to spread easily among a large number of Twitter users thanks to these features. Creating an official account on a website and interacting with customers is important for marketers. Through these official accounts, marketers can provide customers with information or news relevant to their brands, products, services or promotions and lead customers to tweet about the company.

Users may either mention the companies in their posts or *retweet* (i.e., forward the message) the tweets generated by marketers. In both ways, the information about the company can spread and shared among users through eWOM. Every tweet has a retweet (RT) number on it which shows how many times it has been shared by users, and this RT number is accepted as one of the biggest indicators of eWOM in Twitter (Hoffman and Fodor, 2010; Wolny and Mueller, 2013). In addition, all tweets have *favourite* (FAV) numbers on them and this information indicates the number of users who have saved the tweets as one of their favourite tweets. Although it is not as strong indicator as the RT number, hence it is not considered as indicator of eWOM by academics so far. FAV number can also be signs of eWOM in Twitter, because when a user marks the tweets as their favourite tweets, others are able to see them in the user`s profile. Therefore, in this study, FAV numbers is accepted as a tool for measuring eWOM.

Consequently, marketers generate content in order to interact with their current and potential customers in Twitter because of several mentioned reasons. They can spread MGC through eWOM and follow the results by tracking the RT and FAV numbers. However different tweets have different RT and FAV rates and this shows they do not all get the same reactions from users. While some tweets get a big response and spread rapidly through eWOM, some others get a small response, or even no response, and do not spread. We thus understand that there should be some characteristics of tweets that play important role for getting a greater reaction. Then, what are the key characteristics of tweets that enable MGC to spread more rapidly and widely through being retweeted and favourited? The answer to this question is of great importance for both marketers who want to promote their brands and academics who want to study Twitter and eWOM.

2.3 Characteristics of marketer-generated tweets that lead users to eWOM

In order to identify the characteristics of tweets, first, the literature has been critically reviewed in the context of stimulating eWOM (Boyd et al., 2010; De Vries et al., 2012; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Smith et al., 2012 and etc.). Second the marketer-generated tweets (MGT) have been examined. Finally, all extracted characteristics were categorised into four dimensions (see Figure 1). These dimensions will be discussed in detail in the following section.

Figure 1 Characteristics of MGC posted on Twitter
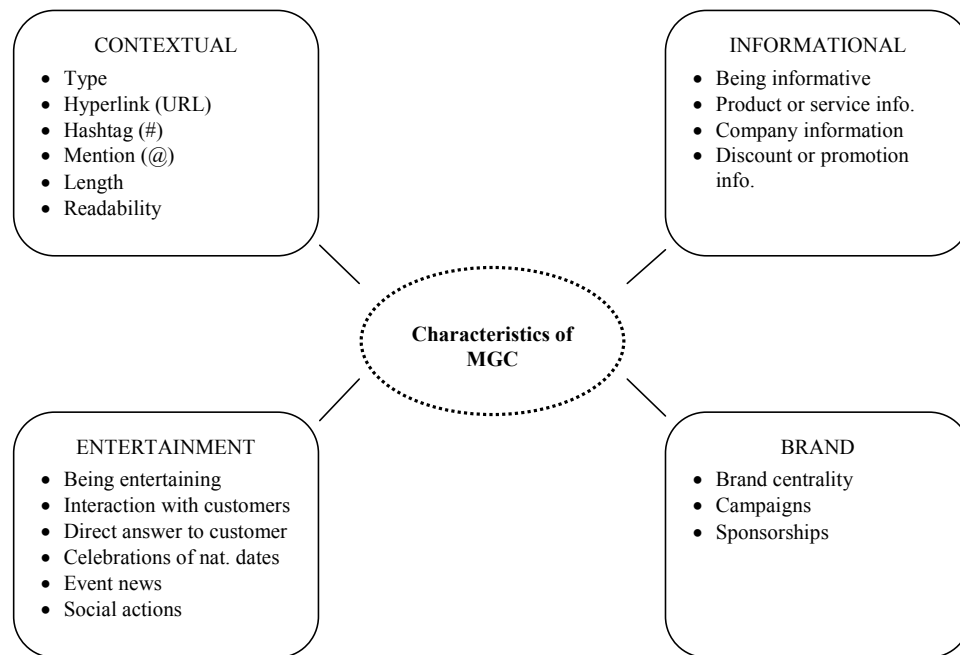
2.3.1 Contextual characteristics

Tweets can include pictures, videos or they can be text-only messages. Due to the natural structure of tweets, it is easy to distinguish quickly, especially when they include pictures or videos. For example, if users, who are looking at a Twitter page, have very little time, they will more likely see those tweets that contain pictures or videos. This may increase the possibility of sharing the content (Rogers, 2014). In addition, having a hyperlink, hashtag (#) or mention (@) signs are other contextual characteristics of tweets (Boyd et al., 2010; Suh et al., 2010). According to Boyd et al. (2010), more than half of retweets contain a hyperlink, almost one-fifth have a hashtag and nearly one-tenth have a mention inside.

Finally, the length and readability of tweets are the last two contextual features in this study that may affect the distribution of a message. The possibility of sharing can be low when the tweet already has 140 characters and does not leave extra space to a person who wants share it. These tweets do not give the reader the chance to add their own opinions

about the content. Moreover, if the tweet is not easy to understand, this may naturally lead readers not to share it.

2.3.2   Informational characteristics

Having a product, service or any information is one of the apparent features of MGT. In fact, if the content is functional (Lovett et al., 2013) and helps to solve users' problems it can spread quickly via WOM (Yen et al., 2011). This is because people enjoy helping others through sharing their knowledge in online platforms (Cheung and Lee, 2012; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In addition, if the tweets contain information about the company this may invoke emotions, and customers might like to share the content with their friends or acquaintances (Berger and Milkman, 2012; Lovett et al., 2013; Peters and Kashima, 2007).

Giving discount or promotional information on a tweet is another tool to attract users to share. These types of information increase the willingness of people to engage with the content and WOM advertising (Nusair et al., 2010). Consumers perceive the discount or promotional information of companies as a reward (Yen et al., 2011) and an opportunity for themselves (Gruen et al., 2006).

2.3.3   Characteristics related to entertainment

Entertainment is a great motivational instrument for users to participate in eWOM; tweets that contain fun and a sense of humour draw users` attention easily (Bronner and de Hoog, 2010). Twitter provides a valuable chance for marketers to interact with their current and potential customers, as many companies do. Asking eye catching questions, celebrating national dates, announcing events and supporting social actions or replying to users` questions are some examples of interaction methods (Smith et al., 2012) that might increase the possibility of eWOM (De Vries et al., 2012).

2.3.4   Characteristics related to brands

Brand centrality refers to role of the brands in MGT and explains whether it is in focus of the content or not (Smith et al., 2012). Introducing more than one topic in a single tweet is not easy due to the 140-character limit, so brand centrality might change according to content (Jansen et al., 2009).

Lastly, containing sponsorship and campaign news are two distinguished characteristics of MGT noticed during the observational part of this study. Companies try to inform and attract people by announcing their sponsorships for events, charities or teams and their online and offline campaigns for customers. Both campaigns for online channels such as social media and offline ones such as in-store campaigns are able to be announced in Twitter via tweets. Particularly, campaign news might encourage people to share the content and initiate the eWOM activity among users.

These characteristics all have the potential to make MGT more dispersible. Therefore, in this study, they are all tested separately in order to find whether they are effective on MGT or not. We identified the common characteristics of retweeted and favourited MGT by undertaking an empirical study, which is presented in the following section.

3 Methodology

A content analysis was conducted with 2,780 tweets generated by marketers. Content analysis is an observational method that scientifically compares the content of recorded communications (Kolbe and Burnett, 1991). It has been used by many researchers to analyse both online and offline content (Roznowski, 2003; Smith et al., 2012). For this research, content analysis offers an analytic way to compare the content of a large sample of MGT. The study has been conducted based on the following conceptual framework (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 Conceptual framework.
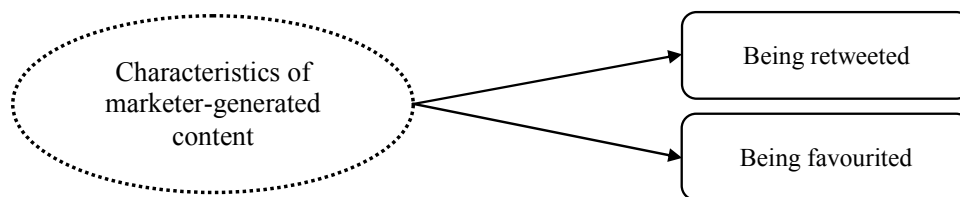
3.1 Sampling

Tweets were selected from the official Twitter accounts of six pure-play e-commerce companies operating in the tourism sector: Booking.com, Hostelworld.com, Hotels.com, Lastminute.com, Laterooms.com and Priceline.com. The reason for choosing pure-play e-commerce companies is that they carry on their business on the internet and are not as active as other companies in the offline world (e.g., they do not have stores). The tourism sector was chosen to avoid a *brand lovers effect*, which leads people to like and share every post by companies without considering their content (e.g., the automotive sector). This effect was noticed during our observation on MGT. Finally, all tweets written by these companies during the period of 1 March 2014 and 15 June 2014 were examined independently; the research period was decided with respect to the beginning of the tourism season.

3.2 Coding

Operational coding instructions were developed for all dependent and independent variables prior to starting coding. Table 2 shows these instructions for each variable. A pre-test was undertaken among the coders, who are researchers in this study, in order to test the relevance of the variables and prevent the occurrence of different comments for similar circumstances. The data were then coded manually; binary coding was used, where 1 indicated the presence of a characteristic and 0 indicated its absence (see Table 2) (Smith et al., 2012; Swani et al., 2014). Discrepancies in coding were resolved by a researcher of the team.

Table 2   Coding Instructions.

Variables	Coding	
Dependent variables:		
1 Being retweeted	If the tweet is retweeted: coded as 1	– If not: 0
2 Being favourited	If the tweet is favourited: 1	– If not: 0
Independent variables:		
1 Picture	If there is a picture in the tweet: coded as 1	– If not: 0
2 Video	If there is a video in the tweet: 1	– If not: 0
3 Only text	If there is no picture or video in the tweet: 1	– If yes: 0
4 Hyperlink	If there is a link in the tweet: 1	– If not: 0
5 Hashtag	If there is a '#' in the tweet: 1	– If not: 0
6 Mention	If there is a '@' in the tweet: 1	– If not: 0
7 Length	If it is longer than 100 characters: 1	– If not: 0
8 Readability	If the tweet is clear and easy to understand: 1	– If not: 0
9 Being informative	If there is ANY information: 1	– If not: 0
10 Product or service info.	If there is this information: 1	– If not: 0
11 Company information	If there is this information: 1 (e.g., rewards)	– If not: 0
12 Discount or promotion info.	If there is this information: 1	– If not: 0
13 Being entertaining	If there is something entertaining: 1	– If not: 0
14 Interaction with customers	If there is customer interaction: 1 (e.g., asks questions)	– If not: 0
15 Direct answer to customer	If there is a direct answer to ONE customer: 1	– If not: 0
16 Event news	If there is event news: 1	– If not: 0
17 Social actions	If there is a social action: 1 (e.g., protecting animal rights…)	– If not: 0
18 Celebrations of nat. dates	If there is a national date: 1	– If not: 0
19 Brand centrality	If the brand is in the focus of tweet: 1	– If not: 0
20 Campaigns	If there is news about a campaign: 1	– If not: 0
21 Sponsorships	If there is news about a sponsorship: 1	– If not: 0

4   Results and analysis

The coding frequencies show that all companies have a high number of RT and FAV rates (see Table 3). It also shows how characteristics of MGC differentiate across the six companies; as an example, some companies prefer to use pictures and videos to post while some others prefer text-only posts.

Table 3   Coding frequencies

Variables	Companies												Total	
	Booking.com 306 tweets		Hostelworld.com 347 tweets		Hotels.com 951 Tweets		Lastminute.com 295 tweets		Laterooms.com 690 tweets		Priceline.com 191 tweets		2,780 tweets	
	Coded as 1	Coded as 0	Coded as 1	Coded as 0	Coded as 1	Coded as 0	Coded as 1	Coded as 0	Coded as 1	Coded as 0	Coded as 1	Coded as 0	Coded as 1	Coded as 0
Being retweeted	280	26	282	65	793	158	152	143	462	228	141	50	2,110	670
Being favourited	282	24	304	43	757	194	168	127	462	228	162	29	2,135	645
Picture	251	55	76	271	37	914	64	231	195	495	48	143	671	2,109
Video	3	303	23	324	26	925	15	280	50	640	30	161	147	2,633
Only text	52	254	248	99	888	63	216	79	445	245	113	78	1,962	818
Hyperlink	263	43	312	35	315	636	183	112	393	297	119	72	1,585	1,195
Hashtag	79	227	154	193	759	192	214	81	589	101	104	87	1,899	881
Mention	34	272	202	145	351	600	158	137	117	573	97	94	959	1,821
Length	69	237	108	239	490	461	185	110	282	408	103	88	1,237	1,543
Readability	299	7	331	16	923	28	265	30	592	98	166	25	2,576	204
Being informative	184	122	280	67	584	367	200	95	457	233	96	95	1,801	979
Product or service info.	151	155	129	218	238	713	107	188	199	491	52	139	876	1,904
Company information	6	300	12	335	43	908	45	250	64	626	33	158	203	2,577
Discount or promotion info.	0	306	24	323	192	759	76	219	101	589	27	164	420	2,360
Being entertaining	179	127	160	187	221	730	74	221	200	490	48	143	882	1,898
Interaction with customers	53	253	183	164	409	542	124	171	212	478	65	126	1,046	1,734
Direct answer to customer	20	286	15	332	9	942	36	259	41	649	7	184	128	2,652
Event news	18	288	18	329	115	836	18	277	7	683	3	188	179	2,601
Social actions	0	306	1	346	7	944	0	295	2	688	0	191	10	2,770
Celebrations of nat. dates	2	304	1	346	33	918	6	289	5	685	5	186	52	2,728
Brand centrality	159	147	39	308	222	729	48	247	94	596	19	172	581	2,199
Campaigns	9	297	25	322	60	891	4	291	43	647	0	191	141	2,639
Sponsorships	0	306	3	344	0	951	0	295	0	690	0	191	3	2,777

In order to understand the factors that affect customers to retweet and favourite marketers' tweets, logistic regression was employed. Logistic regression is a form of regression where the independent factors are categorical or continuous, and the outcome is binary (Akinci et al., 2007). In logistic regression models, many factors influencing dependent variables may be included (Chen et al., 2008). Logistic regression has recently gained more popularity within marketing research. Akinci et al. (2007) contend that as logistic regression generates a better model fit and findings; it is a very useful technique for modelling marketing problems.

Table 4   Logistic regression results for the retweet model

	B	*SE*	*Wald*	*Sig.*
Picture	1.134	0.250	20.504	**0.000**
Video	−0.266	0.280	0.900	0.343
Only text	−0.081	0.231	0.122	0.727
Hyperlink	0.268	0.103	6.797	**0.009**
Hashtag	0.020	0.111	0.031	0.860
Mention	−0.299	0.102	8.554	**0.003**
Length	−0.031	0.102	0.091	0.763
Readability	0.261	0.176	2.197	0.138
Being informative	−0.018	0.110	0.028	0.868
Product or service info.	−0.255	0.128	3.985	**0.046**
company information	0.310	0.193	2.594	0.107
Discount and promotion info.	−0.130	0.147	0.787	0.375
Being entertaining	0.167	0.116	2.046	0.153
Interaction with customers	0.082	0.102	0.649	0.421
Direct answer to customer	−1.427	0.208	47.125	**0.000**
Event news	−0.067	0.206	0.105	0.746
Social actions	−0.390	0.732	0.284	0.594
Celebrations of nat. dates	1.655	0.604	7.510	**0.006**
Brand centrality	0.528	0.152	12.079	**0.001**
Campaigns	0.013	0.260	0.002	0.961
Sponsorships	−1.083	1.295	0.699	0.403
Constant	0.742	0.306	5.877	0.015

Notes: Bold figures: significant variables, *p*-value < 0.05.

The empirical part of the study is divided into two parts according to our dependent variables; both retweet and favourite model are tested with independent variables. The results of the Hosmer and Lemeshow test show that both retweet ($\chi2 = 9.943$, df = 8, $p = 0.269$) and favourite model ($\chi2 = 9.413$, df = 8, $p = 0.309$) adequately fit the data, because the *p*-values of the tests are greater than 0.05 (Hosmer et al., 2013). Using `enter method` for logistic regression, the results for the retweet model illustrate that there are seven predictors that contribute significantly ($p < 0.05$) to the ability of the retweet model, namely – picture (B = 1.134, $p < 0.000$), hyperlink (B = 0 .268, $p < 0.009$), mention (B = −0.299, $p < 0.003$), product or service information (B = −0.255, $p < 0.046$)

direct answer to customer (B = −1.427, $p < 0.000$), celebrations of national dates (B = 1.655, $p < 0.006$), and brand centrality (B = 0.528, $p < 0.001$) (see Table 4). The results suggest that these characteristics have a significant impact on customers` retweet decisions. The MGT that contain such characteristics are spread among Twitter users through retweeting. However, contrary to expectations, being entertaining ($p = 0.153$), discount and promotion information ($p = 0.375$) and campaigns ($p = 0.961$) have no significant effect on consumers` retweet decisions.

On the other hand, the favourite model findings demonstrate that there are ten predictors that contribute significantly ($p < 0.05$) to the ability of the favourite model, namely – picture (B = 1.856, $p < 0.000$), hyperlink (B = 0.209, $p < 0.046$), hashtag (B = −0.472, $p < 0.000$), readability (B = 0.423, $p < 0.015$), product or service information (B = −0.369, $p < 0.005$), being entertaining (B = 0.288, $p < 0.022$), interaction with customers (B = 0.252, $p < 0.016$), direct answer to customer (B = −1.162, $p < 0.000$), brand centrality (B = 0.472, $p < 0.003$), campaigns (B = 0.649, $p < 0.028$) (see Table 5).

Table 5   Logistic regression results for the favourite model

	B	*SE*	*Wald*	*Sig.*
Picture	1.856	0.297	38.977	**0.000**
Video	0.134	0.353	0.145	0.703
Only text	−0.165	0.248	0.440	0.507
Hyperlink	0.209	0.105	3.964	**0.046**
Hashtag	−0.472	0.121	15.210	**0.000**
Mention	0.004	0.105	0.001	0.973
Length	0.146	0.105	1.941	0.164
Readability	0.423	0.175	5.862	**0.015**
Being informative	−0.050	0.113	0.193	0.660
Product or service info.	−0.369	0.131	7.897	**0.005**
Company information	−0.029	0.183	0.025	0.875
Discount and promotion info.	−0.102	0.149	0.469	0.493
Being entertaining	0.288	0.126	5.254	**0.022**
Interaction with customers	0.252	0.104	5.837	**0.016**
Direct answer to customer	−1.162	0.209	30.847	**0.000**
Event news	−0.215	0.209	1.058	0.304
Social actions	−0.729	0.687	1.125	0.289
Celebrations of nat. dates	−0.578	0.324	3.194	0.074
Brand centrality	0.472	0.160	8.706	**0.003**
Campaigns	0.649	0.296	4.807	**0.028**
Sponsorships	−2.629	1.462	3.235	0.072
Constant	0.833	0.324	6.608	0.010

Note: Bold figures: significant variables, *p*-value < 0.05.

According to our results, these ten characteristics are the main drivers for customers to favourite companies` tweets. In other words, the MGT that include such characteristics

are spread among Twitter users through favouriting. Furthermore, both retweet and favourite models have some common results; five characteristics are significant in both models (picture, hyperlink, product or service information, direct answer to customer, brand centrality), while nine of them are not significant (video, only text, length, being informative, company information, discount and promotion information, event news, social actions, sponsorships) (see Table 6).

Table 6   Comparison of the results of retweet and favourite models

	Retweet model	*Favourite model*
Picture	✓	✓
Video	x	x
Only text	x	x
Hyperlink	✓	✓
Hashtag	x	✓
Mention	✓	x
Length	x	x
Readability	x	✓
Being informative	x	x
Product or service info.	✓	✓
Company information	x	x
Discount and promotion info.	x	x
Being entertaining	x	✓
Interaction with customers	x	✓
Direct answer to customer	✓	✓
Event news	x	x
Social actions	x	x
Celebrations of nat. dates	✓	x
Brand centrality	✓	✓
Campaigns	x	✓
Sponsorships	x	x

Notes: ✓ refers to significance; x refers to insignificance.

5   Discussion and conclusions

This study set out with the aim in identifying the characteristics of MGC which lead users to the use of eWOM in social media. The study's aim was accomplished by analysing the posts of six companies (Booking.com, Hostelworld.com, Hotels.com, Lastminute.com, Laterooms.com and Priceline.com) in the tourism industry in the social media site Twitter. The study's findings indicate that pictures, hyperlinks, product or service information, direct answers to customers, and brand centrality are the main attributes that companies' posts should contain to be circulated among consumers. Understanding such attributes is of importance for both theoretical and practical practices. The present study

brings new insights to the antecedents of eWOM and the use of social media for marketing purposes.

Our findings show that, in terms of contextual characteristics, pictures, hyperlinks, hashtags and mentions are the most important drivers for eWOM. Firstly, both retweet and favourite models support that the use of pictures significantly affects customers to engage in eWOM. This suggests that tweets that contain pictures are more likely to be retweeted and favourited by customers. The observed increase in the retweet and favourite rates resulting from pictures could be attributed to the recognition element. Attention-receiving ability is an important component of any marketing activity; pictures have such ability to draw people's attention to posts (MacKenzie, 1986). Secondly, containing a hyperlink was found to affect a customer's intention to adopt eWOM. Tweets that have a hyperlink seem to gain customers' attention more than those that do not. Finally, our results show that eWOM adoption is impacted by hashtags, mentions and readability; signifying that a company receives more attention when it uses hashtags or mentions and when the posts are easy to read. These results correspond to previous research; although the extant researches generalise their results on all tweets, instead of focusing on MGC, previous researches have also identified that having pictures, links and hashtags are important in order to be retweeted (Boyd et al., 2010; Suh et al., 2010; Zarrella, 2009). Other contextual characteristics, such as having video, being text only and the tweet length, on the other hand, have no significant effect on eWOM, since both retweet and favourite models found no significant influence for these characteristics.

The findings also show that information about the products or services significantly affects consumers' intention to adopt eWOM. Both the retweet and favourite models confirm that among the informational characteristics, product or service information is the only attribute that significantly affects retweet and favourite rates. This result suggests that customers pay more attention to posts and tweets that provide information about products or services. A possible explanation for this result may be that customers perceive such tweets to be useful since they might provide, for example, guidelines, tips, or instructions. This is in line with previous researches that reported that eWOM usefulness plays a significant role in adopting eWOM information (Liang et al., 2013; Yang, 2013a).

Contrary to expectations, this study did not find a significant effect of discount and promotion information on the adoption of eWOM information. It appears that consumers are not affected by this kind of information. Nevertheless, the findings of the current study do not support the previous research, which argues that eWOM adoption is influenced by discount and promotion information (Nusair et al., 2010). A possible explanation for this result is that price discount may be associated with the perception of low quality products or services (Grewal et al., 1998). As a consequence of investigating eWOM adoption in a tourism context, such perception of low quality might have a greater impact on customers, and therefore, may not influence their information adoption behaviour.

With regard to entertainment characteristics, the present study shows that being entertaining, interaction with customers, direct answers to customers and celebrations of national dates have a significant effect on eWOM adoption. Particularly, customers tend to engage more in eWOM when a company gives direct answers to them on Twitter. This seems to be a key driver for a customer's engagement in eWOM as it was supported by both the retweet and favourite models. In addition, the result regarding being entertaining supports previous researches that reported the engagement of online users is greatly

affected by enjoyment (Cheung and Lee, 2012; Okazaki, 2009; Schindler and Bickart, 2005). Moreover, this study reveals that customers are interested in companies' posts and tweets that celebrate national dates.

Finally, drawing on brand characteristics, this study indicates a significant impact of brand centrality and campaigns on eWOM adoption. Both the retweet and favourite models disclose that customers' adoption of eWOM is significantly affected by brand-focused posts. Furthermore, posting about campaigns was also found to affect eWOM adoption, but this result was only supported by the favourite model. Lastly, both the retweet and favourite models found no significant relationship between announcing sponsorships of companies and eWOM adoption; customers do not demonstrate any reaction to these posts, neither retweeting nor favouriting.

6   Academic and managerial implications

The paper provides considerable amount of contributions toward the literature of eWOM. First, the paper provides a sufficient previous research that can be used in further studies to develop better understanding for the models describing effective MGC. Second, the paper provides an up-to-date empirical and theoretical literature review on eWOM and its impact on marketing which can be useful for further studies. On the other hand, in terms of practicality, the paper highlighted many aspects and features of online posting which are critical marketing elements that companies need in today's online advertising world. Results can help managers and marketers to improve marketing strategies through better understanding of customers' preferences.

7   Limitations and suggestions for future research

Although the findings of this study have provided a significant contribution on MGC and new insights on eWOM in social media, the results should be considered in the light of the Twitter context. Further studies could apply this study to other social media sites to extend and clarify the picture of MGC in social media. Additionally, the data were gathered from six pure-play e-commerce companies in the tourism sector; in future research, the other sectors can be examined, or the posts of bricks and mortar companies could be tested to see if the results vary.

Lastly, the aim of this study was to identify the common characteristics of retweeted and favourited MGC posted on Twitter; therefore the dependent variables were coded by putting either zero or one, which means the tweet is retweeted or not and favourited or not. For further studies, tweets or posts could be tested by considering the level of response through coding the tweets with their exact RT and FAV numbers. Nevertheless, this study provides useful implications for marketers and presents new possibilities for researchers.

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