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Identifying the factors that influence eWOM in SNSs: the case of Chile

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ABSTRACT

The factors that influence electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in social networking sites (SNSs) in Latin American countries still need to be understood. This paper looks at factors included by prior research, as well as two new factors that have the power to influence eWOM in SNSs in the region. The study is conducted in Chile, a country which already has high Internet and SNSs penetration rates and Hofstede's scores close to the average for Latin America. The results show that tie strength, normative influence, informational influence, self-presentation, and voluntary self-disclosure are all positively directly associated with eWOM in SNSs. The results also show that homophily exerts a positive indirect influence on eWOM through the mediators of tie strength, normative influence, informational influence, and self-presentation. Additionally, the results show that trust exerts a positive indirect influence on eWOM through the mediators of tie strength, normative influence, and voluntary self-disclosure.

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1. Introduction

Word-of-mouth (WOM) occurring on the Internet is generally referred to as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). On social networking sites (SNSs), eWOM plays an essential role in changing consumer attitudes and behaviours towards products, brands, and firms (Fang 2014; Kwon et al. 2014; Lee and Youn 2009; See-To and Ho 2014). Babić Rosario et al. (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of 1532 effect sizes across 96 studies covering 40 SNSs and 26 product categories and showed that eWOM in SNSs is positively correlated with sales. SNSs are growing rapidly in Latin America. In 2018, the number of SNSs users in Latin America is expected to reach 290.5 million, up from 214 million in 2014 (Hidalgo and Farías 2016). All Latin American countries possess high SNSs penetration rates among Internet users. PewResearchCenter (2016) shows that across 40 countries surveyed, a median of 76% of Internet users say that they use SNSs (USA = 71%), and that social media is very prevalent among online adults in Latin America (Argentina = 83%, Brazil = 79%, Chile = 85%, Mexico = 81%, Peru = 80%, Venezuela = 88%). Internet users in Latin America spend more of their online time with SNSs than their counterparts anywhere else in the world. Additionally, Latin America has one of the fastest growing Internet markets in the

world, in conjunction with also having high internet penetration rates (56.6% vs. 45.4% in the rest of the world) (eMarketer 2016). As SNSs are increasingly being used by businesses in Latin America, the factors that influence eWOM in SNSs in Latin American countries need to be understood.

In a study conducted in the USA, Chu and Kim (2011) developed and tested a conceptual framework that identifies tie strength, trust, homophily, normative, and informational influence as important antecedents of eWOM in SNSs. Several studies show that consumers across countries utilize SNSs and eWOM in significantly different ways due to cultural factors (Chu and Choi 2011; Dahl 2015; Fong and Burton 2008; Goodrich and de Mooij 2014; Park, Jun, and Lee 2015). Hofstede's (2001) comparison between the USA and Latin America shows that these two cultures vary in numerous ways. According to Hofstede (2001), all Latin American countries are more collectivist and have higher levels of power distance and uncertainty avoidance compared to the USA. From this, the question then arises; do cultural aspects affect the impact of these five factors on eWOM in SNSs? Additionally, are there other possible contributing factors which may influence SNSs users' participation in eWOM? Self-presentation and voluntary self-disclosure contends that every individual constantly participates in activities to convey an impression to others which is in his or her self-interest (Kaplan and Haenlein 2011). Therefore, self-presentation and voluntary self-disclosure may be factors that lead to eWOM in SNSs in Latin America. This paper will look at factors included by Chu and Kim (2011) as well as these two new factors that have the power to influence eWOM in SNSs in Latin American countries.

Latin Americans possess similar social characteristics such as lifestyles, attitudes, interests, and demographics (Farias 2016; Hofstede 2001; House et al. 2004; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Consequently, the marketing environments in Latin American countries are relatively similar (Farias 2015; Manzur et al. 2012). Chile offers an ideal opportunity to understand the antecedents of eWOM behaviours in SNSs in Latin American countries because Chile has Hofstede's scores close to the average for Latin America (Hofstede 2001). Additionally, Chile and the USA have high penetration rates of Internet (80% of Chileans and 89% of Americans are Internet users) and SNSs (68% of Chileans and 62% of Americans are Facebook users) (Internet World Stats 2016) but also quite distinct and important cultural differences. Consequently, using a sample of SNSs users in Chile will control the effects of Internet and SNSs penetration rates and isolate the effects of culture.

Cultural aspects that may affect the effect of these seven factors on eWOM in SNSs in Latin America will be discussed further in the next section and each factor presented in this study will be evaluated to discover if there is a difference in its relative impact on eWOM in SNSs in Chile compared to the USA. Hypotheses are tested in a sample of 240 SNSs users in Chile using structural equation modelling and the bias-corrected bootstrapping technique described by Hayes (2013). The results show that tie strength, normative influence, informational influence, self-presentation, and voluntary self-disclosure are all positively directly associated with eWOM in SNSs. The results also show that homophily exerts a positive indirect influence on eWOM through the mediators of tie strength, normative influence, informational influence, and self-presentation. Additionally, the results show that trust exerts a positive indirect influence on eWOM through the mediators of tie strength, normative influence, and voluntary self-disclosure.

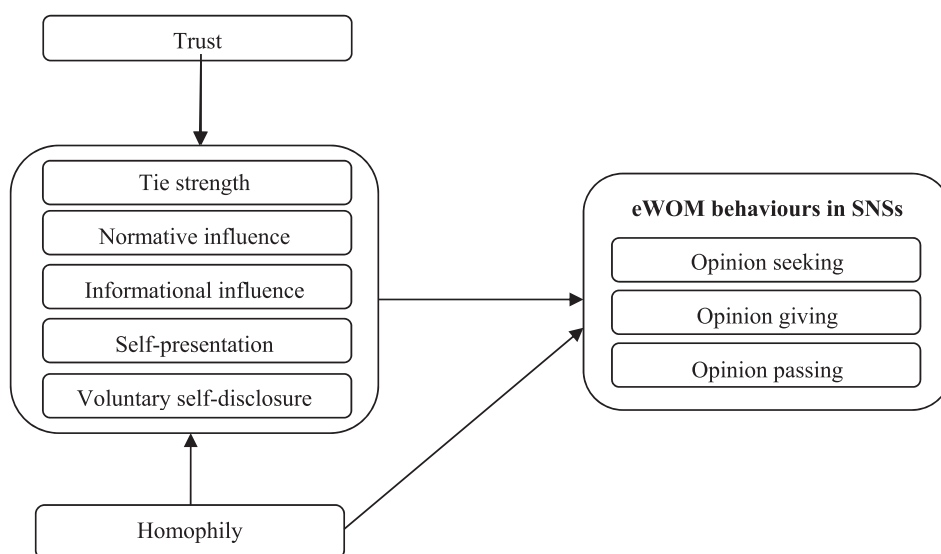


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

Note: Tie strength, normative influence, informational influence, homophily, self-presentation, and voluntary self-disclosure have a positive direct effect on eWOM behaviours in SNSs (H1–H7). Homophily and trust exert a positive indirect effect on eWOM behaviours in SNSs through the mediators of tie strength, normative influence, informational influence, self-presentation, and voluntary self-disclosure (H8–H9).

2. Conceptual framework

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework. Conceptually, eWOM in SNSs can be examined through three dimensions: opinion seeking, opinion giving, and opinion passing. In SNSs, interactivity enables dynamic and interactive eWOM where a single consumer can take on the multiple roles of: (1) opinion seeker, (2) opinion provider, and (3) opinion transmitter (Chu and Kim 2011). Opinion seekers search for information and seek advice from others individuals, while opinion givers exert influence on others' attitudes and behaviours. Opinion passing is a behaviour more likely to occur in an online social context (e.g. SNSs) where multidirectional communication is facilitated; it involves forwarding an opinion originating from another connection (Hayes and King 2014). In this section, cultural aspects that may affect the influence of tie strength, normative influence, informational influence, homophily, trust, self-presentation, and voluntary self-disclosure on eWOM in SNSs in Latin American countries will be discussed.

2.1. The role of tie strength and interpersonal influence

Tie strength refers to the potency of the bond between members of a network (Mittal, Huppertz, and Khare 2008). Strong ties constitute stronger and closer connections that are within an individual's personal network and are able to provide substantive and emotional support (Pigg and Crank 2004). In a SNSs context, relationship closeness is often intertwined with the concept of tie strength (Lin and Utz 2015). In the USA, Chu and Kim (2011) show that tie strength is positively associated with SNSs users' overall eWOM behaviour. USA, with the very high score of 91 (scales run from 0–100 with 50 as a

midlevel), is an individualist society. Conversely, at 23, Chile scores low on this dimension, in line with most other Latin American countries. The fundamental issue addressed by the individualism dimension is the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members (Hofstede 2001). Collectivist societies encourage social harmony and bonding within their in-groups (e.g. SNSs user's friends list) and are also more likely to exhibit greater dependence for their in-groups and to perceive a greater difference between their in-groups and out-groups (Triandis 1995). Consequently, the effects of SNSs users' tie strength (i.e. unrestricted communication) with their contacts on eWOM in SNSs could be strong in collectivist cultures. Hence:

H1. In Chile, SNSs users' tie strength with their contacts has a positive direct influence on eWOM behaviours in SNSs.

Two types of interpersonal influence exist that have the potential to affect eWOM in SNSs: normative influence and informational influence. Normative influence involves conforming (matching attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours) in order to be accepted or liked by others. Informational influence, the second type of interpersonal influence, is the tendency for individuals to believe information from others who they believe are knowledgeable (Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel 1989). Unlike normative influence, informational influence results from an individual thinking that someone else has more accurate information than they do. Chu and Kim's (2011) study, conducted in the USA, found a positive relationship between both types of interpersonal influence and eWOM in SNSs. Chu and Choi (2011) show that normative and informational influences have a much higher effect on eWOM in SNSs in China than in the USA. Fu, Ju, and Hsu (2015) found that interpersonal influence has a positive effect on eWOM intention in Taiwan. Collectivist cultures (e.g. China, Taiwan, and Latin America) tend to place more importance on the view of the group, rather than the view of the individual. Social norms are the primary determinant of behaviour in collectivist cultures (Hofstede 2001). Consequently, interpersonal influence is more likely to affect individuals from collectivist cultures than individualist cultures (Lee and Kacen 2008). Therefore, both types of interpersonal influence are expected to have a positive relationship with eWOM in SNSs in Latin America:

H2. In Chile, SNSs users' normative influence has a positive direct influence on eWOM in SNSs.

H3. In Chile, SNSs users' informational influence has a positive direct influence on eWOM in SNSs.

2.2. The role of homophily and trust

Homophily refers to the degree to which individuals who interact with one another are congruent or similar in certain attributes (e.g. age, gender, social class, and education level). While prior research has suggested that homophilous individuals tend to share information with one another (Rogers and Bhowmik 1970), Chu and Kim (2011), in the USA, found that homophily is negatively related to opinion seeking and opinion passing behaviours in SNSs. According to Chu and Kim (2011), heterophilous communication seems to facilitate eWOM behaviours between diverse contacts in the context of SNSs.

Power distance index (PDI) reflects the extent to which members of a society accept and expect unequal power distribution. In low PDI cultures (e.g. the USA), heterogeneity and diversity are highly valued; however, in high PDI cultures (e.g. Latin America), everyone has a rightful place in the social hierarchy (Hofstede 2001). Consequently, in Latin America, homophily could provide a fertile environment for facilitating eWOM behaviours in SNSs. Hence:

H4. In Chile, SNSs users' homophily with their contacts has a positive direct influence on eWOM behaviours in SNSs.

Trust is defined as a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence (Moorman, Deshpande, and Zaltman 1993, 82). Cho, Huh, and Faber (2014) suggest that a viral ad from a trusted sender can overcome the handicap that a less trusted advertiser might have. Chu and Kim's (2011) study found that when SNSs users trust their social connections, their eWOM behaviour increases. However, this does not take cultural aspects into account. Latin America has a high level of uncertainty avoidance in the uncertainty avoidance index (UAI). The extent to which the members of a society feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations and have created beliefs and institutions that try to avoid these is reflected in the score on uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede 2001). Goodrich and de Mooij (2014) show that members of low UAI cultures (e.g. the USA) generally have more trust in people, whereas members of high UAI cultures (e.g. Latin American countries) generally have more trust in experts, websites, and search engines. Because of this, Latin Americans are more likely to find experts, websites, and search engines credible while simultaneously finding everyday contacts less credible. Thus, while trust may exist between everyday contacts, it is not a strong enough factor to influence eWOM in SNSs in Latin America. Additionally, the prediction that trust is less influential in Latin American countries than in the USA can be explained by the difference in power distance between the two cultures. This difference signifies that unequal power distribution and more rigid pyramids of authority are more expected in Latin American countries than in the USA (Hofstede 2001). Therefore, it can be deduced that because of the important distinction between everyday contacts and those seen in higher standing (e.g. experts, websites, and search engines), trust in everyday contacts does not influence eWOM in SNSs in Latin American countries. The hypothesis that will allow this study to understand the relationship between trust and eWOM in SNSs in Latin American countries is:

H5. In Chile, trust between SNSs users does not have a direct positive influence on eWOM in SNSs.

2.3. The role of self-presentation and voluntary self-disclosure

Self-presentation refers to selectively presenting information to control how the individual is perceived by others (Wright and Webb 2011). Self-presentation theory accounts for the fact that individuals have a need to express an ideal self-image to others (Kim, Chan, and Kankanhalli 2012). This could affect eWOM in SNSs in that people's decisions to share comments may be prohibited or boosted by the importance they place in self-presentation. In South Korea, Choi and Kim (2014) show that self-presentation is positively related to brand-related eWOM. In collectivist cultures (e.g. South Korea and Latin American

countries), people feel the need to belong to their social groups (Hofstede 2001). This need for inclusion could lead to individuals becoming more willing to share their comments (e.g. eWOM in SNSs) to express their identities to others. Hence:

H6. In Chile, self-presentation of SNSs users has a positive direct influence on eWOM in SNSs.

Self-disclosure is a precondition for any social relationship (Taddicken 2014). Self-disclosure is inherent in the communication process and in relationship development (Sicilia, Delgado-Ballester, and Palazon 2016). Voluntary self-disclosure refers to revealing personal information about oneself that is mostly unknown and not available from other sources (Wright and Webb 2011). The uncertainty reduction theory asserts the notion that, when interacting, people need information about the other party in order to reduce their uncertainty (Berger and Bradac 1982). According to uncertainty reduction theory, through self-disclosure, we obtain predictive and explanatory knowledge about another. Consequently, this acquisition of information facilitates relationship development (Lee, Im, and Taylor 2008) and eWOM behaviours in SNSs. In the Netherlands, van Noort, Antheunis, and Verlegh (2014) explains that self-disclosing identification information in SNSs enhances the virility of marketing campaigns. The Netherlands exhibits a slight preference for avoiding uncertainty (Hofstede 2001). The effects of voluntary self-disclosure on eWOM in SNSs could be strong in cultures with a high score on uncertainty avoidance (e.g. Latin American countries). Hence:

H7. In Chile, SNS users' voluntary self-disclosure has a positive direct influence on eWOM behaviours in SNSs.

2.4. The indirect effects of homophily and trust

Homophily and trust could provide a fertile environment for facilitating tie strength, normative influence, informational influence, self-presentation, and voluntary self-disclosure. It can be assumed that tie strength, normative influence, informational influence, self-presentation, and voluntary self-disclosure might play a mediating role between homophily, trust, and eWOM behaviours as well.

Homophily and trust could have a positive indirect effect on eWOM behaviours in SNSs via tie strength, normative influence, and informational influence. Morgan and Hunt (1994) conceptualize trust as existing when one party has confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity. Morgan and Hunt (1994) state that trust is a generalized expectancy held by an individual that the word of another can be relied on. If users of SNSs develop trust between themselves, they could create stronger ties and greater interpersonal influence (normative and informational influence), increasing eWOM behaviours in SNSs. Markiewicz, Devine, and Kausilas (2000) found that same-sex friendships (homophilous groups) are stronger than opposite-sex friendships (heterophilous groups). Therefore, homophily could help build stronger ties and greater interpersonal influence among SNSs users, increasing eWOM behaviours in SNSs.

Self-presentation and voluntary self-disclosure argue that people constantly take part in activities to convey an impression to others which is in his or her self-interest (Kaplan and Haenlein 2011). However, disclosing personal information in SNSs can pose risks to one's physical and emotional safety because it can result in threats such as identity theft

or stalking (Gibbs, Ellison, and Lai 2011). Dwyer, Hiltz, and Passerini (2007) argue that trust may affect what people are willing to share. A strategy for optimizing the disclosure rewards–risks ratio is to establish a boundary within which a discloser shares personal information with a trusted recipient (Bazarova and Choi 2014). Trust could be a precondition for self-presentation and voluntary self-disclosure because it reduces perceived risks involved in revealing private information (Joinson et al. 2010). Similarly, homophilous groups could facilitate the revelation of private information in SNSs (Hancock, Toma, and Fenner 2008). Homophily could help develop self-presentation and voluntary self-disclosure among SNSs users, increasing eWOM behaviours in SNSs.

Unfortunately, this research has not been able to identify any published studies that explore the potential mediating role of tie strength, normative influence, informational influence, self-presentation, and voluntary self-disclosure between homophily, trust, and eWOM behaviours in SNSs. Thus, the following hypotheses are investigated:

- H8.** In Chile, homophily exerts a positive indirect influence on eWOM behaviours in SNSs through the mediators of (a) tie strength, (b) normative influence, (c) informational influence, (d) self-presentation, and (e) voluntary self-disclosure.
- H9.** In Chile, trust exerts a positive indirect influence on eWOM behaviours in SNSs through the mediators of (a) tie strength, (b) normative influence, (c) informational influence, (d) self-presentation, and (e) voluntary self-disclosure.

3. Method

3.1. Sample

An online survey was conducted to test the hypothesized relationships. An invitation to take an anonymous online survey about SNSs was sent to an undergraduate and graduate student email database through a large university in Santiago, capital of Chile. A final sample of 240 SNSs users participated in the study (response rate = 28%). Undergraduate and graduate students tend to be heavy users of the Internet and SNSs, and thus comprise an important segment to marketers (Baek and Morimoto 2012; Ho and Dempsey 2010; De Keyzer, Dens, and De Pelsmacker 2015). SNSs have become perhaps the most popular communication channels for young people in particular (De Keyzer, Dens, and De Pelsmacker 2015)). Furthermore, the use of a homogeneous student sample might help reduce error variance, resulting in a stronger test of theory (Baek and Morimoto 2012). The sample consisted of 50% males and 50% females. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 51 (mean = 24; median = 21; mode = 20). The recruited sample reflects today's SNSs users' demographics for gender and age in Chile. Facebook is the most popular SNS in the world (Duffett 2015). In Latin America, 93% of SNSs users have a Facebook account (eMarketer 2016). Nearly identical percentages of men and women use Facebook in Chile, consistent with the current sample. Additionally, age 15–34, at 54.9% of Facebook users, is the most common age demographic in Chile (Convierta 2016). The SNSs that participants use most frequently are Facebook (99% of participants), Twitter (47% of participants), and Instagram (22% of participants).

3.2. Measures

Drawing from the measures of eWOM in SNSs used in the study by Chu and Kim (2011), eWOM was operationalized with three specific behaviours: opinion seeking, opinion giving, and opinion passing. Tie strength, normative influence, informational influence, homophily, and trust were measured by adopting the scales utilized by Chu and Kim (2011). Self-presentation and voluntary self-disclosure were assessed by adopting items developed by Lee, Im, and Taylor (2008) and Laurenceau and Barrett (1998), respectively. The items used in this study are shown in the Appendix.

3.3. Measurement model

Table 1 shows the constructs, reliability, and descriptive statistics. The reliability of all of the constructs is high: the Cronbach's alphas and composite reliability indexes are above the acceptable levels of .70 (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994). Following Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) methodological suggestions, the data analysis follows a two-step approach. The first stage involves the assessment of the measurement model and the second stage advances to testing the structural relationships (hypotheses) among the latent constructs. This approach avoids interaction between the measurement and structural models and re-specification errors. Model estimation uses maximum likelihood procedures, with no cross-loads or covariants of the measurement errors. Additionally, for a stronger test, all of the inter-factor correlations are set free. Even under these high standard testing conditions, the fit of the model is acceptable. For the measurement model, the comparative fit index (CFI), incremental fit index (IFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) indices are .89, .89, and .07, respectively. CFI and IFI are very close to the threshold of .90 (Hair et al. 2006). The RMSEA is less than .08 (Browne and Cudeck 1992). Taken collectively, these indices suggest an acceptable model fit.

The standard factorial loads of all of the items are significant. The magnitude of these loads t -statistics range from 3.77 to 16.57, indicating a strong linkage between indicators and constructs (Hair et al. 2006). The magnitude of the inter-factor correlations range from .04 to .51, and none of the intervals of 90% of reliability include 1 (or -1), lending support to the discriminating validity of the constructs (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). All of the above support the appropriateness of testing the structural model with 10 constructs. Table 2 presents correlations, covariances, and

Table 1. Measures.

Construct	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Mean	Standard deviation
Opinion seeking	3	.89	.88	2.84	1.55
Opinion giving	3	.89	.88	2.40	1.40
Opinion passing	3	.87	.85	2.67	1.46
Tie strength	3	.71	.71	3.91	1.16
Normative influence	3	.86	.87	2.41	1.43
Informational influence	3	.87	.87	4.49	1.29
Homophily	3	.74	.72	4.47	.97
Trust	3	.89	.89	3.99	1.37
Self-presentation	3	.73	.72	4.42	1.29
Voluntary self-disclosure	3	.84	.83	3.18	1.65

Table 2. Correlation–variance–covariance matrix for latent constructs.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Opinion seeking	1.49	.35	.40	.33	.33	.51	.25	.27	.23	.26
Opinion giving	.56	1.69	.41	.30	.46	.20	.25	.12	.18	.31
Opinion passing	.59	.64	1.45	.27	.41	.27	.24	.14	.17	.50
Tie strength	.29	.28	.23	.52	.16	.11	.48	.48	.13	.22
Normative influence	.62	.90	.75	.17	2.30	.06	.29	.18	.10	.06
Informational influence	.78	.33	.41	.09	.11	1.56	.19	.13	.07	.04
Homophily	.28	.30	.26	.32	.40	.22	.85	.43	.28	.20
Trust	.45	.22	.23	.47	.36	.22	.54	1.82	.37	.18
Self-presentation	.30	.25	.22	.17	.16	.09	.28	.54	1.17	.08
Voluntary self-disclosure	.51	.66	.97	.15	.16	.09	.30	.39	.15	2.63

Note: Variances are on the diagonal, correlations are in the upper triangle, and covariances are in the lower triangle.

variances of the latent constructs in the measurement model used in the development and refinement of the structural model. Consistent with Chu and Kim's (2011) conclusions in the USA, tie strength is higher correlated with homophily and trust.

4. Results

Three alternative models were assessed: direct model (Model 1), full mediation model (Model 2), and partial mediation model (Model 3). A full mediation model (Model 2), with the direct path from homophily and trust to eWOM constrained to zero, was compared with a partial mediation model (Model 3) with the above direct paths not constrained to zero, and a direct model (Model 1). The fit indices of the alternative models are presented in Table 3. Results show that, after eliminating the above direct paths, the fit of the model was similar (chi square difference test = 7.32, $p > .29$). The results also suggest that Models 2 and 3 were superior to Model 1 (chi square difference tests > 92.72 , $p < .01$). Using Akaike information criterion (AIC) and Bayesian information criterion (BIC), the full mediation model (Model 2) shows the lowest AIC and BIC, and therefore, a better fit than the partial mediation model (Model 3) and direct model (Model 1). These results support the full mediation model. Test of parameter estimates indicated that several direct path coefficients were significant in the proposed directions. Table 3 shows that tie strength, normative influence, informational influence, self-presentation, and voluntary self-disclosure are all positively directly associated with eWOM behaviours in SNSs. Therefore, H1, H2, H3, H6, and H7 are supported.

The bootstrapping method appears superior to other tests of indirect effects (e.g. Sobel tests), as it does not require multivariate normality or estimated standard errors (Hayes 2013), and it can be conducted in multiple mediator models (Preacher and Hayes 2008). Therefore, the bias-corrected bootstrapping technique described by Hayes (2013) was used (5000 draws). Confidence intervals not crossing zero indicate that the true effect is not zero. Table 4 shows that the total effects of homophily and trust on eWOM behaviours in SNSs were significant. The results show that the indirect effects of homophily and trust on eWOM behaviours in SNSs were significant, whereas the direct effects were not. Therefore, H4 is not supported and H5 is supported.

Even though homophily and trust did not have a direct effect on eWOM behaviours in SNSs, both had significant indirect effects. Table 5 shows that the homophily exerts a

Table 3. Standardized parameter estimates and model-fit statistics.

From → to	Chu and Kim (2011) in the USA	Model 1 (direct)	Model 2 (full mediation)	Model 3 (partial mediation)
Tie strength → opinion seeking	.15**	.18***	.16**	.23***
Tie strength → opinion giving	.12*	.22***	.11	.26***
Tie strength → opinion passing	.15**	.17**	.07	.21**
Normative influence → opinion seeking	.30***	.27***	.26***	.27***
Normative influence → opinion giving	.32***	.41***	.41***	.42***
Normative influence → opinion passing	.25***	.37***	.35***	.37***
Informational influence → opinion seeking	.18***	.48***	.47***	.47***
Informational influence → opinion giving	.04	.16**	.15**	.16**
Informational influence → opinion passing	.15**	.23***	.22***	.24***
Homophily → opinion seeking	-.15**	.08		-.04
Homophily → opinion giving	-.09	-.01		-.11
Homophily → opinion passing	-.19***	.04		-.07
Trust → opinion seeking	.24***	.07		.02
Trust → opinion giving	.24***	-.12		-.18**
Trust → opinion passing	.26***	-.10		-.15*
Self-presentation → opinion seeking		.13**	.07	.13*
Self-presentation → opinion giving		.09	.03	.13
Self-presentation → opinion passing		.09	.02	.11
Voluntary self-disclosure → opinion seeking		.21***	.23***	.20***
Voluntary self-disclosure → opinion giving		.28***	.31***	.28***
Voluntary self-disclosure → opinion passing		.47***	.50***	.47***
Homophily → tie strength			.30***	.33***
Homophily → normative influence			.26***	.26***
Homophily → informational influence			.15*	.16*
Homophily → self-presentation			.13	.14
Homophily → voluntary self-disclosure			.14	.15
Trust → tie strength			.35***	.34***
Trust → normative influence			.06	.06
Trust → informational influence			.06	.06
Trust → self-presentation			.31***	.31***
Trust → voluntary self-disclosure			.10	.11
Goodness-of-fit indices				
χ^2/df		2.12	1.90	1.91
CFI		.89	.91	.91
TLI		.87	.90	.90
IFI		.89	.91	.91
RMSEA		.07	.06	.06
AIC		975.73	890.99	895.68
BIC		1264.62	1193.81	1219.38

Note: * $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$; all other coefficients are not significant; CFI: comparative fit index, TLI: Tucker-Lewis index, IFI: incremental fit index, RMSEA: root mean square error of approximation, AIC: Akaike information criterion, BIC: Bayesian information criterion.

Table 4. Bias-corrected bootstrapping direct, indirect, and total effects of homophily and trust on eWOM behaviours in SNSs.

	Unstandardized direct effect (90% confidence intervals)	Unstandardized indirect effect (90% confidence intervals)	Unstandardized total effect (90% confidence intervals)
Homophily → opinion seeking	.00 (−.15 to .15)	.29*** (.16 to .43)	.29*** (.12 to .46)
Homophily → opinion giving	.02 (−.12 to .16)	.23*** (.13 to .34)	.25** (.09 to .40)
Homophily → opinion passing	.02 (−.12 to .16)	.24*** (.12 to .37)	.25** (.10 to .41)
Trust → opinion seeking	.10 (−.01 to .20)	.17*** (.09 to .25)	.27*** (.16 to .39)
Trust → opinion giving	−.05 (−.15 to .05)	.16*** (.09 to .24)	.11* (.01 to .22)
Trust → opinion passing	−.06 (−.16 to .04)	.17*** (.09 to .26)	.11* (.01 to .22)

Note: * $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$; all other coefficients are not significant.

positive indirect influence on eWOM behaviours in SNSs through the mediators of tie strength, normative influence, informational influence, and self-presentation. Therefore, H8a, H8b, H8c, and H8d are supported and H8e is not supported. Additionally, Table 5 shows that trust has a positive indirect effect on eWOM behaviours in SNSs via tie strength, normative influence, and voluntary self-disclosure. Therefore, H9a, H9b, and H9e are supported and H9c and H9d are not supported.

Table 5. Bias-corrected bootstrapping indirect effects and 90% confidence intervals.

	Unstandardized indirect effect	Lower	Upper
Homophily → tie strength → opinion seeking	.07**	.02	.14
Homophily → tie strength → opinion giving	.06*	.01	.12
Homophily → tie strength → opinion passing	.04	−.01	.11
Homophily → normative influence → opinion seeking	.07***	.02	.13
Homophily → normative influence → opinion giving	.10***	.04	.18
Homophily → normative influence → opinion passing	.09***	.04	.16
Homophily → informational influence → opinion seeking	.10**	.02	.19
Homophily → informational influence → opinion giving	.02	−.01	.07
Homophily → informational influence → opinion passing	.04*	.01	.09
Homophily → self-presentation → opinion seeking	.03*	.01	.09
Homophily → self-presentation → opinion giving	.02	−.01	.07
Homophily → self-presentation → opinion passing	.02	−.01	.06
Homophily → voluntary self-disclosure → opinion seeking	.02	−.01	.08
Homophily → voluntary self-disclosure → opinion giving	.03	−.01	.08
Homophily → voluntary self-disclosure → opinion passing	.06	−.00	.12
Trust → tie strength → opinion seeking	.05**	.01	.09
Trust → tie strength → opinion giving	.04**	.01	.09
Trust → tie strength → opinion passing	.03	−.01	.08
Trust → normative influence → opinion seeking	.04**	.01	.08
Trust → normative influence → opinion giving	.06**	.02	.12
Trust → normative influence → opinion passing	.05**	.02	.09
Trust → informational influence → opinion seeking	.05	−.00	.10
Trust → informational influence → opinion giving	.01	−.01	.04
Trust → informational influence → opinion passing	.02	−.01	.05
Trust → self-presentation → opinion seeking	.03	−.01	.07
Trust → self-presentation → opinion giving	.03	−.00	.07
Trust → self-presentation → opinion passing	.02	−.01	.06
Trust → voluntary self-disclosure → opinion seeking	.02	−.01	.05
Trust → voluntary self-disclosure → opinion giving	.03*	.01	.06
Trust → voluntary self-disclosure → opinion passing	.05*	.01	.09

Note: * $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$; all other coefficients are not significant.

5. Discussion

This study considers the factors that influence eWOM as transmitted through SNSs in Latin American countries. This study, conducted in Chile, shows that tie strength, normative influence, informational influence, self-presentation, and voluntary self-disclosure are all positively directly associated as influential factors of eWOM in SNSs in Chile. The results also show that homophily exerts a positive indirect influence on eWOM through the mediators of tie strength, normative influence, informational influence, and self-presentation. Additionally, the results show that trust exerts a positive indirect influence on eWOM through the mediators of tie strength, normative influence, and voluntary self-disclosure.

Tie strength was found to have a positive influence on eWOM behaviours in SNSs. This result is not very surprising as, in Latin America, more emphasis is put on relationships because in-groups (e.g. SNSs user's friends list) are more important in collectivist societies, and therefore, the perceived closeness of an individual would impact one's eWOM behaviours.

SNSs users' eWOM was found to be affected by their susceptibility to interpersonal influence. This finding supports the results of Chu and Kim (2011). Indeed, it was thought that if interpersonal influence was influential on eWOM in SNSs in an individualist culture (the USA), it will inevitably affect eWOM in collectivist cultures (Latin American countries). Collectivist societies are characterized by being more group oriented; so, it is not surprising that interpersonal influence is relevant on eWOM in SNSs in Latin American countries. These results are consistent with Chu and Choi (2011) who show that normative and informational influence have a much higher effect on eWOM in SNSs in China (a collectivist country) than in the USA.

In the USA, Chu and Kim (2011) found that homophily had a negative relationship with eWOM in SNSs, but it was thought that power distance, being stronger in Latin America than in the USA, could affect the link between homophily and eWOM in SNSs in this study. In Chile, the results show that homophily exerts a positive indirect influence on eWOM through the mediators of tie strength, normative influence, informational influence, and self-presentation.

Even though trust did not have a direct effect on eWOM behaviours in SNSs, it had significant indirect effects. The results show that trust exerts a positive indirect influence on eWOM behaviours through the mediators of tie strength, normative influence, and voluntary self-disclosure.

Based on the results, self-presentation of SNSs users has a positive direct influence on opinion seeking. In contrast, self-presentation did not correlate with opinion giving and opinion passing. People from high UAI cultures (Latin America) are not comfortable with uncertain situations (Hofstede 2001). Interestingly, this result suggests that opinion giving and opinion passing make idealized self-presentation and image maintenance difficult because SNSs users must negotiate often unanticipated other-provided information (e.g. photo tagging and responses). These unanticipated interactions reduce the SNSs user control over the information about themselves (Rui and Stefanone 2013).

Finally, this study also shows that voluntary self-disclosure has a positive relationship with eWOM behaviours in SNSs. It is contended that this relationship exists because of the high level of uncertainty avoidance in the region. In Latin America, if individuals disclose information about themselves, it makes uncertainty in the legitimacy of their claim

diminish. Thus, voluntary self-disclosure facilitates relationship development and eWOM behaviours in SNSs in Latin America.

5.1. Implications for policy-makers and businesses

It is important to understand that there are multiple stakeholders in the eWOM process, each of whom has different interests: advertisers/marketers (who want to sell their products by improving brand associations and purchase interest via eWOM in SNSs), SNSs owners (who want to keep visitors coming back and turn them into heavy SNSs users so that they can profit from advertisers/marketers), and consumers (who want their needs met with perceptions, attitudes, and interests formed toward both marketed brands and SNSs) (Goodrich, Schiller, and Galletta 2015). Users explicitly do not use SNSs for commercial goals. SNSs primary objective is for users to pass time and amusement, followed by relationship maintenance (De Keyzer, Dens, and De Pelsmacker 2015). Van-Tien Dao et al. (2014) comment that the focal point for SNSs users of using social media is to build and to maintain a network for social interaction. Therefore, marketers need to consider the social influences on SNSs users' eWOM behaviour and adapt their campaigns to build strong consumer–brand relationships.

As SNSs are increasingly being used by businesses in Latin America as a part of their marketing mix, the factors that influence eWOM behaviours in SNSs in Latin American countries need to be understood. This study confirms Chu and Kim's (2011) findings by supporting that tie strength and interpersonal influence have positive impacts on eWOM behaviours in SNSs. Many firms use SNSs looking for instantaneous sales and eWOM behaviours. The results suggest that designing campaigns that can induce SNSs users to engage in interpersonal talks (developing and using tie strength and interpersonal influence) could be effective to generate eWOM behaviours in SNSs in Latin America.

In the USA, Chu and Kim (2011) demonstrate that homophily has a negative influence on eWOM behaviours. Therefore, businesses in the USA should create groups of diverse SNSs users. In contrast, this study found that homophily exerts a positive indirect influence on eWOM through the mediators of tie strength, normative influence, informational influence, and self-presentation. In order to create an effective campaign on SNSs, firms in Latin America should consider creating and taking advantage of groups of similar SNSs users (e.g. using demographics, interests, perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours).

Chu and Kim's (2011) study mentions how policy-makers could keep trust in mind when creating useful SNSs regulations, as this factor was found to correlate with eWOM behaviours in SNSs. This research shows that even though trust did not have a direct effect on eWOM behaviours in SNSs, it had significant indirect effects. Therefore, policy-makers in Latin America could keep trust in mind when creating SNSs regulations in the region. Likewise, firms in Latin America need to consider trust between SNSs users in their campaigns (e.g. a viral marketing campaign that builds upon trust between SNSs users).

This research shows that self-presentation and voluntary self-disclosure positively impacts eWOM behaviours in SNSs. These findings lead to the idea that businesses should encourage and facilitate self-presentation and voluntary self-disclosure in SNSs among their consumers in order to increase eWOM behaviours in SNSs. Firms in Latin America should consider creating campaigns that contain self-presentation and voluntary self-disclosure (e.g. using status updates, wall posts, conversations, and tagged photos).

5.2. Implications for researchers

Limitations of the present research should be recognized. This study examined seven factors in a sample of undergraduate and graduate students. It would be valuable to include other potential factors (e.g. environmental factors and affective measures) among probabilistic samples of the Latin American population. The generalizability of the findings from this research may be limited because this study used a student sample. While students would appear to be a very relevant population to study in the context of SNSs, the inherent limitations on external validity apply. The sample might not accurately reflect the Latin American population, in terms of SNSs usage and eWOM behaviours. Further research is needed to replicate the conceptual model on nonstudent samples with a broader age spectrum to enhance external validity. Therefore, future research should investigate the robustness of the model with a probabilistic sample of the Latin American population. In addition, there are economic differences among Latin American countries. Therefore, others studies must be carried out replicating the current research in other Latin American countries in order to extent the knowledge and insight into the application of the current research findings in all Latin American countries individually. Similarly, further research should be designed to test main and moderating effects of national culture and economic development on eWOM in SNSs. Additionally, because all variables were measured at the same time, this study does not completely cover the long-term effects. Also, this study used a survey that would not be able to establish causality among the variables. Therefore, further research using longitudinal data from different sources (e.g. behavioural data) could complement this study. Despite limitations, the present study identifies several antecedents of eWOM in SNSs in Latin America. These findings have created new insights into the potential tools that businesses can use when trying to spread eWOM in SNSs in Latin America.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

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Appendix. Measures

At the beginning of the survey, respondents were first asked to indicate the SNSs that they visit most frequently from a list of SNSs (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.).

Opinion seeking

- When I consider new products, I ask my contacts on the SNSs for advice.
- I like to get my contacts’ opinions on the SNSs before I buy new products.
- I feel more comfortable choosing products when I have gotten my contacts’ opinions on them on the SNSs.

Opinion giving

- I often persuade my contacts on the SNSs to buy products that I like.
- My contacts on the SNSs pick their products based on what I have told them.
- On the SNSs, I often influence my contacts’ opinions about products.

Opinion passing

- When I receive product related information or opinion from a friend, I will pass it along to my other contacts on the SNSs.

On the SNSs, I like to pass along interesting information about products from one group of my contacts on my 'friends' list to another.

I tend to pass along my contacts' positive reviews of products to other contacts on the SNSs.

Tie strength

Approximately how frequently do you communicate with the contacts on your 'friends' list on the SNSs? (Never/Very frequently)

Overall, how important do you feel about the contacts on your 'friends' list on the SNSs? (Not at all important/Very important)

Overall, how close do you feel to the contacts on your 'friends' list on the SNSs? (Not at all close/Very close)

Normative influence

When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of.

If other people can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy.

I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase.

Informational influence

If I have little experience with a product, I often ask my friends about the product.

I often consult other people to help choose the best alternative available from a product class.

I frequently gather information from friends or family about a product before I buy.

Homophily

In general, the contacts on my 'friends' list on the SNSs:

Don't think like me/Think like me.

Don't behave like me/Behave like me.

Unlike me/Like me.

Trust

I trust most contacts on my 'friends' list on the SNSs.

I have confidence in the contacts on my 'friends' list on the SNSs.

I can believe in the contacts on my 'friends' list on the SNSs.

Self-presentation

On the SNSs, I disclose to present myself in a realistic way.

On the SNSs, I disclose to present my ideal self.

On the SNSs, I disclose to present my individual characteristics.

Voluntary self-disclosure

On the SNSs, I disclose my emotions.

On the SNSs, I disclose my thoughts.

On the SNSs, I disclose my facts.