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Brand co-creation through eWOM: profile, attitudes, and users' behaviour

El proceso de cocreación de marca a través del eWom: perfil, actitud y comportamiento de los usuarios

Dates | Received: 09/05/2021 - Reviewed: 16/04/2021 - In press: 27/09/2021 - Published: 01/01/2022

Abstract

The concept of brand co-creation has been widely dealt with in academic works over the last fifteen years. Although a consensus has not yet been reached as to the definition and scope of this activity, which relates brands directly to the different stakeholders, in particular customers, experts recognise its effectiveness. Significant contributions have been made to defining the phenomenon, and to the motivations and profiles of the different publics involved in cocreation, as well as of the benefits and risks of the practice. This study was performed via an online survey on a sample of 1521 Spanish consumers in November 2020. It examines in detail their attitudes, opinion, and behaviour with respect to brand co-creation and discovers that apart from other factors, sociodemographic variables continue to be determinant in developing eWOM, the main activity in the co-creation process. The conclusions identify the profiles that are most disposed to recommend and create brand content.

Keywords

Brand co-creation; eWOM; consumer's behaviour; engagement

Resumen

El concepto de cocreación de marca ha sido ampliamente tratado en trabajos académicos durante los últimos 15 años y, aunque todavía no se ha alcanzado un consenso en su definición y alcance, los expertos reconocen la eficacia de esta actividad que relaciona de forma directa las marcas con los distintos stakeholders, en particular con los clientes. Se han realizado importantes aportaciones en la descripción de este fenómeno, y en las motivaciones y perfiles de la cocreación entre los distintos públicos, así como en los beneficios y riesgos de esta práctica. El presente estudio, realizado a través de una encuesta online a una muestra de 1.521 consumidores españoles en noviembre de 2020, profundiza en las actitudes, opiniones y comportamientos hacia la cocreación de marca y descubre que, más allá de otros factores, las variables sociodemográficas siguen siendo determinantes a la hora de desarrollar eWOM, la actividad principal del proceso de cocreación. Las conclusiones permiten identificar aquellos perfiles más dispuestos a recomendar y crear contenidos de marca.

Palabras clave

Cocreación de marca; eWOM; comportamiento del consumidor; engagement

1. Introduction

1.1 Review of the co-creation concept

The digital interactivity between the consumer and companies that began with the 21st Century has marked the start of a new form of creating value for brands. The real possibility of starting conversations between the brands and their users, establishing relations of trust, has balanced the two parties in the commercial equation and given rise to a new form of creating brands (Vargo and Lusch, 2004).

The concept of co-creation emerges strongly with the arrival of the internet, and in particular with the appearance of social media (Tajvidi et al., 2018). It has changed the rules of the game in the creation of brand value. The origin itself of the term co-creation creates a new way of understanding the logic of marketing in the 21st Century, which has evolved from materiality to the intangibility of its activity of promoting goods and services (Vargo and Lusch, 2004).

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) defined the concept of co-creation as collaboration between the customer and supplier in the activities of creating an idea, design or development of new products or services. It is not an effort by the company to satisfy the customers, but a joint effort in which both parties end up winning.

The core element of relations between the customers and the company in the co-creation processes modifies the very idea of brand value, dynamising the processes and increasing the importance of individual and collective experiences. Subsequent studies have demonstrated that the process of brand co-creation does not only involve the consumers, but also other stakeholders such as employees, suppliers, sponsors, local communities etc. (Sarkar and Banerjee, 2019; Tjandra et al., 2020).

Table 1: Clarification of the concept of co-creación according to Prahalad and Ramaswamy

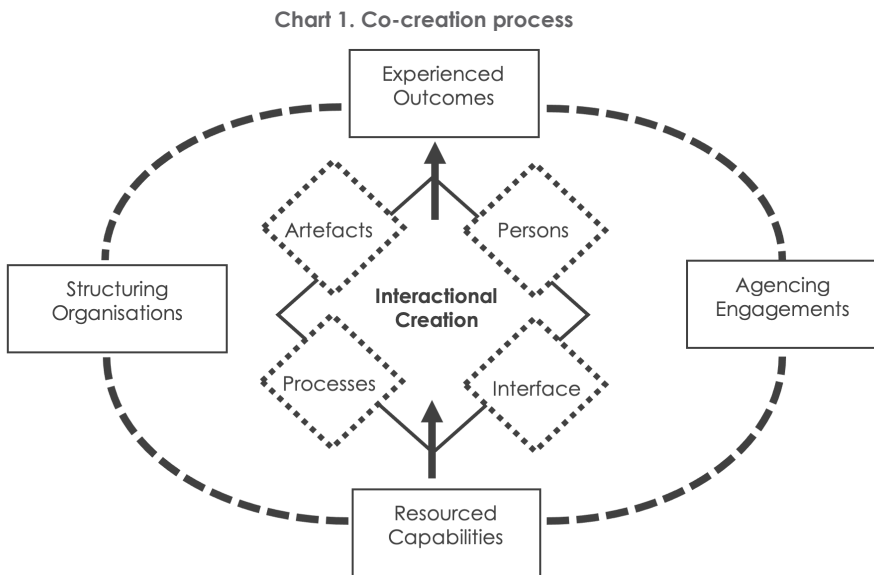
What co-creation is not	What co-creation is
Customer focus	Co-creation is about joint creation of value by the company and the customer. It is not the firm trying to please the customer
Customer is king or customer is always right	Allowing the customer to co-construct the service experience to suit his/her context
Delivering good customer service or pampering the customer with lavish customer service	Joint problem definition and problem solving
Mass customisation of offerings that suit the industry's supply chain	Creating an experience environment in which consumers can have active dialogue and co-construct personalised experiences; product may be the same but customers can construct different experiences
Transfer of activities from the firm to the customer as in self-service	Experience variety
Customer as product manager or co-designing products and services	Experience of one
Product variety	Experiencing the business as consumers do in real time
Segment of one	Continuous dialogue
Meticulous Market research	Co-constructing personalised experiences
Staging experiences	Innovating experience environments for new co-creation experiences
Demand-side innovation for new products and services	

Fuente: Prahalad y Ramaswamy (2004)

The DART model for constructing brand value through co-creation designed by Prahalad and Ramaswamy in 2004, is recognised and accepted by the research community (Hatch and Schultz, 2010; Hsieh and Chang, 2016; Seiler et al., 2018; Lin et al., 2018; Tajvidi et al., 2018; Iglesias et al., 2020; Muñoz and Díaz Soloaga, 2020). This model is based on four pillars: dialogue, access, risk-benefits and transparency.

Hatch and Schultz (2010) proposed a simplified version of the DART model with two axes: the commitment between the company and its stakeholders (dialogue + access) and the information provided by the company (risk-benefits + transparency). They concluded that the companies have a growing interest to offer multiple channels in order to create a greater commitment between the company and its stakeholders.

Nearly fifteen years after the first conceptualisation of the term, Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2018) offered a new definition of the concept of co-creation (Chart 1) as the process of interactional creation across interactive system-environments (afforded by interactive platforms) entailing agency engagements and structuring organisations. This creation is carried out thanks to the interactions of "agential assemblages". The members of the organisations allow and at the same time constrain the interactions. The interactive platforms and agents that use them are composed of heterogeneous relations of artefacts, processes, interfaces and persons. Aided by digital technologies, interactive platforms afford a multiplicity of interactive environments that connect creations with the results that emerge from their relational activity.



Source: Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2018)

While we recognise the validity of the model proposed by the authors, it is excessively academic, given that the authors assign equal importance to the four elements involved in the co-creation process: artefacts, persons, processes and interfaces. Our focus leads us to grant a greater importance to persons, as the activity of users (consumers, customers or recipients) is the true artifact of interaction, which finally concludes the creative process.

By positioning the user at the centre of the dynamic interactive process, it establishes an open and ongoing dialogue with consumers. This process is capable of generating improvements and changes in business activity through interactive dynamics of process-exchange. It acquires an important role, allowing co-creation to be understood in our opinion as the user.

We will now examine electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) as the specific form in which companies and consumers relate and establish co-creation.

1.2 Co-creation and eWOM

Poturak and Softic (2019) define eWOM as any informal communication targeted at consumers through the Internet, relating to the use or features of certain goods or services, or of their distributors.

eWOM is associated with viral marketing and thus with the possibility of creating virtual relationships and communities that have an influence beyond the producers of these contents. There are studies that relate eWOM positively to purchase intent, with an even greater effect than advertising. They have detected that a large number of consumers depends on the recommendations of eWOM when making their purchasing decisions (Tseng et al., 2013; Tajvidi et al., 2018).

In 2015, Zhang, Lu, Wang and Wu offered an original model of co-creation which relates the stimuli, experiences and responses, highlighting certain areas that are more effective in creating the desired experiences in customers: the visual attractiveness of a website is key and care must be taken with appropriate use of fonts, colours, backgrounds and images, as well as high-quality audio, animations, info-graphics and videos. Ideally, the virtual projection of products must allow a practical and almost real experience of them. To do so, websites must focus on increasing the synergy between the information on the site and the customers' objectives, rather than only caring about the extent and depth of the product-related content.

Surprisingly, the efforts of companies to mitigate the negative effects of crisis situations (such as the withdrawal of products from the market) have little effect and the results are almost non-existent (Hsu and Lawrence, 2016), due to the impact of co-creation by customers. This does not mean that companies should not respond to these crises; but their impact on brand value will not be apparent in the short term, and will be practically non-existent while the crisis lasts.

Along the same lines, Relling et al. (2016) analysed the positive and negative comments by consumers on a brand's social media site to discover how the community itself can influence users. To do so, they differentiated two types of customers: (1) Customers who are brand fans: they follow it emotionally and they like to share their passion for the brand with others (social goal community); and (2) Rational brand customers: they follow it for functional reasons and look for information and knowledge about the product and brand features (functional goal community). In this study the results suggested that both negative and positive comments have a different affect according to the type of community. Negative comments have less effect on the community of fans of the brand than on the rational customers. Negative comments are valued more by the rational community, as they provide them with more information, credibility and trust with respect to the brand; while positive comments provoke a bigger response and participation among the fan community.

Balaji, Khong and Chong (2016) identified three types of factors that determine negative eWOM on the social media in the case of product sales: (1) factors in the digital purchase and sale context; (2) individual factors; and (3) factors related to social media. When comparing eWOM with traditional word of mouth, although consumers initially value both the digital content and the offline content, over time they value the digital reviews less (Ransbotham, Lurie and Liu, 2019). This is because digital co-creation reduces reflection, tends to be anchored in the present and is perceived as of less value.

The real experience of companies appears to demonstrate that the most frequent type of experience of co-creation, ahead of other more desirable forms such as product co-creation, is eWOM.

1.3 Co-creation and consumer's behaviour

There are two major theories that explain this by examining the psychological benefits and motivations of consumers in the brand co-creation process (Hsieh and Chang, 2016): self-determination theory and implicit self-esteem theory. In both cases what is highlighted is that (1) a strong connection with the brand facilitates the brand co-creation commitment; (2) the personal competence or skill in the co-creation tasks are positively associated with brand engagement; and (3) the work of brand co-creation that contributes a perception of relationship or affinity between the members of the co-creation team also facilitates a brand engagement, which in turn (4) increases the purchasing intention and other positive activities for the brand.

Cossío-Silva et al. (2016) examined co-creation of brand value and its effect on loyalty to the organisation from the point of view of consumer attitude and conduct. This involves understanding the creation of value in the context of purchases and consumption by customers, given that consumers are not passive subjects of marketing actions, but rather participate actively in the process. These mechanisms extend the traditional focus and show co-creation to be a business concept where the boundaries between companies and customers become blurred due to the redefinition of their roles.

The co-creation interactions between the members of online communities help develop relationships and increase perceived brand loyalty (Hajji et al. 2017). But at the same time, co-creation may expose brands to the danger of losing control over part of the message of the brand, dilute the sense of ownership, endanger corporate values or generate a desynchronisation between the voices of stakeholders (Erdem et al., 2016; Schmeltz and Kjeldsen, 2019).

Pagani and Malacarne (2017) introduce new concepts that connect brand co-creation with other areas such as (1) experiential engagement; (2) personal engagement; and (3) social interactive engagement, as well as the relations between the three. In the digital sphere a number of authors define the creation of engagement as the set of experiences that users have with a specific online medium or support. These experiences differ according to how and for what each medium or support is used. Thus, a distinction is made between a personal connection and a social interaction connection (Calder et al. 2009). A personal connection is made when the user acts in search of a stimulus, inspiration or reflection about their own values, while the social interaction connection occurs when the user's intent is socialisation and participation in an online community through blogs or forums. Li and Bernoff (2008) create user types based on online behaviour (active and passive). "Spectators" are passive actors who consume that which the other users produce, while "creators", "critics", "collectors" or "joiners" behave actively.

Black and Veloutsou (2017) explored the interrelations between brand identity, consumer identity and the brand community in the co-creation process. They discovered that when consumers interact with brands, they not only co-create but also create brand identity, while expressing their own identity through active support to its offerings. Brand, individuals and brand community borrow their identities.

Merz et al. (2018) created a scale for measuring the customer co-creation value (CCCV), based on two factors: (1) customer resources; and (2) customer motivation. The first factor includes the following dimensions: (1) brand knowledge; (2) abilities/capacities of the brand itself; (3) brand creativity; and (4) brand connectivity. The second factor is divided into: (1) passion for the brand; (2) trust in the brand; and (3) commitment to the brand. The customers who show the highest CCCV values are those who respond most positively to the brand: they are more prepared to help the brand, post positive comments on the brand, pay a higher price for the product and even present a greater purchasing intention.

With respect to the corporate perspective, Essamri, McKeachnie and Winklhofer (2019) conclude that the executives interested in strengthening the corporate dimension of the brand must have a participative style and work jointly with the consumers through co-creation processes.

Iglesias et al., 2020 paid attention to the link between corporate social responsibility, consumer trust and brand loyalty through the co-creation processes. They came to the conclusion that co-creation represents a great opportunity for service brands, as it helps them reconvert CSR actions into loyal customers.

2. Objectives of the study and methodology

The main purpose of this study is to find out how the customer perceives the brand co-creation process from three different aspects: the level of involvement, participation and interaction with the brand on the Internet, as well as its possible influence on the purchase decision process.

With respect to the specific objectives, the aim is:

- to study the attitudes and behaviour of individuals in the eWOM-linked co-creation process.
- to propose an explanatory model related to the predisposition to brand co-creation based on the sociodemographic and economic characteristics of individuals.

We have applied a cross-cutting descriptive and explanatory design, with the population of the study being a set of Spanish individuals aged 18 and over, according to the Spanish population census. The sample size is 1,521 individuals, with an estimated error in the case of applying a simple random sample of $\pm 2,5\%$ for a confidence level of 95.5% ($P=Q= 50\%$).

With respect to the sample profile, composed according to sociodemographic and economic characteristics, 49.5% are men and 50.5% are women. As to the age variable, as can be seen in the following table the sample has been divided into 6 age bands distributed according to the Spanish population census (see Table 1).

Table 1. Sample distribution by age intervals

Age intervals	Percentage
18-24	12.2
25-34	15.2
35-44	22.4
45-54	20.2
55-64	17.0
65 and over	13.0
Total	100.0

Source: own work.

The following tables (2 and 3) show the sample distribution according to income level and educational level.

Table 2. Sample distribution by income level

Income level ("if the average level is €1,000 per month, the income level is")	Percentage
Far above average	6.6
Above average	41.0
Average	21.9
Below average	9.8
Far below average	5.6
D/K	14.0
Total	98.8
Missing	1.2
	100.0

Source: own work

Table 3. Sample distribution by individual's educational level

	Percentage
Primary education not complete	0.8
Primary (school certificate (1st stage of EGB), more or less 10 years old)	3.1
Secondary School 1st Cycle (School leaving certificate or 2nd stage of EGB, 1st and 2nd ESO, 1st cycle: to 14 years)	7.3
Secondary School 2nd Cycle (1st and 2nd vocational training, higher baccalaureate, BUP, 3rd and 4th of ESO (2nd cycle), COU, PREU, 1st and 2nd year Baccalaureate)	37.1
Third Level. 1st Cycle (Equivalent to Technical Engineer, 3 years, University Schools, Technical Engineers, Architecture)	16.0
University Diploma, B.A. 2nd Cycle (University, Higher B.A., technical high schools and faculties, etc.)	21.0
Third Level (Master's)	12.7
Third Level (Doctorate)	2.0
Total	100.0

Source: Own work

The information was collected by an online questionnaire created for this purpose. To define the variables in the survey, a focus group was created that identified 13 observable variables divided into 3 blocks. The different variables for analysis are explained below:

- Attitudes related to the level of participation of individuals in the co-creation process through eWOM:
 - The simplest/most basic level of engagement through eWOM:
 - Variable 1: "I am prepared to recommend and share my purchasing experience with my friends through ratings/reviews"
 - Variable 2: "I am prepared to recommend a product of a brand that is worth buying for my friends"
 - Variable 4: "I'm prepared to give suggestions in my social media when my friends need my advice on purchasing a product"
 - Variable 7: "When a product doesn't satisfy me, I tend to post a critical review"
 - The most complex level of engagement through eWOM:
 - Variable 8: "I've taken part in the creation of a new product"
 - Variable 9: "I've participated in the creation of specific content for a brand"
- Attitudes related to the interaction between the company and the user through eWOM:
 - Variable 3: "I like it when the brand website listens to my comments and answers them when necessary"
 - Variable 6: "I like interacting with my favourite brands and give them my opinion on new items they launch on the market"
 - Variable 12: "Small companies consult consumers more"
- Attitudes related to the relationship between eWOM and its involvement in the purchasing process:
 - Variable 5: "When it comes to buying a brand, I take into account the purchasing experience of my friends shared via social media"
 - Variable 10: "I buy more products of brands that take my comments into account"
 - Variable 11: "I've discovered new brands thanks to the interaction of other users"
 - Variable 13: "I make my purchasing decisions based on the opinions of other consumers"

A 5-position scale has been used in all cases (1=Disagree strongly, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Agree strongly).

The information was collected in November 2020. The data obtained has been analysed using the statistical package SPSS version 25.0 (IBM Corp., 2017).

With respect to the methodology for analysis, univariate and bivariate descriptive and inferential statistical techniques such as the Chi squared test were used, as well as the logistic multivariate regression technique for specifying the explanatory model.

3. Results

3.1 General attitudes to the brand co-creation process

The results have been presented after recodifying the variables into three categories for facilitating their interpretation: the first category groups together the ratings 1=Strongly disagree and 2=Disagree; the second category refers to the value 3=Neither agree nor disagree, and the third groups the ratings 4=Agree and 5=Strongly agree.

Given the results, as can be observed in table 4, a high percentage (more than half of those surveyed) shows an attitude favourable to the co-creation processes when they are linked to eWOM (66% are prepared to recommend a brand that is worth it and 52% to recommend and share the purchasing experience). This percentage declines slightly when the attitude is linked to the idea of posting a negative comment if the product has not satisfied the person's expectations (41% agree with this statement compared with 24.9% that declare the contrary and 34.2% neither agree nor disagree), as happens with the variable related to posting suggestions on social media to offer advice in the purchasing process of another person (42.3% agree, while 24.2% disagree and 33.5% neither agree nor disagree).

Although recommendation through eWOM is widely accepted by most of the population, it is interesting to observe that when the level of co-creation requires a greater involvement by the individual, the contrary effect occurs, i.e. the percentage of people who are not prepared to make this creative effort increases (only 17.9% of those surveyed declare they have participated in the process of creating a new product for a company and 24.9% in a process of creating specific content for a brand).

With respect to the variables related to the process of interaction created between a company and its public through eWOM, it should be noted that nearly 60% of those surveyed like being taken into

account by their brands, and like for them to listen and respond when necessary. However, only 28% say that they like to interact with a brand and give it their opinion when the brand requests it. Also, with respect to the perception of what type of company promotes participation and dialogue with its customers most, only 38% believe that they are mainly SMEs.

Finally, when analysing the association between eWOM and the purchasing decision process of a brand, 40% of those surveyed note that their purchasing decision depends on the opinions of other consumers. This percentage increases to 50% when the opinion is in the social media of friends and acquaintances. Moreover, thanks to the interaction that other users have with some brands, new products can be publicised among consumers (nearly 50% of those surveyed have been made aware of the existence of new brands due to the comments of other users). Finally, the interaction and response of a brand to a customer's comments generates a positive attitude to the possible purchase, as a third of those surveyed are more likely to buy a product if it has taken into account their comments or suggestions.

Table 4. Attitudes to co-creation

Attitudes to co-creation through eWOM	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree
1. I am prepared to recommend and share my purchasing experience with my friends through ratings/reviews	16.2	31.7	52.1
2. I am prepared to recommend a product of a brand that is worth buying for my friends	10.4	23.4	66.2
3. I like that the brand's website listens to my comments and answers me when necessary	11.6	30.3	58.1
4. I am prepared to make suggestions in my social media when my friends need my advice on the purchase of a product	24.2	33.5	42.3
5. When it comes to buying a brand, I bear in mind the purchasing experience my friends have shared on social media	18.8	31	50.2
6. I like interacting with my favourite brands and giving them my opinion about what's new on the market	29.3	42.7	28.1
7. When a product does not satisfy me, I tend to post a critical review	24.9	34.2	41
8. I have participated in the creation of a new product	53.4	28.7	17.9
9. I have participated in the creation of specific content for a brand	43.3	31.9	24.9
10. I buy more products from brands that take my comments into account	20.2	45.5	34.3
11. I have discovered new brands thanks to my interaction with other users	20.2	31.6	48.1
12. Small companies consult consumers more	15	46.5	38.5
13. I make my purchasing decisions based on the opinions of other consumers	26.4	32.9	40.6

Source: Own work

3.2 The profile of co-creator by demographic variables

Next, we determined whether or not there was a statistical association (by cross-tabulation analysis with the Chi-squared test) between the declared attitude to co-creation and certain sociodemographic and economic characteristics of the individual: gender, age, income level and educational level.

Next, we present the results for each of the traditional classification variables. The first classification variable is age. In general the most favourable attitude to co-creation is significantly more associated with middle-aged and young people. In all the attitudes studied, the least favourable predisposition to co-creation and eWOM is significantly more associated with having been over 65 years of age (see Table 5).

In the first block of attitudes related to co-creation through eWOM, the middle-aged segment (35 to 44 years) is significantly more likely to recommend or share its purchasing experience with others; and

together with the youngest segment (18-24 years) they are the most likely to post suggestions on social media. Finally, the middle-aged and older segment (34 to 64 years) agree slightly more with the idea of posting a criticism of a product if it has not met their expectations.

When the co-creation process requires greater participation and involvement by the individual, the youngest segment (18 to 24 years) is the most in favour of contributing to the creation, whether of a new product or a more elaborate content for a brand.

In the second block of attitudes related to the interaction between company and users, individuals aged 35 to 64 are those who are most interested in a brand listening to them and answering them when required. The youngest segment (18 to 24 years) agrees significantly more with the perception that the SMEs encourage users most to participate in the co-creation process; and are more in favour of interacting with their brands and contributing ideas to the brands when they ask their customers to do so.

Finally, in the block related to the process of co-creation and product purchase, in general it is the segment aged between 25 and 44 that most prepared to be guided in their purchasing decision by the comments of other persons or the experience of other users shared on social media. This segment of the population has also discovered new brands thanks to interaction with other users through posts on the Internet. Finally, the public aged between 35 and 64, as was the case before, values a brand for taking into account their comments, encouraging them to include it in their purchasing decision process.

Table 5. Attitudes to co-creation and age

Attitudes to co-creation		Age							Chi-squared	Significance
		18-24 %	25-34 %	35-44 %	45-54 %	55-64 %	+65 %	Total %		
I am prepared to recommend/share my purchasing experience with my friend through ratings/ reviews	Disagree	12.9%	13.9%	17.1%	13.6%	17.4%	23.4%	16.2%	26.150	0.004*
	Neither agree nor disagree	35.5%	34.2%	24.1%	33.1%	32.0%	35.5%	31.7%		
	Agree	51.6%	51.9%	58.8%	53.2%	50.6%	41.1%	52.1%		
I like the brand to listen to me and answer when necessary	Disagree	11.3%	10.4%	9.4%	10.4%	12.4%	17.8%	11.6%	28.702	0.001**
	Neither agree nor disagree	40.9%	31.6%	28.5%	28.2%	24.3%	33.0%	30.3%		
	Agree	47.8%	58.0%	62.1%	61.4%	63.3%	49.2%	58.1%		
I am prepared to make suggestions on my social media when my friends need my advice on the purchase of a product	Disagree	17.7%	19.9%	22.4%	21.8%	29.0%	36.0%	24.2%	35.986	0.000**
	Neither agree nor disagree	33.3%	37.7%	31.8%	33.1%	30.5%	36.0%	33.5%		
	Agree	48.9%	42.4%	45.9%	45.1%	40.5%	27.9%	42.3%		
When buying a brand I take into account the purchasing experience my friends have shared on social media	Disagree	14.0%	11.3%	15.9%	19.2%	22.0%	32.5%	18.8%	61.005	0.000**
	Neither agree nor disagree	37.1%	29.0%	28.5%	29.2%	29.0%	37.6%	31.0%		
	Agree	48.9%	59.7%	55.6%	51.6%	49.0%	29.9%	50.2%		
I like interacting with my favourite brands and giving them my opinion about what's new on the market	Disagree	26.3%	26.0%	27.1%	26.6%	34.4%	37.1%	29.3%	19.745	0.032*
	Neither agree nor disagree	40.9%	45.5%	42.2%	46.8%	38.6%	42.6%	42.7%		
	Agree	32.8%	28.6%	31.8%	26.6%	27.0%	20.3%	28.1%		
When a product doesn't satisfy me, I tend to post a critical review of my experience	Disagree	22.6%	23.8%	23.2%	22.4%	24.7%	35.0%	24.9%	33.004	0.000**
	Neither agree nor disagree	40.3%	43.3%	30.3%	34.4%	29.0%	31.0%	34.2%		
	Agree	37.1%	32.9%	46.5%	43.2%	46.3%	34.0%	41.0%		

I have participated in the creation of some new product	Disagree	36.6%	51.9%	53.2%	55.5%	56.4%	64.0%	53.4%	42.500	0.000**
	Neither agree nor disagree	37.6%	30.3%	25.0%	27.9%	27.0%	27.9%	28.7%		
	Agree	25.8%	17.7%	21.8%	16.6%	16.6%	8.1%	17.9%		
I have participated in the creation of specific content for a brand	Disagree	33.3%	40.3%	41.5%	42.9%	46.3%	55.8%	43.3%	28.315	0.002*
	Neither agree nor disagree	38.7%	34.2%	31.2%	29.9%	29.7%	29.9%	31.9%		
	Agree	28.0%	25.5%	27.4%	27.3%	23.9%	14.2%	24.9%		
I buy more products from brands that take my comments into account	Disagree	16.7%	15.6%	20.3%	17.2%	21.6%	31.5%	20.2%	29.670	0.001**
	Neither agree nor disagree	48.9%	48.5%	42.6%	46.8%	42.1%	46.2%	45.5%		
	Agree	34.4%	35.9%	37.1%	36.0%	36.3%	22.3%	34.3%		
I have discovered new brands thanks to the interaction of other users	Disagree	14.5%	16.5%	17.4%	17.5%	22.5%	32.5%	20.2%	45.168	0.001**
	Neither agree nor disagree	33.9%	29.4%	28.2%	32.8%	32.4%	35.0%	31.6%		
	Agree	51.6%	54.1%	54.4%	49.7%	42.1%	32.5%	48.1%		
The SMEs consult consumers more, because they communicate easier with them	Disagree	10.8%	16.0%	15.0%	18.5%	12.4%	15.7%	15.0%	24.687	0.006*
	Neither agree nor disagree	43.5%	40.7%	42.9%	48.7%	49.5%	54.8%	46.5%		
	Agree	45.7%	43.3%	42.1%	32.8%	38.2%	29.4%	38.5%		
My purchasing decisions are based on the opinions of other consumers	Disagree	18.8%	15.6%	22.1%	25.6%	32.4%	47.2%	26.4%	93.887	0.000**
	Neither agree nor disagree	38.7%	33.3%	27.6%	35.7%	32.8%	32.0%	32.9%		
	Agree	42.5%	51.1%	50.3%	38.6%	34.7%	20.8%	40.6%		

*. Significance level of 0.05.

**. Significance level of 0.01.

Source: Own work

With respect to the variable of gender, in general the process of co-creation is significantly more associated with the profile of a female user. Thus, as can be seen in the next table, women are more favourably disposed to: the process of co-creation in general, and specifically to the idea of posting recommendations and participating more actively in the co-creation processes with brands; interacting more with companies; and taking the eWOM more into account when making a purchasing decision (Table 6).

Table 6. Attitudes to co-creation by gender

Attitudes to co-creation		Gender			Chi-squared	Significance
		Men %	Women %	Total %		
I am prepared to recommend and share my purchasing experience with my friends through ratings/reviews	Disagree	16.5%	16.0%	16.2%	6.534	0.038*
	Neither agree nor disagree	34.5%	28.9%	31.7%		
	Agree	49.0%	55.1%	52.1%		
I am prepared to recommend to my friends a product of a brand that is worth buying	Disagree	12.6%	8.2%	10.4%	14.750	0.001**
	Neither agree nor disagree	25.6%	21.2%	23.4%		
	Agree	61.8%	70.6%	66.2%		

4. I am prepared to make suggestions on my social media when my friends need my advice on the purchase of a product	Disagree	27.9%	20.6%	24.2%	11.246	0.004*
	Neither agree nor disagree	32.3%	34.6%	33.5%		
	Agree	39.8%	44.8%	42.3%		
When it comes to buying a brand, I bear in mind the purchasing experience my friends have shared on social media	Disagree	20.7%	16.9%	18.8%	7.465	0.024*
	Neither agree nor disagree	32.5%	29.6%	31.0%		
	Agree	46.7%	53.5%	50.2%		
I like to interact with my favourite brands and give them my opinion on new items that appear on the market	Disagree	31.2%	27.3%	29.3%	6.506	0.039*
	Neither agree nor disagree	43.6%	41.8%	42.7%		
	Agree	25.2%	30.9%	28.1%		
I have participated in the creation of some new product content	Disagree	56.6%	50.3%	53.4%	7.228	0.027*
	Neither agree nor disagree	27.6%	29.7%	28.7%		
	Agree	15.8%	20.1%	17.9%		
I have participated in the creation of specific content for a brand	Disagree	47.1%	39.5%	43.3%	9.918	0.007*
	Neither agree nor disagree	30.5%	33.2%	31.9%		
	Agree	22.3%	27.3%	24.9%		
I have discovered new brands thanks to the interaction of other users	Disagree	22.3%	18.2%	20.2%	8.400	0.015*
	Neither agree nor disagree	33.2%	30.1%	31.6%		
	Agree	44.5%	51.7%	48.1%		
Small companies consult consumers more	Disagree	15.5%	14.5%	15%	7.688	0.021*
	Neither agree nor disagree	49.5%	43.6%	46.5%		
	Agree	35.1%	41.9%	38.5%		
My purchasing decisions are based on the opinions of other consumers	Disagree	29.3%	23.6%	26.4%	11.123	0.004*
	Neither agree nor disagree	34.0%	31.9%	32.9%		
	Agree	36.7%	44.5%	40.6%		

*. Significance level of 0.05.

**. Significance level of 0.01.

Source: Own work

On studying the variable linked to income levels, it can be seen that there are significant differences in the different attitudes of co-creation among users. Thus, the most favourable predisposition to eWOM and the interaction between the company and customer is significantly more associated with the high income-level segment. However, the least favourable predisposition to the co-creation process and eWOM, when it implies a greater participation and effort on the part of the individual, is significantly more associated with persons with high incomes (Table 7).

Table 7. Attitudes to co-creation and income levels

Attitudes to co-creation through eWOM		Income level					Chi-squared	Significance
		High %	Average %	Low %	D/K %	Total %		
I am prepared to recommend and share my purchasing experience with my friends through ratings/reviews	Disagree	16.7%	14.1%	14.1%	19.7%	16.2%	16.983	0.009*
	Neither agree nor disagree	27.9%	35.1%	31.6%	38.5%	31.6%		
	Agree	55.3%	50.8%	54.3%	41.8%	52.2%		
I am prepared to recommend to my friends a product of a brand that is worth buying	Disagree	9.3%	8.7%	12.4%	14.6%	10.4%	26.029	0.000**
	Neither agree nor disagree	19.1%	27.6%	22.6%	30.0%	23.1%		
	Agree	71.6%	63.7%	65.0%	55.4%	66.5%		
I like that the brand's website listens to my comments and answers me when necessary	Disagree	11.2%	8.7%	12.4%	16.0%	11.5%	17.451	0.008*
	Neither agree nor disagree	26.4%	33.9%	33.3%	33.3%	30.1%		
	Agree	62.4%	57.4%	54.3%	50.7%	58.3%		
When a product does not satisfy me, I tend to post a critical review of my experience with the brand	Disagree	25.6%	23.1%	26.5%	23.0%	24.8%	30.626	0.000**
	Neither agree nor disagree	27.5%	39.3%	39.7%	41.8%	34.1%		
	Agree	46.9%	37.5%	33.8%	35.2%	41.1%		
I have participated in the creation of some new product content	Disagree	56.3%	54.1%	50.9%	47.9%	53.8%	14.977	0.020*
	Neither agree nor disagree	25.0%	28.5%	29.5%	38.0%	28.3%		
	Agree	18.7%	17.4%	19.7%	14.1%	17.9%		
I have participated in the creation of specific content for a brand	Disagree	46.9%	39.0%	40.2%	42.7%	43.5%	25.371	0.000**
	Neither agree nor disagree	26.7%	35.1%	32.9%	41.3%	31.6%		
	Agree	26.4%	25.8%	26.9%	16.0%	24.9%		
I buy more products from brands that take into account my comments and suggestions	Disagree	22.8%	16.2%	19.2%	18.8%	20.2%	14.410	0.025*
	Neither agree nor disagree	40.9%	48.6%	47.29%	52.1%	45.3%		
	Agree	36.2%	35.1%	32.9%	29.1%	34.5%		

*. Significance level of 0.05.

** . Significance level of 0.01 .

Source: Own work

The results of the education variable generate significant differences in only three of the attitudes to co-creation. In all cases, the greater the individual's level of studies, the more positive the attitude towards recommending a product; and comments posted on the Internet exercise a greater influence on the likelihood of them buying a specific brand (Table 8).

Table 8. Attitudes to co-creation and educational level

Attitude to co-creation		Educational level					Chi-squared	Significance
		Basic %	Average %	High %	Very high %	Total %		
I am prepared to recommend to my friends a product of a brand that is worth buying	Disagree	17.1%	10.6%	9.0%	8.7%	10.4%	28.661	0.000**
	Neither agree nor disagree	32.9%	24.6%	20.1%	20.6%	23.4%		
	Agree	50.0%	64.7%	70.9%	70.7%	66.2%		
When it comes to buying a brand, I bear in mind the purchasing experience my friends have shared on social media	Disagree	21.2%	20.4%	18.4%	16.6%	18.8%	18.153	0.006*
	Neither agree nor disagree	38.8%	31.7%	33.2%	26.9%	31.0%		
	Agree	40.0%	47.9%	48.4%	56.5%	50.2%		
My purchasing decisions are based on the opinions of other consumers	Disagree	30.6%	27.0%	25.0%	25.2%	26.4%	19.736	0.003*
	Neither agree nor disagree	36.5%	36.5%	34.0%	27.6%	32.9%		
	Agree	32.9%	36.5%	41.0%	47.1%	40.6%		

*. Significance level of 0.05.

**. Significance level of 0.01.

Source: Own work

After the descriptive analysis, we identified (through a binary logistic regression analysis) various explanatory models related to the probability of participating in a co-creation process through eWOM. To create the model, sociodemographic (gender, age and educational level) and economic characteristics (income level) of the individual were considered as possible explanatory variables.

With respect to the Logit model proposed (see Table 9), the probability of greater participation and involvement with a co-creation process (creating a specific content for a brand) increases, as follows (in order of importance): as the age of the person decreases, the income level increases and if the person is a woman.

Table 9. Co-creation model of brand content. Variables in the equation

	B	Standard error	Wald	GI	Sig.	Exp(B)
Gender	.302	.136	4.932	1	.026	1.353
Age in bands	-.150	.045	11.238	1	.001	.861
Income level	-.006	.002	6.083	1	.014	.995
Constant	-.265	.328	.655	1	.419	.767

Source: Own work

In addition, when what is being studied is the willingness to post a recommendation or review of a product/brand through eWOM, the probability increases when the person is a woman, the educational level is higher and the income level is high (table 10)

Table 10. Model of positive recommendation to a brand. Variables in the equation

	B	Standard error	Wald	GI	Sig.	Exp(B)
Gender	.405	.112	12.969	1	.000	1.499
Educational level	.166	.041	16.665	1	.000	1.180
Income level	-.006	.002	14.786	1	.000	.994
Constant	-.615	.253	5.915	1	.015	.541

Source: Own work

Lastly, the probability that a comment shared on the Internet can influence an individual's purchasing decision increases as follows (in order of importance): the younger the person, the higher the person's educational level, and the higher the income level (see table 11).

Table 11. Co-creation model related to the purchasing intention. Variables in the equation

	B	Standard error	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Age in bands	-.144	.034	17.526	1	.000	.866
Educational level	.117	.038	9.289	1	.002	1.124
Income level	-.004	.002	7.801	1	.005	.996
Constant	.165	.271	.371	1	.542	1.180

Source: Own work

Before moving on to the discussion and conclusions, a summary table with the main results of the study is presented (see table 12).

Table 12. Cocreator profile

	Genre	Age	Education Level	Income Level
Profile of the user-creator of content for a brand	Woman	Young	---	High
User profile - brand recommender	---	---	Higher Education	High
User profile influenced by eWOM in the purchasing decision	Woman	Young	Higher Education	High

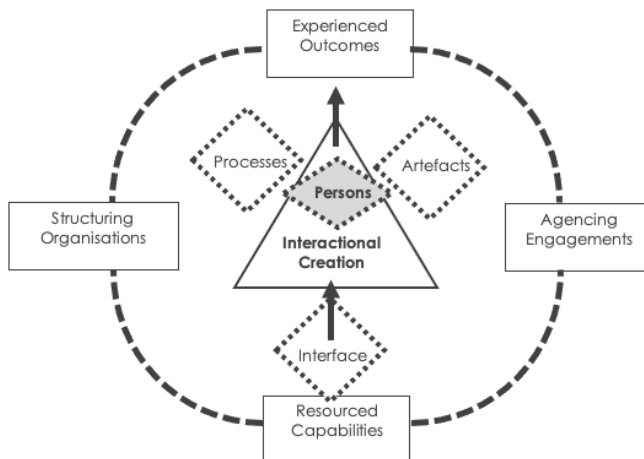
Source: Own work

4. Discussion

This research yields some surprising data, which have been explained on the basis of the results. However, it remains to be answered which model best responds to the co-creation process.

As explained in the introduction, the concept of co-creation proposed in 2018 by Ramaswamy and Ozcan grants equal importance to artefacts, persons, processes and interfaces. However, we propose a modification to the model, so that persons occupy the focus of the co-creation dynamic, given that it is customers, users and consumers who are the leading players in the activity of value creation for the brand (Chart 2).

Chart 2: Redefinition of the co-creation process



Source: Adapted from Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2018)

It is through the eWOM created in social media, forums, chats or hashtags where dialogue is created and the brand content is created with a purpose; and where customers acquire a leading role and share their discourse with other users in an environment in which they feel more comfortable, far from the official brand profiles. This research therefore calls for greater attention to be paid to the dispositions and behaviours of users, in order to discover to what extent they see themselves to be affected in their co-creation activity.

5. Conclusions

This work was carried out with a representative sample of the Spanish population using social media. It offers a profile of the consumers who interact dynamically with the brands in digital environments. Currently the Spanish population has a very positive attitude to eWOM. People engage in this behaviour through recommendations, comments and reviews, on both the Internet and social media. Although it is true that a large number of Spanish people are highly predisposed to co-creation, when this process requires greater participation and effort on the part of users, the percentage who finally become involved declines significantly. As Li and Bernoff, 2008 note, only a small proportion of true “creators” become real participants with an active role in content co-creation, in line with the brands’ marketing and communication strategy.

The results of this study confirm the influence of the recommendations on the purchasing decision of consumers, as noted previously in other studies (Tseng et al. 2013; Tajvidi et al., 2018)

With respect to the profile of social media users, most like to engage in co-creation, there are significant differences based on sociodemographic and economic variables. The age of individuals is the personal variable that contributes most differences in the co-creation process, followed by gender, income level and educational level.

In general, as the age of the individual increases, the probability of participating in processes of co-creation and recommendation of a product or brand decreases. Similarly, the greater the purchasing power, the greater the likelihood of sharing experiences and comments on the Internet. Finally, women are the segment of the population who are most predisposed to co-creation.

Moreover, the co-creator's profile has been identified according to the level of involvement and participation, thanks to the application of regression models. In this way, when the process of creation is more complex and requires a greater commitment to brand content creation, the probability that an individual may participate increases if the individual is a woman, young and with above average income.

When the level of participation is linked to eWOM by recommendations and positive comments about a brand, the probability increases when the user’s profile is a woman, with a university-level education and an above-average income level.

Finally, the probability of a comment/review influencing the purchasing decision of the user increases the younger the person is and the greater their educational level and income.

For all of these reasons, and based on the results of the study, the authors understand that co-creation can be defined as a dynamic process of interaction that establishes an open and ongoing dialogue with consumers that is capable of generating improvements and change in business activity through interactive exchange dynamics. That is why we propose as a final recommendation that brands should promote greater co-creation activity, involving segments identified as the most likely and generating interaction and two-way activity. It is worth recalling that the recommendations and experiential stories of consumers have a beneficial effect on purchasing decisions and on the creation of brand value.

6. Specific contributions of each author

Contributions	Author
Research design	Sonia Carcelén García and Paloma Díaz Soloaga
Documentary search	Paloma Díaz Soloaga
Data collection	Sonia Carcelén García and Paloma Díaz Soloaga
Critical data analysis and interpretation	Sonia Carcelén García

7. Acknowledgement

Translator: Christa Byker.

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This work forms part of the 2019 Banco Santander and Universidad Complutense de Madrid Competitive Research Project No. PR87/19-22686 entitled "The Brand as a Social Phenomenon: Corporate Activism, Trust and Perceptions", at the initiative of the Branding and Integrated Communication Centre Research Group (code No. 962041) of Universidad Complutense de Madrid.

