

A model of the relationships between the Big Five personality traits and the motivations to deliver word-of-mouth online

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The goal of this research is to establish the relationships between the Big Five personality traits – Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Openness – and the motivations to deliver electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) in the social media. The research method was based on a survey administered to 262 subjects, mostly students and young professionals. The personality traits that are most related to eWOM are Extraversion (that influences the need for social appreciation and Positive self-enhancement) and Openness to experience (that determines the concern for others and the desire to help good companies). Conscientiousness has a negative relationship with the tendency to Vent negative feelings about a bad buy, while Neuroticism has a slight influence on the motivation to get Social benefits and Self-enhancement. Knowing the prevalent personality traits and motivations of the eWOM transmitters, the company communication strategist can figure out the most proper ways to approach them. This paper is one of the few that thoroughly investigates the relationship between personality traits and the intrinsic motivations to write online reviews about companies and brands.

Key words: big five model, electronic word of mouth, word of mouth communication; personality traits, social media

Highlights:

- Personality traits are weakly related to eWOM motivations.
- There is a relationship between Extraversion and seeking Social benefits.
- Agreeableness has an important effect on the Concern for others.
- The relationship between Conscientiousness and word-of-mouth amount is inverse.
- There is little evidence for the relationship between Agreeableness and eWOM.

The *electronic word-of-mouth* (eWOM) refers to any consumer-to-consumer communication carried out via the Internet about an event, product, service, brand or company, (Kietzmann & Canhoto, 2013), especially on social media platforms like Facebook, Google+, Instagram, Twitter (Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdry, 2009). eWOM is considered as an essential part of the social media marketing concept, aimed to attract attention, encourage members to share their own experience and gain online traffic. Virtual community members share their interests, needs, wants, values and experiences (de Valck, Langerak, Verhoef, & Verlegh, 2007), which produces affinity and creates a bond. Their messages become a trusted source, other than the company or the brand. The remarkable communication capabilities offered by the social networks, coupled with the perceived credibility of the members' evaluations make the virtual community a powerful platform for exploiting consumer-to-consumer recommendations. This can be done, for example, through viral marketing campaigns, using online consumer-to-consumer referrals as a means for multiplying the popularity of a brand, product or company (Dobele, Lindgreen, Beverland, Vanhamme, & VanWijk, 2007; Smith, MacKenzie, Yang, Buchholz, & Darley, 2007). The amount of word-of-mouth accumulated on the Internet is collected and used by companies to develop and improve products and services and to adapt their marketing strategies (D'Andrea, Ferri, & Grifoni, 2012).

The electronic word-of-mouth can be expressed using either positive or negative statements: positive eWOM is associated with product recommendations, while negative eWOM is associated with complaining behavior (Sundaram, Mitra, & Webster, 1998). Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, and Gremler (2004) say that eWOM represents any positive or negative statement formulated by a potential, current or former customer about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people via the Internet. Companies use eWOM with a view to create new-media buzz, to be visible, to learn from the opinions of their target customers and to increase the customers trust (Saravanakumar & Suganthalakshmi, 2012). Electronic recommendations and evaluations are very good ways to have a product promoted via "consumer-to-consumer interactions" (Muntinga, Moorman, & Smit 2011). For example, a positive review could get free advertising in social media for a hotel, while a negative review for a poor service can harm the hotel's reputation (Kim, Mattila, & Baloglu, 2011). In conclusion, electronic word-of-mouth and other consumers' brand related activities on the Internet generate a both unique and credible online advertising for the companies.

Conceptual frameworks: eWOM motivations and personality traits

Our research goal is to determine the relationship between the personality of the social media users and their motivations to deliver word-of-mouth online. One of the first attempts to categorize the factors that drive people to create WOM belongs to Dichter (1966), who identified four main motivational factors of positive WOM: product involvement, self-involvement, other people involvement, and message involvement. Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard (1993) have added a negative dimension to WOM – dissonance reduction. This dimension refers to a reduction in cognitive dissonance by articulating a negative consumption experience following a purchase decision. A few years

later, Sundaram et al. (1998) proposed four positive motivational factors that generate word-of-mouth: altruism, product involvement, self-enhancement and desire to help the company, as well as four negative motivational factors: anxiety reduction, egoism, vengeance and advice-seeking.

Balasubramanian and Mahajan (2001) studied the integration of the economic and social activities in virtual communities, showing that this integration results in three distinct types of social interaction utility: focus-related utility, consumption utility and approval utility. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) extended Balasubramanian and Mahajan's framework by adding other two types of utility: moderator-related utility (the complaint made through a third party – a moderator – performs better for the member community) and homeostase utility (writing a comment in social networks helps the customer restore the emotional unbalance that comes from a positive or negative buying experience). Starting from a list of 27 motives of eWOM communication, Hennig-Thurau et al. defined *eight key motivational factors* for creating word-of-mouth in the online environment. They called these factors as follows: venting negative feelings, concern for other consumers, social benefits, economic incentives, helping the company, advice seeking, exerting power on the company and positive self enhancement.

Four of these motivations generate predominantly positive word-of-mouth: the desire to Help the company, the need for Social benefits, the need for Positive self-enhancement and the intention to get a Reward. Other three motivations mostly generate negative word-of-mouth: the need to Vent negative feelings, to Exert power upon the company, and to Get advice from friends. The last motivation, Concern for other people, can be included in both categories: a person who advises others to buy a good product delivers positive eWOM, while a person who warns others about a bad product creates negative eWOM. Though Hennig-Thurau's model was meant to be applied to the users of the Web-based opinion platforms, the motivations discovered as being relevant in that context are expected to be appropriate for studying the eWOM communication in the social media.

The predictors of the eWOM motivations in our model will be the subject's personality traits. We expect that personality influences the factors that motivate people to deliver eWOM, in the sense that people with different personality types will have different predominant reasons to write comments about products and services in the social media. Understanding the nature of these influences, brand communication professionals can conceive different strategies to stimulate social network members to produce eWOM.

In the scientific world, the Big Five model is now the most established and used model of personality. The Big Five dimensions that have been consistently and independently identified by various researchers, using various measurement methods (John & Srivastava, 1999). These dimensions are: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to experience. The Big Five personality traits have been used in several studies as predictors for the consumers' purchase behavior. For example, Mulyanegara, Tsarenko, and Anderson (2009) demonstrated that there are significant relationships between some of the Big Five personality traits and brand preference. More specifically, their results show that "those who are conscientious prefer trusted brands (...)

and extroverts prefer sociable brands. Also, those who have high scores on neuroticism have preferences towards trusted brands” (p. 244). Another study conducted by Matzler, Bidmon, and Grabner-Kräuter (2006) show that people with high scores on Extraversion and Openness seek hedonic values and tend to experience greater levels of brand affection.

Among the research endeavours that investigate the associations between the Big Five traits and the inclination to spread word-of-mouth, we can recall here the studies conducted by Doss and Carstens (2014) and Kautish (2010). Both of them focus on the influence of the personality traits on brand evangelism. Doss and Carstens found that Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Openness have a significant influence on brand evangelism, while the influence of Conscientiousness and Agreeableness could not be proved. Kautish considered two Big Five traits only – Extraversion and Openness – and got to some interesting results. He revealed that extraversion persons is positively related to brand evangelism, which is a “a more active and committed way of spreading positive opinions and trying fervently to persuade others to get engaged with the same brand” (Matzler et al., 2006, p. 27). However, this relationships is mediated by brand passion: an extraverted person will only talk about the brands they are passionate about. As for the openness, it does not directly affect brand evangelism according to Kautish. Another study, made by Hosseinali, Seyed, Reza, Seyed, and Elham (2014), showed a significant relationship between most Big Five personality traits (Extraversion, Agreeableness, Openness, and Neuroticism) and inclination to disseminate word-of-mouth.

Although the above studies clearly demonstrate that some people have higher propensity than others to talk about products and brands, depending on their individual characteristics, none of them approached the relationship between subjects’ personality traits and their particular *motivations* to generate word-of-mouth. We expect that different individual will have different primary reasons to give word of-mouth online. So the questions we are trying to answer in this paper are: do personality traits determine the eWOM drivers and if so, to what extent?

Method

Participants

In order to test our assumptions we e hused a convenience sample of Romanian students and young professionals. People in this category surf the Internet daily and are fervent users of the social networks, especially Facebook. Most of them look frequently for information about products and services and are keen to convey their buying experiences – either positive or negative – to their online friends. These are the reasons why we deemed that this population is representative for the goals of our study.

In total, 262 subjects were recruited (195 female, 67 male, $M_{age} = 24.59$, age range: 23–26). About 95% of the subjects access the social networks on a daily basis; 58% spend between 60 and 180 minutes in these networks every day, while 21% spend more than 180 minutes every day. As was expected, the favorite social network was Facebook (practically all the respondents mentioned it), followed by YouTube, Twitter, and Google Plus.

Materials and Procedure

To get the data required for carrying on this research, we have used a questionnaire divided into three parts. The first part contained the forty-four questions of the Big Five Index inventory, created by John, Donahue, and Kentle (1991). Sample items of this inventory include “I am someone who is talkative” (Extraversion), “I am someone who is helpful and unselfish to others” (Agreeableness), “I am someone who does a thorough job” (Conscientiousness), “I am someone who is depressed, blue” (Neuroticism), and “I am someone who is curious for different many things” (Openness). The second part consisted of the eWOM motivation inventory, formed by twenty-two statements, adapted from Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004). Each of the questions and statements used a five-point Likert scale, from “disagree strongly” to “agree strongly”. The individual items of this inventory are listed in Table 1. The last part of the questionnaire contained five demographic and behavioral questions (concerning gender, age, frequency of using the social networks, time spent daily in the social networks and the most favorite social networks of the respondents).

The questionnaire was administered online. All the questions were mandatory – the responders were not allowed to send the data unless they had checked all the answers. As a consequence, our final data set did not contain missing values.

Table 1
Word-of-mouth motivations inventory

Motivation	Item (<i>I write online comments on products and brands because...</i>)
Exert power upon the company	I believe that person in charge within the company will see my message and take measures
	I believe the company will be more willing to cooperate if I publicize the matter
	It is more convenient than writing or calling the company
	It has more power than writing a letter of complaint to the company
Vent negative feelings	The company harmed me, and now I will harm the company!
	I want to take vengeance upon the company
	Help me shake off frustrations about bad buys
	I like to get anger off my chest
Concern about others	I want to warn others of bad products
	I want to save others from having the same bad experiences as me
	I want to help others with my own positive experiences
	I want to give others the opportunity of buying a good product
Positive self-enhancement	This way I can express my joy about a good buy
	I feel good when I tell others about my buying successes
	I can tell others about a great experience
	I can show others that I am a clever customer
Social benefits	I believe a chat with like-minded people is a nice thing
	It is fun to communicate with people in your community
	I meet people this way
	My friends appreciate me if I communicate them my experiences about brands
Financial reward	I receive financial incentives
	I receive a reward for writing
Help the company	I am so satisfied with a company that I want to help it
	In my opinion, good companies should be supported
Seeking for advice	I hope to receive advice from others
	I expect to receive tips or support

Results

The main descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alphas and correlations between constructs for both Big Five personality traits and eWOM motivators are presented in Tables 2 and 3, respectively. All Cronbach's alphas are greater than .70, which indicates a good internal consistency for all the constructs.

Table 2

Main statistical indicators and correlations between personality traits

Constructs	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Alpha	Correlations				
Extraversion	3.59	0.70	.84	-				
Agreeableness	3.80	0.45	.72	.33**	-			
Conscientiousness	3.67	0.55	.75	.30**	.37**	-		
Neuroticism	2.93	0.64	.77	-.31**	-.37**	-.21**	-	
Openness	3.76	0.46	.72	.29**	.21**	.21**	-.75	-

Note. ** correlation is significant at .01 level.

Table 3

Main statistical indicators and correlations between eWOM motivations

Constructs	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Alpha	Correlations						
Exert power	2.97	0.90	.75	-						
Concern for others	3.97	0.77	.88	.31**	-					
Help the company	3.71	0.81	.78	.23**	.41**	-				
Self-enhancement	3.51	0.83	.84	.19**	.50**	.37**	-			
Social benefits	3.40	0.81	.82	.20**	.41**	.34**	.69**	-		
Vent neg. feelings	2.19	0.82	.74	.32**	.23**	.07	.26**	.25**	-	
Reward	2.52	1.00	.71	.29**	.13**	.27**	.40**	.43**	.24**	-
Seek advice	3.44	0.84	.71	.26**	.45**	.46**	.46**	.41**	.19**	.36**

Note. ** correlation is significant at .01 level.

The data analysis process comprised two steps. At the first step we have computed the aggregated scores for each personality trait and motivation factor, by averaging the scores of the individual items. At the second step we have fitted eight multiple regression models, using the variables created at the previous step. In each model the response variable was one of the motivation factors, while the independent variables were the Big Five traits. The goal of the regression models was to assess the relationships between personality traits and eWOM motivations.

The analyses were run with the IBM SPSS software, version 21. The goodness-of-fit indicators and the Durbin-Watson tests values for each model can be found in Table 4.

For all the regression models, the Durbin-Watson test values are comprised between 1.50 and 2.50, indicating the absence of autocorrelation in residuals.

Overall, the R squared values show a modest goodness-of-fit. The motivation factor that is most strongly influenced by the subjects' personality traits is the desire of getting social benefits ($R^2 = .055$), followed by the need of self enhancement ($R^2 = .044$). As assessed by the F tests, three motivation constructs are not at all explained by personality: exerting power over the companies, getting a financial reward and seeking other people's advice ($p > .05$).

Table 4
Summary indicators of the regression models

Model #	Response variable	R Squared	F test		Durbin-Watson
			Value	p	
1	Exert power	.00	0.36	.875	1.94
2	Concern for others	.03	2.46	.034	1.87
3	Help the company	.03	2.40	.038	2.16
4	Self-enhancement	.04	3.23	.008	1.77
5	Social benefits	.05	3.83	.002	1.89
6	Vent neg. feelings	.04	2.87	.015	1.83
7	Reward	.00	0.32	.901	2.09
8	Seek advice	.00	1.09	.366	1.96

Note. R Squared value for Seek advice is .002 but is rounded at .00 for consistency in data presentation.

The exact nature of the relationships between personality characteristics and motivation factors is revealed by inspecting the regression coefficients, presented in Table 5. We can notice that Concern for others and need to desire to Help the company are influenced by Openness only, while need for Self-enhancement and Social benefits are determined by two traits: Extraversion and Neuroticism. Furthermore, the urge to get negative feelings is significantly influenced by Conscientiousness only. This last relationship is negative: the lower the Conscientiousness, higher the tendency to Vent negative feelings. These results are extensively discussed in the next section.

Table 5
Regression coefficients and significance tests

Model #	Response variable	Independent variables	Coefficients	<i>t</i> test	
				Value	<i>p</i>
1	Exert power	Extraversion	.02	0.22	.827
		Agreeableness	.09	0.63	.529
		Conscientiousness	-.01	-0.04	.966
		Neuroticism	.03	0.31	.758
		Openness	.19	0.88	.380
2	Concern for others	Extraversion	-.09	-1.17	.242
		Agreeableness	.19	1.47	.142
		Conscientiousness	.04	0.43	.670
		Neuroticism	-.04	-0.49	.624
		Openness	.29*	2.56	.011
3	Help the company	Extraversion	-.01	-0.09	.930
		Agreeableness	.19	1.41	.159
		Conscientiousness	.05	0.47	.641
		Neuroticism	.03	0.29	.774
		Openness	.29*	2.45	.015
4	Self-enhancement	Extraversion	.18*	2.07	.039
		Agreeableness	.09	0.68	.518
		Conscientiousness	.19	1.78	.077
		Neuroticism	.25**	2.72	.007
		Openness	.04	0.30	.766
5	Social benefits	Extraversion	.24**	2.89	.004
		Agreeableness	.19	1.48	.140
		Conscientiousness	.08	0.77	.443
		Neuroticism	.20*	2.47	.014
		Openness	.03	0.29	.771
6	Vent negative feelings	Extraversion	.11	1.32	.189
		Agreeableness	-.14	-1.02	.310
		Conscientiousness	-.23*	-2.23	.027
		Neuroticism	.16	1.81	.072
		Openness	.01	0.08	.938
7	Reward	Extraversion	.01	0.89	.376
		Agreeableness	-.15	-0.91	.364
		Conscientiousness	.05	0.41	.682
		Neuroticism	.03	0.23	.814
		Openness	-.01	-0.04	.969
8	Seek advice	Extraversion	-.01	-0.12	.907
		Agreeableness	.12	0.88	.381
		Conscientiousness	.14	1.33	.184
		Neuroticism	.01	0.02	.981
		Openness	.09	0.72	.470

Note. * the coefficient is significant at .05 level; ** the coefficient is significant at .01 level.

* Values of coefficients between variables Exert Power and Conscientiousness, Help the company and Extraversion, Vent negative feelings and Openness, Reward and Openness, and Seek advice and Openness are -.005, -.007, .009, -.006, .002, respectively, but are rounded at .01 for consistency in data presentation.

Discussion

Our research demonstrates that the influence of some personality traits on the eWOM motivations is significant, albeit not very large. This could be explained by the fact that the key eWOM antecedents are the same for all customers, without depending strongly on their personality traits. The literature shows that these antecedents are customer satisfaction, customer trust and customer commitment with the brand (Bodo & Hyde, 2013). Therefore, the motivations to deliver eWOM will be mostly related to these antecedents (for example, satisfied customers would recommend their brands to others while dissatisfied customers would warn their online friends about their experiences). To some extent, a customer's personal characteristics can make some eWOM motivations predominate over others. Our research findings highlight the most important motivations for each of the Big Five personality traits.

When people with high scores on Extraversion provide eWOM, they are mainly motivated by the need of Self-enhancement and Social benefits. This was to be expected: extraverted persons want to draw attention to themselves, so they feel good if they know their online friends appreciate them. For them, giving product recommendations in the social networks is a mean to obtain self-worth and self-esteem. The open people also present two motivations to produce eWOM: desire to help companies and concern about other people. Persons with high scores on Openness like novelty, are imaginative, inspirational and often visionary (McCrae & John, 1992). Other facet of Openness is emotionality: open people tend to be aware of their emotions and express them straightforwardly. These characteristics could explain the inclination of open people to support businesses that offer high quality products, on the one hand, and to communicate their experiences related to products, on the other hand.

As we have mentioned earlier in this paper, Social benefits, Self-enhancement and Helping companies are drivers that generate mostly positive word of mouth. In consequence, extroverted and open people will predominantly give positive eWOM.

Neurotic people are motivated to provide eWOM by the same drivers as extrovert people: getting social benefits and Positive self-enhancement. However, in their case the explanation is different. Neurotic persons have the predisposition to experience negative feelings, so other people's admiration and esteem help them counterweigh their bad mood. Furthermore, that there may be a slight tendency that neurotic people provide negative word-of-mouth for the need of venting negative feelings when they are unhappy with a purchase. The regression coefficient for this relationship is very close to significance ($p = .072$). Based on the results of Hosseinali et al. (2014), who discovered a positive significant relationship between neuroticism and propensity to provide eWOM, we can suspect that many neurotic persons talk about bad happenings with products and companies just because feel the urge to communicate their anger to friends in social networks. Therefore, the connection between Neuroticism and need to Vent negative feelings may deserve further exploration.

The motivation of expressing negative feelings is also present at the people who score low on Conscientiousness. These people tend to act under impulse, saying or doing the first thing that comes to mind, without considering the consequences of their actions or looking for better alternatives. That is why there are bigger chances that they post negative comments when they are really disappointed by a product or a company. On the contrary, it is expected that conscientious people will refrain from complaining about bad product online; they will find more effective ways to spend their time. (It is worth to observe that Conscientiousness does not influence any another motivation, except for the propensity to vent negative feelings. So it is likely that conscientious people do not produce a great amount of word-of-mouth online, either positive or negative).

Interestingly, the Agreeableness does not significantly influence any motivation to generate eWOM. This result is consistent with those obtained by Doss and Carstens (2014) and Vazifehdost, Akbari, and Charsted (2012), who show that Agreeableness does not influence the tendency to talk about brands. In conclusion, people do not provide word-of-mouth just because they are kind and altruistic, but because of the personal recompenses they could get by engaging in eWOM activities online – increased self-esteem and improved social relationships.

Finally, there are three eWOM drivers that are not affected by people's personality traits: exerting power on the companies, getting financial rewards and seeking for friends' advice. Therefore, any person can present one of these motivations at some point in time, regardless of his or her personality traits.

Limitations and further research

This research suffers from a couple of limitations. First, we used the convenience sampling method because it was near on impossible to get a list of our population of study in order to apply a probability sampling. This fact could affect the generalizability of our findings. However, the students and young professionals that formed our sample are highly representative for the population of social network members: they are very active in the social media environment and many of them engage in conversations about companies and brands online. This strength overcomes the sampling issues and makes us confident that our results closely reflect the actual relationships associations between the variables of study. Second, the survey was administered to Romanian subjects only, which may render our results somewhat less generalizable. Further research could investigate the relationship between eWOM motivations and personality traits on multicultural basis. Since online word-of-mouth is a global phenomenon, studying the eWOM motivations in different countries and cultures would be an appealing research issue.

Conclusions and managerial implications

Word-of-mouth have always influenced the consumers' behavior and decision-making. Social media is tremendously increasing this influence by allowing anyone to publicly express their opinions about brands and be "heard"

by hundreds or even thousands of people. Companies should take advantage of this immense communication flow and generate positive word-of-mouth in the social networks. Certainly, the cornerstone of any positive eWOM is offering a great product or service that exceeds customers' expectations. The next step is to convert the satisfied customers into influencers who will spread the word about the product in the social media. Understanding the predominant personality traits and motivations of these potential influencers can suggest the most appropriate ways to approach them. As our findings show, people will not talk about a good brand just because they are nice and want to help (Agreeableness does not impact the eWOM motivations). As our paper show, the most important characteristics of the people that deliver positive word-of-mouth online are Extraversion and Openness to experience. We can suggest here two ways to transform these customers into net promoters. The first way is to create a bright, upbeat brand image. Extraverted people are exuberant, enthusiastic and always looking for excitement, so they will be eager to talk about a brand that conveys happiness, optimism and enthusiasm. The second way is to develop an unique, original, unconventional story behind the brand, because, according to Kautish (2010), extraverted people talk especially about the brands that fascinate them. This story would be appealing for the people with high Openness to experience, because these people are curious, open to unusual ideas and responsive to novelty. By offering worthy conversation topics for the social media, the company will help its influencers get the rewards they crave – especially social acknowledgement and great self-esteem – while generating a constant stream of free and credible advertising for its brands.

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Model odnosa Velikih pet crta ličnosti i motivacije za ostavljanjem onlajn komentara o proizvodima i uslugama

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Cilj ovog istraživanja je da se utvrdi odnos između Velikih pet crta ličnosti – ekstraverzije, saradljivosti, savesnosti, neuroticizma i otvorenosti za iskustvo i motivacije za ostavljanjem komentara o proizvodima i uslugama (eng. *electronic word-of-mouth*) na društvenim mrežama. Istraživanje anketnog tipa je sprovedeno na uzroku od 262 ispitanika koji su uglavnom bili studenti i mladi profesionalci. Crte ličnosti koje su najviše povezane sa onlajn komentarisanjem proizvoda i usluga su ekstraverzija (koja utiče na potrebu da se bude cenjen u društvu i na pozitivno samoosnaživanje) i otvorenost za iskustvo (koja određuje brigu za druge i želju da se pomogne dobrim preduzećima). Savesnost je negativno povezana sa tendencijom da se ventiliraju negativna osećanja u vezi sa lošom kupovinom, dok neuroticizam ima sitan uticaj na motivaciju da se ostvare društvene koristi i na samoosnaživanje. Komunikacioni strateg preduzeća može smisliti najadekvatnije načine da priđe ljudima koji su skloni ostavljanju onlajn komentara o proizvodima i uslugama ako poznaje njihove najizraženije crte ličnosti i motive. Ovaj rad je jedan od retkih koji se temeljno bave odnosom crta ličnosti i intrinzičke motivacije da se pišu onlajn recenzije preduzeća i brendova.

Ključne reči: Model Velikih pet, elektronski komentari, elektronska komunikacija, crte ličnosti, društveni mediji

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