

Passion at first sight: how to engage users in social commerce contexts

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Abstract This study analyzes the role of passion in engaging users and how it affects participation in social commerce contexts. Based on extant marketing research, the engagement-generation process is studied in three stages: cognitive (social presence and interactivity), affective (enjoyment and sPassion) and behavioral (spread of sWOM). The results empirically confirm that the cognitive experience and emotional feelings derived from the process boost user participation. At the core of the process, sPassion positively affects the spread of sWOM. Introduction of the new concept sPassion brings new challenges and opportunities to marketing research, helping to develop the concept of engagement and furthering research on WOM valence. Knowing how sPassion is formed and what factors are key to its creation will enable companies to understand the necessary steps to enhance user participation in social commerce contexts.

Keywords sPassion · Engagement · Social commerce · Social presence · Interactivity · Enjoyment

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1 Introduction

What is passion? Everybody has, at some time, experienced passion, whether for a summer love, a job, a football team, or even a favorite brand. From a marketing perspective, some authors relate passion to *brand love* [1] and to *engagement* [2–4]. In a qualitative study carried out by Hollebeek [3], participants stated that their feeling of engagement on the Internet materialized as a sense of passion for the activity they were performing. Previous research demonstrates that if a company wants to succeed on the Internet, it should not only provide useful technology on its website, but also encourage engagement among its users [5, 6]. Could passion be a way to create this engagement in social commerce contexts?

Engagement has been considered a key element in social commerce (s-commerce) contexts. s-commerce is characterized by the combination of social interactions and information exchange [7], two key elements of engagement [8]. This combination makes the individual feel part of the company [9], which generates more engagement than that achieved with traditional e-commerce sites. Some studies state that engagement is the result of a process that consists of three stages: cognitive, affective and behavioral [4, 8, 10, 11]. It has been shown that the affective side is the cornerstone of the engagement process, both offline [12] and online [11]. This affective stage has been measured through attributes such as enjoyment [13, 14] and passion [3]. However, enjoyment by itself is a feeling that needs to be accompanied by a deeper experience in order to allow user engagement. Engaged users show emotional attachment, dedication and passion [15]. Therefore, we propose that in s-commerce contexts, passion is critical in the engagement-generation process.

The aim of this research is to conceptualize *passion* in s-commerce contexts. To do so, we coin the term *sPassion*, referring to the passion that occurs on these websites. We will study the role of *sPassion* in engaging users, and how it positively affects the participation of these users in the form of *sWOM* (social word of mouth). We propose a model to measure the perceptions of the individual in the three stages of the engagement process—cognitive, affective, and behavioral [16]—and the relationships among them. This model will explain to practitioners how increasing the sense of passion in potential users will be beneficial for the success of s-commerce websites. The contribution of this investigation is to lay the foundations of engagement generation based on encouraging *sPassion*, which is a positive affective feeling that can enhance the spread of positive WOM.

In “[Theoretical background](#)” section, we explain the concept of passion to define and contextualize its role in s-commerce. Likewise, we review the literature on the engagement generation process to examine each of its three stages. In “[Hypotheses development](#)” section, we define our hypotheses, while “[Methodology](#)” section describes the methodology and the data analyzed. “[Results](#)” section presents the results. Finally, we conclude with the theoretical and business implications and limitations of our work, and future lines of research.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 The concept of passion

Passion is an area that has attracted interest for many years. Even philosophers such as Descartes (1596–1650), Hegel (1770–1831) and Kant (1724–1804) studied the emotions and consequences linked to passion. The term *passion* is often associated with love or sexual relationships. One of the most popular theories of passion, Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love [17, 18], was developed based on this approach. The theory considers the different kinds of love as the fruit of three components: intimacy, passion and decision/commitment, which are separable but interactive. Passion can *fuel motivation* to engage in an activity, *enhance well-being* and *lead to greater positive affect* during task engagement [2], but it may also have a *dark side*. In fact, the word *passion* comes from the Latin *passio*, or suffering. This is why Vallerand et al. [2] distinguish between obsessive passion, when people lose control of the activity they are performing, and harmonious passion, which is related to positive states of mind and feelings such as *flow*, *enjoyment* and *engagement*, and where the individual can decide whether to engage in an activity and when.

In the marketing literature, passion is defined as “*a strong engagement in the passionate activity*” [19]. In consumer research, use of the term derives from the fact that passionate consumers can love an object in the same way as one person can fall in love with another [20–22]. From marketing perspectives, passion has been studied to explain customers' feelings toward a brand. This passion has been defined as “*a primarily affective, extremely positive attitude toward a specific brand that leads to emotional attachment and influences relevant behavioral factors*” [21]. It has been said that passion is “*the core of all strong brand relationships*” [23]. In the process of customer brand engagement, several related concepts have been used to refer to passion for a brand, such as *passionate*, *mad for*, *obsessive*, *loving*, *adoring*, etc. [3].

When it comes to purchasing and engaging online, as well as adoring a brand, users need to be passionate about the website in question, and its navigation. That is, if the website does not fulfill users' expectations, they may express disappointment and leave it. The real importance of passion in marketing strategies on the Internet lies in the fact that passionate consumers tend to share this excitement through positive WOM and act as brand evangelists [20, 21, 24, 25]. Research on passion in e-commerce contexts is scarce, with the exception of investigations focused on positive WOM as an outcome of passion. However, these studies primarily research the dual role of brand passion—that is, as harmonious and obsessive—disregarding the potential of passion as the main element in the engagement-generation process.

2.2 sPassion: passion in social commerce contexts

On the Internet, the term *passion* has been used as a synonym of engagement [3, 4, 15]. However, passion is conceptually distinct from engagement. We can explain this using an example: when a national football team plays in the World

Cup, people of that country—whether they are football fans or not—will often meet in a pub or at a friend's house to watch the matches, enjoying both the game and the interaction and socialization with friends. When the team scores, a sense of passion is sparked in the audience. If the team wins in the quarterfinals and passes to the semifinals, this passion may turn into engagement, making it “impossible” not to watch the final, even for those who are not fervent fans of football. Therefore, in our study, the concept of engagement refers to an entire process, whose core is sPassion. sPassion appears when users enjoy, interact with, and perceive social presence during the activity they are performing online.

Passion can be contagious [26]. Hence, the s-commerce context, where users are encouraged to share their experiences, participate in the virtual community and socialize [7], is an appropriate place to share and spread passion through positive WOM. Thanks to consumers' experience of positive emotions on s-commerce websites, the affective stage is closely related to eWOM [10, 27], which is how users communicate and interact. Therein lies the importance of studying the perception of passion in s-commerce contexts, since the relationships established there are different from those of other kinds of exchanges. Hajli and Sims [28], in their s-commerce research, point out that social interactions are characterized by informational and emotional support on the website. That is, on these kinds of websites, users exchange functional information and share their experiences. Therefore, in s-commerce, when they exchange information and socialize, users' feelings play an important role because their positive or negative experiences may be reflected in their opinions and recommendations. Moreover, if users show enthusiasm and pleasure on s-commerce websites, they will have a positive emotional experience and will pass on that passion by participating in the website and helping other users. Consistent with investigations into *brand love* [1] and *brand passion* [24, 29], passion plays a major role in the spreading of positive WOM.

We define sPassion as a positive affective feeling that s-commerce users experience as a result of enjoying navigation, and interacting and socializing with users and the company, which leads to the individual being emotionally and commercially engaged with the s-commerce website. sPassion leads to engagement because its capacity to create an emotional bond between the user and the website converts it into the cornerstone of the engagement-generation process in s-commerce contexts. In online marketing, the difference between passion and sPassion is that while the former is linked to *being in love with* a brand or company [1], the latter is related to the *passion* for the s-commerce website and, therefore, to *participation* and *evangelism* in virtual communities. sPassion refers to the website itself, and not to the specific brand. Thus, s-commerce websites are the focus of this study because they sell different brands using the same platform (e.g. Amazon, Aliexpress, etc.). Based on Brodie et al. [8], we propose a model that considers the three stages of the engagement process—cognitive, affective and behavioral—and we consider sPassion as the central element of the process.

2.3 Cognitive antecedents of sPassion: social presence and interactivity

The cognitive stage refers to the knowledge and experience users acquire during the social interactions and exchange of information typical of s-commerce websites [8]. In s-commerce contexts, we assume that social presence and perceived interactivity are the cognitive antecedents of sPassion. Engagement, which involves cognitive and emotional immersion, is considered to be determined by information consumption, interest immersion, sense of presence, and social interaction [15]. Following this argument, social-interactive engagement, which uses the Web as a medium, has also been linked to participation and socialization, since users can take advantage of the utilitarian experience gained through the advice and tips provided by the virtual community [14]. Recent studies suggest that social media engagement, which refers to engagement through social platforms for commercial purposes, is characterized by social interactions, content creation by engaged users and the use of social media as a source of information [30]. Therefore, types of engagement that stem from social interactions are close to the engagement in social commerce contexts.

2.4 Affective antecedent of sPassion: enjoyment

The affective stage refers to the emotional side of the engagement-generation process, in which users feel emotional involvement with and affective commitment to the virtual community [31]. In online engagement, enjoyment [14] and passion [3, 4] have been considered part of the affective stage. In relation to s-commerce, we take both these variables into consideration because of the intrinsic characteristics of the context. The term *enjoyment* has been used by various authors to describe the state of flow, which is a state of optimal experience that is intrinsically rewarding and enjoyable [32]. For some authors [6], the connection between flow and engagement is very strong, although the former is a state of mind—and may therefore be temporary or even not always experienced when a website is visited—and the latter is a feeling, a process that is generated slowly and endures over time. From the perspective of an engaged user, a website is more attractive when it fosters interactivity and enjoyment among its users [15].

2.5 Consequence of sPassion: the spread of positive sWOM

The behavioral stage refers to the changes experienced in consumer behavior due to the influence of the previous stages [8]. It is believed that engaged users play a major role in making recommendations and referrals [10, 16]. Therefore, for s-commerce, based on information exchange and social interactions, it is essential to encourage engagement. Passion influences participation in the form of positive WOM [1, 29], which is called sWOM in s-commerce contexts [33]. Groeger et al. [10] focus their investigation on the behavioral stage, and on non-paying-consumer engagement behaviors, by studying how engaged users help other customers through WOM, product feedback, recommendations and user-generated content.

3 Hypotheses development

3.1 Social presence

The perception of interaction with another human being in online environments has been called social presence, which is defined as the extent to which the feeling of human contact is perceived as similar to that in social relationships in offline environments [34]. Sociability and human contact are absent in e-commerce, which is why websites that increase perceived social presence might encourage positive attitudes towards Internet shopping [35]. This socialization or social presence can influence users' attitude towards the website through their involvement, committed behavior, co-presence and affective or cognitive social presence [36]. According to Kumar and Benbasat [37], recommendations and reviews that can be found on s-commerce websites have both a transactional function—encouraging the individual to make a purchase and, thus, stimulating the utilitarian aspects of the process—and a relational function, through which social presence is increased. Smith and Gallicano [15] consider sense of presence as a variable of online engagement, and define engagement as a state of mind characterized by passion, dedication and emotional attachment, where interactivity per se is necessary but not sufficient to engage users. Thus, we consider social presence to be an antecedent of sPassion:

H1a Social presence has a positive effect on users' sPassion.

3.2 Interactivity

The concept of interactivity has been characterized as communication with a simultaneous and bidirectional flow of information, where the parties exercise active control over the navigation [38–41]. Individuals' socialization may lead to higher levels of involvement [42], and interactivity can influence user engagement [43]. Interactivity has been used in the study of customer engagement [44] and, through interactivity on websites, users can evolve from being passive to active and interactive consumers [45]. Moreover, interactivity has been used as an antecedent associated with different sensations; for example, Novak et al. [46] and Huang [47], among others, show how interactivity helps users to reach the state of flow. Flow and engagement are closely related because they are characterized by users' absorption, enjoyment and positive attitude, and users experience passion for what they are doing. According to Mollen and Wilson [48], the cognitive stage consists of perceived interactivity because, building on this interaction, in the case of online interactivity users begin to create their cognitive experience on a website. In an investigation into entrepreneurial passion, Cardon et al. [49] consider interaction necessary for experiencing passion. Thus, we hypothesize that interactivity acts as an antecedent of sPassion; that is, of the passion that the user experiences in s-commerce contexts:

H1b Perceived interactivity has a positive effect on users' sPassion.

3.3 Enjoyment

The affective stage focuses on the emotions that arise from interactions and socialization on the Web. Enjoyment is one of the feelings that must be experienced in the engagement-generation process because it is necessary in order to experience a positive feeling that engages users [13]. Vivek et al. [4], in their research about online engagement, consider entertainment and passion within the affective stage, and Cardon and Kirk [50] enjoyment is a key dimension of passion. An experiential consumption that implies fun, excitement and pleasure directly affects brand passion [21]. In the case of students' engagement, Case [51] considers that in order to become passionate about an activity, individuals first need to experience enjoyment, which is what generates engagement. Passion and enjoyment could be linked; however, we consider that when an activity ends, enjoyment also finishes, while passion remains (although how long it persists may vary). Based on the above discussion, we hypothesize that enjoyment is an affective antecedent of sPassion.

H2 Enjoyment has a positive effect on users' sPassion.

3.4 The spread of positive sWOM

Several authors define s-commerce as a combination of e-commerce, social media and Web 2.0, where users can participate and interact with the virtual community by spreading WOM [52]. In fact, WOM is so important in s-commerce that the term describing it has evolved from eWOM to sWOM [33]. The difference between eWOM and sWOM lies in the fact that eWOM refers only to the WOM carried out on the Internet through e-mails or private messages while sWOM includes not only private communication tools, but also users' active and public participation on s-commerce platforms. For instance, sWOM can refer to public peer recommendations or posts on a discussion board. In our study, we take into account the sWOM generated on s-commerce websites—that is, websites that sell products online and contain s-commerce features such as recommendation systems, referrals, ratings, discussion forums, etc. Examples of sWOM can be seen on s-commerce websites such as Amazon, Booking and Aliexpress.

Theory states that WOM is a source of information to help other consumers [53], while sWOM refers to the online exchange of information or experiences to help other users [54]. sWOM can be classified as either active or passive. When users provide their experiences and suggestions, rate products or make recommendations, they are spreading active sWOM. On the other hand, drawing on observational learning theory [55–57], passive sWOM, refers to the tendency to observe and learn through the sWOM shared by other users [58]. According to an international report by Total Retail published in February 2016 [59], 45% of consumers were influenced by reading reviews, comments and feedback and 22% by writing reviews, comments and feedback.

Nonetheless, it seems that there are reasons why users spread WOM, whether in e-commerce or s-commerce. There are both positive and negative reasons for sharing opinions; thus, it follows that WOM can be positive or negative [60, 61]. Moreover, several factors can motivate an individual to spread WOM. For instance, depending on

the users' emotional state before sharing their opinions and on the tools available on the s-commerce website that allow socialization and interaction, the WOM (eWOM or sWOM) may be positive or negative. The previous stages of the engagement-generation process have a great deal of importance for the outcome thereof.

In offline environments, the affective response has a positive effect on WOM [12], whereas in online environments engaged users may increase the spread of positive WOM [4]. The behavioral stage of the engagement process has been directly related to collaborative behaviors such as WOM, recommendations and user-generated content [10]. Smith and Gallicano [15] affirm that "*becoming engaged involves making assessments about personal relativity of content for the purpose of consuming, linking and sharing the content*". Consistent with the idea that engagement increases participation, passion has been considered the most important dimension of *brand love*, affecting loyalty, WOM and resistance to negative information [1]. Recent studies show that positive WOM and brand evangelism are outcomes of brand passion [20, 21, 24, 25, 29]. Therefore, we expect that, in s-commerce, sPassion will positively affect users' participation in the form of spreading positive sWOM:

H3 User perception of sPassion has a positive effect on positive sWOM.

The model proposes that sPassion is the cornerstone of the engagement-generation process, where social presence and perceived interactivity are cognitive antecedents, enjoyment is an affective antecedent and sWOM is the outcome (Fig. 1).

4 Methodology

4.1 Data collection

The data used for the analysis were collected in Spain during February 2015 through an online survey administered by a market research agency. The sample consists of

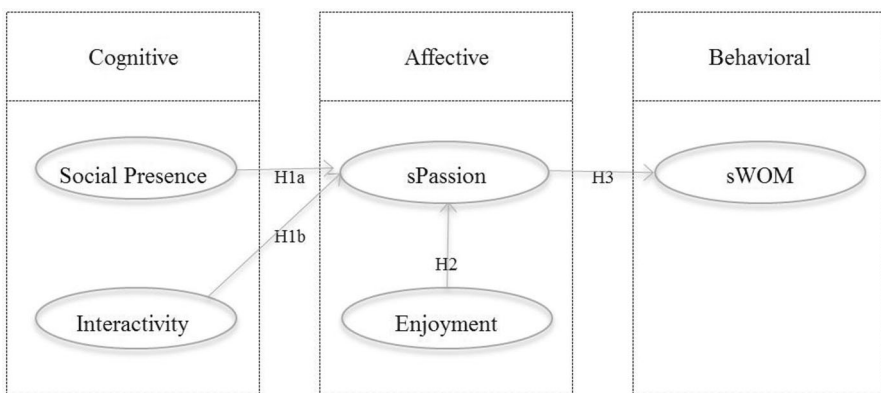


Fig. 1 Research model: engagement generation process

473 users of social commerce websites, of which 59% are male and 41% female, with ages ranging from 16 to 80, similar to the Spanish users' profile according to the annual report of the Telecommunications and Information Society Spanish Watch (ONTSI) [62] (see Table 1, the first column refers to the distribution of online consumers according to the Telecommunications and Information Society Spanish Watch; while the second column shows the distribution of our sample). The respondents were all experienced online consumers.

At the beginning of the questionnaire, after being given an explanation of the concept of social commerce, participants were asked whether they had recently purchased using a website with the characteristics of a social commerce platform. If they answered yes, they carried on answering the survey and were asked to name the social commerce website from which they had purchased. Among their answers were Amazon, Aliexpress and Booking. Throughout the questionnaire, the respondents were continuously asked to recall their experience on the website they had chosen.

In order to ensure content validity, we thoroughly reviewed the literature with respect to the variables included in our model, adapting them to the s-commerce context. The survey was checked by several experts. The cognitive stage was measured through two factors: social presence and interactivity. Social presence was adapted from the scales of Gefen and Straub [63], Shen [64] and Hassanein and Head [35], and comprises three items. Interactivity was adapted from the scales of Song and Zinnkhan [65], McMillan and Hwang [66] and Liu [40], and is composed of three items. The affective stage consists of enjoyment, using the scales of Koufaris [32] and Kim and Han [67], with three items, and the concept of sPassion, which was created from the scale of Baldus et al. [68], consists of six items. The latter paper developed a scale to measure *online brand community engagement*; however, instead of using all of its factors, we only took those related to sPassion (*brand passion and helping*). Finally, the behavioral stage consists of the factor sWOM, created from the scale proposed by Liang et al. [52] with four items (see Appendix Table 4). All of the survey variables were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, with the lowest score being 1, *strongly disagree*, and the highest 7, *strongly agree*.

Table 1 Data representation

Online consumer age percentage according to ONTSI	Data collected (%)
15–24: 15%	15
25–34: 27%	32
35–49: 36%	33
50–64: 17%	18
>65: 5%	3
Total	100
Online consumer gender percentage according to ONTSI	
Women: 45%	41
Men: 55%	59

4.2 Measurement model validation

To ensure the dimensionality, reliability and validity of the scales, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis and a confirmatory factor analysis using the statistical software SPSS version 22 and EQS 6. As shown in Table 2, the Cronbach's alpha was higher than the recommended value of 0.70 [69], and the item-total correlation was at least 0.30 [70].

The next step was to conduct an exploratory factor analysis to assess the degree of unidimensionality of the proposed scales using the Principal Axis Factoring method and varimax rotation as developed by Kaiser [71–73], where the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin values were all greater than the threshold of 0.70 and Bartlett's sphericity tests were significant. The data also showed that the factor loadings were greater than the required minimum of 0.50 [71] and the explained variances for each of the constructs were at least 70%.

We tested the normality of the variables through the skewness and kurtosis values, which were greater than 2.52 and 1.96 [74], the K^2 test (combining the skewness and kurtosis tests), and the significance of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov–Lilliefors and Shapiro–Wilk statistics, so the distribution of our data did not fulfill the hypothesis of normality. Because of this, we used the robust maximum-likelihood estimation method [75].

Finally, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis following the robust method. The results showed that the model fitted the data well and that all estimated coefficients were significant, so we did not have to remove any items. The factor loadings were greater than the accepted value of 0.50 and the recommended value of 0.70. We also calculated the composite reliability index [76], which was greater than 0.70, and the extracted variance or average variance extracted (AVE), which showed consistency with values higher than 0.50 [77]. We can conclude that the scales met the requirements of reliability. The results of these analyses are shown in Table 2.

Scale validity was confirmed through the analysis of convergent validity and discriminant validity. Convergent validity was tested by checking the significance [78] and the value of each item (which had to exceed 0.5 points to confirm validity). Discriminant validity guarantees that the scales represent substantially different concepts. In our analysis, we used the AVE to compare, in a symmetrical matrix, whether the AVE on the diagonal was larger than its corresponding squared correlation coefficients in its rows and columns, which would show discriminant validity [71, 77] (see Table 3).

5 Results

5.1 Structural model examination

After carrying out the exploratory and confirmatory analyses, the structural model was examined to test the hypotheses. The model fit indexes show acceptable values (Satorra-Bentler scaled Chi square = 691.390, 148 d.f. $p < 0.01$; Bentler–Bonett

Table 2 Measurement model results

Item	Cronbach's α	CR (composite reliability)	AVE	% explained variance	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin	t-value*	R ²	λ (factor loadings)
Social presence								
SP1	0.925	0.924	0.803	86.89	0.764	22.584*	0.774	0.880
SP2						24.952*	0.810	0.900
SP3						25.938*	0.824	0.908
Interactivity								
INT1	0.829	0.831	0.621	74.53	0.713	15.319*	0.584	0.764
INT2						16.790*	0.681	0.825
INT3						14.991*	0.599	0.774
Enjoyment								
ENJ1	0.877	0.882	0.715	80.36	0.717	14.007*	0.582	0.763
ENJ2						20.457*	0.743	0.862
ENJ3						19.186*	0.819	0.905
sPassion								
sPASS1	0.924	0.924	0.671	72.50	0.874	22.108*	0.679	0.824
sPASS2						18.470*	0.588	0.767
sPASS3						24.166*	0.707	0.841
sPASS4						24.055*	0.694	0.833
sPASS5						21.761*	0.663	0.814
sPASS6						21.938*	0.692	0.832
Social WOM								
sWOM1	0.858	0.860	0.606	70.36	0.751	21.885*	0.686	0.828
sWOM2						18.310*	0.632	0.795
sWOM3						16.561*	0.581	0.762
sWOM4						16.438*	0.524	0.724

Satorra-Bentler Scaled Chi-Sq = 457.408, 142 d.f., p value = 0.001; Bentler-Bonett normed fit index (NFI) = 0.90; Bentler-Bonett nonnormed fit index (NNFI) = 0.92; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.93; Bollen (IFI) fit index = 0.93; root mean-sq. error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.06; Chi-Sq(d.f. = 3.22

* Significant coefficients at 0.01 level

Table 3 Discriminant validity

	SP	INT	ENJ	sPASS	sWOM
SP	0.803				
INT	0.462	0.621			
ENJ	0.213	0.242	0.715		
sPASS	0.356	0.299	0.387	0.671	
sWOM	0.201	0.229	0.310	0.448	0.606

normed fit index (NFI) = 0.85; Bentler–Bonett non-normed fit index (NNFI) = 0.86; comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.88; Bollen fit index (IFI) = 0.88; root mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.088; Chi square/d.f. = 4.67). However, it should be noted that the normed Chi square (Chi square/d.f.) is above the recommended cut-off of 3 [79] because of the large size of the sample and not because of internal consistency problems, since all factor loadings are statistically significant and above 0.50 [71] and the goodness-of-fit indexes are acceptable. None of the hypotheses had to be rejected.

The findings show that, firstly, social presence ($\beta = 0.39$, $t = 7.775$, $p < 0.01$) and perceived interactivity ($\beta = 0.19$, $t = 3.404$, $p < 0.01$) on s-commerce websites positively influence sPassion. Therefore, we can confirm that the cognitive stage consists of the knowledge acquired from the experience when perceiving social presence and interactivity on s-commerce websites, thereby validating that the cognitive-stage components are antecedents of the affective stage. Secondly, we found support for the idea that enjoyment ($\beta = 0.48$, $t = 9.347$, $p < 0.01$) acts as an antecedent of sPassion in the affective stage, since enjoyment and sPassion are both positive emotional states and the user needs to enjoy to be able to feel passion in s-commerce. Thirdly, the first two stages of the process have a positive effect on user behavior, so sPassion has a positive effect on sWOM ($\beta = 0.64$, $t = 10.705$, $p < 0.01$). In other words, if users are passionate, they are more likely to spread sWOM. The analysis allows us to explain 41.1% of the sWOM variance.

The aim of this study was to conceptualize passion in s-commerce contexts, referred to here as sPassion. On the basis of the literature review and the empirical results, we define the concept of sPassion as the extent to which s-commerce users experience a positive affective feeling as a result of enjoying navigation, and interacting and socializing with users and with the company. As all the model paths were confirmed, our empirical results suggest that, as Brodie et al. [8] proposed, the engagement-generation process has three stages. Firstly, in the cognitive stage, social presence and perceived interactivity generate a higher level of sPassion, which leads users to participate in the virtual community. The findings show that interactivity has a positive effect on user engagement, which supports Cardon et al. [49], and that socialization entails higher levels of involvement [42]. Secondly, the affective stage, besides being influenced by the cognitive stage, depends on the positive influence of enjoyment on sPassion. Finally, the cognitive and affective stages lead us to the behavioral stage. This last stage completes the engagement-generation process and, as a result, user behavior in s-commerce is positively affected by the earlier stages of the process. That is, the cognitive experience and

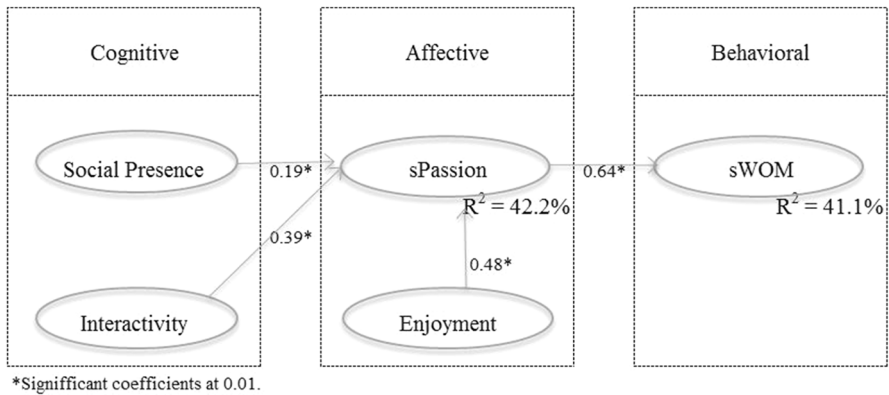


Fig. 2 Structural equation model: engagement generation process

emotional feelings derived from the process stimulate users' sWOM. Consistent with previous studies [1, 15, 24, 25], the results indicate that sPassion positively affects users' participation in the form of spreading sWOM. Therefore, sPassion can be considered a cornerstone of generating engagement in s-commerce (Fig. 2).

6 Conclusions, implications, limitations and future lines of research

6.1 Conclusions and discussion

The objective of this study was to analyze the concept of sPassion within the engagement-generation process so as to study its role as a booster of user participation in s-commerce contexts, leading users to be engaged. Based on the proposal of Brodie et al. [8], the originality of our research is that we propose sPassion as the cornerstone of the engagement-generation process, considering it as the positive affective feeling that individuals experience while using s-commerce websites. As a result of interacting and socializing with other users and with the company, they become emotionally and commercially engaged with the s-commerce website. The empirical findings allow us to conclude that in order to experience the feeling of engagement, the user must first gain experience and knowledge from interaction and socialization on s-commerce websites and enjoy the experience, thus experiencing the affective component alongside a sense of passion. As a result of this, consumers' behavior leads to an increase in their spread of sWOM.

The results of our study allow us to draw the following conclusions. Firstly, we have shown that a cognitive experience on s-commerce websites positively influences users' emotional experience. The significance of s-commerce websites, where one can give an opinion, advise others, ask questions on a forum and share experiences, is subject to the tools available for enhancing interactivity and socialization on the website. That is, the users' perception of interactivity depends

heavily on interactions, but also on the communication options available on the website. The chance to interact on a website is not, in itself, what drives the formulation of sPassion; the user must also perceive interactivity and socialization, as well as experiencing enjoyment. The human contact experienced on a website when social presence is perceived has positive effects on users. If users imagine themselves surrounded by people instead of computers, they feel closer to an offline experience and, therefore, show affections similar to those they feel in real life. We have also shown that enjoyment in s-commerce contexts boosts users' sPassion. Although some research refers to these feelings with respect to online contexts, passion has not been studied quantitatively to date as a variable in s-commerce environments.

When users experience sPassion, their behavior is positively affected, supporting the idea put forth by Brodie et al. [8] that it is in the last stage of the engagement-generation process that user behavior is modified. Once users have acquired knowledge from their experience on s-commerce websites and feel emotionally connected to it, they will transform their behavior in accordance with the feelings they have experienced. They will therefore be more willing to spread sWOM because they want to share their excitement and tell others their personal opinions. Because sPassion is defined as a positive affective feeling, users who experience this sense of passion will report a positive experience. Thus, companies that are concerned about the valence of the WOM on their s-commerce websites—that is, those whose marketing efforts are focused on fostering positive comments, generating high ratings, etc.—can find, in sPassion, an efficient way of affecting users so that they share their positive experiences and opinions.

Finally, consistent with the idea that passion can be contagious [26], the engagement-generation process seems to be a living one because the model involves continuous feedback. Specifically, the behavior of users who have been through the whole process will help others through comments, and improve others' perceptions of each step by increasing the engagement with the company. In other words, through positive WOM, users may spread their passion and influence other users' behavior.

6.2 Implications for business and academia

This study opens new horizons for both marketers and researchers. It has implications for business because knowing how sPassion is formed and what factors are key to its creation will enable companies to understand the necessary steps to enhance users' participation in s-commerce contexts. Once users are engaged they act autonomously as brand promoters, commenting on and sharing their purchase experience with the virtual community. In addition, given that sPassion and enjoyment are related to positive feelings, it is to be expected that these comments will have positive connotations. In this way, companies can make the most of the information and experiences shared by users because it is well known that other users consider this information as more trustworthy compared to that issued by the company.

s-commerce cues are very important for generating engagement. The relationships that are established on these websites have an affective component that makes them optimal platforms on which to engage users. Therefore, s-commerce websites should be designed to encourage interaction between users, to share information and to boost participation since, in this type of online commerce, it is users who form the virtual community. The sense of human contact and interactivity facilitate the integration of users into the website, and as a consequence the possibility of feeling passion increases. However, in addition to the tools that facilitate interpersonal relationships on the Web, companies should encourage enjoyment.

In order to create engagement on s-commerce websites, companies' actions should be twofold. Firstly, they should create an interactive atmosphere in which users are seen as humans, not as machines, thereby promoting enjoyment and passion. Secondly, although the term *passion* has been used as a dimension of *brand love* [1], in the *brand passion dualistic approach* [2], and to describe the concept of *engagement* [3, 4, 15], the introduction of the concept of sPassion may have theoretical implications, thereby opening a new line of research on passion in marketing. Our study can help companies to create an affective feeling that has positive effects on users' participation. Furthermore, in addition to helping to develop the engagement concept, we hope that this study will contribute to the research on WOM valence, since sPassion is directly associated with positive sWOM.

6.3 Limitations and future lines of research

This study is not without limitations. Firstly, the sample of the study was drawn from a single country, so future research should collect data from other countries in order to carry out comparative analyses, considering ethnicity as a moderator. The Internet has no borders, and users of a website may come from different countries, with different languages, different cultures and different perceptions of the same s-commerce website. Thus, as, to a greater or lesser extent, all websites work in the international market and are visible globally, it would be interesting to conduct a cross-cultural study to examine whether there are differences in passion and in the way users become engaged. Secondly, we did not test which factors may influence enjoyment. Therefore, as a future line of research, we propose widening the model in order to analyze which components related to s-commerce website design create or positively affect user enjoyment. It would also be interesting to study how the components of s-commerce [80] (recommendations and referrals, forums and communities, and ratings and reviews) influence the spread of sWOM, the perception of interactivity and social presence, and how website components or tools can contribute to generating a living process in which newcomers create their cognitive experience as a result of sWOM. Moreover, it would be interesting for future research to discriminate between willingness to spread and receive sWOM, considering the active or passive role of users when interacting with online content.

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Appendix

See Table 4.

Table 4 Scale

Scales	
Social presence	Adapted from Gefen and Straub [63]; Shen [64]; Hassanein and Head [35] SP1 There is a sense of human contact on this social commerce website SP2 There is a sense of sociability on this social commerce website SP3 There is a sense of human warmth on this social commerce website
Interactivity	Adapted from Song and Zinnkhan [65], McMillan and Hwang [66], Liu [40] INT1 This social commerce website makes me feel it wants to listen to its users INT2 Getting information from this social commerce website is very fast INT3 When I clicked on the links, I felt I was getting instantaneous information
Enjoyment	Adapted from Koufaris [32], Kim and Han [67] ENJ1 I found my visit interesting ENJ2 I found my visit enjoyable ENJ3 I found my visit fun
sPassion	Developed from Baldus et al. [68] sPASS1 I am motivated to participate on this social commerce website because I am passionate about it sPASS2 I participate on this social commerce website because I care about it sPASS3 My passion for this social commerce website’s products makes me want to participate in its community sPASS4 I like participating on this social commerce website because I can use my experience to help other people sPASS5 I really like helping other users with their questions sPASS6 I feel good when I can help answer other users’ questions
sWOM	Adapted from Liang et al. [52] sWOM1 I have provided my experiences and suggestions when other users need advice on buying something sWOM2 I have recommended a product that is worth buying sWOM3 I have read other users’ recommendations to see their suggestions before I go shopping sWOM4 I have bought the products recommended by others

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