Consumer Behaviour in Growth Hacking: Developing and Validating the Shareability Construct

Highlights

- Five sub-dimensions of Growth Hacking Virality.
- Scale development for consumer Growth Hacking Shareability.
- SHPV is a positive consumer willingness to share.
- SHMIS is a consumer propensity to spread non-verified information.
- SHNV has a negative consumer inclination to share.

Abstract

Due to the explosion of companies' social data and the ongoing digital transformation, growth hacking has emerged as a process of rapid experimentation to achieve sustainable business growth. This paper takes a consumer behaviour approach to explore the organic virality of growth hacking. We examine growth hacking through the lens of Social Identity and Self-Expansion theories, exploring how consumers' motivation in sharing content are determined by social belonging and self-expansion desires. Through a mixed-methods approach, we identify essential dimensions of organic virality resulting from growth hacking tactics, including Shareability, attitude towards the brand, fear of missing out, need for affiliation and willingness to buy/use. It zooms into developing the Shareability construct, uncovering dimensions such as word-of-mouth, referrals, recommendations, sharing attitudes and disinformation. We contribute to growth hacking research by developing and validating the Shareability scale as a reliable tool to measure consumers' propensity towards disseminating growth hacking content, providing actionable implications for growth hackers.

Keywords

Growth Hacking, Consumer Behaviour, Organic Virality, Shareability Construct, Scale Development, CFA.

1. Introduction

In the era of information overload, where every like, comment, and share contribute to the social data explosion (De Maio et al., 2019), sharing information - including reviews, ratings, recommendations, resources, advice, tips, and updates - has become the norm rather than the exception (Belk, 2010). While face-to-face sharing remains influential (ShabbirHusain & Varshney, 2022), a significant portion of social interactions now transpire through virtual mediums, representing a novel development in human connections (Bruno et al., 2023). This shift paves the way for organic virality to become the holy grail of marketers (Akpinar & Berger, 2017). The rise of consumer sharing and the increasing prominence of virality present significant opportunities and challenges (Rosário & Dias, 2023). To capitalise on these for growth, Sean Ellis developed the concept of growth hacking (Bargoni et al., 2023).

In an interview with Holiday (2017), Ellis defined growth hacking as the *"process of rapid experimentation across the full customer journey to accelerate customer and revenue growth*". He explains that success comes from quick learning through experimentation rather than mimicking the growth hacking strategies of companies like Dropbox, Airbnb, Amazon, Netflix, Uber, and Spotify (Bohnsack & Leisner, 2019). Instead, as Ellis argues, growth emerges from an experimentation learning mindset and iterative testing, starting with the product-market fit ("*you can't growth hack your way out of a bad product*") and moving beyond the conventional marketing playbook (Adhiya, 2020; Ellis & Brown, 2017). Despite its increasing popularity among practitioners (e.g., hundreds of "growth hacker" job posts on LinkedIn), the academic community has been slow in examining its theoretical and practical implications (Bargoni et al., 2023; Feiz et al., 2021). The concept remains dynamic and continuously adapted as more start-ups scale and mature companies transition to growth phases, emphasising the need for further research.

Given the newness and evolving nature of growth hacking, studies focus more on the functional and technical processes and capabilities, than on understanding consumer behaviour. Bohnsack and Leisner (2019) generate the growth hacking taxonomy; Troisi et al. (2020) analyse the use of big data in growth hacking; Feiz et al. (2021) suggest the growth hacking funnel; and Bargoni et al. (2024b) investigate big data analytics, firm strategic orientation, coding, and automation as the three pillars of growth hacking strategic capabilities. These studies confirm that, in contrast to traditional business models, companies adopting the growth hacking mindset prioritise viral growth through iterative data-driven experimentation. What differentiates successful growth hacking companies is the intensity and speed in which they experiment and optimise every customer interaction for continuous

improvement, virality and growth. Therefore, while prior research has been pivotal in advancing the development and implementation of growth hacking, the absence of consumer-focused research limits our understanding of the psychological and behavioural factors which ultimately determine the viral success or failure of growth hacking tactics across markets.

As Bargoni et al. (2024b) explain, boosting virality is an essential step in the growth hacking process, where growth hackers aim to create lasting behavioural traces which persist after a purchase. Despite the evident outcomes of successful growth hacking (e.g., Uber, see Dalaman, 2017) and the emphasis on the critical role of virality (Bargoni et al., 2023), a consumer behaviour approach towards growth hacking's organic virality is missing, yet valuable, for the enhancement of the concept. Gaining a deeper knowledge of the factors and components of consumer shareability, which accumulate to organic virality, is essential for growth hackers to improve the precision and effectiveness of their iterations and their data-driven experiments for effective and targeted consumer acquisition, activation, and engagement.

Organic virality relies heavily on consumers actively sharing information, experiences, and recommendations, which amplifies reach and engagement beyond what traditional advertising and paid promotions can achieve. Amidst the rapid dissemination of misinformation (Islam et al., 2020), the prevalence of internet fraud (Norris et al., 2019), information overload (Al-Youzbaky et al., 2022), and intrusive, annoying ads (Belanche, 2019), consumers are experiencing increased fatigue and distrust, particularly for company-generated messages. Consequently, they exercise greater caution when registering, signing up, or interacting with products and services (Ramirez et al., 2002; Acquisti et al., 2017), seeking validation of the perceived value from growth hacking companies. In this context, understanding how consumers perceive and interact with growth hacking tactics emerges as a critical research gap.

Research confirms that consumers trust information shared via word-of-mouth (WOM), referrals, reviews, and recommendations by peers rather than firm promotions (Mahmud et al., 2024). For growth hacking to be successful, it must enable consumers to share quickly and effortlessly through affordances and viral features (Bargoni et al., 2023, 2024b), ensuring its sustainability. It must account for the social and psychological factors influencing consumers' behaviour regarding Shareability, which should be thoroughly examined in the literature. We address the research gap by drawing on the growth hacking taxonomy and zooming in its organic virality component (Bohnsack & Liesner, 2019). Our research addresses the following research questions:

R.Q.1. What are the main dimensions associated with consumer behaviour in the Growth Hacking Virality?
R.Q.2. What are the Shareability factor's main dimensions associated with consumer behaviour in the Growth Hacking Virality?
R.Q.3. How can we operationalise Shareability associated with consumer behaviour in the Growth Hacking Virality?

The crucial role of organic virality and its benefits is examined in relation to growth hacking within the domain of networked communication and spontaneous sharing. Shareability is explored through the lens of Self-Expansion and Social Identity theories. These theories combine psychological and sociological mechanisms to explain how communal interaction and identity formation influence consumers' attitudes toward sharing. They highlight how individuals' perceptions of sharing are shaped by their affiliations to social groups and their desire for self-expansion and social recognition. The originality of this research lies in exploring consumers' perceptions and attitudes toward firms implementing growth hacking strategies by developing the shareability growth hacking construct. Given the novelty of the research, we adopt an iterative approach, organising it into two main studies. In Study 1, we examine the key themes of growth hacking from consumer perceptions using content and thematic analysis based on a survey with 59 participants and open-ended questions. In study 2, we apply the five resulting themes to a novel shareability construct and develop a survey involving 315 individuals. Therefore, we validate the novel construct through an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

We contribute to the existing research on growth hacking in two ways. First, our research advances the theoretical understanding by shifting the focus to consumer perceptions of growth hacking, developing the shareability scale, and identifying critical dimensions, such as psychological factors, influencing consumer behaviour. Given that growth hacking is still at its developmental stage and is mainly investigated through internal processes, this study draws attention to consumer attitudes towards companies implementing growth hacking tactics. The development of the growth hacking shareability scale provides a robust tool capturing factors in positive or negative likelihood to share. This scale delivers a deeper understanding of the consumer's role in organic virality, bridging a significant gap in the growth hacking literature. Second, our research provides actionable insights for practitioners to tailor growth hacking tactics by leveraging psychological triggers in consumer shareability, building customer relationships, and mitigating risks of misinformation to protect brand reputation. By incorporating the consumer shareability factors into the data-driven experimentation

process, growth hacking companies can refine their systematic approach and enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of their virality strategies in achieving sustainable growth.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Consumer Behaviour and Growth Hacking

Understanding how consumers interact with the world around them and how they respond to brands – perceive, feel, and engage – (Keller, 2020) forms the basis for all marketing and strategic decisions (Hawkins et al., 2007). Consumer behaviour theories explore the psychological, social, and economic factors that shape and influence decision-making processes (Solomon, 2020). The approaches in consumer research have evolved from the model of irrational consumer (Dichter, 1964), problem solver (Asam & Bucklin, 1973) and collective decision-maker (Zaichkowsky, 1991) to today's informed and empowered consumer (Auh et al., 2019) influenced by technological advancements, social and cultural factors (Zhang & Benyoucef, 2016). The multiplicity, multiplexity and dynamism of these factors require companies to continuously learn, experiment and combine technologies to stay relevant, innovate and grow (Kang et al., 2019).

Growth hacking is founded on the idea of rapid experimentation aimed to add value to consumers (Ellis & Brown, 2017). It involves rapidly, iteratively, and systematically testing data-driven strategies across the entire consumer journey (Bargoni et al., 2023). This approach uses lean and budget-conscious techniques to acquire and retain an active user base, increase sales, and grow business (Cavallo et al., 2023). Growth hacking aligns closely with consumer behaviour theories as it seeks to understand and influence user engagement and actions across different stages of the consumer lifecycle. The following paragraphs will define key terms about growth hacking – such as rapid, iterative, systematic, data-driven, lean, and budget-conscious techniques – and explain how they relate to consumer behaviour.

Rapid: fast wins, fast failures. The emphasis on rapid experimentation regards fast wins and fast failures since the speed of understanding what consumers value and share is just as crucial as understanding what they do not (Adhiya, 2020). Fast wins include introducing a new feature that quickly gains virality, providing immediate feedback to reinforce consumer attitudes, and aiding growth hackers in exploring new and bolder experiments (Ghosh et al., 2020). Fast failures, like new interface designs' introductions, potentially confusing for users, are essential for gaining valuable

insights into consumer experience and market readiness (Carmeli & Dothan, 2017). However, the learning process can be prolonged in specific business functions, such as product development, while valuable customer insights are derived after launch (Radeka, 2017). Growth hacking addresses this by developing a fast wins/fails learning mindset based on consumer behaviour data that creates an innovative experimentation ecosystem (Troisi et al., 2020).

Iterative: *training a muscle*. Growth hacking's experimentation can be associated with developing muscle strength: it may initially cause discomfort and require navigating a learning curve. Iteration cycles involve progressive adjustments to improve the process and generate innovative ideas (Feiz et al., 2021), assisted by digitalisation (Škare & Soriano, 2021). Companies can refine their messaging and engagement strategies by iterating on experiments to better align with how consumers process and respond to information. However, an extensive number of iterations without a clear focus may slow down the progress. Therefore, growth hacking companies could maintain a searchable central repository of iterations, including achievements, setbacks, customer reactions and feedback (GrowthHackers.com, 2024). Artificial Intelligence (AI) can potentially improve processes by automating data categorisation and retrieval. Additionally, machine learning algorithms can identify patterns over iterative cycles (Deloitte Insights, 2023) and predictive insights (Ucar et al., 2024), as well as detect anomalies or deviations (Shahzad et al., 2022). This trend will assist in streamlining the iterative cycle and prevent redundant efforts.

Systematic: a big "magical" formula? There is rarely one big hack that solves all problems; instead, it is about perpetually adding components of consumer value in the process, ultimately leading to a big win (Adhiya, 2020). As such, growth hacking has evolved from a single experiment to a systematic approach by performing structured tests and trials to confirm hypotheses (Bargoni et al., 2024a). The systematic perspective involves methodical data collection and rigorous analysis, uncovering hidden clues or underlying structures (De Villiers, 2010; Papadopoulos & Iatridou, 2010). By systematically gathering and analysing data, growth hackers can tailor their strategies to meet consumer needs more effectively. Although the systematic approach may introduce procedural overhead, it typically involves small-scale experiments conducted by cross-functional teams within a larger framework of high-impact activities focused on the customer (Love & Roper, 2009). This approach also supports including diverse and skilled individuals within growth hacking teams (Bargoni et al., 2024b).

Data-driven: *transforming data into knowledge*. Data are viewed as strategic assets in data-driven experimentation, particularly customer engagement and feedback data. By prioritising data over intuition (Brynjolfsson et al., 2011), growth hackers rely on factual insights instead of emotions (Shamim et al., 2019). This approach requires nurturing an innovation-centric culture and meticulous data management - a dynamic process involving data collection, extraction, integration, and analysis (Troisi et al., 2020). Therefore, while big data provide actionable ideas (Santoro et al., 2019), growth hackers may face challenges managing vast amounts of information and protecting consumer privacy. Big data analytics, such as coding, automation, and AI, can assist in data extraction and interpretation (Troisi et al., 2020), where traceable marketing tools and analytics can be valuable sources of consumer behaviour data (Bargoni et al., 2024a). However, limitations persist, especially in collecting data on the psychological and social aspects of consumer behaviour due to noisy, unreliable, or incomplete consumer social media data (Stieglitz et al., 2018).

Lean and budget-conscious techniques: optimising resources. According to Bohnsack and Liesner (2019), the lean startup philosophy emphasises rapid experimentation that is not highly resource-intensive, thereby reducing development costs. By emphasising rapid prototyping, iterative testing, and continuous feedback, lean techniques help growth hackers determine the most effective strategies for influencing consumer behaviour without extensive expenditure (Olsen, 2015). Budget-conscious techniques involve prioritising high-impact, low-cost initiatives, such as leveraging social media, content marketing, and organic search optimisation (Kraus et al., 2019). These techniques allow businesses to experiment based on consumer behaviour insights without overextending their resources. When effectively implemented, these strategies can lead to growth hackings' organic virality, where consumers naturally share and promote products within their social networks, leading to fast scalability and growth.

2.2. Organic Virality in Growth Hacking

Bohnsack and Liesner (2019) developed the growth hacking taxonomy, a structured classification system presented as a strategic toolbox for growth hackers across the consumer lifecycle stages: acquisition, activation, revenue, retention, and referral. The referral stage focuses on consumers sharing experiences and recommending to others, leading to organic virality (Bohnsack & Liesner, 2019). However, organic virality in growth hacking needs a precise definition and investigation. Unlike incentivised virality, which relies on rewards and incentives to encourage referrals, organic virality is driven by genuine user engagement and willingness to share experiences, reviews, recommendations, or content from growth hacking companies.

The theoretical basis of organic virality can be explored through Sampson's (2012) distinctions between different kinds of virality in the age of networks by reflecting on the evolution of contagion theory. This work helps delineate how organic virality operates within the broader context of networked communication and spontaneous information dissemination. Sampson (2012) explains that there are two kinds of virality: molar virality and molecular virality. Molar virality is defined as a phenomenon anchored in the organisational and systemic exertion of social power, involving widespread controlled dissemination of ideas and practices via institutional mechanisms. Molecular virality is the spontaneous, incidental, and unplanned spread of information via micro-level events and emotional contagion.

For example, the "ice bucket challenge" became viral in the summer of 2014 and raised billions for the ALS Association (Steel, 2014). It began as a molar virality concept driven by the ALS Association through media coverage and marketing campaigns; however, it quickly spread, exhibiting elements of molecular virality via spontaneous participation and user-generated content (Pressgrove et al., 2018). Therefore, while viral messages may be linked to strategic promotions, they also leverage organic virality by capitalising on genuine user engagement, widespread participation, and network effects. Incentivised and organic virality are distinct yet intertwined, emphasising social contagion and network effects via referrals (Bohnsack & Liesner, 2019). In growth hacking, organic virality can be understood as molecular virality involving the natural and unprompted content spread for growth hacking companies, often driven by users' personal experiences and genuine interest. Thus, another critical challenge for growth hackers is effectively drawing on these spontaneous and unplanned spreads of information, which require a deep understanding of consumer behaviour as well as the social and emotional dynamics.

Bargoni et al. (2023) identify virality as a critical phase in the growth hacking process, which includes achieving product-market fit, leading growth hacking efforts, boosting virality, and focusing on retention and optimisation. Within this framework, organic virality is integral to the growth hacking process due to its valuable benefits, such as cost-effectiveness, authenticity and trust, network effects and enhanced user content. User-generated content and word-of-mouth enable broad dissemination without significant marketing expenditure (Ramirez et al., 2018), supporting rapid and budget-conscious growth hacking. Companies can utilise resources more efficiently by reducing reliance on paid advertising while achieving broad reach and consumer engagement. However, in contrast to paid and targeted promotions, a significant challenge lies in maintaining the accuracy of organic content (Rosario et al., 2020), which is often outside the control of growth hackers. Therefore, the need to

enhance our understanding of the dimensions related to consumer behaviour in organic virality further highlights the challenges this research aims to address.

Content shared organically by consumers, such as social media posts, unboxing videos, and testimonials, is often perceived as more genuine and trustworthy than sponsored campaigns. Evidence confirms that consumers attribute higher reliability to information received from peers via word-of-mouth, referrals, and recommendations rather than company-generated messages (Godes & Mayzlin, 2005; Pescher et al., 2014; Ramirez et al., 2018; Shabbir-Husain & Varshney, 2022). Growth hacking has been associated with unethical strategies and controversial tactics, such as deceiving individuals into subscribing or paying for products/services (Adhiya, 2020). As consumers become increasingly cautious of misinformation (Islam et al., 2020), they exercise greater discretion when signing up or engaging with products and services (Acquisti et al., 2017), seeking to authenticate the value from growth hacking companies. Therefore, it is critical to investigate how consumers perceive information (or misinformation), whether it originates from growth hacking companies or is spread organically by other consumers.

Authentic user recommendations based on personal use and experience contribute towards a credible and relatable brand image, fostering deeper connections with the audience (Ramirez et al., 2018). This trust can lead to higher engagement and conversion rates, greater willingness to buy, and a deeper propensity to build loyalty (Racherla et al., 2012; ShabbirHusain & Varshney, 2022). Furthermore, the perceived value of a product or service increases as more people use and share it, creating a cumulative growth cycle (Xu et al., 2015). This interplay between user engagement and network effects highlights the critical role of experimentation, where iterative refining to better align with market demands leads to enhanced relevance and value.

Companies implementing growth hacking tactics through an effective product-market fit may gain positive brand attitudes from consumers, who perceive them as dynamic and responsive to their evolving needs. Achieving product-market fit is crucial for organic virality. It ensures the product meets the target market's demands, leading to high user satisfaction and naturally encouraging word-of-mouth referrals (Adhiya, 2020; Ellis & Brown, 2017). This strong alignment with consumer needs creates a loyal customer base that advocates for the brand through spontaneous and genuine user interactions (Xu et al., 2015). For growth hackers, continuously experimenting and improving the product-market fit given dynamic consumer behaviour can foster brand linking, which can evolve into brand love. Brand love refers to the emotional attachment and loyalty that consumers develop

towards a brand, often resulting in self-brand integration, resistance to negative information about the brand, and long-lasting relationships (Batra et al., 2012).

While product-market fit creates the basis for organic virality with benefits such as cost-effectiveness, credibility, trust, network effects and enriched user-generated content, little is known about its dimensions and determinants from a consumer behaviour perspective for growth hacking companies. In line with the interplay between molar and molecular virality, growth hackers focus on engineering virality by setting viral features into the product and consumer experience (Bargoni et al., 2023), while organic virality occurs through lasting behavioural traces characterised by the natural and unprompted sharing (Berger & Milkman, 2017). To fully understand the underlying patterns of consumer behaviour driving organic virality, it is essential to investigate the cognitive and social triggers for sharing information about growth hacking companies.

2.3. Shareability in Growth Hacking

The concept of "sharing with others" has been explored in sociology, psychology, cognitive science, and computer science. We synthesise the concept of sharing across these fields to understand the theoretical foundations of Shareability in consumer behaviour throughout the consumer lifecycle in growth hacking companies.

Shareability in Sociology: a communal act. In sociology, shareability is deeply rooted in the communal nature of human interactions. Turner et al. (2001) suggest how sociology itself emerged from peoples' inherent inclination for shared experiences and companionship (a word originating with the Latin "companionem" - one who breaks bread with another), reflecting the bonding that occurs when people engage in shared rituals. Sharing with family members, friends, co-workers, and neighbours strengthens trust and reinforces social bonds. Belk (2010) highlight that sharing creates a sense of connection fundamentally different from economic exchanges. Douglas and Isherwood (1979) speculate on the rarity of solitary behaviours compared to the universal human desire for shared experiences. They suggest that most people prefer to engage in communal activities essential for building and sustaining social bonds. As such, Shareability in sociology provides a framework for understanding the importance of communal acts in maintaining group belonging and social cohesion.

Shareability in Cognitive Science and Psychology: information contagion. According to Freyd (1983), the Shareability theory focuses on how people exchange thoughts and ideas with one another, and once shared, they begin to take on a specific structure and pattern. Freyd (1983, p. 200) further elaborates that *"shareability predicts that a description will approach stability as it spreads"*.

Particularly referring to new information and shared knowledge, the baseline is that *"successfully shared knowledge spreads from person to person (contagion), but that newly introduced knowledge tends to change so that it approaches a steady state that minimises information loss as it spreads"* (Freyd, 1983, p. 200). For instance, if we consider language as a collection of words and meanings, a new word or a new meaning will typically align or integrate into the language's existing structure through similarities to dimensional values of existing words or meanings shared among people.

This conceptualisation is adjacent to foundations in the psychology of group dynamics (Lewin, 1947), where certain aspects of human behaviour only occur (and consistently occur) when people are in the presence of other people. Therefore, specific behaviours manifest exclusively within group settings stemming from peoples' group interactions. Within a society of abundance, where life is not perceived as a zero-sum game (Foster, 1969), the more people engage with sharing, the more possibilities and benefits expand (Freyd, 1983). However, in its contemporary sense, the Internet has redefined sharing, where information is seen as a commodity and a tradable asset. It has paved the way for a new era of experience and information sharing that millions have rapidly adopted (Belk, 2010).

Shareability in Computer Science: human-machine interface. Bruno et al. (2023) explore Shareability from a human-machine interface perspective and define Shareability as *"the attribute that captures to what extent the interface allows, encourages and supports sharing experiences by its users"* (p. 4). They propose a conceptualisation of Shareability as the subset of three interface functionalities: usability associated with sharing – sharing of content with peers in a way that is effective and prompt; sharing related affordances – characteristics which naturally encourage users to share content; and support to shared availability – a sensorimotor context incorporating perceptual data on displayed content user interactions with it. Bargoni et al. (2023) explain that growth hackers can activate user interface affordances to integrate Shareability and virality, which are then constantly readapted within the itinerary nature of growth hacking, enabling them to develop international dynamic marketing capabilities.

Shareability in Consumer Behaviour. We approach Shareability from a consumer behaviour perspective in digital and offline contexts for companies implementing growth hacking strategies. Shareability in this context is explored through the lens of Self-Expansion and Social Identity theories underpinned by the psychological and sociological mechanisms of identity formation and communal interaction. From a psychological standpoint, the alignment with how people (consumers) share knowledge and learning within their networks and, how they incorporate entities (brands) into self-

concept, reflects the principles of Self-expansion theory (Mittal, 2006). Sociological insights on communal bonds parallel Social Identity theory, where group belonging and shared experiences drive consumer behaviours (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). In the context of growth hacking, we perceive that Shareability enables individuals to express their personal and group identity in viral brand communities (Social Identity) and empowers them to pursue personal enhancement by connecting themselves with innovative, value-adding offerings and sharing these within their networks and professional circles (Self-expansion).

The Social Identity theory posits that all individuals uphold a personal identity (self-image) and reinforce their self-perception by identifying and sharing within social groups (Abrams & Hogg, 1990). Consumers prefer brands that mirror their self-image, driven by self-identity incentives, such as self-consistency and self-esteem (Sirgy, 1982; Sirgy et al., 1997). Thus, Shareability becomes a vehicle for group belonging, particularly in viral brand networks. Tapping into this alignment is critical for growth hacking companies to enhance growth via consumer advocacy. Individual self-expressiveness pertains to consumers' perception of a product/service's capacity to share personal and group identity dimensions of esteem (Thorbjørnsen et al., 2007; Taylor et al., 2012), such as keeping up with the latest trends and viral communities. For example, studies indicate that consumers exhibit higher Shareability towards brands that resonate with their social identities, e.g., sustainability-driven brands (Dabija et al., 2019). However, individuals have multiple and intersecting identities with complex and dynamic interactions forming their behaviours (White et al., 2019), highlighting the role of iterative experimentation in aligning product-market fit to enhance organic sharing and growth.

The Self-expansion theory suggests that individuals inherently seek self-expansion and a desire to integrate others (in this case, brands, or personal connections) into their sense of "self" (Aron et al., 1992) and given personal development goals and life projects (Mittal, 2006). As the relationships between the self and the brand progress, driven by personal benefits and positive brand experiences in self-enhancement, the connection leads to cognitive reorganisation, expanding the self to incorporate the entity (Park et al., 2010). Sharing through word-of-mouth, recommendations or referrals is driven by the individual's self-expansion, stemming from a sense of unity with the brand and the inclination to perceive the brand's assets as their own (Mittal, 2006). For example, research on self-expansion highlights that consumers' eagerness for social influence and sharing (Butcher et al., 2017) by purchasing from innovative, viral, or premium brands (Kim et al., 2021) enhance a sense of self-growth and signal their status to others (Mundel et al., 2017; de Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019).

For growth hacking companies, understanding and leveraging both self-expansion and social identity is crucial as it drives Shareability and organic virality (examples in Appendix A).

Insights derived from consumer behaviour concerning organic virality and Shareability can provide feedback to the system in informing iterative improvements and optimise affordances. Therefore, growth hacking companies must understand the factors and components activating consumer dissemination and leading to the organic virality of the brand, incorporating this valuable information into their experimentation processes. A deeper understanding of the factors and components of Shareability can enrich consumer data used in data-driven decision-making. This enables growth hackers to refine their systematic approaches, increase the precision and effectiveness of their iterations, and accelerate their experimentation processes. However, insights into Shareability factors related to organic virality still require empirical validation and further investigation.

3. Methodology and Findings

3.1. Study 1

3.1.1. Methodology

To delineate Growth Hacking Organic Virality boundaries and develop measurable constructs currently lacking in the literature, we adopted an iterative process of exploration, refinement, and validation (Appendix B), following Parasuraman et al. (1998). To address RQ1 and RQ2, we employed a qualitative methodology to uncover critical themes in the growth hacking virality domain, integrating theoretical insights from relevant literature. Qualitative studies offer flexibility and depth for analysing novel topics like Shareability and consumers' viewpoints (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Yin, 2015). Study 1 involved a content and thematic analysis of U.S. respondents' attitudes and perceptions toward growth hacking strategies. We focused on the U.S., given its prominence as the origin of "Growth Studios" (Bargoni et al., 2023) and its diverse population, which captures a broad range of consumers' perspectives (Solomon, 2020). Open-ended questions were designed based on growth hacking and consumer behaviour literature. Each author independently formulated the study questions, subsequently combined and refined through group discussion. A pilot test with 9 participants assessed the queries' clarity and relevance, resulting in eight final open-ended questions (Appendix C - D) administered through a web-based questionnaire (Reja et al., 2003). Participants were introduced to growth hacking concepts with examples from well-known companies and visual

instances (i.e., Dropbox, Uber, Airbnb). Finally, we analysed data using a qualitative content approach to identify the main dimensions of growth hacking virality (Rossolatos, 2019). Responses were examined by using Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2012) thematic investigation guidelines with a latent perspective on NVivo, 14 focusing on (1) familiarising with data, (2) initial coding, (3) identifying themes, (4) refining themes and (5) reporting findings (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

3.1.2. Demographics

A total of 78 responses were collected from Study 1. After applying data cleaning procedures to exclude invalid or off-topic responses (e.g., "none", "nothing", "don't know"), a final sample of 59 valid responses was obtained, appropriate for a qualitative study (Boddy, 2016). The demographic distribution was as follows: 47% male, 53% female; mean age = 32.78, SD_{age} = 8.33; education: 12% high school, 85% graduate, 3% master/PhD, $SD_{education}$ = .38; occupation: 2% students, 88% employees and 10% self-employed with $SD_{occupation}$ = .34. This distribution, particularly in terms of gender and occupation, offers a balanced representation for the in-depth understanding of the topic (Appendix E).

3.1.3. Thematic Analysis

The analysis began with a word frequency review to identify the most mentioned words, followed by a manual content clustering. Initially, prominent frequent words such as "sharing", "speak", "information", "money", "decision", and "miss" appeared alongside growth hacking-related terms (Figure 1a – 1b). Each comment, treated as a unit of analysis, was then manually examined, and categorised into first-order codes. These codes, representing common themes, were re-evaluated and aggregated into broader top-level categoric themes. In cases where individual codes were thematically distinct, they were treated as separate categories. As evidenced in the hierarchy chart (Figure 2) and codebook (Table 1a), five main themes ultimately emerged:

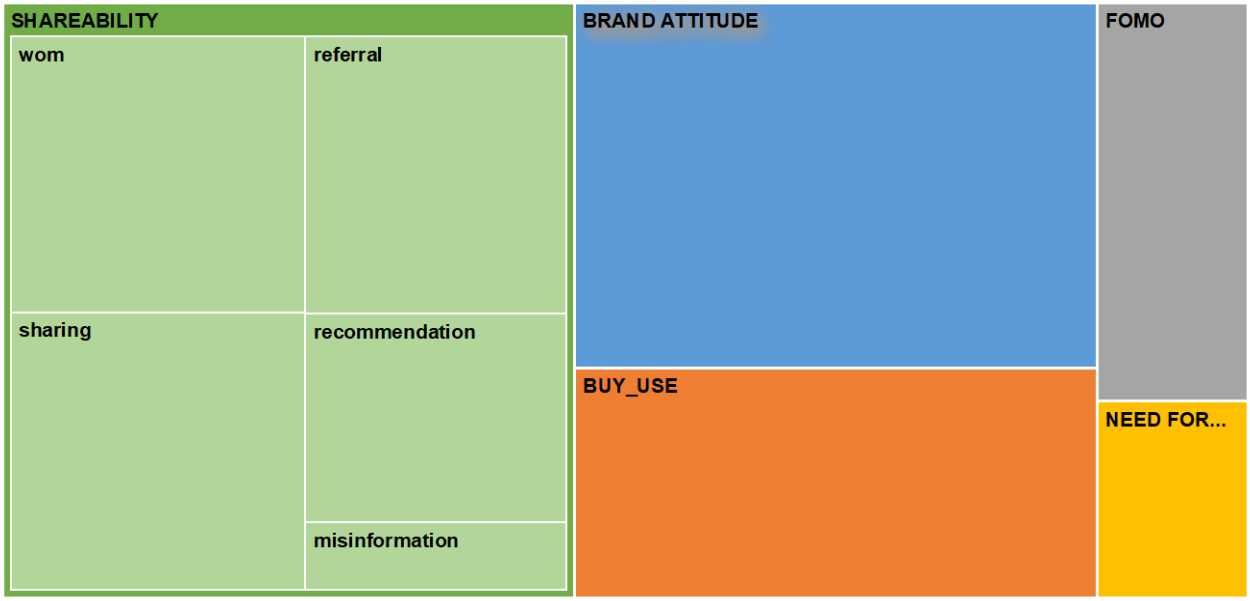
Figure 1a. World Cloud - Study 1

WC Overview - *Source: NVivo 14*

Figure 1b. World Cloud - Study 1

WC Shareability - *Source: NVivo 14*

Figure 2. Hierarchical Codes Chart



Source: NVivo 14

Table 1a. Codebook

Code Label	Coverage %	Coverage Reference Nr.	Level	Description
SHAREABILITY	20.2 %	34	Top	This top-level theme includes the five dimensions of growth hacking virality (WOM, referral, sharing, recommendation and misinformation).
Shareability_WOM	4.30%	9	Second	This second-level code describes the thematic focus on consumers' speaking about growth hacking.
Shareability_Referral	5.94%	8	Second	This second-level code describes the thematic focus on referrals involving monetary gains and incentives for consumers to learn about growth hacking.
Shareability_Sharing	5.66%	9	Second	This second-level code describes the thematic focus on consumers' voluntary distribution of information and experiences about growth hacking.
Shareability_ Recommendation	3.39%	6	Second	This second-level code describes the thematic focus on consumers voluntarily advising others about growth hacking.
Shareability_ Misinformation	.91%	2	Second	This second-level code describes the thematic focus on consumers' disseminating unverified or potentially untrue information about growth hacking.
BRAND ATTITUDE	11.54%	19	Top	This top-level code describes a distinct theme concerning consumers' positive/negative valence attitudes toward a brand that implements growth hacking.
FOMO	3.33%	6	Top	This top-level code describes a distinct theme concerning consumers' fear of missing out on trends and offerings of growth hacking.
NEED FOR AFFILIATION	1.65%	3	Top	This top-level code describes a distinct theme concerning consumers' need to affiliate with their social groups while choosing or experiencing growth hacking cases.
BUY_USE	7.50%	12	Top	This top-level code describes a distinct theme concerning consumers' willingness or intentions to use or purchase growth-hacking products or services.

Source: NVivo 14

Shareability: Composed by five second-level themes such as (1) Word-of-mouth (coverage = 4.30%, references = 9) representing consumers' propensity to discuss firms or apps using growth hacking (*e.g., "I always talk about it"; "I know and speak about it"*); (2) Referral (coverage = 5.94, references = 8), highlighting perceived monetary advantages from those firms *(e.g., "I Have earned some money thanks to these"*); (3) Sharing (coverage = 5.66, references = 9), illustrating a willingness to voluntary share information about the personal experience with growth hacking offerings (*e.g., "might share information", "share because I was impressed by their innovative approach to solving a common problems …"*); (4) Recommendation (coverage = 3.39, references = 6) indicating a spontaneous and authentic likelihood to recommend growth hacking brands (*e.g., "it happened to me to advice for this kind of apps since I used for example airbnb in my traveling"*); (5) Misinformation (coverage = .91, references = 2) revealing a tendency to share not verified information about brands, services or firms (*e.g. "evenn is not so true I don't care so much"*).

Brand Attitude: (coverage = 11.54, references = 19) indicates a consumer propensity to express specific attitudes about brands that implement growth hacking strategies (*e.g., "now Airbnb, it was such a good company", "because I have seen a lot of information from this company, and it will be useful for others as well"*).

Fear of Missing Out: (coverage = 3.33, references = 6) describes a sense of anxiety in missing out significant social trends or offerings from these companies, primarily linked to respondents' social gatherings and sense of belonging (*e.g., "feel i am missing somethib if i'm not on these apps", "feel just like I was missing something of important"*).

Need for affiliation: (coverage = 1.65, references = 3) reflects a need to belong to social groups by sharing growth hacking-related experiences or information (*e.g., "engaged and eager to share my positive experiences with others"*).

Buy/Use: (coverage = 7.50, references = 12) represents a willingness to purchase growth hacking-related products or services (e.g., "*I have many personal benefits in using it for my own page*").

Overall, the thematic analysis reflects five major drivers behind the Growth Hacking Virality dimension. Findings reveal significant connections among these factors, spotting potential drivers that influence consumers' inclinations to engage with products/services from growth hacking firms, such as fear of missing out, need-for-affiliation or brand attitude (*e.g. "Sometimes I used Uber and I saved some money", "taking ataxi is so expensive in some places, i also love Uber for this so I would take a ride again", "Good things about these apps that make me want to talk in my content on instagram and also use them more"*). Additionally, results help to define the boundaries and valence

of Shareability by uncovering significant cognitive factors that consumers make with specific brands (e.g., Airbnb, Instagram, Dropbox, Uber).

Lastly, we performed a coding matrix to explore potential associations among the various dimensions of Shareability and other central themes (Table 1b). Results show that WOM was significantly associated with brand attitude (count = 3) and Buy/Use (count = 2), indicating a tendency for consumers to engage in interpersonal discussions within their social groups. This reveals meaningful intersections between personal perceptions and growth-hacking brands.

Table 1b – Coding Matrix

Shareability	Brand Attitude	FOMO	Need for Affiliation	Buy/Use
Word of Mouth	3	0	0	2
Referral	0	0	0	0
Sharing	0	0	0	0
Recommendation	0	0	0	0
Misinformation	0	0	0	0

Source: NVivo 14

3.1.4. Discussion

Findings from the thematic analysis reveal the intricate nature of consumers' perceptions of growth hacking tactics and the significant motivators for sharing and employing such solutions. As a result, we first delimit the boundaries of growth hacking virality from a consumer viewpoint by identifying five main dimensions (Shareability, Brand Attitude, Fear of Missing Out, Ned For affiliation and Buy-Use). Secondly, we deconstruct our understanding of the shareability domain by identifying the key factors underlying consumers' propensities to disseminate growth hacking-related content.

The emerging domain, termed “Shareability," is organised into five subdimensions: *WOM, Referrals, Sharing, Recommendations, and Misinformation.* These elements offer a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms behind spontaneously sharing brand-related information when growth hacking strategies are implemented. Consistent with Kozinets et al. (2010), *WOM* emerges as a critical driver of organic virality, contributing significantly to brand awareness and influencing purchase decisions. Additionally, peer *Recommendations* reveal to be influential in carving customers’ choices (Lepkowska-White, 2013; Wang et al., 2012), highlighting the relevance of information sources and socialisation contexts in consumer behaviour for growth hacking tactics.

On the other hand, *Referrals* underscore the role of financial incentives in motivating consumers to promote brands, which aligns with Pescher et al. (2014) and Wang & Ding (2022). Indeed, they emphasise the strategic importance of referrals in boosting consumer engagement and acquisition as well as driving positive purchase decisions. Moreover, *Sharing* content on social media or other social

settings becomes integral to growth hacking's strategic success. As Say et al. (2021) suggest, products or services designed to be shared and discussed by consumers benefit from increased visibility and broader reach, ultimately involving a larger audience.

Surprisingly, *Misinformation* presents a critical perspective of Shareability, indicating its potential to distort perceptions and undermine consumer trust. This aligns with Mishra and Samu (2021), who claim that misinformation effectively interacts with consumers' psychological and social contexts to shift brand attitudes.

Our study also highlights the role of psychological factors, such as *Fear of Missing Out* and the *Need for Affiliation*, in the organic virality domain, contributing significantly to the overall consumer engagement with growth hacking tactics. Consistent with Saavedra and Bautista (2020), Ilyas et al. (2022), as well as Kim and Drumwright (2016), our findings suggest that such psychological motivators can enhance the clarification of sharing, by recommending and discussing branded content. Additionally, the diverse brand sentiments revealed by respondents in using or purchasing intentions provide relevant insights into consumer decision-making logic, reinforcing the importance of addressing cognitive and emotional responses to growth hacking strategies (Salehzadeh & Pool, 2017; Sallam & Algammash, 2016). Our analysis indicates a holistic complexity in consumers' perceptions and attitudes, underscoring its multidimensional nature across several themes. By identifying key drivers, we provide a robust foundation for developing a Shareability scale essential for future research and strategic decisions.

3.2. Study 2

3.2.1. Methodology

Findings from Study 1 provided the foundation for the empirical testing and validation of the shareability scale, addressing RQ3. In study 2, we developed the Shareability construct using a web-based survey approach. Participants for Study 2 were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), focusing on U.S. respondents, a tool widely used in academic research (Keith et al., 2017). To ensure data reliability, we implemented attention checks, jointly with cross-check inspections, excluding inaccurate data. The survey introduced participants to data privacy and ethical implications, as well as a briefing on the concept of growth hacking with examples from relevant organisations following findings from Study 1. We run a preliminary group review to reduce response biases in the

experimental stimulus. First, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to evaluate constructs' validity, confirm factors' structure and assess items' correlations (Fabrigar & Wegener, 2011) on IBM SPSS, 29. Once the final items were identified, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to verify latent variables and improve the scale's structural validity using IBM SPSS-AMOS 26 (Arbuckle, 2009; Brown & Moore, 2012).

3.2.2. Measurements

The survey assessed the Shareability domain using established scales retrieved and adapted from extant literature. We employed five latent constructs consisting of thirty-three items (Appendix F). In detail, we used: WOM from Goyette et al. (2010) composed of nineteen items, comprising four sub-dimensions such as intensity (three items), positive valence (six items), negative valence (two items) and content (8 items); Referrals (Ref) from Kumar & Pansari (2016) with four items; Sharing (Shar) from Yang & Wang (2015) with three items; Recommendations (Rec), from Maxham & Netemeyer (2002) with three items, and lastly Misinformation (Mis), from Islam et al. (2020) with four items. All items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Additionally, demographic data were collected to gain a better comprehension of the sample.

3.2.3. Demographics

Overall, 356 responses were collected, with 315 valid responses retained for further analysis. The final sample (characterised by: mean age = 31.77; SD_{age} = 6.32; gender: 57% male and 43% female; SD_{gender} = .49; education: 27% high school, 69% graduate and 3% PhD / Master, $SD_{education}$ = .50; occupation: 3% students, 76% employees and 20% self-employed, 1% unemployed, $SD_{occupation}$ .48, see Appendix E), enabled a balanced sample distribution for the development of the Shareability domain.

3.2.4. Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis

After descriptive statistics, we performed the EFA by using Principal Components with Varimax Rotation. First, as Table 2a and 2b shows, the KMO measure of sampling adequacy value (954> .60) and Bartlett's test of sphericity (p = .000) were found adequate for further analysis (Taherdoost et al., 2022). We implemented a cut-off criterion below .50 (Comrey & Lee, 1992), and the final solution was based on three factors. These factors were structured in 32 ultimate items explaining the 65.423% of the model's total variance and indicating good levels of validity. The resulting scale was further tested for structural validity through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to verify and improve the EFA latent variables. The final model discriminant validity, convergent validity, and reliability were

assessed as indicated in Figure 3 and Table 3a, 3b. Results evidenced the model goodness fit including χ^2 = 1303,188; CMIN/DF = 2.827; CFI = .901; SRMR = .059; RMSEA = .076 and PClose = .000 (Browne & Cudeck, 1992). All items' standardised factor loading were above .60, with the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) above .50, indicating a good convergent validity; the Maximum Shared Variance (MSV) was less than the respective AVE for all variables (Hair et al., 2017). Lastly, Cronbach Alpha and composite reliability (above .70) confirmed the factors' reliability (Pallant, 2020). We also achieved satisfying levels of discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) as indicated by AVE square root indices (Table 3c).

In response to RQ3, in this study we operationalise and validate the *Growth Hacking Shareability* construct composed of thirty-two final items across three key dimensions (Appendix G). This novel scale is structured into the *Shareability Positive Valence (SHPV)* factor, with twenty-five items (reflecting a consumer likelihood to talk, promote, recommend and share growth hacking related content); the *Shareability Misinformation (SHMIS),* with four items (expressing a propensity to share potentially fake or not verified growth hacking related content) and the *Shareability Negative Valence (SHNV)* composed of three items (indicating a negative propensity to share or talk about growth hacking related content).

Table 2a - Test KMO and Bartlett

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		,954
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	8914,968
	df	528
	Sig.	<,001

Source: IBM SPSS, 29

Table 2b - Communalities, Rotated Component Matrix

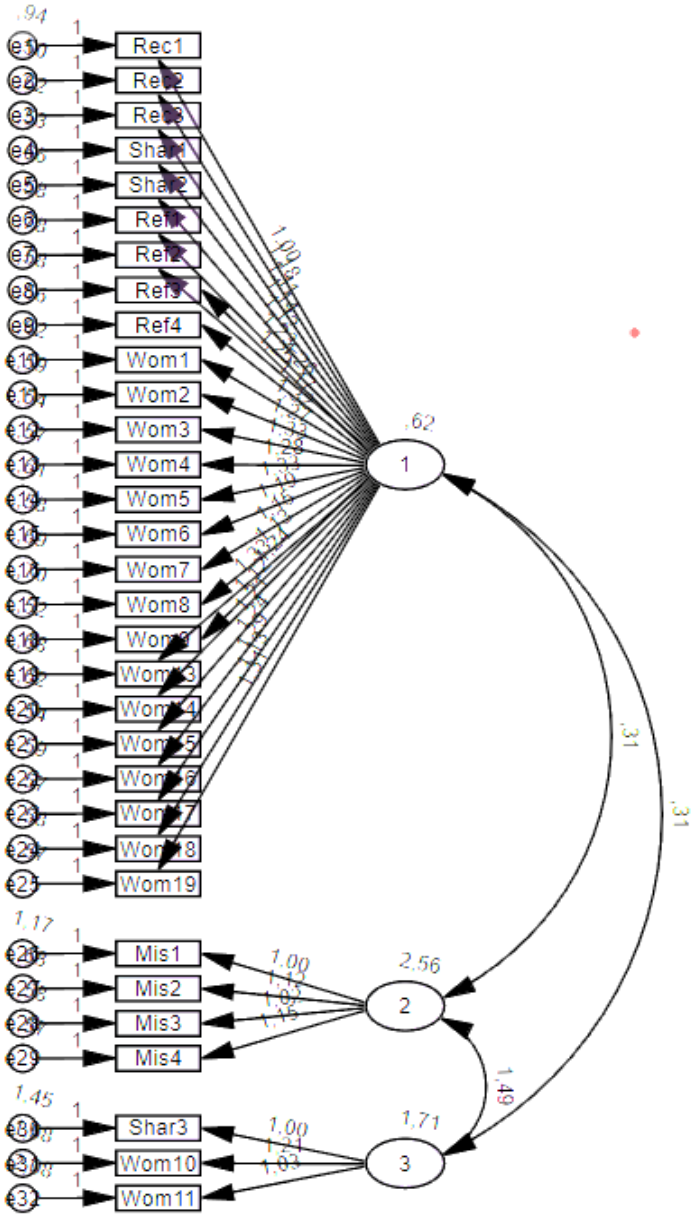
Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Rec1	,707		
Rec2	,807		
Rec3	,756		
Shar1	,819		
Shar2	,747		
Shar3			,551
Ref1	,787		
Ref2	,729		
Ref3	,777		
Ref4	,758		
Wom1	,811		
Wom2	,770		
Wom3	,816		
Wom4	,791		
Wom5	,804		
Wom6	,772		
Wom7	,724		
Wom8	,692		

Wom9	,794		
Wom10			,799
Wom11			,630
Wom13	,785		
Wom14	,749		
Wom15	,802		
Wom16	,783		
Wom17	,807		
Wom18	,749		
Wom19	,787		
Mis1		,889	
Mis2		,904	
Mis3		,905	
Mis4		,900	

(Rec = recommendation; Shar = sharing; Ref = referring; Wom = word-of-mouth; Mis = Misinformation)

Source: IBM SPSS, 29

Figure 3. Final CFA model



Source: IBM SPSS AMOS 26

Table 3a – Model Fit

CMIN	*1303,188*
DF	461,000
CMIN/DF	2,827
CFI	0,901
SRMR	0,059
RMSEA	0,076
PClose	0,000

Source: IBM SPSS AMOS 26

Table 3b - Reliability and Convergent Validity

Shareability Dimensions	Items	Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted	Maximum Shared Variance
Factor 1	SHPV1	.631	.974	.974	.599	.090
	SHPV2	.795				
	SHPV3	.744				
	SHPV4	.779				
	SHPV5	.736				
	SHPV6	.786				
	SHPV7	.743				
	SHPV8	.795				
	SHPV9	.777				
	SHPV10	.795				
	SHPV11	.791				
	SHPV12	.819				
	SHPV13	.800				
	SHPV14	.800				
	SHPV15	.778				
	SHPV16	.737				
	SHPV17	.729				
	SHPV18	.805				
	SHPV19	.787				
	SHPV20	.745				
	SHPV21	.792				
	SHPV22	.787				
	SHPV23	.803				
	SHPV24	.761				
	SHPV25	.806				
Factor 2	SHMIS1	.828	.940	.941	.800	.509
	SHMIS2	.914				
	SHMIS3	.907				
	SHMIS4	.925				
Factor 3	SHNV1	.736	.776	.779	.541	.509
	SHNV2	.784				
	SHNV3	.683				

(SHPV = shareability positive valence; SHMIS = shareability misinformation; SHNV= shareability negative valence)
Source: IBM SPSS AMOS 26

Table 3c - Discriminant validity results

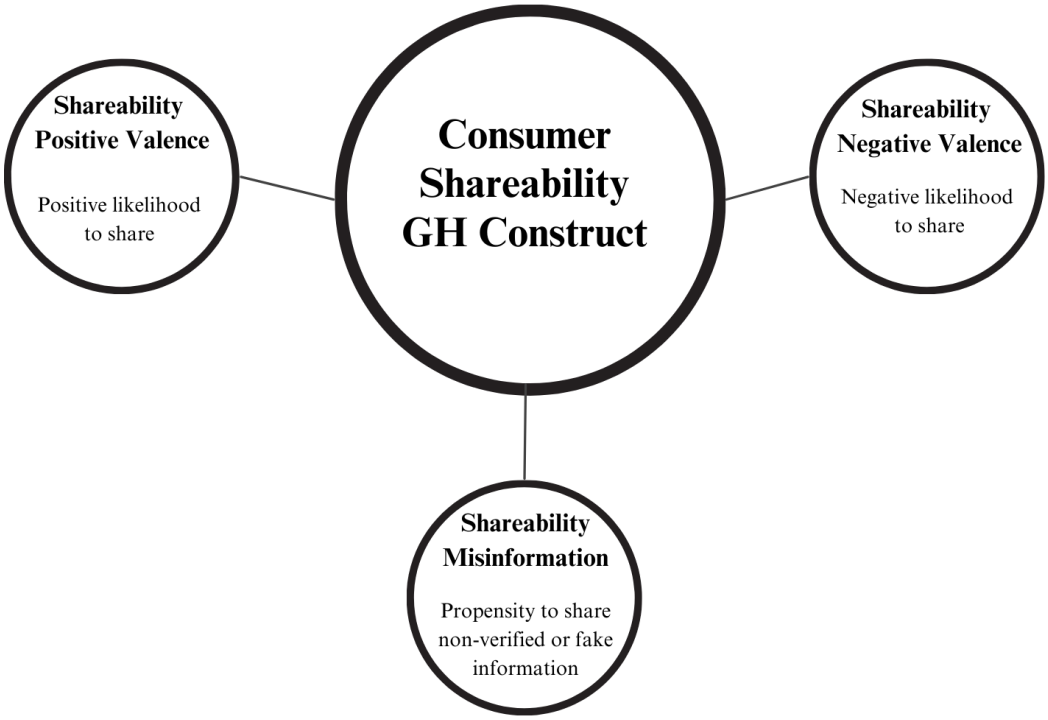
	Factor 1	**Factor 2**	**Factor 3**
Factor 1	**0,774**		
Factor 2	0,242***	**0,894**	
Factor 3	0,300***	0,713***	**0,735**

*** p < 0.001 - *Source: IBM SPSS AMOS 26*

3.2.5. Discussion

This study addresses the RQ3 by introducing Consumer Shareability as a validated scale, filling a fundamental gap in measuring the impact of Growth Hacking strategies on consumer behaviour (Figure 4). Findings indicate three core dimensions of Shareability: positive valence, misinformation, and negative valence, which capture the complex process of growth hacking content dissemination across social networks. While Shareability in psychology is often considered a communal act, and in cognitive sciences, an information contagious process, we propose that in consumer behaviour, for disseminating growth hacking-related content, it serves as a *self-expansion mechanism rooted in social belonging*. Prior research has predominantly focused on the functional and technical aspects of growth hacking from a firm perspective (Bohnsack & Leisner, 2019; Troisi et al., 2020; Feiz et al., 2021), mainly overlooking the consumer standpoint as well as behavioural drivers, essential for organic virality. In contrast, our research emphasises Shareability through identity-driven mechanisms and motivators, which are understood by tackling consumers' social recognition and self-expression needs.

Figure 4. Consumer Shareability Growth Hacking Construct



Source: Own Elaboration

In this perspective, *Shareability Positive Valence (SHPV)* underscores the critical role of spontaneous dissemination driven by social identity streamlines in enhancing brand advocacy, going beyond the technical optimisation and structural factors addressed in previous research. Our findings support the role of social identity in understanding organic virality by introducing the Shareability domain. Specifically, Shareability helps individuals reduce personal uncertainty by spreading content within social circles (Hogg, 2015). It also boosts self-esteem and personal distinctiveness by adhering the self-image to group norms (Sedikides & Strube, 1997; Leonardelli et al., 2010). Over time, this behaviour not only elevates a personal social standing but also reinforces firm-consumer ties, benefiting firms with a desired consumer lifetime value (Zeithaml et al., 2001) and consumers with an increased social value (Kaur et al., 2018; Wong & Lee, 2022).

SHPV encompasses several actions reflecting a consumer's positive propensity to share branded information. These actions include (a) organic-spontaneous brand promotion, as a favourable attitude toward the brand; (b) information sharing and recommendations, as a proactive endorsement of firm-related content; (c) positive brand-centric social discussions, as supportive social attitudes toward the brand; and (d) willingness to share in exchange for monetary benefits, as a consumer positive cost-benefit evaluation. They reflect the importance of spontaneous customer sharing, which is central to organic virality since peer messages are generally perceived as more trustworthy (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1995; Dahl et al., 2015). This peer-driven credibility offers a double benefit because it enhances consumers' perceptions by making the content more engaging (Martin, 2017), and supports positive sharing behaviours by allowing firms to achieve more relevant organic virality.

When managing positive WOM and recommendations –emerged as key items of SHPV – it is essential to recognise that consumers actively adapt and modify information to fit social norms (Kozinets, 1999; Kozinets et al., 2010). Therefore, to effectively leverage growth hacking strategies, brands should develop identity features that resonate with the target social group (Zaglia, 2013). By integrating these features into the self-identity of community members, they can foster a sense of social belonging and strengthen the consumer-brand identification (Wallace & De Chernatony, 2014).

Finally, SHPV underscores the strategic importance of creating environments able to inspire consumers for sharing growth hacking experiences. Addressing events or initiatives that showcase offerings can improve consumer identification and foster emotional connections, such as brand love (Riivits-Arkonsuo & Leppiman, 2014; Karjaluoto et al., 2016). Additionally, incorporating monetary or financial incentives into the strategic implementation of a growth hacking iterative programs can

enhance the rapid scalability of Shareability (Burtch et al., 2018). This is because aligning with social group processes leads to more robust engagement and creates mutual value for brands and consumers (Reischauer & Mair, 2018).

Shareability Misinformation (SHMIS) reveals consumers' tendency to share non-verified or potentially fake information. Unlike other studies that focused on sharing positive, brand-affirming content, our findings highlight a critical issue: the pervasive spread of misinformation elicited by consumers' psychological needs for social validation and self-expansion. As the Self-Expansion theory explains, consumers are motivated by an intrinsic need for self-integration guided by emotional responses and fears about their well-being in social groups (Leary, 2007; Talwar et al., 2019). This need often leads to the dissemination of misinformation as individuals seek to influence their social circles (Shu et al., 2017). Studies 1 and 2 show that this behaviour manifests in sharing misinformation to avoid missing out on social events (Ahmed, 2022; Balakrishnan et al., 2021).
Our findings reveal the darker side of Shareability, where such behaviours are hazardous to firm's image and reputation (Herhausen et al., 2019) as well as to brand value (Mills & Robson, 2020). Misleading content is often perceived as more credible than positive content (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989), making its spread even more insidious. This consideration calls for implementing robust measures to moderate and mitigate the spread of misleading branded content, especially within iterative growth hacking processes.

Shareability Negative Valence (SHNV) captures the propensity of consumers to share negative growth hacking content, likely harmful to brand reputation (Laczniak et al., 2001). According to the self-expansion theory, consumers may spread negative information to increase their influence and power among social groups (Burris et al., 2017). In contrast to positive sharing, which enhances community belonging and reinforces social ties, SHNV shows how sharing adverse content can reinforce the sharers' position within the social group. This adverse event underscores the danger of spreading unmoderated content since negative sharing – motivated by a desire for social dominance and control – can result in a widespread dissatisfaction (Naylor & Kleiser, 2000). When harmful content aligns with a user's desire for influence, it can rapidly determine negative opinions' diffusion and damage brand reputation (Relling et al., 2016). Therefore, addressing effectively SHNV is essential to minimise the risks associated with negative Shareability. By proactively managing this factor, companies can mitigate harmful WOM and build enduring brand trust and consumer loyalty (Tran & Strutton, 2020).

4. Conclusion

4.1. Conclusions

This study contributes substantially to our understanding of customer behaviour in the growth hacking landscape by shifting the focus of analysis from a company-centric to a consumer-centric perspective. Findings offer significant advancements in the literature on organic virality outcomes. We identify five key dimensions of organic molecular virality and, five critical factors of the novel shareability construct, providing a robust foundation for assessing dissemination actions of brand-related information. Grounded in Social Identity and Self-Expansion theories, our findings indicate how consumers interact with growth-hacking strategies, emphasising the need to align marketing efforts with identity dynamics for increasing consumer engagement. In contrast to previous literature, our study positions Shareability as a self-expansion mechanism founded on social belongings. This perspective shows that sharing growth-hacking content drives consumers' desire for social recognition and identity reinforcement. The shareability scale provides managers with a practical tool for evaluating and harnessing customer sharing habits, leading strategic decisions to design practical marketing actions. In conclusion, this study provides a core framework for future growth hacking research and actionable recommendations for managers looking to employ consumer-driven marketing techniques effectively.

4.2. Theoretical Implications

By implementing a mixed methods approach we offer meaningful theoretical implications for customer behaviour toward firms employing innovative processes. The integration of Social Identity and Self-Expansion Theory represents a significant shift in the growth hacking research, focusing on understanding consumers' perceptions as influenced by their social affiliations and desires for self-expansion. Previous literature has primarily focused on the operational and experimental nature of growth hacking, such as iterative and data-driven approaches, without fully exploring the underlying mechanisms driving consumer behaviour. By bridging this gap, our study extends the theoretical foundations of growth hacking, including the field of consumer behaviour. Specifically, we improve the comprehension of how *social interactions, brand perceptions, purchase intentions and psychological motivators* actively function in organic virality. Conceptually, this research establishes fundamental pillars for holistically understanding consumer engagement within the molecular virality realm. Notably, our study addresses limitations in existing research (Stieglitz et al., 2018) concerning unreliable or incomplete consumer data by clarifying the boundaries and critical motivations behind consumer behaviour. We provide a pioneering theoretical framework for understanding the outcomes

of iterative data-driven processing in rapid experimentation within the consumer journey and its ramifications.

Specifically, we offer a theoretical contribution to defining the boundaries of organic virality by delineating five critical dimensions of consumer behaviour: *Shareability, Attitude Toward Brands, Buy/Use, Fear of Missing Out, and Need for Affiliation.* These dimensions deliver a thorough understanding of molecular virality, pointing out how vital psychological factors – attitudes, fear of missing out, and need to affiliate – motivate consumer responses to growth hacking strategic implementation. This study makes a relevant contribution by providing a structural model that integrates major behavioural drivers into the larger discourse. Additionally, we expand the academic conversation by offering new insights on psychological triggers, grasped in the strategic conceptualisation of growth hacking (in line with Wang & Finn, 2014).

In study two, we validate a measurement instrument for the Shareability domain that represents a significant advancement in understanding consumer dissemination. Prior studies failed to develop a precise, empirically validated tool for measuring the psychological and social dynamics behind sharing behaviours. In addressing this gap, we improve the exploration of how network outcomes are influenced by growth-hacking business models across target audiences. The novel validated construct goes beyond general notions like virality or engagement, focusing instead on specific behavioural features that enhance consumer theories, mainly where digital propagation is central to business growth (Zhao & Li, 2020). Such successful insights can lead to more targeted consumer engagement and innovative breakthroughs that keep the brand relevant, competitive, and expanding (Brinker, 2016; Simon et al., 2016). Finally, since Shareability is based on organic, user-driven promotion, it supports the lean and budget-conscious techniques in growth hacking while forming authentic consumer relationships that increase conversion rates and growth (Rollins et al., 2014; Sampson, 2012).

4.3. Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, our findings deliver a model that managers can directly apply to identify and address fundamental behavioural mechanisms that influence the consumer decision-making as well as the information dissemination process. The validated measurement tool gives managers valuable insights into how growth hacking principles affect consumer engagement and reactions, enabling a data-driven approach to develop communication strategies aligned with consumers' social identities and belongings. This alignment generates a dual benefit: (a) for firms, it results in higher

levels of molecular virality, more vigorous brand advocacy and organic growth due to an increased likelihood of sharing among targeted audiences; (b) for consumers, it enriches the social connections and a sense of belonging within their communities.

Moreover, a closer examination of Shareability reveals five critical factors essential for this novel construct's empirical testing and validation. In particular, each of these subdimensions plays a distinct role in consumers' propensity to share branded content: *WOM* emphasises the importance of interactions within social groups in spreading branded information; *Sharing* indicates the relevance of organic and spontaneous distribution of firm-related information; *Recommendations* evidence a proactive effort to diffuse content among social group members, driven by social conformism mechanisms; *Referrals* highlight a nudged attitude toward dissemination, where financial and monetary incentives stimulate consumers to actively engage in sharing and, *Disinformation* reveals the potential risks to brand reputation, often driven by a consumer desire for social power and influence. From a practical viewpoint, these subdimensions can be directly integrated into consumer relationship management strategies, adopting a data-driven approach where firms can better tailor their communication strategies by reflecting consumers' motivations. In implementing data-driven strategies, our findings underscore the importance of cultivating an innovation-centric growth hacking culture (Shamim et al., 2019; Troisi et al., 2020) while mitigating latent risks and fostering long-term consumer connections (Ellis & Brown, 2017).

The validated measurement tool for assessing Shareability also enables practitioners to make informed decisions about pursuing innovative business solutions. The findings empower managers to comprehend the challenges of the modern marketing landscape and design actionable plans that reach audiences while leveraging the emerged pillars of the shareability domain. By understanding the causes of brand perceptions and customer involvement in the sharing process, firms could build stronger customer relationships and increase brand loyalty and advocacy (Aurier & Séré, 2012; Hsieh & Li, 2008).

Lastly, recognising potential risks, such as misinformation or negative valence in sharing, highlights the need for adopting proactive strategies in safeguarding brand reputation and image. On one hand, companies should implement strategies to attenuate the risk of misinformation by integrating pertinent monitoring systems and crisis management plans (Jahng, 2021; Mahdi et al., 2022). On the other, they should exploit the positive aspects of Shareability, encouraging and rewarding the dissemination of authentic content, thereby fostering trust and consumer confidence (aligning with

Dayal et al., 1999). Based on a balance between risks and opportunities, this dual approach can lead to more effective and sustainable growth hacking strategies.

4.4. Limitations and Future Suggestions

This study offers valuable insights, even though some limitations should also be acknowledged. First, focusing exclusively on U.S. consumers may limit the generalizability of the results. Future research should include cross-cultural samples with longitudinal observations to capture consumer perceptions across distinct cultural contexts and variations over time. Second, our sample size was sufficient to achieve a good model fit and meet strict criteria for the EFA and CFA. However, expanding the sample in future studies could improve its overall model robustness and refine scale dimensions. Third, since we relied on a web-based survey, specific nuances of the phenomenon may have been overlooked. Future studies could benefit from more in-depth methodologies like ethnography to understand the environmental context and social mechanisms. Fourth, given that we examined the phenomenon from a broad and holistic perspective across various sectors, future analyses could investigate industry-specific case studies to uncover distinct challenges and opportunities. Lastly, while this study successfully delineates the boundaries of Shareability, several psychological themes that emerged from Study 1 that require further investigation. Thus, future research could build on our findings by integrating those factors to develop and validate a comprehensive model that thoroughly investigates consumer decision-making in the context of growth hacking and organic virality.

References

~~Aaker, D. A. (2009). *Managing brand equity: Capitalizing on the value of a brand name*. simon and schuster.~~

Abrams, D., & Hogg, M. A. (1990). *An Introduction to the Social Identity Approach*. In D. Abrams & M. A. Hogg (Eds.), Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances (pp. 1-9). Springer-Verlag Publishing.

Acquisti, A., Adjerid, I., Balebako, R., Brandimarte, L., Cranor, L. F., Komanduri, S., ... & Wilson, S. (2017). Nudges for privacy and security: Understanding and assisting users' choices online. *ACM Computing Surveys (CSUR)*, *50*(3), 1-41.

Adhiya, A. (2020). *Growth Hacking for Dummies*. Wiley & Sons.

Ahmed, S. (2022). Disinformation sharing thrives with fear of missing out among low cognitive news users: a cross-national examination of intentional sharing of deep fakes. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *66*(1), 89-109.

Akpinar, E., & Berger, J. (2017). Valuable Virality. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 54(2), 318–330.

Al-Youzbaky, B. A., Hanna, R. D., & Najeeb, S. H. (2022). The effect of information overload, and social media fatigue on online consumers purchasing decisions: the mediating role of technostress and information anxiety. *Journal of System and Management Sciences*, *12*(2), 195-220.

Arbuckle, J. L. (2009). Amos (Version 18.0). *Crawfordville, FL: Amos Development Corporation*.

Aron, A., Aron, E. N., & Smollan, D. (1992). Inclusion of Other in the Self-Scale and the Structure of Interpersonal Closeness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 63(4), 596-612.

Asam, E. H., & Bucklin, L. P. (1973). Nutrition labeling for canned goods: A study of consumer response. *Journal of Marketing*, *37*(2), 32-37.

Auh, S., Menguc, B., Katsikeas, C. S., & Jung, Y. S. (2019). When does customer participation matter? An empirical investigation of the role of customer empowerment in the customer participation–performance link. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *56*(6), 1012-1033.

Aurier, P., & Séré de Lanauze, G. (2012). Impacts of perceived brand relationship orientation on attitudinal loyalty: An application to strong brands in the packaged goods sector. *European Journal of Marketing*, *46*(11/12), 1602-1627.

Balakrishnan, V., Ng, K. S., & Rahim, H. A. (2021). To share or not to share–The underlying motives of sharing fake news amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia. *Technology in Society*, *66*, 101676.

Bargoni, A., Jabeen, F., Santoro, G., & Ferraris, A. (2023). Growth Hacking and International Dynamic Marketing Capabilities: A Conceptual Framework and Research Propositions. *International Marketing Review*.

Bargoni, A., Santoro, G., Petruzzelli, A. and Ferraris, A. (2024a). Growth Hacking: A Critical Review to Clarify Its Meaning and Guide Its Practical Application. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change, 200*, 123111.

Bargoni, A., Smrčka, L., Santoro, G., and Ferraris, A. (2024b). Highway to Hell or Paradise City? Exploring the Role of Growth Hacking in Learning from Innovation Failure. *Technovation, 131*, 102945.

Batra, R., Ahuvia, A., & Bagozzi, R. P. (2012). Brand love. *Journal of Marketing*, 76(2), 1-16.

Belanche, D. (2019). Ethical limits to the intrusiveness of online advertising formats: A critical review of Better Ads Standards. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, *25*(7), 685-701.

Belk, R. (2010). Sharing. *Journal of consumer research*, *36*(5), 715-734.

Berger, J., & Milkman, K. L. (2012). What makes online content viral?. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *49*(2), 192-205.

Boddy, C. R. (2016). Sample size for qualitative research. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, *19*(4), 426-432.

Bohnsack, R., & Liesner, M. M. (2019). What the hack? A growth hacking taxonomy and practical applications for firms. *Business Horizons*, 62(6), 799–818.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). *Thematic analysis*. American Psychological Association.

Brinker, S. (2016). *Hacking marketing: Agile practices to make marketing smarter, faster, and more innovative*. John Wiley & Sons.

Brown, T. A., & Moore, M. T. (2012). Confirmatory factor analysis. *Handbook of Structural Equation Modeling*, *361*, 379.

Browne, M. W., & Cudeck, R. (1992). Alternative ways of assessing model fit. *Sociological Methods & Research*, *21*(2), 230-258.

Bruno, N., Guerra, G., Alioto, B. P., & Jacomuzzi, A. C. (2023). Shareability: Novel Perspective on Human-Media Interaction. *Frontiers in Computer Science (Lausanne), 5*, 1106322.

Brynjolfsson, E., Hitt, L. M., & Kim, H. H. (2011). Strength in numbers: How does data-driven decision-making affect firm performance? Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1819486 [Accessed: 10/12/23].

Burris, C. T., Rempel, J. K., Munteanu, A. R., & Therrien, P. A. (2013). More, more, more: The dark side of self-expansion motivation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *39*(5), 578-595.

Burtch, G., Hong, Y., Bapna, R., & Griskevicius, V. (2018). Stimulating online reviews by combining financial incentives and social norms. *Management Science*, *64*(5), 2065-2082.

Butcher, L., Phau, I., & Shimul, A. S. (2017). Uniqueness and status consumption in generation Y consumers: does moderation exist?. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, *35*(5), 673-687.

Carmeli, A., & Dothan, A. (2017). Generative work relationships as a source of direct and indirect learning from experiences of failure: Implications for innovation agility and product innovation. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 119, 27–38.

Cavallo, A., Cosenz, F., & Noto, G. (2023). Business Model Scaling and Growth Hacking in Digital Entrepreneurship. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 1-28.

~~Chaudhuri, A., & Holbrook, M. B. (2001). The chain of effects from brand trust and brand affect to brand performance: the role of brand loyalty. *Journal of marketing*, *65*(2), 81-93.~~

Comrey AL and Lee HB (1992) *A first course in factor analysis* (2nd edition). Hillsdale,NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.

Dabija, D. C., Bejan, B. M., & Dinu, V. (2019). How sustainability oriented is Generation Z in retail? A literature review. *Transformations in Business & Economics*, *18*(2).

Dahl, D. W., Fuchs, C., & Schreier, M. (2015). Why and when consumers prefer products of user-driven firms: A social identification account. *Management science*, *61*(8), 1978-1988.

Dalaman, I. (2017). Overview of growth hacking: The evaluation of implementation on Uber. *International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management*, 7(6), 60-77.

Dayal, S., Landesberg, H., & Zeisser, M. (1999). How to build trust online. *Marketing Management*, *8*(3), 64.

de Kerviler, G., & Rodriguez, C. M. (2019). Luxury brand experiences and relationship quality for Millennials: The role of self-expansion. *Journal of Business Research*, *102*, 250-262.

De Maio, C., Fenza, G., Gallo, M., Loia, V., & Parente, M. (2019). Time-aware adaptive tweets ranking through deep learning. *Future Generation Computer Systems*, 93, 924–932.

De Villiers, M. (2010). *Experimentation and proof in mathematics*. In G. Hanna, H. N. Janke, & H. Pulte (Eds.), Explanation and proof in mathematics. Springer, pp. 205–222.

Deloitte Insights. (2023). Automated machine learning and predictive insights. Deloitte United States. Retrieved from https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/focus/cognitive-technologies/automated-machine-learning-and-predictive-insights.html. [Accessed 05/06/24].

Dichter, E. (1964). *Handbook of consumer motivations*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Douglas, Mary and Baron Isherwood (1979), The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption, New York: Basic.

Ellis, S. and Brown, M. (2017), *Hacking Growth: How Today's Fastest-Growing Companies Drive Breakout Success*, Crown, New York, NY.

Fabrigar, L. R., & Wegener, D. T. (2011). *Exploratory factor analysis*. Oxford University Press.

Feiz, D., Zarei, A., Mibashrazgah, M. M., & Shaabani, A. (2021). Typology of Growth Hacking Strategies along the Growth Hacking Funnel. *Iranian Journal of Management Studies*, 14(2), 331–346.

Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *18*(1), 39-50.

Foster, George M. (1969). Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good. *American Anthropologist*, 67, 293–315.

Freyd, J. J. (1983). Shareability: The social psychology of epistemology. *Cognitive Science, 7*(3), 191–210.

Ghosh, S., Thomke, S., & Pourkhalkhali, H. (2020). The effects of hierarchy on learning and performance in business experimentation. In *Academy of Management Proceedings* (Vol. 2020, No. 1, p. 20500). Briarcliff Manor, NY 10510: Academy of Management.

Godes, D., & Mayzlin, D. (2005). Using online conversations to study word-of-mouth communication. *Marketing Science*, 23(4), 545–560.

Goyette, I., Ricard, L., Bergeron, J., & Marticotte, F. (2010). e-WOM Scale: word-of-mouth measurement scale for e-services context. *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences/Revue Canadienne des Sciences de l'Administration*, *27*(1), 5-23.

GrowthHackers.com (2024). Available at: https://growthhackers.com/ [Accessed at 11/12/24].

Gunawan, D. D., & Huarng, K. H. (2015). Viral effects of social network and media on consumers' purchase intention. *Journal of Business Research*, *68*(11), 2237-2241.

Hair Jr, J. F., Sarstedt, M., Ringle, C. M., & Gudergan, S. P. (2017). *Advanced issues in partial least squares structural equation modeling*. Sage publications.

Hawkins, D. I., Mothersbaugh, D. L., & Best, R. J. (2007). *Consumer behavior: Building marketing strategy* (10th ed.). McGraw-Hill/Irwin.

Herhausen, D., Ludwig, S., Grewal, D., Wulf, J., & Schoegel, M. (2019). Detecting, preventing, and mitigating online firestorms in brand communities. *Journal of Marketing*, *83*(3), 1-21.

Hogg, M. A. (2015). Constructive leadership across groups: How leaders can combat prejudice and conflict between subgroups. *Advances in Group Processes, 32*, 177–207.

Holiday, R. (2017, May). Dropbox's growth guru Sean Ellis on what everyone misses about 'growth hacking'. Observer. Retrieved from https://observer.com/2017/05/dropboxs-growth-guru-sean-ellis-on-what-everyone-misses-about-growth-hacking/ [Accessed: 04/09/2023].

Hsieh, A. T., & Li, C. K. (2008). The moderating effect of brand image on public relations perception and customer loyalty. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, *26*(1), 26-42.

Ilyas, G., Rahmia, S., Tamsah, H., & Yusriadi, Y. (2022). Does fear of missing out give satisfaction in purchasing based on social media content?. *International Journal of Data and Network Science*, *6*(2), 409-418.

Islam, A. N., Laato, S., Talukder, S., & Sutinen, E. (2020). Misinformation sharing and social media fatigue during COVID-19: An affordance and cognitive load perspective. *Technological forecasting and social change*, *159*, 120201.

Jahng, M. R. (2021). Is fake news the new social media crisis? Examining the public evaluation of crisis management for corporate organizations targeted in fake news. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, *15*(1), 18-36.

Kang, T., Baek, C., & Lee, J. D. (2019). Effects of knowledge accumulation strategies through experience and experimentation on firm growth. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, *144*, 169-181.

Karjaluoto, H., Munnukka, J., & Kiuru, K. (2016). Brand love and positive word of mouth: the moderating effects of experience and price. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *25*(6), 527-537.

Kaur, P., Dhir, A., Rajala, R., & Dwivedi, Y. (2018). Why people use online social media brand communities: A consumption value theory perspective. *Online information review*, *42*(2), 205-221.

Keith, M. G., Tay, L., & Harms, P. D. (2017). Systems perspective of Amazon Mechanical Turk for organizational research: Review and recommendations. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *8*, 1359.

Keller, K. L. (2020). Consumer Research Insights on Brands and Branding: a JCR curation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *46*(5), 995-1001.

Kim, E., & Drumwright, M. (2016). Engaging consumers and building relationships in social media: How social relatedness influences intrinsic vs. extrinsic consumer motivation. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *63*, 970-979.

Kim, J., Bang, H., & Campbell, W. K. (2021). Brand awe: A key concept for understanding consumer response to luxury and premium brands. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, *161*(2), 245-260.

Kozinets, R. V. (1999). E-tribalised Marketing? The Strategic Implications of Virtual Communities of Consumption. *European Management Journal*, 17, 252–64.

Kozinets, R. V., De Valck, K., Wojnicki, A. C., & Wilner, S. J. (2010). Networked narratives: Understanding word-of-mouth marketing in online communities. *Journal of Marketing*, *74*(2), 71-89.

Kraus, S., Gast, J., Schleich, M., Jones, P., & Ritter, M. (2019). Content is King: How SMEs Create Content for Social Media Marketing Under Limited Resources. *Journal of Macromarketing*, *39*(4), 415-430.

Kumar, V., & Pansari, A. (2016). Competitive advantage through engagement. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *53*(4), 497-514.

Laczniak, R. N., DeCarlo, T. E., & Ramaswami, S. N. (2001). Consumers' responses to negative word-of-mouth communication: An attribution theory perspective. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *11*(1), 57-73.

Leary, M. R. (2007). Motivational and emotional aspects of the self. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *58*, 317-344.

Leonardelli, G. J., Pickett, C. L., & Brewer, M. B. (2010). Optimal distinctiveness theory: A framework for social identity, social cognition and intergroup relations. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 43, pp. 65–115). San Diego, CA: Elsevier.

Lepkowska-White, E. (2013). Are they listening? Designing online recommendations for today's consumers. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, *7*(3), 182-200.

Lewin, K. (1947). Group decision and social change. In T. M. Newcomb & E. L. Hartley (Eds.), *Readings in social psychology*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Love, J. H., & Roper, S. (2009). Organizing innovation: Complementarities between cross-functional teams. *Technovation, 29*(3), 192-203.

Maguire, M., & Delahunt, B. (2017). Doing a thematic analysis: A practical, step-by-step guide for learning and teaching scholars. *All Ireland Journal of Higher Education*, *9*(3).

Mahdi, A., Farah, M. F., & Ramadan, Z. (2022). What to believe, whom to blame, and when to share: exploring the fake news experience in the marketing context. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, *39*(3), 306-316.

Mahmud, M. S., Islam, M. N., Ali, M. R., & Mehjabin, N. (2024). Impact of electronic word of mouth on customers' buying intention considering trust as a mediator: A SEM approach. *Global Business Review*, *25*(2_suppl), S184-S198.

Martin, W. C. (2017). Positive versus negative word-of-mouth: Effects on receivers. *Academy of Marketing Studies Journal*, *21*(2), 1-10.

Maxham III, J. G., & Netemeyer, R. G. (2002). A longitudinal study of complaining customers' evaluations of multiple service failures and recovery efforts. *Journal of marketing*, *66*(4), 57-71.

Mills, A. J., & Robson, K. (2020). Brand management in the era of fake news: narrative response as a strategy to insulate brand. *The Journal of Product & Brand Management.* 29(2), 159-167.

Mishra, A., & Samu, S. (2021). Impact of fake news on social image perceptions and consumers' behavioral intentions. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*.

Mittal, B. (2006). I, Me, and Mine: How Products Become Consumers' Extended Selves. *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, 5(6), 550-562.

Mundel, J., Huddleston, P., & Vodermeier, M. (2017). An exploratory study of consumers' perceptions: what are affordable luxuries?. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *35*, 68-75.

Naylor, G. S., & Kleiser, S. B. (2000). Negative versus positive word-of-mouth: An exception to the rule. *The Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior*, *13*, 26-36.

Norris, G., Brookes, A., & Dowell, D. (2019). The psychology of internet fraud victimisation: A systematic review. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, *34*, 231-245.

Olsen, D. (2015). *The lean product playbook: How to innovate with minimum viable products and rapid customer feedback*. John Wiley & Sons.

Pallant, J. (2020). *SPSS survival manual: A step by step guide to data analysis using IBM SPSS*. McGraw-hill education (UK).

Papadopoulos, I., & Iatridou, M. (2010). Systematic approaches to experimentation: The case of Pick's Theorem. *The Journal of Mathematical Behavior*, 29(4), 207–217.

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1988). Servqual: A multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perc. *Journal of retailing*, *64*(1), 12.

Park, C. W., MacInnis, D. J., Priester, J., Eisingerich, A. B., & Iacobucci, D. (2010). Brand Attachment and Brand Attitude Strength: Conceptual and Empirical Differentiation of Two Critical Brand Equity Drivers. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(6), 1-17.

Pescher, C., Reichhart, P., & Spann, M. (2014). Consumer Decision-Making Processes in Mobile Viral Marketing Campaigns. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 28(1), 43–54.

Pressgrove, G., McKeever, B. W., & Jang, S. M. (2018). What is Contagious? Exploring why content goes viral on Twitter: A case study of the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, *23*(1), e1586.

Racherla, P., Mandviwalla, M., & Connolly, D. J. (2012). Factors Affecting Consumers' Trust in Online Product Reviews: Consumer Trust in Online Product Reviews. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 11, 94–104.

Radeka, K. (2017). *The shortest distance between you and your new product: How innovators use rapid learning cycles to get their best ideas to market faster*. Chesapeake Research Press.

Ramirez, A., Walther, J., Burgoon, J., & Sunnafrank, M. (2002). Information-Seeking Strategies, Uncertainty, and Computer-Mediated Communication Toward a Conceptual Model. *Human Communication Research*, 28(2), 213-228.

Ramirez, E., Gau, R., Hadjimarcou, J., & Xu, Z. (2018). User-generated content as word-of-mouth. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, *26*(1-2), 90-98.

Reischauer, G., & Mair, J. (2018). How organizations strategically govern online communities: Lessons from the sharing economy. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, *4*(3), 220-247.

Reja, U., Manfreda, K. L., Hlebec, V., & Vehovar, V. (2003). Open-ended vs. close-ended questions in web questionnaires. *Developments in applied statistics*, *19*(1), 159-177.

Relling, M., Schnittka, O., Sattler, H., & Johnen, M. (2016). Each can help or hurt: Negative and positive word of mouth in social network brand communities. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *33*(1), 42-58.

Riivits-Arkonsuo, I., & Leppiman, A. (2014). Online Word-of-Mouth on Brands and Experience Marketing. *Journal of Management & Change*.

Rollins, B., Anitsal, I., Anitsal, M. M., & Meral, M. (2014). Viral marketing: Techniques and implementation. *Entrepreneurial Executive*, *19*(1), 1-17.

Rosário, A. T., & Dias, J. C. (2023). How Has Data-Driven Marketing Evolved: Challenges and Opportunities with Emerging Technologies. *International Journal of Information Management Data Insights*, 3(2), 100203.

Rosario, A.B., de Valck, K. and Sotgiu, F. (2020). Conceptualizing the electronic word-of-mouth process: what we know and need to know about eWOM creation, exposure, and evaluation. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 48(3), 422-448.

Rossolatos, G. (2019). Negative brand meaning co-creation in social media brand communities: A laddering approach using NVivo. *Psychology & Marketing*, *36*(12), 1249-1266.

Saavedra, C. M. C., & Bautista Jr, R. A. (2020). Are you" in" or are you" out"?: Impact of FoMO (Fear of Missing Out) on Generation Z's Masstigebrand Apparel Consumption. *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review*, *20*(2).

Salehzadeh, R., & Pool, J. K. (2017). Brand attitude and perceived value and purchase intention toward global luxury brands. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, *29*(2), 74-82.

Sallam, M. A., & Algammash, F. A. (2016). The effect of attitude toward advertisement on attitude toward brand and purchase intention. *International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management*, *4*(2), 509-520.

Sampson, T. D. (2012). *Virality: Contagion theory in the age of networks*. University of Minnesota Press.

Santoro, G., Fiano, F., Bertoldi, B., & Ciampi, F. (2019). Big data for business management in the retail industry. *Management Decision*, 57(8), 1980–1992.

Say, A. L., Guo, R. S. A., & Chen, C. (2021). Altruism and social utility in consumer sharing behavior. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, *20*(6), 1562-1574.

Schiffman, L. G., & Kanuk, L. L. (1995). *Consumer Behavior*, 9th Ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Sedikides, C., & Strube, M. J. (1997). Self-evaluation: To thine own self be good, to thine own self be sure, to thine own self be true, and to thine own self be better. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 29, pp. 209–296). New York: Academic.

ShabbirHusain R.V., S., & Varshney, S. (2022). Investigating combined effect of WOM and eWOM: role of message valence. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, *39*(2), 180-190.

Shahzad, F., Mannan, A., Javed, A. R., & Batool, I. (2022). Cloud-based multiclass anomaly detection and categorization using ensemble learning. *Journal of Cloud Computing, 11(1)*, 74.

Shamim, S., Zeng, J., Shariq, S. M., & Khan, Z. (2019). Role of big data management in enhancing big data decision-making capability and quality among Chinese firms: A dynamic capabilities view. *Information Management*, 56(6).

Shu, K., Sliva, A., Wang, S., Tang, J., & Liu, H. (2017). Fake news detection on social media: A data mining perspective. *ACM SIGKDD explorations newsletter*, *19*(1), 22-36.

Simon, M., VAn Den DriesT, F., & Wilms, T. O. M. (2016). Driving customer-centric growth: a practical roadmap: the pivotal role of insights and analytics in the customer-centric organization. *Journal of Advertising Research*, *56*(2), 159-168.

Sirgy, M. J. (1982). Self-concept in consumer behavior: A critical review. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9(3), 287-300.

Sirgy, M. J., Grewal, D., Mangleburg, T. F., Park, J.-o., Chon, K.-S., Claiborne, C. B., Johar, J. S., & Berkman, H. (1997). Assessing the predictive validity of two methods of measuring self-image congruence. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 25(3), 229-241.

Škare, M., & Riberio Soriano, D. (2021). A Dynamic Panel Study on Digitalization and Firm's Agility: What Drives Agility in Advanced Economies 2009–2018. *Technological Forecasting & Social Change*, 163, 120418.

Skowronski, J. J., & Carlston, D. E. (1989). Negativity and extremity biases in impression formation: A review of explanations. *Psychological bulletin*, *105*(1), 131.

Solomon, M. R. (2020). *Consumer behavior: Buying, having, and being*. Pearson.

Steel, E. (2014, August 17). 'Ice Bucket Challenge' has raised millions for ALS Association. *The New York Times*. Retrieved June 10, 2024, from https://www.nytimes.com.

Stieglitz, S., Mirbabaie, M., Ross, B., & Neuberger, C. (2018). Social media analytics–Challenges in topic discovery, data collection, and data preparation. *International Journal of Information Management*, *39*, 156-168.

Taherdoost, H., Sahibuddin, S., & Jalaliyoon, N. (2022). Exploratory Factor Analysis: Concepts and Theory. *Advances in Applied and Pure Mathematics*, 27, 375-382.

Talwar, S., Dhir, A., Kaur, P., Zafar, N., & Alrasheedy, M. (2019). Why do people share fake news? Associations between the dark side of social media use and fake news sharing behavior. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *51*, 72-82.

Taylor, D. G., Strutton, D., & Thompson, K. (2012). Self-Enhancement as a Motivation for Sharing Online Advertising. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 12(2), 13-28.

Thorbjørnsen, H., Pedersen, P. E., & Nysveen, H. (2007). "This is who I am": Identity expressiveness and the theory of planned behavior. *Psychology and Marketing*, 24(9), 763-785.

Tran, G. A., & Strutton, D. (2020). Comparing email and SNS users: Investigating e-servicescape, customer reviews, trust, loyalty and E-WOM. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *53*, 101782.

Troisi, O., Maione, G., Grimaldi, M., & Loia, F. (2020). Growth hacking: Insights on data-driven decision-making from three firms. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 90, 538–555.

Turner, B. S., & Rojek, C. (2001). *Society and culture: Scarcity and solidarity*. Sage.

Ucar, A., Karakose, M., & Kırımça, N. (2024). Artificial Intelligence for Predictive Maintenance Applications: Key Components, Trustworthiness, and Future Trends. *Applied Sciences*, *14*(2), 898.

Wallace, E., Buil, I., & De Chernatony, L. (2014). Consumer engagement with self-expressive brands: brand love and WOM outcomes. *Journal of product & brand management*, *23*(1), 33-42.

Wang, L., & Finn, A. (2014). A psychometric theory that measures up to marketing reality: An adapted Many Faceted IRT model. *Australasian marketing journal*, *22*(2), 93-102.

Wang, X., & Ding, Y. (2022). The impact of monetary rewards on product sales in referral programs: The role of product image aesthetics. *Journal of Business Research*, *145*, 828-842.

Wang, X., Yu, C., & Wei, Y. (2012). Social media peer communication and impacts on purchase intentions: A consumer socialization framework. *Journal of interactive marketing*, *26*(4), 198-208.

White, K., Habib, R., & Hardisty, D. J. (2019). How to SHIFT consumer behaviors to be more sustainable: A literature review and guiding framework. *Journal of marketing*, *83*(3), 22-49.

Wong, A., & Lee, M. (2022). Building engagement in online brand communities: The effects of socially beneficial initiatives on collective social capital. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *65*, 102866.

Xu, C., Peak, D., & Prybutok, V. (2015). A customer value, satisfaction, and loyalty perspective of mobile application recommendations. *Decision Support Systems*, *79*, 171-183.

Yang, H. C., & Wang, Y. (2015). Social sharing of online videos: Examining American consumers' video sharing attitudes, intent, and behavior. *Psychology & Marketing*, *32*(9), 907-919.

Yin, R. K. (2015). *Qualitative research from start to finish.* Guilford publications.

Zaglia, M. E. (2013). Brand communities embedded in social networks. *Journal of business research*, *66*(2), 216-223.

Zaichkowsky, J. L. (1991). Consumer behavior: Yesterday, today, and tomorrow. *Business Horizons*, *34*(3), 51-58.

Zeithaml, V. A., Lemon, K. N., & Rust, R. T. (2001). *Driving customer equity: How customer lifetime value is reshaping corporate strategy*. Simon and Schuster.

Zhang, K. Z., & Benyoucef, M. (2016). Consumer behavior in social commerce: A literature review. *Decision support systems*, *86*, 95-108.

Zhao, N., & Li, H. (2020). How can social commerce be boosted? The impact of consumer behaviors on the information dissemination mechanism in a social commerce network. *Electronic Commerce Research*, *20*, 833-856.

Appendix

Appendix A – Social Identity and Social-Expansion in Growth Hacking

Consumer life cycle	**Social Identity theory**	**Self-Expansion theory**
Acquisition	Showcase how the product/service offers opportunities for personal gain. *e.g., Spotify: Spotify initially launched in niche markets, providing exclusive beta access to a limited group of users*[1].	Highlight how the product/service mirrors themselves or their affiliation with a distinct group or community. *e.g., Snapchat: "Augmented reality (AR) appealed to Gen Z"* [2].
Activation	Provide onboarding experiences that foster self-enhancement via added value and strategic content. *e.g., Shutterstock: High-quality and valuable content related to photography, design, and marketing*[3].	Motivate users to join active social forums or waiting lists. *e.g., Mailbox: "528,000 people are still waiting in line for mailbox"* [4].
Revenue	Offer personalized upgrades, premium offerings, or other value-added features that align with self-expansion and willingness to pay. *e.g., YouTube Premium*[5]	Offer exclusive membership or subscription tiers that grant access to premium features. *e.g., Google's Gmail: The limited invitation-only (exclusivity) launch of Gmail is widely regarded as one of the successful tech launches*[6].
Retention	Create a sense of brand unity and community with "quality users". *e.g., LinkedIn: "it's about adding quality users, members, or customers"* [7].	Create loyalty program or reward systems which recognize user's contributions to the community. *e.g., Foursquare [app]: Gamification: users earning badges and points for their check-ins*[8].

[1] Spotify: https://www.cascade.app/studies/how-spotify-became-the-standard.
[2] Snapchat: https://dmexco.com/stories/snapchats-success-story-driven-by-innovation/.
[3] Shutterstock: https://www.inc.com/christine-lagorio/bootstrappers-bible-shutterstock-founder-success-story.html.
[4] Mailbox: https://www.businessinsider.com/half-a-million-people-were-still-waiting-in-line-to-get-mailbox-as-it-gets-acquired-by-dropbox-2013-3.
[5] YouTube Premium: https://www.youtube.com/premium
[6] Google's Gmail: https://www.marketingweek.com/richard-shotton-scarcity-wordle/
[7] LinkedIn: https://www.inc.com/john-koetsier/the-3-stages-of-linkeds-epic-growth-from-500000-to-500-million-users.html
[8] Foursquare [app]: https://expandedramblings.com/index.php/by-the-numbers-interesting-foursquare-user-stats/?expand_article=1.

Appendix B – Research design

Phase	**Description**
Phase 1 – Study approach	Iterative process: a. Explore the main dimensions of consumer perceptions toward the sharing behavior. b. Build on these patterns to develop a quantitative analysis.
Phase 2 – Main steps	1. Exploration (study 1 - qualitative - understanding the main patterns and themes). 2. Refinement (based on insights from Study 1 – defining boundaries and developing the survey dimensions, for study 2). 3. Validation (study 2 – quantitative – EFA: refinement of factor's structure; CFA: final scale development). 4. Iteration (iterative exploration of consumer Growth Hacking shifting from a broad organic virality concept, toward a final shareability scale).

Source: Own Elaboration

Appendix C – Study 1 design

Stage	**Description**
Preliminary phase	
	Initial list of questions criteria: • Consumer experience • Consumer perception • Consumer attitude • Consumer propensity toward sharing
Preliminary list	10 questions
Pilot test	9 participants – to assess for clarity and relevance
Final list	8 questions (2 biased questions were excluded)
Main study	
Stage 1 – Introduction to the topic	Introduction to the topic of Growth Hacking (concept definition and main examples from well-known companies (i.e. Dropbox, Uber, Airbnb)
Stage 2 – Visual Examples	Representation with visual examples of popular firms by displaying their brands' logos and brief description of the main Growth Hacking tactics in relation to consumer experience using simple wording
Stage 3 – Respondents Ethics	Respondents were informed about the ethics and data privacy. Also, they were asked to take a moment and think more in depth about the topic and any personal experiences they could recall
Stage 4 – Main questions	Respondent were presented with the 8 open-ended questions
Stage 5 – Data quality	Data quality criteria: • Attention check: multiple – choice validation question • Repetition test: identical wording check • Consistency check: conflicting information • Non useful responses (i.e. none, don't know).

Source: Own Elaboration

Appendix D - Open-ended questions – Study 1

1. Please, describe any personal experience you had with firms that implemented growth hacking. Provide specific examples, if possible.

2. What are your thoughts about these companies and their offerings?

3. What impression do you have about the reputation or image of these companies?

4.Have you ever spoken about these companies or their products/services with friends, family, or colleagues?

5. When discussing these companies, what topics or aspects do you usually focus on?

6. Can you think of any situation where you recommended or referred these companies to others?

7. What aspects influence your decision to share information about these companies with others?

8. Can you share other additional comments about your experiences with these companies and their growth hacking strategies?

Source: Own Elaboration

Appendix E - Demographics

Description	**Study 1 Sample N = 59**			**Study 2 Sample N = 315**		
	%	Mean	SD	%	Mean	SD
Age		32.78	8.33		31.77	6.32
Gender		1.52	.50		1.43	.49
Male	47%			57%		
Female	53 %			43%		
Education		2.91	.38		2.76	.50
High School	12%			27%		
Graduate	85%			69%		
Master/PhD	3%			3%		
Occupation		2.08	.34		2.19	.48
Student	2%			3%		
Employee	88%			76%		
Self-Employed	10%			20%		
Unemployed	-			1%		

Source: Own elaboration, IBM SPSS 29

Appendix F – Survey Items – Study 2

Shareability Domain

Study 1

Word-of-mouth (Goyette et al., 2010), 19 items (Wom)

Intensity

Speak of it much more frequently than any other.
Speak of it much more frequently than any other type.
Speak of it to many individuals.

Positive valence

Recommend the company.
Speak of the company's good sides.
Be proud to say to others that I am this company's customer.
Strongly recommend people buy offerings online.
Mostly say positive things to others.
Have spoken favourably of it to others.

Negative valence

Mostly say negative things to others.
Have spoken unflatteringly of this company to others.

Content

Discuss the user-friendliness of its website.
Discuss security of transactions and its Internet site.
Discuss the prices of the offerings.
Discuss the variety of the products/services offered.
Discuss the quality of the products/services offered.
Discuss ease of transactions.
Speak of the rapid delivery.
Speak of the company's notoriety.

Referral (Kumar & Pansari, 2016), 4 items (Ref)

Promote it because of the monetary benefits.
Encourage myself to refer it to my friends and relatives, not only for the value derived from the offerings but also for monetary incentives.
Enjoy referring it to my friends and relatives because of the monetary incentives.
Refer to my friends and relatives because of the monetary incentives given that I use this kind of offerings.

Sharing (Yang & Wang, 2015), 3 items (Shar)

My attitudes toward passing along Growth Hacking content on social media are positive.
Generally, I think it is good to pass along Growth Hacking content on social media.
I honestly do not like pass along Growth Hacking content on social media.

Recommendation (Maxham & Netemeyer (2002), 3 items (Rec)

I would spread positive word of mouth.
I would recommend their offerings to my friends.
If my friends were looking to purchase these kinds of offerings, I would tell them to try.

Misinformation (Islam et a., 2020), 4 items (Mis)

I often share information or news on social media without checking its authenticity.
I share information or news on social media without checking facts through trusted sources.
I share information or news on social media without verifying that is true.
I share information or news even if sometimes I feel the information may not be correct.

Source: Own Elaboration

Appendix G – Final dimensions of the Shareability Construct

Scale Name	Description	Items	Mean	SD
Factor 1 Shareability Positive Valence	*It is the propensity to share, through talking, recommending, or promoting actions, from a consumer perspective concerning a firms' growth hacking offerings with a positive valence.* 1. I would spread positive word of mouth. 2. I would recommend their offerings to my friends. 3. If my friends were looking to purchase these kinds of offerings, I would tell them to try. 4. My attitudes toward passing along Growth Hacking content on social media are positive. 5. Generally, I think it is good to pass along Growth Hacking content on social media. 6. Promote it because of the monetary benefits. 7. Encourage myself to refer it to my friends and relatives, not only for the value derived from the offerings but also for monetary incentives. 8. Enjoy referring it to my friends and relatives because of the monetary incentives. 9. Refer to my friends and relatives because of the monetary incentives given that I use these kinds of offerings. 10. Speak of it much more frequently than any other. 11. Speak of it much more frequently than any other type. 12. Speak of it to many individuals. 13. Recommend the company. 14. Speak of the company's good sides. 15. Be proud to say to others that I am this company's customer. 16. Strongly recommend people buy offerings online. 17. Mostly say positive things to others. 18. Have spoken favourably of it to others 19. Discuss security of transactions and its Internet site. 20. Discuss the prices of the offerings. 21. Discuss the variety of the products/services offered. 22. Discuss the quality of the products/services offered. 23. Discuss ease of transactions. 24. Speak of the rapid delivery. 25. Speak of the company's notoriety.	25	141.81	24.238
Factor 2 Shareability Misinformation	*It is the propensity to share non verified or potentially fake information, from consumers about a firms' growth hacking offerings.* 1. I often share information or news on social media without checking its authenticity. 2. I share information or news on social media without checking facts through trusted sources. 3. I share information or news on social media without verifying that is true. 4. I share information or news even if sometimes I feel the information may not be correct.	4	19.29	7.090
Factor 3 Shareability Negative Valence	*It is the propensity to not share, from a consumer perspective concerning a firms' growth hacking offerings with a negative valence.* 1. I honestly do not like pass along Growth Hacking content on social media. 2. Mostly say negative things to others. 3. Have spoken unflatteringly of this company to others.	3	14.11	4.812

Source: Own elaboration