



# International Marketing Trends Conference

**21th IMTC – Rome  
January 20-22 2022**

## **Marketing Trends Congress Research Sessions**

With authors coming from more than 50 countries and a great variety of research topics. A unique occasion to interact and create links for future research and career opportunities.

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An opportunity to meet other researchers who share similar interests and ideas and develop an international profile.

## **Doctoral Colloquium**

Dedicated to outstanding doctoral students in an intermediate or advanced stage of their dissertation process.

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Looking at how the creative world uses the marketing tools to make “business” that makes sense.

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For Ph.D. students who defended a Ph.D. thesis on marketing issues linked to luxury brand management over the past 18 months period.

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# JOURNAL OF MARKETING TRENDS

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# Implicit Cognitions in the Experience Economy: Assessing travelers' implicit attitudes toward (social) travel experiences

## Abstract

Tourism and travel are at the forefront of the experience economy, with consumers articulating growing interest in responsible and social experiences. However, most travel products still provide basic aesthetic experiences, such as e.g. beaches and club settings, along with traditional entertainment. This disparity between travelers' stated needs for more life-changing travel experiences and their acceptance of underwhelming travel offerings might be explained by shortcomings of the traditional survey-based methodology of assessing travelers' attitudes. Therefore, this study uses implicit attitude measurement to elicit consumers' underlying attitudes toward travel experiences. Findings show that travelers associate aesthetics more with positive and education more with negative travel experiences. Comparing escapism and entertainment motives, respondents have more positive associations with passive, absorptive entertainment than with active, immersed escapism experiences. Thus, implicit cognitions may explain observed attitude-behavior gaps in responsible tourism.

*Key words: Implicit Association Test, experience economy, travel motives, experimental study*

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## 1. Introduction

In the experience economy, consumers value the associated experiences of product offerings more than its simple functional value (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003). Tourism and travel are at the forefront of the experience economy, with offerings increasingly addressing 'experiences, fulfilment and rejuvenation' instead of 'places and things' (Kind, 2002). Innovative service providers design responsible travel offerings, which entice travelers to experience travel in novel ways and learn about different cultures (Hanna et al, 2018). In spite of responsible travel's media acclaim, the majority of travel offers however still focus on providing simple aesthetic experiences, such as beautiful beach and club settings and traditional entertainment offers. A possible explanation for this gap between articulated needs and realized offers might be that the experiences that travelers' truly search for are not well captured by traditional surveys. Unconscious desires as well as social desirability biases can lead to an overestimation of the importance of higher-order, politically correct travel experiences. The question then becomes whether travelers truly search for the experiences that the travel firms are offering to them. This questions can be formulated also as a trade-off questions: Which experience is more appealing for a traveler, traditional entertainment providing aesthetic experience, such as a beautiful beach and club settings, or more active experiences, such as escapist and education ones (e.g., hiking, skiing, or even cooking the traditional cuisine).

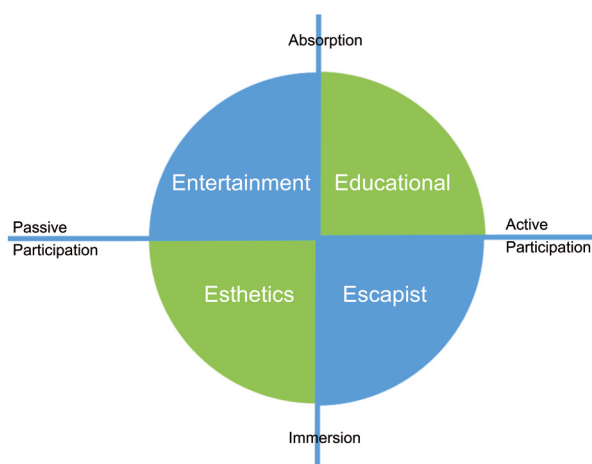
To answer these questions, previous studies have attempted to capture travelers' attitudes using traditional surveys (see: Hosany & Witham, 2010; Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007; Manthiou et al., 2014). These traditional measurements rely on self-reported ratings, where people rate particular items, such as tourism brochures, web-based advertising using bi-dimensional judgments like 'favorable/unfavorable', 'good/bad', 'useful/useless' (Jang, 2016). This self-report measurement focuses only on capturing the respondents' explicit cognitive process (Yang, He, & Gu, 2012). A major drawback of using self-report measurement is the inability to retrieve and analyze the respondents' implicit memories.

A traveler's attitude, corrected for potential social desirability biases, can be measured indirectly. This process is known as implicit attitude measurement. Implicit attitude is a person's unconscious view toward an object, and is triggered automatically by the mere presence of objects outside its attentive oversight (Bohner & Dickel, 2011; Jang, 2016). Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz (1998) thus introduced the implicit association test (IAT). Today IAT is one of the most widely used instruments when measuring individual's implicit cognition. However, there remains a lack of studies that use this robust tool to measure attitudes implicitly in tourism – destination research field (Lee & Kim, 2017; Kim, Chen, & Hwang, 2011; Kim & Chen, 2010). The purpose of this study, therefore, is to utilize Greenwald et al.'s (1998) Implicit Association Test to elicit travelers' true attitudes toward different types of travel experiences by incorporating Pine and Gilmore's (1999) experience economy framework as a supporting framework

## 2. Literature

### 2.1. Experience Economy Framework

Pine and Gilmore's (1999) experience economy framework provides a well established theoretical lens to examine consumption experience via its four realms, namely, education, entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics (see **Figure 1**). According to Pine and Gilmore, in the context of tourism destination, travellers are absorbed in the experience when engaging in an entertainment or an educational activity, whereas those travellers who participate in an aesthetics or and escapist activity are more likely to be immersed in the environment around them (Tercia et al, 2020).



**Figure 1:** The four realms of an economy experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1999)

Pine and Gilmore (1999) differentiate four realms of the experience economy as follow:

*Entertainment experience* is about sensing (e.g. watching a circus, enjoying music concert). Entertainment is classified as passive participation and a reflective absorption. Travellers become just observers of or listeners to an event, and they internalize the experience that they view or hear (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007; Hwang & Lyu, 2015).

*Educational experience* is the desire to learn something new (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), and it is classified as active participation that enhances a traveller's knowledge. Education is characterized as an absorptive experience because travellers have to absorb the obtained input and then store it in their memory (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007). Different tourist activities are considered as educational experience are, for instance, visiting museum, taking a local cuisine cooking course.

*Esthetics experience* is about being in the presence of something (e.g., laying on the beach) where the travellers immerse themselves and passively enjoy watching or are influenced by the sensory appeal of the scenery surrounding them (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007).

*Escapist experience* is about performing the activity at hand (e.g., trekking a rice field, horseback riding, or skiing). When having an escapism experience, a traveller actively participates and becomes immersed in these activities during a vacation (Hosany & Witham, 2010; Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

Researchers have thus far linked Pine and Gilmore's concept with the attitude and intention to visit or revisit a location for specific travel purposes (e.g. Chang, 2018; Park, Oh & Park, 2010; Manthiou et al., 2014). Oh, Fiore and Jeoung (2007) found that an *esthetic experience* constitutes an important aspect for travellers staying in B&B's and not so much escapist and *entertainment experiences*. This result is reasonable since the esthetic experience is a focal marketing strategy of the B&B industry, thereby linking guests' needs and the travel operators' investment. In contrast, Mehmetoglu and Engen (2011) found that *escapism and esthetics experiences* are a driver of visitors' satisfaction in the context of music festivals, whereas *education and aesthetics* become the focal point of experience in the context of museums. In the context of the cruiser experience, Hosany and Witham (2010) confirmed that *esthetics experience* is its main motive, followed by *the entertainment experience and the educational experience*. In the context of sport tourism, Hwang and Lyu (2015) revealed that sport tourism operators should offer experiences for the three dimensions of the experience economy, namely, *education, entertainment and escapism*, in order to enhance (the perception of) well-being by (golf) sport tourists. These findings indicate that the various experiences that tourists strive for depends on the tourism activity that they will undertake during their visits to a destination.

All the previous measurement relied on traditional surveys, which cannot capture the unconscious desires or the social desirability of potential travelers. Kim, Chen and Hwang (2011) argued that questionnaires cause respondents to ignore their feelings and rationalize their thoughts either because of expected social norms or their own individual standards. Thus, obtained findings may encounter potential biases, resulting in an overestimation of the importance of higher order, politically correct travel experiences. To overcome this limitation, this study utilizes an alternative measurement approach to assess people's true attitudes. To shed light on possible hidden desire of travelers, this study combined the four experience dimensions offered by Pine and Gilmore with implicit association measurement.

## **2.2. Implicit Association Test**

Indirect approaches of attitude measurement aim to uncover affective associations (Fazio & Olson, 2003) as well as unconscious cognitive associations (e.g., attitude, self-esteem, and self-concept) by using reaction time data (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). The Implicit Association Test (IAT) developed by Greenwald et al. (1998) is by far the most prominent, even if not undisputed measurement approach (Kurdi, 2020) which compares implicit associations with two categories. Relative response speed thereby reveals the strength of respondents' mental association between a target concept and its evaluative attribute (Sookeun, Liu & Dae-Young, 2015). This measurement paradigm is well recognized and has been adapted to different contexts (Frieze, Wanke & Plessner, 2006; Maison, Greenwald & Bruin, 2004), e.g. for measuring consumers' implicit preference for specific products or services. These studies' results show that the IAT can improve the prediction of behavior as compared to relying on explicit attitude measurements.

The IAT procedure involves a computerized task where participants are exposed to a series of stimuli, which can be either pictures and/or words. Those stimuli are grouped into four different categories: (a) two contrasted target concept categories consisting of objects being evaluated (here e.g. education and entertainment) and (b) two contrasting attributed categories (e.g., pleasant and unpleasant words). On each side (left and right) of the display screen, the names of one of the target categories and one of the attribute categories are presented (e.g., “education” and “unpleasant” on the left and “entertainment” and “pleasant” on the right). Then, participants are asked to assign each of stimulus to a particular category. Participants’ responses are measured according to their reaction time of how quickly they assign the stimuli to a particular category correctly.

Researchers have widely used the IAT in social psychology research (Greenwald & Banaji, 2000), even using it to investigate personality traits (Asendorpf, Banse & Mücke, 2002). In the context of marketing research, e.g., Maison, Greenwald and Bruin (2004) employed IAT to investigate implicit brand attitudes and their relation to explicit attitude, product usage, and product differentiation. Within the context of the tourism field, the IAT was used to measure tourists’ sub-consciousness association with international destinations (Choi, Liu & Kim, 2015) and tourists’ attitudes toward destinations (Kim & Chen, 2010). The study by Choi, Liu and Kim (2015) suggested that the IAT would enhance researchers’ understanding of the tourist perception on prominent international destinations that were particularly related to familiarity issues. Moreover, Kim and Chen (2010) revealed that explicit measures were unsuccessful in revealing the differences in travelers’ preferences toward two country destinations, whereas the IAT proved the presence of an implicit preference for England over China by American and Korean travelers, and China over England by Chinese travelers.

Despite its promising potential for the tourism domain, only a limited number of tourism researches have adopted the IAT to try and understand travelers’ behavior and its underlying psychological construct. Therefore, the current study adopted the IAT to measure tourists’ anticipation of desired travel experiences.

### 3. Methodology

This study applies the IAT to Pine and Gilmore’s four realms of the experience economy to reveal travellers’ implicit associations with education, entertainment, escapist and aesthetic experience. We split the IAT into two experiments that contrast the opposite dimensions of the framework: In the first IAT, educational experiences are been compared with aesthetic experiences. The second IAT then contrasts entertainment with escapist experiences. A total of 411 participants were recruited from three different universities in Indonesia. The experiment was conducted online using the research software AskYourBrain (Teichert et al, 2019), the survey link was sent via participants’ emails, and needed information was provided at the beginning before the respondents started to participate in the experiment. Both IAT are composed of five blocks, and the average response times for each block were compared (Jang, 2016). A variance-adjusted difference score (D-score) of average response times is calculated for a precise comparison.

Experiment 1 used the IAT to assess the implicit attitude toward a pair of target attitude; thus, 257 participants were involved in this experiment. The IAT consisted of five sequential blocks: (1) initial target concept discrimination; (2) evaluative attribute discrimination; (3) first combined task; (4) reversed target concept discrimination; and (5) a reversed combined task. The two target concepts of the experiment, represented by pictures were *educational experience* versus *aesthetic experience* and two evaluative attributes were “*pleasant*” versus “*unpleasant*”, represented by words (**see Table1**). A balanced set of 12 picture stimuli was chosen with six pictures representing “educational experience”(e.g., painting, cooking, visiting museum, wine review) and six pictures representing “esthetic experience” (e.g., garden, beach, mountain, village). In addition, 12 word stimuli were chosen with six words representing “pleasant”(e.g., awesome, fun, satisfying, comfortable) and six words representing “unpleasant”(e.g., bad, disgusting, pathetic, unfortunate). Manipulation checks were executed to verify the adequacy of the chosen pictures. Experts confirmed that these pictures fit well to the categories of Pine and Gilmore’s realms.



**Table 1**

Summary of the stimuli used for Experiment 1

Category	Stimuli Used (Pictures or Words)		
"Education"			
			
"Esthetics"			
			
"Pleasant"	Fun, Awesome, Satisfying, Comfortable, enjoyable, nice		
"Unpleasant"	Bad, Pathetic, Disgusting, Unfortunate, Annoying, Irritating		

The IAT consisted of five blocks, wherein respondents were asked to categorize a randomly selected stimulus into its underlying category. Instructions were given at the beginning of each block, describing the two experience categories, then asking participants to categorize each stimulus into one target experience, and explaining on how to respond (i.e., for the left, slide the mouse to the left; for the right, slide the mouse to the right). The image, caption, and category name labels stayed on the screen until the participant entered a response by moving the mouse. If a response was deemed to be incorrect, the image was immediately replaced by an error message for 500 millisecond (ms). There was a fixed 1000 ms. interval between the onset of a response and the onset of the next trial. The trials were also randomized, with an equal number of trials presented for each category.

The detailed procedure used for the first experiment is described in the following section and also visualized in **Table 2**. Three training blocks (blocks 1, 2 and 4) were used to train participants in the categorization tasks. In the first block, the subjects were asked to respond as quickly as possible by moving the mouse to the left when the presented pictures pertained to education and moving the mouse to the right when the image depicted an esthetic one. The location of both categories switched in block 4. In the second block, The two discrimination categories were replaced with two evaluative attributes, namely, “Unpleasant” on the left and “Pleasant” on the right. There were also 20 randomized trials, 10 for each attribute category.

**Table 2**

The Block Sequence for the IAT

Block	Task description	Left categories	Right categories
1	Initial target concept discrimination	Education	Esthetics
2	Evaluative attribute discrimination	Unpleasant	Pleasant
3	Initial combined task	Education OR Unpleasant	Esthetics OR Pleasant
4	Reversed target concept discrimination	Esthetics	Education
5	Reversed combined task	Esthetics OR Unpleasant	Education OR Pleasant





*Remark: The reversed sequence started with Blocks 4-5, followed by Blocks 2-3.*

In the first combined task (Block 3), the categories for discrimination in each block trial were written as “Education or Unpleasant” in the left upper corner and “Esthetic or Pleasant” in the right upper corner. For reversed target concept discrimination, the positions of two categories for discrimination were switched, with “Education” moving to the right and “Esthetic” to the left. Thus, the correct response was different based on the stimuli that appeared on the screen. The reversed combined task block (Block 5) was similar to the first combined task block, except the categories for discrimination became Esthetic or Unpleasant on the left and “Education or Pleasant” on the right. Both the reaction time and the accuracy of each response were measured.

In the subsequent Experiment 2, the procedures were similar to Experiment 1. The two target concepts of the experiment, as represented by pictures were “Entertainment experience” versus “Escapist experience” and there were two evaluative attributes, as represented by the words “pleasant” versus “unpleasant” (see **Table 3**). There were 12 pictures stimuli with six pictures representing the “Entertainment experience” (e.g., watching a music concert, dance performance, and circus) and 6 pictures representing the “Escapist experience” e.g., tracking, skiing, and diving).

**Table 3**

Summary of the stimuli used for Experiment 2

Category	Stimuli Used (Pictures or Words)		
"Entertainment"			
			
"Escapist"			
			
"Pleasant"	Quiet, Fresh, Excited, Entertaining, Enjoyable, Nice		
"Unpleasant"	Noisy, Boring, Disgusting, Disturbing, Annoying, Irritating		

To control for possible sequence effects in both experiments, the respondents were randomly assigned either to the standard block sequence (the compatible condition shown first, as reported above) or to a reversed block sequence (incompatible condition shown first). Here, the positions of the two categories for discrimination were switched, with "Education"/"Entertainment" being moved to the right and "Esthetics"/"Escapist" being moved to the left. Thus, in contrast to the initial target-concept discrimination block, the subjects were first supposed to move the opposing category to the left-hand side, matching it in Block 3 with the positive attribute dimension and only later in Block 5 with the negative attribute dimension.

## 4. Results

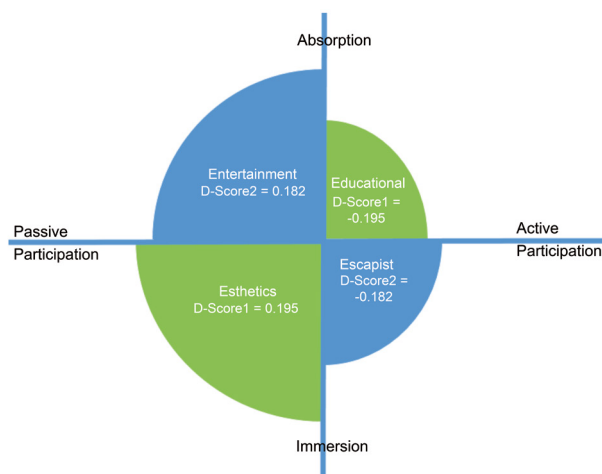
### 4.1. IAT analyses

We followed the IAT scoring algorithm of Greenwald, Nosek and Banaji (2003) and treated the raw data according to the following procedure: First, we eliminated trial response latencies greater than 10,000 milliseconds. Then, we included all response latencies, whereby we could then add a latency correction to the false responses. Finally, we calculated the difference in the score between the congruent and incongruent trial block, divided by the pooled standard deviation in the response latencies across both blocks). The resulting measure resembled the IAT D-score. The D-scores are computed as the mean difference divided by the overall standard deviation (SD) (Greenwald, Nosek, & Banaji 2003).

The analysis of Experiment 1 compared the relative attitudes for aesthetic to educational motives for travel. The analyses showed that respondents associate esthetics more with pleasant impressions and education more with unpleasant impressions, with a significant D-score of 0.195 (std error 0.050). This second key finding is particularly interesting, given the sample population of students where a desire for learning should have been expected.

The analysis of Experiment 2 allowed us to gain further insights regarding the implicit affective associations with escapism compared to entertainment as a travel motive. When comparing the escapist and entertainment motives, the respondents associated entertainment significantly more with a positive attitude than they did escapism, as manifested by a D-score of 0.182 (std error 0.034). This finding is noticeable, given the sample population of young people who often explicitly state escape and adventure as a self-fulfillment motive (Brown 2005).

Figure 2 summarizes the findings of both IAT experiments in a symbolized figure where the size of each quadrant corresponds to the relative (dis)favouring based on the implicit associations' D-score. It shows that the four realms of the experience framework are not of equal value for travellers. The two dimensions of passive experiences outweigh their counterparts that need traveller's active participation. Findings also indicate a small favouring of immersive experiences against absorptive experiences. In sum, an imbalance of travellers' implicit attitudes towards passive and absorptive experiences has to be stated.



**Figure 2:** Implicit associations towards experience dimensions

### 4.2. Robustness Checks

As a robustness check of the findings, we checked for any possible sequence effects of the IAT experiment. Hereto, we analysed the differences in the estimated D-scores across the two settings of the IAT experiment, either starting with the compatible or incompatible task. The following table exhibits the calculated D-scores for the IAT experiment, comparing the educational motives to the aesthetic ones. As can be seen in Table 3, there were no sequence effects present in our study. Thus, findings were not influenced by between-block learning effects.



IAT results differentiated by sequence of the IAT Test			
Criterion	Compatible block first	Incompatible block first	Total
Mean D-Score	0.199	0.191	0.195
Standard Deviation	0.619	0.614	0.617
# observations	84	66	150

Table 3: A Robustness Check on the Findings of the IAT tests

## 5. Discussion

Two experiments tested travellers' unconscious preferences toward destination. The results of Experiment 1 revealed that implicitly respondents have a stronger positive association toward esthetic experiences compared to educational experiences during their destination visit. This finding implies that Indonesian travellers' prefer to passively enjoy nature and immerse in the environment surrounding them. Therefore, compared to active involvement in a local cuisine cooking class, consuming the beautiful scenery of the mountains or lying on the beach are more favorable activities for Indonesian travellers. In Experiment 2, the results revealed that Indonesian travellers prefer entertainment experiences more than escapist experiences. Hence, marketer can offer activities that enable travellers to lay back, become passively involved in activities, or just absorb the environment around them (e.g. watching a traditional dance performance, watching the performing arts) rather than active activities like hiking, trekking or scuba diving, all of which require travellers to actively engage in activity.

These insights about travellers' implicit attitudes differed from the prima-facie expected attitudes and from the findings obtained by standard questionnaires. For example, Utomo and Noormega (2020) from the prominent research consultancy IDN Research Institute (2020) recently reported that Indonesia millennial travellers are primarily concerned about authenticity and experiential travel experiences. However, if their findings were reframed in the experience economy framework used by Pine and Gilmore, we expect that Indonesia millennial travellers prefer education experiences (i.e. visiting colonial sites and cultural sites) and escapist experience (i.e., adventure tourism). This result would then lead to a contradictory suggestion, i.e., to design activity-based travel experiences such as cultural/educational and adventure tourism, because our implicit association test suggests that Indonesian travellers prefer to have esthetic and entertainment experiences during their vacation rather than educational and escapist experiences.

This study comparison let us assume that there is an implicit/explicit dissociation for desired travel experiences. Further studies should assess the extent to which marketer reports may have overstated travelers' desire for active vacations. Since further research is needed to test which method of attitude measurement can best predict ex-post travel experiences, we recommend that market researchers apply both methods to reveal both types of attitudes, namely, travelers' explicit as well as implicit views.

This study is of exploratory nature and clearly not without its limitations. The use of a student sample is an obvious limitation, however, we deemed it acceptable due to the chosen focus on millennials as our traveler population. More importantly, there might be deep-rooted cultural issues that ask for cross-cultural comparisons. Finally, longitudinal studies are needed to cross-verify the validity of ex-ante travel expectations when forecasting ex-post satisfaction with travel experiences.



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# **Sustainable Digital Customer Experience: literature review in search of theoretical roots**

## **Abstract**

This conceptual paper aims to explore theoretical roots in the streams of marketing and sustainability, in particular exploring how could sustainability be included in customer experience, within a digital customer journey. This topic seems to recently receive growing attention by consumers and companies, and this could be a signal of a new trend of mass market demand. If firms do not anticipate new needs they could lose new market opportunities and weaken their competitive advantage. In this scenario, in order to identify theoretical roots and as such to help future contributions and proposal of new frameworks, a literature review has been taken. In summary, this paper is revealing findings from two scoping studies, opens the discussion towards a novel definition of Sustainable Digital Customer Experience.

*Key words: Marketing, Sustainability, Customer Experience, Digital Customer Journey, scoping study.*

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## Introduction

This conceptual paper aims to explore some common literature roots, in the streams of marketing and sustainability, in particular exploring how could sustainability be “included” in customer experience, within a digital customer journey. Sustainability efforts are receiving growing attention by consumers and companies’ investments, and these new values are driving new mass market demand trends. Digitalization is now a big wave that is asking marketing to review distribution and supply chain strategies with omnichannel and sustainable perspectives. The omnishopper is evolving, being his journey off-online integrated, and requiring new digital seamless and sustainable experiences. If firms do not satisfy these new needs they could lose new market opportunities and weaken their competitive advantage. In rapidly changing scenarios, marketers have to innovate anticipating trends and market requests, and academic research is often able to track these changes. However, when a new conceptualization is emerging during a big change, it is useful to explore pre-scenario literature and find its theoretical roots.

## Literature background

### ***A long tradition on the importance of sustainability in corporate and marketing strategy***

Many years ago, companies had included sustainable development in their strategic directions, in alignment with modernization and the emerging economic, social and environmental needs (Potacan and Mulej, 2003). Relevant external pressures have motivated firms to internalize the concept of sustainability in their strategies and activities (Grayson, 2011), so that corporate sustainability had been shaped investing in innovation (Overcash and Twomey, 2011). Sustainable innovation entered the organization, in particular requiring a change in its structure and downloading sustainable strategies at functional levels (Schneider, Wallenburg and Fabel, 2014), marketing and branding included (Nedergaard and Gyrd-Jones, 2013). Corporate sustainability strategies had been embedded into the organizational culture, and enhancing employees’ sustainable orientation permits the continuous improvement of new sustainable initiatives (Engert, and Baumgartner, 2016). Moreover, the sustainability concepts entering in principles and policies helped to ensure the alignment in marketing and communication efforts (Haugh and Talwar, 2010). Above all, marketing strategies have been driven by markets and customers. Consumers in particular, became more informed about sustainability, and their new beliefs changed their purchase behaviour, so then new retailing services were pulled by these market drivers (Naidoo and Gasparatos, 2018). In addition, in their evolution toward sustainability sensitiveness, customers’ responses are more negative when a firm is weak in relevant sustainability aspects (Choi and Ng, 2011). Furthermore, researches confirmed that sustainable practices provide economic and social values (Camilleri, 2017), and corporate sustainability significantly impacts on its economic performance (Lourenço, Branco, Curto and Eugénio, 2012). It is well demonstrated that sustainability and profit can co-exist, and these two goals can be reached in synergy (Hutchinson, Singh, and Walker, 2012).

Sustainability entered business strategies becoming the main purpose for innovative sustainable business models, in order to create value for multiple stakeholders (Dembek, and Singh, 2018), in particular offering superior customer value and contributing to the sustainable development of firms and society. In trying to be successful in the long term (Norman and MacDonald, 2004), companies adopted the Triple Bottom Line approach as a way to sustain a competitive advantage (Schulz and Flanigan, 2016).

Tollin and Christensen (2017) demonstrated that marketing capabilities, together with the innovation of new products, services and business models, form a strong driver to address sustainability in marketing. Indeed, marketing departments have a propensity to lead corporate sustainability (Tollin and Christensen, 2017). Chow (2011) confirms it by discussing the usefulness of the shareholder engagement in sharing and promoting sustainable causes.

Collaborative sustainable business models suggest to welcome in the network the internal organization (top managers and employees) and all of the other actors (Arevalo et al., 2011), final consumers included (Høgevoid and Svensson, 2012). Consumers should take a participative role in helping companies in reaching higher sustainability results, and this collaboration is enabled by societal influences (Hacking and Guthrie, 2008) that are changing the sustainability sensitivity within the customer journey. On the other side, many customers denounce green washing practices and lack of sustainability, boycotting brands that are not perceived as sustainable (Hartmann and Moeller, 2014). The above described market revolution have forced companies to innovate their marketing strategies to creatively reposition their corporate identities in respect of emerging environmental and social values (Aryanasl et al., 2016), assessing sustainability in their supply chain strategies (Ahi and Searcy, 2015), and marketing strategies (Mish and Scammon, 2010) to start engaging customers in these efforts (Wilson, 2015).

### ***Customer experience and sustainability***

Marketing experts know that, on the consumer side, some experiences offered during a purchase process could help in building a unique, pleasurable and memorable brand experience (Jain, Aagja and Bagdare, 2017). With the right signals and stimuli, a brand may evoke sensations, feelings, cognitions and behavioural responses (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello, 2009). Customer experience is crucial in creating customer loyalty, so then, updated marketing strategies are suggesting to re-designing the entire offerings system with personalized co-created experience (Jain et al, 2017). Corporate experience tactics require to pay attention to small details in every touch point.

Each consumption experience produces an emotional response, which impact on customer satisfaction and on the subsequent purchase intention, and thus, customer experiences may influence the costumer's holistic perception of the corporate (Bolton et al., 2014). Customer experience tactics have then to be included in a marketing plan to correctly fulfil marketing goals. The first step should be the adoption of a customer experience framework, that begins with analysing and defining target customer's values, needs and desires, adopting a customer-centric logic (Nasution et al., 2014). To enhance brand reputation and customer loyalty, marketing managers should differentiate their strategies and develop adequate experiences that could address target needs and preferences (Foroudi et al., 2016).

The online shopping channel is increasingly growing, and firms have to provide adequate to customer online engaging activities, with interaction elements (Stein and Ramaseshan, 2016). Rose et al. online customer experience model suggests to focus on the following five Affective Experiential State's elements (Rose, Clark, Samouel and Hair, 2012): Ease of Use; Customization; Connectedness; Aesthetics; Perceived Benefits. Every firm interpret sustainability with different strategies and consequently has differentiated positioning and strengths. Experiential marketing fundamentals (Schmitt, 1999) could be easily adapted to actual online interactions and all of the e-touchpoints. Furthermore, stimuli that create the customer experience might be built on the principal company's vision and core values on sustainability, and should be integrated in each micro moment of truth, digital channels included. However, only if digital experiences fits into the whole customer journey, consumers will be engaged and add value to the company (Kozinets, 2014). As such, the physical and digital sides need to be well cross-channel orchestrated (Avery et al., 2012).

As we know, the literature background about marketing sustainability, customer experience and customer journey, is already well established. However, all of these concepts are explored in silos and it seems they are not yet merged to respond to our original research questions (RQ): What pillars define the Sustainable Digital Customer Experience? Which tactics should be used to enhance sustainability in the customer experience also during the entire customer journey, digital moment of truth included?

### **Methodology**

Based on the above mentioned literature background, this manuscript aims to highlight theoretical roots and identify some further direction for researchers and practitioners.

The methodology adopted is multiple scoping studies (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). Scoping studies are structure literature reviews defined by Mays, Roberts and Popay (2001, 194; in Arksey and O'Malley, 2005), as methods that aim to chart the key concepts that support a research area and the principal sources and kinds of evidence accessible. They can be set out as "stand-alone" projects in their own right, particularly if an area is complex or it has never been entirely examined before. As researchers become more familiar with literature, they will undertake "more sensitive searches of literature" (Arksey and O'Malley 2005, 22). As such, researchers will not follow strict limits on the identification of fitting studies or on the study selection. This method requires an iterative process, not a linear one; this involves researchers undertaking every step in a thoughtful way and, if it is necessary, to repeat steps, in order to assure a complete and comprehensive coverage of literature. The literature review protocol, in relation to the direction of a scoping study, consists of five stages: a) identifying the research questions; b) identifying relevant studies; c) study selection; charting the data; d) collating, summarizing and reporting the results. This paper is describing two scoping studies conducted to respond to the main research question: the first one to identify the fundamentals of the Sustainable Customer Experience concept; the second to apply these findings to the digital side of the integrated customer journey. As such, this research could help in defining what Sustainable Digital Customer Experience means according to the extant literature: its definition, fundamentals and conceptual roots.

### ***Study 1 on Sustainable Customer Experience***

Study 1 focuses its attention to highlight theoretical and managerial roots of the modern concept of the Sustainable Customer Experience. Since this concept is not discussed well yet in academia, there is a need for a deeper, multi-topics literature review, in particular pulling together Sustainability and Customer Experience scientific contributions.



Relevant studies have been searched on five different databases (as suggested by Goyal, Rahman and Kasmi, 2013): Emerald Full Text, Elsevier's Science Direct, JSTOR, Taylor & Francis, Springer-Verlag. This first study did not apply any temporal filter. Six keywords are used in this first study: three on sustainability at a strategic level (corporate sustainability, sustainable business model, TBL triple bottom line) and three specific on customer experience (customer experience, sustainable customer experience, online customer experience). Each keyword was used in searches within each database, with restrictions on title, abstract and keywords in the initial search. The study selection was conducted using the entire articles' contents, seeking relevance for the research questions. This resulted in 119 relevant papers, in particular: 29 on corporate sustainability, 21 on sustainable business model, 17 on triple bottom line, 30 on customer experience, 2 on sustainable customer experience, and 20 on online customer experience. Then, the full content of selected articles has been analysed and main findings helped in responding to the first study goal and to move to the next research phase. In particular, limitations in study 1 suggested to explore the theme upon a broader view of online customer experience, well developed within the Integrated Customer Journey concept, in scientific and managerial contributions. So then, study 2 was built to fulfil those limitations.

### ***Study 2 on Digital Customer Experience***

This second scoping study aims to explore the Digital Customer Experience, following the same research protocol, but being more oriented to explore academic and managerial sources within a specific time range, pre covid (2000-2019). The main keywords used in this second search were: customer journey, customer journey touchpoint, customer journey mapping. This search was run on scientific papers and on industry reports. Keywords are searched on abstracts and keywords of the academic articles, and the focalization on digital customer experience has been then stressed within the content analysis of full text of selected papers. This process lead to 68 relevant articles selected.

Industry reports and companies reports, available online, have been capture within a Google engine search, and directly on important consulting and market research institutes website. The managerial section of the scoping study leads to select 49 industry reports. Initial results are confirming that there is a full range of content about digital customer and user experience, while limited discussion are about sustainable digitalization, but very little is specific on sustainable digital experience.

## **Results**

### ***Sustainable Customer Experience: literature review results***

Study 1 data charting revealed some interesting results, useful for understanding conceptual origins in terms of countries and time periods of the analysed articles. The articles found were published in 71 journals, some appearing more frequently than others, in particular: International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management (frequency 8); Journal of Business Ethics, Journal of Cleaner Production (7); Journal of Brand Management, Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science Procedia-Social and Behavioural Science (5); Corporate Governance, Journal of Direct, Data and Digital Marketing Practice (3); and ten journals (including, Journal of Marketing, Journal of Business Research, International Journal of Physical Distribution & Logistics Management) with 2 articles each, and all of the others with one article each. So than, this literature review found widespread sustainability contributions in multiple journals.

The international authorship of sustainability articles is shown in descriptive statistics as the bigger cluster, with research teams of different nationalities collectively spanning the world. On customer experience topics, American authors are the most frequent.

About the general trend timeline: 101 articles (84,9%) were published in a 9-year range (2009-2018), with a slight variance in customer experience topics, that have some peaks in 2004-2007-2014-2017. This is an interesting finding, considering that the keywords search did not have any temporal filter.

The content analysis of the 119 selected publications revealed a literature gap in relation to the concept of Sustainable Customer Experience. Very few articles found with the keyword "Sustainable Customer Experience", however only one precisely refer to this concept. Therefore, according to the literature study, it is possible to affirm that there is a theoretical gap within the business literature in relation to this topic, and this is a call for theory building in further research.

### ***Digital Customer Journey: literature review results***

Study 2, collecting 68 relevant academic articles, shows the increased interest of researcher on Customer Journey research topic, with the following time range descriptive statistics: 8 studies are published before the year 2000, 13 between 2000 and 2009, 47 between 2010 and 2019. The most used keywords are: Omnichannel customer behaviour (12), Customer journey mobile (9), Augmented reality customer (7), Customer journey omnichannel (6), Customer showrooming

(4), Customer journey (3), Machine learning marketing (3) and all of selected papers are connected to omnichannel. The fragmentation of sources, which the selected paper belong to, is evident, expect for some main academic journal, such as: Journal of Business Research (5), Psychology & Marketing (4), Journal of retailing (4), Journal of marketing (3).

In addition to this search on academic sources, the second study included also other selected 49 managerial sources; about their time range: 10 reports were published before the year 2005, 11 between 2005 and 2017 and then 27 in the last two years (2018-2019). Comparing academic and industry sources it seems that the customer journey conceptualization has grown in parallel, with a similar trend line. Companies reports belong to the following firms: Google Inc. (14), Accenture (4), BGC (4), Forbes (4), SEMrush (3), PWC (2), Salesforce.com (2). The Study 2 on managerial reports contains the following keywords - as the most frequent words related to customer journey: omnichannel, customer journey seamless experience, digital customer behaviour, service blueprinting, customer journey map, moment of truth, showrooming, customer journey measurement, survey and web analysis tool, buyer personas, CRM analysis, analyse market trends, marketing automation, machine learning, augmented reality, voice assistant marketing. This list is a first evidence of industry reports contents, that are pointing out the need of more analysis, measurement and technology tools, to help in assisting the creation of an effective integrated customer journey. However, also in this second study, there is a lack of interest in digitally sustainable experiences.

### Discussion

#### ***What pillars define the Sustainable Digital Customer Experience?***

Based on the content of the first literature review, we can highlight seven relevant elements that could lead to the formulation of the Sustainable Customer Experience pillars:

- customers need products, services and activities that are oriented to economic, social and environmental sustainability;
- sustainability can be improved through innovation and specific business functions;
- the adoption of a sustainable strategy by a company leads to a competitive advantage and to a great economic profit;
- firms are increasingly internalizing sustainability following Sustainable Business Models;
- managers need to follow customers' needs, beliefs and values;
- marketers need to engage customers building customer experiences that are created following their needs, beliefs and values;
- customer experience is one of the most important drivers in the creation of customer loyalty.

These elements could represent the base on which sustainable customer experiences might be developed, in digital environment as well. Sustainable customer experience is an evolution of the traditional customer experience concept, updated to the modern requests of customers, that have needs, beliefs and values that are changing and moving towards sustainability (Smith and Melissen, 2018). So then, Sustainable Customer Experience is defined as "A process that creates holistic value thanks to the customer's engagement derived by sensations, feelings, cognitions and behaviours evoked by sustainable stimuli, based on economic, social and environmental sustainability" (Signori et al., 2019). This conceptualization is broadening to other network members, and stakeholders in general, toward a new definition of Sustainable Stakeholder Experience framework (Signori, Cantele, and Gozzo, 2019). However, all of these new theoretical hints, could not refine the digital side of the interaction and this limitation is bridged with the second study.

The customer journey literature review suggests to consider all of the customer experiences of the customer journey, that is composed by three phase: before-during-after the purchase (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). As such, omnichannel strategies (Google Inc report, 2018 October) should assist customers in every moment of truth and in every touchpoint (Bettucci et al., 2016), providing unique experiences, complete, fluid and without channel barriers (Juaneda-Ayensa, Monquera, and Sierra Murillo, 2016). In a seamless experience (that means without interruptions), consumers seek for simple and intuitive supports for their customer decision journey. This decision process is composed by four stages and it is circular (McKinsey report, Court, Elxinga, Mulder and Vetvik (2009), so then more attention is to give to end-to-end customer experience (Maechler, Neher and Park, 2016).

For practitioners, experience is everything in the digital world (PWC report, Clarke and Kinghorn, 2018). The Marketing Science Institute says that customer experience is the next challenge for research, that could help to optimize marketing performance in every critical touchpoint during the customer journey. This statement is confirming the need for attention to details, that emerged in the first study. Even before the pandemia, action plans to influence positive digital experience responses were set as the short-term future key points by marketing practitioner (Accenture report, 2018 September).

## Conclusions

Despite the growing interest on digital experience tactics (Broekhuizen et al. 2021; Pencarelli, 2020), and at the same time the importance of sustainable values (Urdea et al., 2021), very little effort was made to merge the two sides, digital and sustainability, in customer experiences. This research method, aiming to find conceptual roots throughout a structured literature review integrating different topics, reveals some cues to build a new conceptualization, where digital and physical touchpoints are orchestrated to offer valuable and sustainable customer experiences, but have found an evident literature gap in theoretical roots.

In summary, this conceptual paper is contributing to open the discussion for a novel definition of Sustainable Digital Customer Experience, in the meantime offering some descriptive results on time range and key words to highlight literature gaps and pillars merging sustainability and digital in customer experience. These two studies identify some gaps in the evidence base, as well as highlight some initial findings. In particular, future research should explore how digital customer experience can be enhanced by sustainability values and stimuli, and its role on educating or co-educating customers and managers to become more sustainable. To be clear, a sustainable customer experience in the digital world is different from sustainable digital communication, and digital sustainability does not refer to communicate sustainability digitally only. In conclusion, the Sustainable Digital Customer Experience theories and practice need to be developed, and their roots consists in an integrated process that creates holistic value thanks to the digital customer's engagement derived by sensations, feelings, cognitions and behaviours evoked by sustainable stimuli, based on economic, social and environmental sustainability. This article, with all of its limitations, solicit further research and publications in order to enable more sustainability entering in digital/integrated customer experiences, in multiple touchpoints and with different stimuli.

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## Online Reviews and Reading Strategies: The Airbnb Case.

### Abstract

The platform economy mostly relies on implementing a trust generating system, through rating and reputation mechanisms. Our research aims to arrive at a better understanding of the dynamics of online bookings on the Airbnb platform through the lens of online reviews. The dataset covers the available offers in Paris in June 2019 and includes all the reviews written in French (282,057 reviews). The final dataset includes 30 variables and 31,090 offers. Several nested linear regressions are compared, which include the characteristics of the offer, host strategy, the signals regarding host quality, ratings and sentiment analysis. The results confirm an interaction effect between reviews expressing a positive sentiment and reviews expressing a negative sentiment: offers with mixed content generate the highest booking rate.

*Key words: platform economy, online reviews, signal theory, sentiment analysis, reading strategies*

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## Introduction

Platform economies, such as Uber and Airbnb, are largely based on a trust generating mechanism, i.e. the establishment of a system for generating trust in relationships, with rating and reputation mechanisms (Zhou, Dresner, and Windle, 2008). These platforms have the specificity of a dual evaluation system, by suppliers and customers, which can lead to strategic behavior that can bias the quality of the signal (Masclet and Pénard, 2012). Because of their major impact on decision making and business performance, online reviews attract a great deal of interest, both at a theoretical and managerial level.

At a theoretical level, the availability of aggregate data (cinema audience statistics, online sales rankings) coupled with the availability of average indicators on the reviews expressed, initially oriented research towards sectors such as the cinema (Larceneux, 2007), pure players (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006) and online auction sites (Cabral and Hortacsu, 2010). This research highlights the joint impact of the volume of reviews and their valence on online sales (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Ren et al. 2018). From a managerial point of view, the crucial importance of online reviews explains the interest that customer relations managers have in them. While they are primarily sources of immediate knowledge, managers are also sensitive to the problem of “false reviews” and ways to counter or eliminate them. Several approaches have been proposed to identify false reviews (Hu et al., 2012; Munzel, 2015), including the label awarded by a third party source (Consumer Reports). Similarly, there is a strong temptation to respond even if the strategies are not obvious: in the hotel sector, it is relevant to respond to a negative review, while responding to a positive review is similar to a promotional strategy, generating reaction among internet users (Wang and Chaudhry, 2018).

Much of the now extensive research on customer reviews has focused on assessing the effect of evaluations (both quantitative and textual) on consumer response. Causality tests have established a two-way relationship between the volume of negative reviews and the rank of the item on a commercial web site, with only a marginal relationship for positive reviews (Ren et al., 2018). Thus, it is the negative reviews that play a predominant role because they are attributed to the experience itself and not to the personality of the reviewer (Chen and Lurie, 2013).

On the other hand, little research has focused on the reading strategies that underlie the internet user's decision making. Qualitative research has shown that the motivations for consulting reviews online are essentially utilitarian since these reviews are primarily used to finalize a booking session (Séré de Lanauze and Siadou-Martin, 2018). Two levels of information are taken into account: on the one hand, the corpus of comments considered as a whole, qualified in terms of size (number of comments), trend valence (rather positive or negative) and consistency, and on the other hand, the information elements specific to each message taken individually (source, valence, length and content in terms of substance and form). Following on from this work, our research aims to test on real data the effects of the comments submitted concerning the attractiveness of an offer. As the internet user is not able to process all the available information, a sample-based reading strategy is employed. As a few samples of reviews are read, the information accumulates and it is assumed, in the spirit of Thaler's (1985) mental accounting, that the final evaluation results from a balance between negative and positive feelings. Extremely positive reviews may call into question their veracity (too good to be true) (Maslowska, Malthouse and Bernitter, 2017) while extremely negative reviews discourage the internet user from making a reservation. We are therefore seeking to test the hypothesis of an interaction effect between positive and negative reviews using real data extracted from the Airbnb platform. All the offers available in Paris in June 2019 were collected as well as all the reviews in French. Our research therefore has three specific objectives:

1. To underline the interest of taking into account, beyond the aggregate quantitative elements (volume and valence of the ratings), the analysis of the sentiment expressed.
2. To establish the effects of mitigation between positive and negative reviews.
3. To highlight differentiated reading strategies based on situational variables such as the time horizon.

For this, different nested regression models will be compared, taking into account: (1) housing characteristics, (2) host offering strategy, (3) host related quality signals, (4) online reviews, and (5) sentiment analysis. The results support the proposed theory regarding online review reading strategies: offers with “mixed” content in customer reviews lead to the highest booking rates.

## Theoretical framework

How does an internet user evaluate the attractiveness of the offers available on CtoC platforms? Which clues does he/she rely on to assess the quality of properties offered for rent? How does a more in-depth reading of the reviews submitted support or contradict an initial assessment? In addition to the aggregate indicators indicating the quality of a property, the reviews left by internet users, and in particular the feelings they express, can contribute to the judgment formed by the internet user of the attractiveness of an offer.

### ***Trust signals***

Research on online reviews highlights the preponderant role of social influence, beyond any judgment that the receiver may make on his or her own based on the product description (Tran, 2015). In a first approach, the internet user in search of goods or services can rely on several trust “signals” relating to the goods themselves or to the person offering them.

Initial research conducted on the cinema and online auction site sectors has established the role of two key indicators in explaining the level of sales: the volume of reviews issued and the average score given. A study of the reviews on the Allociné site shows that after the launch week, buzz spreads amongst internet users: the number of internet users in the first week is a significant predictor of attendance after the first week (Larceneux, 2007). Similarly, the average score is positively correlated to sales on pure player sites (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006). A closer examination of the effects of the scores awarded highlights the importance of negative reviews (“one star”), due to their greater scarcity (Ren et al., 2018). The first negative review received by a seller is particularly crucial since it influences the rate of sales growth, which becomes negative (Cabral and Hortacsu, 2010). Beyond the signals that testify to the quality of goods, there are trust labels that make it possible to identify sellers within a collaborative platform. For example, the “Superhost” status on Airbnb rewards the most experienced and highest rated hosts on Airbnb.

These trust signals allow an initial selection to be made by the internet user, which can be coupled with a more in-depth analysis of the offers thus selected after filtering. Indeed, recent research suggests going beyond indicators of the volume and valence of reviews to also take into account the length of the review (Fink et al., 2018) or the sentiment expressed (Wang et al., 2018). Work of a more qualitative nature confirms the consideration of these two levels of information, with the internet user relying both on aggregate indicators and on elements of information specific to each message taken individually (Séré de Lanauze and Siadou-Martin, 2018).

### ***The contribution of sentiment analysis***

The traces left on the web, whether in the form of written reviews or simple emoticons reflecting the writer’s state of mind, have the advantage of being abundant, independent and spontaneous but unstructured (Moscarola and Boughzala, 2016). To analyze these corpora, it seems indispensable to mix traditional methods (based on lexical properties) with ad hoc semantic approaches (construction and application of thesauri) and sentiment analysis.

Sentiment analysis can be approached in two ways: a machine-learning approach and a lexicon-based approach. The first one focuses on the identification of sentences or proposals with evaluative expressions and uses repertoires of positive or negative terms. The discursive or summative composition (Chardon, 2013) of these elements makes it possible to establish the more or less positive or negative character of a review. This approach generally involves two stages (Alkalbani et al., 2016): a pre-processing stage for raw reviews, followed by a stage in which the reviews are classified according to their polarity. To this end, a small sample is used to train the SVM (Support Vector Machine) classification algorithm to measure the accuracy of the prediction. Based on a mapping of emojis according to the sentiment expressed (Novak et al., 2015), Crépin and Ngobo developed a neural model capable of learning the vocabulary associated with the presence of positive or negative emojis (expressing a sentiment). The second approach, based on a lexicon of pre-evaluated words or expressions, makes it possible to determine the feelings contained in texts by simply counting occurrences of these words or expressions (Mohammad and Turney, 2013; Pennebaker et al., 2015). While sentiment analysis has been used primarily for descriptive purposes, it has also been used to explain product sales (Li et al., 2019), to detect false reviews (Hu et al., 2012), and to identify the relative strengths and weaknesses of a product as expressed through consumer reviews (Wang et al., 2018).

Past research has established the importance of negative information in the internet user’s decision-making process (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006). An attribution mechanism is at work to explain the negative relationship between the valence of the review and its usefulness: positive reviews are attributed more to the personality of the reviewer while negative reviews are attributed more to experience with the product or service (Chen and Lurie, 2013). Compared to “classic” commercial web sites, CtoC platforms are characterized by a greater empathy felt between the provider and the customer (Pera et al., 2019), which reduces the propensity to write a negative review.

Both positive and negative topics have an effect on sales that is mediated by the rating given to the product or service (Li et al., 2019). The presence of emotions in the reviews submitted also influences ratings through an attribution mechanism (Kim and Gupta, 2012): a negative review with a high emotional content will be attributed to the irrationality of its writer, unless several negative reviews express similar emotions. An offer that receives several negative reviews with strong emotional content will be rejected, since the convergence of emotions increases the informational value of the reviews and therefore, if they are negative, the feeling of making a bad choice. While positive comments are obviously desirable, one can however imagine that exclusively positive comments can lead to mistrust. The attribution mechanism discussed above (Chen and Lurie, 2013) can relate highly enthusiastic comments to the personality or intent of the writer. On the other hand, the absence of negative emotions expressed in the comments may create doubt about the credibility of the reviews.

## ***The role of reviews in the reading and decision-making process***

The now abundant research on customer reviews has focused mainly on assessing the effect of evaluations (quantitative and textual) on consumer response, but few studies have considered the reading strategies that lead to decision making. However, Afflerbac and Cho (2009) provide a useful synthesis, showing that reading is not limited to the comprehension of words and more complex phrases, but also includes constructive strategies where the choice of texts is critical. Reading is also a decision-making process that leads to filtering and selecting the elements that will receive more attention.

From the repeated observation that positive and negative reviews have an asymmetrical effect, we draw the idea that their evaluation is subject to two independent processes that proceed by elimination in the tradition of attribute elimination models (Laurent, 2007). In our case, the attributes are the positive and negative feelings perceived in the skim reading of texts, at least the most salient ones. The rule used would thus be to penalize offers whose reviews are frequently very negative, because they confirm doubt, but also, less intuitively, those whose reviews are frequently very positive, because they may also be a sign of misleading information (too good to be true). Research based on actual sales data establish that, contrary to popular belief, higher scores do not always lead to higher sales (Maslowska, Malthouse and Bernritter, 2017). On the commercial web sites studied, the probability of purchase increases with an average rating up to 4.2-4.5 stars, and then decreases (especially when the average rating is close to 5 stars). We thus formulate the hypothesis that the presence of exclusively positive or negative reviews leads to fewer reservations of the property.

In a more formal way:

**H1a:** The density of very negative content in the reviews has a negative impact on the degree of attractiveness of an offer on a C2C platform.

**H1b:** The density of very positive content in the reviews has a negative impact on the degree of attractiveness of an offer on a C2C platform.

However, in this sample-based reading strategy, information is accumulated and it is assumed, in the spirit of Thaler's (1985) mental accounting, that the final evaluation is the result of a balance between negative and positive feelings. The value of the estimated density of very positive or negative content most certainly depends on their interaction. If there are only positives or negatives, then the evaluation is bad, and the option is discarded. If there are neither, then the offer presents less risk but little appeal. If, on the contrary, the density of negatives and positives is simultaneously high, the attractiveness of the offer is more pronounced and will result in a higher probability of choice. We therefore formulate the hypothesis of an interaction effect between the density of very positive and very negative sentiments, according to which a property offered on a CtoC platform will be all the more attractive if it has been the subject of reviews with "mixed" content, with positive polarity overall.

**H2:** The concomitant presence of positive and negative sentiments has a positive impact on the degree of attractiveness of an offer on a C2C platform

The work of Lallement (2010) confirms the principle of selection: in a time pressure situation, the number of items of information consulted decreases. As expected, time pressure leads to a consumer selection of the number of items of information consulted but does not deprive the price attribute of its dominant role (Lallement and Zollinger, 2013). We can therefore hypothesize that when the purchase is made at a distance, the internet user will take more information into account and the role of emotional content will be increased.

**H3:** The role of emotional content increases with the degree of planning in the choice of an offer on a C2C platform.

## **Methodology**

### ***Data***

The data processed comes from insideairbnb.com, which contains information about the accommodation offered for rent in more than 50 cities and user reviews associated with these rental ads. These data sets are produced by scraping airbnb.com. The scope of the study focused on the city of Paris, and the data was scraped on 6 June 2019. They include all the information relating to the listings active on that date and visible to consumers, in particular, the description of the properties offered for rent, prices, dates of availability of the offers, but also the average rating of the listing, the number of reviews received and the entire corpus of reviews written (more than one million reviews, of which 60% were written in English, 30% in French and 15% in other languages). These data are divided into three sets that were used to build the analysis models:

- listings, which includes all the variables related to an offer and its owner;
- reviews, which includes all the reviews associated with the listings;
- calendar, which includes the dates on which each listing is open for booking or not.

### Variables construction

The final data set was constructed in three stages, shown in Figure 1. First, we extracted the variables related to the listings and their owner from the listings file by grouping them into four groups: the characteristics of the accommodation (neighborhood, type of rental, number of beds); the host's strategy (price, minimum number of nights, presence of house rules, deposit, household and cancellation fees, possibility of instant booking); the quality signals related to the host (total number of listings, Superhost status, identity verification by the platform, photo, length of time on the platform) and the quality signals related to the reviews (number of reviews, average score).

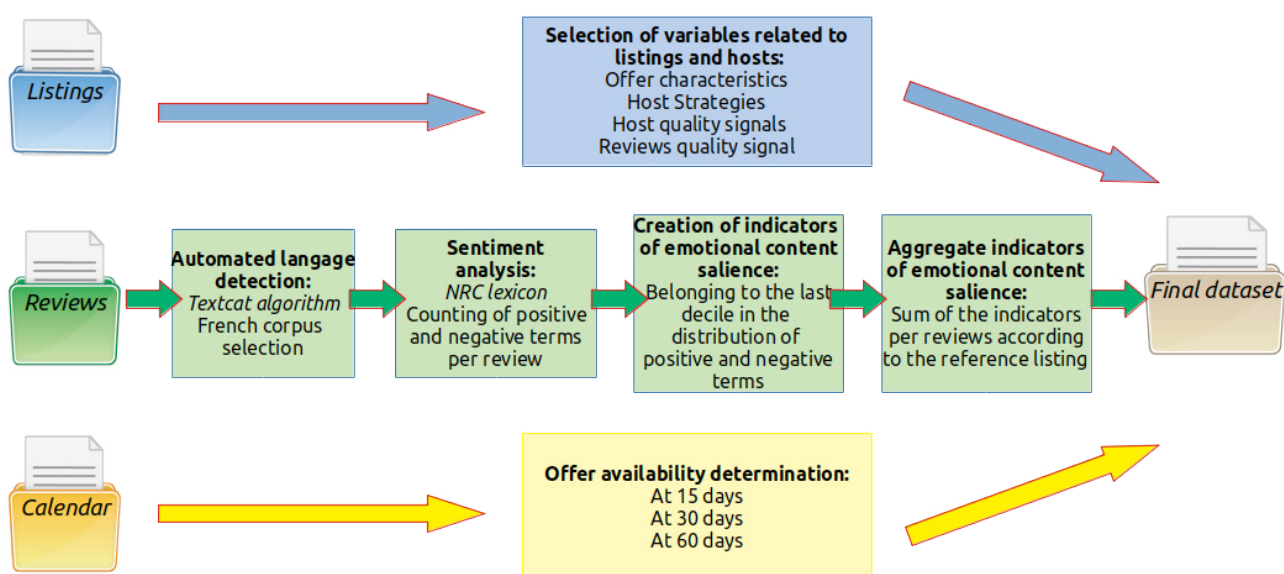
Then, we used the review file and text analysis methods to create indicators of the emotional content of the reviews. We first extracted the corpus of French reviews from the initial file using an n-gram-based categorization tool, the textcat algorithm (Hornik et al., 2013) available under R. For each listing, a maximum of 50 reviews (almost complete French corpus, corpus of 267,444 reviews out of 282,057 French reviews) were selected and processed using text analysis methods performed with R to determine their emotional content. More specifically, a dictionary approach was used using the NRC dictionary (Mohammad and Turney, 2013). Each term was annotated according to the feeling it expressed (positive, negative or neutral), making it possible to calculate a positive and negative feeling score for each review by counting. In order to take into account the skim type reading of online reviews by internet users when making a choice, we were interested in particularly expressive reviews, the content of which belonged to 10% of the most positive or negative reviews (see Appendix A: distribution of positive and negative scores in the corpus). These reviews act as salient elements, easily attracting attention and more strongly affecting the choice.

Finally, the calendar file made it possible to calculate the availability rate of an offer. The attractiveness of an Airbnb offer for the consumer was measured through the number of days the offer was available for booking, 15 days ahead (low degree of planning), 30 days ahead (medium degree of planning) and 60 days ahead (high degree of planning). The greater this number of days, the less the offer is reserved, and the lower its degree of attractiveness. Conversely, an offer with little or no availability is assumed to be more attractive to consumers.

Figure 1 shows the process of building up the final dataset. In total, it includes 31,090 Airbnb listings located in Paris and in operation on 6 June 2019, and 23 variables.

**Figure 1**

Data processing operations to build up the final dataset





### Models

To explain the availability rate of the Airbnb offers, we used 5 nested linear models. The variables were added in 5 different blocks:

1. The specific characteristics of the offer (neighborhood, type of accommodation – entire property, single room, shared room –, number of beds),
2. The host's offer strategy (the minimum number of nights for a reservation, the price per night, the presence or not of house rules, the presence or not of a deposit, the presence or not of additional cleaning costs, the possibility of booking the accommodation instantaneously, the cancellation conditions – three levels: strict, moderate or unconditional),
3. Host related quality signals (total number of host listings, whether the host's identity has been verified by the platform, presence or not of a profile picture, recognition of the platform (whether the host has Superhost status or not), length of time of the host on the platform),
4. Quality signals from the reviews (number of reviews, average rating of the listing, time elapsed since the last review – indicator of recent activity),
5. Raw signals related to the reviews expressed by the salience of their emotional content (number of positive reviews belonging to the 10% most positive reviews, number of negative reviews belonging to the 10% most negative reviews).

Three time horizons were taken into account to construct the dependent variables: availability at 15 days, reflecting rapid planning, at 30 days, reflecting average planning, and availability at 60 days, reflecting long-term planning.

A total of five linear regression models were compared (Table 1) on three availability dependent variables: at 15 days, 30 days and 60 days. Fifteen regressions were performed.

**Table 1**

Linear regression models

Model	Expression	Variables ( <i>name given in models</i> )
Model 1 lm1	avail. {15d; 30d; 60d} = Variables related to accommodation characteristics	<u>The accommodation characteristics:</u> - the number of beds available ( <i>bed</i> ) - the type of rental (whole apartment, room with the inhabitant, shared room) ( <i>room</i> ) - the neighborhood of the listing ( <i>quartier</i> )
Model 2 lm2	avail. {15d; 30d; 60d} = Model 1 + host strategy variables	<u>Host strategy variables:</u> - the minimum number of nights for a reservation ( <i>minimum_nights</i> ) - the price of the night ( <i>prix</i> ) - the presence or absence of rules of procedure ( <i>regl</i> ) - the presence or absence of a deposit ( <i>caution</i> ) - whether or not there are additional cleaning costs ( <i>menage</i> ) - the possibility to book the accommodation instantly ( <i>res_inst</i> ) - cancellation conditions (strict, moderate or unconditional) ( <i>annul</i> )

Model 3 lm3	avail. {15d; 30d; 60d} = Model 2 + host characteristics variables	<u>Host quality signals:</u> - host total listings count ( <i>host_total_listings_count</i> ) - if the identity has been verified by the platform ( <i>check_identity</i> ) - the presence or not of a profile picture ( <i>profile_pic</i> ) - recognition of the platform (the host has Superhost status or not) ( <i>superhost</i> ) - the host's length of time on the platform ( <i>anciennete</i> )
Model 4 lm4	avail. {15d; 30d; 60d} = Model 3 + review related variables	<u>Aggregated signal related to the reviews:</u> - the average rating of the listing ( <i>review_scores_rating</i> ) - the number of reviews ( <i>number_of_reviews</i> ) - the date of the last review (indication of a recent activity) ( <i>dernier_com</i> )
Model 5 lm5	avail. {15d; 30d; 60d} = Model 4 + sentiment related variables	<u>Raw signals related to the reviews:</u> - number of positive reviews belonging to the top 10% of the most positive reviews ( <i>top_pos50</i> ) - number of negative reviews belonging to the top 10% of the most negative reviews ( <i>top_neg_50</i> ) - interaction effect between the two indicators

## Results

### **Model fit comparison**

Table 2 compares the main performance indicators of the models tested.

- The first observation is that the longer the prediction horizon, expressed in days, the better the prediction quality. This can be explained by the more planned nature of visitor behavior. In the short term, reservations are made on a choice more constrained by circumstances. The weight of the sentiment of the reviews would be all the greater as the decision is subject to more thorough and prepared deliberation.
- The second finding is the improvement in fit as blocks of variables are added. The introduction of variables related to the host's strategy greatly improves the prediction quality of the model (lm2 model), which is explained by the major role of price in the decision process. The introduction of features related to online reviews (lm4 model) significantly improves the fit, as does the addition of sentiments (lm5 model).
- The quality of the model improves with the addition of the sentiment indicators of the reviews and with the availability period selected. These initial results confirm the importance of social influence in the choice of a purchase whose quality is difficult to assess a priori.

**Table 2**

Comparison of fit performance of linear regression models

15-day					
	df	AIC	BIC	R <sup>2</sup> Adj.	RMSE
<i>lm1</i>	28	87 354,12	87 587,77	0,029	0,986
<i>lm2</i>	36	84 949,04	85 249,45	0,101	0,948
<i>lm3</i>	41	84 845,97	85 188,10	0,104	0,946
<i>lm4</i>	44	84 272,94	84 640,10	0,121	0,938
<i>lm5</i>	47	84 156,33	84 548,53	0,124	0,936
30-day					
	df	AIC	BIC	R <sup>2</sup> Adj.	RMSE
<i>lm1</i>	28	87 316,59	87 550,24	0,030	0,985
<i>lm2</i>	36	84 757,43	85 057,84	0,107	0,945
<i>lm3</i>	41	84 651,22	84 993,35	0,110	0,943
<i>lm4</i>	44	84 014,44	84 381,61	0,128	0,934
<i>lm5</i>	47	83 874,42	84 266,61	0,132	0,932
60-day					
	df	AIC	BIC	R <sup>2</sup> Adj.	RMSE
<i>lm1</i>	28	87 146,99	87 380,64	0,035	0,982
<i>lm2</i>	36	84 064,79	84 365,20	0,126	0,935
<i>lm3</i>	43	83 961,45	84 303,58	0,129	0,933
<i>lm4</i>	45	83 133,84	83 501,00	0,152	0,921
<i>lm5</i>	47	82 983,94	83 376,13	0,157	0,918

**Examination of the parameters**

Table 3 shows the results of the estimates of the standardized coefficients of the 5 models for a 60-day availability. The average rating of the listing has a negative effect (*lm4*:  $\beta = -0.066$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ; *lm5*:  $\beta = -0.060$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ) on availability, which seems logical, a positive rating sends a quality signal to consumers who will therefore tend to turn to these listings for their stay. However, availability increases with the number of reviews of a listing (*lm4*:  $\beta = 0.150$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ; *lm5*:  $\beta = 0.106$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ), which probably reflects the active strategy of the host who gets more reviews the more he/she rents his/her accommodation and therefore it is offered more for booking.

**Role of sentiment indicators**

The coefficient of the negativity indicator is positive and significant (15-day availability:  $\beta = 0.073$ , p-value = 0.008; 30-day availability:  $\beta = 0.079$ , p-value = 0.008; 60-day availability:  $\beta = 0.079$ , p-value = 0.008). The presence of several converging negative reviews has a negative impact on the attractiveness of the offers, so **we validate hypothesis H1a**.

The coefficient of the positivity indicator is positive and significant (15-day availability:  $\beta = 0.033$ , p-value = 0.007; 30-day availability:  $\beta = 0.037$ , p-value = 0.007; 60-day availability:  $\beta = 0.041$ , p-value = 0.007). The positive sign of this coefficient can be explained by the low credibility associated by consumers with reviews that are too positive, perceived as not being genuine or sincere ("too good to be true") and/or by a very strong commitment of the host to the platform (high availability, high quality of stay). **Hypothesis H1b is therefore validated.**

**Table 3**

Comparison of standardized results of regression models on 60-day availability.

	lm1		lm2		lm3		lm4		lm5	
	Estimate (Std. Error)	t value (Pr(> t ))	Estimate (Std. Error)	t value (Pr(> t ))	Estimate (Std. Error)	t value (Pr(> t ))	Estimate (Std. Error)	t value (Pr(> t ))	Estimate (Std. Error)	t value (Pr(> t ))
(Intercept)	0,476 (0,054)	8,880 (0,00)	0,036 (0,054)	0,672 (0,502)	-0,040 (0,129)	-0,313 (0,754)	-0,090 (0,127)	-0,712 (0,477)	-0,060 (0,127)	-0,470 (0,638)
bed1	-0,426 (0,034)	-12,557 (0,000)	-0,342 (0,032)	-10,586 (0,000)	-0,341 (0,032)	-10,556 (0,000)	-0,303 (0,032)	-9,497 (0,000)	-0,295 (0,032)	-9,270 (0,000)
bed2	-0,341 (0,035)	-9,822 (0,000)	-0,406 (0,033)	-12,265 (0,000)	-0,402 (0,033)	-12,162 (0,000)	-0,372 (0,033)	-11,387 (0,000)	-0,363 (0,033)	-11,134 (0,000)
bed3	-0,214 (0,038)	-5,600 (0,000)	-0,528 (0,037)	-14,270 (0,000)	-0,522 (0,037)	-14,104 (0,000)	-0,501 (0,037)	-13,722 (0,000)	-0,494 (0,036)	-13,552 (0,000)
bed4	-0,205 (0,045)	-4,584 (0,000)	-0,651 (0,044)	-14,946 (0,000)	-0,643 (0,044)	-14,755 (0,000)	-0,621 (0,043)	-14,446 (0,000)	-0,617 (0,043)	-14,388 (0,000)
bed5 ou plus	-0,117 (0,051)	-2,302 (0,021)	-0,816 (0,051)	-16,113 (0,000)	-0,796 (0,051)	-15,725 (0,000)	-0,793 (0,050)	-15,877 (0,000)	-0,791 (0,050)	-15,868 (0,000)
quartier10	-0,233 (0,047)	-4,931 (0,000)	0,014 (0,045)	0,319 (0,75)	0,015 (0,045)	0,33 (0,741)	0,081 (0,045)	1,817 (0,069)	0,06 (0,045)	1,353 (0,176)
quartier11	-0,262 (0,046)	-5,703 (0,000)	0,029 (0,044)	0,665 (0,506)	0,029 (0,044)	0,651 (0,515)	0,106 (0,043)	2,431 (0,015)	0,078 (0,043)	1,806 (0,071)
quartier12	-0,241 (0,050)	-4,794 (0,000)	0,087 (0,048)	1,811 (0,07)	0,086 (0,048)	1,797 (0,072)	0,168 (0,048)	3,533 (0,000)	0,134 (0,048)	2,824 (0,005)
quartier13	-0,270 (0,051)	-5,268 (0,000)	0,068 (0,049)	1,384 (0,166)	0,064 (0,049)	1,307 (0,191)	0,144 (0,049)	2,972 (0,003)	0,113 (0,049)	2,32 (0,02)
quartier14	-0,218 (0,051)	-4,287 (0,000)	0,096 (0,049)	1,685 (0,049)	0,095 (0,049)	1,945 (0,052)	0,169 (0,048)	3,506 (0,000)	0,132 (0,048)	2,735 (0,006)
quartier15	-0,181 (0,047)	-3,825 (0,000)	0,055 (0,045)	1,204 (0,229)	0,054 (0,045)	1,191 (0,234)	0,122 (0,045)	2,735 (0,006)	0,097 (0,045)	2,164 (0,03)
quartier16	0,112 (0,051)	2,209 (0,027)	0,235 (0,049)	4,838 (0,000)	0,233 (0,048)	4,803 (0,000)	0,292 (0,048)	6,098 (0,000)	0,273 (0,048)	5,722 (0,000)
quartier17	-0,153 (0,048)	-3,185 (0,001)	0,125 (0,046)	2,716 (0,007)	0,122 (0,046)	2,664 (0,008)	0,206 (0,045)	4,547 (0,000)	0,181 (0,045)	3,992 (0,000)
quartier18	-0,235 (0,046)	-5,149 (0,000)	0,074 (0,044)	1,685 (0,092)	0,075 (0,044)	1,711 (0,087)	0,151 (0,043)	3,491 (0,000)	0,133 (0,043)	3,066 (0,002)
quartier19	-0,291 (0,048)	-6,036 (0,000)	0,093 (0,047)	1,991 (0,046)	0,092 (0,046)	1,990 (0,047)	0,190 (0,046)	4,132 (0,000)	0,162 (0,046)	3,525 (0,000)
quartier2	0,131 (0,052)	2,521 (0,012)	0,195 (0,049)	3,936 (0,000)	0,190 (0,049)	3,840 (0,000)	0,208 (0,049)	4,278 (0,000)	0,194 (0,049)	3,981 (0,000)
quartier20	-0,289 (0,048)	-5,994 (0,000)	0,105 (0,046)	2,270 (0,023)	0,103 (0,046)	2,229 (0,026)	0,196 (0,046)	4,284 (0,000)	0,165 (0,046)	3,591 (0,000)
quartier3	0,048 (0,050)	0,957 (0,339)	0,096 (0,047)	2,034 (0,042)	0,095 (0,047)	2,004 (0,045)	0,120 (0,047)	2,574 (0,01)	0,108 (0,047)	2,315 (0,021)
quartier4	-0,003 (0,054)	-0,048 (0,962)	0,017 (0,051)	0,325 (0,745)	0,012 (0,051)	0,242 (0,809)	0,018 (0,051)	0,353 (0,724)	0,009 (0,051)	0,187 (0,852)
quartier5	-0,137 (0,052)	-2,606 (0,009)	-0,002 (0,05)	-0,042 (0,967)	-0,003 (0,05)	-0,063 (0,95)	0,037 (0,049)	0,747 (0,455)	0,020 (0,049)	0,407 (0,684)
quartier6	0,048 (0,055)	0,884 (0,377)	0,059 (0,052)	1,127 (0,26)	0,060 (0,052)	1,154 (0,248)	0,069 (0,051)	1,352 (0,176)	0,057 (0,051)	1,124 (0,261)
quartier7	-0,009 (0,057)	-0,166 (0,868)	0,041 (0,054)	0,752 (0,452)	0,038 (0,054)	0,702 (0,483)	0,054 (0,053)	1,007 (0,314)	0,055 (0,053)	1,043 (0,297)
quartier8	0,183 (0,058)	3,185 (0,001)	0,196 (0,055)	3,580 (0,000)	0,194 (0,055)	3,547 (0,000)	0,232 (0,054)	4,304 (0,000)	0,222 (0,054)	4,119 (0,000)
quartier9	-0,104 (0,05)	-2,089 (0,037)	0,103 (0,047)	2,163 (0,031)	0,099 (0,047)	2,084 (0,037)	0,167 (0,047)	3,564 (0,000)	0,147 (0,047)	3,137 (0,002)
roomPrivate room	0,280 (0,018)	15,795 (0,000)	0,415 (0,018)	23,688 (0,000)	0,411 (0,018)	23,425 (0,000)	0,378 (0,017)	21,747 (0,000)	0,395 (0,017)	22,69 (0,000)
roomShared room	0,408 (0,067)	6,091 (0,000)	0,643 (0,064)	10,000 (0,000)	0,636 (0,064)	9,901 (0,000)	0,614 (0,063)	9,686 (0,000)	0,641 (0,063)	10,134 (0,000)
minimum_nights	-0,003 (0,005)	-0,608 (0,543)	-0,002 (0,005)	-0,608 (0,543)	-0,002 (0,005)	-0,396 (0,692)	0,014 (0,005)	2,621 (0,009)	0,018 (0,005)	3,295 (0,001)
reg1TRUE	-0,082 (0,011)	-7,406 (0,000)	-0,081 (0,011)	-7,288 (0,000)	-0,081 (0,011)	-7,288 (0,000)	-0,043 (0,011)	-3,869 (0,000)	-0,038 (0,011)	-3,462 (0,001)
	0,288	41,433	0,280	39,929	0,280	39,929	0,294	42,121	0,301	43,084

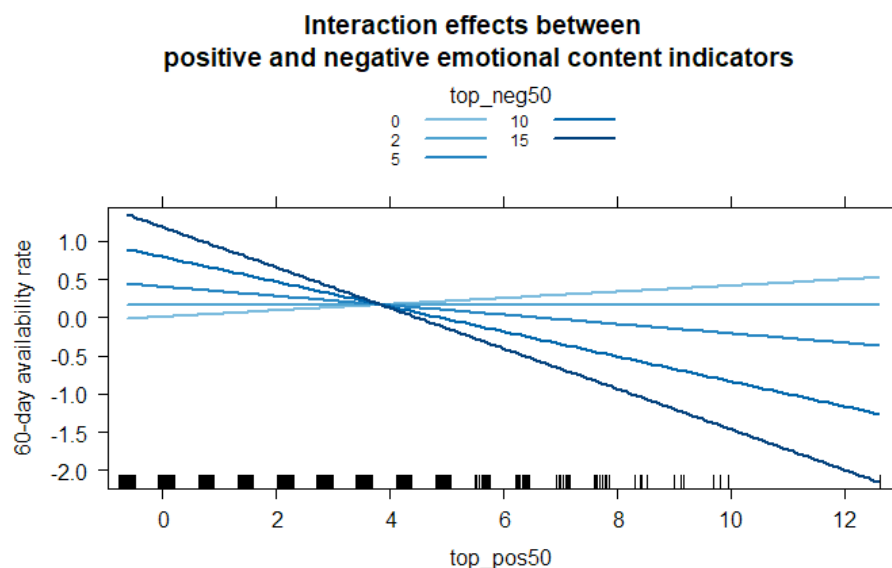
prix	(0,007)	(0,000)	(0,007)	(0,000)	(0,007)	(0,000)	(0,007)	(0,000)
cautionTRUE	0,049	4,002	0,046	3,757	0,033	2,755	0,032	2,627
menageTRUE	(0,012)	(0,000)	(0,012)	(0,000)	(0,012)	(0,006)	(0,012)	(0,009)
res_instTRUE	0,151	11,357	0,150	11,241	0,145	11,02	0,146	11,134
annulmoderate	(0,013)	(0,000)	(0,013)	(0,000)	(0,013)	(0,000)	(0,013)	(0,000)
annulstrict	0,099	8,601	0,089	7,600	0,036	3,072	0,038	3,214
host_total_Listings_count	(0,012)	(0,000)	(0,012)	(0,000)	(0,012)	(0,002)	(0,012)	(0,001)
check_identityTRUE	-0,020	-1,401	-0,024	-1,664	-0,052	-3,738	-0,056	-4,034
profile_picTRUE	(0,014)	(0,161)	(0,014)	(0,096)	(0,014)	(0,000)	(0,014)	(0,000)
superhostTRUE	0,249	16,833	0,245	16,544	0,187	12,659	0,184	12,458
anciennete	(0,015)	(0,000)	(0,015)	(0,000)	(0,015)	(0,000)	(0,015)	(0,000)
review_scores_rating	0,025	4,598	0,025	4,598	0,027	5,132	0,028	5,199
dernier_com	(0,005)	(0,000)	(0,005)	(0,000)	(0,005)	(0,000)	(0,005)	(0,000)
number_of_reviews	-0,088	-8,041	-0,104	-9,556	-0,104	-9,556	-0,104	-9,653
top_pos50	(0,011)	(0,000)	(0,011)	(0,000)	(0,011)	(0,000)	(0,011)	(0,000)
top_neg50	0,113	0,956	0,127	1,092	0,122	1,050	0,122	1,050
top_pos50:top_neg50	(0,118)	(0,339)	(0,116)	(0,275)	(0,116)	(0,294)	(0,116)	(0,294)
	0,059	4,168	0,02	1,37	0,012	0,825	0,012	0,825
	(0,014)	(0,000)	(0,015)	(0,171)	(0,015)	(0,409)	(0,015)	(0,409)
	0,025	4,514	0,013	2,475	0,015	2,838	0,015	2,838
	(0,005)	(0,000)	(0,005)	(0,013)	(0,005)	(0,005)	(0,005)	(0,005)
	-0,066	-11,789	-0,066	-11,789	-0,066	-11,789	-0,066	-11,789
	(0,006)	(0,000)	(0,006)	(0,000)	(0,006)	(0,000)	(0,006)	(0,000)
	-0,004	-0,786	-0,004	-0,786	-0,004	-0,786	-0,004	-0,786
	(0,005)	(0,432)	(0,005)	(0,432)	(0,005)	(0,432)	(0,005)	(0,432)
	0,150	26,123	0,106	14,659	0,106	14,659	0,106	14,659
	(0,006)	(0,000)	(0,007)	(0,000)	(0,007)	(0,000)	(0,007)	(0,000)
	0,041	5,521	0,041	5,521	0,041	5,521	0,041	5,521
	(0,007)	(0,000)	(0,007)	(0,000)	(0,007)	(0,000)	(0,007)	(0,000)
	0,079	10,207	0,079	10,207	0,079	10,207	0,079	10,207
	(0,008)	(0,000)	(0,008)	(0,000)	(0,008)	(0,000)	(0,008)	(0,000)
	-0,020	-7,424	-0,020	-7,424	-0,020	-7,424	-0,020	-7,424
	(0,003)	(0,000)	(0,003)	(0,000)	(0,003)	(0,000)	(0,003)	(0,000)
R <sup>2</sup>	0,036	0,127	0,131	0,154	0,154	0,158	0,158	0,158
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0,035	0,126	0,129	0,152	0,152	0,157	0,157	0,157
Num. Obs.	31090	31090	31090	31090	31090	31090	31090	31090
RMSE	0,982	0,935	0,933	0,921	0,921	0,918	0,918	0,918

### Interaction effect of salient positive and negative emotional content

As we can see in Table 3, the interaction between positive and negative emotional content has a significant negative effect on the availability rate of listings ( $\beta = -0.020$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ). Figure 2 shows the different values of the availability rate at 60 days according to the positivity indicator and according to given values of the negativity indicator (from 0 to 15). The availability rate is lowest when these two indicators are the strongest (dark blue curve). The effect of mixed emotional content on the degree of attractiveness of an offer is therefore confirmed (**H2 validated**).

**Figure 2**

Interaction effect between positive and negative emotional content on the 60-day availability rate





**Impact of the planning level of the stay**

The quality of the models increases with the time horizon studied (see Table 1). The effect of the salient sentiments contained in the reviews increases with the availability horizon, which may be related to the different short and long term booking strategies of travelers (Table 4). **H3 is therefore validated.**

**Table 4**

Comparison of the coefficients of the positive and negative indicators of emotional content

	<b>lm5 15-day</b>	<b>lm5 30-day</b>	<b>lm5 60-day</b>
top_pos50	0.033*** (0.008)	0.037*** (0.007)	0.041*** (0.007)
top_neg50	0.073*** (0.008)	0.079*** (0.008)	0.079*** (0.008)
top_pos50:top_neg50	-0.017*** (0.003)	-0.018*** (0.003)	-0.020*** (0.003)
R2	0.125	0.133	0.158
Adj. R2	0.124	0.132	0.157
Num. obs.	31090	31090	31090
RMSE	0.936	0.932	0.918

\*\*\*p < 0.001, \*\*p < 0.01, \*p < 0.05

Comparison of the coefficients of positive and negative emotional content indicators

**Discussion**

The housing offers available on peer-to-peer platforms belong, according to Nelson's typology (1970), to the category of experience goods. For these goods, whose objective characteristics alone do not necessarily allow the consumer to form an opinion, social influencing factors are expected to play a decisive role. Our research based on the reviews left on the Airbnb platform and the availability of rental housing supports this hypothesis. The introduction of features related to online reviews has helped improve the fit of the model explaining availability, as has the addition of parameters reflecting the sentiments expressed in these reviews. The results also confirm the important role of negative reviews.

A first empirical contribution of this work is to look at the behavior actually observed on the platforms (reservation or not of products) and not at intentions measured under experimental conditions. A second empirical contribution concerns the scale at which we are working in the most complete model, i.e. almost the entire corpus of reviews in French, i.e. 267,444 reviews out of the 282,057 submitted in French. A comparison of the models shows that the quality of the model improves with the number of reviews taken into account for the sentiment indicators (7, 20 or 50). A final empirical contribution is the comparison of prediction quality as a function of the prediction horizon: the longer the prediction horizon, expressed in days, the better the prediction quality, which can be explained by the more planned nature of visitor behavior.

This research shows the complex role that online reviews play in the internet user's decision-making process. The emotional content of a review has an impact on the final decision: very positive content is associated with more available offers on average, as is very negative content. Conversely, offers with reviews that express mixed emotional content (both positive and negative) are the least available. These results are all the stronger the further away the time horizon of the decision is. From a theoretical point of view, these results provide a better understanding of the impact of sentiments expressed in online reviews on consumer evaluations of an offer. Two mechanisms seem to be at work simultaneously when the internet user reads a sample of reviews. The first is the elimination of offers with converging negative reviews, as these seem too risky. These results confirm those of Kim and Gupta (2012). The second seems to go against intuition: internet users tend to reject offers with extremely positive reviews. A "too good to be true" effect could explain this phenomenon, following the example of the work of Maslowska et al. (2017). These two effects seem to show

that internet users, engaged in a strategy of reading online reviews, are able to identify and distinguish the stylistic effects of the reviews and integrate them into their decision-making process.

### Limitations and future research directions

This research leads to many extensions, both methodologically and conceptually. The analysis of sentiment here was based on indicators of positivity and negativity associated with the reviews left by internet users and calculated using the NRC lexicon. Future research should be interested in cross-referencing these sentiment indicators with other measures, performed by machine learning or using other sentiment lexicons (e.g., the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (Piolat et al., 2011) or the Lexicoder Sentiment Dictionary (Duval and Pétry, 2016)). Cross-referencing these sentiment indicators would help confirm the results obtained. Another extension would be to also integrate the topics addressed by the clients in order to see if certain topics are more related to an overall positive (or negative) sentiment. Finally, replicating the analyses on another set of data (the corpus of reviews in English, for example) would make it possible to strengthen the external validity of the results obtained.

Building on the work of Maslowska, Malthouse and Bernitter (2017), a methodological contribution of our research consists in the exploitation of a large volume of actual booking data, put into perspective with the characteristics of listings, hosts and reviews submitted online (ratings and qualitative reviews). The results support the hypothesis that reviews that are extremely positive in tone lead to lower bookings than reviews with mixed content. While the phenomenon of “too good to be true” is put forward to explain this result, only an experimental approach, measuring the psychological constructs at work in the processing of online reviews, would make it possible to confirm this mechanism. However, these approaches generally rely on a small number of reviews relating to a particular offer and cannot account for the sampling strategy used by the internet user when searching for information online. The work of Chen and Lurie (2013) thus makes it possible to highlight the mechanisms for attributing the valence of the reviews expressed and their impact on the usefulness associated with the reviews, based on a single review modified on an experimental basis (Chen and Lurie, 2013, Studies 2A, 2B, 3, 4).

The analysis carried out covered all the reviews on the Airbnb platform, without first sorting between the actual reviews and the “fakes”. Several approaches have been proposed in the literature to identify fakes, based on contextual indicators (Munzel, 2015) or on the sequence of reviews for the same writer (Hu et al., 2012). In particular, based on the assumption that reviews and their writers should follow a random process, it would be possible to identify reviews from a writer who wishes to promote or destroy an offer artificially (Hu et al. 2012). It is not so much the review as the sentiments expressed by these false reviews that have a significant impact on the ranking of the promoted article. From this point of view, it would be interesting to set up a mechanism to identify false reviews and to observe, through experimentation, the reactions of consumers when they make a choice in the presence and absence of these false reviews.

The results of this research lead us to question the strategies of information processing by consumers in an information-rich environment. Future work should focus on uncovering the complex mechanisms of information selection and processing by internet users during the decision-making process.

### Managerial implications

From a managerial point of view, our research shows that online reviews and the sentiments expressed therein do play a role in the user's decision process, but a weak one. Moreover, the presence of reviews with negative emotional content enhances the credibility of an offer, especially when they are associated with more positive content. These two effects tend to advise professionals offering their services or products on the platforms, as well as platform managers, to leave negative reviews visible. This will strengthen the credibility associated with the reviews and consequently the credibility associated with positive reviews, enhancing the value of the offer.

It might also be relevant to present the reviews associated with an offer in two columns side by side, one presenting negative reviews and the other positive ones, in order to help consumers make up their minds about the offer presented, while at the same time enhancing the platform's credibility by giving access to unabridged information about the quality of its offers.

Finally, we can advise that platforms set up tools for internet users to give their feedback on the usefulness of a review for their decision, which will enable them to identify the characteristics of relevant content and highlight useful reviews for consumers in order to facilitate their decision process.

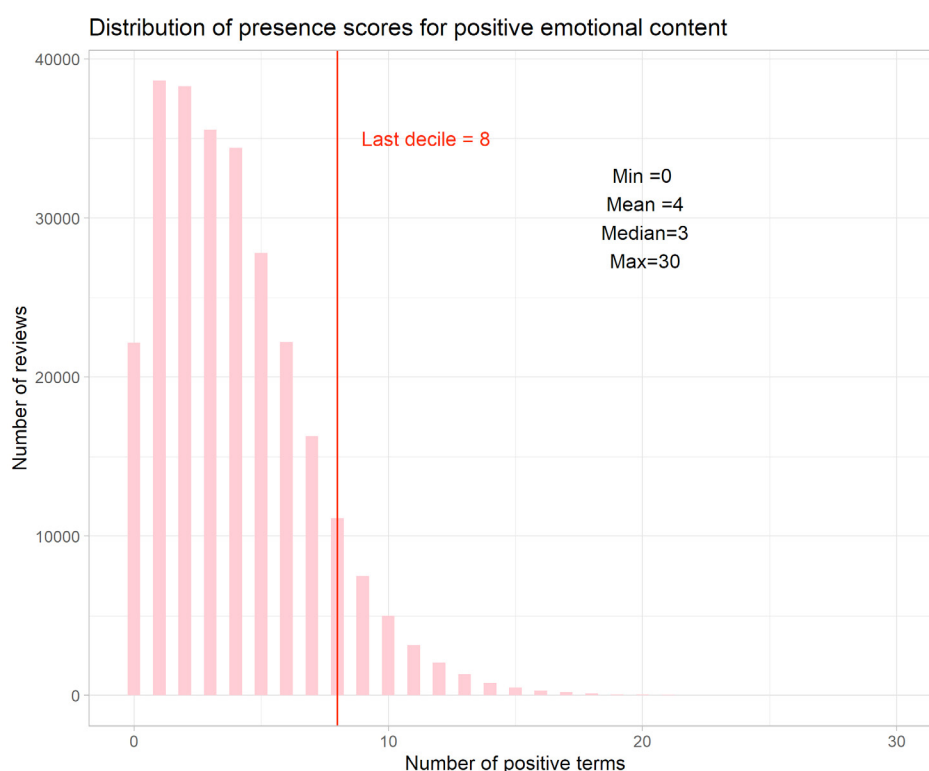
## References

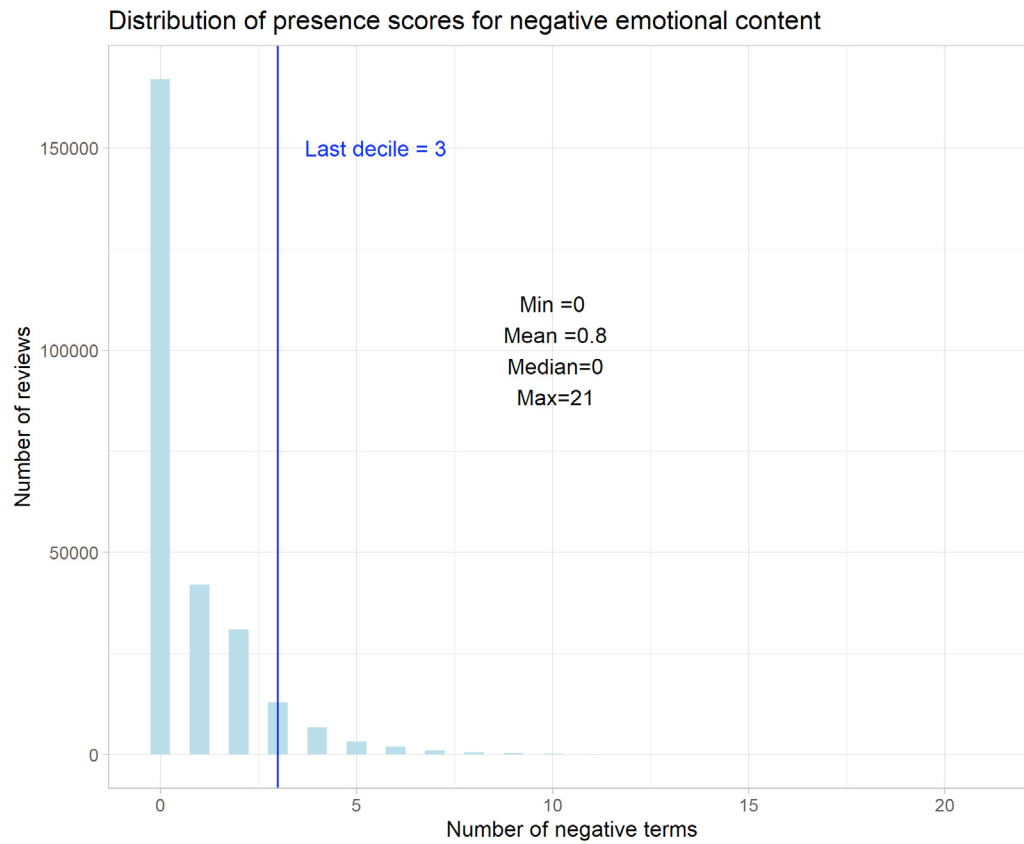
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## Appendix

**Appendix A:** Distribution of presence scores of positive and negative terms in the French corpus of reviews relating to Airbnb listings in the city of Paris, as of June 6, 2019







# **«Please, draw me an apple !»: children's relationship with marketing standards and «ugly» responsible products**

## **Abstract**

Several products are discarded by supermarkets because they are not matching with the aesthetically standardized criteria. Nevertheless, in an ecological perspective and for new business opportunities, supermarkets have recently decided to change their marketing norm in proposing a new offer called: "ugly products". This research focuses on children's receptiveness because they could become influencers and future consumers. A qualitative study has been performed resulting in 18 individual interviews and drawings of French children aged 8 to 12 years. Results highlight the existence of an implicit norm and the negative consequences of a rupture with it. This research helps to understand how this transgression of the aesthetic norm must be realized.

*Key words: transgression, food waste, reverse socialization, retailing, aesthetics.*

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## Introduction

Many authors have highlighted that retailers have means of influencing social and environmental sustainability (Ritch 2015), for example with organic products (Wiese et al. 2015), labels (Bezawada and Pauwels 2013) or sustainable transport and logistic (Björklund et al. 2016). However, their aesthetic criteria today represent a significant food waste (15 to 30% prior to the commercialization process<sup>1</sup>). Some of these products are used to make soups, compotes, or fruit juices, but many do not find outlets<sup>2</sup>. Thus, this aesthetic standard of retailers jeopardizes the sustainability of products and more precisely the reduction of food waste. In a context where consumers are expecting more responsible behavior, several retailers have decided to change this standard. Since 2014, supermarkets<sup>3</sup> propose a new offer of products called "ugly" (appendix 1). This offer (distorted and unsightly products) concerns different categories but mainly fruits and vegetables.

Hanan and Moulins (2017) have highlighted that regular customers reject these products even when they support the "no waste" approach. Thus, given the low level of interest in this more responsible standard, it is interesting to focus on the receptivity of children. The purpose is to know how an offer, which breaks the usual aesthetic standards of the supermarket for less food waste, is perceived by children and how to communicate on it. To answer this question, the psychological mechanism specific to the unaesthetic will be studied, as well as how to modify the value of these products.

The benefit of targeting children is threefold. Children constitute a primary market (the child is consuming), an influencing market (child influences the purchase of his/her parents) and a future market (McNeal, 1992). Studying children is very interesting as it remains easier to initiate habits very early in the consumer's life, rather than making those changes later. Such childhood habits, in addition, become permanent as the consumers grow (Moschis, 2007). In concrete terms, children are to be considered here as potential actors of consumption (future consumers) as well as potential social actors (socialization agents) who can encourage this marketing change.

To do so, in the first part of this article we will give an overview of the pertinent literature concerning children sensibility to ecological problems, food aesthetic standards and socialization. After outlining the methodology, the results will be presented. Finally, discussion and contributions will be addressed.

## Conceptual framework

Consuming "ugly products" represents a specific case among the measures to reduce waste, as it does not imply the throwing away (households' production of food waste) of what is in the refrigerator, but the involvement of oneself more precisely in a systemic perspective. "Ugly products" are related to two different fields: ecology (food waste) and aesthetics. Besides, it is important to specify that the child is characterized by the fact that he/she is in development (Piaget and Inhelder 1966), by a strong affective dimension and by socialization (Ward 1974). So considering children are acquiring skills, knowledge and attitude relevant to become consumers, ecology and aesthetics have to be investigated also from the socialization point of view.

### **Socialization**

We are not born consumer, we become consumer. Thus even if the child is the subject of studies whose aim is to understand his/her influence, it is clear that the child learns standards of consumption. During childhood, socialization is the substratum of the future (Moschis 2007). During this period, socialization remains more structuring than during adulthood. Ward (1974) defines socialization as « processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace ». The authors (e.g. Muratore 1999) consider that there are several factors. Each of them generates a particular form of influence on the child's socialization: family, peers, media and school.

Regarding environmental socialization (i. e. the process of learning pro-environmental behaviours, through the acquisition of relevant skills, knowledge, and attitudes). Several studies in the field of the environment have shown that children's attitudes to environmental issues are influenced by their parents (Ritch and Brownlie 2016). However, it must be noted that parents' influence, when it exists, does not give the main explanation of environmental awareness (Meeusen 2014). This allows us to think that other agents of socialization play a major role.

Several recent studies (e. g. Meeusen 2014) suggest that school may enhance the environmental knowledge of children, that in turn may affect their buying decisions. For Gentina and Muratore (2012), pupils who followed a program or

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<sup>1</sup> Despite their abnormal shape, they have the same quality as any other and have followed the same production process

<sup>2</sup> In France, every year 17 football stadiums are wasted

<sup>3</sup> The first supermarket was "Intermarché" then several retailers (Carrefour, Monoprix or Auchan) did the same.

a course related to environment, are significantly influenced by them. Their mothers are even more likely to think that school plays a major role in informing children about environmental issues. In addition to these courses, schools are implementing more and more environmental programs urging pupils to be eco-friendly (recycle, do not waste...). The reasoning is that if children behave this way at school, they will maintain this behaviour at home (through getting into a kind of routine or gaining conviction) and will in their turn be agents of socialization. Nevertheless, according to Boeve de Pauwet al. (2013) pro-environmental programs implemented at school seem to increase children's environmental involvement more from a cognitive point of view than a behaviour one.

### **Resocialization**

Even if studies concerning children's ecological resocialization present mixed results (Gronhoj and Thogersen 2007 and 2009), recent ones seem to offer the same kind of results (Gentina and Muratore 2012) which is that an ecological resocialization exists. Ecological resocialization refers to the process where parents learn from their children about pro-environmental consumption behaviour (Larsson et al. 2010). Such a process of resocialization can be qualified as active (interaction) and/or passive (observation). Gentina and Muratore (2012) revealed that they "are active participants in decisions about household consumption in relation to pro-environmental issues. However, parenting style and the frequency of communication are clearly decisive to the extent of the kids' influence on pro-environmental parental consumption".

### **Aesthetic standards**

The concept of aesthetics was not initially targeting manufactured products. Indeed, the ability to appreciate aesthetically a product implied the compulsory independence of considerations linked to its use. Marketing literature is generally assuming that the aesthetic value of a product has a positive impact on the global preference and the final choice of consumers (Creusen and Schoormans 2005). The determining role of sensory elements in the consumer's decision-making process (Jansson-Boyd and Marlow 2007), especially for food, can be explained by their impact on functional and symbolic representations of the product. The visual aspect of the product conveys, for the consumer, information about the product's gustative quality. This reflex of the consumer is explained by the impossibility to taste food products before buying them.

The concept of incorporation (literally and etymologically "into the body") relates to the "magic thinking" dealt by anthropological studies related to food (Fischler 1996) and plays a fundamental role in eating. The consumer – the eater – considers that he or she acquires the properties of the food product: "we are what we eat" (Rumiatti and Foroni 2016) is part of the fundamental beliefs of our society. It is consequently not only about health, as Hippocrates mentioned, "let food be your first medicine", or about safety, but also about identity and self-consciousness. These reactions are collective beliefs as valid among adults as children and transmitted via food socialization. Children will in this way acquire consumption standards, knowledge, tastes and food preferences transferred from parents, especially. Moreover, children learn eating practices thanks to social interactions "within different socialization contexts" (Hemar-Nicolas et alii. 2013). One context feeding another one. So children will also, through the phenomenon of reverse socialization, be the introducers of new products to their families (Ayadi and Brée 2010). These eating practices covering both nutritional, emotional and social experiences and contributing to the child food well-being (Hémar-Nicolas and Ezan 2018).

## **Methodology**

### **Recruitment and tested product**

A qualitative survey (semi-directive interviews and drawings) was conducted among 18 French children, aged 8 to 12. We chose children at the "concrete operational stage" (aged 7–12), as described by Piaget and Inhelder (1966). The participants were 10 boys and 8 girls and they live in France. It was important to define which would be the category of product in this study. Among products related to the offer of « ugly products », fresh products have been selected. This category has been represented by apples because the Agrimer study (2013) shows that French people buy more often fruits than vegetables (74% vs 56%), and that apples are more often chosen on a yearly basis. Children were selected according to their age, gender criteria, social category and consumption of apples. Particular attention was paid to verify not only that the selected children liked and consumed apples but also to check that "ugly products" have never been bought. The children were also not exposed to the advertising of "ugly" products. The interviews were between 60 and 75 minutes in length and were conducted privately at home in order to facilitate informant openness.

### **Proceedings**

A semi-structured interview guide based on the Dimensional Qualitative Research (DQR) approach of Cohen (1999) was achieved. Indeed according to Cohen (1999) "DQR represents a comprehensive and systematic model for

approaching and ultimately realizing the objectives typically set in a qualitative research" (Cohen 1999). The DQR has been gradually applied according to the topics covered. For instance, the DQR has been declined through the theme of "apple" then of "the ugly apple" (without telling that it was an "ugly" product) then explaining what is an "ugly" apple (and so food waste, advertising about these products...). So the DQR has been applied several times in the interview according to the topic involved. Specifically, the interview focused on five dimensions (DQR), here are some examples presented according to the dimensions but not necessarily in the order of the interview guide.

*Behavior:* Tell me about your normal routine when you go shopping apples; Tell me about how you choose an apple?(...)Would you eat (buy, ask your parents to buy) this apple (ugly one)? ; Why ? (...) What do you do concerning food waste? (...); (cf. Imaginery) Would you buy (ask your parents to buy, eat) the apple that you want to sell? (...).

*Affect:* What do you think about this apple, what do you feel about it (a standardized apple and later an "ugly" apple)? (...); What do you feel concerning food waste?

*Sensation and Imagery:* Draw and describe the profile (his/her environment, car, job...) of the one who eats, buys this apple (the standardized apple then the ugly one)? (...); Now we are going to imagine "that you are a seller of "ugly" apples... ; What would you do in order to sell these ugly apples to your customers or friends? (What would you say...?).

*Cognition:* What is an ugly apple for you (perception: healthy, natural, ecological, harmful, good?); Have you heard about ugly apples, what do you know about that? Why are these apples different? For you, is this apple "ugly"? ; Why/ where are these apples sold? (...); Tell me what you know about reducing waste; From your point of view are the ugly apples related to food waste?

*Interpersonal relations:* Have you ever talked about ugly apples with someone (friends, parents...how and why); Would you bring such an apple at school (why)?; What would you think if one of your friend brings such an apple at school ? (...); Are your parents/ friends/ school talking about food waste with you (how, why, what, what do they do (...)?; What should you tell your parents/friends in order to make them buy these apples (how ?)(...)

To meet the objective of this research, an approach mobilizing children's drawings was implemented. This projective method is particularly adapted to children who manage to express their thoughts better than through verbal expression.

### **Data analysis**

Consistent with an exploratory approach, content analysis was achieved to identify themes in the interview narratives. In the initial stage, the two researchers have independently read each verbatim transcript to realize several codings. They have developed and refined categories of analysis then after a consensus about the categories they have independently coded all the interview transcripts. The researchers have discussed their codings and also their disagreements and finally have found a consensus.

## **Results**

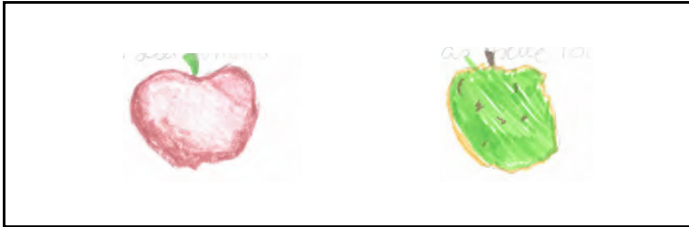
To truly explore the representation of "ugly products", the first questions focused on the children's representation of a beautiful/not beautiful apple as well as on aesthetic habits.

### **Standardization is the norm**

Children were requested to describe and draw their representation of: a beautiful apple vs a not beautiful one (Figure 1). Their distinction between the beautiful apple and the not beautiful one was clearly based on aesthetic dimensions more precisely on color and calibration. The beautiful was associated with perfect products, standardized and calibrated, whereas the not beautiful one was represented by bumps, different shapes, dark colors and associated with rottenness: "A beautiful apple is the red apple we can see in cartoons, it is a shiny apple" (Guillaume, 11 y.o.) ; "Its color must be homogeneous without marks." (Mateo, 12 y.o.). According to Nelson (1970), a difference can be made between research products and experience products. Research products are ones the quality and value of which for the consumer can be easily evaluated before being bought (e.g. the speed of a microprocessor), whereas experience products are ones the quality of which is difficult to evaluate before being bought and used or consumed. For these products, less easily to evaluate, we find the perception of risk (but children do not mention health risks and do not categorize it as an inedible product). These negative mental associations can be akin to beliefs.

**Figure 1**

A beautiful and a not beautiful apple: An example of a child's drawing



Thus, the question of an association between standardization and beauty should be raised. Several decades ago, the aesthetics of these products were probably perceived differently by children. The establishment of standards by retailers contributes to these new representations of beauty for children. Indeed, traditional food is defined (Kühne et al. 2010) as a product which is regularly eaten, according to family habits (the usual food product). In this case, the traditional food for children is represented by the standardized product. The beauty is linked to a familiar universe; it is based upon pictures cumulated all over one's life (Boulding and Kirmani 1993). To be clear when an apple is in the children's mind, it is necessarily a beautiful apple. Children associate the beautiful with a standardized product. Standardization is the norm for food products. So, retailers through a homogenized offer have imposed aesthetic standards. Consequently, the not beautiful apple corresponds to an apple which breaks these aesthetic codes. So, standardization has an influence on the perceived typicality of the product. Thus, from a cognitive point of view, food and aesthetics are perceived as being strongly associated. Children want to buy what they are used to buying that is "the normal" product and leave the "not beautiful" for other people: *"If I really have nothing else to eat then I shall eat this apple"* (Elliott, 11 y.o.). An authentic product is opposed to the standardized offer (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999). Consequently, not beautiful products could refer to the perception of authenticity, a decrease of aesthetics could be perceived as a reduction of pesticide, but results are only extremely marginally following such theory.

These reactions are very homogeneous. Only a very marginal case of children opposed authenticity to standardization. For them, the "not beautiful" is "good" for health (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999). Consequently, not beautiful products could refer to the perception of authenticity, a decrease of aesthetics could be perceived as a reduction of pesticide. But results are only extremely marginally. This difference can be explained by the possession of a vegetable patch by their parents. *"Perfect apples have pesticides, ungracious ones not. Without pesticides, they risk malformation but they are better. Once, I had a kitchen garden, I had carrots, strange, stuck together... there was no pesticides"* (Léo, 10 y.o.).

We also perceive the effect of the aesthetic norm on the taste. When children have been requested to draw a good apple vs a not good one, they explain that their drawings would be like their drawings related to a beautiful and a not beautiful apple. In their comments, the good and the bad refer mainly to the functional approach of the product, especially their nutritional value (fresh or on the opposite unhealthy, musty, bacteriological) and their hedonic value related to pleasure (juicy, appetizing, soft or on the opposite too hard, too soft). Good and beautiful are linked with pleasure, health and well-being: *"If the color is bright it means it will be juicy; I avoid big black marks, it means it is moldy inside"* (Alexia, 8 y.o.). Thus, the spheres of "beautiful and not beautiful" and the one of "good and not good" are extremely linked for children. Judgements are based solely upon affective/aesthetic dimensions instead of upon organoleptic quality: *"A good apple is normal. That is beautiful"* (Juliette, 9 y.o.). Without information about the attributes, uncertainty is high regarding levels of attributes. Consequently, aesthetics are a central discriminating attribute as they play a major role when buying or consuming the product. This is why it can be noticed that standardized products can be bought as impulsive purchases whereas "not beautiful" products tend to follow more complex patterns of informed purchasing decisions.

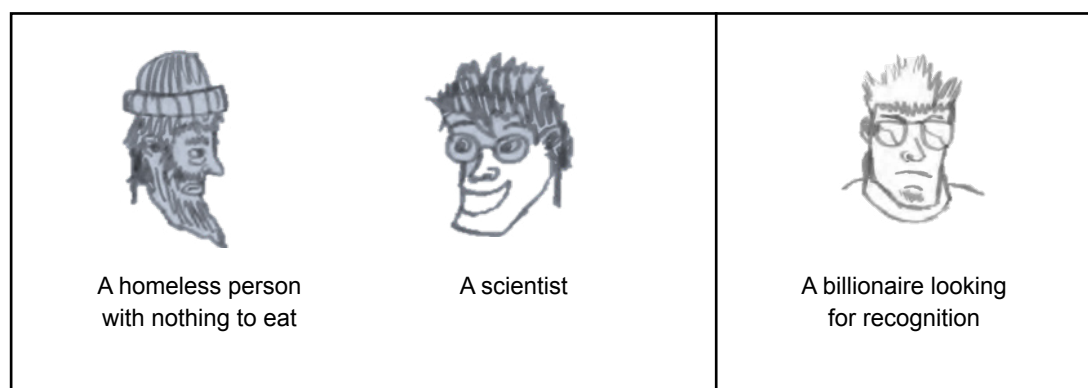
Two criteria were used by children to create a profile which corresponded to their mental picture: emotions of the character and their status. The buyer/consumer of the "ugly apple" is described with negative feelings such as sadness. These characters would either be without income or scientists who could understand these products: *"An elderly person or a disabled person because as she is not as the others, she would take this apple which is not as the others too"* (Jessica, 10 y.o.). On the opposite, consumers of beautiful apple would be active people, rich and beautiful (figure 2): *"He is one of us, a normal person"* (Jessica, 10 y.o.). These reactions highlight the lack of value for these new ecological products. The break with consumption codes reduce this product to a lower rank. These consumers intended for modest people. It is therefore



essential to promote these products, by finding them a different positioning, so that they cease to appear like downgraded products.

**Figure 2**

Consumers of an ugly apple versus consumers of a beautiful apple: examples of children's drawings



After, the interviewer explains that “ugly products” (that is the not beautiful ones) are anti waste products, children understand that if they are not bought, they will be thrown away. From an ecological aspect, these products (from a no waste perspective) appear to show that children talk easily about parental socialization, school socialization and their own behaviour regarding wastage. However for them, food wastage consists only in finishing their plate because children, in other countries, are starving. Their anti-waste behaviour concerns both social and economic perspectives (it costs money to buy food). So, the involvement of “ugly products” in the case is less important because it is “indirect” food wastage. Indeed, it is the retailer who throws away or does not sell these products. So, individual responsibility is clearly less involved. Moreover, children do not make any link between waste and ecology. The ecological aspect of these products doesn't seem to be a strong enough argument to launch a purchase decision whatever the gender: *“No-wastage does not motivate me, concerning the apple because if I have to buy it, I will not eat it thus I am going to waste it”* (Matéo, 12 y. o.).

### **The choice of conformity**

What emerges from, it is that children do not break their parents' socialization standards, who themselves do not break the standards dictated by hypermarkets. Children identify what their parents consume and know perfectly what they themselves or their family appreciate or reject. This phenomenon is linked to an active or a passive socialization, parents explaining upstream which elements to look at when purchasing, or the child learning by observation what parents take into account for a purchase decision (Ayadi and Brée 2010). Children's preferences, habits and norms are learned by socialization. According to them, their parents would make the choice of conformity by preferring the beautiful product: *“My parents buy only what is beautiful, the opposite is not normal.”* (Jade, 11 y. o.)

The negative opinion of children towards the “ugly” products increases when the consumption of these products moves to other places of sociality (their school), where other interactants influence their choice, which refers to the normative influence of peers (Khare and Pandey 2017). They express a negative attitude towards these products which is linked to an apprehension of being mocked by other children or perceived as different. Clearly, children's social well-being is in danger when they consume “ugly products”. It has consequences on what they are and how they are perceived. They also explain that they would make the same judgment about a friend consuming such products. The food product is consumed for what it represents and what it involves in terms of social interactions and peer acceptance (Ward 1974). This is in accordance with several studies showing that peers have in particular a normative influence (Bearden et al. 1989) and that this influence is even more important when the product is consumed in public (Ezanet al. 2014). Such reactions recall how food contributes to the construction of social identities and also the concept of incorporation (Rumiatti and Foroni 2016). Food consumed while being watched by others refers to the concept of self-extension (Belk 1988). What one owns is a reflection of one's identity. Even if identity construction is a lifelong process, childhood is a key moment. This

refers to maintaining or enhancing their self-esteem (Banister and Hogg 2004) and also to the materialism concept, i.e. the importance that the consumer attaches to possession, and the belief that consumer goods and services provide the greatest source of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in life (Belk 1988): *"I shall be perceived as a loser but I am not a loser. It is as if I was this strange fruit and I do not want to be perceived as strange. It is important to be normal as the others. With such a fruit I shall be ashamed. No, I will not bring this fruit at school"* (Raphaël, 12 y.o.).

### **More marketing and less ecological dimension**

Taking into account that children's perceptions and intentions are not positive, children were asked to play the game of being directors of supermarkets in charge of selling "ugly products" to their friends. They are given main objectives: to reduce the perceived uncertainty linked to the evaluation of quality (cognitive dimension) and to improve the value of the product (affective dimension).

Their promotion through their price would be counterproductive because a price decrease would raise a concern regarding their quality and would make them look even less attractive compared to beautiful products. They also highlighted that the apple (for example) was different, rare (and not "ugly") and that rare products were more expensive: *"If you say they are ugly, you must sell them for less, because you say they are not beautiful, but if you say they are special you should sell them as expensive or more"* (Evariste, 10 y.o.).

Moreover, it seems important to further develop a cognitive communication for "ugly products", as they generate uncertainty. The brand name "ugly" must be rethought. For children, such a name does not represent these products which shall rather be represented through positive adjectives such as "special" or "original". They more often use terms such as *"bizarre, distorted, different, strange, quirky"*. Conversely, for them ugly *"is made to hurt"*; *"the apple is not ugly, it is not normal but it is not ugly"*. When choosing a food product, the perception of the product will certainly be affected by its sensory characteristics but also by a symbolism issued through extrinsic variables such as the brand name (Shifferstein 2001). Concretely, here, children are pointing out the fact that even if the word "ugly" offends, once the interest has been aroused, children don't want to buy the product. This word contributes to raise its aestheticism and consequently the signals underlined upfront and related to quality issues. Moreover, it is not the usual way to sell a product. In fact, this "ugly apple" is considered as "different" and not "ugly" and it is not because it is different that it is not good whereas an "ugly" product will be "not good". The transcripts are convergent with Zajonc's research (1968). This deals with the familiarity with the product and the necessity to suppress differences not by stigmatizing them but, on the contrary, by putting these various products (beautiful and ugly apples) on sale together: *"Imagine that there is a city of apples, all the same and that there is a strange one, it will be hated at the beginning, it won't be bought. But after a while, some people will reflect and will buy this apple, then they will explain why this apple is like that"* (Noé, 12 y. o.); *"In fact, it would be necessary to sell the "ugly" apple and the "not-ugly" one together in the same box"* (Maëlle, 11 y. o.).

Besides, as children have expressed the need to taste the product, the experiential dimension of quality signs could be useful. This dimension describes information which conveys a guarantee on consumption experience, i.e. which informs the consumer of somebody else's judgement about the product. The quality meaning can be also indicated by a well-known and trusted agent of certification (Caswell and Mojduk 1996). Concerning ugly products, statements by a nutritionist, a doctor or a well-known practitioner could increase consumer confidence. This kind of information source mainly reassures rather than giving subjective or objective information (Lynch and Schuler 1990) : *"I would offer them to be tasted"* (Alexia, 8 y.o. and Gwendal, 8 y.o.); *"Make advertisements with doctors or dietitians who explain the benefits of this apple"* (Maeva, 12 y.o.). A certification label could increase the credibility of this offer. Official or not, it should allow consumers to be informed, to classify products and to be reassured. In this frame, efficient signal strategy can be implemented by producers if the latter are able to supply a credible information from the consumers' point of view : *"I would have put a question: what does it change? It questions people. We do things by habit and we can change it"* (Léo, 10 y. o.).

Persuasion or incitation techniques have also been suggested, notably the concept of associating fun elements to food products to attract children's attention and leading to impulse buys. This allows them to act as persuaders or deciders of parents' purchase decisions. The addition of fun, reinforcing hedonic elements, would attract the child, for instance scratch cards or presents (Muratore 2003), or paradoxically offering beauty products when buying "ugly products": *"We should offer something to push people to buy it. My friends, they would love to find beauty products (samples) or jewels (i.e. claire's brand)"* (Ambre, 10 y.o.).

If the ecological product is connected with a playful promotion adapted to children's expectations, the purchasing intention becomes possible and the ecological argument appears to be an additional benefit. In agreement with Monnot and Renou (2013), it is necessary to minimize the perceived constraint involved by ecological speech. It seems more relevant "to show the utility of ecological behaviour by valuing economical and practical arguments". So, it seems essential to think about these products, primarily, through a marketing axis and, secondly, an ecological dimension as an additional benefit. This allows children to ask for the "ugly product" through a more rational dimension (an ecological reason) to their

parents and also to participate in their resocialization: *"It is necessary to avoid that the farmer throws away (...). I did not know but it should be known. In fact, it would be necessary to put a lego gift in it and to say also that it is anti-wasting"* (Evariste, 10 y. o.).

### Discussion

From a theoretical perspective, there is a real inference for children between standardization (aesthetic criteria), the taste and the quality of the product: the standardized product is linked to goodness. Moreover, a non-standardized product has less value than the standardized products, and the consumer of those products also has "less value" from a social point of view.

This offer generates a feeling of misunderstanding. It is in contradiction with the aesthetic standards of the hypermarkets and the expectations of a perfect product. The perception of a non-conform aesthetic stimulus can generate the feeling of transgression for the consumer, which is a breach making consumers face the "unthinkable" or the "unexpected", a contradiction to a norm which is not consciously known by the consumer. Such a breach might lead to an alteration of the representation of the product and have an influence on the evaluation done by children. These variations might also be seen negatively (i.e. as losses). This is the reason why brands are usually focusing on incremental improvement operations, rather than on major changes. The conformity and symbolic dimension of consumption are significant and can have consequences for children, this is the result of a socialization phenomenon. The potential transgression, estimated here through a change of consumption habits, plays a role on the behavioral intentions. It induces, in this case, the perception of a product intended for people having a low income: a product for the poorest.

To consume such products which means transgressing aesthetic standards constitutes a double risk: first, the risk of the wrong taste and the wrong quality; secondly, the social risk coming from the social influence of peers' perspective, which is even more important for a child when building his/her social identity. That is why children do not want to buy them and prefer a standardized product, a normal product that they are used to buying.

Still from a theoretical aspect, all these points can deteriorate children well-being (Hémar-Nicolas and Ezan 2018). The study underlines that what is true for adults, is also true for children. In fact, socialization plays a main part in this phenomenon. Indeed, parents socialize their children according the inferences existing between the beautiful and the good, and peers socialize children from a social risk perspective.

From a managerial point of view, children have made suggestions for "ugly products" to be accepted. The aim for them is not to reduce the price which would confirm reduced quality but sales promotions through free gifts in order to raise interest in such products. According to Muratore (2016) promotional incentives can trigger impulsive buying. It is a relevant way to focus consumers' attention on emotionally appealing products. The deal should contribute to increasing the value of the product's image which is perceived as having a low value. This allows an increase in purchasing intentions, to increase the familiarity with the product, to test the product. The free-gift could lead to shape the behaviour and to change the perception of the product, raising awareness of "ugly products" amongst children who in turn become influencers and future consumers. This increase in the familiarity with the product (Loebnitz et al. 2015), contributing to decrease the initially perceived disruption and transgression, means that children can be more "sensitive" to this kind of product if they get used to seeing them in store. This point has to be studied because in France, these "ugly products" are more and more sold. The word "ugly" makes children think about damaged, rotten or inedible food. So, this word "ugly" should not be used because they stigmatized the product, sending wrong cues concerning the product's quality. They feel that terms such as "strange", "special" will be more relevant in order to sell these products.

"Ugly" product communication should, in order to avoid the social risk perceived by the consumption of this type of product, integrate in its visual the friendly presence of peers group. This perspective is in line with the recommendations of Ezan et al. (2014), aiming to put not only a music (which could later be sing by the real peer group), a setting, a story, characters but also a group of peers.

From a societal perspective, even if children are socialized by parents and school concerning food waste in the home, they do not make a link between "ugly product", waste food and ecology. The field of food waste is not so clear. The link between "ugly products" and ecology is not so easy to make. So, it is necessary to engage in educational campaigns in order to understand what is food waste. In fact, if children think that it is not good to waste it is for two main reasons. On the one hand, it concerns an economic perspective (it costs), on the other hand, it deals with some kind of moral perspective. So, it is important to explain in a deeper way that wasting food is an ecological problem. This public policy recommendation is also called, more widely by Gruber et al. (2016) via "Awareness campaign: create understanding about natural resources necessary for food production". As mentioned in the review of literature, school (e. g. Gentina et al. 2010) seems to be the best socialization agent in order to enhance children's anti-waste knowledge explaining the ecological consequences of

this phenomenon. Behaviourist actions have more impact than theoretical teaching in order to maintain behaviours in the supermarket context. The aim of such a socialization is to make them sensitive little by little without feeling any guilt. To be clear, if for them an “ugly product” is not synonymous with ecology. It seems important that such information (in a cognitive way) can be communicated by brands allowing the child to use this argument (while he/she wants products for the promotion which they contain) in order to convince his/her parents and indirectly to contribute to their resocialization.

School has a key role to play. These lessons can be part of the communication axes related to children food well-being (Hémar-Nicolas and Ezan 2018). Indeed, in a logic of well-being, school can intervene, of course, on the objective part of well-being in a transient and durable way. It deals with the importance of consuming fruits reminding the consequences of fruits on vitality and health. But, it is especially, the subjective dimension of well-being which need to be considered in order to make things change. School could demonstrate the organoleptic qualities of “ugly” product (by consuming them) in a transient way but also in a durable way through an altruistic perspective (that is to contribute to the planet well-being and so to feel well because of that). This subjective and durable part of well-being contributing to the eudemonism.

Finally, the fact that these teachings take place at school can modify the perceived social risk because peers would objectively have the same knowledge and could understand that buying such products is in fact a responsible and valuable behavior.

In the light of this new offer of “ugly products” to reduce waste, the school as a socialization agent may be a key-factor in countering the lack of awareness of adults in these products. Once aware of “ugly products”, children could act as an influencer for this product category and modify their parents’ behaviours as part of a reverse socialization.

Concerning limitations, two exist. On the one hand, the small size of the sample even if a semantical saturation has been reached. On the other hand, the exploratory perspective of this research. This aspect constituted the directions for further research. So, deeper investigations must happen concerning socialization about “ugly products”. How to desensitize people from the aesthetic criteria established by retailers. An idea emanating from this research is, for instance, to work on the notion of difference. It would have also been instructive to delve more deeply into the explanation to “ugly food sensitivity”. Gender, siblings, environment (countryside, city), self-esteem, materialism, ecological awareness, normative influence, well-being, parental occupation, country/cultural, should be investigated through their relationship with the intention of purchasing “ugly food”. Moreover, in which way “ugly food” can result in positive effects on retailer perception also needs to be investigated.

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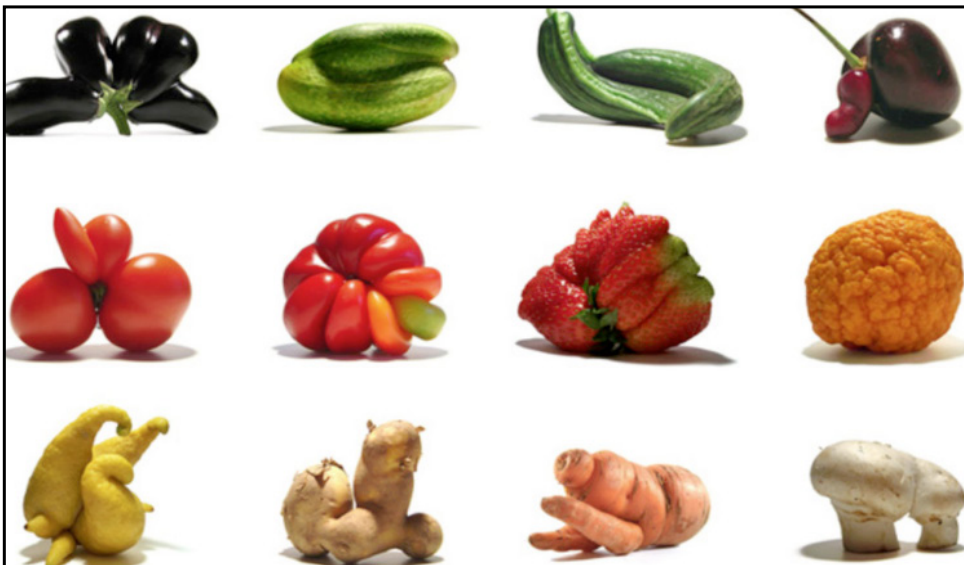
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## Appendix 1

### Example of "ugly products"



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