

Tesis Doctoral

The Influence of Entrepreneurial Talent in Website Design, eWOM and Business Performance. An Application in Rural Tourism.

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Dra. Rosa M. Hernández Maestro y Dr. Pablo A. Muñoz Gallego, como Directores de la Tesis Doctoral “The Influence of Entrepreneurial Talent in Website Design, eWOM and Business Performance. An Application in Rural Tourism”, realizada por Dña. Jannine Waleska Nieto Arias en el Departamento de Administración y Economía de la Empresa de la Universidad de Salamanca, autorizan su presentación a trámite dado que reúne las condiciones necesarias para su defensa.

Y para que conste a los efectos oportunos, se firma la presente en Salamanca, a 22 de Noviembre de 2013.

Fdo. Rosa M. Hernández Maestro

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Contenido

Agradecimientos	7
1. Introducción	11
1.1 Contexto de la Investigación	11
1.2 Objetivos de la Investigación	13
1.3 Estructura de la Tesis	15
2. Modelo Teórico	19
2.1 Talento del Empresario	20
2.2 eWOM	21
2.3 Puntuaciones de los Clientes	21
2.4 Uso de Infomediarios	22
3. Influencia del Talento del Empresario y Tipo de Página Web en los Resultados Empresariales para los Alojamientos de Turismo Rural en España.....	25
3.1 Revisión de la Literatura.....	25
3.2 Metodología	30
3.3 Análisis de Datos y Resultados.....	32
3.4 Discusión y Conclusiones	39
4. Decisiones del Empresario y eWOM en el Turismo Rural.....	45
4.1 Revisión de la Literatura.....	45
4.2 Metodología	49
4.3 Resultados	53
4.4 Discusión y Conclusiones	56
5. eWOM en los Resultados Empresariales, un Análisis Cualitativo de Datos.....	61
5.1 Revisión de la Literatura.....	61
5.2 Metodología	64
5.3 Análisis de Datos y Resultados.....	66
5.4 Discusión y Conclusiones	77
6. Resultados Generales de la Investigación.....	83
6.1 Contribución Académica	83
6.2 Implicaciones para las Empresas.....	83
6.3 Referencias.....	87
Apéndice	100

Tables Index

Tabla 1. Alojamientos Rurales por Comunidad Autónoma. Comparativa entre el total de alojamientos y la muestra utilizada	32
Tabla 2. Análisis Factorial Exploratorio	33
Tabla 3. Regresiones	35
Tabla 4. Ajuste del Modelo	36
Tabla 5. Moderación de la Experiencia	37
Tabla 6. Definición de Variables.....	51
Tabla 7. Análisis Factorial Exploratorio: Resultados Empresariales.....	52
Tabla 8. Efectos del eWOM en los Resultados Empresariales	54
Tabla 9. Efectos de las Decisiones de Marketing en eWOM.....	54
Tabla 10. Efecto Mediador del eWOM	55
Tabla 11. Valor promedio de las variables para cada nivel de inversión publicitaria.....	55
Tabla 12. Efecto Moredador de la Experiencia del Empresario.....	56
Tabla 13. Definición de Variables.....	66
Tabla 14. Categorías.....	68
Tabla 15. Muestra categorizada según el modelo SERVQUAL.....	69
Tabla 16. Análisis Factorial Exploratorio: Resultados Empresariales.....	70
Tabla 17. Regresiones. Categoría por Categoría	72
Tabla 18. Resumen de Satisfactores y Disatisfactores Significativos.....	74
Tabla 19. Regresiones Factores Internos, Externos, Sensaciones Producidas.....	75
Tabla 20. Regresiones Percepción del Mercado-Satisfacción del Empresario y Rentabilidad ...	76
Tabla 21. Resumen de los Aspectos Significativos que Explican la Percepción del Mercado.....	77

Figures Index

Figura 1-Modelo General	14
Figura 2. Modelo General	34
Figura 3. Análisis Factorial Confirmatorio de Primer Orden	37
Figura 4. Modelo Causal.....	38
Figura 5. Modelo General	53
Figura 6. Modelo General	67
Figura 7. Dos niveles de influenciadores: 1)Internos, Externos; 2)Sensaciones Producidas	76

Thanks

The time of completion this first step and continue with others has come, honestly I never imagined how it would be like. So much to say that one page is not enough, I will try to summarize.

First, I want to thank God for life and because I know in every moment He has been with me.

To my mother, for instilling me the love of learning and to my father for teaching me the value of perseverance.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Context

Entrepreneurs provide the engine of development, especially in economically unstable times and Rural Tourism has reached a worldwide peak with regard to its revenue-generating abilities. Although investigations have focused on entrepreneurship, generally referred to as the creation of new businesses, for nearly a century, we still lack a consensus about its definition, which remains an obstacle to developing a conceptual framework of entrepreneurship (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). Various terms exist to refer to entrepreneurship, including entrepreneur, entrepreneurial function, and, more recently, entrepreneurial orientation and entrepreneurial talent. The latter refers specifically to a person's special ability for entrepreneurship. In times of economic crisis, these arguments become even more pertinent, because entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial talent can help countries deal with declining incomes and profits.

To attract tourists, owners of tourism accommodations must be entrepreneurs and their decisions, such as having usability website, room prices and promotional mixes, in turn influence tourists' destination choices (Anderson, 1996; Pathak et al., 2010).

Various kinds of advertising can promote this service sector, but the Internet is a remarkably valuable tool in this setting. In 2004, the Internet had 215 million users worldwide (Cyr and Trevor-Smith, 2004); as of 2009, there were more than 1,600 million Internet users (CIA, 2009). A study carried out in the context of rural tourism also has revealed that 47% of travelers learned about the establishment they visited through the Internet (Hernández-Maestro, 2005). Entrepreneurs of the sector recognize this importance, an Internet Week survey reported that approximately 60% of tourism companies (e.g., travel agencies, bars, hotels, motels) regard the Internet as a "substantial" tool for acquiring new customers (Baloglu and Pekcan, 2006; Mullen, 2000; Quelch and Klein, 1996). Yet some studies suggest e-commerce is not being adopted by SMEs as quickly as might be expected (Beveren and Thomson, 2002). In Spain, 86.5% of rural tourism establishments have a Web site, 81.6% advertise on the Internet, and most autonomous regions in Spain include on their sites an official page for searching for accommodations, though only 35.7% of accommodations can be contracted online (INE, 2006).

Tourists once relied on word of mouth (WOM) from their family, friends, and experts as suggestions to their choice; today they also turn to online or electronic word of mouth (eWOM). As statistics indicate, in some countries 70%-80% of consumers trust in internet

opinions and refer to the postings about products or customer reviews on the Internet when they need product information. For example, in hospitality sector, after reading other customers opinions 33% change hotel, 7% change the destination and 5% change the airline (Puromarketing.com, 2012; Sun-Jaen and Jang-Sun, 2009); it is because in this kind of services where it is not possible to know the quality of the product before consumption, the importance of customers' messages is higher, because the decision involves a high physiological cost – the long-awaited three-day vacation – and a high economic cost – the money saved to do this trip, it is important to know the content of previous customer messages to mitigate the risks to contract the service.

If WOM is defined as any communication about a service firm's offerings (Sandy et al., 2011), then eWOM can be defined as any communication about a service firm's offerings provided via the Internet. As a modern information and communication technology, eWOM has been the subject of various studies (e.g., Crofts et al., 2009; Gruen et al., 2006; Kozinets et al., 2010; Trusov et al., 2009), focus on products (Buda and Zhang, 2000; Lee et al., 2009; Lee and Youn, 2009; Liu, 2006) and services (Wirtz and Chung Lee, 2003). However, research on eWOM in rural tourism is still scarce despite of the potential that the knowledge of the interpersonal influence phenomenon has for the firms in this sector. This study attempts to address this gap by investigating eWOM for service firms; including not only the quantity of messages or its valence (positive or negative) but the content of the message too and its influence on business performance.

Normally, to evaluate the opinions of customers, researchers consider consumers' responses to structured questionnaires according to SERVPERF or SERVQUAL models (Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Parasuraman et al., 1988). In the same way, owners of tourism establishments define a priori the categories to be evaluated, the quality of food, the cleanliness, etc. This type of measurement is not entirely accurate, because measures only the categories that have been defined by the owner, the ones he think are the most important, but maybe those categories are not the most important for a specific customer.

In our research we provide a theoretical modeling contribution, a different approach to explain the implication of customer opinions on business results in two steps: (1) The customers are the ones who spontaneously decide the categories to consider in assessing quality and (2) We associate the categories separately for positive and negative evaluations, what let us to distinguish the different effects on business performance that a category has as satisfier (S) and as dissatisfier (D).

Finally, we have chosen Rural Tourism as our sector of study because this industry is at its worldwide peak with regard to its revenue-generating abilities, which has significant benefits for underdeveloped areas and national economies (UNWTO, 2011). Thus many studies note the implications and concerns related to rural tourism, and institutions such as the World Tourism Organization organize special conferences and other events to address its current situation and future prospects (Nieto, Hernández-Maestro and Muñoz-Gallego, 2011). Rural tourism, or tourism that takes place in rural areas, generally reflects tourists' desire to understand a different way of life and come into closer contact with nature than they would in their regular lives (Hernández-Maestro et al., 2007). Rural tourism is an alternative to mass tourism, favors the establishment of population and income growth and has the ability to contribute to the preservation of historical, cultural and environmental heritage (cultural tourism, ecotourism, gastronomy), because 68% of Cultural assets are located in rural areas. In recent years, it has been portrayed as part of the portfolio of leisure and recreation activities available in virtually every region (Barke, 2004).

Spain ranks among the top three countries in tourism, generating turnover of 66.4 million euros in 2004 and experiencing continued strong growth. For example, compared with 2001, the number of rural tourism establishments in Spain increased from 5,497 to 13,887 in 2009 (National Institute of Statistics [INE], 2010), and they offered a total of 126,234 beds. In terms of the number of tourists, 2,708,000 travelers used rural tourism accommodations in Spain in 2009, 90% of whom reside within the same country and 10% from abroad, producing a total of 7,902,000 overnight stays, with an average stay of 2.9 days each (Nieto et al., 2011b) representing in 2010 the 23.4% of workers in the country. During the first nine months of 2013, the overnight stays in rural tourism increased by 0.4% over the same period last year (INE.es). Rural tourism provides an ideal focus for research into entrepreneurial talent and eWOM, because of its growth, the large amount of governmental support it receives through subsidies, and the changes the rural population has undergone in the switch from agriculture to rural tourism.

1.2 Research Objectives

Taking the context we have shown before, combining the entrepreneurial talent and Entrepreneurs' decisions, eWOM and business performance in Rural Tourism sector, the objectives of this research are:

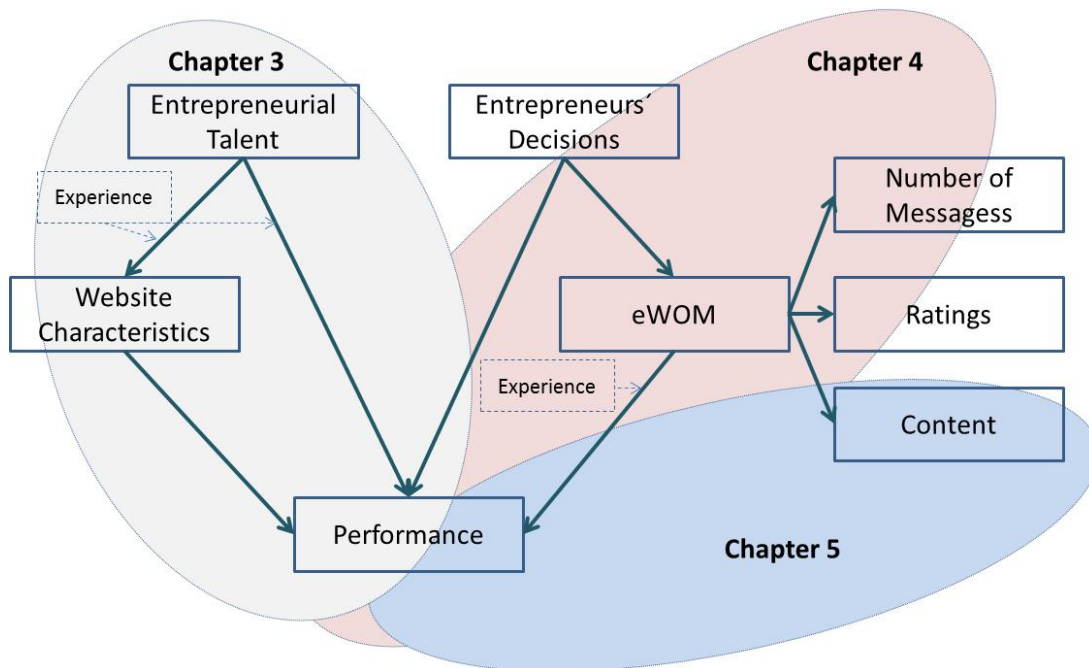
1. Analyze the importance of entrepreneurial talent with regard to the introduction of new technologies, and specifically a Web site on the Internet.

2. Examine the impact of entrepreneurial talent, his experience and the introduction of new technologies on business performance.
3. Determine the effect of entrepreneurs' decisions, as price and advertising on customer eWOM messages.
4. Examine the influence of eWOM on business performance in a dual perspective, namely, the point of view of the customer, as manifested in eWOM messages, and the point of view of the owners of establishments (i.e., entrepreneurs), as evident in their decisions and ultimately their business performance.
5. Try to help fill the research gap associated with the methodology to do content analysis on eWOM.
6. Give a light of how the content of eWOM customer messages from satisfied and dissatisfied customers affects business performance.

The objectives 1 and 2 are covered in chapter 3, the objectives 3 and 4 are seeing on chapter 4, finally the objectives 5 and 6 are studied in chapter 5.

Figure 1 shows the general model of this doctoral thesis:

Figure 1-General Model



1.3 Structure of the Thesis

This doctoral thesis is structured as follows: First, it is established a theoretical framework to understand why it is important for scholars and for rural tourism entrepreneurs analyze eWOM customer messages to improve performance and how new technologies help to achieve this performance, through the information offered in their website and through the content of eWOM, understanding the role of the entrepreneurial talent in this equation.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 deepen on the objectives and themes presented in this research. In each chapter, we first present a literature review and the hypotheses derived from it. In describing the methodology, we specify our database and measures then outline the results. Finally, we present our conclusions, limitations and future research lines of the study.

Focused on the objectives 1, 2 and 3, Chapter 3 **“The Influence of Entrepreneurial Talent and Web Site Type on Business Performance by Rural Tourism Establishments in Spain”**, analyze (1) the importance of entrepreneurial talent to implement a Web site; (2) the relations among entrepreneurial talent, Web site characteristics, and business performance; and (3) the moderating effect of entrepreneurial experience. Using a sample of 150 rural tourism establishments in Spain, this study reveals how Web site content affects performance, how experience moderates the relationships between entrepreneurial talent and performance and between entrepreneurial talent and Web site design.

The objectives 4, 5, 6 and 7 are discussed in chapter 4, **“Entrepreneurs’ Decisions and eWOM In Rural Tourism”**, this study considers both the effects of entrepreneurs’ marketing decisions on eWOM and the effects of eWOM on business performance. Using a sample of 202 rural tourism establishments in Spain, obtained from a leading tourism promoter website, this study reveals that price and advertising expenditures affect eWOM; in turn, eWOM affects business performance. Moreover, the experience of the entrepreneur with infomediaries slightly moderates the link between eWOM and performance.

The objectives 8 and 9 are covered in chapter 5, **“eWOM on Business Performance, a Qualitative Data Analysis”**, this chapter examines how the opinions of previous customers are a valuable information source for marketers, how qualitative data analysis software (QDA) can be an important method to evaluate this information, and propose a new methodology to analyze customers’ opinions, satisfiers and dissatisfiers, based on the content of their messages. This study considers the effects of the content of eWOM on business performance. Using a sample of 118 rural tourism establishments in Spain, obtained from a leading tourism

promoter website, this study reveals how satisfiers and dissatisfiers affect business performance, specifically the related with market perception.

Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes the results of the three studies, presenting the main conclusions and contributions in academia and business. It also exposes the limitations of the study and suggests future lines of research.

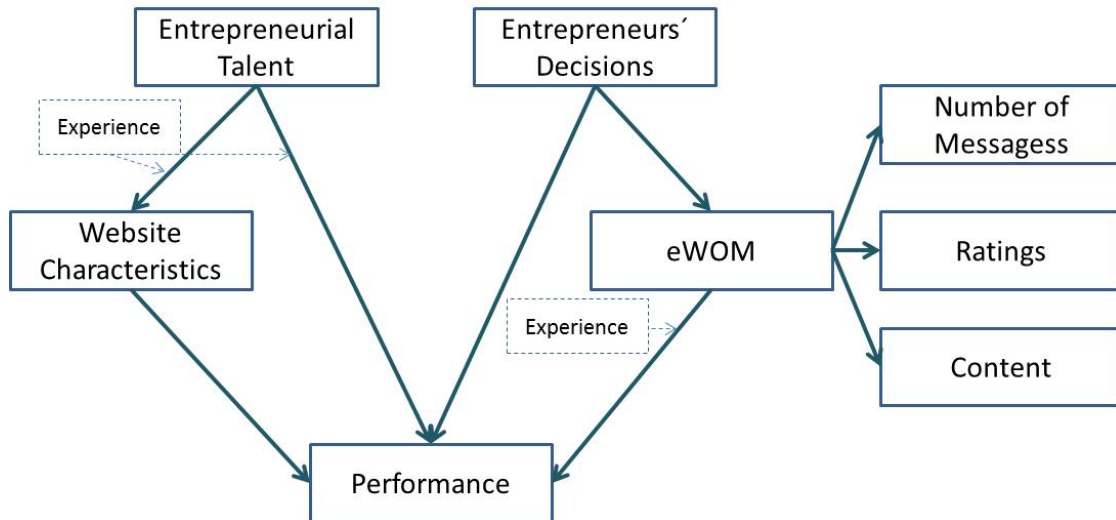
Chapter 2

THEORETICAL MODEL

2. Theoretical Model

In this chapter, we will define the different factors included in the model and the relations between them, those are: Entrepreneurial talent, Entrepreneur’s Decisions, Website characteristics, eWOM and Business performance in Rural Tourism sector.

The relation between them is shown next:



Entrepreneurial Talent: We will study the talent of entrepreneurs in rural tourism Sector. We found little research regarding the relationship between entrepreneurial characteristics and the characteristics of the company Web site. According to the Washington Economic Development Commission (WEDA), talent and entrepreneurship are two key drivers of an innovation economy and the website is a key driver of sales in tourism sector. To study the relation between entrepreneurial talent, website characteristics and business performance can positively influence the benefits for the company in particular and rural tourism sector in general.

eWOM: Word of mouth remains one of the most influential sources of marketplace information, because consumers generally trust their peers more than they trust advertisers or marketers (Lee and Youn, 2009). Thus WOM is the primary influence on 20–50 percent of all purchasing decisions (Bughin, Doogan and Vetvik, 2010). With the advent of new technologies, WOM is spreading, in the form of electronic WOM over the Internet, or eWOM. Product review websites, personal blogs, complaint websites, are all manifestations of eWOM. The ratings assigned by the customer to the service provider (from 1-bad to 5-excellent) as the number of messages, influence future customers in their purchase decision; however, relatively little research documents their effectiveness for increasing sales. Finally, the content of the message and its valence (positive-negative direction of the message) has been shown to make a different effect in customer’s response. In our research, we disaggregate the categories that group the key content of eWOM messages according to whether they express satisfaction or dissatisfaction; this allows us to verify the different effect that a category has on business performance.

Entrepreneur's Decisions: Marketing decisions by service providers—such as the price of the room or advertising levels—influence customer behaviors. Value for money has a significant impact on customer ratings (Narayan et al., 2008), so, for a particular quality, customer ratings should be lower if the price is higher. In the same way, higher visibility achieved by greater advertising expenditures, should encourage clients to pay more attention to the positive features of the establishment and increase customer ratings. The relation between entrepreneur's decisions and eWOM is then important to the final influence in business performance.

Web site Characteristics: If the website is a key driver of sales in tourism sector, to study the characteristics of the web site that can better impulse sales is crucial. Even after an exhaustive review, we found little research regarding the relationship between entrepreneurial characteristics and the characteristics of the company Web sites, despite the seemingly relationship between them. Even with simple Web sites, talented entrepreneurs should recognize the importance of their Web sites for increasing consumer awareness.

Business Performance: The ultimate goal of any business other than non-profit company, is making profits. In this way, all the factors mentioned before has an influence on business performance.

Next, the literature review of this research.

2.1 Entrepreneurial Talent

Although investigations have focused on entrepreneurship, generally referred to as the creation of new businesses, for nearly a century, we still lack a consensus about its definition, which remains an obstacle to developing a conceptual framework of entrepreneurship (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). Various terms exist to refer to entrepreneurship, including entrepreneur, entrepreneurial function, and, more recently, entrepreneurial orientation and entrepreneurial talent. The latter refers specifically to a person's special ability for entrepreneurship.

Further investigations of entrepreneurial talent are critical for several reasons. Entrepreneurs represent engines of sustainable development in an economy (Huiyuan and Hua, 2008). Entrepreneurship also enables society to convert technical information into products and services (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000). Furthermore, through this mechanism, societies can discover and address temporal and spatial inefficiencies in the economy (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000).

In times of economic crisis, these arguments become even more pertinent, because entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial talent can help countries deal with declining incomes and profits.

2.2 eWOM

Word of mouth remains one of the most influential sources of marketplace information, because consumers generally trust their peers more than they trust advertisers or marketers (Lee and Youn, 2009). Thus WOM is the primary influence on 20–50 percent of all purchasing decisions (Bughin, Doogan and Vetvik, 2010). In addition, WOM can attract new customers, which defines a firm's long-term economic success (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner and Gremler, 2002). With the advent of new technologies, WOM is spreading, in the form of electronic WOM over the Internet, or eWOM. Product review websites, personal blogs, complaint websites, message boards, social networking sites, and virtual communities are all manifestations of eWOM.

However, there is an important difference between WOM and eWOM. In traditional WOM, the communicator generally has strong ties or a prior relationship with the receiver (e.g., family, friends). In contrast, eWOM occurs between people who have little or no prior relationship and might even be anonymous. This anonymity allows consumers to share their opinions comfortably and freely with unknown others, as well as potentially create new social bonds. Thus, consumers seeking information have a greater likelihood of finding extensive product expertise, offered by other consumers, on eWOM platforms (Lee and Youn, 2009). Because it is easier for these consumers to find similar others, the credibility of and positive intentions toward using the website generally increase (Ayeh et al., 2013).

Regardless of whether they are online or in person though, WOM providers can offer both positive and negative opinions of market offerings. Product reviews may be posted online and opinions disseminated through social networks; some customers also create websites or blogs to praise or complain about specific brands (Bughin et al., 2010). When a customer posts an assessment of his or her experience with a product or service, the review can generate a sort of tailwind effect. Research also shows that the presence of a few negative messages can be beneficial for perceptions of the offering, in that they ensure the credibility of the review sites and eWOM messages (Sun-Jae and Jang-Sun, 2009). By assessing the impact and volume of eWOM about their offerings, companies can learn a lot about their customers and their needs (Bughin et al., 2010).

2.3 Customer Ratings

Perceived service quality refers to the cognitive process by which people evaluate a service, according to certain attributes and several standards (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Customer satisfaction pertains to the psychological state that results from a cognitive–affective process,

combining the person's perception of the degree of fulfillment of his or her standards with the emotion derived from that perception (Oliver, 1980; Wirtz and Chung Lee, 2003). Therefore, perceived service quality precedes customer satisfaction. Both factors then lead to positive behavioral and economic consequences (Anderson et al., 1994; Carlson and O'Cass, 2011; Hernández-Maestro et al., 2007; Parasuraman et al., 2005). However, the best measures for both concepts (perceived quality and satisfaction) continue to be a topic of debate (Chow and Zhang, 2008; Matzler and Sauerwein, 2002; Narayan, Rajendran and Prakash, 2008; Wirtz and Chung Lee, 2003). Different measures either survey customers immediately after they receive the service (Brunner-Sperdin and Peters, 2009) or ask consumers to remember their most recent experience with a specific service (Wirtz and Chung Lee, 2003).

Unlike regular surveys, online ratings from customers give a company access to immediate, freely granted assessments of their evaluations. Many websites that support eWOM communications suggest a means for customers to quantify their service quality perceptions or satisfaction (e.g., 1–5, letter grades, star ratings). Such product rankings offer strong predictors of travelers' adoption of information from online reviews of accommodations (Filiari and McLeay, 2013).

2.4 The use of Infomediaries

Various kinds of advertising can promote this service sector, but the Internet is a remarkably valuable tool in this setting. One important new model of online advertising uses infomediaries, which are web pages that collect large amounts of data, analyze and organize them in a relevant way, and offer a summary of reviews to users who request it. Usually infomediaries specialize in and offer information about a specific market sector, such as automobiles, tourism, or real estate (e.g., www.zorraquino.com 2011).

Infomediaries also offer various kinds of information to purchasers related to products, companies, and brands, which can assist buying decisions (Bayonet, 2007). Thus consumers can collect information more easily, though using this technology often demands significant time, patience, and the ability to search for deals on their own (Hagel and Rayport, 1997). Advertising on infomediaries offers an effective link between producers and consumers and may create a faster, more dynamic market for the offering by granting consumers information in the shortest possible time (Bayonet, 2007). For this research, we gather information from a leading infomediary in the European tourism sector, Toprural, member of Homeaway.

Chapter 3

THE INFLUENCE OF ENTREPRENEURIAL TALENT **AND WEB SITE TYPE ON BUSINESS** **PERFORMANCE BY RURAL TOURISM** **ESTABLISHMENTS IN SPAIN**

For information regarding chapter 3, please check: Nieto, J., Hernández-Maestro, R.M., Muñoz-Gallego, P.A. (2011): The influence of entrepreneurial talent and website type on business performance by rural tourism establishments in Spain, *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 13: 17-31.

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El contenido del capítulo 3 se encuentra disponible en: Nieto, J., Hernández-Maestro, R.M., Muñoz-Gallego, P.A. (2011): The influence of entrepreneurial talent and website type on business performance by rural tourism establishments in Spain, *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 13: 17-31.

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Chapter 4

ENTREPRENEURS' DECISIONS AND EWOM IN **RURAL TOURISM**

4. Entrepreneurs' Decisions and eWOM In Rural Tourism

4.1 Literature Review

4.1.1 Online Customer Ratings

Perceived service quality refers to the cognitive process by which people evaluate a service, according to certain attributes and several standards (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Customer satisfaction pertains to the psychological state that results from a cognitive–affective process, combining the person's perception of the degree of fulfillment of his or her standards with the emotion derived from that perception (Oliver, 1980; Wirtz and Chung Lee, 2003). Therefore, perceived service quality precedes customer satisfaction. Both factors then lead to positive behavioral and economic consequences (Anderson et al., 1994; Carlson and O' Cass, 2011; Hernández-Maestro et al., 2007; Parasuraman et al., 2005). However, the best measures for both concepts (perceived quality and satisfaction) continue to be a topic of debate (Chow and Zhang, 2008; Matzler and Sauerwein, 2002; Narayan, Rajendran, and Prakash, 2008; Wirtz and Chung Lee, 2003). Different measures either survey customers immediately after they receive the service (Brunner-Sperdin and Peters, 2009) or ask consumers to remember their most recent experience with a specific service (Wirtz and Chung Lee, 2003). Unlike regular surveys, online ratings from customers give a company access to immediate, freely granted assessments of their evaluations. Many websites that support eWOM communications suggest a means for customers to quantify their service quality perceptions or satisfaction (e.g., 1–5, letter grades, star ratings).

Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006), and Pathak et al. (2010) have found that the ratings received by books positively determine their sales. Chintagunta et al. (2010) found that ratings determine box office performance. A positive effect of online ratings on sales was also found for games apps by Zhu and Zhang (2010). And Barton (2006) presented case studies of three companies that observed measurable business impact launching customer ratings and reviews in their websites. Regarding the hospitality context, product ratings offer strong predictors of travelers' adoption of information from online feedback of accommodations (Filiari and McLeay, 2013). In the same line, Ye et al. (2011) found a positive relationship among the customer ratings of hotels and the number of bookings. The ratings have been found to determine sales especially for niche products without large-scale marketing campaigns. In this case, customers especially rely on the online ratings, particularly for experience products with

uncertain quality (Yang et al. 2012). Therefore, we hypothesize that e-ratings influence firm success:

H1: Customer ratings positively affect business performance.

4.1.2 Number of Online Messages

In contrast to customers' oral comments about product-related information, online comments are written and they are accessible not just for customers, but also for companies and researchers. One of the comments' facets that has been analyzed by researchers is the number of the reviews. On this regard, Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006), Pathak et al. (2010), for books, and Zhu and Zhang (2010), for games apps, have found that, together with the ratings, the number of online reviews positively determines their sales. Other works find that the volume of online reviews, not the ratings, has been found to be the key variable in positively influencing the box office ticket sales of movies, according to Duan et al. (2008a, b), and Liu (2006). In addition, Ye et al. (2011) found that there is a positive relationship among the number of reviews and the number of bookings for hotels. The variable in all the above examples is the number of reviews, not any measure of their positive or negative tone. The higher the number of reviews, the higher the awareness. If more reviews are posted for a product, it is easier that someone knows about it (e.g. on this regard, Toprural continuously updates a section on the main page containing the last reviews and photos posted by the travelers). Thus, it is considered that any publicity (positive and negative) may be good publicity (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Duan et al., 2008a, b; Liu, 2006; Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009). That is, we predict:

H2: The number of messages positively affects business performance.

4.1.3 Marketing Decisions

Marketing decisions by service providers—such as the price of the room or advertising levels— influence customer outcomes. Research has established a close relationship between price and customer ratings. The prices consumers are willing to pay reflect the value that they perceive in the offering (Kotler and Levi, 1969). In this case, value represents the ratio of perceived quality relative to price (Anderson et al., 1994), so value for money has a significant impact on customer ratings (Narayan et al., 2008). For a particular quality, customer ratings should be lower if the price is higher.

Prices also affect the quantity of eWOM messages that customers post. Price cues influence subsequent attitudes and customer behaviors (Mazumdar and Monroe, 1992). When people pay more for something, they are more highly involved in the decision, as well as accountable to others for that decision (Puccinelli et al., 2009). Along similar lines, customers who pay more demand more and are more willing to express their opinion by posting more messages (which we consider an indication of their involvement). Thus,

H3: Higher prices per night charged by a rural tourism establishment (a) decrease customer ratings and (b) increase the number of eWOM messages about that establishment.

Another marketing decision involves advertising investments. The Internet has changed business paradigms fundamentally, including increased integration of online tools into marketing functions (Prasad et al., 2001). Web-based information technologies also enable Internet retailers to facilitate online customer interactions and enhance shopping experiences (Pathak et al., 2010). Higher visibility or exhibition, achieved by greater advertising expenditures, should encourage clients to pay more attention to the positive features of the establishment and increase customer ratings. Moreover, greater and better visibility increases the chances of finding similar others, which can increase intentions to participate in and be involved with the website. Advertising investments should favor a greater number of eWOM messages from clients, and we propose:

H4: Greater advertising expenditures by a rural tourism establishment on an infomediary improve (a) customer ratings and (b) the number of eWOM messages.

4.1.4 Moderating Role of Entrepreneur's Experience

Experience in rural tourism should increase entrepreneurs' confidence and knowledge, according to research that indicates experience directly or indirectly enhances performance (Ferrante, 2005; Hernández-Maestro and González-Benito, 2011; Hmieleski and Baron, 2009; Roper, 1998). Some studies argue that the greater the experience of business professionals in a particular sector, the more income they generate, and the higher the growth rates in their firms' assets (Jo and Lee, 1996). An entrepreneur's relevant business experience (before starting the focal company) also should positively affect productivity (Harada, 2004). In terms of a potential moderating role, prior experience with creating ventures could mitigate the previously established negative relationship between entrepreneurial optimism and performance (Hmieleski and Baron, 2009). Prior research affirms that in rural lodging establishments, the entrepreneur's experience has a direct effect on performance, as well as moderating effects on the relationship between quality and performance (Hernández-Maestro and González-Benito, 2011).

Entrepreneurs with greater experience with the infomediary website should be especially conscious of the importance of customers' comments and know which elements tend to induce positive and negative comments, which in turn should affect their management of their rural lodging establishments. Moreover, entrepreneurs with more experience on the infomediary website know how to manage its tools. They feel more confident about resolving conflicts or providing feedback on the website to explain or address negative eWOM. In this case, potential customers are exposed to both customers' and entrepreneur's comments. Even if customers' eWOM is similar for two firms, their performance should vary, depending on their entrepreneurs' experience with the infomediary website. We anticipate a positive moderating effect.

H5: The entrepreneur's experience (length of time the entrepreneur works with the infomediary website) strengthens the influences of customer ratings and the number of eWOM messages on performance.

4.2 Methodology

4.2.1 Data Collection

For this research, we conducted in-depth interviews with experts in rural tourism, surveys of entrepreneurs, and analyses of data stored by the infomediary website. The in-depth interviews helped us better understand the sector, the role of the Internet in tourism advertising, and which research would be most useful for private enterprises.

The eWOM data came from Toprural, a major rural tourism promoter website in Europe (www.toprural.com). The infomediary site contains information about various establishments and messages posted by customers about their experiences with them. It lists 7,181 registered rural establishments in Spain; 72% of these establishments offer rentals of a house or entire building, and 28% offer rooms for rent. Between September 28, 2000, and June 29, 2010, customers posted 98,093 messages with ratings (from 1 = “very bad” to 5 = “excellent”) that summarized their perceptions. We cleaned the data by eliminating any establishments that lacked complete information (e.g., prices per night, number of rooms, length of time on the infomediary website, fees paid to the infomediary), duplicated messages, or blank messages. This process produced a final sample of 4,285 establishments (59.7%) and 29,507 messages (30.1%).

We then ordered all the messages posted by customers on Toprural according to the customer rating they provided (1–3 to indicate low service quality, 4–5 to indicate high service quality) and the price per night ($\geq 25\text{€}$ as expensive, $<25\text{€}$ as inexpensive). The ratio of high quality to low quality was 90% to 10%; that is, most messages indicated people’s satisfaction with the establishments. From among these results, to make the data collection manageable, we randomly sampled 912 establishments that varied in their prices and ratings.

Finally, we e-mailed the 912 establishments a password that enabled them to access a short questionnaire on the Toprural website. This questionnaire was intended to measure their business performance; it requested that the entrepreneurial owner of the establishment respond to the survey. During August and September 2010, we obtained responses from 202 rural tourism establishments and gathered their respective ratings and customer reviews from Toprural.

4.2.2 Measures

We measured the effects of eWOM and entrepreneurs' decisions on business performance using the variables that we summarize in Table 6. For eWOM, we employed two variables: customer ratings and number of messages on the infomediary website. In line with prior literature (Brunner-Sperding and Peters, 2009; Narayan, Rajendran, and Prakash, 2008; Poon and Low, 2005), we used the score assigned by customers to value the establishment, from 1 ("very bad") to 5 ("excellent"), dividing messages in two groups, low service quality (score 1-3) and high service quality (score 4-5), as it is a dichotomy variable, we took the percentage of high service quality messages to do our analysis. Following Dellarocas (2003), Pathak et al. (2010), and Resnick and Zeckhauser (2002), we also measured the number of messages they posted. Then, to measure the entrepreneur's decisions, we used the actual price per night and the amount the establishments paid to appear on the infomediary's website (advertising expenditures). Price is a common influence variable (Guidi, 2010); advertising expenditures (Pergelova et al., 2008) refer to the amount of money the entrepreneurial owner of the establishment allocates to appear on the infomediary's website. Toprural offers four levels to advertisers: exclusive, prestige, gold, and silver. We excluded the exclusive level from this study because it represents less than 1% of establishments in the database. Entrepreneurs' experience refers to the length of the relationship between the establishment and infomediary.

Finally, to measure business performance, we turned to prior literature. Respondents who represent small firms often are reluctant to give their actual performance figures (Walter et al., 2006), so we opted instead to use the owners' perceptions of their performance, on a seven-point agreement scale. Specifically, from the items obtained from Cooper and Artz (1995), Covin et al. (1990), Hmieleski and Corbett (2008), and Walter et al. (2006), and after a pilot test with 10 establishments, we designed a nine-item questionnaire that asked owners of the rural tourism establishments about their perceptions of their establishment's profitability, growth in reservations, customer satisfaction, and public image, as well as their satisfaction with the business in terms of their income, life style, job enjoyment, social recognition, and general satisfaction (see the Appendix). We conducted an exploratory factor analysis to consolidate the nine questions and facilitate their interpretation. They loaded on three constructs: entrepreneur's satisfaction, profitability, and market perception. All questions achieved discriminant validity and loaded well in the exploratory factor analysis, so we retained all of them for our study (see Table 7).

Table 1. Variable definitions

Variable	Description	Measure
Online customer ratings	Score assigned by the customer in a message posted online	Five-point scale: 1 (very bad)–5 (excellent).
Number of eWOM messages	Number of messages posted by customers about each establishment online	Actual number
Price	Price per night and per person in Euros, posted by the owner of the establishment	Actual price
Advertising expenditures	Rate paid by the establishment owner to the infomediary	Three levels: silver, gold, and prestige levels (least to most expensive)
Entrepreneurs' experience	Length of relationship between the establishment and infomediary	Number of months
Performance	Entrepreneur's perception of performance (sales growth, profit growth, customer satisfaction, public image) and satisfaction with the business	Seven-point scale

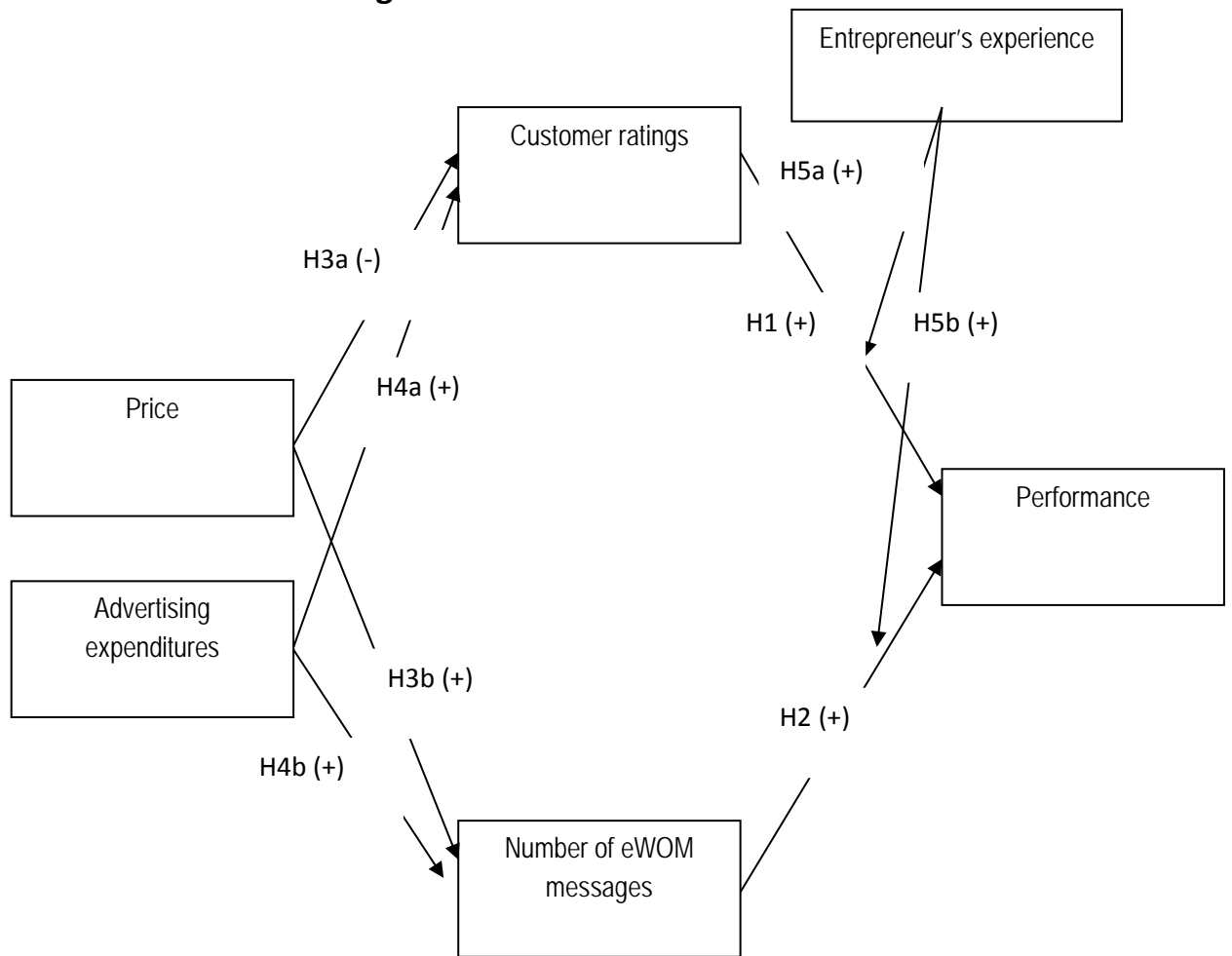
Table 2. Exploratory factor analysis: Performance

Variable	Load	Cronbach's Alpha
Construct: Entrepreneur's satisfaction		0.841
2b: Life style	0.758	
2c: Enjoyable job	0.845	
2d: Social recognition	0.756	
2e: General satisfaction	0.722	
Construct: Profitability		0.846
1a: Profit	0.901	
1b: Reservation growth	0.772	
2a: Income	0.857	
Construct: Market perception		0.769
1c: Customer satisfaction	0.881	
1d: Reputation	0.872	

Notes: This exploratory factor analysis refers to the "Performance" variable, as defined in Table 1

Figure 5 represents the proposed model with six causal relationships: advertising expenditures–customer ratings, advertising expenditures–number of eWOM messages, price–customer ratings, price–number of eWOM messages, customer ratings–performance, and number of eWOM messages–performance. It also features the potential moderation of an entrepreneur's experience on the links among customer ratings, number of online messages, and performance. To test these proposed relationships, we relied on SPSS 15.00 and ran regressions across the independent and dependent variables, using separately specified factor scores for the performance measures: entrepreneur's satisfaction, profitability, and market perceptions (Table 6).

Figure 1. General Model



4.3 Results

Regarding the effects of eWOM on performance, both customer ratings and the number of eWOM messages positively influenced all three measures of performance: entrepreneur’s satisfaction, profitability, and market perceptions (Table 8), in line with both H1 and H2. In terms of the results for the effects of marketing decisions on eWOM (Table 9), neither the price per night nor advertising expenditures influenced customer ratings, but they had positive effects on the number of eWOM messages. In particular, among the advertising expenditure variables, the prestige level most significantly determined the number of online messages. With these findings, we must reject H3a and H4a but confirm H3b and H4b.

In Table 10 we provide information about the role of the number of eWOM messages as a partial mediating variable between price and market perception and between prestige advertising expenditures and profitability. Both price and advertising expenditures influence business performance not just directly but also indirectly through the number of eWOM

messages. In complementary fashion, Table 11 contains the average values for the different advertising expenditure levels as they pertain to customer ratings, the number of eWOM, entrepreneurs' satisfaction, profitability, and market perception. We also include differences across the different advertising expenditure levels for the number of eWOM, entrepreneurs' satisfaction, and profitability, though no differences arose for customer ratings or entrepreneur's market perceptions.

Finally, though entrepreneur's experience with the infomediary did not moderate the effect of customer ratings on any performance measures, it moderated the effect of the number of eWOM messages on two performance measures: entrepreneur's satisfaction and profitability, at 90% confidence levels (Table 12). Therefore, we must reject H5a but the evidence found provides some support of H5b.

Table 3. Effects of eWOM on performance

	Entrepreneur's satisfaction	Profitability	Market perception
Customer ratings	0.154**	0.208***	0.262***
Number of eWOM messages	0.209***	0.185***	0.150**
R ²	0.074	0.086	0.100

*** 99% confidence level.

** 95% confidence level.

Notes: We used exploratory factor measures for each performance measure.

Table 4. Effects of marketing decisions on eWOM

	Customer ratings	Number of eWOM messages
Price	0.072	0.141**
Prestige advertising expenditure	0.069	0.312***
Gold advertising expenditure	0.002	0.023
R ²	0.011	0.119

*** 99% confidence level.

**95% confidence level.

Table 5. Mediating effects of eWOM

	Entrepreneur's satisfaction		Profitability		Market perception	
Number of e-WOM messages	—	0.196***	—	0.147**	—	0.143**
Price	0.023	-0.005	0.047	0.027	0.258***	0.239***
Prestige advertising expenditure	0.125	0.064	0.229***	0.183**	0.053	0.011
Gold advertising expenditure	-0.135	-0.139	0.008	0.004	-0.027	-0.030
R ²	0.047	0.052	0.055	0.074	0.070	0.086

*** 99% confidence level.

**95% confidence level.

Notes: We used exploratory factor measures for each performance measure.

Table 6. Average variable values for each advertising expenditure level

	Expenditure level			F sig.	Differences
	Silver	Gold	Prestige		
Customer ratings	0.87	0.88	0.92	0.562	Not found
Number of eWOM messages	5	6	11	0.000	P-G; P-S
Performance					
Entrepreneur's satisfaction	0.07	-0.19	0.43	0.009	P-G; P-S
Profitability	-0.12	-0.08	0.55	0.005	P-G; P-S
Market perception	-0.07	-0.004	0.19	0.471	Not found

Table 7. Moderating effects of entrepreneur's experience

	Entrepreneur's satisfaction		Profitability		Market perception	
Number of eWOM messages	0.226***	0.019	0.208***	-0.016	0.175***	0.270*
Experience	0.003	-0.106	-0.012	-0.130	-0.093	-0.044
Experience × eWOM	—	0.259*	—	0.281*	—	-0.118
R ²	0.051	0.066	0.044	0.061	0.041	0.044

*** 99% confidence level.

**95% confidence level.

* 90% confidence level.

Notes: We used exploratory factor measures for each performance measure.

4.4 Conclusions and Discussion

We have sought to demonstrate the importance of eWOM for business performance, as well as clarify how entrepreneurs' decisions affect customers' opinions (eWOM) and thus business performance. As we expected, both measures of e-WOM have a strong influence on all three measures of performance: the entrepreneur's satisfaction, profitability, and the entrepreneur's market perceptions. Entrepreneurs must recognize what customers have to say, resolve any concerns, and remain constantly in contact with them. An interesting result is that, apart from the positive effects of customer ratings, an increase in the number of online messages and comments is linked to improved performance.

Although negative feedback has been said to help for the credibility of the reviews and Web site, negative feedback is not harmless, if it grows in importance for a particular establishment, especially if bad managed, it could be quite damaging (Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009). Consequently, owners should monitor low ratings and negative feedback contained in the reviews. They should try to solve those detected problems that may occur when delivering the service. Owners' responses posted in order to thank particularly praising reviewers or to clarify some aspect or misunderstanding may also be useful. Complementarily, owners should try to prompt the number of customer reviews, emphasizing the importance of customer participation (e.g. at the checkout, with a printed message on the invoice, or with an e-mail). Apart from the potential positive effect on customers' awareness, by increasing the number of

reviews it is expected that more positive than negative reviews are posted, improving the ratings (Melián-González et al., 2013).

Regarding the marketing decisions that the rural lodging establishment owner undertakes and their effects on eWOM. On one hand, more customer reviews are posted for the establishments with higher prices in the sample, suggesting that their customers, in comparison to those of the lower prices' establishments, get more involved and/or demanding, as a consequence of paying higher prices. Higher quality should accompany higher prices to avoid customer disappointment and negative comments. On the other hand, enhanced positioning on the infomediary's site, as a result of the establishments' allocation of more resources for advertising, also prompts more messages from customers. Establishment's owners should then spend more on advertising on the site to generate more reviews.

The number of eWOM messages offers a partial mediating variable in the links of high prices and high advertising expenditures with market perception and profitability, respectively. That is, some of the effect of marketing decisions on performance derives from the positive consequences of those decisions on eWOM. The direct effect results also show that price influences entrepreneur's market perception, apart from its indirect influence through eWOM comments. Entrepreneurs may consider that price works as a cue that defines customers' perceived quality.

Higher advertising expenditures also are a good decision from a profit standpoint, because paying more to ensure a first-place listing on a specialized webpage or search engine directly influences profitability, beyond the indirect effect through eWOM. According to previous literature, using the Internet as a marketing tool has a powerful influence on firm performance (Ling-Yee, 2010). Internet advertising spending can improve overall marketing efficiency (Pergelova et al., 2008), because online advertising is interactive, such that advertisers often can identify and differentiate among target consumers, even as those consumers gain more influence over the process by deciding when and how to interact (Pergelova et al., 2008). In the banking sector for example, more advanced Internet applications and attractive websites help banks retain profitable customers (Nielsen, 2002). Rural lodging establishments, with their small size and limited resources, should prioritize the use of infomediaries as a medium of communication with their customers.

The results for the moderating role of the entrepreneur's experience indicate that experienced entrepreneurs acquire know-how about how to deal with comments and provide adequate feedback to consumers, which improves the positive consequences derived from eWOM

messages for profitability and for entrepreneurs' satisfaction of both customer satisfaction and public image.

Finally, the results of this study might generalize to other services, such as automobile rentals or courier services, because the variables we use to develop our model can be accessed easily by any service provider that uses a web platform to offer its services.

Chapter 5

EWOM ON BUSINESS PERFORMANCE, A

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

5. eWOM on Business Performance, a Qualitative Data Analysis

5.1 Literature Review

5.1.1 The Content Analysis

Most of research considers consumers' responses to structured questionnaires according to SERVPERF or SERVQUAL models (Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Parasuraman et al., 1988) to measure service quality. Normally the owner of the establishment defines a priori the categories to be evaluated, the quality of food, the cleanliness, etc. This type of measurement is not entirely accurate, because measures only the categories that have been defined by the owner of the establishment, the ones he thinks are the most important, but maybe those categories are not the most important for a specific customer. We think there could be a better model to measure perceptions in Rural Tourism instead of SERVQUAL or SERVPERF because of the characteristics of the sector.

In the other hand, if we take the content of eWOM messages instead of just the rating assigned by customers to specific categories, despite the appeal of computer-aided text analysis to examine the content of texts, it can become a complicated and labor-intensive process. There is not a consensus of guidance in regard to using content analysis in a consistent manner; the lack of such guidance represents a gap in the literature. McKenny et al. (2012) propose a framework based on Chen et al. (2004), in this framework they propose the following steps: (1) Define the constructs to be evaluated; (2) Develop a Deductive Words List that experts believes are associated with the construct, it means, the words that normally are used in the literature when talk about the area of study, taking a synonym finder or thesaurus (Short et al. 2010); (3) Selecting a sample of texts to generate an inductive word list to complete the deductive one; the inductive word list refers to the list of words obtained from the sample of texts, analyzed with a software for text analysis as NVivo or QDA Miner; and (4) A panel of experts evaluate the words list and identify additional words.

This kind of process has some problems related to the sample of texts selected to do the analysis, because the language used in those texts may not reflect the language of all the respondents of the survey to express their personal thoughts, as has been shown in McKenny, Short and Tyge Payne (2012), expressing it as a limitation of their work. In that way, we propose a new methodology, where we take the entire sample to elaborate the dictionary of terms with QDA Miner software; with this methodology, we ensure to use all the possible words to analyze satisfaction derived from their eWOM messages. Thus, in this research, we

try not to test again models of service quality as SERQUAL or SERVPERF through the text content analysis, but to see what emerges from customer messages as underlying an explanatory model of customer sensitivity, positive or negative, expressed through their messages posted on the web.

5.1.2 Business Performance and eWOM

Hiring a rural tourism establishment is a service activity and therefore its real quality can be verified only once the hosting service has been enjoyed, that encourages rural tourism potential customers to seek information before recruitment to be more certain of their decision. The fact that rural housing is primarily a weekend vacation activity or for a limited period of time, makes that the cost of opportunity of a bad decision gets important, because once hired, no substitute may be able to improve the use of these short vacations. Therefore, the perceived risk is high and the need to search for information on the Internet will also be important, making the sector a focus for research on e-WOM.

As it has been shown by researchers, eWOM is a factor that influences business performance, having an effect in actual and future sales (Engel et al., 1969; Jansen et al., 2009); Products ratings and reviews have been shown to increase sales in several contexts (Berger and Schwartz, 2011).

Specifically about the content of eWOM messages, Jansen et al. (2009) in his research on the use of Twitter messages as a way to share opinions between consumers about brands, indicate that eWOM has an effect on the actual purchase and future purchases. In the other hand, Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) find that differences in the number of reviews received by books sold by two online retailers correlate positively with the difference in the relative sales of those books across the retailers. In this way, the analysis of content of eWOM is an important topic to research in Rural Tourism.

5.1.3 The Valence in eWOM

There are different opinions regarding the effect of the direction of eWOM messages (positive-negative) in customer's response, it is called "valence" (Liu, 2006). Some studies (Lee and Youn, 2009) found that the effect of the eWOM platforms on consumer willingness to recommend products to friends was found only when the review was positive. When the review was negative, however, there were detrimental effects on consumer willingness to recommend the product to friends regardless of the eWOM platform. In the same direction, Bulik (2007), found that roughly half the respondents said they decided to buy a product after

reading a positive review on a personal blog, while one third of them decide not to buy after reading a negative review; unfavorable (versus favorable) product information from a consumer led to a stronger affect toward products (Mizerski, 1982; Park and Lee, 2009); and Duana et al. (2008), pointed out that a large amount of negative eWOM made it difficult for a business to overcome its adverse industry positioning.

Other researchers found that consumers may be less likely to attribute the positive eWOM towards the product's actual performance and more likely to attribute it towards other plausible causes such as circumstance (e.g. the communicator's vested interest) compared to the negative eWOM (Lee and Youn 2009).

Others say that customers are more likely to rely on eWOM if the direction of the messages is all the same; the consensus in eWOM represents the degree of agreement between two or more users regarding a product or its performance. Therefore, eWOM with higher consensus can be more persuasive and powerful than messages with lower consensus (Sun-Jae and Jang-Sun, 2009).

Understanding how and why messages work, allows marketers to craft a coordinated, consistent message that reaches the right people with the right content in the right setting. That generates an exponentially greater impact on the products that customers buy, recommend, and become loyal; that is why researchers have seen the importance of the content of messages and develop researches to study them (Sun-Jaen and Jang-Sun, 2009).

Finally, customer rating assigned to a business about the product or service received is influenced by a three-factor structure: 1) Basic factors: Minimum requirements that cause dissatisfaction if not fulfilled but do not lead to satisfaction if fulfilled or exceed; 2) Performance factors: Lead to satisfaction if fulfilled or exceed and lead to dissatisfaction if not fulfilled; and 3) Excitement factors: increase satisfaction if delivered but do not cause dissatisfaction if they are missing (Matzler and Sauerwein, 2002).

In that way, in this research we disaggregate the categories that group the key content of eWOM messages according to whether they express satisfaction or dissatisfaction, being satisfiers or dissatisfiers; this allows us to verify the different effect that a category has on business performance considering if it appears in the group of satisfiers or in the group of dissatisfiers.

The effect on business performance occurs through two pathways: (a) the positive (negative) perception the market has about the rural tourism establishment causes more (less) attraction

to the establishment, resulting in the improvement of outcomes, improvement of entrepreneur satisfaction and in the perception the entrepreneur has of the image of his establishment, (b) the content of the messages is a guide to improve the offer, whether if the messages have a positive content (reinforcement of the offer) or a negative content (modification of the offer).

We think that the content of customer messages in tourism sector, been satisfiers or dissatisfiers, influence the confidence of a future customer in the establishment, we thus propose:

H1: Satisfiers in eWOM affect business performance.

H2: Dissatisfiers in eWOM affect business performance.

We also think none fulfilled expectations affect customer ratings and future customers travel decisions more than a satisfaction message, we then propose;

H3: Dissatisfiers in eWOM affect business performance more than satisfiers.

5.2 Methodology

5.2.1 Data Collection

The eWOM data came from Toprural, a major rural tourism promoter website in Europe (www.toprural.com), member of homeaway.com. The site contains information about various establishments and messages posted by customers about their experiences with them. It lists 7,181 registered rural establishments in Spain; 72% of these establishments offer rentals of a house or entire building, and 28% offer rooms for rent. Between September 28, 2000, and June 29, 2010, customers posted 98,093 messages with ratings (from 1 = “bad” to 5 = “excellent”) that summarized their service quality perceptions.

In the previous chapter, we measured the effect of decisions taken by the owners of the establishments on customer ratings (eWOM) and business performance, using a random sample of 202 rural tourism establishments and all the messages posted on these establishments. In this new research we take the same sample, but only establishments that has at least 4 messages, in order to the critical mass of potential customers visiting the website can be sensitive to the information. The final sample has 118 rural establishments and 1,398 eWOM messages, between January 1, 2008 and December 31, 2009. As mentioned before, each establishment has associated a set of messages and each message has associated a rating

(from 1 = very bad to 5 = excellent) and one or more reasons (categories) that constitute the message the customer wants to transmit.

This research uses as empirical base, the qualitative data analysis. We take all eWOM messages and categorize them using QDA Miner, a qualitative data analysis software. The use of Qualitative Data Analysis software (QDA) in Marketing is not a common practice because the learning curve is big, as it is the cost of the software and materials (Bezborodova and Bennett, 2004; Johnston, 2006). However, having a proper methodology for using QDA's could help the companies to predict business performance (Anderson and Shaw, 1999; Romand Jr. et al., 2003). As studies say, QDA softwares are a good way to study the content of texts (Musa et al., 2010) and bringing it to the context of customer messages; analyze these messages allows the entrepreneurs to know what customers think and act to improve it.

Finally, about business performance, we turned again to the previous chapter, where the owners of rural tourism establishments answered to a survey about the performance of their establishments.

5.2.2 Measures

In this research we provide a different approach to explain the implication that satisfaction has on business performance in two steps:

- The perception of the market is obtained from messages that customers leave on the Internet. Therefore, in our research, the customers are the ones who spontaneously establish the categories to consider in assessing satisfaction. This also offers the possibility of linking the map of categories obtained, with performance, using the real terminology that the market values both, positively and negatively, the quality of service.
- We associate the categories separately for positive and negative evaluations, what let us distinguish the different effects on business performance that a category has as satisfier (S) and as dissatisfiers (D). This allow us to classify the different categories according to the two axes (S and D, only S, only D, nor S nor D) which facilitates to orientate more effectively the priorities to redesign for the supply to achieve greater value for customers. Therefore, we contrast the effect each category has on business performance, which implies a breakdown much more useful to the owner of the establishment, than the mere record of the grade of satisfaction or dissatisfaction in aggregate way that the establishment reaches, taking into account all the messages left by customers.

The variables used to measure the effect of the content of eWOM on business performance are summarized in Table 13.

Table 8. Variables definition

Variable	Description	Measure
Categories eWOM messages	The content of customer messages posted online about their experience in the establishment, divided in categories, as satisfiers and dissatisfiers	22 categories
Performance	Entrepreneur's perception of performance (sales growth, profit growth, customer satisfaction, public image) and satisfaction with the business	Seven-point scale

As independent variables we use the content of eWOM messages, classifying them into categories, consistent with other studies about service quality in hospitality industry LODGSERV (Knutson et al. 1990), using qualitative data analysis software QDA Miner at has been done in previous researches (Anderson y Shaw 1999; Musa et al., 2010).

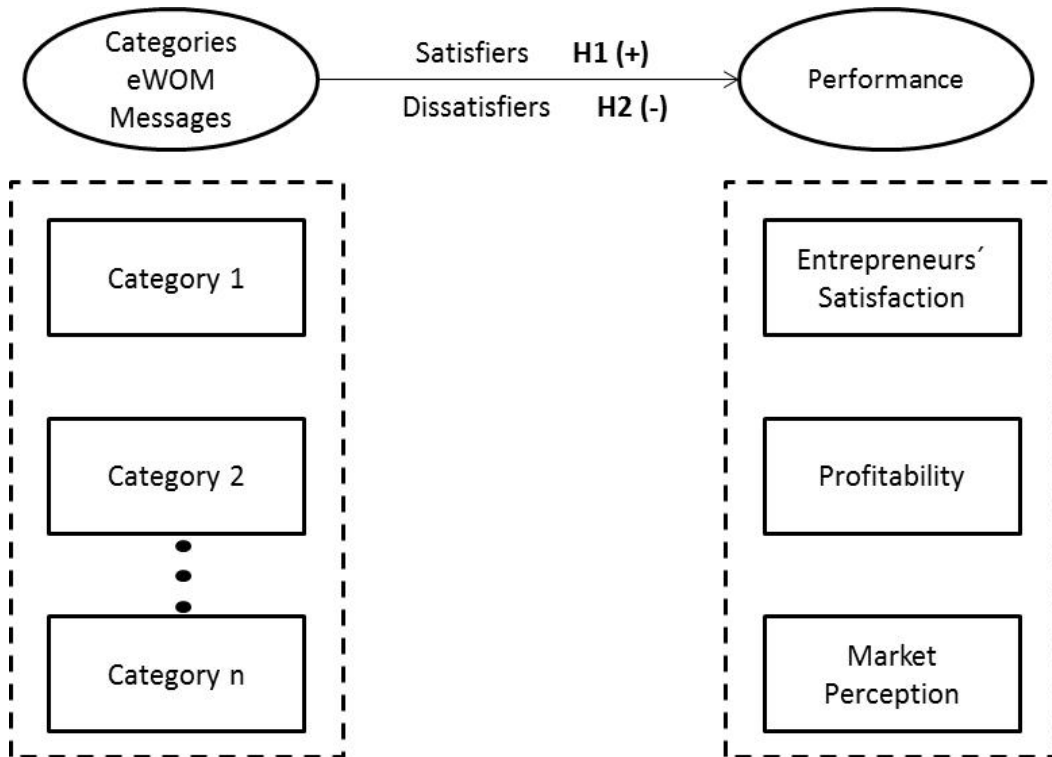
To measure business performance, we use the same variable used in the previous chapter. We used the owners' perceptions of their performance, on a seven-point agreement scale. Specifically, from the items obtained from Cooper and Artz (1995), Covin et al. (1990), Hmieleski and Corbett (2008), and Walter et al. (2006), and after a pilot test with 10 establishments, we designed a nine-item questionnaire that asked owners of the rural tourism establishments about their perceptions of their establishment's profitability, growth in reservations, customer satisfaction, and public image, as well as their satisfaction with the business in terms of their income, life style, job enjoyment, social recognition, and general satisfaction (see the Appendix).

5.3 Data Analysis and Results

Figure 6 represents the proposed model, with two constructs (eWOM and performance) that relate in two causal relationships: satisfiers–performance, dissatisfiers–performance. The first component of each relationship is the independent variable, and the second is the dependent

variable. Performance data correspond to September 2010 (t) and the accumulated eWOM messages correspond to at least three previous semesters (t-1), the most recent information available, since in this way the results reflect the lagged effects of these messages in both, the target market and the efforts to improve the offer from the rural tourism entrepreneur.

Figure 2. General Model



Using QDA Miner Software, it is developed a dictionary of terms to classify eWOM messages in different “categories”, as well as the frequency of its occurrence in the sample. Within each category, we have included all related words, for example: The category “food” includes words like breakfast, buffet, taste, etc., the software integrates all these words into one category “food”. A total of 22 categories emerge from the sample (Table 14).

Table 9. Categories

Categorie	Satisfiers Number of Messages (4-5)	Dissatisfiers Number of Messages (1-3)	Description
Host	965	46	Feeling welcomed, cared for by the owners and other staff
Environment, the surrounding hinterland	857	53	The nature, the environment in which the property is located
Food	718	38	Gastronomy, speaks of breakfast, lunch, etc.
Rest	467	29	Tranquility, possibility to rest
Seasonality	333	23	If the season is suitable to visit the property, climate
Attractive Room	319	58	If he likes the room, has a bathroom
Attention to Special guests/ special requests	317	23	If they admit children, disabled persons, animals
Do Extra Services	246	33	If has a bar, kitchen, pool, etc.
Comfort	219	13	If you feel comfortable in the establishment
Cleanliness	203	31	If the facilities are clean
Decoration	161	6	If has a good decoration
Up-To-Date Equipment	160	26	If it is well-equipped or not as expected
Distance	145	7	If the accommodation is at an adequate distance
Activities to do in the area	139	4	If there are activities which may be made in the area
Heating	97	18	The house is cold, or too hot, or has good temperature, heating is right or wrong, etc.
Spacious	59	4	f you find the establishment has adequate space
Multimedia Services (photos, videos)	40	4	Pictures, videos of establishment available
Information	39	7	If you have the right information to get an idea of what you will find, how to get to the place, etc.
Transportation	34	5	If the roads are good, easy access
Establishment Maintenance	28	9	If proper maintenance is provided to the establishment to keep it in proper condition
Price	22	27	If the price is adequate
Parking	3	1	If has parking space

The dictionary of terms is developed in an inductive way, taking all the messages to the analysis; it is a new approach in the way to do content analysis because previous work define

the categories to be studied a priori and analyze just a group of texts instead of the entirely sample, involving some problems as the possible omission of terms that does not appear in the group of texts but they appear in the rest of the sample.

The messages are divided in two groups according to its valence, the group of satisfaction messages (rating 4-5) and the group of dissatisfaction messages (rating 1-3), in line with prior literature (Brunner-Sperding and Peters, 2009; Liu, 2006; Poon and Low, 2005), because researches show that the impact on results is different between the two groups. If an eWOM message talks about 3 categories, for example, food, cleanliness and comfort, it appears 3 times in the database with the same rating. Each category is measured as a counter of the number of times messages appear classified under that category.

To test if SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1988) could be a good model to this study, on table 15 we show the percentage of messages of our sample categorized as would be done in SERVQUAL in its 5 categories: Tangibles, Empathy, Assurance, Reliability and Responsiveness. We can see that 3 of the 5 categories do not have messages related, it means, a lot of important categories for customers would not be considered if we take SERVQUAL to this study.

Table 10. Sample categorized as SERVQUAL Model

Tangibles		Empathy		Assurance	
Equipment	13%	Extra Services	20%	Trust employees	0%
Decoration	12%	Host	72%	Trained Employees	0%
Attractive Room	27%	Convenient Hours	0%	Employees are polite	0%
Presentation of Employees	0%			Feel safe with employees	0%
Reliability		Responsiveness			
Service on time	0%	Tell when services will be performed	0%		
Dependable (confidence)	0%	Prompt service	0%		
Keeps its records accurately	0%	Willing to help	0%		

5.3.1 Pilot Test

We developed two pilot tests, one per each variable: eWOM and performance.

For performance, to ensure the discriminatory power of the questionnaire that measure it and ensure the comprehensibility of the questions, we took randomly 10 establishments and applied the survey by phone to the entrepreneurs, being sure that the entrepreneur was the one who answered the survey. If he was not in that moment, we called later. With the results, we made the proper modifications to the questions. We conducted an exploratory factor analysis to consolidate the nine questions, to facilitate interpretation. The nine questions loaded on three constructs: entrepreneur’s satisfaction, profitability, and market perception. All the questions achieved discriminant validity and loaded well in the exploratory factor analysis, so we retain all of them for our study (Table 16).

Table 11. Exploratory factor analysis: Business Performance

Variable	Load	Cronbach’s Alpha
Construct: entrepreneur’s satisfaction		0.795
2b: life style	0.806	
2c: enjoyable job	0.835	
2d: social recognition	0.635	
2e: general satisfaction	0.726	
Construct: profitability		0.791
1a: profit	0.908	
1b: reservations’ growth	0.703	
2a: income	0.846	
Construct: market perception		0.724
1c: customer satisfaction	0.851	
1d: reputation	0.852	

Notes: This exploratory factor analysis refers to the variable “Business Performance”, as defined in Table 13.

About eWOM variable and to ensure its proper categorization through the software QDA Miner, we took a random of 50 eWOM messages and apply a double review, it means, a manual categorization and an automatic categorization. For manual categorization, 3 different experts in the area in a separately way received the same 50 messages and divided them in categories as they considered the messages should be divided; they did not receive a previous list of categories, so, the categorization emerged from each researcher. For automatic categorization, the same 50 messages were automatically categorized by QDA Miner software. Finally, the four categorizations, three from the experts and one from the software were compared, obtaining similar results, giving as valid the categorization of the software, as did Jansen et al. (2009) in their research on the use of Twitter messages as a way to share eWOM consumer opinions about brands; and Liu (2006) using three different researchers to read and categorize messages.

To tests our data and proposed relationships, we use SPSS 15.00 program.

5.3.2 Regression Analysis

To analyze the relation between satisfiers/dissatisfiers and business performance, we did regressions between the 22 categories of eWOM messages and business performance factors: Market Perception, Profitability and entrepreneur's satisfaction (Table 17).

As we expected, satisfiers and dissatisfiers are different; this is consistent with previous research (Matzler and Sauerwein, 2002). Note that eight satisfier's categories that influence market perception represents 70% of total satisfaction posts, score 4-5 (Table 14). Only 10% of the database contains dissatisfaction messages (scored 1-3), which may be insufficient in some categories to apply a regression model, that is why dissatisfiers influence is more difficult to confirm.

Although the number of dissatisfiers that significantly affects business performance is lower than satisfiers, most of the relationships have the expected sign (-).It is similar of what is found by Sun-Jae (2009), the more positive sets of multiple eWOM messages would yield higher eWOM effects than the less positive sets. This is also consistent with the results of Lee and Youn (2009), the effect of the eWOM platforms on consumer willingness to recommend the product to friends was found only when the review was positive.

Table 12. Regressions. Category by Category

No.	Categories	Entrepreneurs Satisfaction		Profitability		Market Perception	
		Satisfiers (4-5)	Dissatisfiers (1-3)	Satisfiers (4-5)	Dissatisfiers (1-3)	Satisfiers (4-5)	Dissatisfiers (1-3)
1	Host	,013 (,284)	-,098 (,464)	,005 (,684)	-,130 (,332)	,033 (,007)	-,160 (,233)
2	Comfort	,009 (,858)	-,231 (,244)	,005 (,924)	-,207 (,297)	,091 (,056)	-,369 (,062)
3	Rest	,015 (,507)	-,115 (,447)	-,003 (,908)	-,137 (,365)	,039 (,087)	-,127 (,403)
4	Attractive Room	-,002 (,945)	-,061 (,541)	-,019 (,459)	-,059 (,553)	,076 (,003)	-,133 (,181)
5	Cleanliness	,053 (,201)	-,039 (,805)	-,017 (,689)	,078 (,621)	,032 (,440)	-,270 (,084)
6	Equipment	-,008 (,894)	-,084 (,624)	,015 (,799)	-,120 (,485)	,069 (,246)	-,328 (,055)
7	Environment	,017 (,277)	-,114 (,282)	,007 (,633)	-,168 (,113)	,029 (,060)	-,108 (,308)
8	Extra Services	-,017 (,609)	-,125 (,346)	-,017 (,598)	-,048 (,714)	,084 (,009)	-,167 (,206)
9	Food	,017 (,157)	-,063 (,635)	-,004 (,761)	-,157 (,235)	,033 (,005)	-,190 (,150)
10	Special Guests/Requests	,058 (,103)	-,281 (,109)	,005 (,896)	-,144 (,415)	,027 (,460)	-,154 (,381)
11	Seasonality	,012 (,708)	-,272 (,111)	,027 (,413)	-,436 (,010)	,045 (,168)	-,199 (,244)
12	Heating	,024 (,803)	-,290 (,062)	,105 (,285)	-,175 (,264)	,044 (,653)	-,201 (,198)
13	Price	,080 (,699)	-,184 (,278)	,247 (,230)	-,264 (,120)	,283 (,167)	-,159 (,351)
14	Decoration	-,044 (,392)	-,709 (,091)	-,010 (,847)	-,269 (,523)	,125 (,013)	-,522 (,214)
15	Spacious	,060 (,581)	,526 (,303)	,089 (,415)	,066 (,897)	,050 (,646)	-,262 (,609)
16	Information	,000 (,999)	,189 (,582)	-,014 (,896)	-,131 (,704)	,023 (,823)	,386 (,260)
17	Establishment Maintenance	-,087 (,616)	-,419 (,180)	,135 (,438)	-,305 (,330)	,053 (,759)	-,820 (,008)
18	Transportation	-,046 (,763)	-,592 (,196)	-,107 (,481)	-,200 (,664)	-,037 (,809)	,304 (,509)
19	Distance	,003 (,959)	-,593 (,129)	,065 (,318)	-,429 (,273)	,070 (,286)	,082 (,835)
20	Activities	-,078 (,238)	-,191 (,709)	-,037 (,576)	,170 (,740)	,104 (,113)	-1,042 (,040)
21	Multimedia	-,042 (,691)	-,230 (,579)	,200 (,054)	-,053 (,898)	,045 (,669)	-,954 (,020)
22	Parking	-,342 (,561)	,261 (,796)	,240 (,683)	-,575 (,569)	,124 (,833)	,893 ,376

As it is shown on table 17, Market perception is the performance variable with more satisfiers and dissatisfiers as influencers; it could be because this variable reflects what the entrepreneur thinks is the market perception about his business, based on what listens from customers. In that way, a relation between what the eWOM message say and what the entrepreneur thinks, exists. It does not happen with entrepreneur's satisfaction, it could be because entrepreneur's satisfaction is more related with other aspects as effort made, risk taken or profitability; if the benefits of the establishment are not good the entrepreneur could be not satisfied, even if the satisfaction of the customer is high.

About the performance variable "profitability", the economic crisis in Spain can affect hardly the profits even if the customer is satisfied and reflects it in his message. Other reason that could affect the relation with profitability is that we just measure what the customer says in the messages but we do not measure if one category is more important than another category for that specific customer. When a customer writes his messages, he has one motivation that is highest than the rest and give a 5 (top rating) to this category, other customers think as he does and give 5 to the same category; that category does not have variability and is not reflected in the regressions, in that way, there can be other things that are very important and does not appear, those things could cause a variation in profit.

Taking those results, we can say that H1: Satisfiers in eWOM affect business performance and H2: Dissatisfiers in eWOM affect business performance are accepted for 15 of the 22 categories (table 17).

About H3: Dissatisfiers affect more than satisfiers, in the regression analysis there are not paired matches in the categories, except in the relation between Comfort and Market Perception (table 17). It means, when a category is significant as satisfier, it is not significant as dissatisfier (it cannot be confirmed that its coefficient is different than zero), and when a category is significant as dissatisfier it is not as satisfier. In that way we can at least say that its incidence is different in one category in Entrepreneur's satisfaction, two in profitability and twelve in Market perception, from the 22 categories included in the analysis, but we have not evidence to confirm that dissatisfiers affect more than satisfiers.

An interesting finding of our research is the significative influence of 5 categories on business performance that did not appear in SERVQUAL model, these are: Food, Comfort, Activities to do in the area, Multimedia and Maintenance. See a summary of results on table 18.

Table 13. Summary of Significant Satisfiers and Dissatisfiers

Performance Measure	Satisfiers	Dissatisfiers
Market Perception	Rooms Host Environment extra services Food Rest Comfort Decoration	Cleanliness Equipment Comfort Establishment Maintenance Activities to do in the area Multimedia
Profitability	Multimedia	Seasonality
Entrepreneur's satisfaction	None	Heating, Decoration

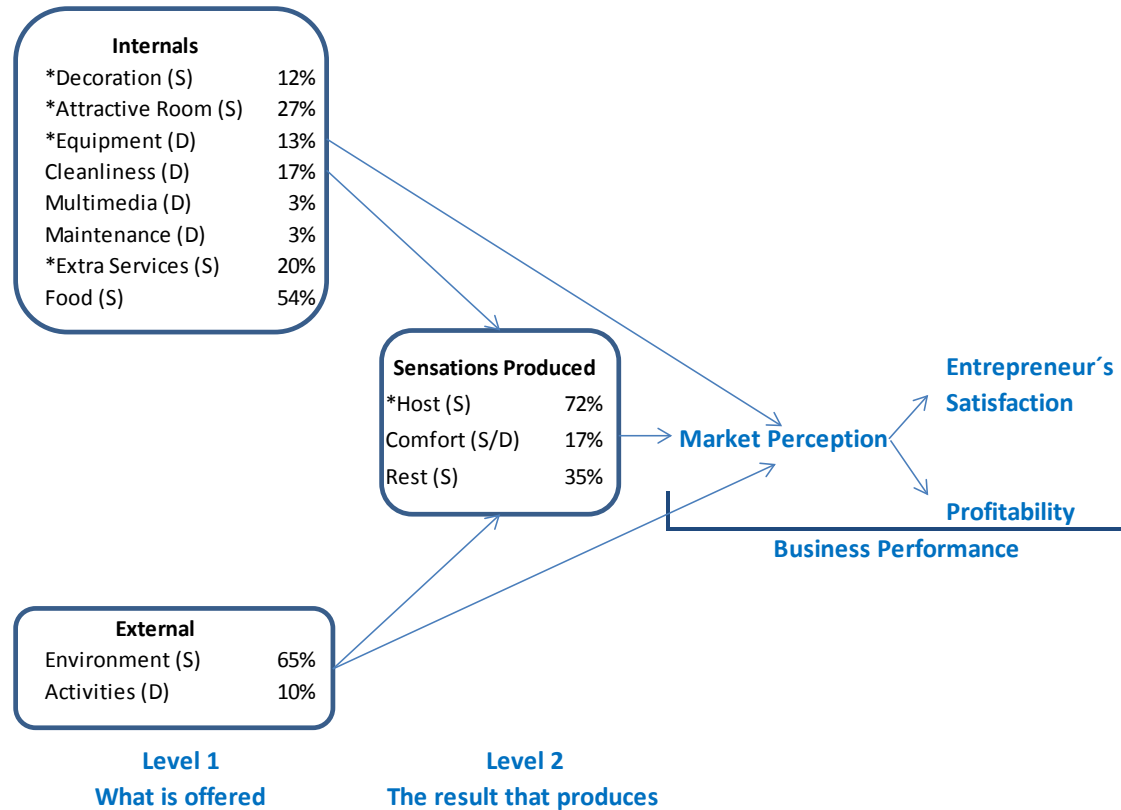
Another interesting finding of our research is that there is not only one level of categories influencing business performance, but there are 2: internals and externals in the first level, Sensations Produced in the second level (Figure 7). Internal influencers are those aspects that completely depend on the establishment; Externals influencers are those that do not depend on the establishment but are very important in this kind of services; Sensations produced are those categories which internals and externals can produce. The categories shown are the ones significant according previous regressions (Table 17); the (S) identifies a Satisfier, (D) a Dissatisfier, the mark (*) shows the categories that appears in SERVQUAL model too; at the right of each category is shown the percentage of messages that talk about the category in our sample. A regression is run between each "internal" and "external" category as independent variable and each "sensation produced" (host, comfort and rest) as dependent variable, dividing messages with rating 1-3 (dissatisfiers) and 4-5 (satisfiers). As an example, cleanliness in an establishment positively affects the customer felling of host, comfort and rest (sensations produced). We found that internal and external categories affect sensations produced (Table 19).

As it is shown on table 18, only 4 of the 22 categories directly affect Profitability or Entrepreneur's satisfaction, because of that, we wanted to test if those variables could affect in indirect way, through Market Perception. We ran regressions between the constructs Market Perception-Entrepreneurs' Satisfaction and Market Perception-Profitability. To run the regressions, the factorial punctuations of the 3 factors were calculated separately, one factor a time, through a Principal Component Analysis, considering only the items of the specific factor, which lead us to no-orthogonal factors. On table 20 we can see that all of the regressions are significant.

Table 14. Regressions Internals, Externals – Sensations Produced

		Sensations Produced					
Categories		Host (4-5)	Host (1-3)	Comfort (4-5)	Comfort (1-3)	Rest (4-5)	Rest (1-3)
I n t e r n a l s	Cleanliness	2,240 (,000)	,732 (,000)	,572 (,000)	,186 (,011)	1,178 (,000)	,499 (,000)
	Equipment	2,450 (,000)	,696 (,000)	,671 (,000)	,646 (,000)	1,239 (,000)	,660 (,000)
	Attractive Room	1,665 (,000)	,556 (,000)	,374 (,000)	,252 (,000)	,864 (,000)	,401 (,000)
	Extra Services	1,706 (,000)	,539 (,000)	,419 (,000)	,283 (,000)	,998 (,000)	,344 (,000)
	Food	,856 (,000)	,713 (,000)	,150 (,000)	,274 (,000)	,405 (,000)	,496 (,000)
	Special Guests/Requests	1,584 (,000)	,493 (,000)	,334 (,000)	,506 (,000)	,703 (,000)	,626 (,000)
	Heating	,815 (,260)	,412 (,000)	,123 (,515)	,317 (,000)	,695 (,080)	,281 (,003)
	Price	7,828 (,000)	,674 (,000)	1,890 (,000)	,489 (,000)	3,387 (,000)	,556 (,000)
	Decoration	2,035 (,000)	1,521 (,000)	,478 (,000)	1,113 (,000)	,999 (,000)	1,146 (,000)
	Spacious	3,491 (,000)	,632 (,073)	,906 (,000)	-,114 (,634)	1,737 (,000)	,522 (,094)
	Information	,522 (,500)	,731 (,002)	,343 (,088)	,726 (,000)	,192 (,653)	,382 (,067)
	Establishment Maintenance	3,178 (,012)	1,211 (,000)	,780 (,019)	1,067 (,000)	2,014 (,004)	,658 (,000)
	Multimedia	1,784 (,020)	,587 (,040)	,528 (,008)	,266 (,169)	,711 (,093)	,514 (,041)
	Parking	-,183 (,966)	1,624 (,019)	-,536 (,637)	-,111 (,814)	-,299 (,901)	,761 (,218)
E x t e r n a l s	Environment	1,125 (,000)	,542 (,000)	,235 (,000)	,327 (,000)	,564 (,000)	,482 (,000)
	Seasonality	1,884 (,000)	,436 (,000)	,419 (,000)	,303 (,000)	,941 (,000)	,503 (,000)
	Transportation	3,958 (,000)	1,264 (,000)	,993 (,000)	-,115 (,592)	2,498 (,000)	,579 (,038)
	Distance	2,526 (,000)	,193 (,477)	,557 (,000)	,035 (,850)	1,191 (,000)	,650 (,006)
	Activities	2,548 (,000)	,890 (,011)	,515 (,000)	,662 (,005)	1,340 (,000)	1,039 (,001)

Figure 3. Two levels of influencers: 1) Internals, externals; 2) Sensations produced



(S)=Satisfier, (D)=Dissatisfier, (*) Categories that appears in SERVQUAL Model (%)=Percentage of messages in the sample

Table 15. Regressions Market Perception- Entrepreneur's satisfaction and Profitability

	Entrepreneur's satisfaction	Profitability
Market Perception	,391 (,000)	,292 (,000)

Finally, as we have seen on table 19, Market Perception is the performance variable that has more satisfiers and dissatisfiers, there is a clear link between entrepreneurs' perception about customers' satisfaction and the evaluation of the service customers express through the score they include in each message (Nieto et al, 2011b). The aspects that most explain Market Perception can be classified as follows (Figure 21):

Table 16. Summary of Significant Aspects that Explain Market Perception

	Satisfiers	Dissatisfiers
Internal	Attractive Room, Decoration, Extra Services, Food	Cleanliness, Equipment, Establishment Maintenance, Multimedia
External	Environment	Activities
Sensations Produced	Host, Comfort, Rest	Comfort

5.4 Conclusions and Discussion

Until now, to evaluate service quality the owner of establishment a priori designs a questionnaire with the categories to be evaluated by customers, it could be a mistake because some important issues for a specific customer could be not evaluated. In this research, we propose a new methodology where the categories to be evaluated are defined a posteriori, after the customer posts his message. In this way, if a category appears in our analysis indicates that variability exists, it means, it is an important issue to be known by the owner of the establishment to empower his competitive advantage, instead of those categories where there is a consensus in the opinion of customers, in a positive or negative way.

We have sought to demonstrate the importance of the content of eWOM messages on business performance. In line with previous studies (Bulik 2007; Lee and Youn 2009), we found that Satisfiers and dissatisfiers affect business performance, directly on market perception; 13 of the 22 categories reached significant coefficients at 90% confidence level, justified by the size of the sample; this relation is important because most of our travel decisions are done consulting eWOM; If market perception is good, more clients will visit the establishment. About the most important categories, there is a close relationship between the number of satisfaction messages and the number of dissatisfaction messages, the correlation between them is 0,76 (0,000), it means that the relevance - from the number of messages - of the categories that appear in the messages best rated and the messages worst rated is very similar, giving more consistency to the proposed list of categories obtained in this research. The categories most mentioned are Host, Environment and Food; the first two together with Attractive Room are the most mentioned in dissatisfaction messages. If these categories stand out is because they concentrate the opinion of customers and therefore should focus the attention or rural tourism establishment owners. Other two performance variables,

profitability and entrepreneur's satisfaction, indirectly affect business performance through market perception.

It is important to note that the coefficients of the six dissatisfiers of Market Perception are clearly much higher than those of the satisfiers (table 17), in line with our hypothesis (the content of dissatisfiers affects business performance more than the content of satisfiers). The only category that is both, satisfier and dissatisfier (comfort) has an impact four times bigger as dissatisfiers than as satisfiers. The fact that a category gets significant as satisfier or dissatisfier but not both at the same time, means that customer expectations about the offer are different; the customers expect the establishment is clean, adequately equipped and cared for, or offer fun activities to make entertained the stay, the satisfaction generated by the fact that this is given is cold because it does not offer anything that is not expected; but if it is not given it will cause dissatisfaction.

About the performance construct "Entrepreneur's satisfaction", the only two categories directly related with it are heating and decoration as dissatisfiers. About "Profitability", the significant categories are "multimedia" as satisfier and "seasonality" as dissatisfiers. In both performance constructs, the interpretation of the relation with these categories is as service quality signals directly associated with them. Thus, the positive messages about "multimedia" (existence of photos, videos on the web about the establishment or the environment) leads to an improvement of the perceived value of the accommodation offer in the eyes of the customer, resulting in greater attraction of the establishment which will generate more revenue reserves (Profitability). Moreover, it could be associated to a business owner with the ability and desire to do technological improvement, as it is one of the less prominent categories, what could be an indicator of proactivity and good management, identifying this minority of establishments.

About "Seasonality", it means, the travel time of the year (spring, snow, summer, etc.), if the establishment is not well prepared to receive the customers in that specific season, causes dissatisfaction to the customer. Finally "heating" and "decoration" as dissatisfiers of Entrepreneur's satisfaction shows the complaints of customers about both aspects, complaints that could be related to a poor attention to provide a comfortable accommodation, which could be attached to the little enjoyment or interest the entrepreneur shows about this rural tourism activity.

As an academic contribution of this research, we propose a new methodology to do content analysis; previous work propose to define the categories to be studied a priori and analyze just

a group of texts instead of the entire sample, involving some problems as the possible omission of terms; we take all eWOM messages to elaborate the dictionary of terms with QDA Miner software; with this methodology, we ensure to use all the possible words to analyze the opinion of customers.

However, the mere relation between categories is not enough to provide useful guidance on whether there is logic to its ordination to explain business performance, the primary objective of this research. In this sense, we propose an order of categories that identify the aspects directly managed by the owner of the establishment (internal) and those that depend on the environment (external). Both explain three top-level categories perceived as the result of both (sensations produced). Analyzed one by one the regression coefficients of internal and external categories, all of them (except one) are significant explaining the three categories of sensations extracted from our analysis (table 19). Therefore, the logic of analysis we propose about the first level of influence of the categories, is justified enough. Moreover, from the three types of business performance measures, Market Perception is the most directly linked to all the categories in general and the categories of sensations produced in particular. This is logic since the categories represent the translation of that perception. Table 17 shows that the three categories of sensations produced as satisfiers have a significant coefficient on Market Perception and none with the other two performance factors.

Finally, Market Perception is a significant explanatory variable of the other two performance factors: Profitability and Entrepreneurs Satisfaction, closing the circle of our proposed model, as an explanation of the process leading to a rural tourism business more profitable and motivator for the entrepreneur. This would be our main contribution, although we recognize that it will be necessary to conduct a model including the set of the identified relationships as SEM model, in order to publish this research.

There are four categories to pay attention to reach better “sensations produced” and therefore a better Market Perception, those are: price, spacious, establishment maintenance (internals) and transportation (externals). Those are the ones with the most important significant coefficients in the three categories of sensations produced, it means, the ones that contribute the most to improve those feelings and therefore the priority of the company that wants to improve his performance in this way.

On the side of the internal aspects, have spacious rooms, adequate investment in keeping the place in the best conditions and above all have the right price to quality expectations generated. On the side of the external aspects, ease to get around in the town. Two other

categories to add to the first we have highlighted are cleanliness and equipment which, although lower than the previous coefficients, also have a great influence on the perception of Host and Rest fundamentally. In short, if we were to propose to a rural tourism establishment a list of categories to include in the valuation that customers make at the end of their stay, would be the six we have outlined, but with different significance to the sensations produced, being the price the most relevant category.

This research has some limitations, we use the information posted in an infomediary, Toprural; but, if the customer post his opinion in other blogs or forums instead of Toprural, we won't have this information, in this way, our information is the one posted in the infomediary but not necessarily the opinion of the market in general. It is important to remember that only 10% of the database has a median score of 1-3 (dissatisfaction messages), it is important a more in-depth study of them. In addition, the representativeness of proactive entrepreneurs in the sample, only 1% of the eWOM messages had an answer from the owner of the establishment and a lot of them were defensive answers instead of apologizing or reflecting an intention of improving.

Other limitation could be the accounting of messages and categories, giving the more importance to the categories that appears the most instead of giving more value to the consensus in the different categories, and as a consequence, the establishments that have more messages have more influence in the results. In the other hand, it could be a marginal representation of people leaving eWOM messages, maybe the information given by this little percentage of customers does not generate the information needed to influence performance; the owner of the establishment could know the opinion of the customer by other methods, like asking personally to the customer. It does not mean that the hypothesis is unreasonable, it just mean the low state of development of this area in rural tourism.

As future research, we could propose a new way to study eWOM messages, analyze not only what the message say, but also what the customer intended to say according to the way he expresses himself, the adjectives he use, if he speaks in first person, the grammatical context, etc.

Chapter 6

GENERAL RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

6. General Results of the Research

6.1 Academic Contribution

Although 86.5% of rural tourism establishments host a Web site, and 81.6% advertise on the Internet, very little research considers the relationship between the characteristics of the entrepreneur and the particular characteristics of the company's Web site. We therefore make a pertinent contribution to this research area.

In the other hand, we continue the investigation of eWOM for service firms, including not only the quantity of messages or its valence (positive or negative) but the content of the message too.

We propose a new methodology to do content analysis, where the dictionary of terms to do the analysis is developed in an inductive way, taking all the messages to the analysis; it is a new approach in the way to do content analysis because previous work define the categories to be studied a priori using SERVPERF or SERVQUAL models, and analyze just a group of texts instead of the entirely sample, involving some problems as the possible omission of terms that does not appear in the group of texts but they appear in the rest of the sample.

6.2 Implication for Companies

This research has some implications for rural tourism establishments, policy makers and service sector in general in two specific areas: the implementation of new technologies and the importance of eWOM.

For policy makers, viewing the strong governmental support to entrepreneurs for new technologies, this work suggests a means to discriminate among projects for resource allocations. Subsidies should focus on improving Web site contents, because according to our research, the contents affect business performance. In the side of rural tourism establishments, Web site contents should be taken into account to ensure that the resource is being used to their advantage and improve their performance. A Web site with sufficient and necessary information about the business is crucial, particularly for this type of service. This study therefore offers a guide for business professionals in this sector to expend their resources.

We have sought to demonstrate the importance of eWOM for business performance, as well as clarify how marketing decisions affect customers' opinions (eWOM) and thus business performance. As we expected, both measures of eWOM have a strong influence on all three measures of performance: entrepreneurs' satisfaction, profitability, and market perceptions. An interesting result is that, apart from the positive effects of customer ratings, an increase in the number of online messages and comments is linked to improved performance.

Although negative feedback has been said to help for the credibility of the reviews and Web site, negative feedback is not harmless, if it grows in importance for a particular establishment, especially if bad managed, it could be quite damaging (Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009). Consequently, owners should monitor low ratings and negative feedback contained in the reviews. They should try to solve those detected problems that may occur when delivering the service. Owners' responses posted in order to thank particularly praising reviewers or to clarify some aspect or misunderstanding may also be useful. Complementarily, owners should try to prompt the number of customer reviews, emphasizing the importance of customer participation (e.g. at the checkout, with a printed message on the invoice, or with an e-mail). Apart from the potential positive effect on customers' awareness, by increasing the number of reviews it is expected that more positive than negative reviews are posted, improving the ratings (Melián-González et al., 2013).

Regarding the marketing decisions that the rural lodging establishment owner undertakes and their effects on eWOM. On one hand, more customer reviews are posted for the establishments with higher prices in the sample, suggesting that their customers, in comparison to those of the lower prices' establishments, get more involved and/or demanding, as a consequence of paying higher prices. Higher quality should accompany higher prices to avoid customer disappointment and negative comments. On the other hand, enhanced positioning on the infomediary's site, as a result of the establishments' allocation of more resources for advertising, also prompts more messages from customers. Establishments' owners should then spend more on advertising on the site to generate more reviews.

The number of eWOM messages offers a partial mediating variable in the links of high prices and high advertising expenditures with market perception and profitability, respectively. That is, some of the effect of marketing decisions on performance derives from the positive consequences of those decisions on eWOM. The direct effect results also show that price influences entrepreneur's market perception, apart from its indirect influence through eWOM

comments. Entrepreneurs may consider that price works as a cue that defines customers' perceived quality.

Higher advertising expenditures also are a good decision from a profit standpoint, because paying more to ensure a first-place listing on a specialized webpage or search engine directly influences profitability, beyond the indirect effect through eWOM. It is suggested that the enhanced position leads to higher volume of sales and profitability.

Rural lodging establishments, with their small size and limited resources, should prioritize the use of infomediaries as a medium of communication with their customers. Low cost tool for reaching a huge amount of potential consumers.

The results regarding the positive moderating role of the rural lodging establishment owner's experience indicate that experience is a valuable asset. This result suggests that experienced business owners acquire know-how about how to deal with positive and negative comments and provide adequate feedback to consumers and to solve those problems in the service delivery, detected through the customer comments, which improves the positive consequences derived from the number of online messages on profitability and entrepreneurs' satisfaction.

About the content of eWOM messages and not only the rating or number of messages, until now, at the time of evaluating the service provided, the owner of establishment a priori design a questionnaire with the categories to be evaluated by the customer, it is a mistake because some important issues for a specific customer could not be evaluated. In this way, if a category appears in our analysis indicates that variability exists, it means, it is an important issue to be known by the owner of the establishment to empower his competitive advantage, instead of those categories where is a consensus in the opinion of the customers, in a positive or negative way.

Market Perception is a significant explanatory variable of the other two performance factors: Profitability and Entrepreneurs Satisfaction, closing the circle of our proposed model, as an explanation of the process leading to a rural tourism business more profitable and motivator for the entrepreneur. This would be our main contribution, although we recognize that it will be necessary to conduct a model including the set of the identified relationships as SEM model, in order to publish this research.

We would like to remark some limitations of this study. First, the price used in this research is the price in Toprural's website in the moment the data was provided by them (July 2010). Therefore, it may be argued that the price in the moment the message was posted is different from the one in the moment of the study, what could bias the results. Second, the study addressed one example of ewom, that is, user-generated content on the Toprural website. Therefore, results cannot be generalized. Third, as the information comes only from Toprural, if the customer post his opinion in other blogs or forums we won't have this information, in this way, our information is the one posted in the infomediary but not necessarily the opinion of the market in general. Fourth, it is important to remember that only 10% of the database has a median score of 1-3 (dissatisfaction messages), it is important a more in-depth study of them. In addition, the representativeness of proactive entrepreneurs in the sample, only 1% of the eWOM messages had an answer from the owner of the establishment and a lot of them were defensive answers instead of apologizing or reflecting an intention of improving. Fifth, the accounting of messages and categories, we give the more importance to the categories that appears the most instead of giving more value to the consensus in the different categories, and as a consequence, the establishments that have more messages have more influence in the results. In the other hand, it could be a marginal representation of people leaving eWOM messages, maybe the information given by this little percentage of customers does not generate the information needed to influence performance; the owner of the establishment could know the opinion of the customer by other methods, like asking personally to the customer. It does not mean that the hypothesis is unreasonable, it just mean the low state of development of this area in rural tourism.

As future research, we could propose a new way to study eWOM messages, analyze not only what the message say, but also what the customer intended to say according to the way he expresses himself, the adjectives he use, if he speaks in first person, the grammatical context, etc., as well as the analysis of the answers of the establishment's owner, the inclusion of photos and videos by customers.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Questionnaire to measure performance.

1. In the last year, please indicate the status of your rural tourism establishment in the following aspects, from 1 to 7 (**1 = very bad, 7 = excellent**)

	Too bad				Excellent		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
a. Profitability							
b. Growth in the number of reservations							
c. Customer satisfaction							
d. Public image of your establishment (reputation)							

2. Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements related to your rural establishment (**1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree**)

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
a. I am satisfied with the income from this business.							
b. I am satisfied with the lifestyle this business affords me.							
c. My job is enjoyable.							
d. I welcome the social recognition that this business gives me.							
e. Overall, I am satisfied with this business.							