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Motivations toward Electronic Word-of-Mouth Sending Behavior Regarding Restaurant Experiences in the Millennial Generation

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Abstract: A growing body of the literature on the study of online reviews presents interesting research opportunities, especially in services highly frequented by young consumer segments, such as restaurants. In this context, the present study examines the restaurant electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) behavior of Millennial consumers by addressing both review queries before the purchase decision and writing and sending after the purchase. Based on the theory of reasoned action, a double objective is pursued. On the one hand, the influence of motivations related to extroversion, social benefits, and altruism on EWOM sending behavior is analyzed. On the other hand, the moderating role of EWOM consultation in these relationships is studied. Using a sample of 341 Millennials from Ecuador, a structural model is constructed that confirms the contribution of two types of motivations in sending EWOM: those of extroversion and those of social benefits. The results also reveal the moderating role of EWOM consultation alone in the effects of extraversion and altruism motivations. Managerial implications for restaurants derived from this study include improvements in the design of digital communication strategies tailored to Millennial customers based on their motivations.



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1. Introduction

In the digital era, a new generation has emerged that communicates and makes purchasing decisions that are very different from the rest of the population: Millennials [1]. Born between the years 1980 and 2000, these individuals have grown up immersed in technology and social networks, thus shaping their way of interacting with the world and affecting their consumption habits [2,3]. This generation plays a crucial role in the expression of emotions and opinions related to the acquisition of products and services through websites and social networks, giving rise to the phenomenon of electronic word-of-mouth (hereinafter EWOM) [4]. This term covers the digital dissemination of experiences, recommendations, and comments from users that greatly influence the purchasing decisions of other consumers [5].

In the current context, gastronomic experiences for Millennials stand out for their significant influence on society [6]. Millennials' relationship with technology and social networks has transformed the way they experience and share their culinary experiences [7]. Their penchant for using digital platforms to express emotions, recommend places, and comment on their eating experiences has reshaped the conventional dynamics of the restaurant sector [8]. The search for authentic and distinctive experiences characterizes the consumption choices of Millennials, a trend that is especially relevant in the Ecuadorian gastronomic field [9]. For this generation, food transcends its nutritional function and is an expression of identity and a tool for socialization [10]. The connection between culinary

experiences and social media plays a crucial role, as sharing images and reviews of food has become a common form of expression and social connection [11].

These changes have deeply affected the restaurant sector, transforming the way Millennial customers enjoy and share their dining experiences [12]. Adapting to these new forms of communication represents a challenge for restaurants since this generation actively shares their culinary opinions on digital platforms, influencing other potential diners [13,14]. A positive presence on social networks has become essential for reputation and success in the current market, being a key aspect for connection with the virtual community and differentiation in the competitive gastronomic world [15–17]. This change in digital dynamics requires restaurants to adapt and take advantage of these opportunities to build strong, long-lasting relationships with their customers.

In this context, this research focuses on analyzing the motivations that drive Millennials to express themselves on various platforms about their experiences in restaurants. Despite recent studies on EWOM behavior in the restaurant sector [18–23], no studies have explored the relationship between different types of motivations toward the diffusion of EWOM and the behavior of sharing experiences through online platforms [24]. Most research in this field has addressed motivations and their moderating effects in isolation. For example, in Anastasiei and Dospinescu's [25] work, the relationships between personality traits and motivations to spread EWOM on social networks are analyzed, but their effect on this behavior is not studied. Ruiz-Equihua et al. [26] investigate the moderating role of brand familiarity and culture on behaviors linked to online reviews in the hospitality sector without addressing the effect of motivations. This has created a gap in the comprehensive understanding of how motivations influence EWOM sending behavior. Therefore, the need arises to deepen the understanding of this relationship in order to establish how they affect the diffusion of EWOM.

The central objective of this research is to explore the relationship between motivations toward sending EWOM, specifically in the dimensions of extroversion [27], social benefits [28], altruism derating role of EWOM consultation behavior to determine if it significantly affects the relationship between these motivations and the diffusion of EWOM among the Millennial generation in the restaurant context [29]. Although there are studies that address the antecedents of EWOM queries [30,31] and their effects on purchase intentions [32], there is no empirical evidence on the moderating effect that these consultations may have prior to the purchase decision.

The geographical context for analyzing these relationships is Ecuador, a developing country with cultural, economic, technological, and social particularities that are especially different from developed countries [33]. Empirical studies on EWOM behavior applied to this population are scarce [30,34]. Therefore, it is necessary to improve knowledge of this type of behavior in this country and deepen future research into the differences with respect to other cultures.

The novelty of this study lies in two areas: the variables related to the EWOM behavior under study and the geographical and generational context of application. Regarding the first, this work offers a detailed focus on the relationship between motivations for sharing EWOM and their behavior on digital platforms, as well as exploring the role of EWOM consultation as a moderator in these relationships. Regarding the second, it provides empirical evidence on Millennial consumers in Ecuador, a generational cohort scarcely investigated in the academic literature on EWOM behavior. The results of this research will contribute to a more complete understanding of the influence of Millennials on the dissemination of opinions online, which will provide valuable information to improve marketing and communication strategies in the Ecuadorian restaurant sector.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Motivations toward EWOM Sending Behavior

EWOM sending behavior has attracted increasing interest in current academic research [35,36]. Several studies have explored the motivations underlying word-of-mouth

EWOM sending behavior [37]. Among others, Llorens-Marin et al. [38] recognize altruism as a key motivator to create and send EWOM. Shen et al. [39] and Cheung and Lee Mr [40] highlight the role of different motives in positive and negative EWOM, identifying the former with confirmation seeking, expression of positive feelings, and negative experiences as significant motivators. From the sender's perspective, Yap et al. [41] investigate the relationship between individual motivations and the EWOM message, concluding that positive and negative message characteristics are linked to different motivations to engage in EWOM.

In this context, the communication established between consumers who share EWOM can be based on the theory of reasoned action (hereinafter TRA). This theory, proposed by Ajzen and Fishbein [42], postulates that an individual's intention prior to a behavior is determined by their attitude and subjective norm [43,44]. This approach implies that people are fundamentally rational and systematically make decisions using available information [45].

Attitude is formed through the evaluation of the credibility and relevance of online comments, as well as the perceived usefulness of this information in their purchasing decisions [46]. Subjective norm refers to the consumer's perception of perceived social pressure to follow other users' online recommendations or comments [47,48]. This norm influences their willingness to follow or ignore EWOM information in their purchasing decisions [49]. Therefore, according to the TRA, the combination of attitudes toward EWOM and subjective norms influences consumers' intentions toward EWOM communication behavior [50]. This intention translates into specific behaviors, such as sharing online comments, following recommendations from other users, or making purchasing decisions based on EWOM queries [51]. With all, it is key to consider the behavior of writing and/or sending EWOM to understand how these specific antecedents influence the post-purchase experience.

EWOM writing and sending behavior plays a significant role in facilitating the dissemination of post-purchase experiences by posting reviews, comments, photos, and videos on various digital channels [52]. This phenomenon goes beyond the simple sharing or contribution of product experiences by consumers, as it also allows them to reach global audiences with similar interests, eliminating geographical and temporal restrictions [53,54]. This is because consumers have the convenience of sharing their shopping experiences and thoughts at the time and place that is most convenient for them [55]. Ease of access and sharing perceptions highlight the importance of understanding motivations to write EWOM, especially in the context of restaurants and among the Millennial generation [56–58].

Furthermore, managers are aware that they can gain a more profound comprehension of their customers' perceptions and behaviors through the underlying motives behind their EWOM contributions [5]. The analysis of these motivations in the context of the Millennial generation provides key insights into preferences for writing EWOM [3]. Among them, the search for social recognition, the need to express opinions, or the desire to help other consumers exert a substantial influence on EWOM submission behavior [59]. In the literature, three types of motivations have been identified that are key in the diffusion of EWOM: extroversion motivations [25], social benefit motivations [60], and altruism motivations [61]. This tripartite focus on motivations seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of how and why consumers engage in EWOM sending behavior.

Extroversion motivations are supported by the notion that extraverted people tend to participate more actively in online interactions [27]. This characteristic is reflected in an individual's tendency toward active participation in social interactions [62,63]. In digital environments, extroverts tend to be more active and participatory in seeking attention and social connection in online activities (e.g., discussion forums) [64,65], showing a greater propensity to form friendships and share personal information on social networks [66].

Motivations related to social benefits are based on the idea that online interactions offer social rewards, such as recognition and approval, which can motivate individuals to share their experiences [28]. Since people seek to satisfy their innate drive to be part

of social groups and be valued by them [67,68], these social rewards are closely linked to the fundamental need for belonging and social recognition [69]. In this sense, the digital environment provides a unique opportunity to receive and grant social recognition and approval [70], being a powerful stimulus to share experiences, receive positive comments and reactions from others [71], and contribute to a sense of connection and belonging without any monetary factor [72].

Finally, altruistic motivations reflect the intention to help other consumers make decisions based on information from others [73]. These motivations, driven by concern for the well-being of others and enjoyment of helping others [74], play a significant role in EWOM communication [75], especially in the context of social media. Various works reveal that altruism affects the EWOM intention [38,76]. Some works have also highlighted that the altruistic approach to EWOM behavior can be an effective alternative to monetary incentives [61] and impact consumer behavior [77]. This research could support the idea that altruistic motivations can influence Millennials' decision-making related to restaurant choices and their EWOM sending behavior, as they promote a culture of mutual help and collaboration in the purchasing process.

2.2. *The Millennial Generation and Their Behavior of Sending EWOM Regarding Restaurants*

The Millennial generation stands out for its affinity and familiarity with technology, its participation in social networks, and its influence on consumer formation trends [78–80]. They represent a significant proportion of the world's population and are considered a driving force in the global economy [81]. In the geographical context of Ecuador, Millennials are also a significant part of the active and consumer population [82] influencing market trends and commercial strategies in various sectors, including the gastronomic sector [83]. Its influence in various areas, such as consumption, technology, and culture, has been widely recognized [84].

Millennials' consumption patterns notably differ from other generations [85,86]. They are active consumers not only in the digital space but also in the gastronomy and restaurant fields [87]. For example, when it comes to the world of food, Millennials tend to look for convenience and social experiences when choosing restaurants and bars [88]. Furthermore, their interest in the quality of food, service, and atmosphere creates new demands and expectations for the food service industry [89,90].

In this context, the Millennial generation plays a crucial role in the dissemination of opinions and experiences related to food products and services [91]. Their influence in the restaurant industry is undeniable, as they are considered the most powerful cohort in the entertainment sector [85,92]. Their constant use of mobile devices and social networks to search for, reserve, and recommend restaurants reflects their importance as a source of information for other consumers [50]. Additionally, Millennials have proven to be frequent consumers of dining establishments, opting for culinary experiences outside the home more regularly than other generations [8]. This poses a challenge for establishments in terms of capturing and retaining their attention, as they value the experience accompanied by technology and expect a gastronomic offer that adapts to their preferences [93]. In this context, online reviews and recommendations play a decisive role in influencing both the choice of the restaurant and the decision regarding the selection of dishes or table reservation [94–96], making the Millennial generation a significant force in the field of writing and sending EWOM in the gastronomic sector.

In the academic literature, there is growing interest in understanding the behaviors and preferences of Millennials in various contexts [97,98], including the field of gastronomy [3]. However, there are still gaps in understanding how these unique characteristics of Millennials impact their consumption decisions and how companies can adapt their strategies to meet their specific needs [91]. Therefore, further exploring this generation and its relationship with the food service industry is essential to address these gaps and provide valuable information for companies in the sector.

3. Proposed Model and Hypothesis Formulation

With the aim of understanding how motivations toward EWOM delivery influence the behavior of the Millennial generation in the context of restaurant experiences, a relationship model is proposed that shows the direct effect of three types of motivations (extroversion, social benefits, and altruism) on EWOM sending behavior and the moderating effect of EWOM consultation behavior (Figure 1).

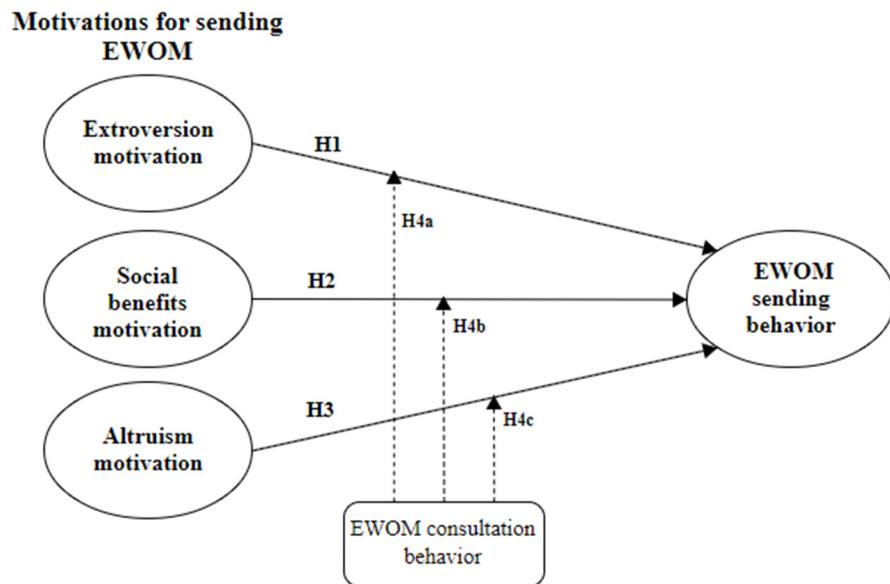


Figure 1. Proposed theoretical model.

One of the most relevant contributions in the literature on the motivations that drive the creation and sending of EWOM was developed by Yen and Tang [56]. In their study, they define extroversion motivation as the act of writing online comments with the purpose of expressing both positive and negative emotions in relation to the service or product received [99]. Extroversion, referring to the expression of positive emotions, makes extroverted individuals share their experiences in a more effusive and participatory way [100]. In contrast, in the case of negative emotions, extraversion could manifest itself in more direct and forceful expressions when communicating discontent [27]. Furthermore, according to Serra-Cantallops et al. [101], the expression of positive experiences plays an essential role in the motivation to post EWOM, especially in the restaurant context [102]. Therefore, it is assumed that the motivation of extroversion will stimulate the behavior of spreading EWOM, raising the first research hypothesis (Figure 1).

H1: Extraversion motivation positively influences EWOM sending behavior.

The search for social benefits motivates individuals to participate in virtual platforms by sending EWOM [27], since it allows them to satisfy the desire to establish connections with friends on social networks and interact in activities supported by others [103]. This involvement in online communication is intrinsically related to actions such as receiving, commenting, liking, or disseminating relevant information about a product or service to the network of contacts [104]. Previous research has demonstrated the association between the search for social benefits and participation in digital platforms [105–107], as well as the connection between this motivation and the strengthening of social relationships [28,108,109]. Therefore, social benefits are expected to influence EWOM sending behavior, increasing participation and the dissemination of opinions about products or services in digital environments. Thus, the second hypothesis is formulated (Figure 1).

H2: Social benefit motivation positively influences EWOM sending behavior.

The motivation of altruism, focused on helping other consumers make purchasing decisions, has been identified as a key factor in the diffusion of EWOM. According to Shiau and Chan [110], this motivation drives individuals to share information with the aim of benefiting others. Therefore, altruism can lead to the action of sharing experiences to positively influence other consumers [38,76,111]. Additional research supports the relevance of altruism in the specific context of restaurant websites [112], where consumers share their experiences with the purpose of influencing the purchasing decisions of others [102,113]. Therefore, it is assumed that altruism motivation could significantly influence the sending of EWOM, formulating the third hypothesis (Figure 1):

H3: *Altruism motivation positively influences EWOM sending behavior.*

In addition to the direct effects of these motivations, it is considered that EWOM sending behavior may also depend on the consumer's previous consultation behavior before the experience. In this context, the study of EWOM behavior can be approached from the point of view of the receiving consumer, who consults online comments, and from the point of view of the sending consumer, who writes and posts online comments [114]. Various works suggest that consultation behavior and dissemination behavior may be closely related [115–117]. Based on these works, it is expected that EWOM querying can exert some influence on EWOM submission behavior.

The influence of EWOM consultation on consumers' decision-making process has received considerable attention in the academic literature. EWOM consultation, understood as the act of searching and reviewing online opinions and reviews before making a purchase, is postulated to be a key behavior that can shape consumer perceptions and attitudes [118]. This behavior is framed in the search for information as a strategy to reduce uncertainty and improve decision making [119]. In this line, several studies support that consumers who consult EWOM on several platforms tend to adjust their purchase decisions based on the opinions of other users [74,120].

EWOM consultation can exert a substantial influence on both consumers' motivations for writing EWOM and their subsequent EWOM sending behavior [121,122]. This phenomenon suggests that the process of searching and reviewing online messages impacts not only the decision to write reviews but also the likelihood of sharing them with other users [123]. In the context of restaurants, Millennial customers who consult EWOM search for relevant information, such as the quality of service, atmosphere, and prices of the restaurant, which helps them make selection decisions [124]. Therefore, these queries would affect their intentions to visit one establishment or another [102].

The study of these consultations has been addressed in some works analyzing their motivations and their relationship with attitudes [31]. However, there is no empirical evidence on how these queries can influence EWOM diffusion behavior. In view of previous studies, it is assumed that the effects of consumers' motivations toward sending EWOM will vary depending on the EWOM queries they have made before the purchase decision. Therefore, it is expected that these queries will play a moderating role in the relationship between motivations and EWOM sending behavior, raising the final research hypothesis (Figure 1):

H4: *EWOM querying behavior positively moderates the motivational effect of (H4a) extraversion, (H4b) social benefits, and (H4c) altruism on EWOM sending behavior.*

4. Methodology

4.1. Measure Instrument

To verify the proposed theoretical model, an empirical investigation was carried out by implementing a structured questionnaire aimed at consumers belonging to the Millennial generation. In Ecuador, as in other countries, Millennials make up a large proportion of the active and consumer population. According to the National Institute of Statistics and

Censuses [125], approximately 23.2% of the Ecuadorian population is within the Millennial generation, aged between 22 and 36 years. Furthermore, internet penetration and the use of social networks among Ecuadorian Millennials is significant, with more than 80% of Ecuadorians between 18 and 34 years old regularly using social networks [34,126–128].

The instrument included measures of different constructs adapted from scales previously tested in the literature. Specifically, Yen and Tang's [56] proposal was used to measure the motivations for sending EWOM, reflecting the dimensions of extraversion (6 items), social benefits (4 items), and altruism (5 items). The behavior of sending EWOM was measured through three indicators adapted from Gvili and Levy's [129] proposal. Additionally, an item adapted from Lee and Kim [130] was included as a measure of EWOM consultation ("I consult online opinions and comments that people write when they visit a restaurant"). All items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale (where 1 indicates "strongly disagree" and 7 indicates "strongly agree"). Finally, regarding the two control variables, gender was coded as male (1) and female (2), while age was recorded as a continuous variable measured in years.

4.2. Sampling and Data Collection

For data collection, a target group was selected consisting of individuals between 20 and 40 years of age with experience reading online reviews and comments as well as visiting restaurants in Ecuador. Non-probabilistic convenience sampling was chosen, which has been used in similar research due to its ability to easily access the population of interest, in this case, Millennial consumers [11,77,131–133]. Participants were invited to voluntarily complete an online questionnaire. Online surveys are effective as they offer the ability to effectively intercept the target audience and explore a specific phenomenon [134]. This study targeted a sample size of 160 respondents, which is equivalent to 10 times the number of variables observed and is suitable for structural equation modeling (SEM) [135]. The survey was distributed for three weeks through the three most used social networks in Ecuador: Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp [136]. This distribution approach allowed us to obtain a diverse sample (Table 1). In total, 341 valid and complete responses were collected, with 142 coming from men and 199 from women. Over 65% of the respondents were single, with an average age of 28.2 years. The majority indicated a monthly income of less than USD 400.

Table 1. Sample profile.

Gender		Marital Status	
Male	42%	Single	66%
Female	58%	Married	23%
Age		De facto union	
Mean (\pm standard deviation)	28.2 years old (\pm 4.7)	Divorced	6%
		Widower	1%
Employment situation		Monthly income	
Part time employment	6%	less than USD 400	51%
Full time employment	32%	USD 401–500	10%
Unemployed	6%	USD 501–600	6%
Self-employed	12%	USD 601–700	4%
Student	41%	USD 701–800	4%
Housewife	3%	USD 801–900	4%
		USD 901–1000	6%
		more than USD 1000	15%

Once the field work was completed, two sample *t*-tests were applied to check if there were significant differences in the mean of the constructs between the group of respondents who answered the questionnaire upon receipt (Nearly = 247) and the group who answered after receiving a reminder (Nlate = 94). The results were not significant (the highest *t*-

statistic ($df = 339$) = 0.634 with an associated p -value = 0.526), indicating the absence of non-response bias [137].

4.3. Data Analysis

To assess the theoretical causal relationships proposed, the PLS-SEM technique was used, which is appropriate for predictive applications [138], as is our objective. Specifically, we aim to predict the behavior of sending EWOM based on the motivations for writing EWOM. Furthermore, it is proposed to verify the moderation of consulting EWOM behavior in the effect of motivations on sending behavior, following the two-stage methodology proposed by Becker et al. [139].

SmartPLS 4.0.9.6 software was used in this process, using a bootstrap resampling procedure with 5000 randomly generated subsamples to test the proposed hypotheses [140]. All constructs were treated as reflective, allowing for a thorough evaluation of the relationships between the variables [141].

5. Results

In the first stage, the measurement model was analyzed to evaluate the psychometric properties of the scales. Based on the results, an item was eliminated from the EWOM sending behavior scale due to a lack of factor loading to its latent construct (SB-EWOM1: I share with my friends on social networks comments about products or services after using or purchasing them). Reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability coefficients. As shown in Table 2, both measures yielded values greater than 0.70 on all scales, which is indicative of adequate reliability for use in this study [142].

Table 2. Reliability and validity of measurement scales.

Constructs	Indicators	Factor Loadings	(t-Stat)
Extroversion motivation (EM) $\alpha = 0.905$ $CR = 0.906$ $AVE = 0.779$	EM1: Because I can tell my experience to others about booking a restaurant	0.862 ***	(42.405)
	EM2: Because I can express my satisfaction for having gone to a good restaurant	0.904 ***	(61.148)
	EM3: Because I can tell others about the success I've had reserving a restaurant	0.904 ***	(52.858)
	EM4: Because I like to say that I am satisfied with the service I have received in a restaurant	0.861 ***	(36.745)
Social benefit motivation (SBM) $\alpha = 0.921$ $CR = 0.926$ $AVE = 0.809$	SBM1: Because I can meet nice people	0.867 ***	(43.376)
	SBM2: Because I think others may like my comments.	0.902 ***	(57.700)
	SBM3: Because it's nice to have a conversation with like-minded people.	0.914 ***	(76.456)
	SBM4: Because I feel identified with others who have had the same experience as me in a restaurant	0.914 ***	(79.014)
Altruism motivations (AM) $\alpha = 0.902$ $CR = 0.904$ $AVE = 0.719$	AM1: Because I want to prevent others from having the same negative experiences as me in a restaurant.	0.848 ***	(33.564)
	AM2: Because I want to warn others about bad restaurants	0.861 ***	(41.816)
	AM3: So that other people know my experience in a restaurant	0.850 ***	(33.127)
	AM4: Because I want to give others the opportunity to make a reservation at a good restaurant	0.872 ***	(40.428)
	AM5: Because I think good restaurants should be promoted	0.805 ***	(27.406)

Table 2. Cont.

Constructs	Indicators	Factor Loadings	(t-Stat)
Behavior of sending EWOM (SB-EWOM) $\alpha = 0.776$ $CR = 0.776$ $AVE = 0.817$	SB-EWOM2: When I receive new information on social networks about products or services, I forward it to other people	0.902 ***	(66.225)
	SB-EWOM3: When I receive information on social networks about products or services, I express my opinion about them	0.905 ***	(67.676)
EWOM consultation behavior (CB-EWOM)	CB-EWOM1: I check online opinions and comments that people write when they visit a restaurant	--	--
Age (Control)		--	--
Gender (Control)		--	--

Note: α : Cronbach's alpha; CR: composite reliability; AVE: average variance extracted. --: not calculable.
*** $p < 0.01$.

Regarding the convergent validity of the constructs, the average extracted variance calculation was used [143]. The results obtained revealed that all constructs reached the minimum recommended value of 0.50, which indicates the existence of satisfactory convergent validity. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that the factor loadings associated with each item also met the minimum value of 0.7 and presented a significance level of 99%. These results support the convergent validity of the constructs evaluated in the present study (Table 2).

The verification of discriminant validity was carried out using the criterion proposed by Fornell and Larcker [144] and the heterotrait/monotrait ratio (HTMT) [145]. In the first case, the results in Table 3 indicate that all correlations between the latent constructs (values below the diagonal) are less than the square root of the value of the average variance extracted (AVE) of each construct (values on the diagonal).

Table 3. Discriminant validity (I): Fornell–Larcker criterion.

	EM	SBM	AM	SB-EWOM	CB-EWOM	Age	Gender
EM	0.883						
SBM	0.666	0.899					
AM	0.803	0.664	0.848				
SB-EWOM	0.611	0.504	0.500	0.904			
CB-EWOM	0.361	0.188	0.370	0.321	--		
Age	0.001	-0.014	0.017	0.026	0.017	--	
Gender	-0.016	-0.027	-0.050	0.034	-0.112	-0.154	--

Note: EM: extroversion motivation; SBM: social benefit motivation; AM: altruism motivation; SB-EWOM: EWOM sending behavior; CB-EWOM: EWOM consultation behavior. Diagonal values (in bold) are the square root of AVE; values below diagonal are the correlations between latent constructs. --: not calculable.

Furthermore, all the HTMT ratios shown in Table 4 are below the recommended threshold of 0.9 recommended by Henseler et al. [145]. These findings confirm the discriminant validity of the measurement scales used in this study, indicating that the constructs evaluated in the research are different from each other and do not present a significant overlap in terms of content.

Several analyses were performed to check the potential common bias issues. First, as shown in Table 3, the highest linear correlation between each pair of latent constructs is 0.803 (AM-EM). This value is lower than 0.9, indicating the absence of multicollinearity [146]. In addition, the variance inflation factors corroborated these results, as none of them exceeded the established upper limit of 3.3 [147]: $VIF_{EM} = 3.168$; $VIF_{SBM} = 1.995$; $VIF_{AM} = 3.184$; $VIF_{CB-EWOM} = 1.206$; $VIF_{GENDER} = 1.040$; $VIF_{AGE} = 1.026$.

Table 4. Discriminant validity (II): heterotrait/monotrait (HTMT).

	EM	SBM	AM	SB-EWOM	CB-EWOM	Age	Gender
EM							
SBM	0.727						
AM	0.888	0.723					
SB-EWOM	0.729	0.593	0.596				
CB-EWOM	0.379	0.194	0.389	0.364			
Age	0.031	0.026	0.018	0.062	0.017		
Gender	0.017	0.029	0.053	0.041	0.112	0.154	

Note: EM: extroversion motivation; SBM: social benefit motivation; AM: altruism motivation; SB-EWOM: EWOM sending behavior; CB-EWOM: EWOM consultation behavior.

Hypothesis Contrast of the Theoretical Model

After validating the measurement scales, two nested models were estimated to verify the hypotheses, considering both the direct effects and the moderating effect. Specifically, to evaluate the moderating role of EWOM consultation behavior on the motivations of extroversion, social benefits, and altruism, a product focus process was carried out. According to Fassott et al. [148], this approach is an appropriate methodology to evaluate the moderating role of a variable in a structural model, which involves comparing the estimates of a model without the interaction with another that incorporates it.

The first step consisted of estimating the causal model, considering only the control variables: gender and age (Model 1, Table 5). Subsequently, the estimation was performed by adding the direct effects of the three motivations (independent variables) and the EWOM consultation on the behavior of sending the EWOM (dependent variable). The results of this estimation, reflected in Model 2 of Table 5, indicate that extroversion motivation ($\beta = 0.49^{***}$; t -Stat = 6.68) and the motivation for social benefits ($\beta = 0.21^{***}$; t -Stat = 3.23) have a significant and positive impact on the sending EWOM behavior. However, in this model, altruism motivation presents a practically null direct effect ($\beta = -0.08$; t -Stat = 0.99). To avoid bias when estimating the moderating effect, at this stage, the direct effect of the moderating variable on the dependent variable was estimated. This estimate indicates that EWOM consultation behavior has a positive and significant impact on EWOM sending behavior ($\beta = 0.14^{***}$; t -Stat = 2.72).

Table 5. Estimation of causal relationships (direct effects and moderators).

Direct Effects	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	t	β	t	β	t
<i>Control variables</i>						
Age → SB-EWOM	0.220	1.031	0.083	0.947	0.072	0.826
Gender → SB-EWOM	0.179	1.025	0.133	1.511	0.124	1.398
<i>Main effects</i>						
EM → SB-EWOM			0.485 ***	6.676	0.516 ***	6.746
SBM → SB-EWOM			0.208 ***	3.228	0.207 ***	3.196
AM → SB-EWOM			-0.078	0.990	-0.109 *	1.409
CB-EWOM → SB-EWOM			0.142 ***	2.719	0.145 ***	2.685
<i>Interaction effects</i>						
EMxCB-EWOM → SB-EWOM					0.153 **	1.935
SBMxCB-EWOM → SB-EWOM					-0.062	0.961
AMxCB-EWOM → SB-EWOM					-0.162 **	1.929
R^2 (SB-EWOM)	0.015		0.411		0.424	
ΔR^2			0.396		0.013	
SRMR					0.050	
NFI					0.856	

Note: SB-EWOM: EWOM sending behavior; EM: extroversion motivation; SBM: social benefit motivation; AM: altruism motivation; CB-EWOM: EWOM consultation behavior. * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

In the last stage, the interaction effect of EWOM consultation behavior was incorporated into the relationships between the three motivations (extroversion, social benefits, and altruism) on EWOM sending behavior (model 3, Table 5). The results show that extroversion ($\beta = 0.52^{***}$; $t\text{-Stat} = 6.75$) and social benefit motivations ($\beta = 0.21^{***}$; $t\text{-Stat} = 3.20$) have a positive and significant influence on EWOM sending behavior; thus, hypotheses H₁ and H₂ could be accepted. On the other hand, altruism motivation exerts a negative influence on EWOM sending behavior ($\beta = -0.11^*$; $t\text{-Stat} = 1.41$), indicating that H₃ should be rejected. This result confirms that altruism motivation and sending behavior have a negative causal relationship; that is, the higher the Millennial consumer's altruism, the lower the EWOM sending behavior. Regarding the goodness of fit, the SRMR index (0.05) is lower than 0.08 and the Normed Fixed Index (0.856) is close to the value of 0.9, indicating an adequate model fit estimation [149].

Regarding the moderating role of EWOM consultation behavior, the results reveal that the relationships between extroversion ($\beta = 0.15^{***}$; $t\text{-Stat} = 1.94$) and altruism motivations are significantly enhanced ($\beta = -0.16^{***}$; $t\text{-Stat} = 1.93$); therefore, hypotheses H4a and H4c could be accepted. However, social benefit motivation, under the moderation of EWOM querying, does not appear to have a significant influence ($\beta = -0.06$; $t\text{-Stat} = 0.961$). Figure 2 graphically shows the significant interaction between EWOM consultation behavior and altruism motivations; when EWOM query behavior increases, the effect of extraversion motivation on EWOM sending behavior increases considerably. However, given this increase in EWOM consultation behavior, the effect of altruism motivation considerably decreases EWOM sending behavior.

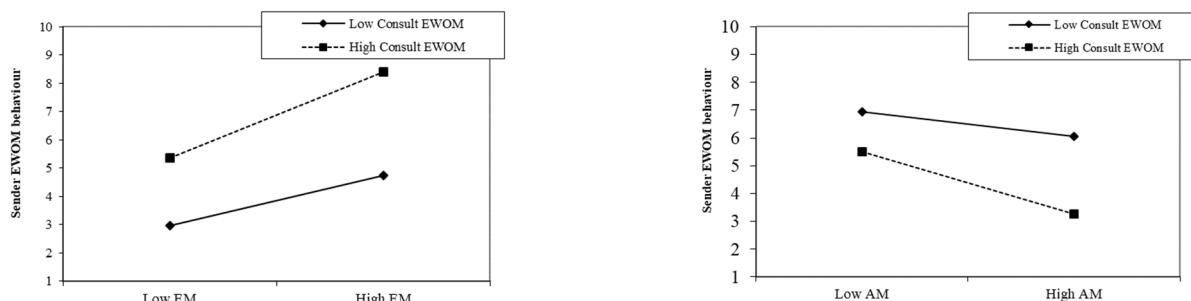


Figure 2. Moderating effect of EWOM consultation behavior.

Finally, the specific contribution of the interaction term is reflected in the size of the effect by the increase in the determination coefficient. $R^2:f^2 = (0.424 - 0.411)/(1 - 0.424) = 0.022$ [150].

6. Discussion and Conclusions

This study contributes significantly to the understanding of the behavior of the Ecuadorian Millennial consumer in relation to their EWOM sending behavior regarding restaurants. It specifically addresses the effect of motivations and the moderating role of review consultations prior to the purchase decision.

Regarding the motivations for sending EWOM, in general, our findings support previous research that highlights the importance of considering them when explaining this behavior. However, the effects of the three motivations analyzed (extroversion, social benefits, and altruism) are different.

Extraversion motivation is directly related to the need to express feelings, whether positive or negative [27]. This finding is reinforced in our study through the observation of how Millennial consumers use online platforms as a means to express their emotions [91]. Furthermore, the influence of extraversion on EWOM sending behavior is supported by previous research indicating that extroverts are more likely to actively participate in online interactions [108].

Benefit motivation has also been previously associated with purchasing decision-making [95,151]. Our results reveal that this type of motivation, coupled with extraversion

motivation, is another important antecedent of EWOM sending behavior. This effect supports the idea that the social benefits perceived by Millennial consumers encourage them to share their experiences online, as highlighted in other previous studies [28,74,108].

Regarding the motivation of altruism, the results confirm that this motivation does not exert a positive influence on the EWOM sending behavior of the Millennial generation in Ecuador, but rather a negative influence. This discrepancy could be attributed to the complexity of online interactions and the changing nature of social dynamics in digital environments [85]. Previous research suggests that altruistic motivations may be offset by other factors, such as the fear of receiving negative reviews or the desire to preserve one's online reputation [152]. Furthermore, cultural context and social expectations can play a crucial role in how altruistic behaviors are perceived and practiced online [153]. This negative relationship between altruism and EWOM sending behavior is in accordance with a study by Li et al. [154], which suggests that other factors or motivations could have a more pronounced impact on sharing restaurant experiences online. Therefore, although altruism may be an underlying motivation for some online actions, its impact on restaurant EWOM sending behavior among Ecuadorian Millennials could be mediated by a number of contextual and psychosocial factors that require further exploration in future research.

In addition to the effects of motivations, our research offers an interesting perspective on how EWOM query behavior moderates the relationships between motivations and EWOM sending behavior of the Millennial generation, as different moderation patterns were observed.

On the one hand, it was found that EWOM consultation acts as a moderator in the relationship between extraversion motivation and EWOM consultation. That is, when consumers consult EWOM before choosing a restaurant, their extraversion increases the propensity to submit online reviews about their experience. This result suggests an amplification of the effect of consulting online reviews on extraverted individuals, which promotes greater emotional expression in their online comments [27]. Furthermore, EWOM consultation was also identified as moderating the relationship between altruism motivation and EWOM sending behavior [73]. This finding indicates that Millennials' inquiry behavior regarding restaurants enhances the effect that their altruism has on sending EWOM, showing more intention to provide useful information online to help other consumers. However, no significant moderation of EWOM consultation was observed in the relationship between social benefit seeking and EWOM sending behavior. This suggests that consulting reviews do not alter the motivation for social benefits when sharing experiences online, which is in line with previous research, such as that carried out by Cheung and Lee [74]. These results highlight the complexity of the interaction between Millennial consumers' consulting behavior and EWOM sending behavior.

7. Implications

7.1. Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, this work contributes significantly to the existing literature by addressing a research gap identified in previous studies. While the literature in this field has focused on offering partial results on motivations [25] and some moderating effects [26], our work offers a more comprehensive approach to better understand how motivations influence EWOM sending behavior and how this influence is moderated by EWOM queries. Regarding motivations, it has improved our understanding of the motivations that drive Millennials to share their restaurant experiences online, integrating the theory of reasoned action (TRA) [42] in the analysis of the relationship between these motivations and the behavior of sending EWOM. Regarding moderation, there is no previous evidence on the effect of EWOM queries on EWOM sending behavior. In this issue, this work adds value to the field by exploring how EWOM consultation moderates these relationships, expanding our understanding of the underlying mechanisms that influence online experience-sharing behavior. In summary, the results obtained allow us to advance scientific research by providing a more complete view of the influence that

psychological and social factors of Millennial consumers have on their motivations and online behaviors related to restaurants.

7.2. Managerial Implications

This research also contributes to practice management in the restaurant sector, aimed at the Millennial generation as a target audience. The results have revealed the importance that EWOM behavior has in the design and/or adaptation of strategies related to the virtual interactions of consumers and between consumers. Therefore, it is recommended to take advantage of the power of online reviews to increase the effectiveness of digital marketing strategies. To this end, it is recommended that those responsible for the management of digital marketing strategies have an in-depth understanding of what drives consumers to share their experiences online, particularly those related to extroversion and social benefits. Managers can use this knowledge to design communication strategies that highlight the relevance of sharing experiences and emotions online. This could help improve the customer experience, build brand loyalty, and increase their engagement in promoting the restaurant.

Although it has been proven that motivations related to extroversion and social benefits impact the submission of reviews, restaurants' communication actions aimed at Millennials should include stimuli of a social and emotional nature to encourage consumers to send EWOM. For example, messages could be used to reinforce sending behavior with expressions and slang typical of Millennials; the advantages of sharing experiences with other consumers, such as emotional release, a sense of belonging to the group, etc., could be made clear; incentives could be offered for leaving reviews and comments online (discounts or point accumulation); and authentic and attractive content could be created for these consumers or in collaboration with local influencers with whom they feel identified. These types of actions could facilitate and motivate Millennials to express their experiences and strengthen their participation in social networks. This would allow us to develop an effective strategy to increase the online visibility and credibility of the establishment in the restaurant industry in Ecuador.

8. Limitations and Future Research Lines

To advance this line of research, the following methodological and conceptual improvements are proposed: regarding the sampling method, although convenience sampling has advantages, such as accessibility to participants, it can also present limitations in terms of representativeness since the sample could be biased toward certain groups or profiles of people. Regarding the scales, the exclusive use of Likert-type scales with seven anchor points to collect data could be another limitation of this study. Although these scales are useful for obtaining information about participants' intentions and perceptions, no empirical verification was performed to determine whether the responses accurately reflected the actual actions and behaviors of individuals in everyday life. This raises the possibility of a gap between what people state they would do and what they actually do in practice, which could influence the interpretation of the results and limit their generalizability.

The data collection process was conducted using a non-probability convenience sampling method and online questionnaire, which implies that the selection of participants was not random and the number of possible respondents could not be controlled. This limitation may compromise the representativeness of the sample. Although a reminder of the questionnaire was sent to potential participants after 10 days to mitigate some non-response bias, it is important to keep this limitation in mind when interpreting the study findings.

The present investigation is also limited by the lack of population-level data. To address this limitation, future research could focus on collecting population-level data to allow direct comparison with the sample. In addition, exploring alternative sampling methodologies that improve the representativeness of the sample could strengthen the external validity of the study and provide a more robust understanding of the results.

This study focused specifically on the Millennial generation in the context of restaurants in Ecuador, which limits its generalization to other generations or geographic regions.

In this question, future research could explore the relationships addressed in different demographic groups. It would be interesting to compare the differences in EWOM sharing motivations and behavior between different generations, such as Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Z, in the restaurant context. One could also analyze how EWOM sharing motivations and behavior vary in different cultural and geographical contexts, as social expectations and norms can greatly influence this behavior.

To improve the estimation of EWOM sending behavior, other antecedents are proposed that may contribute to the remaining variance. On the one hand, since consumer satisfaction is the most shared antecedent in the literature [155], it would be interesting to add its effect on EWOM behavior from the technologies approach [156], analyzing the possible influence of the restaurant's ICT (Information and Communication Technology) setup on customer satisfaction. On the other hand, there is empirical evidence in the restaurant context confirming that perceived quality [22] and customer value [157] have a significant influence on EWOM sending behavior. Therefore, investigating antecedents such as perceived quality or perceived value would help to establish to what degree it improves the explanation for this EWOM behavior.

The effect of other moderating variables could also be addressed. For example, how the quality of food and service in restaurants influences consumers' EWOM motivations and behaviors, considering specific factors such as taste, presentation, and customer service, could be analyzed. Similarly, it would be of interest to study how different incentive strategies, such as discounts, gifts, or exclusive memberships, may affect EWOM sharing motivations and behavior in the restaurant context.

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Data Availability Statement: The dataset that supports the findings of this study is available from the corresponding author on request.

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