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The Audience Response to Different Referral Reward Programs' Designs in Social Networking Sites

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Master in Marketing

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ISCTE Business School

November 2021



BUSINESS
SCHOOL

Department of Marketing, Operations and General Management

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*“Everything will become clear to you
When you see things through another’s eyes
Everything will become clear to you
Whatever’s meant for you, you will find.”*

Phil Collins –Transformation (Brother Bear soundtrack)

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And as you have always said:

“I am the M-A-S-T-E-R of my fate.

I am the captain of my soul!”

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The biggest thank you!

Resumo

A crescente conectividade entre consumidores, a gradual descoberta do poder das recomendações, e o enriquecimento das relações marca-consumidor por meio de Sites de Redes Sociais, levaram a um crescente interesse em torno do passa-a-palavra eletrônico.

Consequentemente, os profissionais de marketing começaram a adotar estratégias para estimular e ampliar essa poderosa ferramenta. Uma técnica comum é a oferta de incentivos (por exemplo, recompensas). A literatura mostra que a estrutura de um programa de passa-a-palavra eletrônico incentivado, nomeadamente, de Programas de Recompensa por Referência, é fundamental para a eficácia dos mesmos.

Reconhecendo que, para serem eficazes, os Programas de Referência por Recompensa precisam, tanto da iniciativa do transmissor, como da adesão do recetor, esta dissertação explora a perspetiva e o papel do recetor nestes programas, em Sites de Redes Sociais.

Deste modo, o seu principal objetivo é analisar o impacto de diferentes alocações de recompensas e forças das ligações (i.e., relação entre o transmissor e o recetor) nas respostas dos recetores a Programas de Referência por Recompensa.

Para tal, o Modelo de Conhecimento de Persuasão foi utilizado a fim de analisar três indicadores: credibilidade da recomendação, atitude perante a marca e intenção de compra.

Para extrair conclusões relevantes, foram desenvolvidos um modelo conceptual e um conjunto de hipóteses, com base numa revisão da literatura que aborda os principais conceitos, teorias e modelos que sustentam a presente pesquisa. A posteriori, foi realizado um questionário online, que reuniu 526 respostas. Por último, os resultados foram discutidos e as implicações teóricas e práticas foram apresentadas.

Palavras-chave: passa-a-palavra eletrônico incentivado, programas de referência por recompensa, alocação da recompensa, força do laço, resposta dos recetores, Modelo de Conhecimento de Persuasão

Sistema de Classificação JEL:

M30 – Marketing and Advertising: General

M31 - Marketing and Advertising: Marketing

Abstract

The growing connectivity of customers through Social Networking Sites (SNSs), the increasing acknowledgment of the power of online reviews, and the enrichment of brand-consumer relations online have led to a rise in interest around electronic word of mouth (eWOM).

These realizations led marketers to embrace strategies to stimulate and amplify eWOM, and one common technique is the delivery incentives (e.g., rewards). Expanding research show that the design of incentivized eWOM programs, namely Referral Reward Programs (RRPs), is expected to determine the overall effectiveness of those programs.

To be successful, RRP need a high likelihood of referral from the referral provider and a high receptivity from the referral receiver. Thus, this thesis further examines the recipient's perspective and role in RRP in Social Networking Sites.

The main goal of this dissertation is to analyze the impact of different reward allocations and tie strength, i.e., the relationship between the recommender and the receiver, on eWOM receivers' responses to RRP.

To do so, this thesis drew upon the Persuasion Knowledge Model to analyze these relations, mainly focusing on three RRP outcomes: review credibility, brand attitude, and purchase intentions.

To extract relevant conclusions, a research model and hypothesis were developed, based on a previously elaborated literature review, containing the main concepts, theories, and models that hold the present research. An experimental design was conducted employing an online questionnaire to test the research model, which gathered 526 responses. Finally, the results were discussed, and both theoretical and practical implications were deduced.

Keywords: incentivized electronic word of mouth, referral reward programs, reward allocation, tie strength, receivers' responses, Persuasion Knowledge Model

JEL Classification System:

M30 – Marketing and Advertising: General

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Index

Acknowledgements	iii
Resumo.....	v
Abstract	vii
Index.....	ix
List Of Figures	xiii
List Of Tables.....	xiv
List Of Abbreviations.....	xv
Introduction	1
1.1. Research Problematic	1
1.2. Research Questions.....	5
1.3. Goals.....	6
1.4. Structure.....	6
Literature Review	7
2.1. From Traditional Word Of Mouth To Electronic Word Of Mouth	7
2.2. Electronic Word Of Mouth.....	7
2.2.1. Definition.....	7
2.2.2. Electronic Word Of Mouth Process.....	8
2.3. Social Networking Sites	9
2.4. Incentives.....	10
2.4.1. Definition And Types Of Incentives.....	10
2.5. Incentivized eWOM Programs	10
2.5.1. Referral Reward Programs	11
2.5.2. Receivers' Responses To Incentivized eWOM.....	12
2.6. Persuasion Knowledge Model	13
2.7. Social Ties	14
2.7.1. Tie Strength	14

2.7.1.1. Strong Ties.....	15
2.7.1.2. Weak Ties	16
2.8. Review Credibility.....	16
2.9. Brand Attitude	17
2.10. Purchase Intentions.....	17
Conceptual Framework And Research Hypothesis.....	19
3.1. Conceptual Framework.....	19
3.2. Reward Allocation	20
3.3. Social Ties	21
3.4. The Inference Of Manipulative Intent	22
3.5. Research Hypothesis.....	23
Methodology	25
4.1. Research Approach.....	25
4.2. Research Method And Design	25
4.3. Sample	26
4.3.1. Population And Sample Design.....	26
4.4. Data Collection	27
4.4.1. Procedure	27
4.4.2. Experimental Procedure.....	27
4.4.3. Questionnaire's Design	28
4.4.4. Manipulations For The Independent Variables	28
4.5. Measures	31
4.5.1. Additional Measures.....	33
4.6. Data Analysis.....	33
4.7. Data Preparation And Treatment.....	33
Results And Data Analysis.....	35
5.1. Measuring Instruments	35
5.2. Sample Characterization.....	36

5.2.1. Social Networking Sites Usage Characterization	37
5.2.2. Electronic Word Of Mouth Engagement On SNSs Characterization.....	39
5.3. Restaurant Involvement	39
5.4. Scenario Realism	40
5.5. Manipulation Checks	40
5.6. Dimensionality Analysis.....	41
5.7. Reliability Analysis	43
5.8. Comparability of Groups	44
5.9. Normality Test.....	46
5.10. Hypothesis Testing	47
Discussion, Theoretical Contributions And Managerial Implications	57
6.1. Discussion.....	57
6.2. Theoretical Contributions	59
6.3. Managerial Implications	60
Conclusion, Limitations And Recommendations For Future Research.....	61
7.1. Conclusion	61
7.2. Limitations And Recommendations For Future Research	62
References	65
Appendixes.....	83
Appendix A - Questionnaire In English	83
Appendix B - Questionnaire In Portuguese	95
Appendix C – Scales And Items In Portuguese And English.....	107
Appendix D – Questionnaire Flow	108
Appendix E – Descriptive Statistics	109
Appendix F – Scenario Realism ANOVA.....	110
Appendix G – Manipulation Checks	110
Appendix H – Principal Component Analysis	111
Appendix I – Comparability Tests Between Groups.....	113

Appendix J - Hypothesis Testing For H1a), H1b) And H1c)	114
Appendix K - Hypothesis Testing For H2a), H2b) And H2c).....	117
Appendix L - Hypothesis Testing For H3a), H3b) And H3c)	120
Appendix M - Hypothesis Testing For H4	123
Appendix N - Hypothesis Testing For H5	124
Appendix O - Hypothesis Testing For H6.....	125

List Of Figures

Figure 3.1 - Conceptual Framework	19
Figure 4.1 - João’s Facebook Posts Of The “4Food” Review For The Reward Allocation Schemes.....	29
Figure 5.1 - Distribution Of The Sample By Gender	36
Figure 5.2 - Distribution Of The Sample By Age Group.....	36
Figure 5.3 - Distribution Of The Sample By Occupation	37
Figure 5.4 - Distribution Of The Sample By Education	37
Figure 5.5 - Distribution Of The Sample By Time Spent On Social Networking Sites Per Day	38
Figure 5.6 - Distribution Of The Sample By Most Used Social Networking Site.....	38
Figure 5.7 - Distribution Of The Sample By Having/No Facebook Account.....	39

List Of Tables

Table 4.1 - Groups And Stimulus For Each Group.....	26
Table 4.2 - Reward Allocation Schemes Stimulus' Descriptions	30
Table 4.3 - Tie Strength Stimulus' Descriptions.....	30
Table 4.4 - Scales And Items For The Manipulation Checks	31
Table 4.5 - Scales And Respective Items Of The Constructs	32
Table 5.1 - KMO And Bartlett's Test S For The 2 nd PCA.....	42
Table 5.2 - Total Variance Explained For The 2 nd PC.....	42
Table 5.3 - PCA Values From The Rotated Component Matrix Using Varimax Rotation For The 2 nd PCA	43
Table 5.4 - Cronbach's Alpha Values For The Constructs	44
Table 5.5 - Control Variables To Test Comparability Between The Groups	44
Table 5.6 - Kruskal-Wallis And Chi-Square Hypothesis Test Summary	46
Table 5.7 - Tests Of Normality	46
Table 5.8 - Pearson Correlation Coefficients	51
Table 5.9 - Simple Linear Regression Model Summary IMI --> BA	53
Table 5.10 - Simple Linear Regression Model Summary IMI --> CRE.....	54
Table 5.11 - Simple Linear Regression Model Summary IMI --> PI	55
Table 5.12 - Research Hypothesis Summary Validation	56

List Of Abbreviations

BA	Brand Attitude
CLT	Central Limit Theorem
CRE	Review Credibility
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
ELM	Elaboration Likelihood Model
ENG	eWOM engagement on SNSs
eWOM	Electronic Word Of Mouth
IMI	Inference of Manipulative Intent
MIM	Motive Inference Model
OSN	Online Social Network
PC	Principal Component
PCA	Principal Component Analysis
PI	Purchase Intentions
PKM	Persuasion Knowledge Model
RA	Reward Allocation
RI	Restaurant Involvement
RRP	Referral Reward Program
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
SET	Social Exchange Theory
SNS	Social Networking Site
SPSS	Statistical for the Social Sciences
SR	Scenario Realism
SST	Social Support Theory
sWOM	Social Word Of Mouth
TPB	Theory of Planned Behavior
TS	Tie Strength
WOM	Word Of Mouth

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1. Research Problematic

Introduced in the literature for more than six decades, word of mouth (WOM) is a powerful and influential communication channel (Allsop et al., 2007). In recent years, the growing proliferation of digital technologies, namely the worldwide spread of the Internet, has transformed the way consumers search for information, purchase products and services, communicate and interact with one another, enabling them to create and share their consumption-related opinions on a wide range of online channels. These and other transformations led to the evolution of the traditional word of mouth concept into electronic word of mouth (Chan & Ngai, 2011; Dellarocas, 2003).

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or company, that is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 39).

Since consumers can more easily share and access opinions, feedback, recommendations, and complaints about a specific product or service, electronic word of mouth has become an important communication tool, leading to consumers' empowerment (S. J. Kim et al., 2016; Rialti et al., 2017; S. Verma & Yadav, 2021). It easily allows them to interact with one another, exchange information related to products and services, and make purchase decisions through computer-mediated conversations, without social, temporal, or geographic boundaries (Chen et al., 2011; Fu et al., 2015; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; S. J. Kim et al., 2016).

Therefore, the importance of this concept has been well recognized in business since it has proved to profoundly influence and shape customers' preferences, behaviors, expectations, and overall decision-making processes (e.g., Allsop et al., 2007; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; East et al., 2007; Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014). Consumers consider WOM as more credible and trustworthy than other marketing communication channels, as studies show that it can be more reliable and persuasive than companies' messages (e.g., advertising) (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Gruen et al., 2006; Loureiro et al., 2017; S. J. Park et al., 2018; D. Smith et al., 2005; Trusov et al., 2009).

Accordingly, a recent Nielsen research revealed that 22% of consumers claim that they will not make a purchase after reading one piece of negative eWOM, and this percentage increases to 59% if they read more than four negative reviews (NielsenIQ, 2020).

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has substantially increased the volume and the recognized importance of customer product/service assessment as, for example, in the US, online reviews grew 87% from December 2019 to December 2020 (McKinsey & Company, 2021).

Giving its exponential growth, importance, and influence among consumers, marketers are paying increasing attention to promoting, managing, and allocating larger budgets to it within their marketing mix communications (Ang et al., 2021; Bulte et al., 2018; John Kim et al., 2016; Zhu & Zhang, 2010). This being said, marketers have been developing different proactive strategies to leverage the generation, volume, and quality of online WOM, namely, by offering incentives (i.e., incentivized eWOM) (Burtch et al., 2018; Chae et al., 2017; Zhao et al., 2012). Incentives have been gradually studied as one important driver of human behavior and, therefore, are considered an external motivational factor influencing eWOM generation (Gerrath & Usrey, 2021; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Incentives (1) play a crucial role in boosting the volume of WOM online, (2) increase eWOM positivity, and (3) deeply influence consumers' attitudes, behaviors, and emotions (Petrescu et al., 2018; Shah et al., 1998).

However, research on incentivized eWOM is generally rare, conflicting, and primarily qualitative in nature (Ahrens et al., 2013; Orsingher & Wirtz, 2018), especially in Referral Reward Programs, shortly referred as RRP (Ang et al., 2021). Referral Reward Programs are one type of incentivized eWOM, composed of firm-managed strategies in which companies offer a reward to existing customers who make a (successful) recommendation and attract new ones (Schmitt et al., 2011). Because of its potential for acquisition, in attracting new customers, and retention, in improving preservation by rewarding existing customers, RRP is an increasingly popular method of stimulating referrals (Ang et al., 2021; Bulte et al., 2018). As so, they are proved to lead to higher customers' lifetime value and firms' profitability (Q. Wang et al., 2018). Furthermore, RRP is considered one of the most valuable marketing strategies (Forbes, 2019) as they encompass endless advantages. RRP can (1) strengthen relationships between consumers and brands; (2) build a strong referral network and create a community of brand followers, (3) produce buzz around the companies' business; (4) generate good quality and high quantity leads, (5) increase trust; and (6) consolidate brand loyalty.

On top of that, RRP is suitable for a massive number of industries, as they are vast and diverse programs (Ahrens et al., 2013). As so, the key to implement effective RRP is the design

of the referral reward (Wolters et al., 2020), namely, by considering reward allocation. Reward allocation can essentially assume three structures: (1) offer the reward mainly to the recommending customer, (2) offer the reward to the receiver of the recommendation, or (3) offer the reward to both (Ryu & Feick, 2007). However, only a few studies have deepened the literature regarding the optimal design of Referral Reward Programs (Jung et al., 2021), namely on Social Networking Sites (SNSs).

Social Networking Sites, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube, are channels where consumers can connect, create and share their opinions and experiences about brands, products, or services, thereby building and maintaining relationships (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). These channels have become increasingly popular, receiving exponential attention, specifically during the COVID-19 panorama (Q. Wang et al., 2018; Woolley & Sharif, 2021).

Despite its popularity in practice, according to different authors, there are still some areas to explore regarding RRP in SNSs, namely, how RRP programs affect brand attitude (Ryu & Feick, 2007; Tuk et al., 2009), how different factors (e.g., source characteristics) moderate those effects (Pongjit & Beise-Zee, 2015), and how different reward allocations can damage the persuasiveness of these programs in the audience's perspective (Jung et al., 2021).

Moreover, up to date, most of the prior marketing literature focuses on the impact of incentives on the reviewers' perspective (e.g., Bialogorsky et al., 2001; Ryu & Feick, 2007; Schmitt et al., 2011) namely, how incentives can influence eWOM creation (John Kim et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the creation of eWOM is not, by itself, sufficient to ensure effective inorganic eWOM programs, such as RRP. The recipient of the incentivized online recommendation, i.e., the receiver of the message, ultimately determines the success or failure of the recommendation and is, consequently, a critical component of the exchange (Ang et al., 2021). As a result, research on how incentives affect eWOM readers, particularly, how rewards impact the acceptance of incentivized recommendations, is vital (Sciandra, 2019).

Additionally, customers acquired from RRP, i.e., converted referral receivers, are proved to be valuable for companies as they exhibit higher margins and lower churns when compared to customers acquired through other means (Bulte et al., 2018). Moreover, following Social Media Today (2018), these customers (1) tend to spend 25% more than customers acquired by other media; (2) refer to someone else the company's products/services three times more often, and (3) are 54% more likely to make a repeat purchase.

Although some previous research provided valuable conceptual and empirical insights into the audience's responses to incentivized eWOM, there is still a lack of understanding on

receivers' responses to these programs (Godes et al., 2005; Hu & Zhang, 2021; John Kim et al., 2016; Reimer & Benkenstein, 2018).

Given that, to be effective, RRP's not only need a high likelihood of referral from the eWOM provider, but also a high receptivity from the receiver, this thesis further examines the recipient's perspective and role in RRP's in Social Networking Sites.

Consequently, this research aims to expand the understanding of the impact of Referral Reward Programs in the perceptions of eWOM readers regarding different reward allocations. In particular, how they influence the receivers' attitudes towards the recommended brand, the credibility attributed to the referral, and the purchase intentions regarding the recommended product/service, in Social Networking Sites.

This thesis will also explore the role of a social factor, tie strength, in these relations. Tie strength, i.e., the relationship between the decision-maker and the information sender, strongly influences the value and utility that consumers recognize in different pieces of eWOM (Berger & Schwartz, 2011; Chu & Kim, 2011; Koo, 2016; Steffes & Burgee, 2009). Different authors argue that tie strength is one of the most significant social factors influencing eWOM (e.g., Choi et al., 2017; Wallace et al., 2012), therefore receiving increasing attention (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Yoon, 2012). Recommendations can be created and shared by people who have strong (e.g., family) or weak ties (e.g., acquaintances) with the consumer (Steffes & Burgee, 2009). Considering that consumers can access various kinds of Referral Reward Programs provided by different ties (strong and weak), it is fundamental for companies to understand the impact that these different relationship's strengths have on customers perceptions and behavior, i.e., how tie strength affect how eWOM readers perceive incentivized messages.

This thesis developed a conceptual framework based on the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) to investigate the mechanisms underlying these effects. The PKM mainly focuses on understanding how knowledge of persuasion tactics and ulterior (biased) motives affects consumers' responses to those persuasion attempts (Friestad & Wright, 1994, 1995).

As one key construct in PKM, inference of manipulative intent (IMI) refers to the "consumer inferences that the advertiser is attempting to persuade by inappropriate, unfair, or manipulative means" (Campbell, 1995, p. 228). When consumers are aware of a persuasive attempt, the IMI increases, leading to negative outcomes, such as reactance, negative brand evaluations, and damage of communicator-receiver relations (Lunardo et al., 2016).

That being said, this research not only aims to understand the effects of reward allocation and tie strength on receivers' responses to online RRP's, namely regarding brand attitude, review credibility, and purchase intentions but also examine how reward allocation and tie strength can

activate the inference of manipulative intent. Moreover, it aims to explain how the inference of manipulative intent can affect RRP's persuasiveness.

Additionally, it is worth highlighting that offering rewards, i.e., extrinsic incentives, can exert two divergent influences on referral generation. On the one hand, rewards may boost referrals through economic or social compensations in exchange for the time and effort spent making referrals (John Kim et al., 2016). On the other hand, rewards may inhibit referrals by raising socially damaging concerns (Orsingher & Wirtz, 2018). By introducing a compensation, referrals may lead to recipients' suspicion of ulterior motives, damaging relationships between the referrer and the recipient (Wirtz et al., 2013). Subsequently, existing customers (i.e., referrers) may opt not to engage in these programs to avoid that.

Answers to these questions provide companies with a better understanding of (1) whom and how to target as referrers and receivers, and (2) which RRP's design minimizes the inference of manipulative intent, that will generate higher levels of brand attitude, credibility, and overall purchase actions.

1.2. Research Questions

This study examines the reader's perceptions of online Referral Reward Programs by manipulating reward allocation and tie strength, i.e., the relationships between the recommender and the reader. Additionally, it studies how these perceptions can activate the inference of manipulative intent and consequently affect receivers' overall attitude towards the recommended brand (brand attitude), the message's credibility (review credibility), and, finally, purchase intentions. Therefore, the following research questions were elaborated:

***RQ1:** How do different reward allocation programs affect receivers' responses to these programs (i.e., attitudes toward the recommended brand and purchase intentions)?*

***RQ2:** How do different reward allocation programs affect the receiver's inference of manipulative intent from recommenders?*

***RQ3:** How does tie strength influence the impact of different reward allocation programs on the receiver's brand attitudes, purchase intentions, and inference of manipulative intent?*

***RQ4:** How does the inference of manipulative intent further impact the different RRP's outcomes: brand attitudes, review credibility, and purchase intentions?*

1.3. Goals

The above reinforces the dissertation's object of study by emphasizing the need to understand how different Referral Reward Programs' designs impact brand attitudes, inference of manipulative intent, review credibility and, consequently, shape purchase intentions.

Recognizing the importance of this area, this dissertation focuses on the impact of different Referral Reward Programs on receivers' perspectives and consecutive courses of actions. The aim is to understand how different reward allocations and tie strengths can affect the persuasiveness of these programs by analyzing the attitude towards the recommended brand, the credibility of the referral and the intentions to purchase the recommended product/service, drawing upon the Persuasion Knowledge Model.

The findings of this study contribute to the theoretical advancement of eWOM marketing by analyzing the conditions under which the effectiveness of incentivized eWOM marketing increases on SNSs. As practical implications, it will provide insights regarding how marketers can develop sponsored brand programs and guide eWOM agents on these social networks.

1.4. Structure

To develop and deepen this relevant theme, the present report is divided into seven main chapters. The first chapter contains the main motivations that justify the chosen topic and its practical and theoretical relevance. It also presents the research questions, goals, and structure.

Subsequently, in the second chapter, a literature review is exposed regarding the principal concepts explored. Electronic word of mouth, its evolution, and process, incentivized electronic word of mouth, Referral Reward Programs, the impact of rewards in the RRP's receivers, tie strength, review credibility, brand attitude, and purchase intentions, as well as some theories and models from prior literature, are all the topics covered in this chapter.

This chapter serves as basis for chapter three, which consists of a conceptual framework, where the research model and formulated hypothesis are exposed. Chapter four exhibits the adequate methodology for the study in question. The methodology encompasses the research approach, method, sample, detailed description of the data collection procedure, questionnaire design, adopted measures, and data analysis processes. This leads to chapter five, where the results obtained throughout the dissertation process are presented, as well as their assessment and research hypothesis validation. The sixth chapter contains a brief discussion of the results, theoretical contributions, and managerial applications. Lastly, conclusions, limitations and future research recommendations topics around the researched area are presented.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.1. From Traditional Word Of Mouth To Electronic Word Of Mouth

Word of mouth (WOM) is one of the oldest and most established ways of conveying information, hence defined in numerous ways (Dellarocas, 2003). Early scholars like Arndt (1967) described WOM as "oral, person-to-person communication between a perceived non-commercial communicator and a receiver concerning a brand, a product, or a service offered for sale" (p. 190). Westbrook (1987) defined word of mouth as the exchange of information (positive or negative) between consumers about particular goods, services (i.e., ownership, usage, and characteristics) or their sellers. It was also documented as "informal communication between private parties concerning evaluations of goods and services" (Anderson, 1998, p. 6). Such interpersonal communication provides access to a wide range of information related to the consumption of products, services, brands, and/or sellers that goes beyond companies' content, like advertising (J. Brown et al., 2007).

The evolution of digital technologies, mainly Web 2.0 and the Internet, allowed consumers to access and engage with an endless variety of WOM messages provided by a global community of users online (S. Verma & Yadav, 2021), in which it is fundamental to highlight the increasing interactions in Social Networking Sites (SNSs) (Dellarocas, 2003; Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006). These changes shifted the consumer communication paradigm and the consumer journey and revitalized the concept of word of mouth (Choi et al., 2017; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In this regard, a new form of word of mouth was raised: electronic word of mouth.

2.2. Electronic Word Of Mouth

2.2.1. Definition

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) was defined by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or a company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (p. 39). It is a communication somehow related to consumption, generated by consumers through digital tools, whose primary target is other consumers (Babić Rosario et al., 2020). It is an

interactive approach for consumers to express their feelings and exchange information about products, services, and brands (Baker et al., 2016; Li et al., 2020). Also known as consumer-consumer interactions (Yadav et al., 2013), eWOM is a dynamic process, as the information is spread and exchanged spontaneously online (Bhandari & Rodgers, 2018).

It can have diverse formats (e.g., opinions, feedback, suggestions, recommendations, comments, reviews, complaints) and may occur in different online platforms, such as, blogs, review websites, discussion forums, virtual communities, emails, chat rooms, instant messaging media, and especially in Social Networking Sites (Baker et al., 2016; Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Sohaib et al., 2020).

Due to its virtual foundation, eWOM can be expressed in different ways; primarily via text information, but also through rich multimedia such as images, videos, and animations, throughout all the world without geographic boundaries (Chen et al., 2011; Dellarocas et al., 2010; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). eWOM messages can vary in volume and valence (C. M. K. Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Volume is the total number of eWOM interactions (Liu, 2006). Valence represents the nature of eWOM communications and can either be positive, negative (Liu, 2006), or neutral. Positive eWOM (PWOM) is usually characterized by a pleasant, vivid experience in the form of recommendation, while negative eWOM (NWOM) usually reflects complaining, unpleasant, or depreciative descriptions (Anderson, 1998; Mauri & Minazzi, 2013).

2.2.2. Electronic Word Of Mouth Process

Babić Rosario et al. (2020) conceptualized eWOM as a non-linear process with three main stages: creation, exposure, and evaluation. Creation involves the generation and spreading of consumers' original content and sharing a companies' or other consumers' content.

For more than two decades, researchers and practitioners have been studying the antecedents and motivations for eWOM creation (e.g., Berger, 2014; De Angelis et al., 2012; De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; J. C. Wang & Chang, 2013). Different approaches have been emerging, as well as theories and frameworks, such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), in which the main goal is to anticipate and understand human behavioral intentions and behaviors focusing on three main variables: attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). More recent research introduced other theories, such as the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), proposed by Ryan and Deci (2000), which distinguishes extrinsic from intrinsic motivations. Intrinsic motivation is doing an activity simply for its enjoyment or interest, for no other reasons than personal fulfillment and

gratification, whereas extrinsic motivation is goal-orientated, meaning it is done to attain some separable outcome (Kankanhalli et al., 2005; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Motivations can also be distinguished between organic and inorganic/incentivized. Organic factors motivate consumers to create content voluntarily, whereas incentivized promote this behavior in exchange for a monetary or non-monetary incentive (Ahrens et al., 2013; Cheung & Lee, 2012; Jin & Huang, 2014; King et al., 2014).

After the content is created by eWOM senders, other consumers are exposed by it (eWOM receivers). Exposure can either be accidental, if the consumer receives the information without searching (e.g. company's marketing campaign) or voluntarily, when the consumer actively searches for it (Hildebrand & Schlager, 2019). Consumers seek exposure to obtain and compare product-related information, reduce perceived risk and pre-purchase evaluation time and effort (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006), receive social approval, validate information, influence others, or as a leisure activity, among others (Moe & Trusov, 2011; C. Park & Lee, 2009; Zhu & Zhang, 2010).

Lastly, consumers evaluate the eWOM received. Evaluation strongly depends on the sender and the receiver but also on other variables, such as the message characteristics (e.g., detail, helpfulness, objectivity) (Babić Rosario et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2014).

2.3. Social Networking Sites

Every day consumers establish and deepen relationships by interacting with each other online, particularly on Social Networking Sites (Gvili & Levy, 2018). Social Networking Sites (SNSs), such as Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn, are Web-based free social media applications that allow the foundation of a social network, where users can create user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Schamari & Schaefer, 2015). SNSs are virtual communities where users create individual public or semi-public profiles, interact with real-life "friends," and expand their networks based on shared interests (Berger, 2014).

These sites are characterized by a visible display of (1) connections (i.e., contacts, fans, friends), (2) the information posted by the profile owner, which occurs directly on the profile page (e.g. images, text), and (3) groups or interest areas of which a profile owner is a member (Chatterjee, 2015; Trusov et al., 2009).

In SNSs, consumers can generate, access, and spread uncountable word of mouth messages online (Zaglia, 2013), also called social word of mouth (sWOM). Once SNSs are recognized as

a powerful and effective tool, facilitating customers' interactions, these platforms have been attracting marketers' and researchers' attention (Gvili & Levy, 2018).

2.4. Incentives

2.4.1. Definition And Types Of Incentives

According to the Economic Theory of motivation, rational beings are utility driven. This implies that to maximize their utility, they get motivated to conduct a particular action when the expected benefits associated with it overdo the anticipated costs (Shah et al., 1998). Thus, in general, receiving a reward or incentive will shift the cost-benefit ratio of action and increase individuals' motivation to perform that particular action.

In consonance with the Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976; Homans, 1958; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), one of the most applied theories in explaining information exchange in online reviews (e.g., Cheung & Lee, 2012), individuals evaluate alternative paths to achieve the best outcome at the lowest cost. SET states that an individual exchanges resources with other individuals out of the desire to receive something contact, with the primary goal of maximizing benefits and reducing costs (Blau, 1964). These benefits can be tangible (e.g., monetary incentives) and intangible (e.g., expected reciprocity, reputation, influence, and visibility in the community and altruism).

Incentives can have several formats, varying from extrinsic to intrinsic. Focusing on the extrinsic, these rewards can either be monetary or non-monetary (Bartol & Srivastava, 2002). Monetary or economic rewards are material rewards that add economic value (i.e., financial compensation) to who consume them individually (Knoke, 1988) (e.g., coupons, discounts, prizes, free samples, or remuneration). In contrast, non-monetary rewards are reinforcements to act according to social norms or principles to achieve a common goal without an economic face value. They can be in-kind rewards (e.g., gifts) and symbolic rewards (e.g., charity donations). Studies like D. Wang et al. (2017) distinguished monetary and social rewards, where social/normative rewards are verbal praise, praise, status, altruism, and others.

2.5. Incentivized eWOM Programs

Applied in the online context, members anticipate benefits and costs, such as time and effort, when participating and engaging in online communities (Garnefeld et al., 2012). To mitigate those costs, essentially coming from the creation of eWOM, firms have developed a variety of

incentive strategies, the so-called "incentivized" eWOM. These strategies primarily aim to compensate and stimulate senders and receivers (Ang et al., 2021; Libai et al., 2010). Unlike organic eWOM, firms deliberately stimulate and actively monitor this form of firm-encouraged, consumer-to-consumer WOM (also known as amplified WOM) (Libai et al., 2010). Following Petrescu et al. (2018), incentivized reviews are written by consumers who obtained the product for free or at a considerable discount from the manufacturers, retailers, or third-party companies (i.e., sellers) in exchange for an "honest and unbiased review".

Haenlein and Libai (2017) highlighted three main types of incentivized eWOM programs (i.e., an initiative provided by companies to trigger word of mouth by incentivizing targeted customers): online recommendation programs, which encourage incentivized consumers to spread WOM through their social or broader networks; seeding programs, which uses customers (seeds) to try products to accelerate and expand the growth of those products among other consumers; and Referral Reward Programs.

2.5.1. Referral Reward Programs

Referral Reward Programs (RRPs) are a form of incentivized eWOM, which encourage existing/current customers to refer, i.e., to make recommendations to help the company acquiring and retaining new potential customers (Biyalogorsky et al., 2001). According to Schmitt et al. (2011), these programs have three distinctive characteristics. First, they are actively and deliberately initiated, managed, and controlled by companies, which does not occur in organic eWOM messages, usually spontaneously created by consumers. Second, the goal is to use existing firm-consumer social connections to reach non-existing conversations. Third, to do that, companies design reward strategies to prize consumers for bringing new clients.

RRPs have gradually been considered an attractive acquisition tool that not only aims to attract new customers but also to maintain and increase existing relations and loyalty with actual customers (Ang et al., 2021; Orsingher & Wirtz, 2018; Wolters et al., 2020). Moreover, different researchers agree that encouraging customers to make referrals is an effective way to improve customer acquisition rates, reduce defection rates and boost customer lifetime value (Bulte et al., 2018; Gorlier & Michel, 2020; Ryu & Feick, 2007).

Incentivized eWOM programs design, namely e-referral incentive programs, consider three key parameters: incentive type (mainly monetary or non-monetary), incentive size, and incentive scheme. Incentive size corresponds to the face value or price of the given reward (Orsingher & Wirtz, 2018). Some authors defend that larger incentives positively affect referral

likelihood (e.g., Ryu & Feick, 2007), while others believe that they have either no impact or a negative effect in incentivized eWOM programs effectiveness (Wirtz et al., 2013).

The reward scheme determines how the incentive is divided between the inviter and the invitee. In referral programs, once an existing customer is making the recommendation and a new customer receiving the referral, companies can opt for one of the three generic designs: reward the recommender/existing customer ("*reward me*"), reward the receiver/new customer ("*reward you*"), or *reward both* recommender and receiver ("*reward both*") (Ryu & Feick, 2007). As mentioned above, there is no consensus regarding which of the three schemes would maximize incentivized eWOM's effectiveness (Jung et al., 2021; Pongjit & Beise-Zee, 2015; Q. Wang et al., 2018), as they are proved to differently impact referrers' perceptions and opinions regarding both the recommender and the program (Jung et al., 2021). From the three, *reward you* is the least adopted scheme, opposing to the *reward me*, which is the most used by companies. Following the Rational Choice Theory, the reward should be solely given to the recommender once, as an existing customer, is the one responsible for generating the referral who can lead the company into new customers (Ahrens et al., 2013). Following the Equity Theory (Walster et al., 1973), *reward both* is recognized as the optimal scheme once individuals value fairness and equity in their interactions, and the fact that both inviter and invitee are rewarded balances both attractiveness and social impression for existing and new customers (Q. Wang et al., 2018).

2.5.2. Receivers' Responses To Incentivized eWOM

As mentioned above, only a few studies explain how readers respond to incentive-based online reviews, although the main focus has been on RRP. Tuk et al. (2009) examined the impact of relationship factors on consumers' responses towards rewarded referrals, specifically demonstrating some conditions wherein those are negatively accepted by receivers. Verlegh et al. (2013) have further investigated this topic by examining whether, how, and under which conditions a Referral Reward Program affects receivers' responses. By incorporating the Motive Inference Model (MIM), this study concluded that individuals take into consideration different pieces of information about the recommender, their current and past behaviors, and the situational constraints in which the review was processed further to evaluate both the recommender and the reviewed product. Pongjit and Beise-Zee (2015) provided further light on the effects of non-monetary incentives on the brand attitude of eWOM recipients, according to consumers' expertise and relationships with the receiver. To do so, the Persuasion Knowledge

Model (PKM) was adopted, a model previously adopted to study incentivized eWOM (Verlegh et al., 2013).

Recently, Q. Wang et al. (2018) studied the outcomes of reward allocation, tie strength, and brand relationships (weak vs. strong brands) on receivers' responses to Referral Reward Programs, enhancing and confirming the mediating effects of social cost. Jung et al. (2021) provided further lightning regarding which type of referral reward structure, namely reward allocation scheme, is most effective in maximizing WOM employing two randomized experiments in the mobile gaming context.

Incentivized programs also make consumers question companies' motives for conducting a promotional campaign, which profoundly influences how they evaluate and respond to that campaign (Ellen et al., 2006; Stumpf & Baum, 2016). eWOM readers make inferences about the reasons for companies' strategies based on the characteristics of incentivized eWOM. As so, recipients may acknowledge the company's persuasion attempts, providing incentives to get favorable evaluation, leading to less positive attitudes.

2.6. Persuasion Knowledge Model

Persuasion knowledge is an individual's ability to identify a sales representative's psychological tactics and strategies (Friestad & Wright, 1994, 1995). It consists of a wide range of beliefs regarding marketers' persuasion tactics, techniques, goals, and motives to conduct a particular behavior (Kirmani & Zhu, 2007). This model proposes that whenever individuals perceive a message as a persuasion attempt, they activate their persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Once activated, a suspicion of manipulative intent is created, meaning that the communicator might be trying to persuade based on unfair, inappropriate means (Kirmani & Campbell, 2004). These means, also called ulterior or inferred motives, are hidden interests, primarily conceived deceptive, to persuade individuals to engage in a particular behavior. In other words, they represent how much the message is perceived as misleading and biased toward the senders' personal benefits. This inference of ulterior/manipulative means creates resistance to the persuasive attempt (Boerman et al., 2012), entails suspicion about the marketer's ulterior motives, generates skepticism towards the brand claims, and result in less favorable communicator and brand evaluations and outcomes (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000; Qin et al., 2016). As one key construct in PKM, inference of manipulative intent (IMI) refers to the "consumer inferences that the advertiser is attempting to persuade by inappropriate, unfair, or manipulative means" (Campbell, 1995, p. 228). The more ulterior motives are perceived, the

greater the recipient's resistance, and the weaker the message's credibility and persuasiveness (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000).

The Persuasion Knowledge Model has been used to study how consumers respond to promotional messages (Lunardo et al., 2016), providing essential insights into the impact of a persuasion agent, message, and target characteristics on the effectiveness of different persuasion attempts (Song et al., 2021; Tuk et al., 2009). Likewise, persuasion knowledge may help recommendation receivers to identify ulterior motives and, therefore, indicate to which extent they suspect a persuasion attempt in the recommendations process (Lunardo et al., 2016).

In this regard, the value consumers attach to the recommendations depends on how much the receiver of that information perceives the recommendations as a persuasion attempt of the recommender, rather than genuine and unbiased advice. Consumers' knowledge about the recommenders' motives and tactics of persuasion will help them acknowledge the motives underlying the recommenders' behaviors and interpret, evaluate, and respond to the persuasion attempt (Boerman et al., 2012). Therefore, the extent to which recipients perceive / activate their persuasion knowledge will strongly dictate receivers' responses to incentivized eWOM programs and their effectiveness (Kirmani & Campbell, 2004).

2.7. Social Ties

2.7.1. Tie Strength

Social ties were originally conceptualized by Granovetter (1973) as the "(probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (or mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize each tie" (p. 1361). Consumers generally have a wide range of relationships in their social networks which, depending on both the time the person has and the cognitive resources, an individual can only maintain a limited number of connections (Dunbar, 1993). These connections are possible to distinguish regarding their strength (Steffes & Burgee, 2009). Tie strength was defined as a "multidimensional construct that represents the strength of the dyadic interpersonal relationships in the context of social networks" (Money et al., 1998, p. 79). Steffes and Burgee (2009) conceptualized tie strength as both the level of intensity of the social relationship between consumers or the degree of overlap of two individuals' friendship. It refers to the closeness of the social relationships between individuals (Duhan et al., 1997). Past studies evaluated tie strength according to a variety of variables, such as duration of the tie, importance of the relation (J. J. Brown & Reingen, 1987),

intimacy (Granovetter, 1973), and frequency of contacts (J. J. Brown & Reingen, 1987; Granovetter, 1973). In this regard, the more durable, meaningful, intimate, and frequent the tie, the stronger it becomes (Weimann, 1983). Subsequent research expanded the list and added social distance (N. Lin et al., 1981), emotional support (Wellman & Wortley, 1990), and structural factors (e.g., network topology) (Burt, 2004) as other tie strength measures. Social ties can vary from strong primary ties to weak secondary ties (Granovetter, 1973; Marsden & Campbell, 1984) and can be non-existent if established with complete strangers (Steffes & Burgee, 2009).

With the emergence and growth of the Internet, the concept is also known as the link between different online users via an Online Social Network (OSN) (Gilbert & Karahalios, 2009; Mittal et al., 2008). Following Aral and Walker (2014), tie strength in the online environment can be measured by the social context of the interaction (i.e., how individuals met, know one another and relate), recency of communication, the number of shared interests (e.g., common social groups) and the frequency of interactions. In Referral Reward Programs, tie strength is the relationship between the recommender and receiver in a referral (Biyalogorsky et al., 2001).

2.7.1.1. Strong Ties

Strong ties are people that the consumer deeply knows, trusts, feels connected with, and shares the same social circles, with more frequent contact and reciprocal communication (e.g., family members, close friends, and close colleagues) (Gilbert & Karahalios, 2009; Steffes & Burgee, 2009). In addition, strong ties involve individuals who generally have more close, intimate, stable, and emotional relationships and share similar interests and beliefs, in which there are trust and willingness to provide substantive and emotional support (Burt, 1987).

As a result, strong ties typically share a more comprehensive range of consumption-related messages, including more detailed personal experiences, compared to weak ties (Koo, 2016).

According to the Social Support Theory (SST), proposed by Cohen and Wills (1985), individuals value more strong social ties' opinions when they have trouble making decisions. It is supposed that, because strongly tied individuals have a more detailed and profound knowledge of each other, they can understand their thoughts and feelings, how likely a product or service can satisfy the other's need (Steffes & Burgee, 2009) and, therefore, influence their opinion (Burt, 1987).

2.7.1.2. Weak Ties

A weak tie can be conceptualized as a more distant and less personal bond between individuals that are just acquaintances (Granovetter, 1973; Koo, 2016). Weak ties are usually composed of individuals with less frequent contact, which don't know each other well, have low levels of emotional commitment, and don't share the same close social circles (e.g. neighbors, friends of friends, and co-workers) (Junga Kim & Lee, 2017; S. Kim et al., 2018; Mittal et al., 2008; Steffes & Burgee, 2009; J. C. Wang & Chang, 2013). While in strong ties, the individual's social circles are overlapped, weak ties correspond to relations outside the individual's close network (Dellarocas, 2003). Some researchers claimed that particular weak-tie eWOM messages can be more influential in the consumer decision-making process as they can provide new, clear, objective, and scientific information and greater expertise about a product or service to a social network (J. J. Brown & Reingen, 1987; De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008; Granovetter, 1973; Steffes & Burgee, 2009). Through the Internet, consumers have more convenient access to a limitless amount of weak-tie eWOM messages, which play a fundamental role in sharing and disseminating information, helping the consumer to increase their knowledge about a certain product, sometimes even provided by professionals (J. J. Brown & Reingen, 1987; Dubois et al., 2016; Steffes & Burgee, 2009).

2.8. Review Credibility

At its simplest, credibility can be defined as believability (Fogg, 1999). Following T. Lin et al. (2012), credibility consists in the consumers' perceived believability of message content. Recent literature defends that credibility in the virtual world is a perceived quality resulting from a multidimensional evaluation, whereas a large number of researchers identify trustworthiness and expertise as the two key components (D. Verma & Dewani, 2020). In other words, individuals evaluate credibility by assessing both trustworthiness (i.e., truth, unbiasedness) and expertise (i.e., knowledge, experience, and competence) of the information (Hovland et al., 1953). Within the framework of eWOM, credibility can be defined as "the extent to which one perceives other consumers' recommendations or reviews as believable, true, or factual" (Levy & Gvili, 2015, p. 97).

Marketing literature has used different theoretical foundations to explain the information processing process and eWOM credibility, where the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) is among the most adopted (D. Verma & Dewani, 2020). The Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) is focused on information processing and persuasion and how

individuals process the received information (C. M. Y. Cheung et al., 2012). ELM suggests that individuals have two routes to process information: the central and peripheral routes. In the central route, individuals carefully and devotedly process message-related information, whereas, in the peripheral route, they quickly and automatically process cues (Petty et al., 1983; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Hence, when using the central route, argument quality is the primary driver to review credibility, whereas, when using the peripheral route, consistency, sidedness, and volume of eWOM content dictate its credibility.

2.9. Brand Attitude

For many years, brand attitude has been considered a vital marketing subject. Brand attitude is the consumers' internal overall evaluation of a particular brand, reflecting the continuous preference or tendency over that brand (Mitchell & Olson, 1981). The basis of this ongoing evaluation is the prominent associations, benefits, and judgments consumers make about brands (Spears & Singh, 2004), which results in either a favorable or unfavorable evaluation.

According to Percy and Rossiter (1992), this evaluation is made by the extent to which a brand is perceived to meet a currently relevant motivation.

Researchers suggest that brand attitudes have three dimensions: affective, which is related to emotional associations with the brand (e.g., excitement, sadness); behavioral, which reflects the effects of brand attitudes on individuals' behaviors; and cognitive, which is the assessment of previous brand awareness, knowledge, opinions, beliefs, and thoughts about advantages and disadvantages associated with the attitude (S. P. Brown et al., 1998; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Having a positive attitude regarding a brand leads to a continuous preference over that brand and a direct positive effect on purchase intentions (Aaker & Keller, 1990). Moreover, the attitude consumers have towards a brand profoundly shapes the acceptance of brand communications, as well as consumers' overall understanding of other brand aspects.

Research in incentivized eWOM considers brand attitude as the attitude of the person receiving the recommendation (eWOM receiver) towards the recommended brand (e.g., Pongjit & Beise-Zee, 2015). Therefore, marketers consider this phenomenon as one of the most important predictors of consumer behavior and decision.

2.10. Purchase Intentions

A purchase intention can be described as a combination of the consumer interest and the possibility of buying a product (A. J. Kim & Ko, 2012). It is both the willingness to try a certain

product and the interest in making a purchase (J. Wang et al., 2012). Since it is based on consumer attitudes towards buying a brand, it can be translated into a motivation to purchase a specific brand in a particular condition (Saad et al., 2012). Purchase intentions are complex processes (C. M. K. Cheung & Thadani, 2012), typically influenced by many different factors, such as practical cost considerations (e.g., price), product perceived quality, brand image, and value (Baker et al., 2016; Kotler, 2000). They are also motivated by considerations about how the purchase can help the customer achieving different goals (e.g., social goals like self-presentation and conformance) and expected practical benefits (Ajzen, 1991). In the online environment, a purchase intention is the intensity of the consumers' aim to conduct online transactions or complete a purchasing behavior online (Salisbury et al., 2001).

Regarding WOM studies, Baker et al. (2016) defined purchase intentions as "the WOM recipient's degree of motivation and willingness to eventually purchase the brand discussed in the WOM episode" (p. 226). Several studies provided necessary inputs into this literature, analyzing different aspects of electronic WOM impact in the intention to purchase. D. H. Park et al. (2007) concluded that the quality of the online review has proved to have a positive effect on the consumer's intention to buy, as well as the quantity of eWOM messages, once the more consumer reviews, the higher the purchase intention. D. H. Park and Kim (2008) found that the type and number of online consumer reviews have a more substantial impact on purchase intentions of high expertise consumers, rather than low expertise consumers. Ismagilova et al. (2020) presented a study based on a wide range of eWOM variables affecting purchase intentions from 69 other eWOM communication studies. The findings indicated that eWOM usefulness, attitude towards the brand, argument quality, valence, and trust in the message are the best predictors of buying intentions. It is firmly established that both traditional and electronic WOM, as an emerging market phenomenon, profoundly shape consumers' decision making and strongly affect purchase intentions (e.g., Chang et al., 2010; De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Ismagilova et al., 2020; Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012).

CHAPTER 3

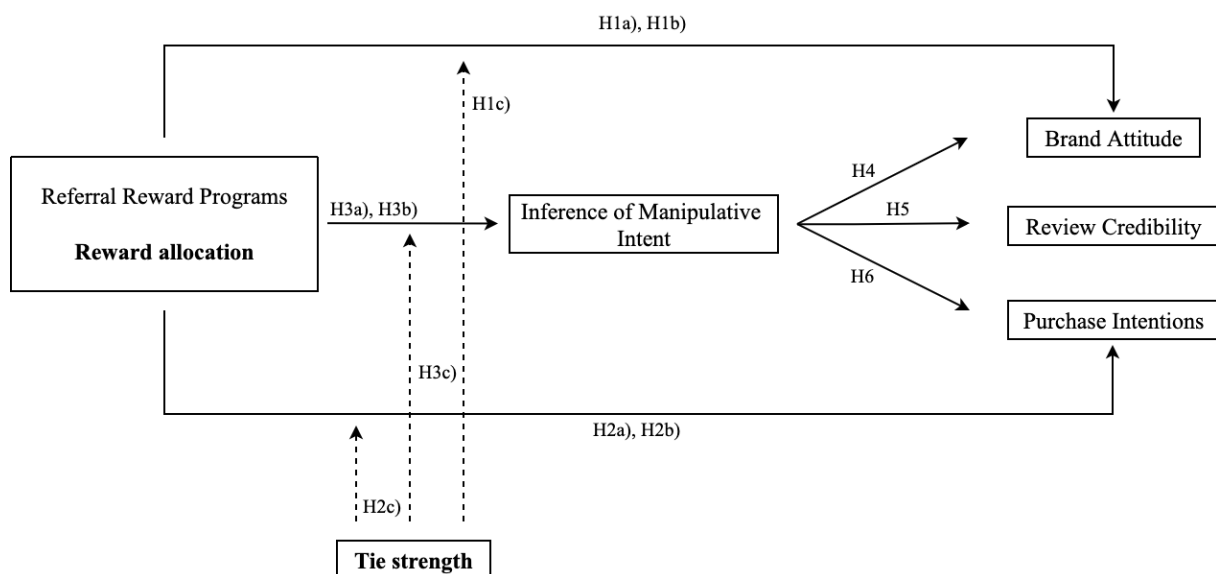
Conceptual Framework And Research Hypothesis

3.1. Conceptual Framework

To demonstrate the impacts of incentivized eWOM in receivers, a conceptual model and research hypothesis were formulated. This model illustrates the influence of different program characteristics on the recipients' response to Referral Reward Programs (RRPs). Primarily, this investigation examines how different RRP's designs affect the audience's perception of those programs and, consequently, course of actions, having as basis de Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM). Therefore, it analyses how reward allocation (no reward, *reward me*, *reward both*) and tie strength (strong and weak ties) influence three main RRP's outcomes: overall attitude towards the recommended brand (brand attitude), credibility of the referral (review credibility) and purchase intentions. The present framework was developed considering the literature review presented above, and leading research around incentivized eWOM and the Persuasion Knowledge Model concepts (i.e., Friestad & Wright, 1994, Campbell & Kirmani, 2000; Ryu & Feick, 2007; Verlegh et al., 2013; M. Kim & Song, 2018; Lunardo et al., 2016; Pongjit & Beise-Zee, 2015).

Figure 3.1

Conceptual Framework



Source. Author's elaboration, 2021

3.2. Reward Allocation

Recommendations help consumers gather information, reduce the uncertainty about a particular product or service, and, consequently, reduce the overall risk associated with the purchase (Alrwashdeh et al., 2019; J. Wang et al., 2012). Hence, it is very likely that consumers plan to use recommendations and other eWOM messages in their decision-making processes, which further shapes their purchase actions (Ismagilova et al., 2020; Sussman & Siegal, 2003).

According to the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM), recommenders' motivations for recommending are central to the impact that those have on the customer who receives them (i.e., receiver), their acceptance and use (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000). Accordingly, the allocation of RRP, i.e., how and to whom the reward is allocated in these programs, may differently influence referral's likelihood, acceptance, and use (Q. Wang et al., 2018).

Drawing on the receiver's perspective, following the PKM, when there is no reward in the referral, the recommendations are essentially perceived to be more genuine, altruistic and objective (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Berger, 2014; Eisend et al., 2020). Once no economic component is introduced in the social relationship, an unrewarded recommendation is expected to be interpreted as being driven by sincere, intrinsic motives (Song et al., 2021). Conversely, obtaining any form of reward on RRP arouses doubt and ambiguity as receivers question the recommenders' and recommendations' veracity and credibility (Ryu & Feick, 2007). Therefore, receivers question if the recommenders are driven by authenticity and product-related motives, biased ulterior motives, (Verlegh et al., 2013), or both (Tuk et al., 2009). Thus, it is proposed that no reward allocations lead to a lower inference of manipulative intent than rewarded allocations, such as *reward me* or *reward both* schemes.

Consequently, in RRP, when a reward is offered either to the recommender or both, i.e., the recommender and the receiver, the behaviors are more likely to be perceived as biased, resulting in less favorable responses regarding incentivized eWOM messages (Verlegh et al., 2013). Therefore, no reward allocations are expected to generate higher purchase intentions than rewarded allocations, such as *reward me* or *reward both* allocation schemes.

The same is expected concerning the attitudes towards the recommended brand, for three main reasons. First, once rewards are perceived as ulterior motives, the brand is the entity or instigator that provides those rewards and brings out perceived recommender's biased behaviors. Second, rewards can damage the perceived quality and sophistication of the brand. Rewarded programs may lead consumers to ask themselves the brands' necessity to use rewards to induce and reinforce eWOM on SNSs. Lastly, incentives are seen as a norm violation in

social interactions, damaging the relationship and trust between consumers (Pongjit & Beise-Zee, 2015).

Therefore, it is proposed that no reward allocation schemes lead to higher brand attitudes than rewarded allocations, such as *reward me* or *reward both* schemes.

Following Ryu and Feick (2007), in both "*reward me*", where only the recommender receives the reward, or "*reward both*", where both the recommender and the receiver obtain it, receivers can infer manipulative intents in the recommendation. This occurs once both allocation schemes undertake a reward for the recommender. However, in *reward both* schemes, unlike what happens in *reward me*, there is also a benefit for the receiver. This shared benefit is supposed to: 1) maintain reward equity (Ryu & Feick, 2007); 2) attenuate receivers' perceptions of the referrer making the recommendation solely to have a personal gain, focusing on his/her self-interest and welfare (Sciandra, 2019) and, consequently 3) downplay the plausibility of potential ulterior motives (Tuk et al., 2009). Accordingly, it is proposed that *reward both* schemes activate lower inference of manipulative intent than *reward me* schemes.

In *reward both* allocation schemes, the shared benefit is also expected to reduce the idea that the recommender is only recommending obtaining a reward and taking advantage of the receiver. Consequently, it is purposed that *reward me* allocation schemes lead to lower referral responses, such as purchase intentions towards the recommended product/service, than *reward both* schemes. Additionally, it is expected that *reward me* programs exacerbate the previously described brand negative effects. Following the PKM, *reward both* programs will decrease the receivers' inference of manipulative intent, lessening the suspicions of persuasion attempts into the recommendation, compared to *reward me* schemes. Hence, *reward me* schemes may lead the review reader to perceive a company's attempt to receive favorable evaluations in return for a reward, leading to receivers' lower positive attitudes. Therefore, it is proposed that *reward me* schemes produce lower brand attitudes brand than *reward both* schemes.

3.3. Social Ties

The PKM emphasizes the role of prior knowledge about a communicator in the receiver's perceived motives of that communicator's actions (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Hence, prior knowledge shapes the interpretation of the communicators' behavior and guides the acceptance or resistance towards the communicators' message.

As noted above, RRP's are ambiguous since either intrinsic (genuine) or extrinsic (biased) motivations can be behind the recommenders' referrals. Thus, the receiver's prior knowledge of

the recommender is likely to influence the receivers' perception of the recommenders' motives. Therefore, it is proposed that the social relationships between the two, generally conceptualized as tie strength, will be a crucial factor in acknowledging the communicators' motives and, consequently, the persuasiveness of RRP.

Accordingly, consumers consider strong-tie messages influential, trustworthy, and credible and accept them more than weak-tie ones (J. J. Brown & Reingen, 1987; Koo, 2016; Wu et al., 2016). Strongly tied individuals are concerned about each other, acting on behalf of other's needs and welfare, without expecting any return (Clark, 1984; Frenzen & Nakamoto, 1993). Contrarily, weakly tied individuals search for balanced exchange relationships without feeling special responsibility for others, aiming their self-interest, by maximizing outcomes and mitigating costs (Clark, 1984; Frenzen & Nakamoto, 1993). In Social Networking Sites, the solid and more frequent bond of strong ties is believed to discourage a recommender from making dubious recommendations, apprehensive in damaging future interactions (Levin & Cross, 2004). This will reduce the receiver's consideration of the recommender's manipulative intent as the main driver of recommendations (Wirtz et al., 2013).

On the other hand, the weaker the tie, the less frequent the contact, the fewer the opportunities to assess the other person's trustworthiness and motivations (Song et al., 2021). Consequently, the higher the likelihood of the receiver to perceive the recommender with persuasive attempts. Therefore, it is proposed that reward allocation leads to higher values of inference of manipulative intent when the RRP occur between weak rather than strong ties.

Additionally, one can say that as the strength of the tie decreases, the impact of rewards on receivers' acceptance of pieces of information increases (Sciandra, 2019). Thus, it is expected that the effects of reward allocation on both purchase intentions and brand attitudes will be lower if the recommender is strongly tied with the receiver than if it is weakly tied. For example, in *reward me* allocation schemes, RRP between strongly tied individuals will lead to higher brand attitudes than weakly-tied individuals.

3.4. The Inference Of Manipulative Intent

Reward allocation schemes and tie strength are expected to differently make receivers aware of ulterior motives, acknowledging manipulative intents. As a result, the perception of the salesperson's sincerity and the consumer responses, are suspected to be negatively affected (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000). Therefore, it is fundamental for marketers to be aware of the

negative consequences behind different RRP program designs to implement programs capable to mitigate tradeoffs and increase effectiveness (M. Kim & Song, 2018).

In line with the PKM, persuasion agents are judged less favorably when the inference of manipulative intent is more salient (Kirmani & Campbell, 2004). The fact that receivers infer a manipulative intent from recommenders will create suspicion and resistance in adopting the recommender's messages (Song et al., 2021). Therefore, the inference of manipulative intent is usually negatively perceived by receivers once they do not like to feel manipulated or to have their autonomy and independence put in question. As a consequence, the more inference of ulterior motives is perceived, the lower the brand perceived trustworthiness and the persuasiveness of the companies' messages and programs (Kirmani & Campbell, 2004).

For all the reasons present above, the inference of manipulative intent is expected to negatively impact brand evaluations and message acceptance (M. Kim & Song, 2018; Lunardo et al., 2016).

In RRP in Social Networking Sites, the same is expected to occur. Accordingly, if receivers suspect a hidden or ulterior motive, the persuasion attempt will more strongly conduct to the recipient's resistance, and the credibility and persuasiveness of the message will be weakened (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000; M. Kim & Song, 2018).

Therefore, it is proposed that the inference of manipulative intent will negatively influence the credibility of the message (review credibility), the attitude towards the recommended brand (brand attitude), and, consequently, the receiver's overall desire to accept those programs and buy the recommended product/service (purchase intentions).

3.5. Research Hypothesis

According to the proposed conceptual framework, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

H1a): *In online RRPs, no reward allocation schemes are more likely to produce higher brand attitudes than reward both and reward me allocation schemes.*

H1b): *Online RRPs using reward me allocation schemes are more likely to produce lower brand attitudes than reward both schemes.*

H1c): *The effects of reward allocation on brand attitude are more positive for strong ties than weak ties.*

H2a): *In online RRPs, no reward allocation schemes are more likely to generate higher purchase intentions than reward both and reward me allocation schemes.*

H2b): *Online RRPs using reward me allocation schemes are more likely to produce lower purchase intentions than reward both schemes.*

H2c): *The effects of reward allocation on purchase intentions are more positive for strong ties than for weak ties.*

H3a): *In online RRPs, no reward allocation schemes are more likely to produce lower inference of manipulative intent than reward both and reward me allocation schemes.*

H3b): *In online RRPs, reward me allocation schemes will generate a higher receiver's inference of manipulative intent from the recommender than reward both schemes.*

H3c): *In the different reward allocations, the inference of manipulative intent is higher for weak than strong ties.*

H4): *The inference of manipulative intent negatively influences brand attitudes.*

H5): *The inference of manipulative intent negatively influences review credibility.*

H6): *The inference of manipulative intent negatively influences purchase intentions.*

CHAPTER 4

Methodology

To conduct this research, both primary and secondary data were collected. Secondary data, which is contemplated in the literature review chapter, is relevant to deepen the concepts, acknowledging the background conducted around the areas of interest. Furthermore, it provides essential models, notions, and correlations, already confirmed that can be considered a strong foundation for the study and crucial to identify key variables of the research (Greenhoot & Dowsett, 2012). From that point, it was important to conduct a quantitative methodology to extract conclusions and recommendations for future market improvements. Therefore, this chapter aims to expose the methods used to obtain and analyze this primary data type.

4.1. Research Approach

The impact that incentivized eWOM has on eWOM readers is far from being consensual, and, as described early, can be affected by external factors causing different possible results. Therefore, the research goal of this dissertation is to analyze the impact of incentivized eWOM on receivers' responses by examining one specific program (Referral Reward Program) and three primary outcomes: review credibility, brand attitude, and purchase intentions. Likewise, this thesis uses the Persuasion Knowledge as a model to understand how three different RRP's allocation schemes (no reward, *reward me* and *reward both*) shape readers' perceptions according to different ties between the recommender and the receiver (strong and weak tie). To do so, primary research was developed.

4.2. Research Method And Design

Experiment research was conducted through a quantitative methodology to collect information and test the research model and hypotheses. The conducted study was an experiment, mainly, a 3 x 2 between-subject factorial design with reward allocation scheme (no reward, *reward me* and *reward both*) and tie strength (strong tie and weak tie) as the experimental conditions. This experimental design produced six possible combinations, each represented by a scenario.

An experimental scenarios approach was deemed appropriate for several reasons. First, rather than relying solely on participants' memory of previous similar experiences, providing scenarios minimizes memory bias (A. K. Smith et al., 1999). Second, scenarios help to mitigate

the impact of personal circumstances on the research context. Third, scenarios enhance internal validity by providing a standardized setting for all respondents, reducing the experiment's random noise (Wirtz & Bateson, 1999).

A questionnaire was elaborated, as it provides insights about individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and observational trends and are among the most frequently used tools in data collection (Hinkin, 1995). This method was chosen once it can be quantified, is more efficient in collecting a wide variety of facts, and can reach a wide range of individuals despite being dependent on respondents' availability and receptiveness (Queirós et al., 2017). As seen in the questionnaire flow of the Appendix D, each participant was randomly assigned to one of the six scenarios (Table 4.1), through a randomizer tool of the Qualtrics Software.

Table 4.1

Groups And Stimulus For Each Group

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6
No reward		Reward me		Reward both	
Strong Tie	Weak Tie	Strong Tie	Weak Tie	Strong Tie	Weak Tie
Stimulus presented					
Close friend No discount	Acquaintance No discount	Close friend 20% discount	Acquaintance 20% discount	Close friend 10% discount	Acquaintance 10% discount

Source. Author's elaboration, 2021

4.3. Sample

4.3.1. Population And Sample Design

The target population primarily consisted of Portuguese consumers who had previous experience regarding electronic word of mouth on Social Networking Sites. Accordingly, a sampling frame was defined for the study (Lavrakas, 2008). Keeping present that the sample should represent the population studied to which results will be generalized (Hinkin, 1995), the sample design was elaborated. A convenience sampling method was chosen once the questionnaire was spread to different personal online networks. It should be noted that while this method may not acquire the most representative sample of the population, it effectively facilitates the collection of data (Lavrakas, 2008). Therefore, to overcome this constraint and conduct a more rigorous and realistic study, the sampling aimed to achieve the maximum amount and diversity of responses regarding demographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, education, and current occupation).

4.4. Data Collection

4.4.1. Procedure

The different scenarios and items were contingent on the foundations of prior relevant research. After selected, these items were properly adjusted to align with the scope of the study and ensure the validity and reliability of the research. The questionnaire was developed through Qualtrics Survey Software, published exclusively online, and spread through social networking platforms, namely Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and LinkedIn.

The study was released in Portuguese to reduce respondents' misunderstandings and misinterpretations of questions. Both Portuguese and English versions of the items of the questionnaire can be found in the Appendix A and B. In addition, back-translation of the items/measurements was conducted to ensure the comparability of the translations and further quality and accuracy. Finally, the original source material was compared with the back translation, wherein some edits and adjustments were made as needed to optimize the final translation (Appendix C).

The questionnaire was published during August 2021 and gathered 526 responses.

4.4.2. Experimental Procedure

Facebook was selected as the research context of the experiment. It represents a solid Social Networking Site used by brands worldwide to conduct diverse marketing strategies as a means of creating and strengthening relationships with consumers. Additionally, in July of the present year, Facebook registered approximately 7.93 million users worldwide, out of which 22.5% are between 25 and 35 years old (Statista, 2021), being the most used social media in Portugal and the World (Statcounter, 2021).

A restaurant was chosen to base the scenarios of the study once, not only is a service where eWOM is very common but also is of everyday use in incentivized recommendations and referrals studies (e.g., Verlegh et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2018; Wirtz & Chew, 2002). Moreover, as intangible and experiential, restaurants are generally recognized as higher-risk decisions with more difficult evaluation assessments before purchase (Reimer & Benkenstein, 2018). Therefore, compared to manufactured goods, eWOM assumes a more critical role for both review readers and the company itself (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Dodds et al., 1991; Verlegh et al., 2013). In addition, many restaurants offer discounts to attract customers, which allows a realistic manipulation of the incentive allocations (Reimer & Benkenstein, 2018).

The restaurant's brand was fictitiously created with the name "4Food". The usage of a fictitious brand is commonly done by leading research in the eWOM field (e.g., Ryu & Feick, 2007). It can be explained by the need to reduce potential biases and prior brand evaluations towards the recommended brand (Wirtz & Chew, 2002). By leaving aside any pre-existing attitudes, respondents were aimed to build their initial attitude and beliefs towards the created brand while reading the exposed scenario (Ryu & Feick, 2007).

4.4.3. Questionnaire's Design

The questionnaire design followed a commonly adopted structure, composed of three main sections: the cover letter, the instructions, and the main body (Lavrakas, 2008). It followed a methodic, intuitive, and logical layout to achieve higher response rates and avoid cognitive burden (Lavrakas, 2008). The cover letter introduced the research, briefly presented the aim of the questionnaire, and, ultimately, guaranteed respondents' anonymity and confidentiality. Instructions on how to correctly complete the questionnaire were provided, as well as a description of how the questions were organized. All relevant definitions were presented throughout the questionnaire to ensure its complete understanding. The main body section was divided into seven parts. The first part presented an eWOM definition and asked respondents if they had ever had an experience regarding this topic on SNSs. The second part included questions to acknowledge the reliability of the study, and to better understand participants' online behavior in these platforms (i.e., most used SNS, time spent on SNSs per day, and detention of a Facebook account). In the third part, respondents evaluated their eWOM engagement and behavior on SNSs. In the fourth part, respondents' restaurant involvement was measured, and, in the fifth part, participants were randomly allocated to one of the six scenarios (through a randomizer tool in the Qualtrics Software). In the seventh part, respondents had to answer two verification questions and evaluate the realism of the scenario and, in the last part, fill out demographic data (as observable in the questionnaire flow of the Appendix D).

4.4.4. Manipulations For The Independent Variables

All scenarios began by asking the respondent to imagine that they were surfing the Internet when they come across an online recommendation, on Facebook, from a customer in their network, named João. In his review, João described a restaurant (4Food) as entirely satisfactory regarding meal, service, and price. João's online review was positive in nature because, in the eyes of receivers, negative recommendations are rarely suspected of being the result of a

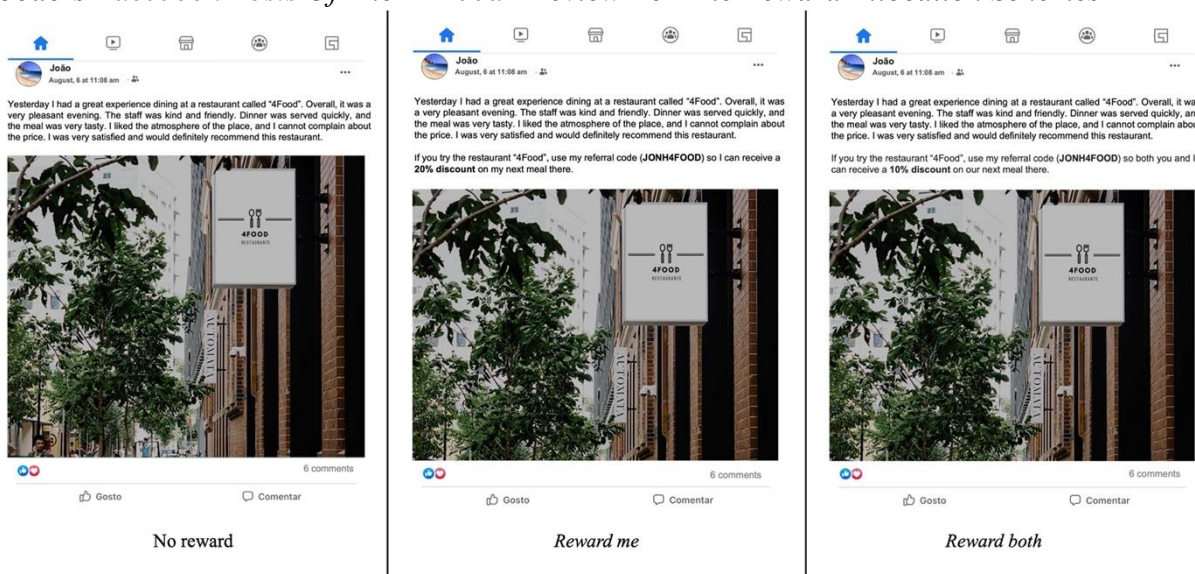
rewarded program (Reimer & Benkenstein, 2018). Subjects were instructed to read the scenarios carefully and answer the questions that followed. To increase the realism and imaginativeness of the scenarios, this description was accompanied by a picture of João's review (Figure 4.1).

As previously mentioned, the scenarios were drawn upon current academic knowledge regarding tie strength, eWOM, and Referral Reward Programs. Reward allocation manipulation (RA) was adapted from Reimer and Benkenstein (2018), Ryu and Feick (2007), and Wang et al. (2018). Tie strength manipulation (TS) was developed based on Ahrens et al. (2013), Wang et al. (2018), Wirtz et al. (2013), and Steffes and Burgee (2009).

Three different levels were considered for reward allocations: no reward, *reward me*, and *reward both* schemes. *Reward you* scheme, where only the receiver gets the reward, was not considered because it is a much less common practice (Ryu & Feick, 2007).

Figure 4.1

João's Facebook Posts Of The "4Food" Review For The Reward Allocation Schemes



Source. Author's elaboration, 2021

The incentive used was monetary, as it is the most common practice adopted by firms in Referral Reward Programs (Jin & Huang, 2014). Especially, a relative (rather than absolute) monetary reward was chosen, as respondents may have different references regarding reasonable incentive sizes. Therefore, the reward was presented in a percentage, following the principle of relativity (Heath et al., 2000). Moreover, discounts are generally considered a cost-effective method for companies, as they are more economic than cash rewards or rewards that are unrelated to company's offerings (B.-D. Kim et al., 2001). For the *reward me* scenarios, a

20% discount on the next visit to the restaurant was offered for the recommender, and for the *reward both* scenarios, both the recommender and the receiver would receive a 10% discount if visiting the restaurant. The values of the provided discounts were chosen based on similar studies regarding RRP, such as Ryu and Feick (2007) and Wirtz et al. (2013). The descriptions for each reward allocation are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Reward Allocation Schemes Stimulus' Descriptions

Reward allocation	Description of scenario
<i>Reward me</i>	If you try the restaurant "4Food", use my referral code (JONH4FOOD), so I can receive a 20% discount on my next meal there.
<i>Reward both</i>	If you try the restaurant "4Food", use my referral code (JONH4FOOD), so both you and I can receive a 10% discount on our next meal there.

Source. Author's elaboration, 2021

In the no reward scheme condition, no information regarding a discount was presented.

As seen in Table 4.3, tie strength was manipulated at two levels, namely strong and weak, which is consistent with past research (e.g., Ahrens et al., 2013; Orsingher & Wirtz, 2018; Wirtz et al., 2013).

Table 4.3

Tie Strength Stimulus' Descriptions

Tie strength	Description of scenario
Strong ties	João is one of your closest friends, someone you truly know, have frequent contact with, and share your life. It is a person with whom you constantly interact, through comments, likes, and messages, on Facebook.
Weak ties	João is one of your casual acquaintances, someone you have met but barely know and communicate with, especially for personal matters. It is a person with whom you rarely interact; through comments, likes, and messages on Facebook.

Source. Author's elaboration, 2021

As a manipulation check for reward allocation (Table 4.4.), the perceptions of the perceived value of referral rewards were measured using two items on a nine-point semantic scale ranging

from 1 = "Very unattractive" to 9 = "Very attractive" and 1 = "A very small amount" to 9 = "A very large amount" (Ryu & Feick, 2007).

For tie strength's manipulation check (Table 4.4), four items were used; the first three to measure intimacy, association, and support, with a seven-point Likert-type scale anchored in 1 = "Totally disagree" to 7 = "Totally agree", and the last one, representing closeness in a seven-point semantic-scale ranging from 1=" Not at all close" to 7= "Very close". These four items for tie strength manipulation check were extracted from Frenzen and Nakamoto (1993).

Table 4.4
Scales And Items For The Manipulation Checks

Author	Manipulation check	Items
(Ryu & Feick, 2007)	Reward allocation	RA_1. The reward is a very unattractive / a very attractive. RA_2. The reward is a very small amount / a very large amount.
(Frenzen & Nakamoto, 1993)	Tie strength	TS_1. He/she is someone whom I would be willing to share personal confidences with. TS_2. He/she is someone whom I would gladly spend a free afternoon socializing with. TS_3. He/she is someone whom I would be likely to perform a large favor for. TS_4. On a scale from 1 to 7, rate you level of closeness with him/her.

Source. Author's elaboration, 2021

4.5. Measures

The questionnaire was elaborated with a deductive scale development with multi-item scales (Table 4.5), meaning that it used the support of different implemented scales presented in literature to measure each of the proposed constructs (Hinkin, 1995).

First, to analyze eWOM behavior on Social Networking Sites, eWOM engagement in SNSs (ENG) was measured through a nine-item scale adopted from Chu and Kim (2011). It was measured with a seven-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 = "Totally disagree" to 7 = "Totally agree". Restaurant involvement (RI) was measured through a four-item scale adopted from Beatty and Talpade (1994), also with the same seven-point Likert-scale.

As seen in Table 4.5, the variables for inference of manipulative intent (IMI), review credibility (CRE), and purchase intention (PI) were also measured using seven-point Likert-scales ranging from 1 = "Totally disagree" to 7 = "Totally agree". Inference of manipulative intent was measured with six items from Campbell (1995). Review credibility was measured

with four items adapted from R. E. Smith and Vogt (1995) and Yee Cheung et al. (2009). Purchase intention was measured with three items (Coyle & Thorson, 2001). Finally, a four five-point semantic differential scale was used to measure brand attitude (BA) (Holbrook & Batra, 1987).

Table 4.5
Scales And Respective Items Of The Constructs

Author	Construct	Items
(Campbell, 1995)	Inference of manipulative intent	IMI_1_R. The way the information provider tried to persuade me seems acceptable to me. IMI_2. The information provider tried to manipulate people in ways that I do not like. IMI_3. I was annoyed by the information provider's review because s/he seemed to be trying to inappropriately manage or control people. IMI_4_R. I do not mind the information provider's reviews about products/services. IMI_5_R. The information provider tried to be persuasive without being excessively manipulative. IMI_6_R. The information provider's review was fair in what was said and shown.
(R. E. Smith & Vogt, 1995; Yee Cheung et al., 2009)	eWOM credibility	CRE_1. The review is factual. CRE_2. The review is accurate. CRE_3. The review is credible. CRE_4. The review is trustworthy.
(Holbrook & Batra, 1987)	Brand attitude	BA_1. Negative / positive BA_2. Unfavourable / favourable BA_3. Bad / good BA_4. Something that I dislike / like
(Coyle & Thorson, 2001)	Purchase Intentions	PI_1. It is very likely that I will buy (brand). PI_2. I will purchase (brand) the next time I need a (product). PI_3. I will definitely try (brand).

Source. Author's elaboration, 2021

Regarding demographic constructs, age, gender, education, and occupation were measured. Age was divided into eight groups: less than 18 years old, 18-24 years old, 25-34 years old, 35-44 years old, 45-54 years old, 55-64 years old, 65-74 years old, and over 75 years old. Gender was measured between "Female", "Male" and "Rather not say". Education was divided into six groups: Primary or Elementary School, High School, Bachelor's Degree (or equivalent), Postgraduate Degree, Master's Degree, and Ph.D./Doctoral Degree. Lastly, occupation was measured according to Student, Student-Employee, Employed, Unemployed or Retired.

4.5.1. Additional Measures

Two verification questions were exhibited at the end of the questionnaire to ensure the scenarios' comprehension, following Dean and Lang (2008). Subjects had to correctly identify (without looking back at the previous page) which incentive scheme (no reward, 20% for the recommender, 10% for both the recommender and the receiver) and tie strength (strong tie, weak tie) they had previously been exposed to.

Three items were applied to test scenario realism (SR) on a seven-point Likert scale. The items were proposed by Feick and Higie (1992) and later adapted by Wirtz et al. (2013), and are the following: "*The context described in the scenario is easy to imagine*"; "*The context described in the scenario is realistic*"; "*The context described in the scenario is likely to occur in real life*".

4.5.2. Pre-Test

Before releasing its final version, a pre-test of the questionnaire was elaborated with a total of 12 responses (2 responses for each scenario). The main goal of this pre-test was to revise the questionnaire and to acknowledge potential errors, misleading questions, or any other problems before the final collection of data. After this step, the final questionnaire was administered online through a link with data collected from the 14th to the 25th of August of the present year.

4.6. Data Analysis

After collecting all the responses from the online-based questionnaire, the collected data was analyzed using IBM SPSS (Statistical for the Social Sciences) Software version 27. The variables were recoded, treated, and then introduced to build the research's database. Initially, filtering was conducted to identify and remove responses that did not match the target sample or failed the scenario verification. A total of 526 responses were collected.

The statistical analysis and the results obtained are presented in the next chapter. These findings were crucial in discussing the study's major implications and contributions, as well as in drawing the main conclusions and future research, presented in the following chapters.

4.7. Data Preparation And Treatment

Before initiating the statistical analysis in SPSS, to ensure the correct data assessment, all items were treated, and scales were defined. Regarding demographics, age was treated as an ordinal scale, and gender, education, and occupation were treated as nominal scales, wherein each

answer a word was replaced by a number (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011). Likert-type scales items varied from 1 - "Totally Disagree" to 7 - "Totally Agree" (except for manipulation checks for reward allocation and one item of tie strength), depending on the variable scale, were treated as an interval. Finally, the variable of brand attitude was treated as a semantic differential scale.

In one specific dependent variable, the inference of manipulation intent, four reversed-scale items (IMI_1, IMI_4, IMI_5, IMI_6) were identified by the original authors of the measurement scale (Campbell, 1995) and were marked up with an "R" in the line after the item. Non-reverse scale items were coded in the following way: "Totally agree" was substituted with a 7, "Agree" was replaced with a 6, "Somewhat agree" with a 5, "Neither agree nor disagree" with a 4, "Somewhat disagree" with a 3, "Disagree" with a 2, and "Totally disagree" with a 1. Reverse-scale items were coded in the opposite way in which "Totally agree" was substituted with a 1, and the other values had the same logic.

Three new nominal variables were created to label each respondents' stimuli and scenario, and further conduct the results analysis. Regarding scenario, the "Experimental_Scenario" variable was coded the following way: "1 = no reward x strong tie"; "2 = no reward x weak tie"; "3 = reward me x strong tie"; "4 = reward me x weak tie"; "5 = reward both x strong tie"; "6 = reward both x weak tie". Regarding stimuli, the tie strength originated the variable "Tie_Strength", which was coded with "1 = strong tie" and "2 = weak tie".

Regarding reward allocation, "Reward_Allocation" variable was also created, and coded as "1 = no reward", "2 = reward me", "3 = reward both".

CHAPTER 5

Results And Data Analysis

This chapter presents the results of the study, and the data analysis performed to validate the research hypotheses. The present analysis includes descriptive statistics, manipulation checks, constructs' validation regarding reliability (through Cronbach Alpha) and dimensionality (through Principal Component Analysis), normality tests, groups' comparability tests, and finally, hypothesis tests. A 95% level of significance was used as decision criteria, therefore considering $\alpha = 0.05$.

5.1. Measuring Instruments

526 responses were initially collected from the online questionnaire. As previously mentioned, invalid ones were excluded. Thus, 20 participants, who responded negatively to the eliminatory question: "*Have you ever read electronic word of mouth about products, services, or brands, in Social Networking Sites?*", were removed from the sample. In such cases, the survey ended automatically, preventing respondents from proceeding further into the experiment, as they were not part of the target sample. Thus, a total of 506 completed answers were still valid.

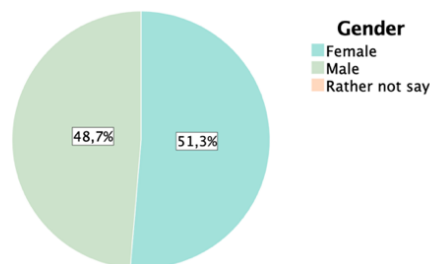
To assure that participants carefully read the questions and understood the presented stimulus, two multiple-choice verification questions were asked at the end of the questionnaire. Both questions asked: "Which of the following best describes the scenario you have just read?". Two options were presented in the tie strength verification question ("João is one of your closest friends" and "João is a casual acquaintance"), and three questions were presented in the reward allocation question ("There was no reward", "There was a 10% discount both for you and for João" and "There was a 20% discount for João"). To further narrow the data and identify wrong answers that could compromise the study's validity, all responses that failed at least one verification question were considered invalid and were excluded from the database. As a result, a total of 43 incorrect answers were identified and eliminated. Additionally, to guarantee that all the scenarios presented an even number of responses (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011), 13 responses were randomly excluded. The final target sample consisted of (N = 450) valid responses, with 75 responses distributed evenly among the six scenarios.

5.2. Sample Characterization

As far as gender is concerned, the sample was 51.3% female and 48.7% male, as presented in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1

Distribution Of The Sample By Gender

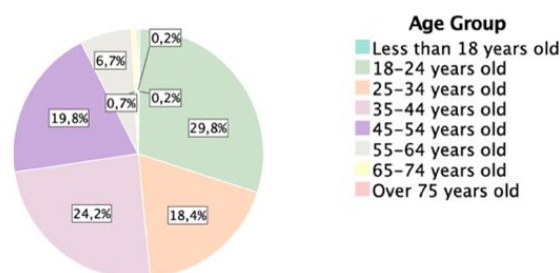


Source. SPSS Output, 2021

Regarding age group, ages from 18 to 24 years old held the most significant part of the sample (29.8%). Additionally, 25 to 34 years old represented 18.4% of the sample, and 35 to 44 years old represented 24.2%. The other groups held not so significant percentages of the sample, which can be observed in in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2

Distribution Of The Sample By Age Group

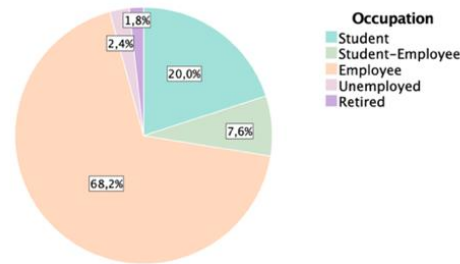


Source. SPSS Output, 2021

Regarding occupation (Figure 5.3), the predominance of employed participants is notorious, representing 68.2% of the sample. Students represented the second major group of respondents, corresponding to 20% of the sample. In the third place, student-employee respondents held 7.6%. Retired and unemployed respondents represented less than 5% of the sample, with retired holding 1.8% and unemployed 2.4%.

Figure 5.3

Distribution Of The Sample By Occupation

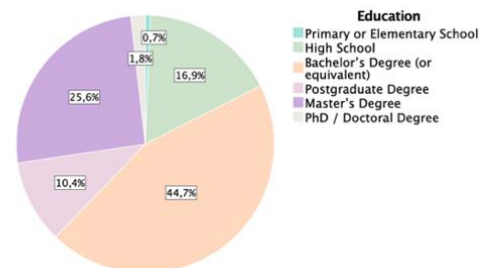


Source. SPSS Output, 2021

Regarding education, from Figure 5.4, respondents with a bachelor's degree (or equivalent) almost represented half of the sample, with 44.7%. This was followed by the master's degree, which represented 25.6% of the sample. Ph.D. and postgraduate programs represented 1.8% and 10.4% of respondents' education, respectively. Lastly, respondents with high school or less education levels symbolized 17.6% of the sample.

Figure 5.4

Distribution Of The Sample By Education



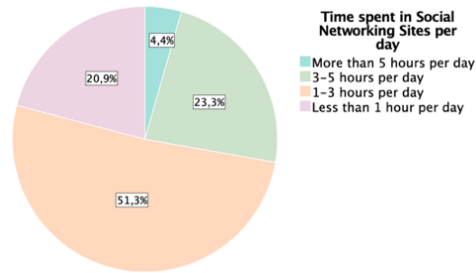
Source. SPSS Output, 2021

5.2.1. Social Networking Sites Usage Characterization

To measure respondents' usage of Social Networking Sites, time spent in SNSs per day, and the most used SNS were analyzed. Regarding time spent on SNSs per day (Figure 5.5), more than half of the sample usually spends between 1 to 3 hours per day on these sites. The rest is divided between 3 to 5 hours (23.3%), less than 1 hour (20.9%), and more than 5 hours per day (4.4%).

Figure 5.5

Distribution Of The Sample By Time Spent On Social Networking Sites Per Day

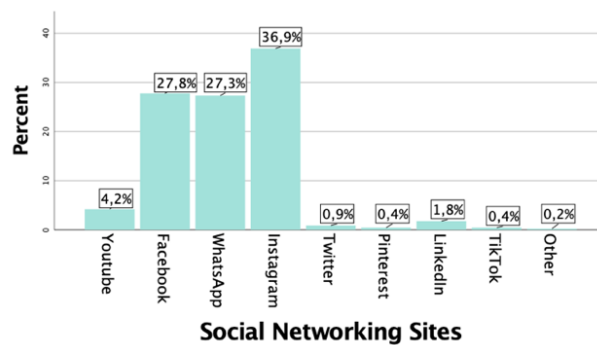


Source. SPSS Output, 2021

Considering the most used SNSs (Figure 5.6), Instagram holds a substantial weight, corresponding to 36.9% of respondent's choice. Facebook (27.8%) and WhatsApp (27.3%) occupy second and third place, respectively. YouTube is the sample's fourth most used SNS with 4.2%. The other SNSs presented (i.e., Twitter, Pinterest, LinkedIn, TikTok, and others) did not have a considerable weight, corresponding to less than 5% of the sample (3.7%).

Figure 5.6

Distribution Of The Sample By Most Used Social Networking Site

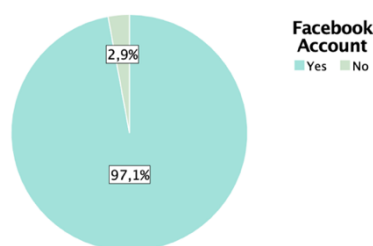


Source. SPSS Output, 2021

Additionally, respondents were asked if they had an active Facebook account, as is common practice in eWOM studies, to increase the study's validity (Chu & Kim, 2011). As shown in Figure 5.7, the vast majority of the sample (97.1%) had an active Facebook account. This notorious percentage shows that almost all the sample was exposed to a scenario they were somehow more or less familiar with.

Figure 5.7

Distribution Of The Sample By Having/No Facebook Account



Source. SPSS Output, 2021

5.2.2. Electronic Word Of Mouth Engagement On SNSs Characterization

A scale with nine items was used to measure eWOM engagement on Social Networking Sites (Chu and Kim, 2011). According to previous research, this scale measures the three most significant eWOM behaviors in SNSs (Chu & Kim, 2011; Flynn et al., 1996): opinion-seeking, opinion-giving, and opinion-passing. It was measured with a seven-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 = "Totally disagree" to 7 = "Totally agree".

The descriptive table (Appendix E) shows that opinion-seeking items presented the highest mean values; therefore, they are the ones most conducted by the sample (4.16, 4.59, and 4.84). On the contrary, opinion giving items registered the lowest means (3.26, 3.46, 3.58) and, therefore, correspond to the minor eWOM behavior of the sample in SNSs.

From all the items, ENG_3: *"I feel more comfortable choosing products/services when I have gotten my contacts' opinions on them on the SNS"* is the one with the highest mean (4.84), which reconfirms the importance and influence of eWOM on purchasing decisions (Chu & Kim, 2011). Regarding the overall SNSs users' eWOM engagement behavior, the estimated mean is $M = 4.0012$, and a standard deviation of $SD = 1.29580$. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that participants have an average eWOM engagement in social networking platforms.

5.3. Restaurant Involvement

As previously mentioned, restaurant involvement was also measured with four items (Beatty & Talpade, 1994) on a seven-point Likert scale. This measure was included to understand the sample's involvement with the service in the experimental scenarios, as previously conducted in other studies (e.g., Reimer & Benkenstein, 2018). The item RI_4: *"I get bored when other people talk to me about restaurants"* was reverse scaled; therefore, it was recoded to complete further analysis. Overall, restaurant involvement registered values above average with $M =$

5.5467 and $SD = 1.05013$ (Appendix E). Consequently, from descriptive statistics presented in Appendix E, the sample showed high levels of restaurant involvement.

5.4. Scenario Realism

As observable in Appendix E, scenario realism registered above-average means, being significantly high ($M = 6.06615$ and $SD = 0.76513$). A one-way ANOVA was conducted to check if the mean realism significantly varied for all experimental scenarios. The normality of this variable was accessed with the Linear Central Theorem, and once $N = 450 > 30$, normality was verified. From the Test of Homogeneity of Variances Table (Appendix F), Levene's test was successful, where $p = 0.152 > \alpha = 0.05$, so the samples came from populations with equal variance. As this assumption was fulfilled, it was possible to conduct the test (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011). Results from the ANOVA (Appendix F) showed that on average, realism did not significantly vary across different scenarios ($p = 0.235 > \alpha = 0.05$ ($F = 1.368$)).

5.5. Manipulation Checks

To evaluate manipulation checks, two independent t-tests were conducted, for both tie strength and reward allocation.

The manipulation for tie strength was successful (Appendix G). First, through Levene's test, $p = 0.234 > \alpha = 0.05$, so it is possible to assume the equality of variances and conduct the analysis (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011). From the independent T-test, once $p = 0.00 < \alpha = 0.05$, the means were significantly different between strong and weak ties ($t(448) = 50.167$, $\alpha = 0.05$). Both lower and upper limits of the 95% confidence interval are positive, suggesting that strong ties ($M = 5.89$) have, on average, higher levels of tie strength than weak ties ($M = 1.79$).

Regarding the reward perceived value, the same procedure as tie strength was conducted (Appendix G). In the Levene's test, $p = 0.001 < \alpha = 0.05$ ($F = 10.548$), implying that the equality of variances was not met. Focusing on the "equal variances not assumed" analysis, once $p = 0.213 > \alpha = 0.05$, there is no statistically significant difference between the groups ($t(282.716) = -1.248$, $\alpha = 0.05$). Once respondents perceived the reward size as equal, between *reward me* and *reward both* conditions, the reward allocation manipulation was successful (Ryu and Feick, 2007).

5.6. Dimensionality Analysis

To assure the scale's consistency and confirm the dimensionality of the variables initially proposed, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted, by the means of a Principal Component Analysis (PCA).

As it can be observed in the Appendix H, the KMO result assumed a value of 0.922 (> 0.5 and < 1.0), indicating that the factor analysis is appropriate with extremely good adequacy of the sample (Field, 2009). Simultaneously, the Bartlett's test indicated that the variables were sufficiently correlated to conduct the factor analysis by exhibiting a $p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$. Therefore, the Principal Component Analysis was performed (Appendix H).

This analysis began by acknowledging how many factors to extract. Three criteria were used to base this decision.

First, the Kaiser's criterion, which recommends the extraction of principal components with eigenvalues equal to or greater than 1. Second, the percentage of explained variance, which considers that the factors extracted should group between 70% and 80% of explained variance. Third, the scree plot, which indicates the number of components to extract based on the points of inflexion. Looking into the Total Variance Explained Table in Appendix H, the PCA found evidence that 4 components should be extracted, corresponding to eigenvalues superior to 1 and 77.310% of the variance of the initial variables explained. The analysis of the scree plot (Appendix H) was slightly ambiguous, displaying inflexion points in 5 and 6 components. Given the nature of this research, the fact that the original dimensions are 4, and that the Kaiser's criterion and percentage of explained variance converge in extracting 4 factors, this investigation proceeded with the extraction of 4 components.

Subsequently, the investigation continued by analyzing the Rotated Component Matrix, to understand which variables loaded into each of the 4 extracted factors. By analyzing this Matrix and considering the validity of loadings superior to 0.6 (Field, 2009), there is evidence that 16 of the initial 17 items loaded individually to one of the 4 components (Appendix H). Therefore, 1 item (IMI_4: "I do not mind the information provider's reviews about products and services") (in red on Appendix H) expressed loadings under the cut-off point (0.6), which led to its suppression from the analysis.

The elimination of this item reinforced the necessity to undertake another PCA to truly confirm the structure's consistency of the components and remaining variables. Thus, a second PCA was conducted with 16 items. The KMO was 0.923, demonstrating a marvelous degree of adequacy of the correlation between variables, and Bartlett's test of sphericity expressed a $p =$

0.000, which indicates the adequacy of the sample and correlation between the variables (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1

KMO And Bartlett's Test S For The 2nd PCA

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.923
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	6,986.927
	df	120
	Sig.	.000

Source. SPSS Output, 2021

Deciding on how many factors to extract from the PCA, the criteria followed were the same. The Kaiser's criterion indicated the extraction of 4 components, the total percentage of explained variance also corroborated the 4-factor decision, explaining 81.363% of the variance (Table 5.2), and finally, the scree plot (Appendix H) displayed inflexion points in 5 and 6 components. Consequently, in the second PCA, the number of factors remains the same.

Table 5.2

Total Variance Explained For The 2nd PC

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	8.892	55.573	55.573	8.892	55.573	55.573	3.663	22.895	22.895
2	1.818	11.365	66.938	1.818	11.365	66.938	3.501	21.883	44.778
3	1.212	7.574	74.513	1.212	7.574	74.513	2.948	18.423	63.201
4	1.096	6.850	81.363	1.096	6.850	81.363	2.906	18.162	81.363
5	.611	3.819	85.182						
6	.514	3.210	88.392						
7	.341	2.133	90.525						
8	.315	1.971	92.496						
9	.233	1.458	93.953						
10	.191	1.196	95.150						
11	.169	1.054	96.204						
12	.143	.892	97.096						
13	.127	.795	97.891						
14	.119	.746	98.638						
15	.113	.705	99.343						
16	.105	.657	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Source. SPSS Output, 2021

When analyzing the association of the variables to each of the 4 factors (Table 5.3), all the variables loaded to each component remained the same as in the previous PCA. Additionally, all the items remained above the cut-off point previously defined (0.6) and with significant variance in the loading values throughout the 4 components. The fact that the structure of the

extracted factors was validated with the second PCA allowed the correct interpretation of the Rotated Component Matrix (Varimax with Kaiser Normalization). This Matrix shows that all items were correctly correlated, as the initially identified variables (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3

PCA Values From The Rotated Component Matrix Using Varimax Rotation For The 2nd PCA

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
IMI_1_R. The way the information provider tried to persuade me seems acceptable to me.	.844	-.196	-.085	-.280
IMI_5_R. The information provider tried to be persuasive without being excessively manipulative.	.795	-.161	-.092	-.228
IMI_2. The information provider tried to manipulate people in ways that I do not like.	.773	-.222	-.264	.031
IMI_3. I was annoyed by the information provider's review because s/he seemed to be trying to inappropriately manage or control people.	.766	-.229	-.294	.022
IMI_6_R. The information provider's review was fair in what was said and shown.	.747	-.243	-.112	-.359
BA_3. My attitude regarding the brand "4Food" is Bad / Good.	-.244	.844	.257	.273
BA_2. My attitude regarding the brand "4Food" is Unfavourable / Favourable.	-.302	.824	.228	.253
BA_1. My attitude regarding the brand "4Food" is Negative / Positive.	-.263	.821	.260	.274
BA_4. My attitude regarding the brand "4Food" is Something that I Dislike / Something that I Like .	-.261	.808	.260	.261
CRE_1. The review is factual.	-.119	.154	.820	.182
CRE_2. The review is accurate.	-.174	.196	.800	.158
CRE_4. The review is trustworthy.	-.249	.320	.706	.343
CRE_3. The review is credible.	-.273	.360	.694	.296
PI_2. I will go to the restaurant "4Food" the next time I need a restaurant.	-.215	.282	.232	.847
PI_3. I will definitely try the restaurant "4Food".	-.142	.281	.293	.847
PI_1. It is very likely that I will go to restaurant "4Food".	-.203	.326	.285	.815

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

Source. SPSS Output, 2021

5.7. Reliability Analysis

Subsequently, a reliability analysis was performed. The goal was to comprehend if each factor extracted during the PCA had internal consistency, reflecting the measuring construct (Field, 2009). This analysis was conducted through the Cronbach's alpha test. To confirm the reliability, Cronbach's alpha should be at least higher than 0.7 and is greater as the alpha comes close to 1 (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011).

All components revealed an alpha value superior to 0.7, as observable in Table 5.4. Accordingly, review credibility can be characterized as having good reliability for demonstrating values superior to 0.8 (Cronbach's alpha = 0.880), while the inference of manipulative intent, brand attitude, and purchase intentions can be characterized as having

excellent reliability by presenting alpha values superior to 0.9 (0.900, 0.959 and 0.955, respectively) (Field, 2009). Moreover, all items of each component were tested using the "Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted", a method that allows to verify if items are negatively affecting the alpha. The results demonstrate that none of the items undermined the alpha, indicating the scale's overall reliability.

Table 5.4

Cronbach's Alpha Values For The Constructs

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Items	Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted
Inference of manipulative intent	0.900	IMI_1	0.855
		IMI_2	0.887
		IMI_3	0.886
		IMI_5	0.884
		IMI_6	0.877
		CRED_1	0.866
Review credibility	0.880	CRED_2	0.863
		CRED_3	0.821
		CRED_4	0.834
		BA_1	0.943
Brand attitude	0.959	BA_2	0.943
		BA_3	0.938
		BA_4	0.931
		PI_1	0.935
Purchase Intentions	0.955	PI_2	0.934
		PI_3	0.932

Source. SPSS Output, 2021

5.8. Comparability of Groups

To check if the six groups under study are comparable, it was relevant to analyze if the differences between them resulted from the manipulation stimuli or other characteristics apart from the scenarios. Therefore, an examination was conducted to acknowledge any statistically significant differences regarding selected control variables (Table 5.5), which were accessed in the questionnaire before the users were exposed to the stimuli.

Table 5.5

Control Variables To Test Comparability Between The Groups

Demographic variables			eWOM behaviour on SNSs		Involvement
Age	Gender	Education	eWOM engagement on SNSs	Time spent in SNSs	Restaurant Involvement

Source. SPSS Output, 2021

Considering that the control variables are categorical, either ordinal or nominal form, different tests had to be applied according to the nature and scales of data (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011). To compare ordinal variables, namely age, education level, eWOM engagement on SNSs, time spent in SNSs per day, and restaurant involvement, Kruskal-Wallis H test were conducted (Appendix I). For gender, a nominal variable, the Chi-Square of independence was applied (Laerd Statistics, 2015) (Appendix I).

Before performing the Kruskal-Wallis, it was assured that the data met the three main assumptions required for this test. Considering how the study was conducted and the organization of the dataset, the data conforms with the assumptions.

First, the dependent variables are ordinal, second, the independent variables have two or more categorical, independent groups (in this case, they are six), and third, observations are independent, which means that there is no relationship between the observations in each group.

Therefore, the Kruskal-Wallis H test was suitable and conducted, using the variable "Experimental_Scenarios" in every test to categorize the groups. For every test, the p-value was higher than $\alpha = 0.05$, not rejecting null hypothesis and concluding that the distribution of age group ($\chi^2(5) = 5.944$, $p = 0.312$), education ($\chi^2(5) = 8.792$, $p = 0.118$), eWOM engagement on SNSs ($\chi^2(5) = 6.093$, $p = 0.297$), time spent on SNSs per day ($\chi^2(5) = 5.450$, $p = 0.363$) and restaurant involvement ($\chi^2(5) = 8.335$, $p = 0.139$) are not significantly different between the six experimental scenarios (Table 5.6).

Regarding the Qui-Square, two main assumptions are required. First, no more than 20% of the contingency table cells should have an expected count equal to or less than 5 regarding the expected frequencies. Second, no expected count should be inferior to 1. When conducting this test, both assumptions are verified (Appendix I), so it is possible to draw conclusions. Once $p = 0.09 > \alpha = 0.05$, the null hypothesis is not rejected, concluding that there is no significant relationship between the two variables: gender and experimental scenario (Table 5.6).

Since no statistically significant differences were found regarding the distribution of the control variables, it is possible to consider that the six groups are comparable, and any differences that might be identified in the hypothesis testing will be the result of the manipulations made to the stimuli.

Table 5.6

Kruskal-Wallis And Chi-Square Hypothesis Test Summary

Null hypothesis	Test ^a	Sig.	Decision
1 The distribution of Age_Group is the same across categories of Experimental_scenarios	Independent-samples Kruskal-Wallis test	0.312	Do not reject the null hypothesis
2 The distribution of Education_Level is the same across categories of Experimental_scenarios	Independent-samples Kruskal-Wallis test	0.118	Do not reject the null hypothesis
3 The distribution of eWOM_Engagement_SNS is the same across categories of Experimental_scenarios	Independent-samples Kruskal-Wallis test	0.297	Do not reject the null hypothesis
4 The distribution of Time_Spent_SNS is the same across categories of Experimental_scenarios	Independent-samples Kruskal-Wallis test	0.363	Do not reject the null hypothesis
5 The distribution of Restaurant_Involvement is the same across categories of Experimental_scenarios	Independent-samples Kruskal-Wallis test	0.139	Do not reject the null hypothesis
6 The variables Gender and Experimental_Scenario are independent (there is no significant relationship between them)	Chi-Square test	0.09	Do not reject the null hypothesis

a. Grouping Variable: Experimental_Scenario

Source. SPSS Output, 2021

5.9. Normality Test

Prior to the analysis of the research hypotheses, it was necessary to acknowledge if the research population followed a normal distribution to use either parametric or non-parametric tests.

In respect to the assessment of the normality of data, Shapiro-Wilk tests were used, following Mooi and Sarstedt (2011). Accordingly, as seen in Table 5.7, it can be noted that p-values = 0.000 < α = 0.05, indicating that the data is not normal. However, the Central Limit Theorem postulates that data approximately follows a normal distribution when samples are higher than 30. In the present research N = 450 for reward allocation and N = 75 for every one of the six scenarios.

Table 5.7

Tests Of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Inference of Manipulative Intent	.127	450	.000	.927	450	.000
Brand Attitude	.122	450	.000	.944	450	.000
Review Credibility	.100	450	.000	.968	450	.000
Purchase Intentions	.112	450	.000	.961	450	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Source. SPSS Output, 2021

5.10. Hypothesis Testing

ANOVA tests were aimed to be performed to test the first six hypothesis (H1a, H1b, H1c, H2a, H2b, H2c, H3a, H3b, H3c). Before conducting them, it was necessary to confirm if three main ANOVA assumptions were met. First, the samples needed to be independent. This was verified since each response came from a separate individual who was randomly assigned to one of the treatment conditions (Lavrakas, 2008). Second, the variables needed to be normally distributed. Above, normality was not met. Although, following Mooi and Sarstedt (2011) and the Central Limit Theorem ($N > 30$), the data can be assumed to approximately follow a normal distribution. Third, the variances need to be equally distributed. From the conducted Levene's Test the sample did not meet the homogeneity of variances.

According to Mooi and Sarstedt (2011), equality of variances is a crucial assumption of the two-way ANOVA, which can bias the results significantly. Therefore, following Mooi and Sarstedt (2011), Field (2009) and Saunders et al. (2019) once both normality and variance assumptions were not completely met, the author agrees that ANOVA is not robust and should not be performed. After careful consideration, non-parametric tests were performed.

Hypothesis H1a), H1b) and H1c)

To test H1a), H1b), and H1c), three non-parametric tests were applied (Appendix J). The goal of these tests was to acknowledge the main effects of (1) tie strength (experimental variable 1) in brand attitude, through a Mann-Whitney Test; (2) reward allocation (experimental variable 2) in brand attitude, through a Kruskal-Wallis test; and (3) the interaction between tie strength and experimental scenarios (experimental variable 1 x experimental variable 2) in brand attitude, with a Kruskal-Wallis test.

According to the Mann-Whitney Test, the distribution of BA is significantly different between the two populations: strong and weak ties ($p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). Moreover, strong ties hold a considerable higher mean rank (mean rank = 282.08) than weak ties (mean rank = 168.92), suggesting that, in online RRP in SNSs, referrals provided by strong ties produce more favorable brand attitudes than if provided by weak ties.

The Kruskal-Wallis performed between brand attitude and reward allocation groups revealed that the distribution of BA is significantly different for at least one of the three groups: no reward, *reward me* and *reward both* ($\chi^2(2) = 125.886, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). Through the pairwise comparisons in the post hoc test, statistically significant differences were found between all three types of reward allocations: *reward me* and *reward both* ($p = 0.000$), *reward*

me ($p = 0.000$) and no reward, *reward both* and no reward ($p = 0.000$). Moreover, looking for the mean ranks, there is evidence that no reward schemes produce higher values of BA (mean rank = 304.83) than *reward both* and *reward me*. Therefore, **H1a) is supported.**

Additionally, referrals in *reward both* programs (mean rank = 233.59) generate higher BA than *reward me* programs (mean rank = 138.08). Therefore, online RRP using *reward me* schemes produce lower brand attitudes than *reward both* schemes, which **supports H1b).**

Following another Kruskal-Wallis analysis between brand attitude and the experimental groups, there is evidence that the distribution significantly varies between the six experimental groups: no reward & strong tie, no reward & weak tie, *reward me* & strong tie, *reward me* & weak tie, *reward both* & strong tie and *reward both* & weak tie ($\chi^2(5) = 217.197$, $p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). Therefore, at least one pair of the six groups is different from each other, to find which, a post hoc test was conducted.

Regarding no reward between strong and weak ties, the pairwise comparison is significantly different ($p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$), and according to the mean ranks, "no reward & strong ties" conditions (mean rank = 360.24), generate higher values of brand attitude than "no reward weak ties" (mean rank = 249.41).

Regarding *reward both*, the pairwise comparison between strong and weak ties was also significant ($p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). Therefore, strong ties relationships (mean rank = 274.17) generate higher BA in *reward both* programs than weak tied relationships (mean rank = 193.01).

Finally, in *reward me* conditions, the two groups also varied significantly ($p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$), therefore, "*reward me* & strong ties" BA values (mean rank = 211.82), outweigh "*reward me* & weak ties" brand attitude values (mean rank = 64.35).

All these being said, there is evidence **to support H1c)**, therefore, the effects of reward allocation on brand attitude are higher for strong ties than weak ties.

Moreover, the "*reward me* & weak tie" group is significantly different from all the other groups (p -values = $0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$), and once is also the one with lower mean ranks (mean rank = 64.35), it is possible to conclude that, referral programs rewarding only the recommender, between weak ties, contribute to the lowest attitudes towards the recommended brand. Additionally, the group "no reward & strong ties" is also significantly different from all the other groups (p -values = $0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). Since it holds the higher mean rank value (mean rank = 360.24), one can say that referral programs between strong ties, where no reward is offered, contribute to the highest brand attitudes.

Lastly, it can be seen that no significant differences were found between "*reward me* & strong ties" and "*reward both* & weak ties" ($p = 0.372 > \alpha = 0.05$).

Hypothesis H2a), H2b) and H2c)

To test H2a), H2b) and H2c), the same procedure as the first hypothesis was performed, as it can be observed in Appendix K.

The Mann-Whitney Test was successful in showing that the distribution of purchase intentions (PI) is significantly different between strong and weak ties ($p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). From the mean ranks, there is evidence that online referrals provided by strong ties (mean rank = 294.98) generate higher levels of PI than provided by weak ties (mean rank = 156.02).

Regarding the Kruskal-Wallis performed between purchase intentions and reward allocation schemes, the distribution of PI is significantly different between the three groups ($\chi^2(2) = 103.219, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). The pairwise comparisons in the post hoc test revealed statistically significant differences between all the pairs of three types of reward allocations. Consequently, no reward schemes produce higher values of PI (mean rank = 288.81) than *reward both* and *reward me*, which **supports H2a)**. Additionally, *reward both* programs (mean rank = 246.58) generate higher PI values than *reward me* programs (mean rank = 141.11), which allows the **validation of H2b)**.

From the Kruskal-Wallis analysis between PI and the six experimental groups, the distribution is significantly different ($\chi^2(5) = 233.775, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). To test H2c), the Pairwise Comparisons table from the post hoc revealed that, for all the three reward allocations there was a significant difference between strong and weak ties. Moreover, following the mean ranks, purchase intentions from strong ties outweigh weak ties in all three reward allocations, which **supports H2c)**.

The Pairwise Comparison also revealed that the "*reward me* & weak ties" group is not only significantly different from all the other groups (p -values = $0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$), but also is the one generating the lowest values of PI (mean rank = 64.65). The opposite does occur in "*no reward* & strong ties", which proved to significantly differ from the others in the post hoc, but also registered the highest mean ranks of the six experimental groups (mean rank = 360.81). Moreover, no significant differences were found between "*reward me* & strong ties" and "*reward both* & weak ties" groups ($p = 0.144 > \alpha = 0.05$).

Hypothesis H3a), H3b) and H3c)

To test H3a), H3b), and H3c), non-parametric tests were performed, as demonstrated in Appendix L. According to the Mann-Whitney Test, the inference of manipulative intent (IMI) is significantly different between strong and weak ties ($p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$), being significantly higher in weak tie referral programs (mean rank = 251.29) than strong tie programs (mean rank

= 199.71). This suggests that in RRP, referrals provided by weak ties, originate higher receiver's inference of manipulative intent from the recommender than strong ties.

The Kruskal-Wallis performed between inference of manipulative intent and reward allocation groups revealed that the distribution of IMI is significantly different for at least one of the three groups ($\chi^2(2) = 92.357, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). Through the Pairwise Comparisons, there are statistically significant differences between all three types of reward allocations. Moreover, there is evidence that no reward schemes are the ones producing lower values of IMI (mean rank = 144.91) therefore, **supporting H3a**).

Additionally, referrals in *reward both* programs (mean rank = 247.92) generate lower IMI values than *reward me* programs (mean rank = 283.67). Therefore, online RRP using *reward me* schemes produce higher IMI values than *reward both* schemes, which **supports H3b**).

To test H3c), one last Kruskal-Wallis was conducted between the inference of manipulative intent and the experimental groups. There is evidence that the distribution significantly varies between the six groups ($\chi^2(5) = 110.597, p = 0.000 < \alpha = 0.05$). Regarding no reward between strong and weak ties the Pairwise Comparison is significantly ($p = 0.012 < \alpha = 0.05$), and “no reward & weak ties” conditions (mean rank = 171.49), generate higher values for IMI than “no reward & strong ties” (mean rank = 118.33). Regarding *reward both*, the two groups did not vary significantly ($p = 0.057 > \alpha = 0.05$), therefore concluding that the IMI does not significantly vary *reward both* programs with strong ties and weak ties relationships between the recommender and the receiver.

Finally, in *reward me* conditions, significant difference is verified between the two groups ($p = 0.004 < \alpha = 0.05$), therefore, “*reward me* & weak ties” IMI values (mean rank = 314.29), outweigh “*reward me* & strong ties” IMI values (mean rank = 253.06). This being said, **H3c) is partially rejected**.

Additionally, the "*reward me* & weak ties" group is significantly different from all the other groups (p -values $< \alpha = 0.05$), and once is also the one with higher mean ranks (mean rank = 314.29), RRP rewarding only the recommender, between weak ties, generate the highest values of IMI. The opposite occurs in "no reward & strong ties", which also significantly differs from all the other groups (p -values $< \alpha = 0.05$) and, from the mean ranks, it is the group that generates the lower values for IMI (mean rank = 118.33). From the pairwise comparison, no significant differences were found between "*reward me* & strong ties" and "*reward both* & weak ties" regarding IMI ($p = 0.479 > \alpha = 0.05$).

Hypothesis H4, H5, and H6

Bivariate Correlations and Linear Regression Analysis were run to test the last three hypotheses (H4, H5, and H6). Therefore, to measure the correlation between the variables the Pearson's Correlation was applied (Figure 5.8).

According to Cohen (1988), all correlations revealed values greater than 0.49, indicating strong relationships between the constructs. Positive correlations were found between BA and CRE ($r_p = 0.662$, $p = 0.000$), BA and PI ($r_p = 0.715$, $p = 0.000$) and CRE and PI ($r_p = 0.631$, $p = 0.000$). As expected, the correlations between the IMI and the other constructs were negative, but all significant ($p < 0.05$), as IMI and CRE ($r_p = -0.573$, $p = 0.000$), IMI and PI ($r_p = -0.555$, $p = 0.000$), IMI and BA ($r_p = -0.638$, $p = 0.000$).

Table 5.8

Pearson Correlation Coefficients

		Score_Inference_ Manipulative Intent	Score_Brand_ Attitude	Score_Review_ Credibility	Score_Purchase_ Intentions
Score_Inference_Manipulative _Intent	Pearson Correlation	1	-.638**	-.573**	-.555**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	450	450	450	450
Score_Brand_Attitude	Pearson Correlation	-.638**	1	.662**	.715**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	450	450	450	450
Score_Review_Credibility	Pearson Correlation	-.573**	.662**	1	.631**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	450	450	450	450
Score_Purchase_Intentions	Pearson Correlation	-.555**	.715**	.631**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	450	450	450	450

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source. SPSS Output, 2021

Subsequently, linear regression models were applied, therefore for its valid implementation and further analysis, prior verification of the following model assumptions was conducted (Joseph F. Hair et al., 2009; Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011):

1. Linearity of the relationship between X and Y

The theoretical model must be written in a linear way, as the following:

$$y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times X_1 + \beta_2 \times X_2 + \beta_i \times X_i + \varepsilon (VI) \quad i = 0,1,2, \dots, k \quad (5.1)$$

2. The mean of the residual component of the model is zero $E(\varepsilon_i) = 0$

3. The independent variables are not correlated with residual terms $Cov(\epsilon_i, X_k) = 0$

The relationship between the unstandardized residual and the independent variable must be equal to zero for each regression, which can be analyzed through a Pearson's Correlation Bivariate Test.

4. The variance of the random term is constant: Homoscedasticity

This assumption implies the analysis of the different scatterplots and sees if, alongside $y = 0$, the points are getting closer or dispersing more and more of the linear line. If not, then the assumption holds. If the variance of the random term is homogeneous, it means that the errors do not increase, they rather decrease as the dependent variable increases (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2011).

5. Normality of the residuals

Acknowledge if the errors are normally distributed. Normality can be checked through the examination of each model's histogram and normal P-Plot.

Hypothesis H4: Brand Attitude and Inference of Manipulative Intent

The fourth hypothesis (H4) aimed to analyze the influence of the Inference of Manipulative Intent (IMI) on the dependable variable, Brand Attitude (BA). Therefore, the following linear regression model was elaborated and tested as shown in Appendix M:

$$\text{BrandAttitude} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * \text{InferenceManipulativeIntent} + \epsilon \quad (5.2)$$

First, it was essential to check the viability of this model before moving onwards on the analysis. The p-value on the ANOVA table equals 0.000, which is lower than 0.05, confirming that the IMI has some impact on BA. Once the model is validated, a closer look was made at the Model Summary table (Table 5.8). R^2 value is 0.408, meaning that the Inference of Manipulative Intent explains 40.8% of the construct Brand Attitudes. Considering this a high value, it is possible to say that IMI is a critical element of BA.

Table 5.9*Simple Linear Regression Model Summary IMI --> BA*

Model Summary ^b					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.638 ^a	.408	.406	3.16792	1.562

a. Predictors: (Constant), Score_Inference_Manipulative_Intent
b. Dependent Variable: Score_Brand_Attitude

Source. SPSS Output, 2021

From the coefficients table, it is also possible to conclude that IMI negatively influences BA once the estimated unstandardized coefficient is below 0. In the same table, the p-values are lower than 0.05, concluding that the constant term (IMI) should be included in the model and that there is a significant effect of IMI in BA. This being said, the equation of the linear regression model is:

$$\hat{Y} = 19.681 - 0.354 * \text{InferenceofManipulativeIntent} \quad (5.3)$$

With $\hat{\beta}_0 = 19.681$ being the level of BA when the IMI level equals zero and $\hat{\beta}_1 = -0.354$, meaning that a unit increase in Inference of Manipulative intent leads to a decrease of 0.354 in Brand Attitude. There is sufficient statistical evidence **to support H4**.

Hypothesis H5: Review Credibility and Inference of Manipulative Intent

The fifth hypothesis (H5) aimed to analyze the influence of the Inference of Manipulative Intent on the dependent variable, Review Credibility (CRE). Therefore, the following linear regression model was elaborated, and further results are present in Appendix N:

$$\text{ReviewCredibility} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * \text{InferenceManipulativeIntent} + \varepsilon \quad (5.4)$$

Regarding the ANOVA test, it is possible to see that the significant value is lower than the critical value ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$), and therefore the variable is essential in explaining review credibility. Analyzing the R^2 on the Model Summary table (Table 5.9), one can see that the IMI contributes to explain 32.8% of the total variance of CRE.

Table 5.10*Simple Linear Regression Model Summary IMI --> CRE*

Model Summary ^b					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.573 ^a	.328	.327	4.54460	1.463

a. Predictors: (Constant), Score_Inference_Manipulative_Intent
b. Dependent Variable: Score_Review_Credibility

Source. SPSS Output, 2021

Regarding the individual parameters' contribution, the p-value for the constant of the coefficients is equal to 0, indicating that the constant is needed in the model. Moreover, the p-value of the coefficient for the explanatory variable is equal to 0.000. Thus, it can be concluded that the explanatory variable (IMI) significantly explains the dependent variable (CRE). Moreover, the IMI interaction has a negative impact of -0.429 (beta value on standardized coefficients' column) on CRE. Therefore, the equation of the linear regression model is:

$$\hat{Y} = 23.906 - 0.429 * InferenceManipulativeIntent \quad (5.5)$$

With $\hat{\beta}_0 = 23.906$ being the level of CRE when the IMI level equals zero and $\hat{\beta}_1 = -0.429$ representing a decrease of 0.429 in Review Credibility when the level of Inference of Manipulative Intent increases by one unit. Therefore, **H5 is supported**.

Hypothesis H6: Purchase Intention and Inference of Manipulative Intent

The last hypothesis (H6) aimed to analyze the influence of the Inference of Manipulative Intent on the dependable variable, Purchase Intentions (PI). Therefore, the following linear regression model was elaborated and analyzed by the results of Appendix O:

$$PurchaseIntention = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * InferenceManipulativeIntent + \varepsilon \quad (5.6)$$

The model proved to be valid to continue with the linear regression due to a p-value equal to 0.000 from the ANOVA table. From the Model Summary table (Table 5.10), namely the R^2 , one can see that the IMI contributes to explain 30.8% of the total variance of PI.

Table 5.11*Simple Linear Regression Model Summary IMI --> PI*

Model Summary ^b					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.555 ^a	.308	.307	4.04132	1.526

a. Predictors: (Constant), Score_Inference_Manipulative_Intent
b. Dependent Variable: Score_Purchase_Intentions

Source. SPSS Output, 2021

Furthermore, from the coefficients table, it is also possible to conclude that the IMI negatively influences PI (estimated unstandardized coefficients are below 0). The p-value for the constant of the coefficients is equal to 0, thus concluding that the constant IMI is needed in the model. Moreover, the p-value of the coefficient for the explanatory variable is equal to 0.000, which indicates that the IMI significantly determines the dependent variable (PI). The equation of the linear regression model is the following:

$$\hat{Y} = 17.899 - 0.364 * InferenceManipulativeIntent \quad (5.7)$$

With $\hat{\beta}_0 = 17.899$ being the level of PI when the IMI level equals zero and $\hat{\beta}_1 = -0.364$, meaning that a unit increase in Inference of Manipulative intent leads to a decrease of 0.364 in Purchase Intentions. There is sufficient statistical evidence to **support H6**.

In conclusion, as seen in Appendix M, N and O, after checking the linear regression assumptions of the for all the three models, there is evidence that they are not entirely fulfilled once the normality of residuals is not verified. Therefore, it can be stated that the sample results cannot be used for prediction, and results cannot be generalized but can only be applied to this sample.

To finalize, after a complete analysis of the Mann-Whitneys, Kruskal-Wallis, and Linear Regression Models, Table 5.11 resumes the results and validation of the 12 formulated research hypothesis.

Table 5.12

Research Hypothesis Summary Validation

Hypothesis	Validation
H1a) In online RRPs, no reward allocation schemes are more likely to produce higher brand attitudes than <i>reward both</i> and <i>reward me</i> allocation schemes.	Supported
H1 H1b) Online RRPs using <i>reward me</i> allocation schemes are more likely to produce lower brand attitudes than <i>reward both</i> schemes.	Supported
H1c) The effects of reward allocation on brand attitude are more positive for strong ties than weak ties.	Supported
H2a) In online RRPs, no reward allocation schemes are more likely to generate higher purchase intentions than <i>reward both</i> and <i>reward me</i> allocation schemes.	Supported
H2 H2b) Online RRPs using <i>reward me</i> allocation schemes are more likely to produce lower purchase intentions than <i>reward both</i> schemes.	Supported
H2c) The effects of reward allocation on purchase intentions are more positive for strong ties than for weak ties.	Supported
H3a) In online RRPs, no reward allocation schemes are more likely to produce lower inference of manipulative intent than <i>reward both</i> and <i>reward me</i> allocation schemes.	Supported
H3 H3b) In online RRPs, <i>reward me</i> allocation schemes will generate a higher receiver's inference of manipulative intent from the recommender than <i>reward both</i> schemes.	Supported
H3c) In the different reward allocations, the inference of manipulative intent is higher for weak than strong ties.	Partially Rejected
H4 The inference of manipulative intent negatively influences brand attitudes.	Supported
H5 The inference of manipulative intent negatively influences review credibility.	Supported
H6 The inference of manipulative intent negatively influences purchase intention.	Supported

Source. Author's elaboration, 2021

CHAPTER 6

Discussion, Theoretical Contributions And Managerial Implications

6.1. Discussion

This research was intended to study the effects of reward allocation and tie strength on receivers' responses, having as basis the Persuasion Knowledge Model. From the analysis exposed above, in the receivers' perspective, no reward schemes generated the highest RRP responses, followed by *reward both* and *reward me* schemes. Therefore, no reward allocations registered the highest levels of brand attitudes and purchase intentions over the recommended brand, thus suggesting that unrewarded referral programs still lead to better outcomes than rewarded programs. These conclusions are aligned with previous research since in rewarded programs, recipients more likely assume that senders' actions are driven by biased, dishonest, less sincere motives (e.g., Ryu & Feick, 2007; Tuk et al., 2009; Verlegh et al., 2013, Eisend et al., 2020).

Subsequently, *reward both* schemes registered the second-best position leading to RRP outcomes. As expected, these programs lead to more favorable brand attitudes and purchase intentions than *reward me* programs. Previous research stated that *reward both* schemes are an optimal allocation, by balancing perceived attractiveness and social concerns (Jin & Huang, 2014; Ryu & Feick, 2007; Q. Wang et al., 2018). This to say that, once both the recommender and receiver receive a reward, the risk, and concern of damaging existing relationships is lower, making this allocation more appealing for receivers (Jung et al., 2021; Q. Wang et al., 2018).

Additionally, the results reveal the importance of the relationship between recommender and the receiver in RRP's overall effectiveness, regarding different reward allocations. More favorable brand attitudes and higher purchase intentions were verified in strong-tied RRP than weak-tied. This is to say that there is evidence from the sample that in RRP in SNSs, receivers' responses are more favorable with strong ties than weak ties, in all three allocation schemes. Previous literature stated the same results, defending that the trust and closeness among strong ties diminishes recommenders' biased behaviors and receiver's apprehension regarding recommendations (Orsingher & Wirtz, 2018; Ryu & Feick, 2007; Q. Wang et al., 2018).

From the six different types of programs studied (3 reward allocation x 2 tie strength), it was observable that *reward me* programs between weakly tied individuals are the ones leading

to lower RRP's outcomes. Therefore, from the analysis conducted, programs where only the recommender receives the reward, and that recommender is a weak tie to the referrer, led to the lowest values of brand attitudes and purchase intentions. These results follow previous research (Verlegh et al., 2013), once in an RRP context, the extrinsic motives induced through incentives make recommendations seem less impartial and, that impartiality is more difficult to analyze if coming from a more distant and secondary bond (Ryu & Feick, 2007).

Conversely, referral programs with no rewards between strong-tied individuals were the ones that led to higher outcomes, both regarding brand attitudes and purchase intentions. Unrewarded programs between friends and family are the ideal of organic eWOM messages, demonstrating that recommendations without any persuasion attempt where the only possible gains are based on altruism, are the ones lessening suspicion about ulterior motives (Reimer & Benkenstein, 2018; Ryu & Feick, 2007).

Concerning the inference of manipulative intent (IMI), no reward programs inferred the lowest levels of IMI. Since no compensation is involved in unrewarded programs, receivers are less likely to infer manipulative, dishonest, biased behaviors from the recommenders. As a result, recommendations are perceived as being more trustworthy and sincere (Song et al., 2021; Verlegh et al., 2013). Programs in which only the recommender received the reward inferred the highest manipulative intents from the receiver. Strong ties significantly lead receivers to infer lower levels of manipulative intent than weak ties. In SNSs, stronger ties have more frequent contact and a more solid relation, mitigating suspicion of persuasion attempts, also concerning about damaging the existing bond between the two parts (Wirtz et al., 2013).

One exception was in *reward both* allocation schemes, in which there was no significant difference in the IMI, between strong and weak ties. This result was not expected. Although, once both the recommender and the receiver have a gain with the RRP, the strength of the tie does not have a significant power in changing receivers' perceptions (Verlegh et al., 2013).

Additionally, "*reward both & weak tie*" and "*reward me & strong tie*" scenarios did not present significant differences regarding IMI. Consequently, these two groups did not vary significantly regarding both brand attitudes and purchase intentions. This result was not verified in other research, although one possible justification can be that, in SNSs, the strength of the tie is more relevant. Although only the recommender redeems the reward, which would typically infer higher IMI and lower RRP's responses, the receiver has a close relation to him/her, balancing the inference and the outcomes. At the same time, in "*reward both & weak tie*" conditions, although both receive the reward, which ideally would infer lower IMI and generate higher RRP's outcomes, the tie strength is weak, which affects the overall results.

Lastly, results also revealed the negative relationship between IMI and three different RRP outcomes: brand attitudes, purchase intentions, and review credibility. Consequently, once the inference of manipulative intent negatively influences RRP outcomes, the higher the receiver infers a manipulative intent from the recommender, the lower the persuasiveness, credibility, and overall attitude towards the program and the recommended brand.

Aligned with the PKM, when receivers activate persuasion knowledge, they start inferring manipulative intent from the communicator, which instigates skepticism (Boerman et al., 2012; Song et al., 2021). Consequently, this sense of insecurity regarding the recommender and the recommendation triggers resistance and negative emotional responses, such as less favorable brand attitudes and lower purchase intentions (Reijmersdal et al., 2016).

6.2. Theoretical Contributions

The present investigation makes a few contributions to the literature of incentivized eWOM, namely regarding RRP. In a broader sense, this research advances the literature on incentivized eWOM regarding the impact of incentives (rewards) on the audience's attitude towards those programs. Accordingly, it extends the theory on the effect of different RRP designs on receivers' responses to those programs in SNSs.

According to different authors, namely Wolters et al. (2020), prior literature was mainly focused on the effects of reward size and reward type on sales and customer value (e.g., Schmitt et al., 2011). Only a few studies have explored reward allocation schemes, and even less have focused their research on the receiver's perspective (Tuk et al., 2009; Q. Wang et al., 2018). The present study's findings reveal that different referral programs designs, namely regarding whom to incentivize (i.e., reward allocation), can differently influence the outcomes and overall effectiveness of RRP. This research provides important insights about receivers' responses in SNSs, focusing on when, and how rewarded referrals can be expected to result in favorable receiver responses. It also suggests a framework that can be used to preliminarily predict responses to RRP in SNSs. Especially, the present findings show that unrewarded programs are the ones generating the highest RRP outcomes, but *reward both* programs, if conducted between strong ties, can also achieve significant positive outcomes.

Further, this study integrated the Persuasion Knowledge Model by building on prior research (e.g., Lunardo et al., 2016; Song et al., 2021), acknowledging that manipulative intent's inference plays a key role in the receivers' perceptions and consecutive responses of referral programs. Although this model has been used to examine a wide range of behaviors, namely regarding advertisement, scholars have little approached eWOM and RRP from this

perspective (two exceptions are Verlegh et al. (2013) and Pongjit and Beise-Zee (2015)). Therefore, it is believed that this study shows the utility of applying the Persuasion Knowledge Model in understanding incentivized eWOM programs. The study revealed that the inference of manipulative intents is higher in programs where only the recommender is rewarded and that it negatively influences brand attitudes, purchase intentions and review credibility.

6.3. Managerial Implications

The results of this thesis hold important managerial implications. This study identified the conditions under which different RRP affect receivers' responses in SNSs and offers multiple actionable suggestions that can help managers increase the persuasiveness and effectiveness of these programs. First, in SNSs companies should plan attractive marketing strategies, namely, RRPs, focusing on both the referrer and the receiver. To do so, the effects of reward allocation and tie strength are proven significant and, therefore, should be considered in its design.

As discussed above, unrewarded referral programs are still the ones leading to lower inferences of manipulative intent and, consequently, higher RRP outcomes. On the contrary, rewarded programs tend to lead to less favorable attitudes and RRP outcomes, as they are perceived as higher persuasion attempts. All this considered, marketers should focus on designing RRPs to decrease suspicion and plausibility of manipulative intents to achieve higher acceptance and persuasiveness of these programs. The subtler and more natural the RRP program, the lower the receiver's inference of manipulative intent, the higher the outcomes. As seen above, for example, *reward both* schemes decline the inference of manipulative intents, compared to *reward me* schemes, so applying this subtler allocation scheme may be an effective technique to achieve this goal.

Moreover, strong ties undoubtedly led to higher RRP responses in all three allocation schemes, than weak ties. Therefore, when firms design RRPs, tie strength should be taken into consideration. However, it can be difficult for companies to implement RRPs solely targeting strong ties. A solution may be positioning RRP design amplifying the fact that the referral occurs between strongly tied individuals—for example, considering the naming of the program to be around "recommend-to-a-friend" instead of "member-get-member" (Verlegh et al., 2013).

When tie strength is difficult to distinguish, due to one-to-many relationships in SNSs, companies should opt to consider *reward me* programs instead of *reward both* programs. This is because no significant differences were found between "*reward both* & weak tie" and "*reward me* & strong tie" programs regarding the inference of manipulative intent and RRP outcomes and, *reward me* programs are less costly.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusion, Limitations And Recommendations For Future Research

7.1. Conclusion

Referral programs are a means through which firms can leverage their existing customers' networks, acquiring new customers who exhibit higher margins and lower churn (Stumpf & Baum, 2016; Wolters et al., 2020). Therefore, the design of these programs represents a core component to its persuasiveness and companies' overall performance (Hu & Zhang, 2021).

Marketing managers face one central dilemma regarding RRP: counter-productiveness. While incentives are proven to significantly increase the recommenders' likelihood and quality of referrals (Ryu & Feick, 2007), they are also likely to decrease receivers' referral acceptance (Tuk et al., 2009). One reason for this is the fact that the presence of rewards often drives receivers to infer manipulate and persuasive attempts from recommenders (Verlegh et al., 2013). As a consequence, this drastically reduces the credibility and trustworthiness of the brand, the recommender, and the product / service (Orsingher & Wirtz, 2018). Thus, from the receivers' perspective, rewards are generally proven to damage social relationships and reduce the overall persuasiveness of RRPs (John Kim et al., 2016).

Having said that, the present study explored how companies can design these programs, to minimize manipulation inferences from the sender while making them more appealing to receivers. Thus, this thesis provided evidence on the mechanisms through which reward allocation and tie strength influence RRP responses, namely brand attitudes, review credibility, and purchase intentions, regarding the recipients' perspective.

To understand these phenomena, a model that included both reward allocation and tie strength effects on the variables inference of manipulative intent, brand attitude, and purchase intention was created employing a between-subjects experimental design (N = 450). Respondents were randomly assigned to one of six possible conditions, fruit of the combination between a 3 reward allocation (no reward, *reward both*, *reward me*) x 2 tie strength (strong tie, weak tie): no reward & strong tie; no reward & weak tie; *reward both* & strong tie; *reward both* & weak tie; *reward me* & strong tie and *reward me* & weak tie.

The study revealed that, in the receivers' perspective, RRP's persuasiveness is dependent upon the allocation of the referral reward and the interpersonal tie-strength between the recommender and recipient. Providing important insights about how rewarded referrals can be expected to result in favorable product responses, the present study suggests a framework that can be applied to understand and predict rewarded referral responses in a wide variety of settings on Social Networking Sites. Moreover, results support a theoretical view that receivers infer the motives underlying recommenders' behaviors, consequently negatively influencing evaluations, credibility and intentions over the recommended product and brand (M. Kim & Song, 2018).

7.2. Limitations And Recommendations For Future Research

While the present study produced insightful findings and clues for both academics and professionals specialized in eWOM marketing and Referral Reward Programs, some limitations and opportunities for future research need to be acknowledged.

This research focused on the effects of referral allocation schemes and tie strength in the audience's responses to those programs. To do so, three levels of reward allocation were considered (no reward, *reward me*, and *reward both*). Although, Ryu and Feick (2007) also conceptualized *reward you* schemes, in which only the recipient receives the reward. This is a much less common tactic, which was why it was not considered in this investigation, but that could receive examination in future studies. Regarding tie strength, two levels were considered, strong and weak ties. However, it may be worth investigating and comparing how non-existent ties (i.e., when the recommender and the receiver do not know each other) (e.g., influencers) would behave regarding the attitudes towards the recommended brand, purchase intentions, and the credibility of the recommendation, for different RRP's designs.

Another limitation of the study can be related to the methodology applied. Different authors agree that experimental studies are valuable in providing accurate data, namely regarding incentivized marketing campaigns. However, authors such as Orsingher and Wirtz (2018), considered that experimental studies, in which subjects are instructed to imagine being in a presented written scenario, may not fully represent how subjects would respond in real life. To avoid this limitation, a pretest was conducted, and all misleading information was cleared to increase the questionnaires' precision. Nevertheless, for external validity, field experiments could reinforce the obtained results.

For the experimental study, a restaurant was chosen once it is something considered familiar for the sample and through which participants were revealed to have high levels of involvement. The scenarios involved a restaurant named "4Food", which is a fictitious brand. It could be worth investigating how the audience perceives different designs of Referral Reward Programs according to existing brands.

Additionally, as established by a plenitude of researchers, satisfaction is a critical element in marketing planning and firm's profitability. Thus, an important extension of this research would be to consider satisfaction with current products/service providers as another situational constraint, and then examine how responses to RRP are affected by different levels of satisfaction with the current brand.

Moreover, this research was general and did not specify one industry. Therefore, an avenue for future research may pass from studying these relations for each industry, alongside acknowledging specific industry indicators that can influence the effects of incentivized eWOM programs.

One of the central insights of the present research is the identification of the negative effects of Referral Reward Programs in review credibility, brand attitude, and, consequently, purchase intentions. Therefore, future research could be devoted to designing referral campaigns that minimize the mentioned negative effects while presenting the already established benefits (e.g., customer acquisition and retention) (Tuk et al., 2009).

Regarding the incentives, this research considered monetary rewards (discounts), as frequently adopted by companies in referral programs (Jin & Huang, 2014). Therefore, conduct the analysis with purely non-monetary/symbolic rewards (cannot be converted into money) and understand if it decreases the negative showed effects, appositively to prior research (Ryu & Feick, 2007; Tuk et al., 2009; Verlegh et al., 2013).

Also, this research was only focused on a sample from Portugal, thus making it difficult to generalize results to other countries. Different countries have different Social Networking Sites usages, especially when it comes to eWOM participation in social networks. Insides from respondents out of Portugal could be valuable in providing different insights regarding consumer behavior facing different RRP designs.

Lastly, from the results of the study the results coming from the Simple Linear Regressions could not be generalized as some assumptions were not met. This being said, it might be relevant to test these results once again to assure that they can be generalized.

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Appendixes

Appendix A - Questionnaire In English

Cover letter

Dear participant,

This questionnaire was prepared within the framework of an academic master's degree in Marketing, from ISCTE Business School. It aims to study the influence of incentivized electronic word of mouth in receivers' responses, in social networking sites. To do so, a scenario was created, recreating a specific situation, while I kindly ask you to answer accordingly.

All critical definitions are present throughout the questionnaire, to assure its full understanding. Your answers will completely anonymous and will not be shared for any purpose. The estimated time for completing this questionnaire is 5 minutes. Any question related to this questionnaire can be sent to aggfs@iscte-iul.pt .

Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your cooperation,

Abigail Fernandes

1. eWOM

Electronic word of mouth (eWOM) is the exchange of information regarding, products, services and/or brand between consumers online, via the Internet.

Some examples of eWOM are:

1. A **review** or **evaluation** of a restaurant in TripAdvisor or Zomato.
2. A **rating** of a Hotel in an Online Travel agency, such as Booking.com or Airbnb.
3. A **comment** or **recommendation** regarding a product on social media, such as Facebook or Instagram.
4. An **opinion, information, or feedback** regarding a brand on a discussion forum, blog, or company's website.

Have you ever read electronic word of about products, services, or brands, in social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, LinkedIn)?

- Yes
- No

2. Electronic Word of Mouth behavior and SNSs usage

Which of the following social networking site do you use the most:

- YouTube
- Facebook
- WhatsApp
- Instagram
- Twitter
- Pinterest
- LinkedIn
- TikTok
- Other

How much time do you spend on social networking sites (e.g., YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn) per day?

- More than 5 hours per day

- 3-5 hours per day
- 1-3 hours per day
- Less than 1 hour per day

Do you have an active Facebook account?

- Yes
- No

Please rate your level of agreement from 1 - “totally disagree” to 7 - “totally agree” with the following statements:

Note: SNS = Social Networking Sites (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, LinkedIn, etc.)?

- When I consider new products/services, I ask my contacts on the SNS for advice.
- I like to get my contacts' opinions on the SNS before I buy new products/services.
- I feel more comfortable choosing products/services when I have gotten my contacts' opinions on them on the SNS.
- I often persuade my contacts on the SNS to buy products/services that I like.
- My contacts on the SNS pick their products/services based on what I have told them.
- On the SNS, I often influence my contacts' opinions about products/services.
- When I receive product/service-related information or opinion from a friend, I will pass it along to my other contacts on the SNS.
- On the SNS, I like to pass along interesting information about products/services from one group of my contacts on my 'friends' list to another.
- I tend to pass along my contacts' positive reviews of products/services to other contacts on the SNS

Please rate your level of agreement from 1 - “totally disagree” to 7 - “totally agree” with the following statements. In general:

- I have a strong interest in restaurants.
- Restaurants are very important to me.
- Restaurants matter a lot to me.
- I get bored when other people talk to me about restaurants

Scenarios

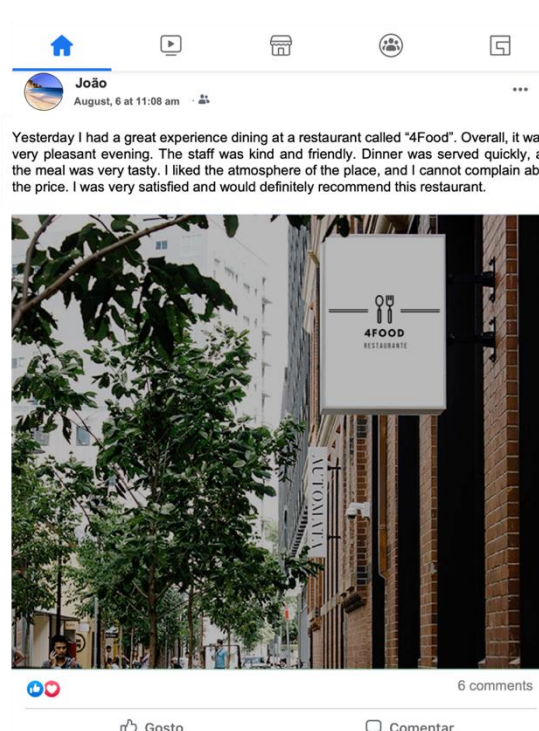
Scenario 1: No reward vs. Strong tie

Next, you will be asked to read a made-up scenario carefully. This scenario contains electronic word of mouth, by representing an online review about a restaurant on Facebook. Please pay attention to the review characteristics and details and answer accordingly.

Please imagine the following situation:

You were casually scrolling on your Facebook when you found a restaurant review from João. **João** is one of your **closest friends**, someone you truly know, have a frequent contact with and share your life. It is a person with whom you constantly interact, through comments, likes, and messages, on Facebook.

Please read João's review:



Scenario 2: No reward vs. Weak tie

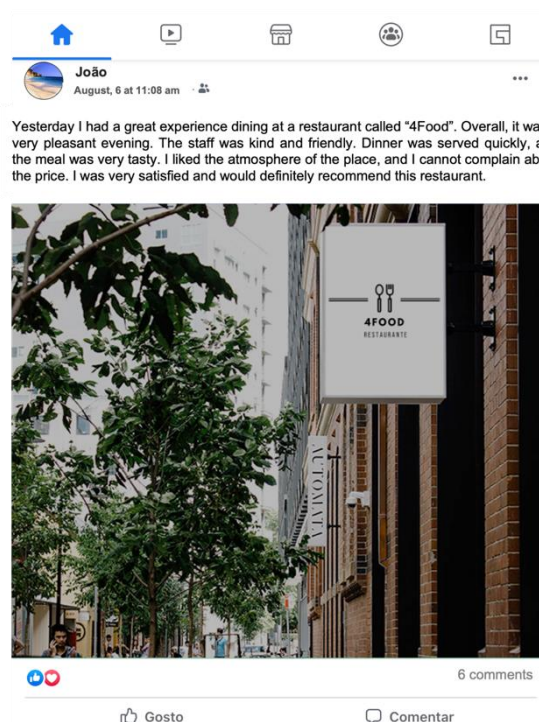
Next, you will be asked to read a made-up scenario carefully. This scenario contains electronic word of mouth, by representing an online review about a restaurant on Facebook.

Please pay attention to the review characteristics and details and answer accordingly

Please imagine the following situation:

You were casually scrolling on your Facebook when you found a restaurant review from João. **João** is one of your **casual acquaintances**, someone you have met but barely know and communicate, especially for personal matters. It is person with whom you rarely interact; through comments, likes, and messages, on Facebook.

Please read João's review:



Scenario 3: *Reward me* vs. **Strong tie**

Next, you will be asked to read a made-up scenario carefully. This scenario illustrates a situation of incentivized electronic word of mouth, namely a Referral Reward Program.

A **Referral Reward Program** is a type of incentivized electronic word of mouth, in which companies encourage existing customers to make referrals about their products/services in order to attract new customers, in exchange for a reward/incentive.

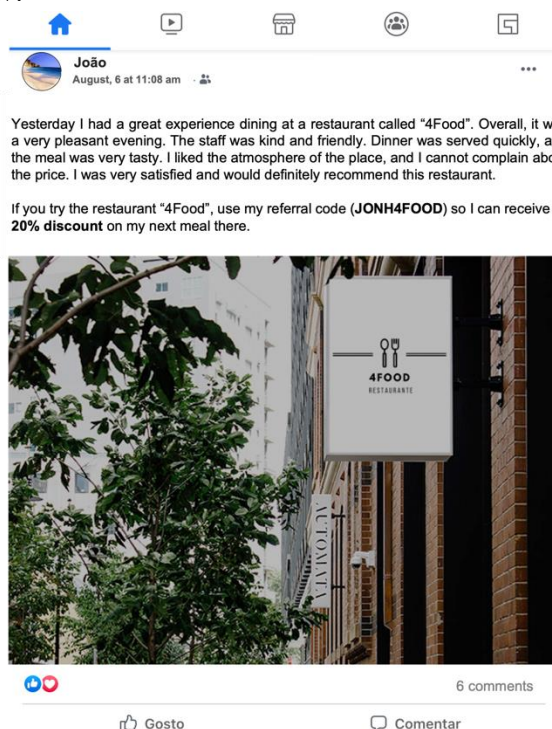
The Referral Reward Program is succeeded when an existing customer is able to attract and get new customers into the company and, for that reason, receives a reward (e.g., discount, present, coupon, samples, etc.).

Please pay attention to the review characteristics and details and answer accordingly.

Please imagine the following situation:

You were casually scrolling on your Facebook when you found a restaurant review from João. **João** is one of your **closest friends**, someone you truly know, have a frequent contact with and share your life. It is a person with whom you constantly interact, through comments, likes, and messages, on Facebook.

Please read João's review:



Scenario 4: *Reward me vs. Weak tie*

Next, you will be asked to read a made-up scenario carefully. This scenario illustrates a situation of incentivized electronic word of mouth, namely a Referral Reward Program.

A **Referral Reward Program** is a type of incentivized electronic word of mouth, in which companies encourage existing customers to make referrals about their products/services in order to attract new customers, in exchange for a reward/incentive.

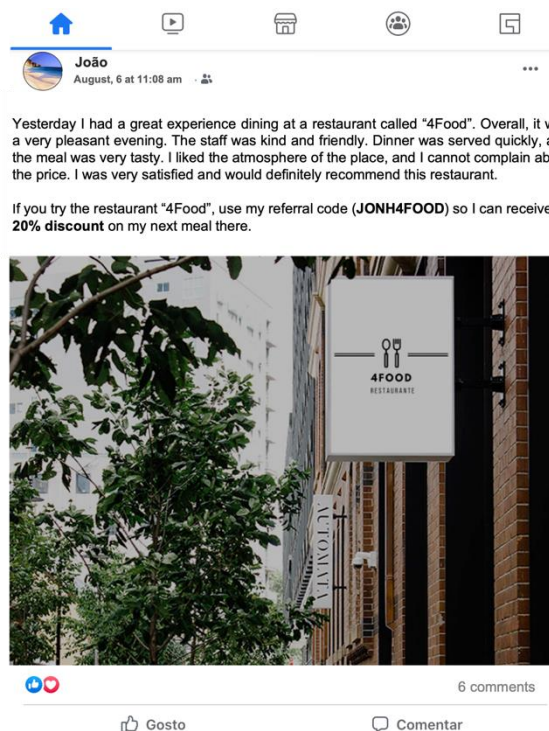
The Referral Reward Program is succeeded when an existing customer is able to attract and get new customers into the company and, for that reason, receives a reward (e.g., discount, present, coupon, samples, etc.).

Please pay attention to the review characteristics and details and answer accordingly.

Please imagine the following situation:

You were casually scrolling on your Facebook when you found a restaurant review from João. **João** is one of your **casual acquaintances**, someone you have met but barely know and communicate, especially for personal matters. It is person with whom you rarely interact; through comments, likes, and messages, on Facebook.

Please read João's review:



Scenario 5: *Reward both* vs. *Strong tie*

Next, you will be asked to read a made-up scenario carefully. This scenario illustrates a situation of incentivized electronic word of mouth, namely a Referral Reward Program.

A **Referral Reward Program** is a type of incentivized electronic word of mouth, in which companies encourage existing customers to make referrals about their products/services in order to attract new customers, in exchange for a reward/incentive.

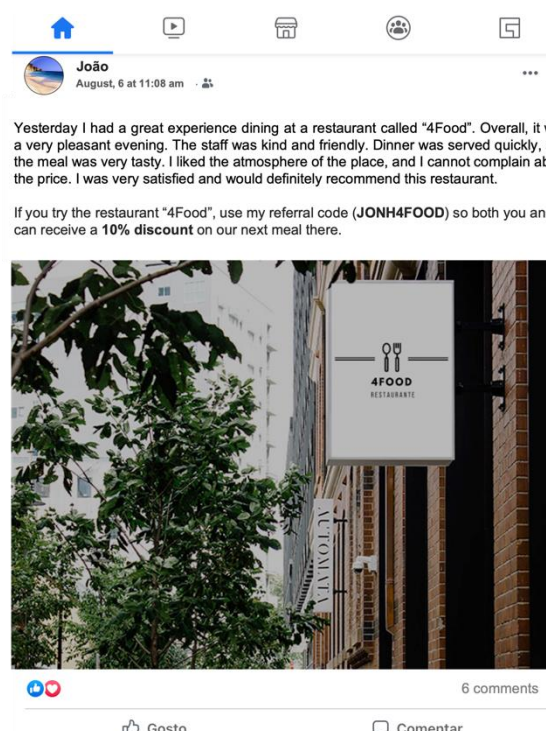
The Referral Reward Program is succeeded when an existing customer is able to attract and get new customers into the company and, for that reason, receives a reward (e.g., discount, present, coupon, samples, etc.).

Please pay attention to the review characteristics and details and answer accordingly.

Please imagine the following situation:

You were casually scrolling on your Facebook when you found a restaurant review from João. **João** is one of your **closest friends**, someone you truly know, have a frequent contact with and share your life. It is a person with whom you constantly interact, through comments, likes, and messages, on Facebook.

Please read João's review:



Scenario 6: *Reward both vs. Weak tie*

Next, you will be asked to read a made-up scenario carefully. This scenario illustrates a situation of incentivized electronic word of mouth, namely a Referral Reward Program.

A **Referral Reward Program** is a type of incentivized electronic word of mouth, in which companies encourage existing customers to make referrals about their products/services in order to attract new customers, in exchange for a reward/incentive.

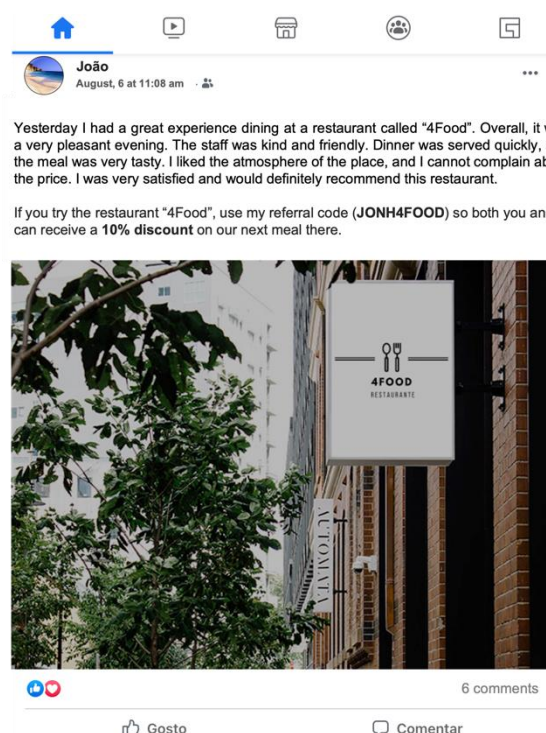
The Referral Reward Program is succeeded when an existing customer is able to attract and get new customers into the company and, for that reason, receives a reward (e.g., discount, present, coupon, samples, etc.).

Please pay attention to the review characteristics and details and answer accordingly.

Please imagine the following situation:

You were casually scrolling on your Facebook when you found a restaurant review from João. **João** is one of your **casual acquaintances**, someone you have met but barely know and communicate, especially for personal matters. It is person with whom you rarely interact; through comments, likes, and messages, on Facebook.

Please read João's review:



1. Facing the described information, please rate your level of agreement from 1- “totally disagree” to 7- “totally agree” with the following sentences regarding João:

- He is someone whom I would be willing to share personal confidences with.
- He is someone whom I would gladly spend a free afternoon socializing with.
- He is someone whom I would be likely to perform a large favor for.
- On a scale from 1 to 7, rate your level of closeness with João (1= not at all close; 7= very close).

2. The presented reward is:

- 1. Very unattractive / 9. Very attractive
- 1. A very small amount / 9. A very big amount.

3. After reading the review, please indicate your level of agreement from 1 - “totally disagree” to 7 - “totally agree” with these sentences regarding João, the information provider:

- The way the information provider tried to persuade me seems acceptable to me.
- The information provider tried to manipulate people in ways that I do not like.
- I was annoyed by the information provider's review because s/he seemed to be trying to inappropriately manage or control people.
- I do not mind the information provider's reviews about products/services.
- The information provider tried to be persuasive without being excessively manipulative.
- The information provider's review was fair in what was said and shown.

4. After reading João' review, I think:

- The review is factual.
- The review is accurate.
- The review is credible.
- The review is trustworthy.

5. Overall, after reading this review, my attitude towards the brand “4Food” is:

Negative						Positive
Unfavourable						Favourable
Bad						Good
Something I like						Something I dislike

6. After reading João’s recommendation:

- It is very likely that I will go to the restaurant “4Food”.
- I will go to the restaurant “4Food” the next time I need a restaurant.
- I will definitely try the restaurant “4Food”.

Verification questions

7. Which of the following sentences best describes the scenario you just read:

- João is one of your closest friends.
- João is a casual acquaintance.

8. Which of the following sentences best describes the scenario you just read:

- It was not presented any discount.
- Both you and João could receive a 10% discount each.
- Only João could receive a 20% discount.

9. Regarding the described scenario, please rate your level of agreement from 1 -

“totally disagree” to 7 - “totally agree” with the following statements:

- It is easy to imagine being in the situation described in this study.
- The scenario is realistic.
- Something like the situation can happen.

Demographic questions

Age:

- Less than 18 years old
- 18-24 years old
- 25-34 years old
- 35-44 years old
- 45-54 years old
- 55-64 years old
- 65-74 years old
- Over 75 years old

Gender:

- Female
- Male
- Rather not say

Education:

- Primary or Elementary School
- High School
- Bachelor's Degree (or equivalent)
- Postgraduate Degree
- Master's degree
- PhD/Doctoral Degree

Occupation:

- Student
- Student-employee
- Employed
- Unemployed
- Retired

Thank you for your participation!

Appendix B - Questionnaire In Portuguese

Carta de apresentação

Caro participante,

Este questionário foi elaborado no âmbito de uma Tese de Mestrado em Marketing, pelo ISCTE Business School. Tem como objetivo estudar a influência do passa-a-palavra eletrónico nas respostas dos recetores (i.e., quem recebe esse passa a palavra), em Sites de Redes Sociais (SRSs). Para isso, foi criado um cenário, recriando uma situação específica, na qual eu peço para responder em conformidade. Todas as definições necessárias estão presentes ao longo do questionário, para garantir sua total compreensão. As respostas serão completamente anónimas e não serão partilhadas para qualquer outro propósito. O tempo estimado para o preenchimento deste questionário é de 7 minutos. Qualquer questão pode ser enviada para aggfs@iscte-iul.pt.

Muito obrigada pela sua cooperação,

Abigail Fernandes

1. Passa a palavra eletrônico

O **passa-a-palavra eletrônico** é a troca de informação sobre produtos, serviços e/ou marcas entre consumidores online, via Internet.

Alguns exemplos de passa a palavra eletrônico são:

1. Uma **review** ou **avaliação** de um restaurante na TripAdvisor ou no Zomato.
2. Uma **classificação** (*rating*) de um hotel no Booking ou no Airbnb.
3. Um **comentário** ou **recomendação** sobre um produto nas redes sociais, como o Facebook ou o Instagram.
4. Uma **opinião, informação** ou **feedback** sobre uma marca num fórum de discussão ou blog.

Alguma vez leu passa-a-palavra eletrônico sobre produtos, serviços ou marcas de alguém que conhece ou não conhece, em Sites de Redes Sociais (por exemplo, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, LinkedIn, etc.)?

- Sim
- Não

2. Uso do passa-a-palavra eletrônico e de Sites de Redes Sociais

Qual dos seguintes Sites de Rede Social mais usa:

- YouTube
- Facebook
- WhatsApp
- Instagram
- Twitter
- Pinterest
- LinkedIn
- TikTok
- Outro

Quanto tempo passa em Sites de Redes Sociais (por exemplo, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, LinkedIn, etc.) por dia?
por dia?

- Mais de 5 horas por dia.

- 3-5 horas por dia
- 1-3 horas por dia
- Menos de 1 hora por dia

Tem uma conta no Facebook

- Sim
- Não

Avalie, numa escala de 1 - “discordo totalmente” a 7- “concordo totalmente” o seu nível de concordância com as seguintes afirmações:

Observação: SNS = Sites de Redes Sociais (por exemplo, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, LinkedIn, etc.)

- Quando considero novos produtos/serviços, peço conselhos aos meus contatos nos SNS.
- Gosto de receber opiniões dos meus contatos nos SNS antes de comprar novos produtos/serviços.
- Sinto-me mais confortável ao escolher produtos/serviços quando obtive opinião sobre eles dos meus contatos nos SNS.
- Nos SNS, costumo persuadir os meus contatos a comprar produtos/serviços de que gosto.
- Os meus contatos nos SNS escolhem adquirir os seus produtos/serviços com base no que eu lhes disse.
- Nos SNS, muitas vezes influencio as opiniões dos meus contatos sobre produtos/serviços.
- Quando recebo informações ou opiniões de um amigo sobre produtos/serviços, irei passá-las aos meus outros contatos nos SNS.
- Nos SNS, gosto de passar informação interessante sobre produtos/serviços de um grupo de contatos na minha lista de “amigos” para outro.
- Tenho a tendência de passar avaliações positivas dos meus contatos sobre produtos/serviços para outros contatos nos SNS.

Avalie, numa escala de 1 - “discordo totalmente” a 7 - “concordo totalmente” o seu nível de concordância com as seguintes afirmações. Em geral:

- Tenho um forte interesse em restaurantes.
- Restaurantes são muito importantes para mim.
- Restaurantes têm um grande significado para mim.
- Fico aborrecido quando outras pessoas falam comigo sobre restaurantes.

Cenários

Cenário 1: Sem recompensa vs. Laço forte

Em seguida, será solicitado a ler com atenção um cenário criado. Este cenário representará uma situação de passa a palavra eletrônico nomeadamente, uma *review* online sobre um restaurante no Facebook. Preste atenção às características e aos detalhes da situação e responda de acordo.

Imagine a seguinte situação:

Estava descontraidamente a percorrer o seu Facebook, quando lhe apareceu uma review de um restaurante, feita pelo João, no seu Facebook, (em seguida apresentada).

O **João** é um dos seus **amigos mais próximos**, alguém que conhece bastante bem, com quem tem contato frequente e compartilha a sua vida. É uma pessoa com quem interage constantemente, por meio de comentários, *likes* e mensagens, no Facebook.

Por favor, leia a *review* do João:



Cenário 2: Sem recompensa vs. Laço fraco

Em seguida, será solicitado a ler com atenção um cenário criado. Este cenário representará uma situação de passa a palavra eletrônico nomeadamente, uma *review* online sobre um restaurante no Facebook. Preste atenção às características e aos detalhes da situação e responda de acordo.

Imagine a seguinte situação:

Estava descontraidamente a percorrer o seu Facebook, quando lhe apareceu uma review de um restaurante, feita por João, no seu Facebook, (em seguida apresentada).

O **João** é um dos seus **casuais conhecidos**, alguém que mal conhece, com quem raramente comunica, principalmente no que diz respeito a assuntos pessoais. É uma pessoa com quem raramente interage; por meio de comentários, *likes* e mensagens, no Facebook.

Por favor, leia a *review* do João:



Cenário 3: 20% desconto para quem dá a recomendação vs. Laço forte

Em seguida, será solicitado a ler com atenção um cenário criado. Este cenário representará uma situação de um **programa de referência por recompensa** nomeadamente, uma *review* online sobre um restaurante no Facebook.

Um **programa de referência por recompensa** é um tipo de passa a palavra incentivado/não orgânico, onde as empresas encorajam clientes existentes a fazer referências sobre os seus produtos/serviços a potenciais clientes, em troca de uma recompensa. Este programa é bem-sucedido quando um cliente atual consegue atrair novos clientes para a empresa e, por isso recebe um prémio (exemplo: descontos, presentes, cupões, amostras, etc.).

Imagine a seguinte situação:

Estava descontraidamente a percorrer o seu Facebook, quando lhe apareceu uma *review* de um restaurante, feita pelo João, no seu Facebook, (em seguida apresentada). O **João** é um dos seus **amigos mais próximos**, alguém que conhece bastante bem, com quem tem contato frequente e compartilha a sua vida. É uma pessoa com quem interage constantemente, por meio de comentários, *likes* e mensagens, no Facebook.

Por favor, leia a *review* do João:



Cenário 4: 20% desconto para quem dá a recomendação vs. Laço fraco

Em seguida, será solicitado a ler com atenção um cenário criado. Este cenário representará uma situação de um **programa de referência por recompensa** nomeadamente, uma *review* online sobre um restaurante no Facebook.

Um **programa de referência por recompensa** é um tipo de passa a palavra incentivado/não orgânico, onde as empresas encorajam clientes existentes a fazer referências sobre os seus produtos/serviços a potenciais clientes, em troca de uma recompensa. Este programa é bem-sucedido quando um cliente atual consegue atrair novos clientes para a empresa e, por isso recebe um prémio (exemplo: descontos, presentes, cupões, amostras, etc.).

Imagine a seguinte situação:

Estava descontraidamente a percorrer o seu Facebook, quando lhe apareceu uma review de um restaurante, feita pelo João, no seu Facebook, (em seguida apresentada). O **João** é um dos seus **casuais conhecidos**, alguém que mal conhece, com quem raramente comunica, principalmente no que diz respeito a assuntos pessoais. É uma pessoa com quem raramente interage; por meio de comentários, *likes* e mensagens, no Facebook.

Por favor, leia a *review* do João:



Cenário 5: 10% desconto para quem dá e recebe a recomendação vs. Laço forte

Em seguida, será solicitado a ler com atenção um cenário criado. Este cenário representará uma situação de um **programa de referência por recompensa** nomeadamente, uma *review* online sobre um restaurante no Facebook.

Um **programa de referência por recompensa** é um tipo de passa a palavra incentivado/não orgânico, onde as empresas encorajam clientes existentes a fazer referências sobre os seus produtos/serviços a potenciais clientes, em troca de uma recompensa. Este programa é bem-sucedido quando um cliente atual consegue atrair novos clientes para a empresa e, por isso recebe um prémio (exemplo: descontos, presentes, cupões, amostras, etc.).

Imagine a seguinte situação:

Estava descontraidamente a percorrer o seu Facebook, quando lhe apareceu uma review de um restaurante, feita pelo João (em seguida apresentada). O **João** é um dos seus **amigos mais próximos**, alguém que conhece bastante bem, com quem tem contato frequente e compartilha a sua vida. É uma pessoa com quem interage constantemente, por meio de comentários, *likes* e mensagens, no Facebook.

Por favor, leia a *review* do João:



Cenário 6: 10% desconto para quem dá e recebe a recomendação vs. Laço fraco

Em seguida, será solicitado a ler com atenção um cenário criado. Este cenário representará uma situação de um **programa de referência por recompensa** nomeadamente, uma *review* online sobre um restaurante no Facebook.

Um **programa de referência por recompensa** é um tipo de passa a palavra incentivado/não orgânico, onde as empresas encorajam clientes existentes a fazer referências sobre os seus produtos/serviços a potenciais clientes, em troca de uma recompensa. Este programa é bem-sucedido quando um cliente atual consegue atrair novos clientes para a empresa e, por isso recebe um prémio (exemplo: descontos, presentes, cupões, amostras, etc.).

Imagine a seguinte situação:

Estava descontraidamente a percorrer o seu Facebook, quando lhe apareceu uma review de um restaurante, feita pelo João (em seguida apresentada). O **João** é um dos seus **casuais conhecidos**, alguém que mal conhece, com quem raramente comunica, principalmente no que diz respeito a assuntos pessoais. É uma pessoa com quem raramente interage; por meio de comentários, *likes* e mensagens, no Facebook.

Por favor, leia a *review* do João:



1. Após a descrição apresentada, avalie, numa escala de 1 - “discordo totalmente” a 7- “concordo totalmente” o seu nível de concordância em relação às seguintes afirmações, sobre o João:

- O João é alguém com quem eu estaria disposto/a a partilhar confidências pessoais.
- O João é alguém com quem eu gostaria de passar uma tarde livre a socializar.
- O João é alguém para quem eu estaria disposto a prestar um grande favor.
- Numa escala de 1 a 7, avalie o seu grau de proximidade com o João.

2. A recompensa apresentada é:

- 1- “muito pouco atrativa” / 9- “muito atrativa”
- 1- “um montante muito pequeno” / 9- “um montante muito grande”

3. Numa escala de 1 - “discordo totalmente” a 7- “concordo totalmente” qual o seu nível de concordância em relação às seguintes afirmações sobre o João, fornecedor da informação.

- A maneira como o fornecedor da informação tentou persuadir-me parece aceitável.
- O fornecedor da informação tentou manipular as pessoas de maneiras que eu não gosto.
- Fiquei irritado com a *review* do fornecedor da informação porque ele parecia estar a tentar gerir ou controlar as pessoas de forma inadequada.
- Não me importo com as *reviews* do fornecedor da informação sobre produtos / serviços.
- O fornecedor da informação tentou ser persuasivo sem ser excessivamente manipulador.
- A avaliação do fornecedor da informação foi imparcial no que foi dito e mostrado.

4. Depois de ler a *review* do João, eu considero:

- A *review* é factual.
- A *review* é precisa.
- A *review* é credível.
- A *review* é confiável.

5. No geral, depois de ler esta *review*, a minha atitude perante o restaurante “4Food” é:

Negativa						Positiva
Desfavorável						Favorável
Má						Boa
Algo que não gosto						Algo que gosto

6. Depois de ler a recomendação do João:

- É muito provável que eu visite o restaurante “4Food”.
- Irei ao “4Food” da próxima vez que precise de um restaurante.
- Irei definitivamente experimentar o restaurante “4Food”.

Perguntas de verificação

7. Qual das seguintes frases melhor descreve o cenário que acabou de ler:

- O João é dos meus amigos mais próximos.
- O João é um casual conhecido.

8. Qual das seguintes frases melhor descreve o cenário que acabou de ler:

- Não foi apresentado qualquer desconto.
- Foi apresentado um desconto de 10% para mim e outro de 10% para o João.
- Foi apresentado um desconto de 20% para o João.

Realismo do cenário

9. Numa escala de 1 - “discordo totalmente” a 7 - “concordo totalmente” qual o seu nível de concordância em relação às seguintes afirmações sobre o cenário descrito:

- É fácil imaginar estar na situação descrita neste estudo.
- O cenário é realista.
- Algo parecido com a situação pode acontecer.

Questões demográficas

Faixa etária:

- Menor de 18 anos
- 18-24 anos
- 25-34 anos
- 35-44 anos
- 45-54 anos
- 55-64 anos
- 65-74 anos
- Mais de 75 anos

Gênero:

- Feminino
- Masculino
- Prefiro não responder

Grau de escolaridade:

- Ensino básico
- Ensino secundário
- Licenciatura (ou equivalente)
- Pós-graduação
- Mestrado
- Doutorado

Situação profissional:

- Estudante
- Trabalhador-estudante
- Trabalhador
- Desempregado
- Reformado

Muito obrigado pela sua participação!

Appendix C – Scales And Items In Portuguese And English

Questionnaire Items

Construct	Name of the item	Items in English	Items in Portuguese	Authors
Inference of Manipulative Inference	IMI_1_R	The way the information provider tried to persuade me seems acceptable to me.	A maneira como o fornecedor da informação tentou persuadir-me parece aceitável.	(Campbell, 1995)
	IMI_2	The information provider tried to manipulate people in ways that I do not like.	O fornecedor da informação tentou manipular as pessoas de maneiras que eu não gosto.	
	IMI_3	I was annoyed by the information provider's review because s/he seemed to be trying to inappropriately manage or control people.	Fiquei irritado com a <i>review</i> do fornecedor da informação porque ele parecia estar a tentar gerir ou controlar as pessoas de forma inadequada.	
	IMI_4_R	I do not mind the information provider's reviews about products/services.	Não me importo com as <i>reviews</i> do fornecedor da informação sobre produtos / serviços.	
	IMI_5_R	The information provider tried to be persuasive without being excessively manipulative.	O fornecedor da informação tentou ser persuasivo sem ser excessivamente manipulador.	
	IMI_6_R	The information provider's review was fair in what was said and shown.	A avaliação do fornecedor da informação foi imparcial no que foi dito e mostrado.	
Brand Attitude	BA_1	Negative / Positive	Negativa / Positiva	(Holbrook & Batra, 1987)
	BA_2	Unfavourable / Favourable	Desfavorável / Favorável	
	BA_3	Bad / Good	Má / Boa	
	BA_4	Something that I dislike / Like	Algo que eu Não Gosto / Gosto	
Review Credibility	CRE_1	The review is factual.	A review é factual.	(Smith & Vogt, 1995; Yee Cheung et al., 2009)
	CRE_2	The review is accurate.	A review é precisa.	
	CRE_3	The review is credible.	A review é credível.	
	CRE_4	The review is trustworthy.	A review é confiável.	
Purchase Intentions	PI_1	It is very likely that I will go to the restaurant "4Food".	É muito provável que eu visite o restaurante "4Food".	(Coyle & Thorson, 2001)
	PI_2	I will go to the restaurant "4Food" the next time I need a restaurant.	Irei ao "4Food" da próxima vez que precise de um restaurante.	
	PI_3	I will definitely try the restaurant "4Food".	Irei definitivamente experimentar o restaurante "4Food".	
Manipulation checks				
Tie strength	TS_1	He/she is someone whom I would be willing to share personal confidences with.	O João é alguém com quem eu estaria disposto/a a partilhar confidências pessoais.	(Frenzen & Nakamoto, 1993)
	TS_2	He/she is someone whom I would gladly spend a free afternoon socializing with.	O João é alguém com quem eu gostaria de passar uma tarde livre a socializar.	
	TS_3	He/she is someone whom I would be likely to perform a large favor for.	O João é alguém para quem eu estaria disposto a prestar um grande favor.	
Reward allocation	TS_4	On a scale from 1 to 7, rate you level of closeness with him/her.	Numa escala de 1 a 7, avalie o seu grau de proximidade com o João.	(Ryu & Feick, 2007)
	RA_1	The reward is very unattractive / very attractive.	A recompensa é muito pouco atrativa / muito atrativa.	
	RA_2	The reward is a very small amount / a very large amount.	A recompensa é um montante muito pequeno / muito grande.	

Appendix D – Questionnaire Flow

The image displays a questionnaire flow editor interface. It consists of several horizontal blocks, each representing a different section of the survey. Each block has a title, a count of questions, and a set of control buttons (Add Below, Move, Duplicate, Delete). The blocks are as follows:

- Show Block: Cover Letter** (1 Question) - Buttons: Add Below, Move, Duplicate, Delete
- Show Block: Electronic Word of Mouth** (1 Question) - Buttons: Add Below, Move, Duplicate, Delete
- Then Branch If:** - Condition: "If O passa-a-palavra eletrônico é a troca de informação que acontece entre consumidores, sobre produ... Não Is Selected" - Buttons: Edit Condition, Move, Duplicate, Options, Collapse, Delete
- End of Survey** - Buttons: Move, Duplicate, Customise, Delete
- + Add a New Element Here**
- Show Block: Social Networking Sites usage behavior** (3 Questions) - Buttons: Add Below, Move, Duplicate, Delete
- Show Block: eWOM engagement on SNSs** (1 Question) - Buttons: Add Below, Move, Duplicate, Delete
- Show Block: Restaurant involvement** (1 Question) - Buttons: Add Below, Move, Duplicate, Delete
- Randomiser** - Controls: Randomly present (minus), 1 (input), plus, of the following elements, Evenly Present Elements, Edit Count - Buttons: Add Below, Move, Duplicate, Collapse, Delete
- Show Block: Scenario 1 - no reward vs. strong tie** (8 Questions) - Buttons: Add Below, Move, Duplicate, Delete
- Show Block: Scenario 2 - no reward vs. weak tie** (8 Questions) - Buttons: Add Below, Move, Duplicate, Delete
- Show Block: Scenario 3 - reward me vs. strong tie** (10 Questions) - Buttons: Add Below, Move, Duplicate, Delete
- Show Block: Scenario 4 - reward me vs weak tie** (10 Questions) - Buttons: Add Below, Move, Duplicate, Delete
- Show Block: Scenario 5 - reward both vs. strong tie** (10 Questions) - Buttons: Add Below, Move, Duplicate, Delete
- Show Block: Scenario 6 - reward both vs. weak ties** (10 Questions) - Buttons: Add Below, Move, Duplicate, Delete
- + Add a New Element Here**
- Show Block: Verification questions** (3 Questions) - Buttons: Add Below, Move, Duplicate, Delete
- Show Block: Demographic questions** (4 Questions) - Buttons: Add Below, Move, Duplicate, Delete
- + Add a New Element Here**

Appendix E – Descriptive Statistics

eWOM engagement on SNSs – Descriptive Statistics		
	Mean	Std. Deviation
Opinion seeking		
ENG_1. When I consider new products/services, I ask my contacts on the SNS for advice.	4.16	1.831
ENG_2. I like to get my contacts' opinions on the SNS before I buy new products/services.	4.59	1.653
ENG_3. I feel more comfortable choosing products/services when I have gotten my contacts' opinions on them on the SNS.	4.84	1.638
Opinion giving		
ENG_4. I often persuade my contacts on the SNS to buy products/services that I like.	3.26	1.748
ENG_5. My contacts on the SNS pick their products/services based on what I have told them.	3.46	1.609
ENG_6. On the SNS, I often influence my contacts' opinions about products/services.	3.58	1.663
Opinion passing		
ENG_7. When I receive product/service-related information or opinion from a friend, I will pass it along to my other contacts on the SNS.	3.96	1.649
ENG_8. On the SNS, I like to pass along interesting information about products/services from one group of my contacts on my 'friends' list to another.	4.08	1.737
ENG_9. I tend to pass along my contacts' positive reviews of products/services to other contacts on the SNS.	4.09	1.730
eWOM engagement on SNSs	4.0012	1.29580

Restaurant Involvement - Descriptive Statistics		
	Mean	Std. Deviation
RI_1. I have a strong interest in restaurants.	5.81	1.135
RI_2. Restaurants are very important to me.	5.38	1.304
RI_3. Restaurants matter a lot to me.	5.07	1.462
RI_4_R. I get bored when other people talk to me about restaurants.	5.93	1.131
Restaurant Involvement	5.5467	1.05013

Scenario Realism - Descriptive Statistics		
	Mean	Std. Deviation
SR_1. It is easy to imagine being in the situation described in this study.	6.02	0.893
SR_2. The scenario is realistic.	6.01	0895
SR_3. Something like the situation can happen.	6.15	0.790
Scenario Realism	6.0615	0.76513

Appendix F – Scenario Realism ANOVA

Tests of Homogeneity of Variances

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Scenario Realism	Based on Mean	1.625	5	444	.152
	Based on Median	2.038	5	444	.072
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2.038	5	431.158	.072
	Based on trimmed mean	1.424	5	444	.214

ANOVA

Scenario Realism					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4.578	5	.916	1.368	.235
Within Group	297.120	444	.669		
Total	301.698	449			

Appendix G – Manipulation Checks

Tie Strength Manipulation Check

Group Statistics

	Tie strength (strong tie, weak tie)	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	Weak tie	225	1.78778	.811617	.054108

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Tie strength	Equal variances assumed	1.418	.234	50.167	448	.000	4.106667	.081860	3.945789	4.267544
	Equal variances not assumed			50.167	440.975	.000	4.106667	.081860	3.945782	4.267551

Perceived Reward Size Manipulation Check

Group Statistics

	Reward Allocation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Perceived Reward Size	<i>Reward both</i>	150	4.4233	1.97700	.16142
	<i>Reward me</i>	150	4.6800	1.56007	.12738

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower		Upper
Perceived Reward Size	Equal variances assumed	10.548	.001	-1.248	298	.213	-2.5667	.20563	-.66133	.14800
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.248	282.716	.213	-2.5667	.20563	-.66142	.14809

Appendix H – Principal Component Analysis

1st Principal Component Analysis (17 items)

KMO And Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.922
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	7,029.988
	df	136
	Sig.	.000

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	8.940	52.590	52.590	8.940	52.590	52.590	3.771	22.185	22.185
2	1.845	10.852	63.442	1.845	10.852	63.442	3.632	21.365	43.549
3	1.220	7.179	70.621	1.220	7.179	70.621	3.101	18.242	61.791
4	1.137	6.689	77.310	1.137	6.689	77.310	2.638	15.519	77.310
5	.889	5.230	82.539						
6	.611	3.593	86.133						
7	.512	3.011	89.143						
8	.338	1.987	91.131						
9	.315	1.852	92.982						
10	.228	1.342	94.324						
11	.190	1.120	95.444						
12	.168	.991	96.435						
13	.142	.837	97.272						
14	.127	.748	98.021						
15	.119	.699	98.719						
16	.113	.662	99.381						
17	.105	.619	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

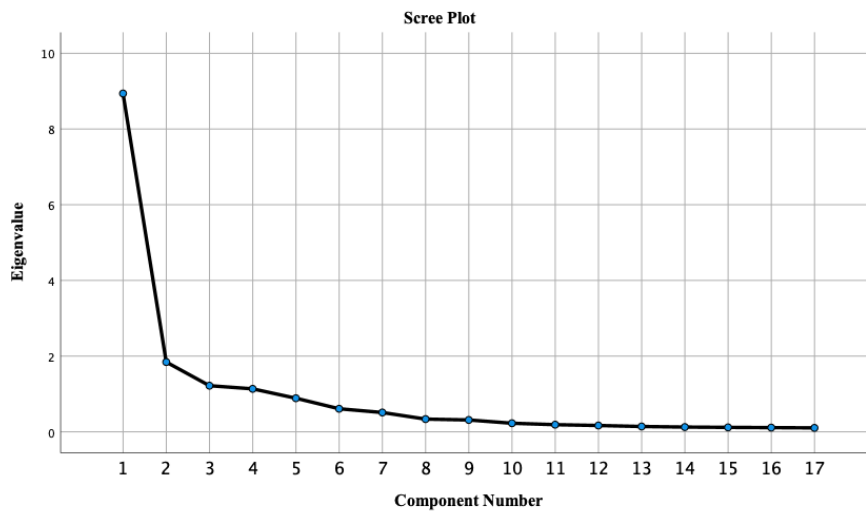
Rotated Component Matrix^a

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
IMI_1_R. The way the information provider tried to persuade me seems acceptable to me.	.853	-.216	-.098	-.229
IMI_5_R. The information provider tried to be persuasive without being excessively manipulative.	.801	-.162	-.100	-.204
IMI_2. The information provider tried to manipulate people in ways that I do not like.	.768	-.227	-.262	.069
IMI_3. I was annoyed by the information provider's review because s/he seemed to be trying to inappropriately manage or control people.	.760	-.207	-.288	.024
IMI_6_R. The information provider's review was fair in what was said and shown.	.758	-.266	-.129	-.306
BA_3. My attitude regarding the brand "4Food" is Bad / Good.	-.243	.828	.265	.276
BA_1. My attitude regarding the brand "4Food" is Negative / Positive.	-.263	.810	.268	.269
BA_2. My attitude regarding the brand "4Food" is Unfavourable / Favourable.	-.300	.808	.234	.257
BA_4. My attitude regarding the brand "4Food" is Something that I Dislike / Something that I Like .	-.260	.806	.269	.245
IMI_4. I do not mind the information provider's reviews about products/services.	-.203	.367	.127	-.345
CRED_1. The review is factual.	-.123	.155	.826	.145
CRED_2. The review is accurate.	-.176	.188	.803	.132
CRED_4. The review is trustworthy.	-.257	.328	.719	.298
CRED_3. The review is credible.	-.278	.368	.706	.250
PI_3. I will definitely try the restaurant "4Food".	-.174	.303	.330	.804
PI_2. I will go to the restaurant "4Food" the next time I need a restaurant.	-.247	.313	.270	.793
PI_1. It is very likely that I will go to restaurant "4Food".	-.233	.352	.321	.765

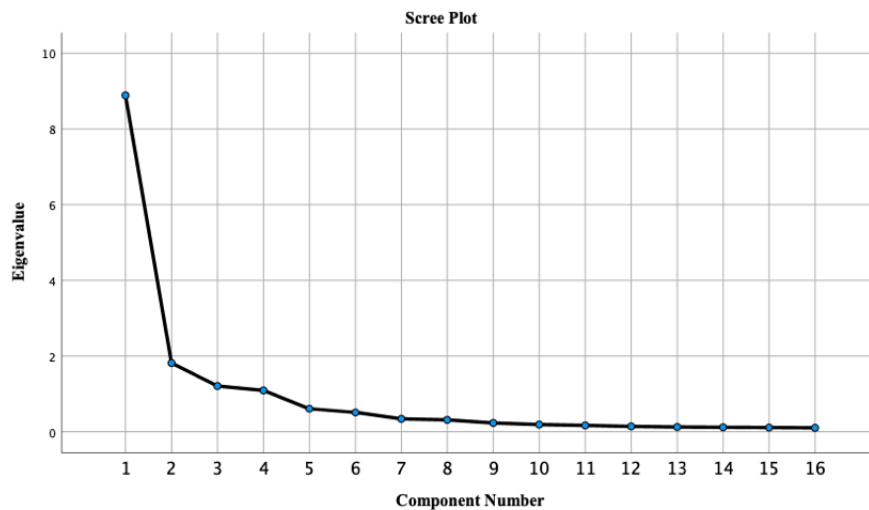
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.



2nd Principal Component Analysis (16 items)



Appendix I – Comparability Tests Between Groups

Kruskal-Wallis Tests for Age, Education, eWOM engagement on SNSs, Time spent in SNSs per day And Restaurant Involvement

Test Statistics ^{a,b}

	Age	Education	eWOM engagement on SNSs	Time spent in SNSs per day	Restaurant Involvement
Kruskal-Wallis H	5.944	8.792	6.093	5.450	8.335
df	5	5	5	5	5
Asymp. Sig.	.312	.118	.297	.363	.139

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Experimental condition scenario

Chi-Square test for Gender

Chi-Square Test for Gender

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.451 ^a	5	.009
Likelihood Ratio	15.632	5	.008
Linear-by-Linear Association	.007	1	.934
N of Valid Cases	450		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 36.50.

Appendix J - Hypothesis Testing For H1a), H1b) And H1c)

Mann-Whitney Test Output (Source: SPSS Output, 2021)

Variable under analysis: Brand attitude

Grouping variables: Tie strength (strong tie, weak tie)

Ranks					Test Statistics ^a		
	Tie strength (strong tie, weak tie)	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks		Brand Attitude	
Brand Attitude	Strong tie	225	282.08	63,467.50	Mann-Whitney U	12,582.500	
	Weak tie	225	168.92	38,007.50	Wilcoxon W	38,007.500	
	Total	450			Z	-9.293	
						<u>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</u>	.000

a. Grouping Variable: Tie strength (strong tie, weak tie)

Hypothesis Test Summary				
	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig. ^{a,b}	Decision
1	The distribution of Brand Attitude is the same across categories of Tie strength (strong tie, weak tie).	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.

a. The significance level is .050.

b. Asymptotic significance is displayed.

Kruskal-Wallis Test Output (Source: SPSS Output, 2021)

Variable under analysis: Brand attitude

Grouping variables: Reward allocation (no reward, *reward me*, *reward both*)

Ranks				Test Statistics ^{a,b}	
	Reward allocation type (no reward, reward me, reward both)	N	Mean Rank		Brand Attitude
Brand Attitude	No reward	150	304.83	Kruskal-Wallis H	125.886
	Reward me	150	138.08	df	2
	Reward both	150	233.59	<u>Asymp. Sig.</u>	.000
		Total	450		

a. Kruskal Wallis Test
b. Grouping Variable: Reward allocation (no reward, reward me, reward both)

Hypothesis Test Summary				
	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig. ^{a,b}	Decision
1	The distribution of Brand Attitude is the same across categories of Reward allocation type (no reward, reward me, reward both).	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.

a. The significance level is .050.

b. Asymptotic significance is displayed.

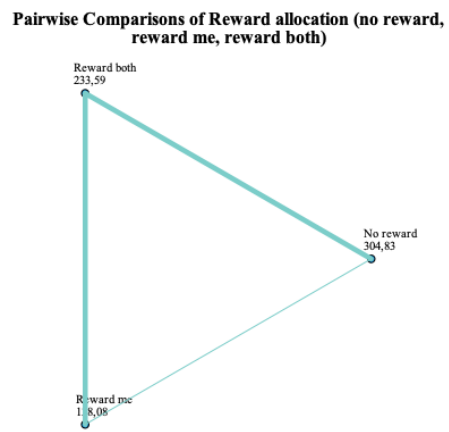
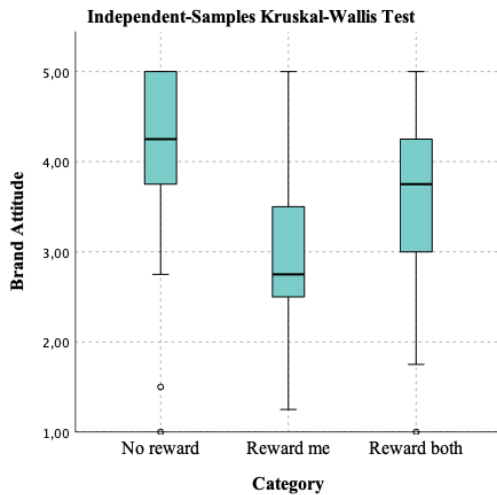
The Audience Response to Different Referral Reward Programs' Designs in Social Networking Sites

Pairwise Comparisons of Reward allocation type (no reward, reward me, reward both)					
Sample 1-Sample 2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig. ^a
Reward me-Reward both	-95.507	14.914	-6.404	.000	.000
Reward me-No reward	166.743	14.914	11.180	.000	.000
Reward both-No reward	71.237	14.914	4.777	.000	.000

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same.

Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .050.

a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.



Kruskal-Wallis Test Output (Source: SPSS Output, 2021)

Variable under analysis: Brand attitude

Grouping variables: Experimental Scenario (no reward & strong tie, no reward & weak tie, *reward me* & strong tie, *reward me* & weak tie, *reward both* & strong tie and *reward both* & weak tie)

Ranks			
	Experimental condition scenario	N	Mean Rank
Brand Attitude	No reward x strong tie	75	360.24
	No reward x weak tie	75	249.41
	Reward me x strong tie	75	211.82
	Reward me x weak tie	75	64.35
	Reward both x strong tie	75	274.17
	Reward both x weak tie	75	193.01
	Total		450

Test Statistics ^{a,b}	
	Brand Attitude
Kruskal-Wallis H	217.197
df	5
Asymp. Sig.	.000
a. Kruskal Wallis Test	
b. Grouping Variable: Experimental condition scenario	

Hypothesis Test Summary				
	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig. ^{a,b}	Decision
1	The distribution of Brand Attitude is the same across categories of Experimental condition scenario.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.

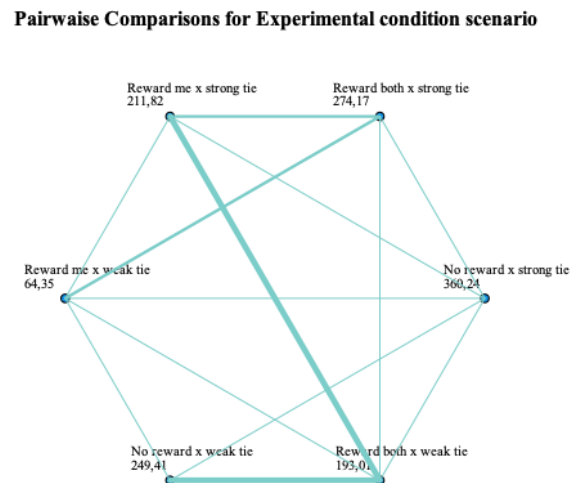
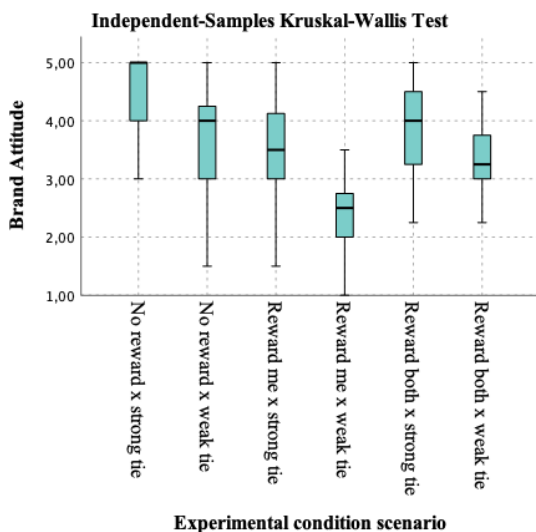
a. The significance level is .050.

b. Asymptotic significance is displayed.

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Pairwise Comparisons of Experimental condition scenario					
Sample 1-Sample 2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig. ^a
Reward me x weak tie- Reward both x weak tie	-128.660	21.091	-6.100	.000	.000
Reward me x weak tie- Reward me x strong tie	147.473	21.091	6.992	.000	.000
Reward me x weak tie-No reward x weak tie	185.067	21.091	8.775	.000	.000
Reward me x weak tie- Reward both x strong tie	-209.827	21.091	-9.948	.000	.000
Reward me x weak tie-No reward x strong tie	295.893	21.091	14.029	.000	.000
Reward both x weak tie- Reward me x strong tie	18.813	21.091	.892	.372	1.000
Reward both x weak tie- No reward x weak tie	56.407	21.091	2.674	.007	.112
Reward both x weak tie- Reward both x strong tie	81.167	21.091	3.848	.000	.002
Reward both x weak tie- No reward x strong tie	167.233	21.091	7.929	.000	.000
Reward me x strong tie- No reward x weak tie	37.593	21.091	1.782	.075	1.000
Reward me x strong tie- Reward both x strong tie	-62.353	21.091	-2.956	.003	.047
Reward me x strong tie- No reward x strong tie	148.420	21.091	7.037	.000	.000
No reward x weak tie- Reward both x strong tie	-24.760	21.091	-1.174	.240	1.000
No reward x weak tie-No reward x strong tie	110.827	21.091	5.255	.000	.000
Reward both x strong tie- No reward x strong tie	86.067	21.091	4.081	.000	.001

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .050. a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.



Appendix K - Hypothesis Testing For H2a), H2b) And H2c)

Mann-Whitney Test Output (Source: SPSS Output, 2021)

Variable under analysis: Purchase Intentions

Grouping variables: Tie strength (strong tie, weak tie)

Ranks					Test Statistics ^a	
	Tie strength (strong tie, weak tie)	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Purchase Intentions	
Purchase Intentions	Strong tie	225	294.98	66,369.50	Wilcoxon W	35,105.500
	Weak tie	225	156.02	35,105.50	Z	-11.364
	Total	450			Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Grouping Variable: Tie strength (strong tie, weak tie)

Hypothesis Test Summary				
	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig. ^{a,b}	Decision
1	The distribution of Purchase Intentions is the same across categories of Tie strength (strong tie, weak tie).	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.

a. The significance level is ,050.

b. Asymptotic significance is displayed.

Kruskal-Wallis Test Output (Source: SPSS Output, 2021)

Variable under analysis: Purchase Intentions

Grouping variables: Reward allocation (no reward, *reward me*, *reward both*)

Ranks				Test Statistics ^{a,b}	
	Reward allocation type (no reward, reward me, reward both)	N	Mean Rank	Purchase Intentions	
Purchase Intentions	No reward	150	288.81	df	2
	Reward me	150	141.11	Asymp. Sig.	.000
	Reward both	150	246.58		
	Total	450			

a. Kruskal Wallis Test
b. Grouping Variable: Reward allocation type (no reward, reward me, reward both)

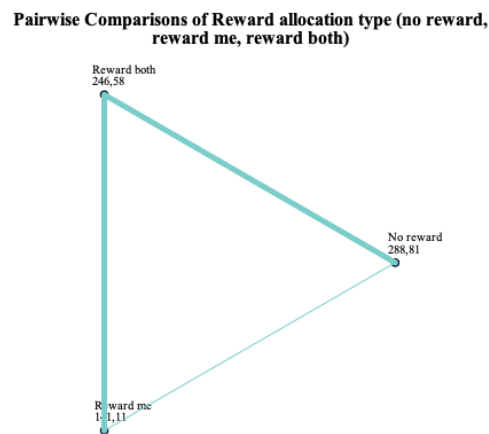
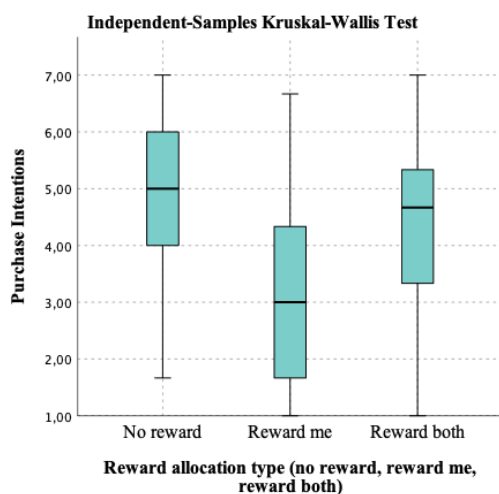
Hypothesis Test Summary				
	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig. ^{a,b}	Decision
1	The distribution of Purchase Intentions is the same across categories of Reward allocation type (no reward, reward me, reward both).	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.

a. The significance level is .050.

b. Asymptotic significance is displayed.

Pairwise Comparisons of Reward allocation type (no reward, reward me, reward both)					
Sample 1-Sample 2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig. ^a
Reward me-Reward both	-105.470	14.975	-7.043	.000	.000
Reward me-No reward	147.700	14.975	9.863	.000	.000
Reward both-No reward	42.230	14.975	2.820	.005	.014

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .050.
 a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.



Kruskal-Wallis Test Output (Source: SPSS Output, 2021)

Variable under analysis: Purchase Intentions

Grouping variables: Experimental Scenario (no reward & strong tie, no reward & weak tie, *reward me* & strong tie, *reward me* & weak tie, *reward both* & strong tie and *reward both* & weak tie)

Ranks				Test Statistics ^{a,b}	
Purchase Intentions	Experimental condition scenario	N	Mean Rank	Purchase Intentions	
	No reward x strong tie	75	360.81	Kruskal-Wallis	233.775
	No reward x weak tie	75	216.81	H	5
	Reward me x strong tie	75	217.97	df	.000
	Reward me x weak tie	75	64.25	Asymp. Sig.	.000
	Reward both x strong tie	75	306.15	a. Kruskal Wallis Test	
	Reward both x weak tie	75	187.01	b. Grouping Variable: Experimental condition scenario	
	Total	450			

Hypothesis Test Summary				
	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig. ^{a,b}	Decision
1	The distribution of Purchase Intentions is the same across categories of Experimental condition scenario.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.

a. The significance level is .050.
 b. Asymptotic significance is displayed.

The Audience Response to Different Referral Reward Programs' Designs in Social Networking Sites

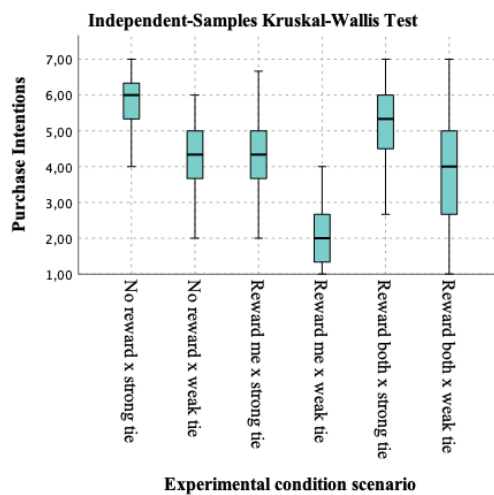
Pairwise Comparisons of Experimental condition scenario						
Sample 1-Sample 2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig. ^a	
Reward me x weak tie-	-122.767	21.179	-5.797	.000	.000	
Reward both x weak tie						
Reward me x weak tie-	152.567	21.179	7.204	.000	.000	
No reward x weak tie						
Reward me x weak tie-	153.727	21.179	7.259	.000	.000	
Reward me x strong tie						
Reward me x weak tie-	-241.900	21.179	-11.422	.000	.000	
Reward both x strong tie						
Reward me x weak tie-	296.560	21.179	14.003	.000	.000	
No reward x strong tie						
Reward both x weak tie-	29.800	21.179	1.407	.159	1.000	
No reward x weak tie						
Reward both x weak tie-	30.960	21.179	1.462	.144	1.000	
Reward me x strong tie						
Reward both x weak tie-	119.133	21.179	5.625	.000	.000	
Reward both x strong tie						
Reward both x weak tie-	173.793	21.179	8.206	.000	.000	
No reward x strong tie						
No reward x weak tie-	-1.160	21.179	-.055	.956	1.000	
Reward me x strong tie						
No reward x weak tie-	-89.333	21.179	-4.218	.000	.000	
Reward both x strong tie						
No reward x weak tie-	143.993	21.179	6.799	.000	.000	
No reward x strong tie						
Reward me x strong tie-	-88.173	21.179	-4.163	.000	.000	
Reward both x strong tie						
Reward me x strong tie-	142.833	21.179	6.744	.000	.000	
No reward x strong tie						
Reward both x strong						
tie-No reward x strong	54.660	21.179	2.581	.010	.148	

tie

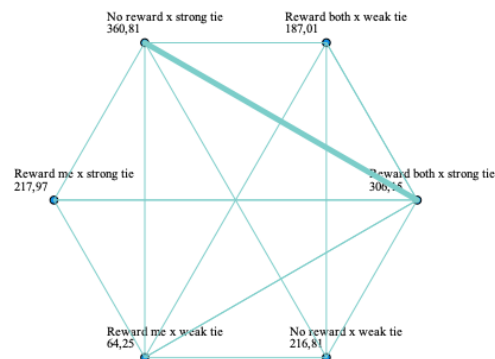
Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same.

Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .050.

a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.



Pairwise Comparisons of Experimental condition scenario



Appendix L - Hypothesis Testing For H3a), H3b) And H3c)

Mann-Whitney Test Output (Source: SPSS Output, 2021)

Variable under analysis: Inference of Manipulative Intent

Grouping variables: Tie strength (strong tie, weak tie)

Ranks					Test Statistics ^a	
	Tie strength (strong tie, weak tie)	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks		Inference of Manipulative Intent
Inference of Manipulative Intent	Strong tie	225	199.71	44,935.50	Mann-Whitney U	19,510.500
	Weak tie	225	251.29	56,539.50	Wilcoxon W	44,935.500
	Total	450			Z	-4.213
					Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Grouping Variable: Tie strength (strong tie, weak tie)

Hypothesis Test Summary			
	Null Hypothesis	Test	Decision
1	The distribution of Inference of Manipulative Intent is the same across categories of Tie strength (strong tie, weak tie).	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.000 Reject the null hypothesis.

a. The significance level is ,050.

b. Asymptotic significance is displayed.

Kruskal-Wallis Test Output (Source: SPSS Output, 2021)

Variable under analysis: Inference of Manipulative Intent

Grouping variables: Reward allocation (no reward, *reward me*, *reward both*)

Ranks				Test Statistics ^{a,b}	
	Reward allocation type (no reward, reward me, reward both)	N	Mean Rank		Inference of Manipulative Intent
Inference of Manipulative Intent	No reward	150	144.91	Kruskal-Wallis H	92.357
	Reward me	150	283.67	df	2
	Reward both	150	247.92	Asymp. Sig.	.000
Total		450		a. Kruskal Wallis Test	

b. Grouping Variable: Reward allocation type (no reward, reward me, reward both)

Hypothesis Test Summary			
	Null Hypothesis	Test	Decision
1	The distribution of Inference of Manipulative Intent is the same across categories of Reward allocation type (no reward, reward me, reward both).	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.000 Reject the null hypothesis.

a. The significance level is .050.

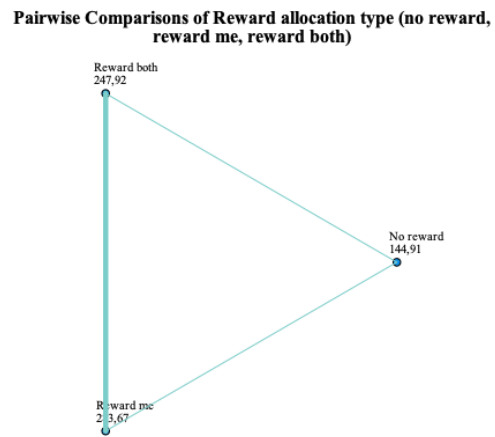
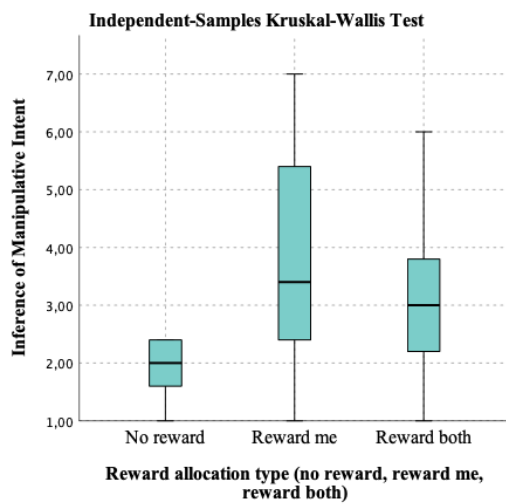
b. Asymptotic significance is displayed.

Pairwise Comparisons of Reward allocation type (no reward, reward me, reward both)					
Sample 1-Sample 2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig.a
No reward-Reward both	-103.013	14.994	-6.870	.000	.000
No reward-Reward me	-138.767	14.994	-9.255	.000	.000
Reward both-Reward me	35.753	14.994	2.384	.017	.051

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same.

Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .050.

a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.



Kruskal-Wallis Test Output (Source: SPSS Output, 2021)

Variable under analysis: Inference of Manipulative Intent

Grouping variables: Experimental Scenario (no reward & strong tie, no reward & weak tie, *reward me* & strong tie, *reward me* & weak tie, *reward both* & strong tie and *reward both* & weak tie)

Ranks				Test Statistics ^{a,b}	
Inference of Manipulative Intent	Experimental condition scenario	N	Mean Rank	Inference of Manipulative Intent	
	No reward x strong tie	75	118.33	Kruskal-Wallis H	110.597
	No reward x weak tie	75	171.49		df
	Reward me x strong tie	75	253.06	Asymp. Sig.	.000
	Reward me x weak tie	75	314.29	a. Kruskal Wallis Test	
	Reward both x strong tie	75	227.75	b. Grouping Variable: Experimental condition scenario	
	Reward both x weak tie	75	268.09		
Total	450				

Hypothesis Test Summary			
Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig. ^{a,b}	Decision
1 The distribution of Inference of Manipulative Intent is the same across categories of Experimental condition scenario.	Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis Test	.000	Reject the null hypothesis.

a. The significance level is .050.

b. Asymptotic significance is displayed.

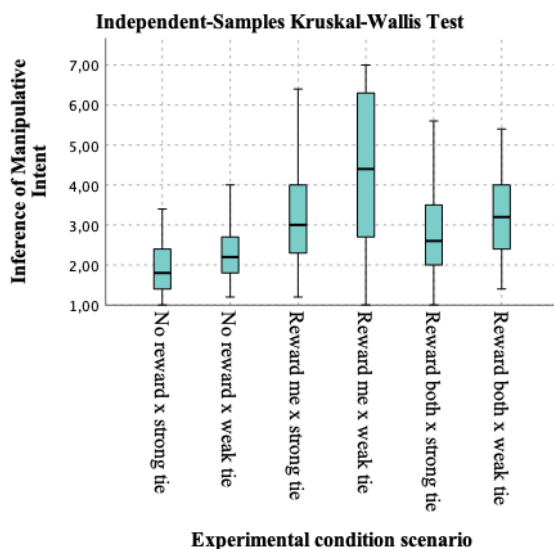
The Audience Response to Different Referral Reward Programs' Designs in Social Networking Sites

Pairwise Comparisons of Experimental condition scenario						
Sample 1-Sample 2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig. ^a	
No reward x strong tie-No reward x weak tie	-53.160	21.205	-2.507	.012	.183	
No reward x strong tie-Reward both x strong tie	-109.427	21.205	-5.160	.000	.000	
No reward x strong tie-Reward me x strong tie	-134.733	21.205	-6.354	.000	.000	
No reward x strong tie-Reward both x weak tie	-149.760	21.205	-7.063	.000	.000	
No reward x strong tie-Reward me x weak tie	-195.960	21.205	-9.241	.000	.000	
No reward x weak tie-Reward both x strong tie	-56.267	21.205	-2.653	.008	.120	
No reward x weak tie-Reward me x strong tie	-81.573	21.205	-3.847	.000	.002	
No reward x weak tie-Reward both x weak tie	-96.600	21.205	-4.556	.000	.000	
No reward x weak tie-Reward me x weak tie	-142.800	21.205	-6.734	.000	.000	
Reward both x strong tie-Reward me x strong tie	25.307	21.205	1.193	.233	1.000	
Reward both x strong tie-Reward both x weak tie	-40.333	21.205	-1.902	.057	.857	
Reward both x strong tie-Reward me x weak tie	86.533	21.205	4.081	.000	.001	
Reward me x strong tie-Reward both x weak tie	-15.027	21.205	-.709	.479	1.000	
Reward me x strong tie-Reward me x weak tie	-61.227	21.205	-2.887	.004	.058	
Reward both x weak tie-Reward me x weak tie	46.200	21.205	2.179	.029	.440	

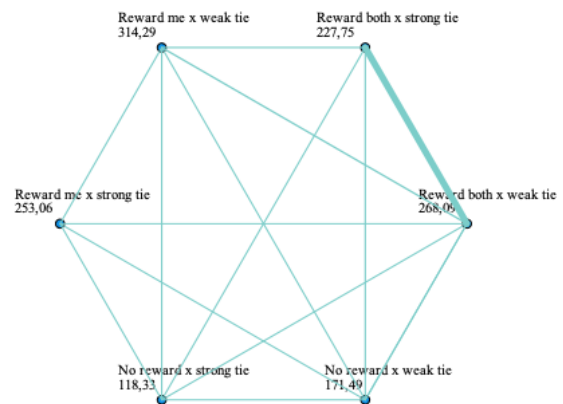
Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same.

Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is .050.

a. Significance values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.



Pairwise Comparisons of Experimental condition scenario



Appendix M - Hypothesis Testing For H4

Simple Linear Regression – Inference of Manipulative intent -> Brand Attitude

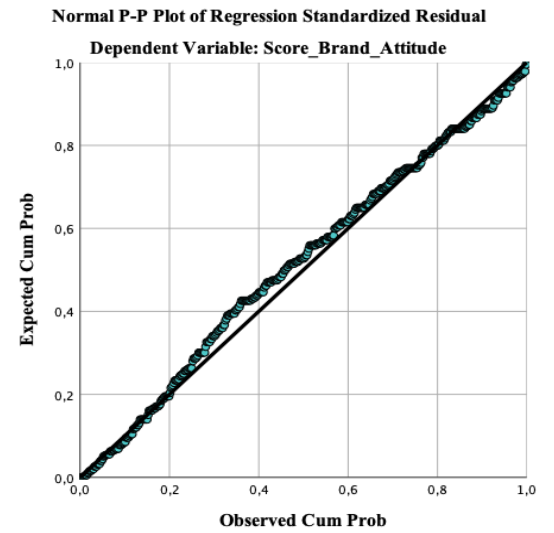
Residuals Statistics ^a					
	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	7.2735	17.9083	14.3689	2.62452	450
Residual	-12.84483	8.11808	.00000	3.16439	450
Std. Predicted Value	-2.704	1.349	.000	1.000	450
Std. Residual	-4.055	2.563	.000	.999	450

a. Dependent Variable: Score_Brand_Attitude

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3,092.755	1	3,092.755	308.174	.000 ^b
	Residual	4,496.009	448	10.036		
	Total	7,588.764	449			

a. Dependent Variable: Score_Brand_Attitude

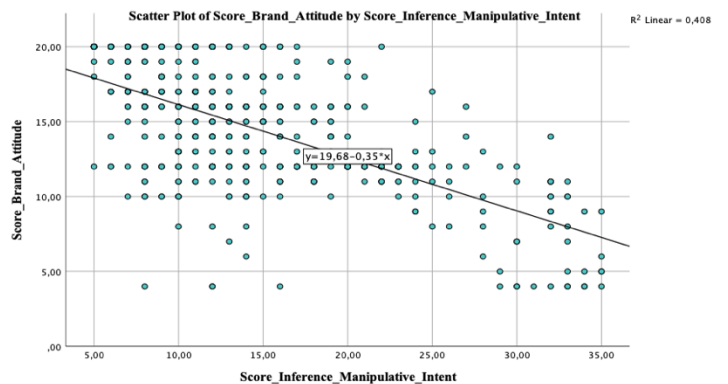
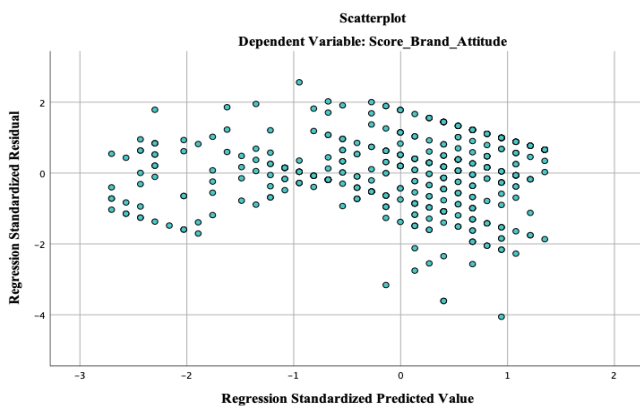
b. Predictors: (Constant), Score_Inference_Manipulative_Intent

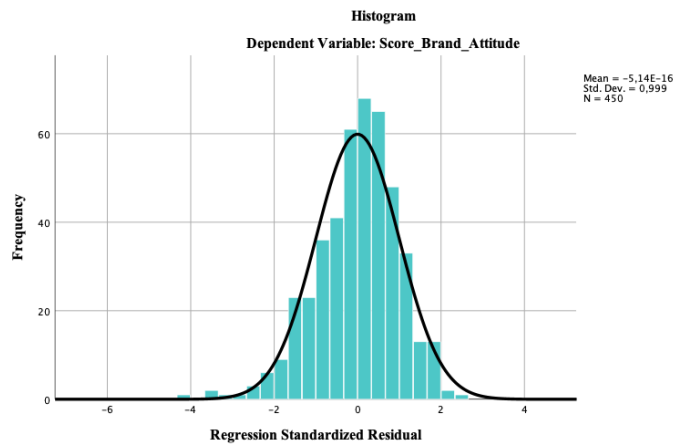


Coefficients ^a								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	19.681	.337		58.325	.000		
	Score_Inference_Manipulative_Intent	-.354	.020	-.638	-17.555	.000	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: Score_Brand_Attitude

Correlations			
		Unstandardized Residual	Score_Inference_Manipulative_Intent
Unstandardized Residual	Pearson Correlation	1	.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)		1.000
	N	450	450
Score_Inference_Manipulative_Intent	Pearson Correlation	.000	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000	
	N	450	450





Appendix N - Hypothesis Testing For H5

Simple Linear Regression – Inference Of Manipulative Intent -->Review Credibility

Residuals Statistics ^a					
	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	8.8969	21.7615	17.4800	3.17479	450
Residual	-16.47507	11.38431	.00000	4.53953	450
Std. Predicted Value	-2.704	1.349	.000	1.000	450
Std. Residual	-3.625	2.505	.000	.999	450

a. Dependent Variable: Score_Review_Credibility

ANOVA ^a					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	4,525.611	1	4,525.611	219.122	.000 ^b
1 Residual	9,252.709	448	20.653		
Total	13,778.320	449			

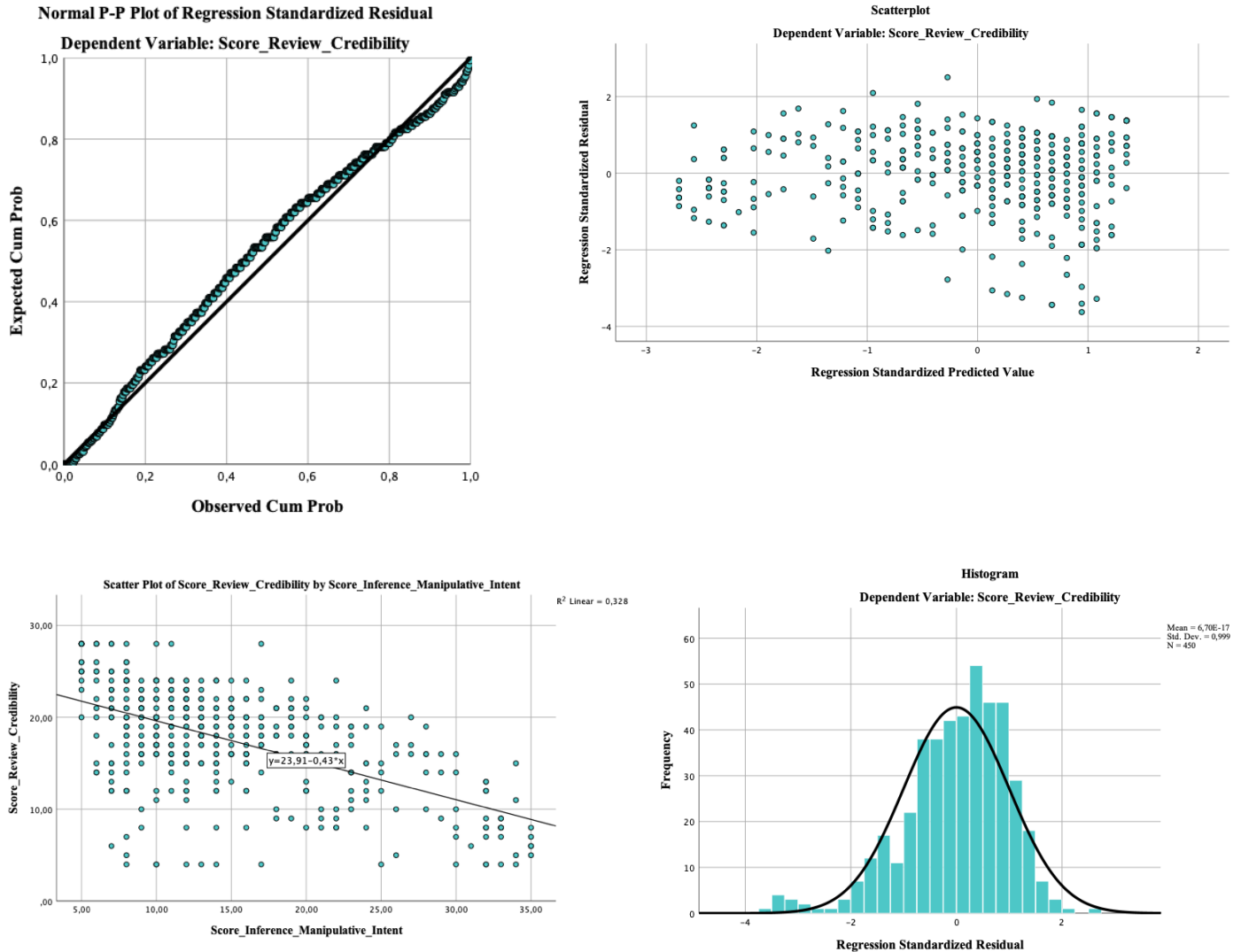
a. Dependent Variable: Score_Review_Credibility

b. Predictors: (Constant), Score_Inference_Manipulative_Intent

Coefficients ^a								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	23.906	.484		49.385	.000		
1	Score_Inference_Manipulative_Intent	-.429	.029	-.573	-14.803	.000	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: Score_Review_Credibility

Correlations			
		Score_Inference_Manipulative_Intent	Unstandardized Residual
Score_Inference_Manipulative_Intent	Pearson Correlation	1	.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)		1.000
	N	450	450
Unstandardized Residual	Pearson Correlation	.000	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000	
	N	450	450



Appendix O - Hypothesis Testing For H6

Simple Linear Regression – Inference Of Manipulative Intent -->Purchase Intentions

Residuals Statistics ^a					
	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	5.1529	16.0784	12.4422	2.69626	450
Residual	-11.98585	9.38437	.00000	4.03681	450
Std. Predicted Value	-2.704	1.349	.000	1.000	450
Std. Residual	-2.966	2.322	.000	.999	450

a. Dependent Variable: Score_Purchase_Intentions

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3,264.151	1	3,264.151	199.859	.000 ^b
	Residual	7,316.847	448	16.332		
	Total	10,580.998	449			

a. Dependent Variable: Score_Purchase_Intentions

b. Predictors: (Constant), Score_Inference_Manipulative_Intent

The Audience Response to Different Referral Reward Programs' Designs in Social Networking Sites

Model		Coefficients ^a		t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics		
		Unstandardized Coefficients				Standardized Coefficients	Tolerance	VIF
		B	Std. Error			Beta		
1	(Constant)	17.899	.430	41.582	.000	1.000	1.000	
1	Score_Inference_Manipulative_Intent	-.364	.026	-14.137	.000	1.000	1.000	

a. Dependent Variable: Score_Purchase_Intentions

Correlations			
		Score_Inference_Manipulative_Intent	Unstandardized Residual
Score_Inference_Manipulative_Intent	Pearson Correlation	1	.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)		1.000
	N	450	450
Unstandardized Residual	Pearson Correlation	.000	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	1.000	
	N	450	450

